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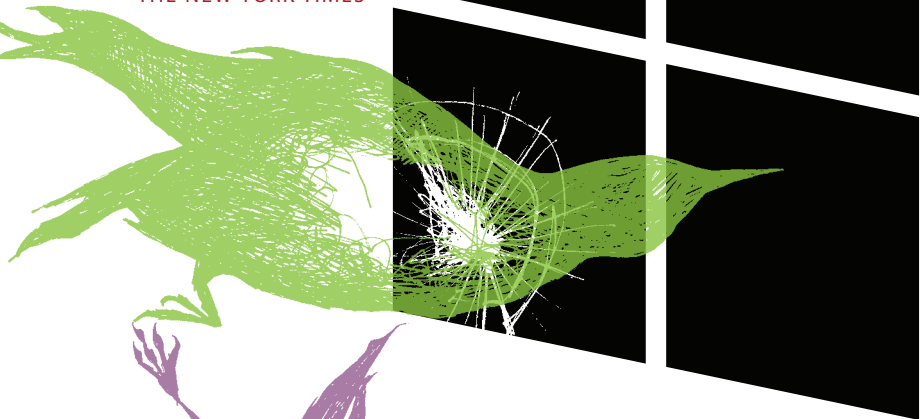
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# THE BEAUTIFUL DARK



ERIK GERNAND



# THE BEAUTIFUL DARK

Drama. *By* **ERIK GERNAND.**

Cast: 4m., 2w. Two int. sets. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: BL8.

In a small town in the Midwest, high-school principal Nancy Weller's life is turned upside down when her 18-year-old son, Jacob, fails out of college and returns home. He's angry, moody and unwilling to do anything except sleep. A past suicide attempt has Nancy on edge that Jacob might try to hurt himself again. She's devastated to learn that Jacob, living on his own at college, stopped taking his psychiatric medication and now refuses to go to therapy. Enlisting the help of her ex-husband, Tom, and her younger son, Charlie, she's determined to get Jacob back on track, whether he likes it or not. Nancy bargains, coerces, pleads, even tears down his bedroom door to get his attention. She finally convinces Jacob to enroll in community college and do something productive with his life. From this deceitful calm, however, Jacob's former girlfriend from college shows up, and Nancy makes a startling discovery: Jacob didn't fail out of college; he was kicked out for writing a graphic play about an on-campus killing spree, carried out by a young man who sounds eerily like her son. As the evidence mounts against Jacob, Nancy is forced to confront her darkest fear: *Is her son capable of the unthinkable? And can she stop him before it's too late?*

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Premiere Stages at Kean University, Union, N.J., featuring (l-r) Logan Riley Bruner and Daniel Pellicano. Photo: Mike Peters.



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By

ERIK GERNAND



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The Barrow Group Theatre Company ([www.barrowgroup.org](http://www.barrowgroup.org)).  
First Equity production produced by Premiere Stages at Kean University,  
Union, N.J., John Wooten, Producing Artistic Director.”

*The Beautiful Dark* received its world premiere at Redtwist Theatre in Chicago on July 27, 2013, with the following cast:

Jacob ..... Aaron Kirby  
Charlie.....Jacob Bond  
Nancy ..... Jacqueline Grandt  
Tom ..... Tommy Lee Johnston  
Mr. Marsh.....Scott Olson  
Sydney..... Tiffany Williams

Production staff:

Director .....Josh Altman  
Assistant Director..... Reed Motz  
Stage Manager ..... Lauren Yarbrough  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Olivia Leah Baker  
Production Manager.....Jeff Glass  
Technical Director..... Alan Weusthoff  
Set Designer ..... Dan Stratton  
Lighting Designer ..... Garvin Jellison  
Costume Designer ..... Kelsey Ettman  
Sound Designer/Original Music ..... Christopher Kriz  
Properties Designer..... Jeff Shields  
Violence Designer ..... Chris Rickett  
Set Assistant ..... Kelsey Melvin  
Set Construction..... McTavish McArdle  
Dramaturg .....Kevin McDonald  
Producers.....Michael Colucci, Jan Ellen Graves

The play was subsequently performed by Premiere Stages at Kean University in Union, N.J., in September 2013.

Cast:

Jacob ..... Daniel Pellicano  
Nancy ..... Dana Benningfield  
Tom ..... Steven Rishard  
Charlie..... Logan Riley Bruner  
Sydney.....Cara Ganski  
Mr. Marsh..... Mitch Greenberg  
Understudy..... Natalie Bailey  
Understudy..... Stephen Mishkovsky

Production staff:

Director ..... John Wooten  
Stage Manager ..... Dale Smallwood  
Casting Director ..... Carol Hanzel  
Set Design ..... Joseph Gourley  
Lighting Designer ..... Nadine Charlsen  
Costume Design ..... Dori Strober  
Sound Design ..... Janie Bullard  
Props Master ..... Karen Cahill  
Dramaturg ..... Clare Drobot



For Mark.

# **The Beautiful Dark**

## **CHARACTERS**

NANCY: 40s, female, a high-school principal.

TOM: 40s, male, Nancy's ex-husband, a cop.

JACOB: 18, male, Nancy's eldest son.

CHARLIE: 13, male, Nancy's youngest son.

SYDNEY: 18, female, a college student.

MR. MARSH: 60s, male, a teacher at Nancy's school.

## SETTING

The play takes place in spring, the present, in a mid-sized town in the Midwest.

The bulk of the play takes place in Nancy's home, in an open living room/dining room/kitchen area. To one side, there is an exterior door. To the other side, there is a hallway leading to bedrooms. There should be a window somewhere where someone walking outside can be seen.

There are also several scenes in Nancy's office at the high school.

# The Beautiful Dark

## Scene 1

JACOB. Imagine when a hurricane comes. The people all run around in panic. Like she is this horrible thing. This monster who has invaded them from above. They board up their windows. They buy supplies to save themselves. They turn on the news and listen for the winds to arrive.

But what they do not know ... what their feeble minds cannot comprehend ... is that the hurricane is good. Natural. A thing of beauty.

When she hits, she takes away all the disease and the death that the people have created themselves, and washes it out to sea. The houses with their perfectly manicured lawns. The offices where the drones do their mindless buying and selling. The schools where they feed the children lies.

And then ... and this can only happen because the hurricane has finally done her work ... can the sun come out and the people who are left behind wake up for the first time in their wasted, miserable lives and see the truth:

“Perhaps we should not have built our homes so close to the fucking sea.”

“I guess we really are just assholes and pricks.”

“Nature was right to destroy us.”

And she was.

**Scene 2**

*(Friday. A chilly April day in the Midwest. An aging home in a mid-sized city.)*

*NANCY, in her 40s, prepares dinner. Her son CHARLIE, 13, argues with her.)*

CHARLIE. She doesn't want to.

NANCY. Dogs take time and patience.

CHARLIE. That's what I'm doing.

NANCY. Do it more.

CHARLIE. But, I'm tired.

NANCY. So is she. So am I. We all are. We don't just give up though.

CHARLIE. She tried to bite me.

NANCY. Bite her back.

CHARLIE. That's stupid.

NANCY. Says the boy wasting 20 minutes in a futile argument.

CHARLIE. Why does she have to do stupid tricks anyway?

NANCY. They're not tricks. I don't need Lady to jump through a burning Hula-Hoop. I need her to sit. And stay. And be obedient. It's for her own good.

CHARLIE. What about my good?

NANCY. I'll worry about that.

CHARLIE. Kevin's mom didn't make him train their dog.

NANCY. And Kevin's house smells like someone tried to microwave a poodle.

CHARLIE. So?

NANCY. So you're going to have to be a grown-up and take care of Lady. Your brother will be here any minute.

CHARLIE. But she hates it.

NANCY. She might.

CHARLIE. And I hate it.

NANCY. Too bad.

CHARLIE. And if I keep making her, she's going to hate me!

*(Beat.)*

NANCY. She's not going to hate you. You're protecting her.

CHARLIE. She doesn't know that.

NANCY. Lady is a dog; you are her boy. She loves you.

CHARLIE. Not if I keep bossing her around.

NANCY. You love me, don't you? *(Silence.)* Fine. Don't answer.

CHARLIE. Can't we take the night off? I want to hang out with Jacob.

NANCY. One lesson. Every night. Twenty minutes.

CHARLIE. But, he hasn't been home in forever.

NANCY. You do realize that in the time you've spent whining, you could be finished.

CHARLIE. So?

NANCY. So, you could be *hanging out* with Jacob. But instead, you're crying about your dog. *Your* dog, who *you* picked out. And *you* pleaded—"Mother, I must have her. I'll die if I don't get a dog."—Does any of that sound familiar?

CHARLIE. What did Grandma do that made you so mean?

NANCY. Now.

*(CHARLIE starts to leave but stops.)*

CHARLIE. I do.

NANCY. You do, what?

CHARLIE. What you asked before.

NANCY (*taunting him*). I don't recall what I asked before.

CHARLIE. Yes, you do.

NANCY. You'll have to remind me.

CHARLIE. Whatever. (*He exits.*)

NANCY. I love you, too.

*(NANCY continues preparing dinner. Her 18-year-old son, JACOB, enters.)*

NANCY (*cont'd*). Oh. Hey there.

*(JACOB storms through the room without even a look at NANCY. He carries multiple bags and quickly exits to his bedroom.)*

NANCY (*cont'd, sarcastic*). It's good to see you, too. I'm fine, thanks for asking. We'll catch up soon. Chit-chat.

*(JACOB slams his bedroom door offstage.)*

NANCY (*cont'd*). Welcome home.

*(TOM, also in his 40s, enters.)*

TOM. He's all yours.

NANCY. Thanks for picking him up.

TOM (*it's not*). My pleasure.

NANCY. How was the drive?

TOM. Exactly like you imagine.

NANCY. That good?

TOM. Hmmmm.

NANCY. Sorry.

TOM. Not your fault.

NANCY. So, what did you find out?

TOM. Nothing.

NANCY. At all?

TOM. He didn't say a damn thing.

NANCY. For three hours.

TOM. No, wait. I think he said, "I have to piss." But he mumbled it while staring out the window and listening to his music. Does that count?

NANCY. Sounds lovely.

TOM. It wasn't. *(Slight beat.)* Smells good.

NANCY. If you want, you can stay for dinner. It would mean a lot to Charlie.

TOM. I should get home. Janice ordered food.

*(Slight beat.)*

NANCY. OK.

TOM. Don't be mad.

NANCY. I'm not mad. Why would I be mad?

TOM. Sorry.

NANCY. I was asking for Charlie.

TOM. I'll have him all next weekend.

*(Music suddenly blares from JACOB's bedroom.)*

NANCY *(yells over music)*. Can you take your tools at least?

TOM *(yells)*. Can it wait?

NANCY *(yells)*. Sure. I guess. I just need the space. It would be nice to have the garage back.

TOM *(yells)*. I don't have room in the truck. Next time. I promise.



NANCY (*yells*). Fine.

*(NANCY flips a switch on the breaker box in the kitchen. JACOB's bedroom power and music go off. JACOB screams in anger from his bedroom.)*

TOM. He needs reality to kick him in the ass.

NANCY. Call me reality.

TOM. This is the good life.

NANCY. How quickly you forget what it's like to live with me.

TOM. He shouldn't get to move home and have his old bedroom back.

NANCY. It won't be the same.

TOM. You can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped.

NANCY. And you can't help someone if you don't try.

TOM. He's an adult.

NANCY. What would you do, Tom?

TOM. Kick him out.

NANCY. And where would he go?

TOM. Anywhere he wants. He's 18. Maybe he'd learn to make good choices. Not keep fucking things up.

NANCY. Maybe he should go to work with you.

TOM. That's funny.

NANCY. I'm serious.

TOM. I can't do that.

NANCY. You're the police chief.

TOM. Should I get him a sidearm, too?

NANCY. Just be his father.

TOM. I tried that. It didn't go so hot.

NANCY. Then as much as I appreciate your suggestion to do nothing, I'll move forward with my own plan.

TOM. You always do.

NANCY. I think I'm man enough to whip him into shape.

TOM. What's that supposed to mean?

*(Slight beat.)*

NANCY. Nothing. I'm sorry. I didn't . . . I shouldn't have said that.

TOM. Sometimes I have it coming.

NANCY. Sometimes you don't.

*(In the backyard, JACOB walks by the kitchen window. He waves at his parents and exits.)*

NANCY *(cont'd, calling to him)*. Your bedroom window is not a door, Jacob!

TOM. Good luck. With everything.

### Scene 3

*(NANCY's home. Afternoon the next day.)*

*NANCY plates up lunch. CHARLIE sits at the table playing on a device.)*

NANCY. Put that away. Lunch is ready.

CHARLIE. I don't want any cooked carrots.

NANCY. Just a few.

CHARLIE. They're disgusting.

NANCY. They're good for you.

CHARLIE. They taste like butt.

NANCY. I don't appreciate that language.

CHARLIE. Kevin doesn't have to eat anything he doesn't want to.

NANCY. Then, sweetheart, go live at Kevin's house.

CHARLIE. Maybe I will.

NANCY. And you can finally live the dream of Ding Dongs and pizza for breakfast while feral dogs circle the dining room table.

CHARLIE. Kevin's mom lets us eat in front of the TV.

*(JACOB enters wearing a pair of boxer shorts. He just woke up.)*

JACOB *(sarcastic)*. Perhaps you could be a skosh louder.

NANCY *(friendly, she's really trying)*. Good morning, sunshine.

JACOB. I think it's afternoon.

NANCY. It is.

JACOB. Then your salutation is erroneous.

NANCY. And I was aiming for facetious. *Good afternoon, sunshine.*

JACOB. But is it good?

CHARLIE. Hey, Jacob.

JACOB. Hey, kiddo. Sorry I didn't get to talk to you last night.

CHARLIE. It's OK.

JACOB. We'll hang out though. I swear.

CHARLIE. Good.

NANCY. It's nice to finally see you. Your hair looks different.  
I like it.

JACOB. It's different every day. Always growing.

CHARLIE. Even after you die, it still grows.

JACOB. Who told you that?

CHARLIE. My teacher.

JACOB. Then she lied or is misinformed. Both are sadly plausible.

*(Beat.)*

NANCY. I made lunch. You'll need it with your pills.

JACOB. Thanks, doc.

*(JACOB pours himself a mug of coffee and goes to the couch.)*

NANCY. Do you have any clothes you could maybe wear around the house?

JACOB. I'm wearing clothes: boxer shorts.

NANCY. Maybe some pants?

JACOB. Everything is dirty.

NANCY. Everything you brought home from school is dirty?

JACOB. Affirmative.

CHARLIE *(changing direction)*. I like boxer briefs.

JACOB. Huh?

CHARLIE. You know, they're like a cross between boxer shorts and regular underwear. That's what I had Mom buy when I outgrew my old stuff. Except I still wear briefs sometimes. I guess it just depends what kind of mood I'm in when I wake up. I can't remember what I have on today though. I'd have to go look.

JACOB *(with kindness)*. Why don't you wait and tell us tonight. The suspense will keep us on the edge of our seats.

CHARLIE. OK.

*(Beat.)*

NANCY. Some girl called for you this morning. Cindy, I think? Charlie wrote down her number on the counter.

CHARLIE. Is she your girlfriend?

JACOB. A girl, probably. A friend, definitely not.

*(JACOB picks up the paper, crumples it and throws it away.)*

NANCY. Why don't you join us?

JACOB. I just want coffee.

NANCY. You can still sit at the table.

JACOB. Can't I just sit?

NANCY. I cooked.

JACOB. I didn't ask you to.

CHARLIE. She's getting better.

JACOB. That's not at issue.

NANCY *(relents)*. Just take your medicine.

*(He doesn't.*

*Beat.)*

CHARLIE. I know it's a month away still, but I already bought your birthday present.

JACOB. You don't have to buy me anything, kiddo.

CHARLIE. I know.

JACOB. I'm sure it's awesome though.

CHARLIE. Will you still be here on your birthday?

JACOB. Afraid not.

NANCY *(somewhat dubious)*. Oh. Are you getting your own place?

JACOB. Something like that.

NANCY. That's very soon. It's already April.

CHARLIE. I can help you move out. You know, carry boxes and stuff. Like I did for Dad.

JACOB. Except I'm *choosing* to move out.

*(Beat.)*