

# ...and child

*a play in three parts by Madison Fiedler*

Draft 10/21/17

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## **Characters**

Mari- 16, 18, 34. Skeptical, independent, curious. Kind, not nice.

(The Consoler of Women, New Eve, Mother of Sorrows)

## **Time**

The indeterminate present.

## **Setting**

Bronzeville, Chicago:

An abortion clinic somewhere between the South Side and Nazareth.

A makeshift nursery.

Beside an open casket.

## **Space**

Should be able to transform, simply, between parts.

Should feel inexplicably holy.

## **Notes**

Mari should be played by an actress of color.

The play should be performed without an intermission.

The staging should resist absolutely literal interpretation— if possible, no miming.

Words in parentheses ( ) are spoken, and indicate an afterthought, a digression, a sidetracked thought.

(–) indicates an interruption of speech or thought.

(...) indicates a trailing off, a moment of suspension in thought.

### A Prayer:

*Mother of suffering,  
 you carry the grief of the whole world  
 in your boundless, shattered heart.  
 Please, carry mine.  
 I know that the broken-open container  
 of your Mother's Heart  
 has room for us all:  
 for the women of Iraq and Rwanda,  
 Afghanistan and Bosnia,  
 Darfur and Burma,  
 Palestine and Israel,  
 whose innocent children are sacrificed every day  
 as victims of these senseless wars;  
 for parents in Los Angeles and Albuquerque,  
 London and Buenos Aires,  
 whose sons and daughters are killed in sudden car wrecks,  
 or die of lingering cancers,  
 or wrestle with the demons of addiction,  
 or languish in prison systems  
 specially designed to breed violence and hatred.  
 Your own sorrow has rendered you invincible, Mother.  
 I cannot bear these losses alone.  
 Please share them with me.*

-Mirabai Starr, "Nuestra Señora de Los Dolores" (from *Mother of God Similar to Fire*)

## 1/ Annunciazione

*Mari waits in the waiting room of an abortion clinic. The light is flickering, too-bright, humming. She is agitated, moving or wanting to. She addresses the clinic counselor.*

MARI.

I can go get this thing outta me somewhere else, you know.

*Am I sure.*

Am I— what kind of stupid question is that?

You ask everyone in here that?

You ask that cranky-faced forty-somethin lady over there looking like even menopause didn't wanna fuck with her that question?

She looks so fuckin grumpy I bet her baby wouldn't want her either.

Yeah, I'm sure. Never been surer. I'm *doing* this.

I'm older than I look, okay? So don't talk down to me.

I'm not big but I'm not a kid.

You ask me that cause you think I look scared or something?

Cause I'm not even scared.

I'm fine.

Or was it cause I'm here on my own?

What, is that what "clinic counselors" are supposed to do? Boot out pregnant teenagers cause they're too young to do something about it?

Cause I'm old enough to do it alone in Illinois, I checked.

Nah, don't look at me like that,

You're not my mom and I'm not having some temper tantrum in a grocery store,

This is me quiet,

And I *checked*.

Cause, cause it's a medical emergency.

And "in cases of medical emergency—"

It's a medical emergency cause I'll do it myself if you don't.

Cause I, I figured out how to do it. Without it even hurting.

I could do it less painful than you all could, maybe.

I couldn't get the pills and shit without my parents, but me, I'm *resourceful*.

I could just eat papayas. Did you know that?

I mean you gotta eat a whole lot of them yeah but I could eat papayas like it was my *job*.

Eat papayas until I threw up. Over and over.

Or you can just work out. You know that one?

I could run all the way down Lake Shore

I could do one of those 5Ks where everyone's like, wearing their yoga halter tops and "doing it for charity" and I could sprint the whole fuckin thing. And I could drop down and do pushups and squats and jumping jacks and whatever until I feel my belly go all butterflies and I could go to a public bathroom and then it could be their problem not mine.

Did you know it's that easy?  
I don't even know why I'm here.

I don't know why I'm here.  
I mean, I'm *here* because I'm.  
I'm smart.  
I'm like really smart.  
I scored so high on tests when I was little they told my parents I might be exceptional.  
So I could still be,  
*Exceptional.*  
My parents, they're not exceptional.  
And I could do something,  
I could *make* something out of myself even if they can't.  
Cause me, I'm not ready to settle.  
So I'm here.  
And I'm sure.  
And I'm *doing* this.

Not that,  
Not that I didn't think through all the options.  
I have friends who'd straight up punch themselves in the ovaries if they found out.  
Turn that shit negative.  
But I thought through it.  
And I considered, y'know,  
Perspectives.  
And they were I guess easier to consider than you'd think,  
The perspectives.  
The perspective that maybe I could just do nothing.  
Cause it's not always easy to do something.  
Like coming here, it was like—

I mean I changed my mind like twenty times on the way here.  
I told myself if I couldn't find the address, it'd be fate saying don't.  
Or if my train broke down, or some perv tried to talk to me  
Like, if there was any *any* kinda  
Sign, I guess  
I would've turned back if,  
If a friend called and said her piece-of-shit boyfriend cheated on her again  
If a friend called and said do you wanna go to Southtown Sub  
If a friend *called*  
Or texted me  
If anyone texted me,  
Not like I don't have people texting me  
I have *people*, people who text me all the time,  
Just, no one did on the way here  
Like  
Like  
Like I could've read my horoscope and turned around, I mean

It's the kinda thing you look for reasons not to do.  
But.

I'm *doing* it because.

Because it's like wow I really didn't wanna be the one in my family to get pregnant at sixteen.

I always had a feeling it'd be my cousin Yasmin.  
My cousin Yasmin, she's like—

*She gestures to her breasts.*

Like *real* big here. "Gifted."  
I mean she was always the one at family reunions like—

You've sure grown *up*, Yasmin. Look at you.  
Touching her shoulders.  
Her hair.

Nasty perve uncle type motherfuckers.  
And she'd just let them, she'd just laugh.

It's not like she's throwing it around or anything, but.

I thought it'd be Yasmin who'd get pregnant in high school. We all did.  
And you know what,  
I think she'd keep it. I do.  
First, she's got hella guilt issues, second, she's—  
She'd be a good mom.  
She's, a really good person.  
She breaks up fights with her brothers and even when they get pissed and take it out on her she  
just, takes it.  
Just suffers and doesn't say shit.  
And that's, that's half of being a mom, yeah?  
Also she's already taken Home Ec, so.  
She could do it.

Plus *her* mom wouldn't kill her.  
My mom—  
I think she'd be less upset if I was just,  
Hit by a car.  
She had kids young but she got married even younger,  
So.  
None of us were mistakes.  
Ma doesn't make mistakes.

But then again.  
She wouldn't love to see me here, either.  
She would have some *words* for me if she saw me here.  
Either a lot of words a lot of

*Angry* words

*Screamed* words

Or no words at all and just the saddest look you ever saw, and maybe—

Mari, is this how I raised you?

She says that shit more than she says I love you. All the *time*, it's,

It's like saying the opposite of I love you.

It's words that dig the fuck under your skin.

So

So you can't win!

It'd be nice to have someone to help make the decision, though.

Someone here.

Someone I could remember.

I'd like to know what color eyes the dude had,

If he had a freckle by his mouth or

Soft skin behind his ears or,

*Something.*

Words of wisdom:

Don't try tequila with That Flakey Friend That Always Ditches You cause you just might get pregnant in some janky broken-down bathroom,

Or car,

Or um.

It's all—

Next-day vomit and a fucked-up ankle.

I think I twisted it dancing.

I hope this baby came out of dancing.

Not that it's a—

You know, a—

Yet—

I didn't mean to say that.

Why do they make these rooms so bright?

It's so fuckin *bright* and cold and—

No one in here wants to show their face! No one wants to listen to—

What the fuck, is this Sarah Bareilles?

I can't—

Who turned on this nonsense?

Why won't anyone here really *look* at me?

I dare you all to look at me!

See, no one wants to look at the crazy pregnant teenager. No one wants to listen to the crazy pregnant teenager. Even not pregnant, no one wants to...

Whatever, I don't want to listen to anyone either.

*Short beat.*

But I guess I'd kinda like to hear someone's voice right now.  
Someone I *know*  
Someone who could give a shit about where I'm at.

It sucks that no one texted me on the way here.  
It sucks that my mom won't pick up.

Not that—  
It's not like I'd *tell* her but—  
I'd just like to hear her voice.  
I think people are kinda wired, probably, to wanna hear their mom's voice before they make big decisions.  
Even when you're grown, I bet.  
That's what happens when you gotta get her permission all those years, when every time you *don't* get her permission you *hear* about it later.  
She'd probably just yell at me for calling while she's at work.  
But I wouldn't mind just hearing her yelling.  
Put me to sleep a lot of nights.  
Not that I had it so bad or anything,  
She wasn't even yelling at me half the time.  
She's just a yeller.  
A fighter.

The sound of your mom's voice, doesn't matter what it's doing, it's.  
Not *nice* exactly but, you recognize it like it's,  
I d'know.  
The smell of your house after you've been away for a minute.  
Frees something up in you, you didn't know had gotten stuck.

This motherfucking Sara Bareilles!  
You fuckers can't make me cry.  
I'm just doing what I gotta do, okay...

Cause it would be crazy, right?  
It'd be the looniest thing a person ever did to keep this,  
This thing.  
I'd have to drop out of school, I'd have to—  
People would look at me like, like  
Like they felt bad for me.  
I'd be broker than I am already. I'd have to split meals with it.

Half a bowl of noodles,  
You gotta sip that real slow to trick your belly,  
To make it quiet.  
And babies don't know how to sip slow. They're babies.

And if all that wasn't enough,  
 There's Ma.  
 Maybe if the dude who made this all go down was in the picture, she could tell herself some  
 different kinda story, but this,  
 She wouldn't like this story at all.  
 She wouldn't like this baby.  
 You don't wanna have a baby your mom wouldn't like.

And the thing is  
 The funny not-funny fucked-up thing is  
 I just *knew* it.  
 I knew weeks before I took the test, the stupid pee test.  
 I woke up and I felt so damn dirty.  
 Inside and out.  
 I threw up and I thought, okay, I should feel better.  
 And I showered and brushed my teeth  
 And shaved, and washed  
 And blow-dried my hair even which like,  
 I *don't* do  
 And I got coffee from Dunkin  
 Cause coffee from Dunkin always does the job  
 And it didn't  
 Do the job  
 And I still felt so gross  
 And, dirty  
 And the night was like one of those—  
 Kaleidoscopes, that you look in as a kid?  
 Except if someone had taken a sharpie and kinda scribbled over most of the part you look into?  
 And I didn't even think I'd gotten that drunk  
 I'm not one of those lightweight girls who have a beer and are all—  
 I'm not like that.

So, whatever, I left Dunkin and I felt dirty and I thought, whatever.  
 Whatever I did,  
 Whatever was *done*,  
 It's done now

And then a hot two weeks later  
 It's like, *textbook*, two weeks  
 I looked it up  
 Like clockwork  
 I woke up and I threw up all over my floor  
 I threw up *fast*, like  
 Hard  
 Like something was tryna get out of me  
 And I thought  
 Ohh  
 It's not— done,

Whatever I did.

*Beat.*

Can you stop looking at me?

Can you—

I hate this. I *hate* this.

It's not fair.

It's not—

This isn't how I wanted to spend my Sunday morning, alright?

I thought it would be like,

Weirdly comforting to see a bunch of other sad pregnant girls

But no one told me everyone brings their boyfriend to an abortion!

Or— what, is that her grandma?

I read it would hurt.

I read it hurts worse than kidney stones, somewhere?

And I read that this place would do it even if it wasn't

“A medical emergency”

Cause you actually give a shit, about the people who come here

And their futures, and whatever

I read you of all places don't ask too many questions

So—

Can you just get *rid* of this *thing* that is *growing inside me*?

This this this *thing* that had

The nerve to just be alive all of a sudden!

Guess that's not the thing's fault.

But it's not my fault either!

This isn't me!

I'm not just the kind of someone who comes in here.

I'm not,

I'm not *like* that.

Swear.

And I'm *doing* this, I'm here, I didn't turn back, I didn't back out of this,

And making me talk about it is some kinda mind trick.

I see you,

I see what you're tryna do,

You think I haven't thought this through?

I haven't done homework in a week,

I haven't been to class since Wednesday.

And like even if my friends are the kinda people who skip class,

I'm not the kinda person who skips class.

*Pleading:*

I'm not that kind of person.

*Beat.*

What kind of person are you, anyway?  
 I'm not asking to be rude, I'm just.  
 What kind of person works at one of these places?  
 You must meet a lot of unhappy people.  
 You must get inside a lot of sad, sad people's heads.  
 You must understand a dozen kinds of sad.

*She notices the time.*

Oh.  
 I didn't—  
 It's just,  
 12:27.  
 Word.  
 That's fine.  
 Are they gonna—  
 How long am I supposed to talk to you for?  
 Like, is it going down at 12:30, or—  
 Can I have a second to like,  
 Not to *think* about it but just to,  
 Sit with  
 All this for a minute?  
 Like, when they call my name do I just—  
 Is that it?

I could call my mom one more time.  
 I think I could know, *really* know what I had to do, if I could just—

*Pause.*

I mean I'm ready  
 And I'm doing this,  
 But  
 I guess I just didn't account for right before.  
 I don't know how you would.  
 Account for right before.  
 You read Internet horror stories and hope it won't be as bad as any of those, I guess.

And like,  
 I know what goes down once I'm in there.  
 I read up.

*The words are a little clumsy in her mouth:*

The speculum,

The numbing medication—  
 That, um, dilates—  
 And the clamp or rod or something, for your cervix,  
 The suction—  
 Of, the tissue—

*A wave of nausea hits. Quickly, violently, she doubles over, trying not to vomit.*

*Beat.*

*She recovers. She straightens up.*

I'm fine, don't be weird about it.

*Pause.*

So are you gonna be in there with me?  
 For the,  
 Thing.

*Quickly:*

No, you don't have to answer that, that's—  
 That's not your job, so.  
 It's cool.

*She inhales, exhales.*

*Softer:*

I just wanna be—  
 I can't *think* here, it's so bright and cold and quiet it's like screaming  
 I just wish I could be in this— this place, I'd go,  
 As a kid,  
 And I could think there, I could— hear myself think  
 And it's stupid, it's like soap-opera stupid, talking about it  
 But—

I was in one of those programs for special kids,  
 Like for smart kids,  
 An "enrichment"— whatever, you get it—  
 And once a semester,  
 Since we did so much extra work,  
 They'd bring us on a field trip.  
 Shedd, the Field Museum, wherever.  
 But sometimes they'd just kinda go rogue and go where the teachers wanted to go,  
 For a vacation day, basically,  
 So once in elementary school and a couple times in middle school

We went to Hartigan Beach, way north.  
 And everyone would be playing around in the sand and whatever and dipping their toes like  
 "oh it's so cold I CAN'T" and splashing each other and,  
 That nonsense,  
 And right by where the beach ended,  
 Where the usual shore began,  
 Y'know, Chicago shores,  
 Rocks, shrubs,  
 I'd sneak off and sit between the rocks

And I'd always come back,  
 And they wouldn't notice I'd gone,  
 Cause the boys would always be throwing sand in each other's eyes or dunking each other and  
 the teachers'd be trying to split them up so they wouldn't kill each other  
 But for a while I'd just sit there  
 And really I could've sat there forever  
 Cause time--  
 It's hard, explaining it, it's like, someone needs to put it in a poem or something cause it doesn't  
 translate,  
 But the water's just--  
 Crash, pull, crash, pull

And if you weren't looking at your phone it would be like time was just a thing we made up to  
 put a price on things  
 And it's so loud you can barely hear the cars on Lake Shore,  
 And you start to notice things,  
 Like the way the lake's never the same color day to day,  
 And the way even the Budweiser can under the rocks just kinda floats there gentle,  
 Like the water doesn't care what you are or where you came from,  
 Cause it's just doing its own thing like it always has been,  
 And being in between all those rocks is like disappearing  
 Or being really, really beautiful  
 And somehow it didn't all feel so  
 Just  
 Alone?

*Beat.*

So  
 I should try to make it up there. Sometime.  
 One of these days.

I'll go back to school day after tomorrow.  
 I'll give myself a day,  
 With a heating pad and some Advil,  
 Some of my sister's boyfriend's weed, maybe

I mean damn, not even my *sister's* ever had a pregnancy scare

And she and Matt have been together since she was like,  
Prepubescent and skinny and he had braces

My sister—  
My sister's older,  
Lorna  
Her name being Lorna pretty much tells you everything you need to know  
She's...  
We're not close.  
But she and Matt,  
(Matt's fine,  
Matt's from *Winnetka*,  
Matt's white)  
They're like, *madly*.  
Like: you hang up first,  
Ear kisses,  
All that.

It's not like I want Lorna to get pregnant or anything.  
Not even like I've ever expected her to.  
It's just,  
Let's just say she has no shortage of opportunities.  
And it's not like Matt would be a good dad or something but he's  
Rich  
White  
I d'know, *tall*  
Everything Lorna ever wanted to be, so, at least she'd have that.  
And her kid would have that.  
Kid could be *ginger*, though.  
Can't have everything, I guess.

I don't even know what this—  
What it would look like.  
What it would *be* like.  
What if it were—  
Like, *annoying*  
Or, a *Republican* or laughed too long at people's jokes or always smelled bad or thought it was  
better than everyone or  
I d'know  
It feels like you should get to see your options  
See what's coming out of there  
That way if you see "*Boy, brunette, tall, serial killer,*" you're like:  
Nope  
And boom, saved the world from another shitty someone  
I mean, what if this thing was gonna end up a Bad Person  
Or or even worse what if it's a blank nothing and it'd be all up to me to make it good or bad  
Like all on me not even half on me and half on some dude, just—

Hold up  
 Is that clock right?  
 It's—  
 Are they running behind?  
 Are they like, *about* to walk through that door?  
 It's fine, I'm fine.  
 I've got—  
 Lorna taught it to me,  
 My mom taught it to her,  
 And her mom before, y'know:

Just say ow,  
 Do it now,  
 Just say ow and now it's done.

We'd say it for shots, for pulling out splinters,  
 For pulling out *teeth* cause my mom doesn't fuck around with loose teeth,  
 Ripping off bandaids.

And this might be a little longer I guess  
 So I'll just say it  
 Ten, fifteen  
 Thirty times  
 How long does it take to get one of these things out?

*Fast as before, she doubles over.*

*Beat. She breathes. The wave of nausea passes.*

*Not feeling so brave anymore:*

Uh  
 Lady—  
 How long does it take for most people who come here to be sure?

When you ask that question, I mean—  
 How many people say yes right away?  
 How many people say no?  
 Is this my last chance to say no?

I just  
 This isn't like me, this isn't *me*  
 Cause I make my own decisions, I make my own rules  
 I work two part-time jobs after school and weekend mornings so no one else gets to make my  
 decisions  
 But—  
 But I kinda need to hear someone tell me what to do right now  
 I mean what if I *died*, or what if

What if this thing was maybe worth having around?

Like

I don't know, hear me out, cause like  
I'm one of *seven*  
So it's not like I've ever been alone  
But I've always been kinda lonely  
And I've got friends, I've got *people*  
But I've never,  
No one's ever like really listened to just me?

I'm just I'm like playing devil's advocate here, okay  
I'm not saying I *am*  
Just if I *did*  
And would my mom want me to keep it  
Or I guess— would my mom not want me to get rid of it  
More than she'd not want me to be pregnant?

And I could do all the other stuff  
This isn't me giving up on doing the other stuff  
I could finish school, get a degree somewhere  
People do that  
Moms do that  
I could, I could *love* this fucker  
And it—  
Could love me more than anyone,  
Could love me the *most*.

It's almost like starting all over,  
Something that clean.

*Beat.*

I'm just playing devil's advocate. Y'know.  
I'm not saying I'm not sure.

*Pause.*

Cause then there's school.  
There's linoleum floors and lockers you gotta bang to open  
And the tenured teachers who smoke out back and the new ones who wear too much lipstick  
And, and my friends  
There's Devin  
Who's so dumb and so funny and superstitious as all shit and can tell you anything you ever  
wanted to know or *didn't* want to know about your horoscope  
And Kenny who likes chess for some reason and can do any impression and has a gap between  
his teeth you can only really see when he laughs, and you gotta earn those laughs

And Jasira who just won't stop talking and tells stories about her little sisters and her crazy Baptist grandma and her on-again off-again boyfriend who hangs out with us too but only when they're on-again,  
Cause Jasira's just too good of a person to not side with  
And there's World History and Earth Science and the let's-get-you-outta-here-let's-get-you-to-college-you're-*better*-than-this school counselor, Ms. Branden  
There's Ma who works as much as she can and  
Dad who works so much we barely see him and  
Seven ungrateful mouths they gotta feed

There's,  
Sixteen.

*Her phone rings.*

*She looks at the phone.*

*Beat.*

*She looks up.*

*She makes a decision.*

*She answers the phone.*

Mom?

*End of Part 1.*

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## 2/ Madonna

*Fifteen months later. Mari is reluctantly holding her baby. He is crying. He has been crying for some time. She speaks to him, bouncing and rocking him intermittently. She is deliriously tired, frustrated, not yet comfortably maternal.*

MARI.

Hi, Baby.

Yep, hi, hi.

You wanna maybe stop crying?

You wanna maybe just maybe shut up for a second like just for a *second* little guy?

Might be kinda nice for both of us, yeah?

I know you don't get the whole concept of *time* yet but

It's very late at night

Night is when I put you in your crib and I give you a blanket to keep you warm and I give you your teddy bear and the light goes away

And morning is when I take you out of your crib and change your diaper and feed you and the light comes in

And right now is just about halfway in between those times

And— Ma has to sleep too, you know

*That one doesn't feel right. She tries again:*

Mommy.

*Not liking that one:*

Mom.

*One last try:*

Mama.

*Satisfied with that one:*

Mama has to sleep too.

*Sleep* is when you stop crying

And lie perfectly still

And dream pretty dreams with your eyes shut to block out the light

And Mama hasn't gotten to sleep long enough to dream pretty dreams or

Or *any* dreams in the past four months or any dreams that weren't bad dreams in the past thirteen months so so maybe you could just

Just,

Please

Stop

Crying?

Okay?

*Pause.*

Okay, no bullshit, no begging, I'm your mother, you need to STOP CRYING. NOW.

PLEASE.

Please.

*Pause.*

Or sure, cry harder, that's, that's great.

I don't know what you need from me.

I don't know how to get this through your head but I basically gave you my life?

Everything from before you is pretty much, it's gone, and I don't *blame* you for that cause you're just a stupid little baby with a stupid little brain but I need you to give me *something* dude cause every minute of my *day* moves around you and I just need to have my *night* right now I just need two *hours* where I can—

I'm scared too.

I'm scared too.

Cause you know what Baby?

I'm not gonna sugarcoat it for you.

The world's a scary place.

In here it's safe, in here you get to be warm in your blankets and be fed when you get hungry and look up at glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling, but out there,

In the real world,

Well, outside, you won't get stars, first off,

And you won't get warm,

Cause, Chicago,

But out there—

The world will chew you up and spit you out and forget your name.

Cause here's how the world works, Baby.

Some days you wake up at three,

Cause your baby's crying,

And then again at five,

Cause, same reason,

And then you don't go back to bed because you might as well stay up and get the formula ready and study for the test you've got in the afternoon,

Cause the only way your Ma will even think about helping you out with taking care of your kid is if you get your GED and apparently you're ready to do that four months after giving birth, and you feed your baby,

And you bring him outside even though it's freezing because you're supposed to bring your baby outside,

And of course your baby cries,

Because when does this baby stop crying,  
 And then you remember you haven't eaten yet but at this point you're running late for work so  
 you grab a Poptart and wrap your baby up in a little baby coat that cost too much that he's  
 gonna outgrow too soon and you bring extra formula and walk twelve blocks to Starbucks  
 because as luck would have it the Starbucks four blocks away isn't hiring,  
 So you go to Starbucks for your shift because Starbucks gives you health insurance and that's  
 too good to pass up even though the manager looks at you like you're always naked, even when  
 you're carrying a kid around,  
 Almost like the kid is proof you've gotten naked for someone else,  
 Proof you're not what you say you are, or something,  
 And you sit your baby down in the back room in a bouncer and you give him a pacifier and pray  
 he won't cry because he's cried four out of the past six days and you can tell you're on thin ice,  
 you're not stupid.  
 And you make Valentine's Day-themed limited edition frappachinos that are supposed to taste  
 like red velvet,  
 And are just regular coffee and ice and sugar and half and half and a few squirts of a syrup that  
 looks like period blood,  
 And you think wow, that Poptart really wasn't enough and your stomach is growling like, loud,  
 and you're trying to go over what's gonna be on this test in your head and meanwhile you're  
 kinda calculating how many hours of sleep you got and it's gotta hit somewhere between three  
 and five and you're trying to remember when the last time was that you got more than that and  
 you're *still* squirting this nasty blood-looking syrup into some rich old white lady's *frap* because  
 that's what she calls it when she orders it she calls it a *frap* and suddenly you hear your baby  
 crying,  
 Again,  
 Not the kind of crying you can go see about in fifteen minutes, not crying you can only kinda  
 hear,  
 Loud, mad, volume-all-the-way-up crying,  
 And I can't blame him, he's probably hungry too,  
 And this rich old lady I mentioned before,  
 Well,  
 She kinda leans over the counter like she's looking where the sound is coming from and says,  
 All nasty, with a face like something stinks:  
 "Is someone going to take care of that?"

And you think, you know what,  
 An old you could've ripped this lady to shreds.  
 But you're asking yourself the same thing.  
 And besides, you're too tired and too hungry to have the energy.  
 So you hand her the drink and you smile and say, "Have a nice day."

So that's how the world works, Baby.  
 What do you think about that?

Ohhh, *now* you smile?  
 You got a twisted sense of humor, you know that?

Just cause I chose you doesn't mean I *like* you.

Yeah, what do you think about *that*, Baby?  
 The folks I work with might think you're cute but I think you cry too much.  
 Your great-aunt Maiya might wanna kiss your face and buy you shit,  
 Shit for *you*, not for your mom, because, y'know, you need new rattles more than I need to eat—  
 But maybe not everyone wants to kiss your face and buy you toys all the time.  
 Cause not everyone has had to flip their lives upside down and inside out for you, Baby.  
 That's all me.

Okay, fine, I guess that makes me wanna cry more too.  
 That's my bad.

It's okay, Baby.  
 Might not be room for us in my house,  
 Might not be room for more than a few months in Jasira's apartment,  
 But we'll find room.  
 We're gonna make it, Baby.  
 We're gonna figure this out.

But— and this is my deal, this is my offer, okay— I'm gonna need you to stop crying if that's ever  
 gonna happen.  
 Cause for us to make it,  
 Mama's gonna need her GED,  
 And Mama's gonna need another job,  
 And Mama's gonna need you to be quiet when she's working so she doesn't get fired,  
 And Mama's gonna need to get some sleep so she doesn't doze off standing up at work.

I just need some sleep.  
 Ohhhh, I need some sleep.

How do people do this?  
 How have billions of girls become women and become mothers and become good at this?  
 I guess I threw that whole order for a loop, Baby.  
 I'm no good at playing grown-up. I'm no good!  
 I don't know how to make my own baby stop crying.  
 I can't breastfeed.  
 Took twenty-three hours to even get you out of me alive.  
 But I'm glad you're alive, Baby.

Actually,  
 If we're being honest,  
 The first time I heard you cry,  
 Somewhere in those twenty-three hours,  
 I cried too.  
 Swear.  
 You're not gonna see it happen ever again, like ever ever,  
 But I did.

I was sweaty and bloody and covered in my own pee and screaming and swearing and dead scared and alone, alone if you don't count the nurses holding my arms down and yelling "push," cause I don't—  
 But I was— glad, hearing you.  
 I was sure.

Now, just so we're on the same page,  
 It doesn't make me feel that way anymore when you cry.  
 So if that's your goal here,  
 It's very sweet of you, Baby,  
 But what would make me happier than anything is just—  
 Just a little silence.  
 It's so sweet, Baby, I promise you.  
 It's Chicago silence, so not—  
*Silent.*  
 But it's a full kinda silence.  
 There's still life in it, so it's not so scary.

No? Okay.

Do you even understand me right now?  
 Am I just talking to myself?  
 Lookin up at me with those sweet stupid eyes.  
 I could tell you anything, Baby.  
 And it'd be the same to you.  
 I could tell you my secrets.

*Beat. He's still crying. She decides to try it:*

I cut all my hair off in third grade cause I wanted to be faster, like the boys.  
 And it worked. And I didn't care when kids laughed at it because I could come second in a race, instead of fifth.  
 I could see why the girls would laugh,  
 Cause it looked kinda dumb,  
 All spiky and crooked like I'd done it,  
 But I didn't get why the boys did.  
 I was just playing their game, by their rules.  
 But I told my mom some girl in my class had done it,  
 Because my mom cried and cried when I came home that day,  
 Touching my head,  
 Telling me she'd been braiding my hair, combing my hair since I was little.  
 And I didn't wanna tell her I'd undone all that so I could win a race. So I lied, and Ma called up this girl's mom and chewed her out on the phone and of course this girl's mom didn't know what she was talking about but she said she'd handle her family and my mom could handle hers.  
 And that girl  
 Janie Bradeen,  
 She didn't talk in school the rest of that week.  
 Just looked down, chewed her fingernails.

That was my first secret.

*She checks the baby's reaction. He's quieting down.*

My second was just that I ate half a caterpillar once, cause my brother Jason told me to. Nothing happened, it was just gross.

You like these, huh?

Maybe you do understand me, a little.

Maybe you just wanted the juicy stuff all along.

I see you, Baby.

Um,

My third secret is that I found all my mom's cigarettes when I was little,

Seven, eight, maybe,

And I took them out one by one and I buried them out back in the little garden we had.

And she screamed at all of us,

*Cigarettes are expensive,*

*That's money, gone now*

And none of us ever said who did it,

Cause that was our code

(Only Lorna broke it, sometimes, but that's Lorna for you)

But Ma was so mad and her hands were shaking for days.

And half the flowers in that garden died.

She still hasn't quit smoking, Baby.

I was trying to do a good thing there.

I ever start that shit, you feel free to bury my cigarettes too.

*Beat.*

You wanna know my biggest secret, Baby?

You don't have a dad.

I mean, you got *someone's* DNA in there,

Fighting it out with mine,

But you don't have a dad.

That's an unusual thing, Baby.

Makes you special.

And I'm not gonna give you some stepdad bullshit either.

I never wanted to get married, all that.

It's just gonna be me, Baby. Me and you.

*The baby has finally completely stopped crying.*

Really?

*That's* what makes you stop crying?

Okay, Baby!

*She laughs, for the first time in a while.*

Okay.  
That's gotta be a good sign.  
A very good sign, Baby.

*Something has changed.*

And you know something?  
Maybe I do like you.  
*Maybe.*  
I like your stupid little ears.  
They're so tiny.  
And your toes! The tiniest, most perfect toes.  
Okay, Baby, you're alright. You're cool.  
Yes, Baby, I like seeing that yawn. Yes I do.  
Yeah, you wanna sleep, don't you? You like being quiet, don't you?  
Nice change, huh?

I kinda wish you could talk though, Baby.  
I know when you cry you're just tryna make conversation.  
I bet you've got some funny shit to say. *Stuff.* Stuff.  
I bet you hate that nasty food I feed you. Some diarrhea-looking kinda...stuff. When you get all your teeth, we're gonna have some *fun*, alright? You won't know what hit you. No more puréed nonsense.

And when you can talk... I don't know, maybe we'll be friends.  
Yeah?  
I don't have a lot of friends anymore.  
I can't blame them, they're just going through their lives different.  
Their problems are prom dresses and failing Calc.  
They invite me to go out,  
But what kinda time do they think I have to go out?  
What clothes do they think I have that aren't stained with *someone's* spit-up?  
I mean what do they think happened last time I went out  
So,  
So I don't have a lot of friends anymore.  
Maybe you and me, we'll hang out,  
Watch TV together, I don't know.  
I'm not about to watch baby TV for you though, you got that?  
I never messed around with Disney.  
Nickelodeon, *maybe.*

You're alright.

*The baby stops crying.*

Okay, that's my Baby!  
You want a bedtime story or something?

No baby books, I'm tired of those. Why do they write to kids like kids are idiots?  
 I get the bright colors and happy endings and— *stuff*— but,  
 They shouldn't set up kids with so many expectations.  
 They shouldn't make the world that pretty!  
 They should use colors you see in the real world.  
 Cause otherwise they're just setting you up to go outside and be like damn, why isn't the lake  
 bluer? Why aren't my lips redder?  
 Why won't a prince come and *save* me I'm so *little* and *helpless* without one?  
 Nah.  
 That's not the kinda stuff you and me are gonna be about, okay?

I can tell you a story though.  
 I, uh.

Once upon a time,  
 The night you were born,  
 I was lying there, just, more tired than I've ever been and I'm hurting like a motherfucker from  
 the inside out—  
 I'm hurting— really badly— from the inside out,  
 And trying to get a hold of your grandma while they're cleaning you off,  
 And the nurses are tiptoeing around kinda whispering and finally one's like,  
 "Is anyone, um... here with you?"  
 And I'm like does it *look* like someone stepped out to take a bathroom break for twenty-three  
 hours of labor?  
 And I see more nurses in the hall, they've come from where you clean the newborns and there  
 are a couple of them and they're each holding a baby and I realize for a split second I don't  
 know which baby is mine.  
 Every newborn baby looks the same, pretty much, and besides they had you guys in those little  
 medical blankets and whatever but I could see your faces and they could've come in there and  
 given me the wrong baby and I don't think I would've known.  
 And I realized, wow, I'm not ready to be a mom.  
 Cause a mom recognizes her kid, you know?  
 But you just looked like a baby.

And the nurse comes in, and she's telling me how to hold you right,  
 And making me sit up against the pillows, and plopping you into my lap,  
 And I'm holding your head and your butt and it doesn't feel like I'm doing it right,  
 And after holding you like that, for a while,  
 Well, it still didn't feel like I was doing it right,  
 But I saw a little tiny birthmark on your little tiny knee,  
 And I thought okay.  
 Who knows if I can do this whole mom thing,  
 But at least they can't give me the wrong baby, from now on.  
 At least I'll know how to recognize my kid.

*The baby is sleeping.*

And they lived happily ever...

*She watches him sleep for a moment.*

You stupid sweet little Baby.  
 I think you're gonna grow up to be kinda smart. You look smart.  
 Maybe strong, even.  
 Does every mom think her kid's gonna be really special?  
 Does every woman get a little delusional when she becomes a mom?

I still don't think of myself as a woman, Baby.  
 I feel so dumb sometimes. Even before I had you I felt so dumb sometimes.  
 Cause they tell you you're exceptional when you're a kid,  
 But then you're one of thousands of kids in school and one of seven kids at home and—  
 Well, your grandma, she loves me but she never told me I was smart.  
 She had **stuff** to do besides tell me I was smart.  
 But I think it's a good thing to tell your kid they're smart. Or exceptional.

You're maybe the most exceptional thing I've done.

*She starts rocking her baby, a little awkwardly at first, easing into it.*

Yeah, Baby. You gonna stay sleeping this time?

*She sings, making up the melody as she goes.*

Hi, Baby...  
 Fat-cheeks Baby,  
 Sweet-smellin Baby  
 Some of the time.

Hi, Baby...  
 Messed-up-my-life Baby,  
 Stinky little Baby,  
 Most of the time.

Hi, Baby...  
 Whatcha think of livin?  
 It hasn't been too long,  
 But you're doin good so far.

Hi, Baby...  
 Tomorrow, we can take the Green Line  
 And walk along the river,  
 Share ice cream but I'll eat most of it,  
 Make faces at each other,  
 Or something dumb like that...

*End of Part II.*

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### 3/ Pietà

*Fifteen years later. Mari is dressed in all black. She stands over her son's casket. She is alone, exhausted, dazed. She does not look at the casket until she can no longer avoid looking at it. She speaks to herself, at first, working through her thoughts.*

*First, a long silence.*

An hour, I have  
 An hour.  
 And then all the the— people are gonna come  
 And I'm gonna smile at them  
 I'm gonna—

And they'll hug me,

And they'll hold my hands  
 They'll, they'll say I'm sorry.  
 I'm so sorry  
 And I'll—

*Short silence.*

I'll say thank you  
 They'll cry, some of them will cry, the kids will cry, Ma might cry  
 I won't cry,  
 They'll cry to me  
 They'll tell me about people they loved who died  
 Like it's the same thing like they understand something  
 And I'll nod  
 And I'll hold their hands I'll, hold their hands  
 And then the next person will come and,  
 They'll do the same thing  
 And I'll,  
 Again, I'll,

*Beat. She does not look at the casket.*

And I'll smile and hug and hold  
 Hold hands  
 And say thank you  
 And thank you  
 And thank you  
 And

*Beat.*

Right  
 Like Ma said  
 She said— people go to funerals to cry about the things they never cried about  
 Because, because,  
 It's the only place you're allowed to cry in public  
 And you have an excuse  
 And—  
 You have,  
 An audience—  
 I have an hour.

*Beat.*

An hour with my boy.  
 They told me I should prepare some words.  
 Collect myself.  
 Who said that?  
 Lorna  
 Or Matt, maybe  
 What an— interesting expression.  
 Because, it—  
 It just—  
 I mean what do they think I've been doing these past thirty-two years?  
 These past sixteen years?

They told me I should collect myself (what do they think I've been doing these past four days?)

*Beat. She looks around.*

This church was built over a hundred years ago.

Last time I was here—  
 I was getting baptized, probably.  
 I was— little little.  
 Baptized because—  
 Ma insisted.  
 Of course, Ma...  
 She said Mari,  
 What would your grandmother say?  
 What would your poor sweet grandmother say if I told her that her favorite granddaughter  
 was gonna be her only granddaughter to go unbaptized?  
 My “poor sweet grandmother” was dead at that point, so  
 So what could I do, argue?  
 So I did it.  
 It was very ceremonious.  
 Ma cried.

Must've been... one of three times I saw her cry.

It's a beautiful church...

*Beat.*

I am  
Tired.

I could sleep all day...  
It's like back when he was little,  
We never wanted to sleep at the same time...  
Just didn't line up that way, it drove me crazy  
One of us, awake as they come, waiting for the other one to wake up

*Beat.*

I'll sleep when all this is over,  
And we can drive out to Hartigan Beach  
Like I would,  
Like we would Sundays,  
Sit between the rocks,  
With the—  
Crash, pull, crash, pull...

We'll spend all day out there.  
All this just has to be done,  
And I'll need a full night of sleep,  
And he...

*Half-realizing. Hurriedly:*

I need to wash his clothes.  
I know I,  
I know he's old enough to, and he does, usually, he's good about doing chores without being asked,  
But it's been such a busy few weeks  
And it takes me no time to help,  
It's not like when he was little,  
I look for things to do to help now,  
I'm not used to free time,  
I need to wash his clothes,  
It's all been such a mess,  
I need to sleep, and wash his clothes, and then we can take a day out at the beach, I'll let him drive, he needs practice before he takes the—

*Beat.*

I'm tired, I know I'm tired, it's not good to be so tired,  
 But I can't sleep when everything's such a,  
 Such a mess—

*Beat.*

Mm.  
 "Collect myself"—  
 No one's told me to do that since I was a kid,  
 Or maybe— no, some nurse said it after I gave birth.  
 It all means the same thing, I guess.  
 Count to ten, breathe, start over.  
 Or maybe that's not what it—  
 I should ask him, he knows all the—  
 He used to read the dictionary, as a kid,  
 Not all of it, he wasn't, y'know, a recluse,  
 He'd just flip through the pages and come across words he liked,  
 He'd highlight them.  
 Vaccination.  
 Diminution.  
 Valedictory.  
 (He made me learn them too...)

*Beat.*

*She breathes, with effort.*

There's gonna be something about it in the paper, probably.  
 I should prepare myself for that, there's gonna be something...  
 Not the Tribune, but,  
 South Side Weekly, maybe.  
 "Sixteen-year-old in tragic accident."  
 "High school student a tragic victim of gun violence."  
 "Young Chicagoan involved in tragic—" (they'll say tragic, whatever they say)  
 They won't say his name.

He wouldn't like that.  
 He'd like to be called a Chicagoan the best,  
 He's proud of where he's from,  
 But you go to one of these schools with about a thousand kids,  
 You live in a city with over two million people,  
 You want a name for yourself.  
 You don't want to be another number.  
 You don't wanna be, just—  
 "Sixteen."

But there'll be something about it in the paper.  
 On Facebook.

People will give me flowers, or home-cooked meals, or something.

But who's gonna sit with me and listen to me talk about every day of the last sixteen years?

Who's gonna want to know the way he would hum himself to sleep when he was a little boy? The time he got croup and we walked all day in the dead of winter because that's the only way you can breathe when you've got croup and even as he's coughing his face off he manages to sneak off for a second and throw a snowball at me and we got in a snowball fight? With nasty gray Chicago snow? And we laughed so hard we could've peed ourselves?

Who wants to know the way he wanted to be an astronaut for about four years and I'd find drawings of planets and stars and diagrams of black holes all over the apartment? The time we went to the Planetarium for his birthday and waited in line for the Observatory and when he looked at the sun through the telescope there was more wonder and, and *joy* in a person's face than I'd ever seen?

No one wants to hear all of it

People wanna say I'm sorry, they don't wanna listen,

I wanna- talk.

You wanna immortalize your kid, you want the world to know how- exceptional-

I wanna be listened to.

Someone's gotta listen to my son's story.

And it's my story too.

It's my story too, it's our life, it's not just his, it's ours, and I won't let him be "a sixteen-year-old" or "a high schooler" and I won't let myself be the name after "he is survived by."

I'll be damned if I don't tell every last detail of me and my boy's days together.

Our adventures, our survival, our *life*.

*Beat.*

*She makes a decision. She gets lost in remembering. She doesn't look at the casket.*

Two days before,

He asked if he could go to the movies with his friend James. I told him if his friend James wanted to go to the movies then he could pay for his ticket because I certainly wasn't gonna pay for him to go to the movies when he wouldn't even watch our old TV shows with me.

I was half-joking, you know.

"You won't watch TV with your old lady."

And he got- so sad.

He said Mom I can watch TV with you. I didn't know you wanted me to.

And I could've just cried right there.

How lucky, I thought.

To have the kind of son that says he's sorry when you say he can't go to a movie cause you can't pay for the ticket,

Who says he'll watch TV with you instead.

I told him don't be stupid and gave him the money.

Ten dollars for a movie these days. It was so much less just, ten years back.

And I kissed him on the head and he said thanks Mama.

He'll still call me Mama when he thinks he's being sweet.

And he texted me when it was done, when he was coming home.  
He does that, so I can sleep easy. You always worry when your kid's out late.

*Beat.*

*She breathes in, out, in.*

Three weeks before,  
We fought.  
A little fight, nothing.  
I told him he thought he was smarter than me.  
He is, smarter than me.  
Brilliant.  
Exceptional. The most, exceptional.  
But he's not allowed to know that.  
You're not supposed to know you're smarter than your parents until you're all grown up.  
That's the secret.  
And he is so close to all grown up I have to remind myself he's not.  
I have to remind him, too.

So, we fought.  
He'd been talking about a class, a class he's taking at the University of Chicago, his chemistry teacher drives him once a week to a class at the University of Chicago because—  
Because, he's exceptional—  
And I'd asked him about this class, about what he was learning, we always talk about his classes, I tell him about mine, he tells me about his,  
And he was kinda reluctant but he answered, and he was talking about it, and I suddenly kinda put it together that he was dumbing it down, significantly dumbing it down, like I wouldn't understand it.  
He was telling me, "I don't know if you'd think it's interesting."  
And I knew what that meant.  
So I told him I'm your mother, you do not talk down to me.  
He didn't mean to talk down to me.

So we fought, a short stupid fight  
A really unnecessary fight (and they're all unnecessary, you learn that, as a mother, they all blend into one and they're all about the same thing and that thing is you have to stop slipping away from me, you have to stop growing up so fast)  
And he caved first, he said, I'm *sorry*  
He said it all mad  
And then, I'm sorry  
Quiet, cause he meant it  
And I said yeah, yeah  
Sure you're sorry  
Cause I was still simmering down, cause I get too worked up to just forgive all at once  
But I knew he was sorry,  
And he knew I knew he was sorry,  
And we made dinner without talking.

But it was that comfortable silence, that good silence that's better than talking.

And I'm not saying it's always been perfect.

You raise a kid through however-many-jobs, through night classes, your kid walks for the first time in the back room of a Starbucks and your friend who's on her break sees it, not you—  
You raise a kid in *Chicago*, where every time you're waiting for the Green Line and he's goofing off and gets too close to the tracks you've gotta scream at him, because he doesn't know it's dangerous and you've gotta *make* him know and people look at you like you're some kind of monster—

You raise a kid who's smart enough to know sometimes you wished you'd been smarter,  
You're not always gonna be smiling and cooking with that kid in the kitchen

We've had big fights, too

I haven't been perfect

But he's been damn close

And I raised him

I made sure he was never too hungry to be distracted in school,

I made sure he didn't have to worry about having a coat for the winter,

He never slept on the floor, on a couch, I always gave him the bed.

I raised him, and he is damn near perfect.

That's all you can do.

Man,

I thought I was so lucky when he was born.

I didn't wanna know if it was a boy or girl, before. I didn't care.

But I was so—relieved, when it was a boy.

I thought, good. I don't have to bring a person into the world that *so* many people want to destroy.

I don't have to bring a person into the world that this can happen to.

I thought good, I can bring a person into the world who wouldn't do this to another person.

I can make a good one. Someone's got to.

If he'd ever so much as pulled a little girl's hair on the playground, I would've shut that shit down so fast his world would've spun

But he didn't. Never was interested in that kinda thing.

I like to think I can take credit for that. But sometimes the good ones just end up that way all by themselves.

And I mean, he's...

*Smart.*

When he was little he'd ask teachers so many questions they thought at first he was getting fresh with them,

But he really just wants to know.

He takes in the world like he's hungry for it, starving.

He was so interested by everything as a little boy.

He'd ask a thousand questions when we'd go anywhere.

"Mama, what's on the other side of the lake? Why can't we see it? Can they see us?"

"Mama, why does it get so cold in the winter but still so hot in the summer?"

"Mama, what are clouds made of? What do they feel like if you touch them?"

He was four years old, waddling around behind me and looking up, around, everywhere but right in front of him. I'd have to steer him so he wouldn't trip everywhere.

And I didn't know all the answers, and I never lie to my kid.

So I'd tell him, ask your teacher tomorrow.

And he would. Every question. And it never stopped.

Come middle school, high school, I'd get phone calls, saying he'd be disrupting lessons. I'd ask what he did, teacher would say, I couldn't get through the lesson, it's like he doesn't think I'm qualified to teach.

It could come off disrespectful, I knew that. He knew that. He didn't care. He'd be polite about it, he just wanted to understand it just as much as the teacher did. And he wouldn't accept an answer until there were no more questions left. He wouldn't accept "because that's what the history book says." He didn't just wanna know the truth, he wanted to know why it was true. And not every teacher loved it, at first.

But once they figured out it wasn't attitude— it was the real kinda curiosity you don't see in kids after they're ten— they loved him.

Who wouldn't love a student who's interested? Really, *interested*.

(Some teachers, the ones who don't wanna take the time to explain, they didn't love him, but.)

Most teachers, they love him.

It was why I wanted to get my degree.

You spend that much time with a person who asks so many questions,

You figure you'd like to be able to answer, sometimes.

I'd go to night classes and come home late, we'd do our homework together.

I'd teach him things I was learning, tell him about educational psychology, about business, all that,

And he'd listen so hard.

It felt so special, to teach him things he didn't know already.

It was the best way to study. I had to know my stuff inside and out.

He came to my "graduation."

I picked up a diploma, we took a picture.

He taped my diploma to the fridge.

Like I was his kid.

*She laughs.*

He was so proud of me, when I got that diploma.

I told him I'd tape his up next to mine one day and we'd celebrate.

He said, "Deal."

Shook on it.

A good, good kid.

Deep good.

My boy is bones-good.

*Beat.*

*Beat.*

My boy was—

*Beat.*

(1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6...)

*She breathes, or tries to.*

I am trying to *collect myself*.

*Beat.*

I have an hour, I have forty minutes maybe, and then the people are going to come in here  
 His friends, the girls who had crushes on him, the girl he asked to Junior Prom, their parents,  
 his coaches, his teammates from soccer, from baseball, from swimming, the kids from student  
 council and the school newspaper and chess club, the kids from his classes, his teachers, the  
 little kids he coached in soccer, their parents, my cousins, my aunts, my uncles, my  
 grandparents, my brothers and sisters, Lorna and Matt and their kid, Ma—  
 And they're going to grieve for an hour  
 And then they're going to leave  
 They're going to leave, and *he's* going to—

They'll all go at once, and I won't have the words to—

I deserved to see him grow up.  
 I deserved to watch the world see how exceptional he was.  
 I deserve that.

*Beat. Getting angry.*

I worked my *ass* off for him.  
 I'm tired, I'm sixteen years tired,  
 And now—

And you.

*She looks at the casket, finally. She talks to her son.*

You, mister, you have the nerve to go and—  
 I told you to be *safe*.  
 Didn't I tell you that?  
 Didn't I sit you down and tell you to look both ways,  
 To stay away from strangers  
 To never jump off the rocks or swim at night,  
 To stay in well-lit places after dark,  
 To stay away from trouble,  
 I taught you all that and more  
 And you have the nerve to

Go and get killed?

You have the nerve to ride your bike through the park at night cause it cuts a few minutes off on the way home?

I taught you to never be in the wrong place at the wrong time,

It is too

Easy,

To be in the wrong place at the wrong time,

And you had no business being there, and you had no business dying

It was an unintentional discharge

It was an old crazy veteran who wasn't trying to hurt anyone

You were an accidental victim

You had

No

Business—

You got off work three minutes late.

You weren't home twenty minutes after you should've been and I got the call a few minutes after I texted you and it wasn't your voice and it took the ambulance eleven minutes to get there once they were called and it took three minutes to get you on oxygen and strapped into a gurney in the ambulance and it took six minutes to get to Mercy Medical and it took an hour and a half for life support to not be enough and it took me sixteen years to get here.

It took me thirty-two years to get here.

I gave up *everything* for you.

You *punk*,

You ungrateful,

You martyr,

You reckless invincibility-complex—

You have the nerve to make me hate my own city?

You have the nerve

To die by accident

And *leave me here*.

*Alone*.

I wasn't ready.

You were this close to being grown up,

I was this close to doing it right...

*Finally: grief, animal and foreign.*

*A long silence. She looks at her son.*

You look like you're sleeping.

*A long beat.*

*She makes a decision.*

You're not gonna wake up.

I don't have to wash your clothes.  
We're not driving to Hartigan Beach,  
You're never gonna take your driving test.  
I have an hour.  
I have, thirty minutes, maybe.  
My son, my best friend, who taught me words.

*Beat.*

We were exceptional, weren't we?

*Beat.*

You just might be the most exceptional thing I've done,  
So far.

*Beat. She takes in her son. She kneels behind the casket and bends over his body, holding him. She hums the lullaby she sang to him as a baby.*