

MOUNTAIN LION  
By Ellen Struve  
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PEGGY                                  mother, gardener, wife  
BOYD                                    husband  
JOSEPH                                son, pitching sensation

Scene: The back exterior of the Petersen home. Late-afternoon summer. There is a sliding glass door center. There is a three-tiered wire shelf to the right, a picnic table with umbrella to the left. A gate to the left of the house.

PEGGY makes her entrance through the sliding glass doors. She carries a hunting rifle, by the barrel. She rests it against the gardening shelf. Picks her gardening gloves out of the basket, puts them on. She puts the gardening basket over her arm. Picks up the rifle, again by the barrel and turns. BOYD enters via the fence. He is carrying an empty leash.

PEGGY

Any sign of her?

BOYD (shakes his head no, sees gun)

You sure that's a good idea?

PEGGY

I know you think I'm crazy, but I saw what I saw.

BOYD

I didn't say that.

PEGGY

No. You said I was imagining things. You said what I saw was in all likelihood the Magnusen's golden retriever.

BOYD

They let that dog run loose all the time. You could have made a mistake.

PEGGY

You also said I probably need bifocals, which I have.

(BOYD turns his back on Peggy puts the leash on top of the grill and picks up a plastic package.)

PEGGY

Golden retrievers don't crouch. And they don't scare the shit out of me.

(BOYD opens the plastic package (grill cover) and starts to unfold it. PEGGY moves downstage.)

BOYD

What exactly did the police have to say about Joe?

PEGGY

Just what I told you on the phone. They want to talk to him after he gets home from practice. I didn't know what to say.

BOYD

What exactly.

PEGGY

I told you.

BOYD

You were upset. It was hard to make out.

PEGGY

(As she speaks, she starts settling in to gardening, digging up bulbs.)

Detective Janousek, that's his name, was very polite. Very polite. He always used my name, never ma'am like you hear on the television shows. Just, "Mrs. Petersen, I do not know if you are aware that a picnic shelter burned to the ground in Prairie Lane Park sometime between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning."

I told him I was not aware. We can't see the picnic shelter from our house. It is obscured by the trees. I told him I wished I could help him.

He told me I could help him, as someone who lives on the other side of the creek, saw a silver Nissan leaving the park late Tuesday night. And another neighbor had noticed a group of teenage boys carousing at the picnic shelter.

(she starts ripping the snapping the bulbs in two)

PEGGY cont'd

It turns out Detective Janousek, who is so very polite, has been informed that our teenage son drives a silver Nissan. No doubt that is a matter of public record after the two speeding tickets and one failure to yield citation he has accumulated in the one year he has had his license.

Then he asked, could I account for my son's whereabouts Tuesday evening?

(turns to face Boyd)

Can you account for your son's whereabouts Tuesday evening?

(BOYD closes his eyes, opens them)

PEGGY

I told you we should have kept his keys.

BOYD

It had been a week Peg.

PEGGY

You realize if Coach finds out about this, he's off the team. He's already got the one suspension for hitting that kid from West. If there are charges, Coach'll have to kick him off the team. Fastball or no fastball, he's off. And then what will we do when senior year kicks in. He scraped through spring only under the direct threat of no baseball. If he's kicked off the team think how attractive he'll be to university then. How will we survive senior year?

What will there be left for us to take away?

BOYD

You don't know he did it.

PEGGY

I wish you were right. I wish you were right.

I was right here when I saw it. Pulling bindweed out of the border. I told you I saw it. In the grasses in the park. Large and animal. The color of winter wheat. And it moved Boyd. It moved forward as deliberate as weather. I looked at it and it looked straight through me before it turned around.

I know you don't believe me. And in all likelihood... If I could forget or try to pretend. (beat) But I can't. I can't. I can't get it out of my mind.

PEGGY cont'd.

The city needs to mow that grass. It is beautiful and I love it. But it's too dangerous. The bluestem is too tall. They should reseed with buffalo grass or something non native that won't thrive quite so well. It's a shame. Such a lovely idea, making it prairie again. With the wildflowers and the millet.

If it were just a regular park, I don't think a mountain lion could've gotten so far into the city, if it hadn't been for the grass. God Boyd what could've happened if that fire had spread to the grass? A crying shame.

BOYD (looks out at the audience/prairie)

It didn't.

(BOYD picks up the leash again.  
Moves as to go out the fence.)

PEGGY

It's been thirty-six hours. If she were running around the neighborhood don't you think we'd know by now? I called the Humane Society today. Nothing.

BOYD

It's happened before.

PEGGY

When she was a pup. She's nine. She's a ninety-four pound black lab and that's after the switch to the expensive diet food. She doesn't run anymore. I'm just saying...it's not like her.

BOYD

The gate was open.

PEGGY

You should've seen Joe yesterday morning, when we figured out Maisy was missing. He was so upset. Really broken up. His eyes were all red and he just tore around the house, calling... When I made him promise me not to go into the park to look for her, when I reminded him how I'd seen the mountain lion... I saw the tears in his eyes. And I was upset too. After all, she's a good dog. But in that moment, when I could actually put my arms around him. I thought finally. Finally everything is going to be okay. After all the fighting, all the everything lately. He actually cared about something in our house. He was human again. My boy, crying about his lost dog.

PEGGY cont'd.

Now this. I could kill him with my bare hands.

BOYD

The gun'd be quicker.

PEGGY

Well, it's the one thing we haven't tried. We probably should have pulled it out after that first bad report card. I just.. I don't understand him at all. He's so angry and when he's not angry he's injured and when he's not injured, he's playing a game. A ballgame or a videogame. And either way I don't get it. Or so I hear.

Did he tell you why he socked that kid last week?

BOYD

I saw it. The kid fell on him on purpose.

PEGGY

That's not why he hit him.

BOYD

Yeah it is.

PEGGY

No, it's not. See, this is a classic example of the problem. You think you know him, because he is your son. But you never actually ask him anything, about why he does the things he does.

BOYD

What did he say about it?

PEGGY

Oh, he said he hit him because the kid fell on him on purpose. But I knew there had to be something else. And I was right. He hit him, because as the kid was helping him up the kid called him a dickweed. Dickweed. That's why he hit him.

BOYD

Uh huh.

PEGGY

I don't even know what that means really? Does it even mean anything? Like motherfucker or...

BOYD

No. It's pretty much just what it is.

PEGGY

Is it any reason to hit someone? Such a grave insult that you need to hit somebody for it?

BOYD

It was a close game.

PEGGY

Is it some kind of guy thing, some sort of insult to his manhood?

BOYD

The kid fell on him on purpose.

PEGGY

I don't understand him. You don't either. That's why we have Detective Janousek coming to our house.

BOYD

All he wants is to ask some questions. So he was at the park. Probably there was a whole gang of kids there. So maybe Joe drove. You don't know what happened.

PEGGY

He's capable of it.

BOYD

Jesus Peg. It's not like he killed somebody for Christ's sake.

PEGGY

It was a destructive act.

BOYD

You don't even know for sure he was in the park.

PEGGY

Did he say anything to you about where he was going on Tuesday? Did he seem upset or-

BOYD

He went to his game.

PEGGY

But did he-

BOYD

I got home from work. You were already gone. He came out of his room and asked for his keys.

PEGGY

And you just gave them to him?

BOYD

Yes. I gave them to him. Like we said we would.

PEGGY

You didn't say anything to him?

BOYD

No.

PEGGY

And he didn't say anything to you?

BOYD

No.

PEGGY

We shouldn't have given him back his keys.

BOYD

He's seventeen.

PEGGY

Exactly.

I knew the minute I stepped in the house Tuesday night and he wasn't home. Not that you'd believe me, but there was something wrong about it. You'd turned the television up so loud. And left the curtains open. You know how I hate that at night, the whole world looking in and there we are reflected back at us. I almost said something. But.. But then I thought, no. It's just seeing that thing in the park. Thinking about it watching. And I told myself he'd be home soon, took my pill and went to bed.

Did you see him come home?

BOYD

No.

PEGGY

Did something happen at the game?

BOYD

I wasn't there.

(beat)

You weren't there either.

PEGGY

I teach class Tuesday nights.

BOYD

It's not like he was even pitching. I think I've put my time in on those bleachers.

PEGGY

I should have stayed up.

BOYD

He's not a child.

PEGGY

That's what you think. It's not the same for him as it was for us. His is a different and dangerous world.

BOYD

What are you talking about?

PEGGY

I'm talking about consequences. About college. About how now everything can come back to haunt you. Like those stupid dance squad girls and the internet. About how making fun of the wrong kid can kill people. Steroids. Drugs and sex and disease and all the things we didn't really know about before. Mosquitos for God's sake. At least he's a boy and we can be grateful for that, but he still can't afford..We can't afford.. it's just a different world. Can you imagine? The stuff we used to do? It's not the same.

(picks up the rifle)

You know where I first learned to shoot a gun? Outdoor Ed. Rifle safety, there's a class they don't have anymore.

BOYD

You should put that thing away.



PEGGY

I don't like being scared.

I told Jack Arldt about it, the thing in the park. I saw him at extension office Tuesday night before class. You know, they have that summer place up in Colorado, so he knows a little bit about mountain lions. Of course, he dismissed me too. Agreed with your theory. He said it would be incredibly rare to see one, even in the mountains, much less all the way out here. Still, he said it was possible. Unlikely, but.. It's probably sick or lost. Probably got pushed out of its territory by some other cat and had to find somewhere else to go. Maybe it got wounded, confused and can't find its way back.

I keep thinking I should call the Frosts. Those kids are pretty young, I think. I can't tell their ages. It's been so long since Joseph, I've forgotten everything. Still, the middle one is substantial, but the little one.

BOYD

Tell the police. They'll be here soon enough.

(Boyd gets up. Picks up the leash. Exits through fence. When she hears the fence close, Peggy rips up what is left of the iris. Breaks them in two. Gathers the bunch. Puts them in the basket. She picks up the basket and the gun. Takes the basket to the gardening bench. Leans the gun against it. Puts the basket on top. Pulls out a bowl, box of sulfur and a spoon. Takes the bowl, box, spoon and the basket over to the picnic table. Sits facing sliding doors. Dips the bulbs in the bowl. Scrubs them. Joseph enters through the sliding glass doors. He is holding an apple.)

JOSEPH

Hey. Maisy come home?

PEGGY

No. Not yet.

JOSEPH

Oh. I thought maybe, since Dad's car is here.

PEGGY

He came home early. He's out looking.

JOSEPH

Maybe I should drive around some more.

PEGGY

He'll be back soon.

JOSEPH

Is he real upset?

PEGGY

We are all very upset.

(Joseph turns to go inside)

Don't go inside. Have a seat.

Did Coach have you throw more than yesterday?

(Joseph shrugs.)

PEGGY

How many pitches did you throw?

JOSEPH

I don't know.

PEGGY

More than yesterday?

JOSEPH

Probably.

PEGGY

You got awfully sore the last time you had a week off. The doctor said-

JOSEPH

I'm fine.

PEGGY

The doctor said you needed to start slower and take the extra time warming up.

JOSEPH

Yeah. I know, I was the one he said it to.

PEGGY

Well did you do it?

JOSEPH

Yeah. I said I was fine. Okay.

PEGGY

Okay. I just want to make sure you're being smart about your arm.

JOSEPH

Okay

PEGGY

I don't think it's so terrible of me to ask how practice went, considering the last time you had a week off you thought you tore something and we had to make that appointment with the sports doctor, who is not in plan by the way.

JOSEPH

I'm not sore.

PEGGY

I was just asking about practice.

JOSEPH

It's my arm.  
(pause)

That stuff reeks.

(Joseph starts eating the apple)

PEGGY

Yes it does.

JOSEPH

What's it for?

PEGGY

To protect against rot.

JOSEPH

Oh

PEGGY

I'm dividing the iris. Iris need dividing every three to four years or else they start clumping, they don't bloom. At least not so many blooms. You dig them up, break them apart, tear off the old parts. Then you look for signs of rot. Where there is rot, you dust the wounds with sulfur.

JOSEPH

Why?

PEGGY

So they can make more blooms.

JOSEPH

That's a lot of work for a few flowers.

PEGGY

Gardening is like that.

JOSEPH

I'm just saying, they seemed fine without it. So they don't have so many flowers.

PEGGY

The plant is the flower, Joe. It's the whole point. Pollination then propagation. Did you skip as much science this year as you did English?

JOSEPH

(moves to get up off the bench)

I'm gonna go change.

PEGGY

I didn't mean to..Joe. Wait. Can't we just sit, together, for a minute.

(JOSEPH sits. It's a long minute.)

PEGGY

Do you want to know something about why iris are so different from all the other flowers? I teach it in my perennials class. I like it.

(JOSEPH shrugs.)

PEGGY

The Iris' unique architecture actually serves a clever purpose. The petals—the top part—and the sepals—those are the droopy petals are- arranged so that the pollinators—bees have to crawl inside and the stigmatic stamens

(JOSEPH breaks eye contact, shifts body movement to boredom. She works harder to keep his attention)

PEGGY cont'd.

...Well, anyway, the way it is, its shape..

(She holds her hands up, cupped together like an iris top)

prevents the plant, the Mother plant from self-pollinating. Keeps all the plants from being the same as the parent flower. And the resultant cross-pollination... Well, anyway, it makes the children hardier, stronger. The way they're made.

JOSEPH

Can I go now?

(PEGGY looks at her hands, releases them. Joe gets up. Then as he reaches the door)

PEGGY

I'm just so worried about you.

JOSEPH

I get that. You know, I just don't know why. I gotta go change.

(JOSEPH opens the door)

PEGGY

(stands up. Looks down takes off her gloves while speaking. JOSEPH faces in towards the door.)

Your father and I have something we want to talk to you about. I'm going to ask you a question and it is very important that you tell me the truth. I mean it. But first I'm going to give you the chance.

Is there something you did that you want to tell me about?

The truth, Joseph.

(Joseph still has his hand on the door)

Do we always have to be the last to know?

JOSEPH (quietly)

I'm sorry. I'm real sorry Mom.

PEGGY

What were you thinking? Do you have any idea what you might have done? How could you? How could you?

Of all the stupid brainless stunts Joseph. This. What is the matter with you? Are we that awful?

This. This, Joseph, is what I'm worried about. About you. About taking a wrong turn and turning into someone who doesn't give a damn about anyone but himself, about the day I look at you and I see someone I can't even recognize.

JOSEPH

I said I was sorry. I didn't mean to. I just..

PEGGY

Oh, Joe.

JOSEPH

It's my fault. Okay. I feel real bad. I know it. I know it's my fault.

PEGGY

Is that what you're going to tell the police.

JOSEPH

The police?

PEGGY

Yes the police. Who could be here any moment now.

JOSEPH

But.

PEGGY

Is it sinking in? What you've done?

JOSEPH

The police? But. I mean.. You called the police? I know I shouldn't have been drinking. I broke the rules. You called the police? Shit. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry about Maisy.

PEGGY

What are you talking about? What does any of this have to do with Maisy.

JOSEPH

Why else would you be pissed enough to call the cops? Because it's my fault. How if you really saw what you think you saw and if something really bad happened to Maisy I know it's my fault. Because I was the one who left the gate open when I came home Tuesday night. I can't believe you called the cops.

PEGGY

(puts her hand on the picnic bench. Confused.)  
 You think we called the police? You think this is about Maisy?  
 (relieved)  
 You think this is about Maisy.  
 (goes to him. Puts her hands on his face.)  
 And you don't know what I'm talking about it? You don't know anything about it do you?

JOSEPH

About what?

PEGGY

About the fire in the park. My son is not an arsonist. You're not so angry. So self-destructive. Oh thank god. We can just tell Detective Janousek it's a misunderstanding.  
 (hugs him)  
 You weren't even there. You were at a party.

JOSEPH

The fire in the park?

PEGGY

Yes. A policeman called me today. Somebody burnt down the picnic shelter. He thought. Somebody thought they saw your car.  
 (puts her hand in his hair)  
 But they couldn't have.

JOSEPH

(sits on the step going into the house)  
 Shit.  
 (stands up. Face in hands, pacing.  
 Moves to picnic table.  
 Shit!  
 (Slams his hand down hard)

(physical pain) Oh shit.

PEGGY

What's the matter? Joe? I'm sorry...

(PEGGY crosses to comfort him.)

I...I shouldn't have said those things to you. Not that you aren't still in trouble for the alcohol, but...I was just... I mean.

JOSEPH

Jesus. (shrugs her off him) Mom, what if...what if I was there?

PEGGY

What?

JOSEPH

If I was there, I mean, if I was there Tuesday night. In the park.

PEGGY

That's not funny Joseph. I said I was sorry and I meant it. I-

JOSEPH

I was there. After the game the guys and I went to the park to hang out... and stuff.

PEGGY

Did you see it? Did one of the other boys do it? Was it Finn?

JOSEPH

No. I don't know. It wasn't..it...wasn't Finn.

PEGGY

Who did it? Joseph, I can see how you might think there might be some kind of, some sort of code of honor in not telling, but the police are going to be here and if you don't tell them what you know-

JOSEPH

I don't know! Okay? I don't know who set the fire.

PEGGY

What do you mean you don't know who set the fire?

JOSEPH

I just. I don't know, alright?



PEGGY

Was it Finn?

JOSEPH

No.

PEGGY

Gary?

JOSEPH

It wasn't any of the guys.

PEGGY(surprised)

Were there girls there?

JOSEPH

No. No. Nobody was there okay? I was the only one.

PEGGY

But you said you and the guys went to the park.

JOSEPH

We did. We went to the park and(cautiously)And we had some alcohol with us.

(Beat)

PEGGY

Go on.

JOSEPH

It's all pretty stupid really. I told the guys about how you thought you thought you saw a mountain lion and, I don't know, we, we were jokin' around and somebody came up with this idea that we ought to go on safari. Like a hunt. Sperry said we should do it like a boar hunt and drive it out. Make a chain and walk through the grass. Only once we got to the park, it was all buggy and nasty and it seemed kinda weird to walk around holding hands just to see if there was a mountain lion. So we sat around the shelter drinking beer instead. Only we had this bottle of kinda hardcore stuff and after a while one of us got the idea..

PEGGY

What stuff?

JOSEPH

Everclear. We just. I don't know we just...thought.. Once we were kinda wasted it seemed like a good idea. Nobody really knew how but we thought maybe we could do something with it. Like, you know, blow stuff up or something. Like a molotov cocktail. And that would scare the cat. If it was there. So we tried that. With the empty beer bottles and stuff.

PEGGY

Do you have any idea how dangerous that is?

JOSEPH

(under his breath)  
Like you do.

PEGGY

What is that supposed to mean?

(Silence)

JOSEPH

Nothing

(She stares at him, waiting for him to explain.)

Just. I mean, it's not like you ever tried it or anything so how can you...?

PEGGY

I think I know what's dangerous and what's not.

JOSEPH

We were too chicken to do it anyway. I mean, nobody wanted to lose a hand or anything. So we tried to light pieces of grass with Finn's lighter--for fuses. But they didn't burn super well. Too green I guess. They'd smolder out before getting down to the stuff. Or they'd go out when we threw the bottles. It was pretty disappointing really. And after a while the guys left. And after that... I don't really remember.

PEGGY

What do you mean you don't remember?

JOSEPH

I don't remember.

PEGGY

How can you not remember?

JOSEPH

I don't know.

PEGGY

How can you not remember setting a fire?

JOSEPH

I don't know. I was drunk okay? I was really, really drunk.

PEGGY

So drunk you don't remember setting a fire?

JOSEPH

Yes.

PEGGY

How can you not remember?

JOSEPH

I don't know.

PEGGY

So drunk you don't remember setting a fire—How—

JOSEPH

I don't know okay? I don't remember. I was drunk. Really, really drunk. Maybe you should try it and then we can see how much you remember?

PEGGY

How did you get home?

JOSEPH

I'm pretty sure I drove.

PEGGY

Great. That's just great Joe. Now I know exactly what to say. I've been so worked up about it all day. Calling your father home from work, trying to imagine... now I know I can just say, 'Detective Janousek, thank you for coming. I do believe I can help you now. You see, my son, my spectacularly beautiful, athletic and underage son, the one with so much potential, was in the park that night in a drunken stupor setting fires that might have spread to the entire neighborhood of children and fathers and mothers sleeping in their beds, but do be lenient with him because when it was all over he showed the good sense

PEGGY cont'd

to get behind the wheel of his car, so that he might possibly take out a few more innocent bystanders before plummeting head on into a telephone pole and driving the steering column straight through his mother's heart."

(PEGGY sits down on the picnic bench again, where Joseph had been sitting. She doesn't look at him.)

You could have killed yourself, twice over. Three times if you count the fire. Four.

JOSEPH hangs back awkwardly, not knowing what to do. BOYD enters still holding the empty leash.

Do you want to tell him or shall I?

(She stands up.)

I'm going to call Mary and find out who handled Brian's DUI.

(PEGGY moves past Joe without looking at him and casts a Miserable, pleading look at BOYD before exiting through sliding glass door.)

BOYD

What's she talking about?

JOSEPH

I think I maybe I set the fire in the park.

BOYD

How's that?

JOSEPH

I went there with the guys after the game. To get drunk. And we were screwing around with stuff. With a lighter and some booze. And I think...

BOYD

You shouldn't have been there. Shouldn't have been drinking.

(BOYD puts the leash on the picnic table)

JOSEPH

I know. I told Mom. It was stupid. We were stupid.

We were throwing bottles. I threw one almost to the creek. It had a real arc to it, beautiful. Not like throwing a baseball. High. I thought maybe it'd caught. And when I tossed it up it'd would explode mid-air like a firework. It didn't. I guess the fuse fell out. And then it broke. But nobody got hurt or anything. I mean, not then I guess. I was pretty drunk.

BOYD

Imagine you all were.

JOSEPH

The rest of the guys left. For some party. I stayed.

BOYD

Alone?

JOSEPH

Yeah.

BOYD

And the rest of the guys left?

JOSEPH

Yeah.

BOYD

So you stayed to sober up.

JOSEPH

No.

(long pause between them.)

Not really to sober up I guess. Cause I kind of kept on drinking a little bit.

I don't know. I wanted to think or something. I needed to think about stuff. Or I don't know. Not think about stuff. (Starts and the stops) You ever?

That night at the game...

BOYD

The game.

JOSEPH

Yeah the game.

It was weird. Sitting on the bench. You know I haven't sat out the whole game since seventh grade? I've missed practices sure, but I never missed a whole game. It was weird, sitting on the bench.

Byerly pitched the whole time. He's not bad. I mean, we won. I hated it sitting there. Made me think. How bad it'd be, if I couldn't play. I know I've got university ball next year and maybe something good after that. But I never really thought about how baseball isn't forever. And I know bad stuff happens and guys get injured or they don't ever make it. But I never thought about how even if everything works out. It still ends. Jesus, I mean—even Coach. He doesn't really play you know? And that's the thing I think, the thing I'm really good at. And after the game—at the park, I couldn't shake it, how it felt not being on the field. How I might as well just be sitting in the bleachers. So I just kept on drinking. Started setting blade after blade of grass on fire. Holding them to see how long it took for them to burn out.

(BOYD attacks JOSEPH, grabs him by the shoulders and shakes him. Holds him tight staring into his face PEGGY rushes out the door to separate them.)

PEGGY

Joseph! Boyd!

BOYD

You've got a simple enough goddamned life, you know that. All you gotta do is throw that ball and it's at your feet. Everything waiting for you. A simple enough goddamned life and you got to go screw it up.

PEGGY

Boyd--

JOSEPH

S'okay, Mom.

(Stares directly at his Dad)

So you know, it was me who left the gate open and let Maisy out.

BOYD

MAISY?!

(Boyd pushes Joseph backwards. Steps toward him. JOSEPH pushes his dad back with one hand and pulls back the other making a fist.)

Yeah, well, Maisy's dead.

(Joe lets go of his dad, drops his fist)

PEGGY (one arm extended to Josephs' shoulder)  
What are y-?

BOYD (looking directly at Peggy)  
A mountain lion killed her.

PEGGY  
How do you know?

BOYD (looks out to park)  
I saw it.

PEGGY  
What do you mean you saw it?

BOYD  
I was getting a glass of water. She never saw it coming. It carried her right back over that fence like she wasn't nothing but a sack of potatoes. It was over before, before I could turn off the sink.

PEGGY  
Poor Maisy.

JOSEPH  
Wha? When? Did she come home?

(Silence)

PEGGY  
Tuesday. It happened Tuesday. Poor Maisy.

JOSEPH  
What dya mean Tuesday? You mean you just, you just let us look for her?

JOSEPH cont'd

I thought it was me. I thought I... I got Finn to cover me at the center so I could look for her. I went up and down every goddamned street in the neighborhood. Three times. Thinking the whole time I was the one'd left the gate open.

BOYD

You did leave that gate open.

JOSEPH

When she didn't come home I thought it was my fault. And you just let it happen. I thought-

BOYD

You thought what? Her being dead doesn't change anything. You still went out and got so shitfaced you could barely get in the door. Sneaking around. Caught up in whatever the hell matters to you. Didn't even bother shutting the gate.

PEGGY

That's enough. Joe, you should go change.

(PEGGY tries to reach out for his elbow. Is rebuffed.)

Please.

(JOE goes inside. BOYD sits on picnic bench. PEGGY advances)

PEGGY

He could've killed you, you know, with that arm of his. If he'd wanted to.

BOYD

Don't be silly.

PEGGY

You know it's true.

BOYD

Leave it alone, Peg.

PEG

I can't. I understand. I understand getting so frustrated with someone that there's no other way than to beat it into them. He's our son. He needs us now. He needs you.

BOYD

Maisy's dead.



PEGGY

Yes. She is.

BOYD

You don't know what it was like, seeing it.

(Peggy steps over to him, touches him)

It carried her off like Friday night's trash. My dog that I loved, that loved me better than anyone ever has...gone...and I did nothing. Could do nothing.

I just sat there watching PrimeTime while some animal cracked open her ribs and stuck its face in her chest for dinner.

(Peggy leans into him.)

PEGGY

We need to decide what to do about Joe. We can't let him speak to the police.

BOYD

This is his own damn fault. For being.. For thinking about stuff that no goddamned seventeen year old has any goddamned business thinking about. For sitting there and worrying about stuff that isn't going to happen. Fretting like some helpless old lady. Just like...Just like his mother.

(Peggy takes her hands off him.)

PEGGY

So now this is my fault.

BOYD

I didn't say that.

PEGGY

My fault. My fault that Joe's in trouble with the police. His drinking, I suppose, my fault too. And Maisy. My fault she got eaten by a mountain lion and you didn't say boo about it for two whole days. (beat)

Two whole days you spend walking around the neighborhood with that leash in your hand. Nothing. Not a word. I get a call from the police, what's the first thing I do? You wait two days to tell me the dog is dead.

BOYD

It's not the same for you.

PEGGY

No, I suppose it's not.

BOYD

She never meant as much to you. You took her for granted. How she was always here. How ~~once you got home~~ you'd pat her head and she'd just watch you, happy enough with how things were. You don't know what that meant to me. No idea. That night you came home she was already gone. You were so focused on Joseph being out with his friends you didn't even notice Maisy wasn't sitting next to me.

PEGGY

I take it your silence wasn't to spare us then. The truth wasn't punishment enough.

BOYD

I was in pain.

PEGGY

She was my dog too.

BOYD

Not the same. You never loved her the same.

PEGGY

No two people do. That's the trouble.  
(big beat)  
The police are coming—

BOYD

He'll be okay.

PEGGY

He burnt down a building. He's not okay.

BOYD

You don't know him so well as you think you do.

PEGGY

Maybe I don't but it's still more than you. I was right about this.

BOYD

You were right and I was wrong. Your turn.

PEGGY

Stop it.

BOYD

You're right aren't you? I'm wrong. Aren't I? Go on. Say it. No big deal. My dog is dead. It can't hurt me. I'll say the first part. You were right and I was wrong. Now you get to say the second part.

PEGGY

What is wrong with you?

BOYD

Plenty.

PEGGY

We need to talk about Joe.

BOYD

No Peg, you need to talk about Joe.

PEG

He's your son too.

BOYD

Only by accident of birth. That's your boy Peg. Always has been.

PEG

What is that supposed to mean?

BOYD

It means he's just like you. Ever since he was a kid. That first select team. You know how many pitches I caught? Over and over and over. Night after night after night. Years spent in the backyard catching and none of 'em good enough. Relentless and unforgiving.

PEG

I never pushed him. In baseball.

BOYD

Nature or nurture what does it matter? Most of the time it's the same damn people anyway. He can't help it Peg, any more than you can.

PEG

He always wanted you there.

BOYD

Those bleachers fill one way or the other, as long as he throws fast enough. How many times have you said it yourself? All he cares about is baseball.

PEG

He's seventeen. It's a selfish age.

BOYD

I'm not saying he's selfish. He's single-minded and it's not his fault. You're single-minded too. All he cares about is baseball. All you care about is Joe.

PEG

He's all we have. Our child. And there he was sitting on a picnic bench drinking himself into oblivion, halfway to death. Alone. Whose son was that?

What would have happened if? What could have happened? If the mountain lion had seen him? Helpless.

BOYD

It was full. Remember. It ate our dog.

PEG

I'm sorry. She's gone. There's nothing I can do about that, but--

BOYD

You can go ahead and say it. Four easy words, Peg. You've said them before. You saw a mountain lion in the park. I didn't agree. Or maybe I did. Only I just didn't want you to be right. But you were. You're always right, Peg. Go on ahead and say 'I told you so.'

PEG

To what possible purpose. (She begins to get frightened)

BOYD

Because I want you to.

PEG

No.

BOYD

Because I need to hear it. Isn't that enough?

PEG

No.

BOYD

I am trying to tell you what happened. Say it and I will tell you what happened.

PEGGY

I am not always right.

BOYD

Sure you are.

PEGGY

I make mistakes.

BOYD

Say it! Say it so that I can tell you about the fire.

PEGGY

I don't want to know.

BOYD

That's a lie. You always want to know. You always have to know. Joe wasn't home five minutes and you got a full confession. Or is it just me you don't want to know about. (pleading)

Say it. And I will tell you what happened.

PEG

No.

BOYD

I want to confess.

I want to tell you what I did.

How I lay in bed listening to you breathe. Knowing Maisy was a carcass in the park. Waiting for someone to open the door and scare it away. Like I didn't when it grabbed her by the throat and bit down.

How I heard Joe sneak in and got up. Put on my pants. Got the shovel and a tarp from the garage. And I walked out.

PEGGY

Why would you do that? You knew it was out there. You knew she was dead. You saw the whole thing. Why would you go out there in the middle of the night knowing-

BOYD

I didn't care.

PEGGY

You didn't even take the gun.

BOYD

I didn't even remember we had a gun.

I didn't think it through. I got out there and I couldn't find her. The grass just closed in around me. I couldn't tell where I'd been from where I hadn't. Stupid. Standing there in my pajama shirt with no flashlight.

Then I stepped on her tail. And there she was. Just lying there, open. I rolled her up in the tarp. What was left of her. I meant to bury her down by the creek in softer ground. But she was so heavy, even without her organs. It was too hard to hold both her and the shovel. I left it, carried her out of the grass. I didn't know what I was doing. I got to the shelter. I didn't know what to do. Maybe leave her in a dumpster. Maybe.. I don't know. I put her down to rest. On the picnic table, (meets Peggy's eyes) next to a lighter and some booze.

PEGGY

You didn't.

BOYD

I didn't plan it. I unwrapped her. She was this mess of insides and outsides. Not at all like something I loved, like had ever been a dog. (averts eyes again) I was afraid to touch her. I rubbed the tip of her ear between my fingers. I covered her up and just stood there. My hand pressed against her skull. Like it was. Like we were.

(JOSEPH is visible through the glass door. He hesitates, his hand on the pull.)

PEGGY

I told you so. (crying and angry) I told you so. I told you I saw a mountain lion staring at our house and you didn't believe me.

BOYD

I couldn't have left her there like that Peg. I couldn'ta done it. She loved me. She was my best friend and she deserved something else. She was fine. She deserved something better. Don't you understand? Don't you see? She was..

PEG

She was a good dog. Joe is your son. I am your wife.

BOYD

She was my best friend.

PEG

A lot of good it did her.

BOYD

I didn't know about Joe. I didn't know.

The fire spread so fast. Maybe there was some turpentine on the tarp or maybe just the alcohol, but once it caught, it just kept on burning. I hadn't thought..The bench was too close to the supports, it spread fast.

PEG

What do we tell the police now?

BOYD

I don't know.

PEG

You should have told me.

BOYD

I shouldn't have come home at all.

(long pause while Peggy tries to recover from this.)

PEGGY

What are we are going to tell the police?

BOYD

I don't know.

PEG

Why not?

You've had hours. You've had days of knowing.

Figure it out! It wasn't your funeral. You are not exempt. You want to burn things down. Fine. You need to destroy something. Fine. But don't tell me you don't know what to do. You don't get to walk away. Don't you dare just walk away.

PEGGY cont'd.

I saw a monster in the grass. I told you and I can't take it back.

BOYD

I'm sorry.

PEG

Don't.

BOYD

What do you want me to say?

PEGGY

Nothing. I don't want you to say anything. You were wrong. I was wrong. I thought for sure Joseph had set that fire. My only child. Maisy's dead. A mountain lion killed her. I was right. This whole time I thought that the danger was out there. The minute I open my mouth. Every time I open my mouth I am screaming. I don't want to be right. I don't want you to say anything. I want to be heard. I want to know I am not alone. I saw a mountain lion in the park. All you had to do was believe.

(JOE enters, leaves the door open)

JOE

Mrs. Barton called. With that lawyer's number. I have it. But I think when they get here I should probably just tell them the truth.

PEGGY

That, that won't be necessary. Joe, your dad. (takes in a breath, starts over) Your father and I... That night in the park..



JOE

I know. Okay. I heard.

BOYD

How?

JOE

It's just a glass door. That's all. I could hear you. (looks down) See you.

The cops already probably know about me.

PEGGY

No.

JOE

I mean. They probably already know about us drinking and everything.

BOYD

This is my mess.

JOE

They don't know that. I mean. They can't prove it. They can't prove I set the fire. I'll tell them I can't remember. That's true anyway.

PEGGY

This is not what we're going to do.

JOE

Think about it. I'm still a minor. It's not like I've ever done anything before. I mean and got caught or anything.

It could've been an accident. And

PEG

You didn't do it. We're not going to let them think you did.

JOE

Why not, Mom? You thought I did it. You believed it. My own mom. So what's the big deal.

(Boyd disengages, stares out into the yard)

PEG

Your future is the big deal.

JOE

What future? Baseball? I'm still screwed—but it's just summer ball. I mean Coach might take pity on me because my dad's all fucked up or something but it's not like everybody on the team doesn't know I was drunk. Half the juniors were there and he's gonna have to do something. So you know that's already done. So I'm suspended. It's not like it's spring. It's not the end of the world.

PEG

Lying to the police is a ridiculously stupid idea.

JOE

Why, cause it's not yours.  
It's a good idea. Dad?

BOYD

I don't know Joe.

JOE

It's a good idea. You want me to think about other people. I can think about other people. You don't know me. Look at me now. Do you recognize me now?

PEGGY

You are our son and you do not need to do this. We won't let you do this. Boyd. Tell him we are not doing this.

(Boyd is looking off into the distance)

Tell him we are not doing this.

BOYD

I don't know.. (looking back out at the grass.)

PEGGY

Say we aren't doing this.

BOYD

I think there's something out there.  
Do you see something?

PEGGY

Listen to me. Boyd, are you listening to me?

BOYD

Just past the ash tree.  
Something moved.

Where?  
JOE

Do you see it?  
BOYD

I think so. I think I see it.  
JOE

(PEG moves quickly to get the gun, remove the safety and prepare to shoot.)  
BOYD

Peggy, wait.

I will not be afraid.  
PEG

JOE (steps forward)  
I see it! Do you see it?

(PEGGY raises her rifle)

BOYD

Don't shoot. Peggy. Peggy!

(Peggy shoots once, and then twice. JOSEPH rushes forward to the edge of the stage. BOYD covers his face and slumps down on the edge of the picnic table.)

PEGGY

Did I hit it? Did I kill the mountain lion?

JOE

No, mom. You killed the Magnusen's golden retriever.

(PEGGY covers her mouth with her hand, letting her other arm fall, holding the rifle.)

Oh

PEGGY

(JOE crosses to his mother, gently puts his arm around her and takes the gun as she sinks to her knees. He sets the gun against the garden shelf. JOE looks to his father who is still staring at the ground.)

We should go in.

JOE

(BOYD is unresponsive. JOSEPH helps his mother to her feet and escorts her inside.)

END OF PLAY