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Dramatic Publishing

Three Nightmares



An Evening of Thrillers

by

Stephen Gregg

Three Nightmares

An evening of thrillers. By Stephen Gregg. Cast: 4m., 9w., 3 to 10 either gender. Doubling possible. Extras as desired. Three Nightmares is one evening of theatre comprised of three different thrillers, each scarier than the last: Wake-Up Call, The New Margo and One Lane Bridge. A young man wakes up from one nightmare, only to find that he's in another. Now he can't tell what's real and what's not. A young woman's best friend disappears and is replaced by an entirely different person, but she's the only one who seems to be able to tell. A teenage driver realizes that his mysterious passenger isn't who he thought she was—she's something much, much worse. Each act gives the audience the horrifying feeling that all is not right with the world and that it's going to be hard to sleep tonight. Three unit sets. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Code: TS8.

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Three Nightmares

An evening of thrillers by

STEPHEN GREGG

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Three Nightmares

ACT I

Wake-Up Call..... 9

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One Lane Bridge..... 81

Wake-Up Call

CHARACTERS

JIM 16, in love.
ROCHELLE.....16, loved.
DAD Rochelle's father.
MOTHER..... Jim's mother, 30, concerned, then erratic,
then magnificent.
POET(S)..... one or a chorus.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Some of *Wake-Up Call* is based on T.S. Eliot's long masterpiece of a poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

You should read the poem, partly because it informs *Wake-Up Call*, but mostly because it's a good read.

The poets can speak their lines singly, in unison or some combination.

There are lots of options for costuming the poets. They can look like poets: artsy and/or poor. They can reflect different aspects of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Or perhaps they look like sea captains or like the sea itself.

Likewise, an alien mermaid is, to say the least, open to interpretation. In one of the early productions, she was 9 feet tall. In another, she looked normal, except for a lobster claw.

The mother refers to other mothers as "puny" and "pale." If those characterizations don't accurately reflect how Mother has changed, just adjust the lines.

ACT I

Wake-Up Call

PROLOGUE

Music. Maybe dark circus music. The entire Three Nightmares acting company enters, somber. They form a line.

One of them starts to pass something down the line. It's a box. Sometimes the direction reverses, then reverses again. Maybe the box gets tossed and caught by someone down the line.

The music stops and with it, the passing of the box, as in musical chairs.

A young man is left holding it. He knows that this is not good news. This boy will play JIM in Wake-up Call.

The rest of the cast leaves.

JIM isn't sure if he wants to open the box or not. He does.

It contains a knife. He's confused by it. He puts the knife in the drawer of a side table next to the bed.

The lights dim.

AT RISE: The setting alternates between JIM's bedroom and ROCHELLE's bedroom. The furnishings in both are neutral: a bed, a large desk.

We start in JIM's room.

ROCHELLE and JIM have been studying.

JIM. My life could not get worse.

ROCHELLE. So ... you're not even gonna ask me?

JIM. I'm sorry. That was rude. What's the big favor?

ROCHELLE. No, you first. Why is your life so terrible?

(JIM holds up two pieces of paper: his barely started paper on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by T.S. Eliot.)

JIM. Because I'm lazy. I had three weeks and this is all I've got.

ROCHELLE. Get your mom to let you stay home.

JIM. She's not that kind of mom.

ROCHELLE. I like her.

JIM. I like her too. I love her. But she's not going to let me stay home just 'cause I didn't write my paper.

Would your dad?

ROCHELLE. My dad would write it for me if I asked him.

JIM. How's he doing?

ROCHELLE. I think he's having a rough time, a little bit.

JIM. He puts up a good front.

ROCHELLE. Yeah.

JIM. Now. Your favor.

ROCHELLE. No, I'm not ready yet.

JIM. Why?

ROCHELLE. I'm just not. It's big.

JIM. So ask. I'll do it or I won't. But you can ask.

ROCHELLE. No. I was brave enough a few minutes ago.

Now I'm not brave enough.

JIM. Just do it.

ROCHELLE. I can't.

JIM. I'm not gonna say no. *(This just hangs there. He returns his attention to the poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T.S. Eliot.)*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells;
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, "what is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.
In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo

So, he wants to go out, into the night. But then he never does anything. That's all I've got. Tell me your favor.

ROCHELLE. I can't.

JIM. All right, you want brave? I can be brave. Or not.

ROCHELLE. What?

JIM. I love you.

(And it seems to take ROCHELLE an eternity to respond, but she manages.)

ROCHELLE. I love you too. Thank you.

(They kiss. They're both very pleased and then suddenly shy. He looks at something out the window.)

JIM. Huh.

ROCHELLE. (*What?*) Hmm?

JIM. Just looking at those kids. I used to have picnics in that park. It's weird when you think ...

ROCHELLE. What?

JIM. I don't know. It feels like the world is different all of a sudden. So much better, and those kids are just—they don't have any idea that this huge thing has happened 50 yards away. And it makes you think, what's the closest I've ever been to some huge event in somebody's life and not known it?

ROCHELLE. I love you.

JIM. I love you too. So.

ROCHELLE. So.

JIM. Now you can ask me anything.

ROCHELLE. I want you to help me kill my father.

JIM. OK. Anyone else?

ROCHELLE. No, just Dad.

JIM. All right. How?

ROCHELLE. Poison.

JIM. Why do you need my help?

ROCHELLE. I need someone to corroborate that he seemed sad all the time.

JIM. He's not sad.

ROCHELLE. That's my point. Everyone thinks he's been handling it great. I need someone to say that they'd seen him crying. That you'd walked in on him once and he was sobbing.

JIM. Whatever. Whatever you want. (*Regarding the poem.*) Now, unless you suddenly have insight about this, I should get going.

ROCHELLE. Wait. We need to talk about this. I think I just made a bad mistake.

The New Margo was commissioned by *Dramatics* magazine on behalf of the Educational Theatre Association and developed in a workshop at the 2012 Thespian Festival.

The New Margo

CHARACTERS

(The characters are four days away from starting their freshman year of college.)

DELTA

MARGO

DANALYNN

SAYRE

IRIS

CHARACTER NOTES

Let's start with what these young women are on a normal day: they're smart, kind and funny. One of the things that bonds them is that they amuse one another—loudly and quietly. They're ambitious for themselves and each other.

On a normal day, Delta is the person you want to greet you in a new place. She hunts for the good in you, finds it, and relaxes you by enjoying you.

Margo's not herself today, but Margo is the star. She's the kind of person who seems to make time to move differently, to expand and slow down, so that her list of accomplishments seems endless: piano, soccer, fiction writer, honor roll and on and on.

Danalynn, or Dani (pronounced as “Danna-lynn” or “Danny”), is a jock. It shows in her walk and allows her to be physically intimidating, if need be.

Sayre is the leader, but effortlessly so. On a normal day, she leads the group so calmly and thoughtfully that it's impossible to resent her.

Iris's sense of humor is both ironic and dark. It's not easy to get to know her, but you'd be glad if you did.

This isn't a normal day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The New Margo wouldn't exist if *Dramatics* magazine hadn't commissioned it. It's always good to have a deadline, even better to have a group who you know is rooting for you. I'm especially grateful to Julie York Coppens, Jim Palmarini and Don Corathers.

A huge thanks to the actors who helped develop this play.

The first reading, at the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Md., featured Lexi Butler, Meagan Carr, Polly Feldman, Katie Kirk, Sarah Lossing and Morgan McNair. My favorite memory of that reading, which was cold (I'd finished it on the plane), was how shocked Lossing was to discover at the end of the play that she was the murderer.

The performance at the International Thespian Festival in Lincoln, Neb., featured Amelia Corrada, Phenix Johnson, Briana Taylor, Tori Thomas and Cristina Vazquez.

And thank you to the actors from my writer's group, Lab Twenty6, but especially Jessica Goldapple, Kari Lee Cartwright and Maria McCann-Glover.

For Margo Rodgers, the one and only.

ACT II

The New Margo

PROLOGUE

Music. Dark but not circusy.

As before, the company members enter and line up.

They start to pass a box.

Again, it's not one smooth pass. At least once, the character holding the box leaves his or her place in the line and carries it to another character down the way.

The music stops.

A young woman holds it. This girl will play DELTA in The New Margo.

The rest of the cast leaves.

She opens the box to find a flashlight.

She's confused and scared, emphasis on scared. She puts the flashlight in the drawer that IRIS will find it in later.

The lights dim.

SCENE 1

AT RISE: A CLAP OF THUNDER as lights bang up on DELTA, in her bedroom, mid-panic attack. She's never had a panic attack before, which makes it much worse since she's not exactly sure what's happening to her. She's trying to control her out-of-control, shallow breaths. She doubles over, goes almost to the floor. DELTA's got a largish bandage on her forehead.

The scene is in the living room and one bedroom of a three-bedroom dormitory suite. Exits lead out to the hallway and to the other two bedrooms.

Though we're not yet aware of it, the living room fourth wall contains a large window. The seating—a couch and a chair or two—is arranged to allow the occupants to see out of the window.

The five new occupants of the suite arrived yesterday, so while some unpacking and decorating has been accomplished, there are still boxes and packing detritus lying around. A pennant or some memorabilia shows us that at least one of these young women is a baseball fan. The bedroom we can see belongs to DELTA and a roommate who hasn't arrived yet.

DELTA struggles to calm herself as the outer door opens and SAYRE enters, using a walking stick to guide herself to the couch. SAYRE is blind.

SAYRE (*yells*). Hey, anyone here? HELLO?

(DELTA, still fighting her panic, doesn't answer. IRIS emerges into the living room from her bedroom.)

IRIS. Hey. You beat the storm.

SAYRE. Barely. You the only one here?

IRIS. I think so.

SAYRE. No word from Margo?

IRIS. Nothing. I called her about a hundred and eighty times.

SAYRE. Me too. And I had Dani email her.

IRIS. You did?

SAYRE. Yeah.

IRIS. Let me see if she checked it.

(IRIS enters DELTA's room.)

IRIS *(cont'd, startled)*. Jesus!

DELTA. Sorry.

IRIS. I didn't think you were here. *(Sees the state DELTA's in.)*
Are you OK?

(DELTA nods.)

SAYRE. Is that Delta?

DELTA. Yeah.

SAYRE. What are you doing in there?

DELTA. Worrying.

SAYRE. Come in here.

(DELTA enters the living room. Meanwhile, IRIS looks around the bedroom for DELTA's iPad. She finds it and a flashlight in a desk drawer.)

DELTA. Hey.

SAYRE. Hi. One to 10—how worried are you?

DELTA. Eight.

SAYRE. Let's give her another hour.

DELTA. Why not just call her house?

SAYRE. Because. If I don't come home one night, I don't want any of you calling my parents.

(Another rumble of thunder makes them pause. We hear thunder occasionally throughout the scene as the storm approaches.)

DELTA. Does it seem like her not to come home?

SAYRE. College is different rules. You don't have to come home if you don't want to.

DELTA. Yeah, but her whole personality wouldn't just change overnight.

SAYRE. You don't know that. New place, new person.

IRIS (*emerging from DELTA's bedroom holding DELTA's iPad and a flashlight*). She could have come home last night and left while we were still asleep.

DELTA. She didn't. I was out here waiting for her.

IRIS. All night?

DELTA. Yeah. I wanted to apologize.

SAYRE. You didn't sleep at all?

DELTA. No.

SAYRE. Let me feel your head.

(DELTA goes to SAYRE, leans over and guides SAYRE's hand to the bandage on her head. The bump is big.)

SAYRE (*cont'd*). Oh!

DELTA. Yeah.

SAYRE. You have to go to a doctor.

DELTA. It's fine.

SAYRE. You don't know that for sure.

IRIS (*holding up the flashlight*). Can I borrow this if I go out later?

DELTA. It's not mine.

IRIS. It was in your drawer.

DELTA. No it wasn't.

IRIS. Yeah it was. Someone must've left it. (*Starts typing into DELTA's iPad.*)

DELTA. Is that my iPad?

IRIS. Yeah.

DELTA. How'd you know my password?

IRIS. Same way I know Margo's email password—I watched you type it in.

DELTA. Really?

IRIS. Yeah.

DELTA. You're scary sometimes ...

IRIS. She hasn't checked email.

(DANALYNN enters. She's dressed for running and breathing hard.)

DANALYNN. Hi.

SAYRE. Hey there.

IRIS. Are you all right?

DANALYNN. Yeah, I took the stairs.

SAYRE. You walked up 17 flights?

DANALYNN. I *ran* up 17 flights. *(To DELTA.)* Where's the body?

DELTA. What do you mean?

DANALYNN. You look like you're at a funeral.

DELTA. I'm worried.

DANALYNN. No word from her?

DELTA. No.

DANALYNN. Should we call the police?

SAYRE. Let's give her a little more time.

DELTA *(sharply)*. Why?

SAYRE. I told you why. Call if you want.

DELTA. But you think we should just wait.

SAYRE. Yeah. A little longer.

IRIS. We should play the Murder Game.

DELTA. I'm too on edge.

SAYRE. Me too.

DANALYNN *(still warm from her run)*. I have to open a window.

(DANALYNN opens the window and reacts to the missing screen, which DELTA and IRIS see instantly, and SAYRE feels as well.)

DANALYNN (*cont'd*). Whoa!

DELTA. What happened to the screen?

DANALYNN. Must've fallen.

IRIS. How? Look, it was attached. Someone unscrewed it.

SAYRE. Are you sure?

IRIS (*indicating the inside perimeter of the frame*). Yeah.

Even if it *had* fallen, it would've fallen in, not out. That's so weird ...

DANALYNN (*looking out*). There is still *no one* on this campus.

IRIS. No kidding.

SAYRE. I met an RA who was moving in on the second floor.

DANALYNN. And there's a light on in that dorm. (*Leans out the window too far to look.*)

DELTA. Careful!

IRIS (*low-key amusement*). You know someone jumped once.

DELTA. No.

IRIS. Or maybe didn't jump. As it turned out, she wasn't getting along with her roommates.

DELTA. They think her roommates pushed her out?

IRIS. Threw her out. But they couldn't prove it.

(*SAYRE's phone rings.*)

SAYRE. Hello? HEY!!!! (*To the others, who are enormously relieved.*) It's Margo. (*Back to MARGO.*) Where have you been? We've been worried sick. (*Beat.*) You did what? Well how fun! I can't wait. No, OK. I won't tell. But why didn't you at least call? (*A long pause.*) Yeah, Delta's here. Do you want to talk to her? (*Though she doesn't make a big deal of it, the answer is apparently "no."*) All right. Well, hurry. We'll see you soon. (*Hangs up.*) She's practically here.

IRIS. Perfect! Time for a quick round of Murder Game.

One Lane Bridge was originally produced by Bakersfield High School, Bakersfield, Calif., on October 26, 2010.

Cast

(Named roles were double cast.)

Eli..... Mark Adame
Brock Stone
Samantha..... Briana Taylor
Alice Verderber
Male Narrator..... Eric Dains
Ian Flowers
NarratorsAnotonio Quiliar
Norma G. Camorlinga
Chelsea Dakota Hatler
Justin Hinds
Nora Mansour
Jill Price
Emily Rizo
Sharila Stewart
Megan Taira
Rachel Washington

Production

Director Jacquelyn Thompson-Mercer
Technical Director..... Dale Olvera
Costumes..... Jo O'Mera
Stage manager..... Emily Smith
Original Music (composed and performed)..... Phillip Gonzales
Jonathon Holguin
Daniel Miramontes
Steven Whyte

One Lane Bridge

CHARACTERS

ELI 16 years old.

SAMANTHA 28 years old.

MALE NARRATOR

OTHER NARRATORS (2 to 10, or so)

TIME

The present.

PLACE

A canyon road in Colorado.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Jacquie Thompson-Mercer and her students at Bakersfield High School did the excellent first production of this play on October 26 – 29, 2010.

Mercer had four student musician/music theorists come up with a scary-sounding theme, then play it intermittently and at tense moments. The music really added to the feel of the play.

She used 10 Narrators.

THE NARRATORS

The overall note about the Narrators is that you can assign lines as you choose, depending on the number of Narrators you're using.

The Narrators in *One Lane Bridge* provide exposition, some of Eli's thoughts, reenactments of 911 calls and the occasional reinforcement of certain words.

Ten Narrators worked well in Bakersfield, but in the script, the story that Samantha tells is in six voices. Feel free to divvy up the story into as many parts as you need. It's not necessary to get through the whole story.

At least some of the Narrators are trees, and they should probably suggest trees with as little artifice as possible. They look like people, which is helpful at the end of the play when neither Eli nor the audience can tell if the thing holding the cell phone is a person or a tree.

Play with the moments when a Narrator adds emphasis to words that Eli and Samantha speak. An actor in one reading said the words slightly after the characters said them, to good effect.

The Male Narrator is played by the same actor throughout the play and becomes Male Narrator as Samantha.

Both the car crash and the bridge collapse can be recorded sound effects or sound effects created live by the Narrators, or both.

SAMANTHA'S STORY ABOUT EZRA

If, as I suggest, you tell the story with overlapping Narrators, the audience won't be able to follow it, and that's fine. What you're going for is Eli's subjective, very scared experience of it. (Even if you overlap, you're likely to have way more story than you can actually narrate.)

Early in 2010, the Bakersfield group and I spent a couple of hours together, during which we played around with scary ways to tell Samantha's story. What we found was this:

A minute of stage time is a long time. After that, the novelty is gone and it becomes tiresome not to be able to understand the story. Our Narrators whispered for about 45 seconds, then got much louder, then got way WAY LOUDER WITH FIVE SECONDS TO GO. Then an instant silence.

Overlapping whispers are actually quite spooky, particularly if they come from all around. If you have microphones or actors you can plant in your audience, it might be worth it.

The image of Samantha's mouth wide open is scary.

At about 30 seconds, our group started to add the occasional sound: rain sticks, shakers, triangles, dissonant guitar, etc.

Projections might be effective as well.

Huge thanks to the actors from the Twenty6 Writers Lab who read iterations of this play over the course of a year:

April Billingsley, Gary Frank, Jessica Goldapple, Barry Jenner, Nathaneal Johnson, Steve Longmuir, Maria McCann, Dawn McDaniel, Erik Passoja, John Reha, Amy Smallman and Sean Smith.

ACT III

One Lane Bridge

PROLOGUE

Music. Dark, dark, dark. Foghorn dark or ghost dark.

The cast members line up. One young man stands behind a young woman.

One of the cast members holds a bundle. It's a little heavy.

He or she hands the bundle to someone in the line. Nobody wants to hold it, as though it holds a dead thing.

When the young woman in front of the young man gets the bundle, she moves behind him and he takes the bundle.

The music stops. The young man left holding it will be ELI in One Lane Bridge.

The rest of the cast leaves.

He's terrified of what's inside, won't even look.

The lights dim.

AT RISE: Lights up on ELI, a 16-year-old boy, driving. He's driving slowly because it's snowing.

NARRATORS are scattered around the stage or enter as they speak, or some combination. At least some of the NARRATORS are trees.

A NARRATOR picks up the story in the middle.

NARRATOR. And, even though he'd made this trip before, twice, there was the anxiety that he'd miss a turn, that the snow would hide some landmark, and he'd have to back-track along the canyon roads. Strange that his fear of being late should exceed his fear of getting lost.

ELI (*thinking out loud*). Which is ridiculous if you think about it. Nothing bad happens if I'm late.

NARRATOR. And now there's the house, at the edge of the hill. Only a porch light is on. Maybe he was early.

(*SAMANTHA CAPTAIN enters to one side, carrying a gym bag.*)

NARRATOR. But no. There she is.

NARRATOR. No, that's just a tree.

NARRATOR. No, it is her. Standing there, at the end of the driveway, as though she didn't mind the snow.

(*ELI stops.*

SAMANTHA comes rushing to the car.

ELI opens the door. Their conversation is urgent. They need to get SAMANTHA out of the cold.)

ELI. Hi! You must be freezing!

SAMANTHA. Pretty cold! (*Her bag:*) I just need to set this in your trunk.

ELI. Oh, hang on! Let me find the latch! (*He can't find it.*)

Or you could just set it in the back.

SAMANTHA. Your seat'll get wet. (*She brushes snow from her bag.*)

ELI. It's fine!

SAMANTHA. You're sure?

ELI. Yeah, let's just get you into the car!

(She sets her bag in the backseat. Gets in the car, closes the door.)

ELI (*cont'd*). Oh, man! You must be freezing.

SAMANTHA. A little bit.

ELI (*the heat*). Let me turn this up.

SAMANTHA. Thank you. I do feel bad about your seat.

ELI. It's plastic. And it's my dad's old car anyway. (*Beat.*)

I'm Eli.

SAMANTHA. Samantha Captain.

ELI. Kep-tin?

SAMANTHA. Captain. Like a ship's captain.

ELI. Nice to meet you.

(They shake hands. Hers is cold.)

ELI (**ADD A NARRATOR, SOFTLY**). Didn't your mother ever tell you not to stand outside in a snowstorm? I hope you're not in a **rush**.

(NOTE: "rush" and bolded words like it are almost subliminal—flickering auditory hallucinations that ELI registers, but barely.)

SAMANTHA. Oh ...

ELI. Are you?

SAMANTHA. Well, Home Depot closes at nine so ... I guess, a little bit, I am.

ELI (**ADD A NARRATOR, SOFTLY**). Thirty five minutes. We can make it if we **hurry**. (*He pulls out onto the dark road.*) How do you know the Carvers?

SAMANTHA. Friends of friends is all.

ELI. How are they?

SAMANTHA. I don't really know them.

ELI. Mrs. Carver sounded funny on the phone.

SAMANTHA. She's distracted. She got sick and then she gave it to the 6-year-old.

ELI. Ben.

SAMANTHA. Right. So there's a lot of sneezing and coughing and vomiting and Ben's technique for covering his mouth is sort of a megaphone.

ELI. I've seen that.

SAMANTHA. Yeah. And they don't want the baby to catch it, so—It just doesn't seem like a great time for an extra body to be hanging around.

ELI. What are you going to Bloomington for?

SAMANTHA. Home Depot for a shower curtain. And then just some unfinished business. How about you?

ELI. I'm picking up a trumpet from my friend Mason—
(*He is a distractable driver.*)

SAMANTHA/ MALE NARRATOR (*simultaneously*). **Watch the road!**

ELI. Sorry! (*Beat.*) They warned you, right?

SAMANTHA. About what?

ELI. I've only been driving three and a half weeks.

SAMANTHA. No. Nobody mentioned that.

ELI. This is only my sixth—well, sort of my seventh solo trip.

SAMANTHA. Is that right?

ELI. Yeah. Hang on ... this is the turn I always miss. (*He makes the turn.*) There. All set.

NARRATOR (*spoken and maybe holding a sign*). Winding road.

ELI. Hope you don't get carsick.

SAMANTHA. Not usually, no.

ELI. If you do, just feel free to close your eyes, if that helps.

SAMANTHA. Thank you. You're a nice boy.

ELI. And you're a nice elderly person. (*Which amuses SAMANTHA, as was the intent.*)

SAMANTHA. Twenty-eight, thank you very much. Should I have said nice young man?

ELI. It doesn't matter.

SAMANTHA (*beat*). You'll get there soon enough.

ELI (*focused on the road*). Where?

SAMANTHA. You know ... manhood. Not being a boy.

ELI. Oh.

SAMANTHA. Just in case—if I had offended you by saying boy.

ELI. Oh. No, I didn't take it that way.

SAMANTHA. Good, 'cause you know, you've still got some growing to do, and your voice will change ...

ELI. My voice did change.

SAMANTHA. It'll change even more. (*A long moment.*)
Did you know the boy?

ELI. Which—oh. No, he was from the public school. I go to St. Pius.

SAMANTHA. You're Catholic?

ELI. I try.

SAMANTHA. What does that mean?

ELI. Just, you know, I try.

SAMANTHA. The paper says the parents are still holding out hope.

ELI. Yeah.

SAMANTHA. They shouldn't. He's dead.

ELI. How do you know?

SAMANTHA. He was an honor student. Honor students don't run away. They fall into wells. Or they trust people they shouldn't.

ELI. Meaning what?

SAMANTHA. Someone offered him a ride, probably.

ELI. Why would someone do that?

SAMANTHA. Don't know. You'd have to ask him.

ELI. Justin?

SAMANTHA. No. The man who killed him.

ELI. How do you know it was a man?

SAMANTHA. It's always a man.

(This just sits there. Finally, ELI changes the subject.)

ELI. What do you do for a job?

SAMANTHA. I'm an actuary.

ELI. I don't know what that is.

SAMANTHA. An actuary is the person who sets insurance rates. Like car insurance rates, for example.

ELI. That's a whole profession?

SAMANTHA. Oh yes.

ELI. You should see my insurance! It's crazy high!

SAMANTHA. Yes, well, that's what the statistics tell us. The average 16-year-old boy is crazy and—

MALE NARRATOR. Hi.

ELI. Not me.

SAMANTHA. No. It's just an average.

ELI. So it's just all about math?

SAMANTHA. Pretty much, yeah. Although I could tell you some horror stories.

ELI *(beat)*. OK.

SAMANTHA. What?

ELI. Give me some horror stories.

SAMANTHA. I don't want to unsettle you.

ELI. You won't. I like roller coasters and, I guess you'd call 'em, slasher movies.

SAMANTHA. Me too.

ELI. Really?

SAMANTHA. Yeah. I love them.

ELI. You do not.

SAMANTHA. Are you surprised because I'm female, or because I'm ancient?

ELI. Both. *(Pause. The snow:)* Wow. It's coming down even—

NARRATOR. —harder now. Visibility getting worse. The flakes bigger and faster, hitting the windshield at different angles as the road twists. The occasional ghost of wind clipping the final leaves from the branches.

(The car drifts again.)

SAMANTHA *(mouths)* / MALE NARRATOR. **Watch the road!**

ELI. What?

SAMANTHA. You know what? That was cute, once—

ELI. I wasn't trying to be cute—

SAMANTHA. You need to be careful!

ELI. I wasn't even near the edge!

SAMANTHA. Should I drive?

ELI. *No.*

SAMANTHA. If it happens again, I'm going to insist.

ELI. No you are not. *(A sullen moment.)* I've got a car horror story.

SAMANTHA. Uh-huh.

ELI. Doesn't that surprise you?