

# **A Good Year**

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

Contact:

Philip Middleton Williams

16600 SW 77<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Palmetto Bay, FL 33157

[pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com)

[www.pmwplaywright.com](http://www.pmwplaywright.com)

**CHARACTERS:**

MARC GRIFFIN: Late twenties. A teacher of English.

SANDY PARKER: Late twenties. Marc's former partner.

BARRY KESSLER: Late thirties. A parent.

BRIAN KESSLER: Eighteen. Barry's son.

**PLACE and TIME:**

A classroom in a prestigious private day school in New England. Present day.

The play takes place over the course of a school year.

## A Good Year

### Fall

*The setting is an open stage that suggests a classroom in a prestigious private day school in New England. There is a conference table with chairs around it. Lighting on the back wall suggests windows looking out to an open sky. There is a whiteboard on a stand or easel. Stage Right is an entry door, which is open. Downstage Right and off to the side is a spot that can be lit solo. Stage Left side has the teacher's desk. It has an in-box, a laptop computer, a telephone, a desk lamp, and other desk items. Behind the desk is a bookshelf with paperback books and files. There is a coat tree in the corner.*

*At rise, it is mid-morning. MARC GRIFFIN, a well-built man in his late twenties, is sitting at the desk. He is wearing a short-sleeved button-down shirt, tie, khakis, and loafers. A lightweight sports coat is hanging on the coat tree. At the moment he is filling in paperwork.*

MARC (to himself): Emergency contact. (Thinks for a moment, then writes.) Okay, Sandy, you're it. Mom and Dad would just freak out. (He pulls out a cellphone, quickly texts a message, then goes back to the paperwork.) Direct deposit information. Well, first I need to open an account here. That can wait.

*(He looks at some of the other papers, shakes his head, then sticks the papers in a manila envelope. He gets up from the desk, stretching, perhaps flexing his muscles, then goes over to the whiteboard. He picks up a marker and writes DR. MARC GRIFFIN – SENIOR ENGLISH. He looks at it, chuckles as if he doesn't quite believe it himself. Then underneath that he writes WELCOME STUDENTS AND PARENTS.)*

MARC: Okay, bring 'em on.

*(MARC goes back to the desk. As he does, SANDY PARKER, Marc's former partner, appears in the Downstage Right spot. He is the same age as MARC, in good shape, in jeans, a t-shirt, bare feet, and holding a coffee mug in one hand, a cellphone in the other. MARC's cellphone rings. He sees the caller ID, smiles, and puts in a Bluetooth earbud.)*

MARC: Hey, good morning.

SANDY: It's barely that. It's still dark two hours earlier here, y'know.

MARC: Didn't wake you, did I?

SANDY: No, I gotta get going anyway. I saw your text. So, how's it going?

MARC: Good. First real day and all that. I'm supposed to meet with my department chair this morning to get things squared away before it all begins next week. The Open House is tonight.

SANDY: You'll be swell, you'll be great....

MARC: Thank you, Mama Rose.

SANDY: Yeah, thought you'd like that little musical theatre reference. So, I'm your emergency contact, huh?

MARC: Well, better you than my folks. They're three thousand miles away. You're only two thousand. And you'll know what to do, just in case.

SANDY: Just in case.

MARC: Yep. So, is Charlie gonna move in, or...?

*(Beat.)*

SANDY: No. That was never the plan.

MARC: Oh, I thought –

SANDY: Nope, just me. Here alone in the house. It's still our house. *(Beat.)* So, how was the trip?

MARC: Wasn't too bad. Spent the night in the middle of nowhere, then got here Monday. I found a nice one-bedroom, the movers will deliver my stuff next week, and I'm at the school now, trying to get things going. So far –

SANDY: Good. *(Beat.)* Look, I know we left things a little...

MARC: Unfinished?

SANDY: Not exactly.

MARC: What would you call it? We had four months to talk about it. We're not gonna wrap it up in a phone call at eight o'clock in the morning.

SANDY: Six o'clock here.

MARC: Whatever. We're –

*(BARRY KESSLER enters from SR door. He is in his mid-thirties, handsome, well-dressed in casual summer business attire, and well-groomed. He looks around the room then smiles at MARC. MARC indicates he's on the phone, and BARRY nods.)*

MARC *(to SANDY)*: I'll... uh...I gotta go. I'll call you later.

SANDY: Okay.

*(Light out on SANDY; he exits. MARC takes out earbud.)*

BARRY: Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt your call.

MARC: Oh, it's okay. I was just about to hang up anyway.

BARRY: Well, I'm glad to see you made it.

MARC (*putting on his jacket, smoothing his hair*): Yessir. Good to see you again, Mr. Kessler.

BARRY: All settled in?

MARC: Yessir, I found a nice little place out west of town. The moving van will be here sometime next week.

BARRY: So, what, you're camping out in your living room?

MARC: I brought enough clothes and stuff in my car, and for now I'm putting my old sleeping bag to good use.

BARRY (*chuckling*): Well, I think the school should spot you for a motel until your furniture gets here. Or we could have put you up at my place. Got plenty of room now that my oldest is off to Princeton.

MARC: Oh, it's no trouble, sir. Kind of reminds me when I went to summer camp.

BARRY: Good, good. (*Beat.*) Well, I was really happy to see you come aboard. I was truly impressed with your resume and your scholarly work, and I know the rest of the hiring committee was impressed as well. And since I am chairman of the board, I usually get my way. I'm just glad some college or university didn't snap you up.

MARC: Well, sir, I gave them plenty of chances over the last couple of years. Not a lot of places are hiring, and when they are, they're only part-time.

BARRY: Not a lot to live on.

MARC: No, sir. So, I'm really happy to be here.

BARRY: Good. I know things might be a little overwhelming these first few days. The headmaster or your department chair would normally handle these meetings, but they're really under the gun, so I told them I'd help pick up the slack. I was a student here myself, so I know the ropes, so to speak.

MARC: Thank you. I really appreciate it. It's...

BARRY: Quite a switch from the lumberyard, isn't it? That wasn't exactly a job for a guy with doctorate in English. But I knew you would be a good fit. The kids will love you. As I'm sure you've heard over and over, we think of this school like a family. Part of that is the board's Weekend Off. Board members host new faculty members as their overnight guest. I've got a little place up at a lake a couple of hours north of here. I'd like you to be my guest some weekend this fall.

MARC: Yes, sure, thank you.

BARRY: My pleasure; I'm looking forward to it. By the way, has Alvin spoken to you yet?

MARC: Alvin?

BARRY: Alvin Green, the Fizz Ed department chair. He's looking for an assistant coach in wrestling and weight training. Based on your background, and judging by your build, you're good for it.

MARC: Well, it's been a while since I did any wrestling.

BARRY: But it looks like you still work out.

MARC: Oh, yessir, I do. I'd be happy to help with that.

BARRY: Good. We built a state-of-the-art weight room this summer. And that should come with a little extra in your paycheck. I'll talk to the headmaster about that before classes start next week.

MARC: Thank you, sir. That'd be great.

BARRY: Maybe it will inspire me to go back to the gym myself. Feel like I'm getting soft.

MARC: You look good, sir.

BARRY: Well, thanks. The real jock in the family is Brian. You'll see. I think he's one of your advisees. Lacrosse, wrestling, baseball, swimming, built like a Greek god, handsome as hell. Hard to believe he's my son.

*(BRIAN KESSLER enters SR. He is as advertised: a handsome, well-built young man of eighteen. He is wearing a rugby shirt over gym shorts and sneakers, and wire-rimmed glasses. He enters with a self-assured swagger.)*

BARRY: And speaking of Adonis...

BRIAN: Hi, Dad.

BARRY: Brian, I'd like you to meet Dr. Griffin. He's taking over Senior English this year, plus he'll be your advisor.

*(MARC stands up as BRIAN strides across the room as if he owns it and puts out his hand.)*

BRIAN: Nice to meet you, sir.

*(They shake hands, and BRIAN checks out MARC head to toe with a grin, apparently liking what he sees. MARC senses this obvious cruise and smiles nervously.)*

MARC: Nice to meet you, too, Brian.

BARRY *(to BRIAN)*: How's it going out there?

BRIAN: Pretty good. Coach had us running wind sprints and laps. Some of the new kids are taking it kind of hard, but we're done for now.

BARRY: You'll whip 'em into shape.

BRIAN *(shrug)*: Comes with the job.

BARRY (to MARC): He's the team captain.

MARC: Great.

BARRY: Dr. Griffin is also going to be the assistant wrestling coach and fitness trainer.

BRIAN: Hey, good. We need someone in there who knows his shit.

*(MARC reacts mildly to the boy's use of profanity, but BARRY doesn't react. BARRY's phone pings a text alert.)*

BARRY: Excuse me. *(Pulls out phone, reads it.)* Hmph. *(Texts a quick reply.)* Gentlemen, I'll right back. Why don't you two get acquainted?

BRIAN: Okay, Dad.

*(BARRY exits SR, closing the door behind him.)*

MARC: So, Brian, have a seat.

*(MARC goes and sits at his desk. BRIAN pulls out a chair from the conference table and sits casually, spreading his legs a little and leaning back, showing off. MARC sees this but does not respond. He picks up a stack of folders and thumbs through them until he comes to one. He pulls it out and opens it.)*

MARC: All right. Okay. Um... Brian. *(Reads through the paper in front of him, not looking up at BRIAN.)* Okay. Not a bad record: mostly A's and B's. Did pretty well on your PSAT's. You ready for the SAT's in November?

BRIAN: Yes.

MARC: Thing to remember about them, especially in the reading comprehension part, is that all the answers are there. All you have to do is answer the questions based on what you just read.

BRIAN: Thing is, I'm dyslexic. And nearsighted. Tests...bother me.

MARC: Yeah, they noted that here. But you have to have a Zen approach to it. Remember, you're the one taking the test; the test isn't taking you.

BRIAN *(chuckling)*: Yeah, okay.

MARC: I imagine you're all ready to apply to college, right?

BRIAN: Oh, yeah, they've been pushing that since freshman year.

MARC: Right. You'll be working with the college counselor on that. Mister –

BRIAN: Mister Cochran. Yeah, he's the guy. *(Beat.)* Where'd you go?

MARC: Beg pardon?

BRIAN: For college.

MARC: Oh. Minnesota for my B.A., Colorado for grad school.

BRIAN: High school?

MARC: A prep school in my hometown.

BRIAN: Where's that?

MARC: Santa Monica. California.

BRIAN: Yeah, I've heard of it. Nice. So, you were a wrestler.

MARC: Uh, yeah. In high school.

BRIAN: What class? I mean, what weight class?

MARC: One eighty-two.

BRIAN: Me too. Coach says that's the perfect weight for a guy my size. Big enough to really do the job, but still light enough to be quick with the moves, if you know what I mean.

MARC: Good. *(Looks down at the folder.)* So, it looks like you did pretty well in English last year despite your dyslexia.

BRIAN: Yeah, I did okay. So, are you married?

MARC: I'm sorry?

BRIAN: Just curious. Getting to know you.

MARC: Uh... No.

BRIAN: That's cool. *(Chuckling.)* Me neither.

*(MARC gets up and through the following casually strolls over to the door, opens it all the way, then goes back to his desk. BRIAN watches him the whole time.)*

MARC *(cont'd)*: My job, besides teaching your class, is to keep an eye out for you in terms of any academic issues or if you have any kind of...something you want to talk about. I'm a pretty good listener, and anything you tell me will be kept confidential. I know how senior year can be; can't wait to get out there, but it can be kinda scary, too. I'm here to help. If you need it.

BRIAN: Since you're new here, maybe I can help you, too. I've been going here since I was five. Kinda know how shit works around here. If you need it.

*(MARC is back at his desk now. He sits.)*

MARC: I've got a few more days of orientation and meetings, but I'd appreciate that when school gets going. *(He looks at the folder.)* So, if there's anything else –

BRIAN: No, we're good for now. At least I am.

*(BRIAN gets up, as does MARC, who comes out from behind the desk and offers a handshake.)*

MARC: Thanks for coming by.

*(BRIAN takes MARC's hand.)*

BRIAN: Sure. Oh, one more thing. I'm gay.

MARC: Oh. Okay.

*(BRIAN is still holding MARC's hand.)*

BRIAN: Everyone here knows it. I came out in the eighth grade. Just thought I'd let you know, too.

MARC: Thanks.

*(BRIAN smiles broadly and releases MARC's hand.)*

BRIAN: You're welcome. *(Glancing at the whiteboard.)* Dr. Griffin.

*(BARRY reenters SR.)*

BARRY: No good deed and all that. I have to go back to the office, kiddo. Why don't you hit the showers and I'll drop you at the house?

BRIAN: Sure, Dad. *(To MARC.)* Catch you later.

MARC: You bet.

*(BRIAN exits SR, BARRY and MARC watching. BARRY turns to MARC.)*

BARRY: Good meeting?

MARC: Yessir, I'd say so. Nice kid.

BARRY: Thanks. He's been my rock for the last year, what with me going through the separation and all.

MARC: Sorry to hear that.

BARRY: Thanks.

MARC: I know... well, I understand.

BARRY: Been there, done that?

MARC: In a way.

*(BARRY goes and sits in the same chair BRIAN vacated, assuming a similar posture, although not as blatantly displaying himself. MARC sits at his desk.)*

MARC *(cont'd)*: He told me about his dyslexia and his challenge with taking tests. Is there anything you want me to keep an eye out for?

BARRY: As a matter of fact, I was going to ask you if you'd consider working with him outside of class, perhaps doing some test prep and his college entrance essays. The school does offer it, but I think he could use some one-on-one. That's been helpful in the past, and the last teacher seemed to make some headway with him. But she left last year. Goes without saying that I'd compensate you for your time.

MARC: Um... okay. Let me check with the school about that. See how that works in my schedule.

BARRY: Or maybe we can work out some arrangement where you come to the house. We're not far from here, and I think doing it in familiar surroundings might be more conducive to accomplishing our goals.

MARC: That sounds good.

BARRY: All right. Say, what are you doing for dinner?

MARC (*chuckling*): I've got a Lean Cuisine in the freezer.

BARRY: Let me take you out tonight and we can talk about what you can do for us. My treat.

MARC: That'd be great. Thank you.

BARRY: Meet me here at six and we'll go from here. You like Thai?

MARC: Uh, yessir.

BARRY: Good.

(*BARRY stands, as does MARC.*)

BARRY (*cont'd*): I've got a really good feeling about you, Marc. Like I said, I knew it the minute we met last spring when you interviewed, and I'm sure we're going to be very happy to have you as a part of the family here.

MARC: Thank you, sir. I'm... well, I'm really glad to be here. It's a nice place.

(*BARRY comes over to MARC, offers a hand. They shake, then BARRY puts a hand on MARC's biceps, squeezes it, and then walks with him to the door.*)

BARRY: This will be a good year. I can feel it.

(*BARRY gives MARC's biceps one more squeeze, grins broadly, then exits SR. MARC watches him go, then closes the door. He leans back in the chair, closing his eyes.*)

MARC (*softly, to himself*): Oh, wow.

*Lights fade slowly to black. In the darkness we hear the ambient sounds of students passing in the hall outside the classroom, rising in crescendo as they pass: snatches of conversation, lockers opening and closing, until we hear a school bell. The sounds fade, the lights come up slowly. The writing on the whiteboard now reads GATSBY INTRO STUDY QUESTIONS DUE*

*MON. MARC is in the same outfit but exchanged the light sports coat with a blazer. The light comes up on SANDY in his same place. Now he is in a shirt, tie, and khakis as if for work in an office. They are mid-conversation on their phones.*

SANDY: Yeah, it sounds like you had a good time.

MARC: We did. It's really pretty up there with all the fall colors. 'Course, I bet it's pretty harsh in the winter with all the snow and ice.

SANDY: So, you stay inside and cuddle in front of the fireplace. Or soak in the hot tub.

MARC: It wasn't like that.

SANDY (*gigglesnort*): Oh, I'm sure. Just two guys out in the woods.

MARC: Get your mind out of the gutter. Barry's the chairman of the school's board of trustees...

SANDY: Oh, you call him Barry?

MARC: Well, not to his face.

SANDY: You're so polite.

MARC: He's my boss's boss. Besides, he had his son with us.

SANDY: Brian Kessler, the star of the lacrosse team?

MARC: How do you know –

SANDY: The kid's on Facebook, Instagram – You didn't know that?

MARC: I don't go near those sites with my students, and if they try to contact me through them, I decline it. C'mon.

SANDY: Okay, I was only teasing you.

MARC: You have to be so careful these days.

SANDY: I get it. Now, the dad.... He's on there, too. He's not too bad, either.

MARC: Shut up.

SANDY: Okay, okay. Look, we still need to –

MARC (*interrupting*): I gotta get going. I'll talk to you later.

SANDY: Okay. Still love you.

MARC: Uh, yeah, you too.

*(Light goes down on SANDY; he exits. MARC is still lit. He heaves a big sigh, then puts away his phone. Lights go down to dark, followed by the ambient sounds of students in the hall again.)*

*Bell rings. Then the lights come up on the classroom, after school. The SR door is open. The light in the windows is dusky. It is now October, indicated by a jack-o'-lantern decoration affixed to one corner of the whiteboard. The whiteboard now reads GATSBY CHAPTERS 5-7 STUDY QUESTIONS DUE MON. MARC is sitting at the conference table. BRIAN is next to him. He is in the school uniform of a blue blazer, tie, button-down shirt, khakis, and loafers. MARC is reading something on a paper, pencil at the ready, BRIAN watching him.)*

MARC: This is better.

*(MARC reads on, makes a couple of marks on the paper that BRIAN cranes his neck to see, then sits back.)*

MARC *(cont'd)*: Okay, this paragraph here where you talk about the work you did last summer with the disabled kids.

BRIAN: That's good, isn't it?

MARC: It is, but right now it could have been written by anybody. You want your college entrance essays to stand out from the rest. You need to show them what it meant to you, how it makes you someone that they think will contribute to society and make a difference.

BRIAN: How do I do that?

MARC: See it from the kids' point of view.

BRIAN: What, like I'm... disabled? I don't know what that's like.

MARC: You don't?

BRIAN: How could I?

MARC: You're dyslexic.

BRIAN: So? That's not a disability, really.

MARC: What was it like for you when you started to learn to read? What did the letters look like?

BRIAN: I don't remember.

MARC: You don't?

*(BRIAN shrugs.)*

MARC: I've seen your handwriting. You've learned a lot over the years, but you still sometimes get your letters backwards, and it takes you a long time to write out things in longhand.

BRIAN: Thank God for computers.

MARC: Look, you have a disability. We all do, to some degree. So, think about how you would fit in with those kids. Imagine what it would be like to live in a world that wasn't designed for you. Running across the lacrosse field; heck, even going up the stairs to the second floor of your

house. Or having limited vision or hearing. What would it mean to you to have someone like you be a friend, take them swimming or sailing or just hanging out together? Think how you changed their life, even if it was only for an afternoon.

BRIAN (*sigh*): Yeah, okay.

MARC: C'mon, you've got a week. You can bat this out in a day. Then move on to the next one, then the next...

BRIAN: Okay, okay.

(*BRIAN looks at the whiteboard, seeing the assignment, perhaps whispering it to himself. MARC sees this.*)

MARC: So, how are you liking *The Great Gatsby*?

BRIAN: It's good.

MARC: Sound familiar?

BRIAN: What, the story?

MARC: The people. Nick. Tom. Daisy. Know anyone like them?

BRIAN: Yeah. Lots.

MARC: Good.

BRIAN: What, that I know people like them? Most of 'em are shits.

MARC: Even Nick?

BRIAN: Well, no, not him. I think he's... (*BRIAN chuckles.*) He reminds me of you.

MARC: Really?

BRIAN: Yeah, I mean he's this cool observer, not really part of the whole crazy scene, but people confide in him, tell him things.

MARC: Why do you think they do that?

BRIAN: Because he's a good listener, like you. Plus, he's kinda hot.

(*MARC stares for a second, then laughs.*)

BRIAN (*cont'd*): Well, he is. I mean, not like some guy in some underwear fashion shoot, but... Maybe Gatsby's got a little thing for him, huh? And vice-versa?

MARC (*shaking his head*): I don't think Fitzgerald had that in mind.

BRIAN: What about at the end of the second chapter where Nick is with Mr. McKee, standing next to his bed and the guy is between the sheets in his underwear?

MARC: You caught that.

BRIAN: Yeah, I did. They left that out of the movie, by the way.

MARC: I understand why you would watch the movie with your dyslexia, but this isn't a film studies class. You won't be able to answer the study questions from watching it. I made sure of that. *(Beat.)* Which version did you watch?

BRIAN: The old one. With Robert Redford.

MARC: What'd you think?

BRIAN: I like the book better.

MARC: Me too.

BRIAN: So, what's your disability?

MARC: Beg pardon?

BRIAN: You said we all have a disability of some kind. What's yours?

MARC: I can't whistle.

BRIAN: Oh, come on. Anyone can whistle.

MARC: I can't. I tried. *(He tries. Nothing.)* See?

BRIAN: That doesn't count. For real. Do you have a real disability?

MARC: Well, I can't see three-D.

BRIAN: Seriously?

MARC: In case you haven't noticed, I have crossed eyes. I can see out of both of them, but not together, so there's no three-D.

BRIAN: So, how do you... What about three-D movies? What do you do there?

MARC: I don't. The viewers give me a headache. On the upside, I don't have to pay to rent them. On the downside, I can't be an airline pilot. Not that I ever aspired to be one.

BRIAN: Wow, that's too bad.

MARC: Born this way, so I don't miss it. *(Hands paper back to BRIAN.)* Keep working on this. You're almost there.

*(MARC goes back to his desk. BRIAN gets up.)*

MARC: So, how was your visit to Princeton last week?

BRIAN: Good. Saw my brother, saw the campus, got the whole pitch.

MARC: Think you want to go there?

BRIAN: No. One Kessler there is enough.

MARC: I suppose.

*(MARC begins to tidy up his desk.)*

BRIAN: So, do you have a boyfriend?

MARC: Whoa. Now we're crossing boundaries, Brian.

BRIAN: Oh, c'mon. Mr. Wheeler talks about his boyfriend all the time. "Jack and I went to the beach; Jack and I went to the movies, yada-yada-yada." Ms. Jackson-Paris had her wedding reception in the courtyard.

MARC: Mr. Wheeler teaches drama, and Ms. Jackson-Paris has been here for twenty years. I've been here two months. I'd rather keep my personal life to myself if you don't mind.

BRIAN: Hey, it's not like we don't see each other out of school. You've been to our house. You went with me and Dad up to the lake a couple of weeks ago for the weekend. You and I slept in the same room.

MARC: We *all* slept in the same room; it's an open floorplan A-frame. And I was in my sleeping bag.

BRIAN: C'mon, remember what they're always saying: we're one big family here.

MARC: Why is my life that important to you?

BRIAN: It's not. I mean, I just want to get to know you better, that's all.

*(BRIAN gazes at MARC. Beat. Finally...)*

MARC: I did.

BRIAN: You did. But not anymore.

MARC: No.

BRIAN: What's his name?

*(Beat as MARC looks at BRIAN, who holds his gaze.)*

MARC: Sandy.

BRIAN *(nodding)*: Nice name. What happened?

MARC: Okay, that's enough for now.

*(BRIAN keeps gazing into MARC's eyes. Another long beat.)*

BRIAN: Okay.

MARC: I'd appreciate it if you would keep that to yourself.

BRIAN: I will. Scout's honor. I mean it. I'm an Eagle Scout.

MARC: Be sure to put that on your college applications.

BRIAN: I will. *(Beat.)* You really do have crossed eyes.

MARC: I know.

*(BRIAN grins and exits through SR door. MARC follows him, then closes the door. Beat as he stares at the door.)*

MARC *(to himself)*: He's eighteen. He's your student. And he's eighteen.

*(MARC crosses to his desk and continues tidying up. A knock on the door.)*

MARC: Come in.

*(BARRY enters. He is in a business suit and carrying an attaché case. MARC stands.)*

BARRY: I was here for some board business, so I thought I'd stop by and see how you're doing.

MARC: Thanks. Brian just left if you're looking for him.

BARRY: I saw him in the hall. How's he doing?

MARC: Good; we're making progress on his essays.

BARRY: And the rest?

MARC: Uh...?

BARRY: First marking period grades come out this Friday.

MARC: Oh, right.

*(MARC shuffles some papers as BARRY watches. MARC finds what he's looking for.)*

MARC: Um, looks good so far. A's and B-plusses.

BARRY: Where are the B's?

MARC: Physics, for one.

BARRY: And the other?

*(For a moment, BARRY and MARC look at each other, then MARC looks down at the paper.)*

MARC: In my class.

BARRY: Why's that?

MARC: Well, uh, to be honest, I don't think he's really pulling his weight. He seems to be going through the motions. He's doing the assignments, but I don't think he's really into it...

*(MARC tries not to look flustered, but he's fidgeting under BARRY's eyes.)*

MARC *(cont'd)*: And in our class discussions about the reading, he's either not participating or he's making snarky comments –

BARRY: Snarky?

MARC *(hesitant)*: Wisecracks. Not really relevant to the discussion.

BARRY: You mean he's being a wise-ass.

MARC: Well, yessir.

BARRY *(chuckling)*: Not surprising. He can be like that. A lot. Have you said anything to him?

MARC: Well, I've told him – and others – to stick to the subject. I mean, I don't mind the occasional joke or going off on a tangent. I do that myself just to, y'know, lighten the mood, but...

BARRY: These kids are used to getting their way... or thinking they can. Don't be afraid to rein them in. Show 'em who's in charge. Flex those impressive biceps of yours. They'll come around. Even Brian.

MARC: Yessir.

BARRY: You know he likes you.

MARC: And I like him, too –

BARRY: What's more, he respects you. So, if you come down on him with a firm but gentle hand, he'll respond the way you expect him to.

MARC: Yessir.

BARRY: More importantly, the other kids in the class will as well. A lot of kids follow his lead, so if he shows more useful attention in class, they will, too.

MARC: Good to know.

BARRY: Oh, it's the typical high school dynamic. Teenagers all want to be their own person, but they live and die by peer pressure. I'm sure you remember, right? Wasn't that long ago for you.

MARC: No sir, it wasn't.

BARRY: Me neither, although it seems like it was several geological ages ago.

MARC: Yessir.

BARRY: Well, I just wanted to pop in and see how it's going, see how you're doing.

MARC: Thanks.

BARRY: Finding your way around.

MARC: Yessir.

BARRY: Good. Glad to hear it.

MARC: Thank you.

*(BARRY starts to head for the door, then stops.)*

BARRY: Say, what are you doing this weekend?

MARC *(shrug)*: Not much. Maybe finally get around to hanging some pictures.

BARRY: Well, Brian's going to be spending the weekend with his mother. I was thinking maybe you and I could go back up to the lake, grill up some steaks, enjoy the quiet. It's really beautiful this time of year with the leaves and all. How about it?

MARC: Uh, sure, sounds great.

BARRY: Okay, then. We'll head out Friday after school and be back on Sunday in time for the late game.

MARC: Thank you very much, Mr. Kessler.

*(BARRY crosses to MARC, puts a hand on his shoulder.)*

BARRY: I'm not that much older than you, Marc. You can call me Barry.

MARC *(nodding)*: Uh, okay... Barry.

*(BARRY squeezes MARC's biceps and grins.)*

BARRY: Great.

*(BARRY heads for the door.)*

BARRY: See you Friday, Marc.

MARC: See you Friday, Barry.

*(BARRY opens the door, turns back and smiles, then exits. MARC watches him go, then closes the door. He goes back to his desk, sits, continues to organize his papers, then stops and stares at the door. He leans back, closes his eyes, and lets out a deep sigh. He pulls out his phone and punches a speed-dial.)*

MARC *(into phone)*: Hey, I know you're still at work, so I'll talk to you later. Yeah, still love you, too.

*(MARC ends the call.)*

MARC *(to himself)*: He's your boss. He's your boss's boss. He's your boss's boss's boss. Wow.

*(Lights fade slowly to blackout and we hear the ambient sounds of people in the hall as before. This goes on as long as necessary to facilitate costume and set changes, then the lights come back up slowly. Bell rings. It is mid-afternoon, after school. It is November, the week before Thanksgiving break. A turkey or some other seasonal decoration is on the corner of the whiteboard. The classroom is empty. MARC's jacket, shirt, and pants are on the coat tree. A gym bag is next to it. On the whiteboard is written TERM PAPER TOPICS / THESIS STATEMENTS DUE MON. MARC enters from SR door. He is wearing a sweatshirt, gym shorts, and sneakers. He is followed by BRIAN in gym clothes: sleeveless t-shirt and gym shorts. MARC goes over to the bookshelf and pulls out a slim volume.)*

MARC: Here. You can borrow this.

*(BRIAN takes the book and opens it.)*

BRIAN *(reading)*: The M-L-A Handbook.

MARC: Everything you need to know about how to write a paper is in there. Or at least format it. The research and the actual writing are up to you.

BRIAN: Thanks, Doc. So, thirty pages? Really?

MARC: Including notes and bibliography.

BRIAN: Jeez...

MARC: You're doing one for Mr. Thorton's history class, aren't you?

BRIAN: Yeah.

MARC: Okay, then. Get used to it. In college it'll be what's expected in every class. In grad school, thirty pages is just getting warmed up.

BRIAN *(shaking his head)*: How'd you do it?

MARC: I picked a topic that I liked and read up on it. That made it easy. *(Beat.)* C'mon, Brian, I'm not asking for a five-hundred-page dissertation. Do a character study. Find someone – or something – from one of the books on the reading list, read up on them, and write about him. Or her. Or it.

BRIAN: It?

MARC: Yeah. Not all characters in literature are people. They can be places, or times. Like the Dustbowl in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The 1920's and Prohibition in *Gatsby*. Write about how they were a part of the story. Don't make it too big; just focus on one element that you find interesting, then dig into it and see what new insights you come up with. You've got until next Monday to pick your topic. Plenty of time.

BRIAN: Okay. I thought about writing about Nick Carraway.

MARC: Great. I know for a fact that there's plenty of research about him. Just be sure to cite your sources.

*(MARC pulls off his sweatshirt. He is wearing a tank top underneath.)*

BRIAN: Nice guns.

MARC *(glancing at his arms)*: Thanks.

BRIAN: How big are they?

MARC: No idea.

BRIAN: I'd say sixteen inches.

MARC *(chuckling)*: I'll take your word for it.

BRIAN: I'm getting there. *(He flexes a biceps.)* How's that?

MARC: Looks good.

*(BRIAN feels his flexed muscle.)*

BRIAN: Yeah. Feel that.

MARC *(politely)*: That's okay.

BRIAN: Aw, c'mon.

*(MARC hesitates, then and comes over and gives the flexed muscle a quick squeeze.)*

MARC: Good. Keep at it.

BRIAN: Thanks. *(Breaks the pose.)* Now show me yours.

MARC: That's okay.

*(BRIAN crosses to MARC.)*

BRIAN: C'mon, just a quick shot, okay?

*(MARC looks at BRIAN, who is grinning broadly. He shrugs, then flexes a biceps. BRIAN squeezes it.)*

BRIAN: Wow, like a rock.

MARC: Thanks. C'mon, I gotta change.

*(He stuffs the sweatshirt in the gym bag and starts to dress, putting on his shirt, kicking off his sneakers, pulling on his pants over his gym shorts; he does not take the gym shorts off. BRIAN watches as MARC gets dressed.)*

BRIAN: So, you're not gonna take a shower?

MARC: I do that at home.

BRIAN: Oh, okay. So, when did you start working out?

MARC: High school, freshman year. Went out for football and needed to bulk up.

BRIAN: You play much?

MARC: Collected a lot of splinters.

BRIAN: Splinters?

MARC: Sitting on the bench. Switched to soccer the next year and started wrestling.

BRIAN: You got big.

MARC: Big enough.

*(MARC has finished dressing, BRIAN still watching him. Beat.)*

MARC: So... how do you think you did on the SAT's?

BRIAN: Okay, I guess. We'll know in a couple of weeks. Thanks for your help.

MARC: You did all the work.

BRIAN: Yeah, but... So, do you think you can keep working with me?

MARC: On what?

BRIAN: I dunno, maybe like in physics or math.

MARC: I was an English major for a reason.

BRIAN: Well, then, how about my study skills?

MARC: Uh...okay. Tell your dad.

BRIAN: Why him?

MARC: Because he was paying me to tutor you for the essays and SATs. He should know you want to keep on doing it.

BRIAN: Oh, okay. I really like working with you.

*(BRIAN moves close to MARC, close enough that MARC feels a bit uncomfortable. He picks up his gym bag.)*

MARC: I like working with you, too, Brian. So... See you tomorrow in class.

*(MARC starts to head for the door, and BRIAN starts to follow. BARRY enters.)*

BARRY: Thought I'd find you here.

BRIAN: Yeah, Dad, just picking up this book.

BARRY: Great. Why don't you hit the showers and we'll go home?

BRIAN: Okay. (*To MARC, holding up the book.*) Thanks, Doc.

MARC: You're welcome.

(*BRIAN exits SR. BARRY closes the door, turns to MARC.*)

BARRY: Good to see you.

MARC: You too.

BARRY: Been a while.

MARC: Yeah, well, we've both been kinda busy, I guess.

BARRY: I know.

(*Pause as they look at each other, MARC trying very hard not to fidget. Finally...*)

BARRY: We're okay, aren't we?

MARC: Yeah. Yeah.

BARRY: I really liked being with you.

MARC: Um...

(*Long pregnant pause.*)

BARRY: Is there something we need to discuss?

MARC (*Captain Obvious*): I'm Brian's teacher.

BARRY: I'm quite aware of that.

MARC: Not to mention the fact that he's –

BARRY: He's what?

(*Another long pregnant pause.*)

MARC: He's –

BARRY: Is he hitting on you?

MARC: I haven't done anything to encourage him. When we're alone, I keep the door open. When I change for the gym, I do it here, not in the locker room. He's never seen me undressed. (*Beat.*) He wants me to keep tutoring him. I told him to ask you.

BARRY: That's fine with me. Look, I know it's awkward –

MARC: Awkward? How about grounds for immediate dismissal? If anyone even suspected that there was anything between me and him, I'd be out of here so fast...

BARRY: I meant you and me.

*(Beat.)*

MARC: That too. If word got out –

BARRY: That's not going to happen.

MARC: How do you know?

BARRY: Have you told anyone?

MARC: God, no.

BARRY: Not even Sandy?

MARC *(lying)*: No.

BARRY: I believe you. *(Goes to check to see that the door is closed.)* This hasn't been easy for me, either. Ever since Brian came out, I've been trying to understand what he feels and what he was going through. Meanwhile I'm watching him become stronger, more self-assured, more comfortable in his identity. But all this time I'm feeling the opposite, as if everything I ever was no longer made sense. I loved my wife, but it seemed like some illusion of what love was supposed to be. I feel like I've missed out on who I really am. *(Beat.)* Do you know what I'm talking about?

MARC: I guess.

*(BARRY looks again at the door, then crosses to MARC.)*

BARRY: I know it sounds like something out of a movie, but from the moment I met you, I felt something I'd never felt before for a man... or anyone, for that matter. Up to then, men and my feelings about being with them were abstracts. But I couldn't stop thinking about you, and when you accepted the offer, it was like...*(Chuckle.)* Oh, this sounds so corny, but it was like I was waiting all this time for you. And when we were at the lake by ourselves, and we... It just seemed so natural.

MARC *(attempt at gallows humor)*: A hot tub and a bottle of wine will do that.

BARRY: I mean it. *(Beat.)* You were my first.

MARC: What?

BARRY: I'd never been with a man before.

MARC: Not even...?

BARRY: Summer camp, scout trips, college: nothing.

MARC: You seemed to know what you were doing and what you wanted.

BARRY: So did you.

MARC: I've had lots of practice.

BARRY: What happened with you and Sandy?

MARC: We grew apart. He met someone else, and... (*Beat.*) We're still friends. Why do you want to know?

BARRY: So I don't do it to you.

MARC: Look, Barry –

BARRY: I get it. I don't expect you to feel for me what I feel for you. If you just want to keep it simple – two guys having fun every now and then – I'm okay with that. But I want you to know that it's not just about getting laid. At least not for me. I hope you understand that.

MARC: Yes. I get it. And I did like it. I didn't know I was the one who –

BARRY: It was worth waiting for, believe me.

(*MARC nods and grins awkwardly.*)

MARC: Thank you.

BARRY: You're welcome. Any time. So...

MARC: Uh...

BARRY: How about tonight?

(*Beat as they exchange looks. MARC caves.*)

MARC: Yeah, okay.

BARRY: Your place? I've never seen it.

MARC: It's not much, just a one-bedroom.

BARRY: That's fine. Around eight?

MARC: Yeah. I'll get you the address.

BARRY: I've got it. It's in the faculty directory.

MARC: Okay.

BARRY: Thanks. See you then.

MARC: See you.

BARRY: Oh, by the way, what are you doing for Thanksgiving?

MARC: Couple of football games on TV that I like to watch.

BARRY: I'm hosting some of the other faculty who don't have a place to go for Thanksgiving dinner. I'd love to have you join us.

*(Beat.)*

BARRY *(cont'd)*: It's just dinner. You'll be home in time for the late game. And there'll be plenty of leftovers to take home. Nothing more –

MARC: Okay. Thanks, I'd like that. Let me know if there's anything I can bring.

BARRY: Just yourself. See you.

*(BARRY exits. MARC watches him go, then pulls out his phone. He dials. Light comes up on SANDY. He is wearing jeans and a CU Boulder sweatshirt. He answers his phone.)*

SANDY: Hey, 'sup?

MARC: Nothing, just thought I'd, y'know, check in.

SANDY: Okay. I'm about to head for the gym.

MARC: Oh, okay, well, don't let me...keep you.

*(Beat as SANDY senses something.)*

SANDY: Everything okay?

MARC: Huh? Uh, yeah.

*(Beat.)*

SANDY: C'mon.

MARC: I'm okay. Really.

SANDY: You're seeing him again, aren't you?

MARC *(sotto voce)*: Yeah. Tonight.

SANDY: Jesus. Must be nice.

MARC: It's just –

SANDY: It's just sex. I get it. I should talk.

MARC: Yeah, really. I mean... I'm not trying to guilt you about Charlie or anything.

SANDY: No, I get it. Hey, as long as it's just, y'know, fun and no strings, go for it.

MARC: Yeah, well, he seems to think that there's some kinda... Something more. At least for him.

SANDY: Whoa.

MARC: Yeah. And then there's Brian.

SANDY: Oh, no; you're not getting into some kind of...

MARC: No, hell no. Strictly hands off.

SANDY: Whew.

MARC: Look, you go on.... Go to the gym. I'll be okay. I just wanted to –

SANDY: Dammit, I'm sorry.

MARC: Thanks.

SANDY: No, I mean about us. If I hadn't... Oh, shit, Marc.

MARC: No, c'mon, we've had this all out before. It's okay. We had a good run. And then this job came along, it was like... I dunno, kismet or whatever. We're better off. Really. I'm fine. This'll just be....

SANDY: Yeah, well, I'm glad you called. Just –

MARC: I know. I'll call you later. After. (*Beat.*) So, what're you doing for Thanksgiving?

SANDY: Dan and Kathy invited me. Tofurkey with mashed potatoes and roasted brussels sprouts or something. You?

MARC: Barry's invited me and a bunch of other people over. Strictly social with a lot of leftovers.

SANDY: Sounds great. Okay, well, I'm gonna head out. Talk to you later. Still love you.

MARC: Yeah.

*(They end the call. Light goes down on SANDY.)*

MARC *(to himself)*: Still love you too.

*(Lights fade slowly to blackout and we hear the ambient sounds of people in the hall as before. This goes on as long as necessary to facilitate costume and set changes, then the lights come back up slowly. It is now an afternoon in December. On the whiteboard is written HAPPY HOLIDAYS – SEE YOU NEXT YEAR. There is a stack of report binders of various sizes and colors on the table. The SR door is open. MARC is sitting at the table. He is wearing a sweater over his shirt and tie. We can hear soft Christmas music coming from his laptop computer on the desk. He is grading papers, wielding a red pen.)*

MARC *(to himself)*: Okay, it's "I Before E except after C." This isn't sixth grade and spelling does count.

*(Makes a mark on the page, then continues reading, perhaps whispering what he's reading. He stops, grins, and laughs softly.)*

MARC (*cont'd*): Okay, I agree: "Walt Whitman was a unique individual." But that's redundant. And repetitive.

*(Knock on the door.)*

MARC: Come in.

*(BARRY enters SR. He is carrying a small gift-wrapped box.)*

BARRY: Just wanted to stop by to wish you a happy holiday and ... *(Holds out gift.)*

MARC: Oh, thank you. You didn't have to.

BARRY: It's okay. I checked with the school. Gifts from parents are allowed as long as they're not... extravagant. Just my way of saying thank you for all the work you've done with Brian, how you're fitting in so well here.

*(MARC takes the box, not exactly sure what to do.)*

BARRY (*cont'd*): The kids all seem to like you very much.

MARC: I like them. It's been... I'm glad to be here.

BARRY: And I'm glad you're here, too. *(Nods at the gift.)* Go ahead, open it.

*(MARC unwraps the box and opens it, pulling out a gold men's bracelet. He holds it up.)*

MARC: Thank you so much. It's beautiful.

BARRY: Here, let me put it on.

*(MARC holds out his right wrist. BARRY moves in close and places it around MARC's wrist, then keeps holding MARC's hand. He does not step back.)*

BARRY: There.

*(They hold their gaze for a long moment, then BARRY lets go of MARC's hand.)*

BARRY: You've done a great job with Brian.

MARC (*teacher mode*): It's been a pleasure to work with him. He's very... He's worked hard. He told me about his SAT's. Twelve-ninety. I know you were probably hoping for better, but –

BARRY: Brian got an early decision.

MARC: Wow, that's terrific. Where?

BARRY: Amherst. *(Beat.)* Not our first choice.

MARC: That's a great school.

BARRY: He can do better.

MARC: But still: Amherst.

BARRY: It's better than some state school.

MARC: Minnesota and Colorado are both state schools.

BARRY (*chuckling*): They're great schools, too. But after all we've been through – summer school, tutoring – overcoming his...

MARC: Disability.

BARRY: It's not like he's in a wheelchair.

MARC: He's working hard.

BARRY: How did he do on his term paper?

MARC (*indicating binders*): I haven't gotten through all of them yet. But I'm sure he did fine. By the way, I would have killed to have gotten into Amherst. And early decision? C'mon.

BARRY (*sighing*): Amherst is fine.

MARC: Please let him know that.

BARRY: He doesn't need me to boost his ego. He does that fine all on his own.

MARC: Well, you might just say something anyway.

BARRY: I will. (*Beat.*) So, can I stop by tonight? Say around nine? I know you're busy. I won't stay late.

(*Beat as MARC struggles with his inner self, then gives in.*)

MARC: I'd like that.

BARRY: Great. I'll see you then.

(*BARRY smiles, then comes over to MARC. They embrace, and BARRY kisses MARC on the mouth. At first MARC is surprised, but he gives in and returns it.*)

BARRY (*heading for the door*): Later.

MARC (*a whisper*): Later.

(*BARRY is gone, leaving the door open. For a moment MARC stares after him, then looks at the bracelet. He slowly smiles, then goes to the desk, humming along with the music. He digs through the pile of binders, finds what he's looking for, and pulls it out. He leafs through it, then starts to read. A moment later BRIAN enters.*)

BRIAN: Hey, Doc.

MARC: Hey. If you're looking for Barry – your dad – you just missed him.

BRIAN: Yeah, I saw him. Did he tell you?

MARC: About Amherst? Yes. Congratulations.

BRIAN: Yeah. Thanks.

MARC: It's a great school.

BRIAN (*shrug*): I guess. So, where are you going over break?

MARC: Back home.

BRIAN: Boulder?

MARC: California. To see my folks. Spend some time storing up some warmth for the winter. What about you?

BRIAN: Dad and me and Keith are going down to Boca. My grandparents have a condo right on the beach. Gonna spend two weeks on the beach wearing nothing but a Speedo.

MARC: Sounds like a good time. Don't forget the sunscreen.

BRIAN: I won't.

(*BRIAN reaches in his pocket and pulls out a small slender gift box.*)

BRIAN (*cont'd*): Here, I got you something.

MARC: Oh, you didn't have to.

(*BRIAN goes to MARC to hand him the box.*)

BRIAN: Go on, open it.

MARC: Thank you.

(*MARC opens the box. It is a silver pen, like a Cross.*)

MARC: It's beautiful. Thank you.

BRIAN: And it's got red ink so you can grade papers in style. (*Notices the bracelet.*) Hey, nice bling.

MARC: Huh? Oh, um, thanks. A, uh, a gift from a friend.

BRIAN: It's hot.

MARC: So, anyway, thanks again.

BRIAN: You're welcome. Hey, listen, you think maybe tonight we can go and like get a pizza or something? Y'know, celebrate the end of the semester and all that kinda stuff?

MARC: Um, I have plans. But... maybe sometime. We'll see.

BRIAN: Okay. (*Beat.*) I gotta tell you, Doc, when I first walked in here last summer, I was kinda nervous.

MARC: Why?

BRIAN: Oh, you know; new school year, senior year, a new teacher, a lotta unknowns. It's kinda scary.

MARC: You didn't seem nervous, as I recall.

BRIAN: Yeah, well, I was. But you're not like any teacher I've ever had before. I mean, you're good, you know your stuff, and you don't treat us like we're kids. You respect us. It's not like you're always trying to bust us for something, y'know what I mean?

MARC: I guess that's because it's hard to really learn something – and understand it – if there's an adversarial relationship.

BRIAN: Yeah. And you listen.

MARC: Well, I learn from you, too.

BRIAN: All that time you spent working with me. It's like you really care about me.

MARC: I do, Brian. I've really liked working with you. You're a good guy.

BRIAN: So are you, Marc.

*(Without warning, BRIAN embraces MARC, holding him close. At first MARC is too stunned to do anything, but then he gently returns the hug and begins to pull away. Then BRIAN suddenly kisses MARC full on the mouth, pressing himself against him. For an instant MARC does nothing, then he pushes BRIAN away, breaking the kiss and the embrace. Neither of them speaks. Then BRIAN turns and quickly exits wordlessly SR, leaving MARC standing in the middle of the room, still stunned. Finally, he comes to.)*

MARC: Holy shit.

*(MARC slowly begins to gather up the binders and takes them over to the desk. He's moving slowly, almost robotically as he tidies up, then stops and closes his eyes.)*

MARC: Oh, holy shit.

*Lights slowly fade to black.*

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**