

Those who have eyes to see

Characters:

YOU (Mothers): biological mother of the Daughter

YOU (Fathers): biological father of the Daughter

MOTHER: adoptive mother of the Daughter

DAUGHTER: teenager, about 13-14 years old

SON: boy, about 6-7 years old

I or **STAGED DIRECTIONS**, a voice off of a grown-up Daughter; it could be read by the same actor interpreting the Daughter

There. Then.

Mothers.

YOU and I, sitting at a table, in front of each other. Close-ups of the actors are projected in the background throughout the play. Extremely minimal, Dogville stage-like set.

YOU Thank you... When I called, I didn't know... I didn't know
(biological whether you'd come, so...
mother)

I don't know what to say, I open my mouth and something like "thank you" gets out softly. Whenever I speak, You carry on moving your lips, muted.

YOU Thank you.
(biological
mother)

Beat.

Not that I have the right to speak, who am I after all, but You're sweating, trembling, not breathing well, moving back and forth on your chair. What's going on with you?

YOU Thank you for coming and for... for... for you know.
(biological
mother)

I just look at her.

YOU It's awkward, isn't it? Yeah, a bit right?
(biological
mother)

Beat.

YOU I know.
(biological
mother)

Beat.

YOU On this side, it feels the same, it feels the same, yeah, if not even
(biological worse... you can imagine.
mother)

Beat.

YOU It was really difficult... difficult... for me, you know. To call you,
(biological I mean.
mother)

I don't know what I'm doing here. What do You want from me? Is it.../

YOU I don't want anything from you, no, no, no. I don't want anything
(biological from you. From you. You. I just wanted to finally, finally, put a
mother) face to a name. That's all I want. To put a face to a name.

I feel relieved.

YOU And look you... look you... in the eye.
(biological
mother)

Beat.

The one my heart has just skipped.

YOU I know, I know it is a done deal, done deal. Done. Deal. Nothing
(biological can be changed now, they said "once you sign, you can't go back"
mother) and they pressed their finger next to a line. Such a long line on the
 form for such a short name that I have.

Pause.

YOU I signed.
(biological
mother)

I breathe deeply. Inhale. Exhale.

YOU I mean, I never learned how to write. My parents didn't care,
(biological nobody cared, I didn't care, so I didn't go to school. "It's better
mother) this way", they said. They said "you're not wasting time..." So I
never learned how to write. I do care about *her*, I want *her* to go to
school and know how to read and write. I can't read. Can't even
write my name, so I just drew something on the paper, on the
paper, a short line that went up, then down a little, then crossed
quickly with the pen. It looked quite fancy, it looked like a real...
real signature, you know.

Beat.

YOU I signed the form. So it's a done deal. We can't go back now. You
(biological know it. They know it. I now know it too.
mother)

Beat.

YOU "You two worked out a good deal", they said. I'm still trying to
(biological figure out what they meant. I wasn't sure. I started freaking out,
mother) but they took the forms away and left. That's why I called. I just
wanted to see what that meant, scribbling on *that* form, above *that*
long black line.

Pause.

YOU I don't want anything from *you*. I just wanted to finally put a face
(biological to a name. That's all I want. To put a face to a name. And look you
mother) in the eye and see what *she* sees. Or what *she*'ll see from now on.

Pause.

YOU It's not easy, you know.
(biological
mother)

Beat.

I don't. I wish I'll never have to know.

YOU It wasn't easy. It's not easy. I don't know if it will ever get easier,
(biological but it's good to know who *you* are. I wanted to know what she'll
mother) see every day. How old is she now? She must be about six... She
must be... yeah, five or six. When she wakes up, she'll see *you*. She's
hungry, she'll see *you*. She's wet her pants overnight, she'll see *you*.
Don't be surprised, it's not the age, it's that she has nightmares,
you know. And when she comes crying, she'll come to *you*. *You*'ll
be the one to dry her tears, caress her cheeks, give her a hug, say
"that's ok, sweetie, that's ok", wash her clothes, her hands, her
arms, her legs, her feet, her tiny little scared body... She can't be
five though... I've been here longer than that... She must be so
big by now... ten or eleven. No? Twelve? Thirteen?

I nod.

YOU Thirteen then...
(biological
mother)

You sigh.

YOU My baby girl is thirteen.
(biological
mother)

Pause.

YOU She'll look up to *you*, you know. Your hair, your smile, the way you
(biological dress, the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you move. Now
mother) you're looking at me. You're looking at me... Yeah. I... I washed

my hair, I... I try to do it as often as I have the chance. I wash my face every morning. Oh, it's the clothes, right? I sometimes forget.

Beat.

YOU
(biological
mother)

Not always.

Beat.

YOU
(biological
mother)

Sometimes.

Beat.

YOU
(biological
mother)

Sometimes I do.

Beat.

YOU
(biological
mother)

It's not easy, everything keeps reminding me of.... Everything. So it's not easy, but sometimes I manage to forget. Not always. Sometimes...

Pause.

YOU
(biological
mother)

She'll look up to you, you know. Your hair, your smile, the way you dress, the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you move. What do they ... call it? What do they call it? A role model. That's it! That's what you're going to be. You're going to be her role model. Who would've thought? Who would've thought, huh? That one day *you'd* be a role model for her.

Pause.

YOU They say I'm not fit. You're not fit. You're NOT fit. You're not a
(biological fit mother. Not a fit mother notafitmothernotafitmother
mother) notafitmothernotafitmothernotafitmothernotafitmothernotnotnot
 notafitmothernotafitmother

*Fists clenched, You start hitting yourself.
I can't look at You, I just can't.*

Pause. Longer than usual.

YOU Who is? Who is a fit parent? Who? I'm sitting here and can't get
(biological this out of my head – who is?
mother)

A guard comes in. Your behaviour means the visit is over.

YOU /...no, I haven't, I haven't finished speaking to her! I'm not done!
(biological
mother)

Beat.

The guard takes the patient to her ward.

YOU I signed those god damn adoption forms, it's a done deal! My girl
(biological will now be yours. She IS yours. Don't let her forget me, please. I'll
mother) still be her mother, somehow, even from here. She has my eyes and
 my freckles and...

Beat.

You shout.

YOU Please don't change, don't change her name, call her...
(biological
mother)

Beat.

YOU ... I always thought it's a nice name for a girl.
(biological
mother)

You and I leave the room. If only you could still be yourself...

If.

Fathers.

Maybe this scene never happened, maybe it was all in Your head, maybe it was the meds. Maybe, maybe I imagined it... It doesn't even matter. I can't help but wonder, what would this conversation sound like if You and I were men? Would these lines be a bit too much? Would you open your mouth and say them? Out loud, I mean? I bet you wouldn't.

You and I, sitting at a table, in front of each other. You, acknowledging my presence.

YOU When I called, I didn't know whether you'd come, so...
(biological
father)

I don't know what to say, I open my mouth, but nothing gets out.

YOU It's awkward, isn't it? Yeah, a bit, right?
(biological
father)

Beat.

YOU I know.
(biological
father)

Beat.

YOU It wasn't easy to call.
(biological
father)

I don't know what I'm doing here. What do You want from me? Is it.../

YOU I don't want anything from you. I just wanted to finally put a
(biological face to a name. That's all I wanted. To put a face to a name.
father)

I feel relieved.

YOU And look you in the eye. Man to man.
(biological
father)

Beat.

YOU I know, I know it is a done deal, nothing can be changed now,
(biological they said "once you sign, you can't go back" and they pressed
father) their finger next to a line.

Beat.

YOU I signed.
(biological
father)

I need to get out of here.

YOU I mean...
(biological
father)

Beat.

You want to say ‘I mean, I never learned how to write. My parents didn’t care, so I didn’t go to school. It’s better this way’, they said, ‘you’re not wasting time...’ So I never learned how to write. I just drew something on the form.’, but you don’t say it out loud.

YOU I signed the form. So it’s a done deal. We can’t go back now.
(biological
father)

Beat.

You want to say “‘You two worked out a good deal’, they said. I don’t want anything from you. I just wanted to finally put a face to a name. That’s all I want. To put a face to a name.”, but, no surprise here, you don’t say that either.

YOU You know it. They know it. I now know it too.
(biological
father)

Pause.

You want to say ‘He’ll look up to you, you know. What do they call it? A role model. That’s it! That’s what you’re going to be for him. Who would’ve thought?’, but nothing comes out of your mouth. It’s not easy, you know.

Beat.

I don’t. I wish I’ll never have to know.

YOU They say...
(biological
father)

Beat. You swallow – saliva, fear, regret... You look lost.

YOU They say I’m not prepared to be a parent. And who is, really?
(biological
father) Are *you*?

Beat. A guard comes in and takes the patient to his ward. The visit is over. You and I leave the room.

To be fair, I very much doubt you exchanged those lines... I think you just looked at each other, both of you paralysed by your own... inability? Unwillingness? Lack of practice? Whatever you want to call it to express your vulnerability. But that's just me...

Here. Now.

The adoptive MOTHER, the adopted DAUGHTER (perhaps she) and the SON (perhaps he) come home, in the evening. The Son lights up the room with energy and excitement. The Daughter is quiet, her eyes sharp, penetrating. She uses only body language with the Mother; she only talks with the Son when it's just the two of them. She's present though. How strange, you'd think. If only you knew... As they enter, hanging their coats on the door hanger, taking their shoes off etc., the Daughter turns on the TV, while the Son tells everyone what happened at the pool, during the swimming class. He can't stop chuckling, speaks super-fast, you know, like kids do, full of excitement, forgetting how to articulate the sounds properly.

SON andthenthe newboywantedtogetinthewaterImeanhedidin'tbut
hismotherpushedhimtodoitdoitdoitshesaidandthecoachtooa
ndweallkindofwantedhimtodoithiswimmingsuitwasgreyyou'd
thinkhewasarockskippingnotreallyonthewaterbutdoitdoitand
hewasshakingsoIdidthisandhefellsplash

The Mother looks at the Daughter.

MOTHER He never breathes!

The Mother addresses her son.

MOTHER Breathe! I didn't get a word you said.

The Son tries again.

SON And then the new boy wanted to get in the
waterImeanhedidin'tbuthismotherpushedhimtodoit

The Mother frowns.

SON I mean, he didn't, but his mother pushed him to do it, do it...
"Do it!", sheeee said and the coach toooooo and we aaaall
kind of wanted him to do it. His swimming suit was grey.
You'd think he was a rock skipping, not really on the water,

but “Do it, do it” and he was shaking so I did this (*poking out the finger*) and he fell. Splash!

The Son laughs at his own joke.

SON Mommy, where are you going?

That’s right, where are you going?

MOTHER Where am I going? Guess where... Are you going to prepare dinner? No. So who gets to do it? Me.

When the Mother disappears in the kitchen, the Daughter talks to the Son.

DAUGHTER You can’t swim, you can barely stay afloat, and you pushed him... so nice of you. Kind and understanding.

SON I can swim./

DAUGHTER /you can’t.

SON Yeah, I can./

DAUGHTER No, you can’t.

The TV is broadcasting the news. The news about that photo, now projected in the background. Yeah, right, you don’t know it. The little boy lying dead on the shore, after having crossed the sea with his family. You know the photo. THAT photo. We all know it and none of us has done anything. Oh, you did? What exactly? You watched it on the news, put on a sad face and posted a comment – tearing emoji from the bottom of your social media heart. Yeah, right. We forgot that photo soon after the news was broadcast. None of us has done anything about it. Me neither.

Pause.

The kids listen to the news and look at the picture.

SON So what?!? At least I’m not afraid of the water.

DAUGHTER Oh, so now you were helping him overcome his fear or what? You can't swim, so pushing him was not ok. You should know that 'cause you can't swim. You can't even float.

SON Yes, I can! Do you want me to show you? I can show you!/
The Mother pokes her head around the door.

MOTHER I'm going to be in the kitchen for a while. Would you two be good kids and rush to the bathroom?

SON Without daddy?

MOTHER Daddy's working night shift.

Beat.

Sweetie, you'll help him, yes?

The Daughter nods, compliant. The kids go to the bathroom.

Guess what they are doing. The Son and the Daughter practice staying afloat, holding their breath to break records, as you can imagine. They also play "refugees". Yeah, quite risky to put on stage, but hey, I mean, what can go wrong?

When the kids play, they use the same lines parents use. They don't know any other vocabulary. Special snowflake one. The Son is in the bathtub.

DAUGHTER Come on, flap your arms. You can do it! Come on, don't give up! You can do it, you can do it!

SON Made iiiiiiit!

DAUGHTER There you go! That's my boy!

SON You think that's what his sister told him too?

DAUGHTER I don't know.

SON Or his mom?

DAUGHTER I don't think so. On the news they said ... they said his whole family died. The only one that was still alive was ... his father.

Beat.

SON Now I'm gonna hold my breath!

The Daughter times the Son. The Son gasps for air.

DAUGHTER Well done!

SON How long?

DAUGHTER Ten seconds.

SON TEN seconds!!!

DAUGHTER Ten point two, to be more precise. I guess that's pretty good. Better than last time, at least.

SON What did I get last time?

DAUGHTER Eight point nine.

SON I'm so good!!!

DAUGHTER You're getting better. Next time you'll break some records, who knows.

They take a break.

SON Why was he there?

Do you think he had taken swimming classes?

How long do you think he held his breath?

How long can you hold your breath? I can hold it longer!

Wanna try? If I beat you, what do I get?

Why wasn't he wearing a swimming suit?

Was he in a swimming club or something?

Why hadn't he practiced in a swimming pool like us?

Do you think he knew where they were going? Where was he going? If I leave, I'd pack a bunch of stuff: my swimming suit, goggles, sandwiches, savoury and sweet, some apples and... And milk. To be healthy you need to drink a glass of milk every day.

DAUGHTER Imagine having an upset tummy on a boat!

SON Maybe it's not good with apples 'cause last time I ate an apple and drank a glass of milk, you know what happened! I'll pack orange juice instead, to have in the morning. Much better. And gummy bears.

What did you pack when you left?

Beat.

Before you came?

The Daughter shakes her head.

SON Did you say anything to your mom?

DAUGHTER I could have said...

Beat.

But I didn't.

Beat.

I could have said a lot of things.
Like what did I do to you?
Why did you leave me?
Why wasn't I enough?
Why didn't you let me die somewhere?
Why didn't you kill me?

Why didn't you want me?
Why did you want other people to be my parents?
Why did you sign those papers?
Why did you give me up for adoption?
Why couldn't you love me?
Why wasn't love enough for you to keep me?
The usual, you know...
But I didn't say any of those things.
I didn't ask her what I did to her nor why she had left me.
I didn't ask why I wasn't enough for her.
I didn't even ask, whispering, why she didn't let me die
somewhere or why she didn't have the courage to kill me, if
she didn't want me.
I couldn't muster the courage to ask her why she signed those
forms, why she gave me up for adoption, why she wanted
other people to be my parents.
I didn't even dare ask her why she couldn't love me... Maybe
I couldn't be loved.
As simple as that.
She left
and got smaller
and smaller,
until she could almost fit
in my hand.

Beat.

What if...
Can you imagine my future?
Maybe we would have been friends, you and I.

Highly unlikely.

DAUGHTER No chance, right? Our worlds would not have – as they say –
collided.

SON Co-what?

DAUGHTER Met. We have nothing in common.

*Let's not be overdramatic. Not that I don't get too dramatic myself, but you do have things in
common.*

SON Yes, we do!

Thank you, that's what I wanted to hear.

DAUGHTER No, we don't, we really don't. We come from two different worlds.

She must have heard this line on a TV show and memorized it for future use. Clever.

DAUGHTER Just imagine
my past,
my present
and my future,
they'd all be the same.
People would have said
"Oh, poor thing,
she not going to school because she has no money,
she's just playing all day long,
dirty,
looking for food,
looking for money,
looking to steal."
They would have said
"Oh, poor thing,
you didn't deserve
to get a second chance."
They would have said
"Oh, poor thing,
it's not her fault
her family had so many babies
like birth control was not a thing."
People would have said
"Oh, poor thing,
what faith she must have had
to be left by her own mother."
Or they would have said
"Oh, poor thing,
what a dark soul you must have
that your own mother sent you away."
And I would have looked at them
the same way we look right now in this room

and see in them the same emptiness.
I could have lived like before,
I guess,
playing all day long,
with all the kids
we were sharing the place with,
cooking,
taking care of my mother,
growing up,
taking care of my father,
becoming a teenager,
taking care of my family...
I could have lived
like soooooo many other people live
and could have said
till the day I would have died
that the morning had the smell of summer rain
and that regardless we would have lunch,
together,
it would be just the two of us,
the food -
I dropped just a bit too much salt,
my bad,
but we'd be together,
and we would have had so many stories to tell
like that time
when the cherry trees in blossom lost their petals
like when I shake the raindrops out of my hair.

Beat.

An angel would have passed
and heard what was to be heard,
would have seen what was to be seen
and
perhaps
just
left...

Beat.

I could have said...
I didn't say anything.
I felt it in my bones

the same way
we
sometimes
feel a storm approaching.
But I didn't even open my mouth.
I just couldn't.

SON Like you were holding your breath.

DAUGHTER Yeah, like when you're holding your breath.

Pause.

The kids go back to practicing who holds their breath longer. The Mother gets closer to the bathroom and calls the kids.

MOTHER Sweeties, are you done?

Pause.

Ummm... with kids, silence doesn't sound good to me. Something is going on...

MOTHER What are you two doing in there?!?

When the mom comes in, she freaks out, thinking that her Son was dead.

MOTHER No!

Wow, that sounded convincing!

MOTHER Noo!

Try again, and this time say it like you mean it.

MOTHER Nooo!

Seriously, would you call that genuine? I'm asking you all. Genuine – yes or no? No. Thank you.

You think your son is dying – not in the sea far away from your country after having crossed it on a flimsy plastic boat, but in your own chic bathroom. You’re not reacting like that for all the journalists taking photos of your dead son on the beach, you’re doing it because it hurts. It just hurts.

Again.

MOTHER Noooo!

Again.

MOTHER Nooooooooo!

You’re going to have to say it until you mean it. Full stop.

MOTHER Nooooo No Noooo Nooo Nooooooooo Nooooo No Noooo
Nooo Nooooooooo

Mother’s language breaks down into bare sounds. The Son bursts into laughter - he pulled a prank.

Hey, nobody said parenting was easy.

MOTHER Never do that again, you heard me? Never! You scared me...

Don’t get angry at me, it’s not my fault you have different expectations of stage directions. Descriptive. Prescriptive. Something in between. Sometimes you see the stage directions and you intentionally ignore them. So why even bother including or expecting stage directions? Oh, you need some guidance, to imagine the set or what the characters are doing on stage. Now that makes sense! So don’t complain, don’t rebel against this voice. It was about time stage directions told their own story, as they have long been ignored, somewhere on the page, closer to the margins. Smaller. Insignificant. Easy to ignore. Oh, you don’t like it. Or rather you’re curious, but you don’t know what to make of it. What a surprise! If my opinion even matters, then take it like a Stanford prison experiment, playwriting version. Oh, I’m being all “me, me, me” – selfish tyrant, disrupting the plot, destroying the vibe, breaking the flow of the characters’ lines?!? You’ll be fine, an avid reader of the Greatest – judging by your look, you only so far bought their plays, they’re on your desk, but you haven’t read them. It’s fine, you get to be honest and vulnerable. Looking at my style, it’s obvious I haven’t either, that’s why I’m not judging. Last thing I want to be is a hypocrite. As I was saying, the seasoned reader that you are survived the ego of so many directors

that a little insignificant playwright wannabe – as despotic as it may happen to be today – won't be too much for you. You can take it. I have a lot of faith in you.

The Son is whispering.

SON She left?

The Daughter nods.

SON I'm gonna try again to hold my breath!

The Daughter times the Son.

DAUGHTER One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, you can do it!

The Son gasps for air. He asks the Daughter, with his eyes, how many seconds.

DAUGHTER Eleven seconds. Eleven point three.

SON ELEVEN seconds! Last time I only got ten, but now I got ELEVEN!

DAUGHTER Eleven seconds.

SON I'm so good!!!

DAUGHTER That's pretty good. Better than last time for sure, but you can do better.

SON What did I get last time?

DAUGHTER Ten point two.

SON And how many seconds did I get today?

DAUGHTER Eleven point three.

SON Oh I'm not good, I'm the best!

DAUGHTER Well, that's to be seen.

SON How long do you think he held his breath?

DAUGHTER Who?

SON The little boy on TV.

DAUGHTER I don't know.

SON Longer than me?
More than eleven seconds?
Beat.
He should have practiced.

Oh, irony...

DAUGHTER Yeah, right, he should have practiced.

SON Why did he die?

Beat.

DAUGHTER I don't know... They never say why on the news.

SON Let's play the news! I'm gonna be the guy who reads the news.

The Son gets his father's police uniform jacket and a tie to look presentable. He sits at a table. The Daughter gets a tablet and looks up the news; she sits down with the Son. The text is projected in the background.

SON Cck... uuur... bbb... Curb... i... n...g

DAUGHTER Curbing

SON ...g....gggun

DAUGHTER Gun violence

SON ... violence.
You can be the lady who reads the news. She has a voice like in the underground – “N.e.x.t. s.t.o.p. d.o.o.r.s o.p.e.n. o.n. t.h.e. r.i.g.h.t.!”

DAUGHTER Ok, I’ll be the journalist and you’ll be the news reporter?

SON No, first you tell and then we show.

Whenever the Daughter reads the news, her mouth is projected in the background.

DAUGHTER After several deadly mass shootings, the President announced a list of measures and executive orders in the hope of reducing gun-related violence. The President has called for Congress to ban assault weapons.

The Son takes out an imaginary gun and starts shooting.

SON Pew pew pew! Pew pew pew!

The Son takes cover and brings out heavy artillery.

SON Bang bang!

DAUGHTER Hold your fire! Give me your gun.

SON NO!

DAUGHTER You didn’t get it, the President wants people to stop fighting.

SON Why?

DAUGHTER Because a lot of people died.

SON Why did they die?

DAUGHTER Because people were shooting. Like you.

SON Pew pew pew...

DAUGHTER It's serious.

SON What do you mean it's serious?

DAUGHTER Serious is like when you can't smile.

The Son is grinning.

SON I can smile. Look at me. I can smile!

DAUGHTER This is not funny! Serious is like when you get a bad grade or go to church or when you sing the anthem or like/

SON Let's sing it!

DAUGHTER Sing what?

SON The what you said...

DAUGHTER The national anthem?

SON Yeah, that one.

DAUGHTER Which one?

SON The one of the country where they were playing with guns.

DAUGHTER Let me look up the lyrics.

The kids listen to the American Anthem.

'Oh, say! can you see by the dawn's early light... O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?'

They try to sing along, messing up the song.

DAUGHTER Oh, say! can you see

SON ...by the dawn's early light....

Now the kids try again and sing the song in English, with minority and immigrant accents. Have you ever heard the national anthem sang by voices you don't listen to, by voices you don't hear?

DAUGHTER Oh, say! can you see
SON ...by the dawn's early light....
...What so proudly we hailed
...at the twilight's last gleaming...
...rocket's red glare...
...the bombs bursting in air...
...our flag was still there
... the land of the free
...and the home of the brave

Pause.

SON That was serious...

Beat.

I didn't like the news. Let's find another one.

The Daughter thinks about it, then nods. She scrolls down.

DAUGHTER Ok...

In a village, a woman who went out in the street chasing her
sow in heat was fined/

The Daughter bursts in laughter. I mean... I can't blame her.

DAUGHTER for not having/

laughter

a signed exemption certificate/

laughter

during the lockdown.

The police officer who stopped the woman notified her that she was not commuting to and from work, school or training place. She was not carrying out an essential business trip that couldn't be postponed. It was neither a medical appointment that had to be carried out remotely, nor was she obtaining medicines. According to the police officer, it was not an essential family reason like assisting vulnerable persons in a precarious situation or taking care of children. The officer emphasized that she was not a person with a disability because she chased the sow for 300 meters and the animal couldn't qualify as an accompanying person.

No shit, Sherlock!

DAUGHTER This case, according to the law, was not a judicial or administrative summon that couldn't be postponed. The woman was not participating in a mission of general interest upon request from an administrative authority.

Obviously!

DAUGHTER Obviously, there was no question of air or rail transit related to long distance journeys. When the woman tried to argue that she had to get her family pig back, the police officer considered that the situation couldn't be qualified as walking a pet outdoors withing 1 km of one's place of residence and only for a brief amount of time.
Given that all the curfew rules were violated, the woman was fined \$500. Further offenses may lead to larger fines or prosecution.

SON Can I play the police officer? Pleeeeeeeaaaaase....

DAUGHTER And who do I play then, the pig? No way.
Next.

And that's how you get a child unhappy, sulking...

DAUGHTER The local authorities have evicted a ...

Mouth quivering, the Daughter trails off and can't finish the sentence. She doesn't even know if it really happened or if it was a dream, but random memories invade her: voices, cries, moans, shouts, people running around.

Pause.

She tries to wash off that feeling. Again.

DAUGHTER The local authorities have evicted a group of Roma people from a housing estate and burnt down their camp, local media report. There were no reports of violence when the Roma people were forced out of the city's estate. Two camps housing more than three hundred people were forcibly evacuated and their residents repatriated to Romania, although the two camps in question stated they originally came from Bulgaria, Spain and Italy and had no relatives in Romania. Nevertheless, the authorities continued their operation, despite the fact that the EU widely condemned the eviction and compared it to WWII deportations.

SON Can I play the police officer? Please, please, please....

The Daughter nods, exhausted from saying no.

SON Good afternoon, madam. I am a police officer and I would like you to leave.

DAUGHTER That's clearly not what a police officer sounds like!

Another figment of memory-dream. At a loss, the Daughter struggles. What is better: oblivion or survival?

SON What?

DAUGHTER You are too polite. They are not like that when they evict people, especially...

SON That's easy, I can be rude.

Freeze! Hands up! You need to leave now! Go back to your... country!

*The kids do a re-enactment of the eviction.
Afterwards, the Daughter keeps scrolling down.*

DAUGHTER Numerous Eastern European *badanti* take care of the elderly in Italy. Nowadays numerous women from Eastern European countries such as Romania and Moldova leave their countries of origin for their first trip abroad to care for people who need support. Some fake agencies promise the *badanti* stable working conditions and decent wages, only to exploit them in the absence of a contract, with low wages and abusive host families.

SON I'm gonna play an old man and you are gonna take care of me!

The kids do a re-enactment of a badante and the elderly. The Son tries to mimic an older person's behaviour. The Daughter pronounces her lines with an Eastern European accent.

DAUGHTER “I feel tired, but I'm trying to work even harder, so I don't give myself time to think about my family...I miss them so much.”

Let's not have her speak with an accent just because she's an immigrant. Aren't you tired of this representation? I am.

DAUGHTER I feel tired, but I'm trying to work even harder, so I don't give myself time to think about my family...I miss them so much...

SON I'm so old... I'm thirty. No, forty. Bring me some water! No, wait, orange juice!

Beat.

And Chupa-Chups. You know the flavour I want – apples.

Beat.

Not apples. Coke.

Beat.

Oops! I dropped it. Now you pick it up.

DAUGHTER Are you done being so mean? People aren't born to be looked down on.

You took the words right out of my mouth!

DAUGHTER They work hard and they leave their children all alone to be raised by their neighbours while they wash old people in the West!

Come on, ask her anything, I see you can't hold your tongue... Come on, break the silence!

SON How do *you* know?

You thought hard about this question...

DAUGHTER I know... 'cause I'm older! In real life, not like when we're playing.

Beat.

Actually, I don't even know what to say... The news has been so messed up in the past year, it's been so confusing, there have been so many points of view that unlike before I no longer have just one opinion, now I have them all... Now I am for, I am against and I also abstain at the same time.

The Daughter scrolls down.

DAUGHTER Let's read another one...

A man put a kitten in a sealed jar and recorded it while the animal was struggling to breathe. The man insisted he just wanted to create exciting content for his social media.

SON Can I/

Don't even think about getting a jar to try it on Marshmallow! How sick can we people be if we do this to animals?!? The night of the mind...

The Daughter ignores him. She keeps scrolling down.

DAUGHTER A North American mining company has been trying for two decades now to build Europe's largest gold mine in Transylvania. Environmentalists say the mining would spoil the mountain range given the heavy use of toxic chemical compounds involved in the process. 300 tonnes of gold and/

SON Whoa! So much gold!

DAUGHTER 300 tonnes of gold and 1,600 tonnes of silver equal the destruction of a quaint area and a high risk of contaminating ground water with cyanide. The government approved the new draft law that allows the project to go ahead, while numerous demonstrations took place across the country.

SON Is that bad?

DAUGHTER Yeap, quite bad.

SON What's that, sianaid?

DAUGHTER That's something very toxic.

SON What's toxic?

DAUGHTER Something very bad for your health. You can get sick if you drink water that has cyanide.

SON Will those people who live there die?

DAUGHTER I hope not.

SON I know what we can do! We can send them our bottles of water. And some orange juice. No, apple juice, 'cause I don't really like it, too sweet.

If only that was enough...

The Daughter keeps scrolling down.

DAUGHTER Homophobic violence has escalated in the past year. Politicians are turning a blind eye as attacks on the country's LGBTQ community are on the rise. In some of the main parks of the capital, the victims of the attacks were being beaten up and set on fire, which left severe physical and mental scars.

SON So just like that, they can beat me if I go for a walk in the park? Why do they do that?

The Daughter sighs.

DAUGHTER I guess hatred blinded them...

Pause.

SON One more!

DAUGHTER The Supreme Court has ruled abortion unconstitutional, which represents not only a victory for the government, but also a way of controlling women's bodies. For several days in a row, thousands of people took to the streets to protest against the ban. Annually, it is estimated that more than 200,000 women seek pregnancy termination, either in the country, illegally, or abroad.

SON I didn't understand anything. Is that bad?

DAUGHTER Very bad... It means women suffer.

SON Mommy too? I don't want mommy to suffer.

Beat.

Will you suffer when you get old?

DAUGHTER I hope I won't have to.

SON I am not strong, I am the strongest! I will protect both of you!

The Daughter tousles the Son's hair affectionately, then hugs him.

SON One more!!!

DAUGHTER Despite the EU's strong campaign at the beginning of the pandemic aiming to provide vaccines to people worldwide, the European Commission went back on its word and has stated that it cannot donate Covid-19 vaccines to developing countries because it struggles too with a high number of cases. The EU has even/

SON Is that bad?

DAUGHTER Yeah, that's bad.

SON Why?

DAUGHTER Do you remember last year when we couldn't find any toilet paper in the shops?

The Son nods, grinning.

That's ok, you don't have to tell everybody what you did instead when you ran out of toilet paper...

SON LastyearwhentherewasnotoiletpaperintheshopsonedayIwenttothebathroomanddidnumbertwoand/

DAUGHTER S-l-o-w-l-y. Breathe...

Slowly, no pressure, it's not like you have an audience...

SON ... I went to the baaaathroom and did number twoooo and when I wanted to wiiiipe my/

We've heard enough. Really. We've all been there... or most of us, at least.

DAUGHTER /So you do remember. Good!

SON Yes! Greedy people went and bought ALL the toilet paper!

DAUGHTER Exactly. Well, now the same thing happens, but with vaccines. Greedy people who have already decent resources and healthcare systems don't want to share what they have.

SON But they say they have a lot of people who are sick...

DAUGHTER That is right, they are not lying, but other countries register thousands of deaths each day. Can you imagine being surrounded by thousands of dead people?

The Son covers his face, in horror. Peek-a-boo style, he then suddenly takes his hands away.

SON What do you think they did with it?

DAUGHTER With what?

SON With the toilet paper.

DAUGHTER God!

SON I think they made *papier-mâché*! I know how to make papier-mâché too I can/

DAUGHTER I know you do! Now let's see: migration, environment, animal rights, public health or economic crisis? Migration?

You've just read my mind!

DAUGHTER National security threat: last week a migrant woman fell on metal bars after she and her family tried to climb the border fence with our neighbouring country, the local authorities reported. Not only did the woman risk her life climbing the border wall, but she also put the life of her children in danger while crossing the border illegally, according to Customs and Border Protection. Many migrants trying to enter the country/

SON Why did she do that?

DAUGHTER Life is hard where she comes from...

SON Why did she do that to her kids?

DAUGHTER She didn't want them to be in danger, poor and hungry.

SON Are they now safe?

DAUGHTER I don't know.

SON What was that at the beginning that you said?

DAUGHTER National security threat?

SON Yeah, that...

DAUGHTER Mmm... it means that politicians say they are dangerous for the country.

SON That's why they built a wall?

The Daughter nods.

SON And are they dangerous?

DAUGHTER No, they aren't.

SON How do you know that?

DAUGHTER I know because I know. Do you trust me?

SON You read it in your history textbooks?

DAUGHTER Oh, this is never going to be taught at school...

SON Then why do they say that?

DAUGHTER Because they're writing history the way they want.

Beat.

Do you trust me?

The Son nods. Pinkie promise.

A series of news pictures keep appearing projected in the background, faster and faster...

SON I don't wanna do the news anymore...

DAUGHTER Why so much sadness?

I guess that's for me to know and come up with an answer to your line, but you know what? I have no answer. No one has.

DAUGHTER Why so much sadness? Everywhere you look, there's only pain, fear, hopelessness...

SON Then don't look! Close your eyes, like me!

The Son squints, then closes his eyes. The Daughter smiles.

DAUGHTER We can't really live like this, with our eyes closed. We have eyes to see/

SON I don't wanna play immigrants anymore...

Well, that's nice, the immigrants don't get a choice...

Aylan's photo, again, in the background, like a memory that keeps haunting you...

SON I want to break the record!

DAUGHTER You are a broken record, I don't know what else there is to break.

The daughter mimics him.

DAUGHTER "I can hold my breath... How long can you hold your breath?"

The kids start fighting with the towels. So much laughter... so nice to hear.

SON I'm gonna try again to hold my breath!

DAUGHTER Ok, let's see this time...

The Daughter times the Son.

DAUGHTER One...
Two...
Three...
Four...
Five...
Six...
Seven...
Eight...

The Son gasps for air.

DAUGHTER Only nine seconds. Nine point seven.

SON NINE seconds! That's so cool!

DAUGHTER Last time you got eleven seconds...

SON Ooooh...

The Son is disappointed. To improve the mood, the Daughter picks up a towel... no, this time a flag, and they start fighting. Flag fight.

SON Can I try again?!?! Can I try? I wanna try again to hold my breath under water.

DAUGHTER We need to hurry up, mom could come any minute.

SON I'll try again, this time fifteen seconds!

The Daughter times the Son who gets into the bathtub again.

DAUGHTER One...

Two...

Three...

Four...

Five...

Six...

Seven...

Eight...

Nine...

Ten...

Eleven...

Twelve...

Thirteen...

Fourteen...

Fifteen...

Don't worry, the boy is ok. Safe. Alive. You name it.

DAUGHTER Sixteen...

Seventeen...

Eighteen...

Nineteen/

The Daughter started counting, she didn't even get to twenty and then lost count. She now tries to get the Son out of the bathtub.

He's not breathing. She lets a visceral scream out.

The Mother comes. Two people standing together in a fading light. No matter what she does, he's not breathing.

Their game is over.

Pause.

*I'm speechless. You're so used to believing the stage directions that you took me for granted!
If you remember anything from these scenes, remember this:*

Never. Trust. Anyone.

There. Sometimes.

The MOTHER and the DAUGHTER, sitting at a table, in front of each other. Extremely minimal. Two scenes that are mirror images of one another.

MOTHER Thank you... When I called, I didn't know whether you'd come, so...

I don't know what to say, I open my mouth and nothing gets out.

MOTHER You came.

I came.

MOTHER Thank you. Thank you for coming and for... you know.

I just look at you. You look wounded like people who are no longer even tempted to pursue happiness.

MOTHER It's a bit strange, isn't it? Yeah, a bit right?

I try to breathe a word out. Was it a sigh?

MOTHER On this side, it feels the same, if not even worse... you can imagine.

I don't know what I'm doing here. What am I doing here? What are you doing here? I don't know what to say... For such a long time I've been trying to... Now I don't even know...

MOTHER I don't want anything from you, no, no, no. I just wanted to see you one more time. That's all I want.

I don't know how to feel. I don't know if I feel anything at all. I'm numb.

MOTHER And look you in the eye.

I immediately knew I was right.

Do you think it's my fault? Was it my fault? You nod bleakly and stare off into the distance, but deep down you simmer with quiet rage. Do you think I killed your Son? Do you think I was responsible? Do you think I should have done more? Do you think I should have known better? Do you think I should have stopped him?

*We are kids. We are playing. He wants to break records!
We were kids. We were playing. He wanted to break records.*

I didn't want him to drown.

MOTHER

I know, I know it is a done deal, nothing can be changed now, they said “once you sign, you can’t go back” and they pointed their finger next to a line. I signed.

I breathe deeply. Inhale. Exhale.

MOTHER

You will be placed in a new family. They will find someone who can take care of you. Someone who will know how to take care of you. I signed the form. So it’s a done deal. We can’t go back now. I know it. They know it. You now know it too. It wasn’t easy. It’s not easy. I don’t know if it will ever get easier. I wanted you to know that I did my best. I wanted to be a good mother to you, especially after what my husband did to you, to your family.

After such a long time, you put my nightmare into words.

MOTHER

I thought you knew. I always thought you knew.

Just say it!

Say what you mean... Say it already!

What did he do? I don't want it to be just something messed up – half imagined, half lived – in my head. I want you to say it and make it real.

What you're putting into words is my nightmare...

MOTHER

When I was-/ When you were... Do you remember the... the camps, right outside the city?

How could I forget? That's where I grew up.

MOTHER

I remember that night so clearly. You should know we had the best intentions. We always wanted to...

I remember that night too.

It wasn't a dream,

it happened,

it really happened.

Bits and pieces of shattered memories came back again,

*over and over again,
like when you drown and
can't make it back to the surface:
the currents carry the echoes of endless muffled voices,
cries, moans, shouts,
people running around and
spreading like a shoal of fish
after the stingrays attack them.*

*I remember him. I remember you.
You asked him what my name was.
He didn't know.
How could he?
You then asked him
to pass me over the sill.
This is what mothers
who can't have children need to do, you said,
to scare the evil.
You gave him a coin.
Pass her over the sill,
pay for the gift,
give her a new name
and the evil spirit won't know
where to look for her,
will never find her
and will never take her away from us.
I looked you in the eye and I knew I was yours and from that moment on I swore not to speak
to you.*

MOTHER

Your father and I... my husband. Well, after the boy died, he left me. It's my fault, he said. "It's your fault, it's all your fault", he said. It's everybody's fault, never his...

If tears could ever bring the dead back to life...

MOTHER

My ex-husband and I tried to have children for years, for *years*. We tried everything. Everything that was to try, we tried. Until one night he came back from work. It was *that* night. The sky was so clear that from our fifth floor you'd think you were so close to the stars that you could call them by name. He unlocked the door. I knew it was him. I knew he was going to come home late, it was all over the news – the authorities were expelling the Roma people from their illegal encampments outside the city.

Throbbing headache.

MOTHER

He didn't say much. He said only that it went all wrong. Dismantling the camps went wrong. It all went wrong. At first, I didn't understand whose hand he was holding...It was you. I didn't say anything. I just held you in my arms, you were cold and so small, and from that moment on you were my daughter.

I know you might judge me and hate me and think I'm the worst person in the world, a murderer, a criminal who destroyed your family, but if I could go back in time, I'd do it all over again. We thought we had no chance, we didn't know that a few years later we were going to have a baby boy. We wanted children's laughter to fill up our home. We were desperate and you were there. You were there.

I breathe deeply. Inhale. Exhale.

MOTHER

Only a few years later I met your mother. She called me. And when she called, I thought I was going to lose you. I thought I was going to lose my mind.

Like me right now.

MOTHER

It's not easy, everything keeps reminding me of.... Everything. I don't blame you for his death. I did, but I no longer do. I sometimes manage to forget. Not always. Sometimes...

MOTHER

They say I'm not fit. Who is? I'm sitting here and can't get this out of my head – who is? How could I have known that he was going to drown, that my son was going to die on my watch. How could I have known? What could I have done?

I ask myself the same thing, over and over again.

I think I killed your Son. I am responsible. I should have done more. I should have known better.

I should have stopped that stupid game.

I didn't want him to drown.

In ten seconds, an officer will come in and take you back to your cell.

Ten...

I

I have been trying to forget...

Nine...

I

...memories that were unforgettable...

Eight...

I

...I have been trying to forgive...

Seven...

I

...mistakes that were unforgivable...

Six...

I ...I have been trying to replace...

Five...

I ...people that were irreplaceable.

Four...

I And all this time...

Three...

I ...I have been holding my breath, ...

Two...

I ...or those who have eyes to see...

One.

No more blackouts, light invades the stage.

Light in.