

Wonderland Isn't Real

A full-length play

By Carlyn Flint

CAST LIST

RAY: A nine year old boy. Extremely bright, creative, and inquisitive. Deals with mild autism.

GIANNA: Ray's mother. A woman in her early 30s who is raising him alone. She is stoic but has a softer side, especially for him.

MS. JESSE: Ray's special education teacher. A woman in her mid 20s, a new teacher but naturally good at it and passionate. Educated, middle class.

MR. HATTER: Ray's imaginary friend. A combination of Gianna's wonderland ideas, the mad hatter, and Ray's desire for a father. Wild, unpredictable, bubbly, and slightly manic.

AT HOME:

AUNTIE: Ray's Aunt and Gianna's sister. Mid 30s.

UNCLE: Ray's Uncle and Auntie's husband. Early 40s, not to be disobeyed.

AT SCHOOL:

PRINCIPAL: The principal at Ray's elementary school.

THE JABBERWOCKY

AT THE HOSPITAL:

RECEPTIONIST

PATIENT

TIGER: The smile behind the tiger's face in a picture on the wall in the exam room. Comforting, motherly.

DOCTOR

NURSE

THE BLUE RABBIT

IN COURT:

THE JUDGE: An older man in his 50s. Bald, big, and loud.

THE JURY: Puppeteers and puppets, or people in masks.

THE PROSECUTOR

THE GUARD

TIME AND PLACE

Tulsa, Oklahoma. Present.

NOTES ON PERFORMANCE

When characters write letters, a slash through written words such as ~~this~~ indicates that the character should read it as written, then cross off the slashed section on the paper they're writing on.

Beats are represented in various ways. A "... " before a line begins indicates a hesitation before delivery. A "(Beat)" inside a line is a short pause. A "Beat" as a line of action is a longer pause.

Puppetry will be essential to create the magic of wonderland. It should be as realistic as possible until Ray's illusion disintegrates in the court scene.

CHARLOTTE DIED.

RAY and MS. JESSE sit at a desk. They have just finished reading “Charlotte’s Web.”

A silence. Ray processes a realization, Ms. Jesse observes.

RAY

Charlotte...died?

MS. JESSE

In the story, yes.

Ray is rocked to the core.

RAY

Why would you make me read this book?!

MS. JESSE

Because it’s a good book.

RAY

But she died! She was in pain! And -and Wilbur...Wilbur must be so sad...Why Would you make me read about DEATH?!

He’s fighting back emotion. When he does this, he crimps his chin into his chest and looks up, as though looking up will stop the tears from coming.

MS. JESSE

Ray, Charlotte isn’t a real spider.

RAY

That’s mean.

MS. JESSE

No,

RAY

She wouldn’t like it if you said that to her face!

MS. JESSE

She can't hear me because she's *fiction*, Ray. You've learned about fiction. She's imaginary.

RAY

You're imaginary.

MS. JESSE

Do you know what imaginary means?

RAY

Yes.

MS. JESSE

It means that Charlotte came from E.B. White's ideas. She came from his brain.

RAY

Why would he want Charlotte to die?

MS. JESSE

Well...death happens.

RAY

Am I gonna die?

MS. JESSE

...One day, yes.

RAY

WHY WOULD YOU TELL ME THAT?!

Ray crumples into a ball on the desk.

MS. JESSE

I'm not going to lie to you, Ray.

RAY

And my mama?

MS. JESSE

Why don't you go pick our next book.

RAY

Is my mama gonna die?!

MS. JESSE

No. Not today, not anytime soon.

Beat. He's somewhat satisfied with this. He goes to the library to look.

There's a calm moment between them. Ms. Jesse organizes materials while Ray peruses. She watches him for a moment, amused by him, then goes back to her business.

He makes his way to the area labeled "6th grade". He shrieks.

RAY

No way! No way!

He pulls a book out and starts jumping up and down.

RAY

Wonderland! HaHA! Wait wait... *(he stops jumping)* who's Alice?

MS. JESSE

She's the main character in the story. Can I see?

Ms. Jesse takes the book from him and looks at it for a second.

MS. JESSE

This is from the sixth grade shelf, Ray.

RAY

So?

MS. JESSE

So you can read it when you get to sixth grade.

She starts to put it back.

RAY

NOOOO!!!

He jumps up and down in frustration.

MS. JESSE

Don't do that.

He tries to calm himself, chin to chest.

RAY

I just...I...I...It's my favorite book in the world.

MS. JESSE

How could you know that if you haven't read it?

RAY

I just know.

MS. JESSE

There are some scary parts in that book. You didn't even like it when Charlotte died.

RAY

I'm older now.

MS. JESSE

Than you were at the beginning of class?

RAY

I've matured.

Ray says "matured" wrong. Ms. Jesse corrects it.

MS. JESSE

You've matured?

RAY

Yes. Please, please it's my turn! It's my turn to choose the book!

MS. JESSE

And I told you we could read it next year. Pick another one, please. *(Beat)* Ray. Pick another book.

He doesn't like this. Ms. Jesse watches him for a moment, then bends down to his level.

MS. JESSE

You know what? I'll ask your Aunt and Uncle if it's okay with them. I'm coming to your house after school, did you know that?

RAY

It isn't my house. I don't have a house.

MS. JESSE

But you live there, right?

RAY

Temporarily.

MS. JESSE

Then it is your house, Ray. Temporarily.

RAY

They're gonna say no.

MS. JESSE

We'll see.

The bell rings. Ray grabs his bag and drags it off dramatically.

MS. JESSE

Bye, bud.

He leaves without saying goodbye.

The lights fade on Ms. Jesse and follow Ray. He goes into the boys bathroom and sits. He pulls out a folded piece of paper

Gianna, his mother, is illuminated. She is in a cell in a detention center. She writes as he reads.

GIANNA

Dear Ray Ray. I miss you. The mission is going well.

RAY

I've been speaking with the Queen about freeing all of the cats with rabbit tails.

GIANNA

They got in trouble because everyone thought the cats had ripped the tails off of the rabbits, but really it was an equal trade.

RAY

Once the case is settled I'll come home.

GIANNA

You should see the skies here. In the morning they're purple and then the sun comes out and everything turns to gold / with sparkles!

RAY

With sparkles! When I come home I'll bring you a flower from the Queen's garden.

GIANNA

My favorite one has petals the shape of triangles, and they sing when the sun comes up.

RAY

I love you.

GIANNA

Listen to your Auntie and Uncle, and work hard in school.

RAY

I'll be back ASAP (as soon as possible). Love you,

GIANNA

Your mama.

They both fold the letter back into its creases.
Gianna puts it in an envelope. Ray puts it in his
backpack.

As the bell rings in the school, a bell rings in the
prison.

HOME VISIT.

Ms. Jesse stands in the doorway of AUNTIE and UNCLE's home. It's clean, but there's very little furniture and virtually nothing on the walls.

Ray hides behind the couch as Ms. Jesse sits. Ray runs out from behind it. He doesn't know what to do with himself, so he hides again, peering over it.

AUNTIE

Ray go play with your cousins.

He hides himself even more. Uncle re-enters the space.

UNCLE

I know you heard her.

Ray slowly makes his way out of the room.

UNCLE

Do you need me to help you?

Ray shakes his head and goes.

UNCLE

Does he listen to you at school?

MS. JESSE

So far. There's always a honeymoon period, though.

AUNTIE

Keep track of your purse, that's all I gotta say. That boy gets all up in shit all the time. Yesterday I found him paintin' his damn face with my lipstick. Thinks he can put his hands wherever he damn well want.

MS. JESSE

That makes sense. With his diagnosis he's gonna be/ prone to--

UNCLE

No, no, see I don't give a fuck about his "diagnosis". He doesn't need any more excuses. I don't care if he's autistic, ADD or HIJKLMNPO or whatever the fuck y'all wanna call it. You put rules down for kids and they don't act like that. I say what I mean and I mean what I say, you know what I mean? Ray knows that.

MS. JESSE

Kids definitely need discipline.

UNCLE

I'm glad you understand that.

MS. JESSE

I have a feeling it will get easier over time.

AUNTIE

What he needs is something to ground him in the real world.

MS. JESSE

What do you mean?

AUNTIE

He likes to choose his own reality.

UNCLE

Whatever he wants to believe, that's what he's gonna believe.

AUNTIE

No matter what anyone tells him.

MS. JESSE

Can you give me an example?

AUNTIE

I could give you a million. Shoot... We're in the grocery store yesterday and I catch him hoarding candy bars. He's just stuffing 'em in his pockets. And I told him "those cost money" and he says, "I got money, Auntie." I says, "Really? Show me your money, boy" And he holds out an empty hand full of lint and goes, "see?"

UNCLE

Tell her about the street.

AUNTIE

Oh lord. He tells me he doesn't have to look both ways before crossin' the street now because he's got "360 vision". I says, "You still gotta look both ways, Ray." And he says, "No, I got a super power now." So you see how that might be a little dangerous.

MS. JESSE

I do.

AUNTIE

He thinks his truth is the world's truth. And he doesn't let up. You could spend three hours tryin' to convince him and he won't believe you. Hell I spank him and he still thinks I'm wrong.

MS. JESSE

Well I was gonna ask you...he wants to read "Alice in Wonderland."

UNCLE

Ha!

AUNTIE

Of course he does. He thinks his mom is in Wonderland.

MS. JESSE

Really.

AUNTIE

That's what she told him.

MS. JESSE

Where is she? If you don't mind telling me.

AUNTIE

Mabel Basset.

Ms. Jesse is still confused.

AUNTIE

Detention Center.

MS. JESSE

Oh. That's got to be really hard for him.

UNCLE

Depends on how you look at it.

...even more confused.

MS. JESSE

And how long?

AUNTIE

We don't know yet. She's awaiting trial. He doesn't know this and don't you dare tell him. She asked us to go along with the whole Wonderland story.

UNCLE

See, when I was a kid, no one sugar coated shit like this. I've been telling him she's in the "Big House" in a land called "Bing." Maybe one day he'll get the idea.

AUNTIE

I wish you'd stop that.

UNCLE

I wish she'd tell him the truth. All it's gonna do is make it harder when he finds out.

AUNTIE

It's annoying as hell but it's...her wish.

MS. JESSE

I won't tell him. Then...do you want to let him read it? It's a bit scary at times, but it might help him sort out what's true and what isn't. If that's what you want.

UNCLE

Sure, whatever.

AUNTIE

It's a kids book, isn't it?

MS. JESSE

It's better for older kids, but yes. And he's very advanced when it comes to reading.

AUNTIE

Then yeah, please. Maybe he'll realize his mama isn't anywhere in that book.

MS. JESSE

Anything else you'd like to me know?

Auntie and Uncle look at each other, then shake their heads no.

AUNTIE

Thank you for your time, Ms. Jesse.

Of course!

MS. JESSE

Ray runs back in.

RAY

Do I get to read Wonderland?!

MS. JESSE

You do.

RAY

Thank you thank you thank you thank you!!

Ray jumps up and down while rocking and shaking his fists. Ray rushes her and gives her a huge hug.

MS. JESSE

I'm glad you're excited.

AUNTIE

Don't you touch her like that, Ray!

MS. JESSE

It's alright.

UNCLE

Get back in your room.

Uncle stands and Ray retreats. Ms. Jesse registers this.

MS. JESSE

See you, bud. Thank you, again.

RAY

Bye!

She exits.

Ray skips toward his room.

I get to find her! I get to find her!

RAY

Find her?

AUNTIE

Make sure you check the slammer.

UNCLE

What's a slammer?

RAY

Would you shut up?

AUNTIE

It's real pretty there. It's like a big hotel.

UNCLE

Go to your room, Ray.

AUNTIE

Ray doesn't want to go.

GO!

AUNTIE

He runs out.

Slammer, slammer, slammer!

RAY

Auntie gives Uncle a death stare.

THE GARDEN.

Ms. Jesse and Ray sit at the table, reading
“Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”.

Ray’s reading is speedy. It’s clear he’s an
excellent reader, but unclear whether he
understands what he’s reading.

RAY

“...not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw.”

Here Ray gasps and slows down.

RAY

“How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains”-- That’s the Queen’s garden!

MS. JESSE

The Queen’s garden?

RAY

Yeah! My mom told me. She likes the flowers with triangle petals. Those are her favorite. And they sing when the sun comes up.

MS. JESSE

What else did your Mom tell you about Wonderland, Ray?

RAY

She’s on a mission for the Queen! The cats are in jail because they have rabbit tails and the Queen thought that the cats were mean, that they ripped the tails off the rabbits but they didn’t, they didn’t hurt the rabbits. They talked to them and asked for their tails because they wanted to trade for the rabbit tails and the rabbits actually agreed.

MS. JESSE

That sounds complicated.

RAY

Yeah. She’ll be back soon though. A.S.A.P.

Ms. Jesse nods.

RAY
She will!

MS. JESSE
That's good.

RAY
Do you believe me?

MS. JESSE
Let's keep reading, Ray.

RAY
You don't believe me!

MS. JESSE
I believe you bud. Let's keep reading.

RAY
What's a slammer?

MS. JESSE
We're reading the book right now.

RAY
What's a slammer, though?

MS. JESSE
I'll tell you after you finish this passage.

RAY
Why won't you tell me now?

MS. JESSE
Because your job right now is to read. Just finish this paragraph.

RAY
And then you'll tell me?

MS. JESSE
Yes.

Ray speeds through the words at lightning pace.

RAY

“For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible.”

The bell rings.

RAY

Tell me!

MS. JESSE

A slammer is...a person who slams things.

RAY

No it's a place. Like a hotel.

MS. JESSE

Hm. I didn't know that.

RAY

I want to know what a slammer is!

MS. JESSE

I can't tell you, bud. It's time to go.

He decides to accept it.

RAY

Okay. Okay, bye.

He exits into the hallway, walking slowly and rocking as he goes.

Ms. Jesse takes a breath and goes back to her desk, before the classroom fades away.

The Principal sees him.

PRINCIPAL

Faster!

He doesn't hear her. She approaches.

PRINCIPAL

I said faster, Ray! You're gonna be late. Did you hear me?!

He wakes up and sees her.

RAY
 What's a slammer?

PRINCIPAL
 A slammer?

RAY
 Yeah.

PRINCIPAL
 A slammer means jail.

Ray stops walking.

RAY
 Jail?

PRINCIPAL
 Where is your next class, Ray?

He doesn't respond. The principal changes her tone.

PRINCIPAL
 Where are you supposed to be?!

Ray points down the hall.

PRINCIPAL
 Then get there. Now. You're already late.

Ray starts walking. The principal walks on in the other direction. Ray runs into the boys bathroom.

He shuts himself in a stall and pulls out a notebook and a pen. As he writes, Gianna is illuminated, reading his words.

RAY
 (writing)

Dear Mama,
 Is there a slammer in Wonderland?
 Are the cats in the slammer?
 Are you helping them?

I hope you're having fun in the garden.

GIANNA

Can you send me a triangle petal? Love, Ray.

Ray folds up the paper and puts it lovingly into his backpack.

As he is doing so, a flower with triangle petals slowly grows out of the bathroom sink.

As he's closing the door, he sees it. He runs to it, plucks it, and smells it, instigating his flashback:

The sound of two adults arguing, screaming. A door slams. Gianna runs in, panicked. She grabs Ray by the arm and pulls him forcefully, a clear need to escape.

RAY

You're hurting me!

GIANNA

Sorry.

She lets go of him. He flops onto the ground.

GIANNA

We have to go now, Ray Ray.

RAY

No.

GIANNA

YES. We have to go. We have to go now.

She grabs his arm again and he starts screaming.

GIANNA

I can't do this right now, Ray. GET IN THE CAR!

RAY

I don't wanna-

GET IN THE CAR.

GIANNA

He gets up slowly, and gets in.

She turns the ignition, again and again, but the battery won't start.

Shit. SHIT!

GIANNA

Ray rubs his arm.

Finally the car starts. The tires scream as she speeds away.

Is JJ being mean?

RAY

We're gonna go on a little drive. That's all.

GIANNA

What happened to your eye?

RAY

Gianna touches her eye. There's blood. She wipes it quickly.

I bumped it.

GIANNA

Did JJ bump it?

RAY

Gianna doesn't respond. Emotion bubbles up but she stuffs it down...something she's very good at.

Let's go to Wonderland, baby.

GIANNA

No.

RAY

GIANNA

Come on. Please. You start.

RAY

I don't wanna start.

Beat. He rubs his arm.

RAY

My arm hurts. You hurt my arm, mama.

GIANNA

That wouldn't have happened if you had got in the car. When I say get in the car, I mean get in the car.

He's quiet. He looks out the window.

GIANNA

I didn't mean to hurt you, baby. I never mean to hurt you. I was just...I was a little scared. And I needed you to go faster. *(Beat)* Trees. Trees, Ray.

It takes a second, but he decides to forgive her.

RAY

Polka dots.

GIANNA

What color?

RAY

Orange.

GIANNA

That's my favorite color.

RAY

That's why I picked it.

Gianna smiles at him through the rearview mirror. His face calms her.

GIANNA

Your turn.

RAY

Grass.

GIANNA

The grass is...jelly. Sticky blue jelly. You have to wear special jelly boots so you don't stick to the grass.

RAY

Ew!

GIANNA

And fireworks.

RAY

BIG ONES!

GIANNA

Yeah? How big?

RAY

They make elephant shapes. And giraffes. And snakes.

RAY

A castle.

GIANNA

With guards.

RAY

Ooh and the guards have swords!

GIANNA

And they wear sparkly pink suits.

RAY

Nooo!

GIANNA

Yes. Definitely. And sparkly pink birthday hats.

Ray laughs.

RAY

And they all have pet rabbits.

GIANNA

But the rabbits have cat tails.

Ray laughs even more.

RAY

Yeah! And the cats have rabbit tails!

GIANNA

And shiny gold teeth.

Ray giggles, looking out the window.

Gianna drives.

The flashback fades. Ray puts the flower in this backpack.

THE TRUTH

Ray enters Ms. Jesse's classroom, on a mission.

RAY

You told me FICTION! You..you...the slammer IS a place. The slammer means JAIL!

MS. JESSE

Who told you that?

RAY

Principal Rena.

MS. JESSE

Hm. I never knew that.

RAY

I thought you would always tell me the truth.

MS. JESSE

...I thought you didn't always like the truth.

RAY

I can handle it. I want you to ALWAYS tell me the truth.

MS. JESSE

I'll try.

RAY

Do you promise?

Beat.

MS. JESSE

Sometimes the truth is very sad, Ray. Or scary.

RAY

Then you can tell me the kids version.

MS. JESSE

Sometimes there isn't a kids version. Sometimes the truth is just..what it is. And you have to accept it, even though it's sad or hard.

Ray thinks about this.

RAY

I still want to know.

MS. JESSE

I promise not to lie to you, even if I can't tell you the whole truth.

Ray accepts this, then builds up a bit of courage.

RAY

Is my mom in jail?

Ms. Jesse freezes. Then...

MS. JESSE

She's **at** the jail.

Ray starts to rock. He bends his chin into his chest as he does, looking up to keep the tears from falling. Maybe he starts to twirl his wrists.

RAY

The Queen is mean, isn't she?

MS. JESSE

The Queen?

RAY

In Wonderland. She put her in jail, didn't she? I know she did!

MS. JESSE

(searching)

The Queen *is* mean, in the book. But I'm not sure about the Wonderland where your mom is. The Queen might be nice there.

RAY

Is my mom bad? She's in jail and only bad guys go to jail.

MS. JESSE

Well that's...not exactly true.

RAY

Yes it is.

MS. JESSE

People who have done bad THINGS end up in jail. That doesn't mean they're all bad or aren't good. It's just one thing they did.

RAY

But a part of them must be bad. You have to have bad inside you to do bad things.

MS. JESSE

Sometimes...people mess up. Sometimes you don't listen in class and you get in trouble, but that doesn't make you "bad".

RAY

Yes it does. I'm bad too.

MS. JESSE

No you're not, Ray.

RAY

My uncle said so.

MS. JESSE

(firmly)

If your uncle really said that, he's wrong.

RAY

How do you know?

MS. JESSE

Because you're a kid. No kid is bad.

RAY

But grown ups can be bad?

Ms. Jesse tries to decide how to answer this.

MS. JESSE

...I think that's a matter of opinion.

RAY

What's opinion?

MS. JESSE

Opinion. Something you...choose to believe. Let's get to work.

She puts the book in front of him.

RAY

I don't...I don't think my mom is bad.

MS. JESSE

I think a little bit of distraction would be a good thing. Alright so. Page 53. We left off with the Mad Hatter, right there at the top. See it?

RAY

I have to get her out.

MS. JESSE

Your job right now is to read, Ray.

RAY

I don't wanna read.

MS. JESSE

I'll read first. Take a breath, bud. Just listen.

Ray's internal panic is palpable.

As Ms. Jesse reads, Mr. Hatter materializes in the corner of the room and takes his seat at Ms. Jesse's desk.

He is wearing a sparkling pink suit. His hat is the same famous hatter hat as it is in the book, but decked out for a birthday. Ray stares at him.

MS. JESSE

“Why is a raven like a writing-desk?” / “Come we shall have some fun now!” thought Alice. “I'm glad they've begun asking riddles- I believe I can guess that,” she added aloud. “Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?” Said the March Hare. “Exactly so.” Said Alice. “Then you should say what you mean,” the March Hare went on. “I do,” Alice hastily replied; “at least - at least I mean what I say - that's the same thing, you know.” / “Not the same thing a bit!”

MR. HATTER

Not the same thing a bit!

MS. JESSE

Said the Hatter.

MR. HATTER and MS. JESSE

Why, you might just as well say that ‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see!’”

MS. JESSE

What does he mean by “I see what I eat” isn’t the same as “I eat what I see?” *(Beat.)*
Ray?

Ray reluctantly looks back to his book.

RAY

Um...

MR. HATTER

So many questions!

RAY

You don’t...

MS. JESSE

Do you eat what you see?

MR. HATTER

So “asky-wasky”!

RAY

Uh, yes.

She looks to the corner to see what’s going on.

MS. JESSE

You don’t eat every single thing that you see. Are you eating your book?

MR. HATTER

Eat your book?! Does she think you’re a BABY?!

RAY

No.

MR. HATTER

Waaaa! Waaaa! *(He mimes eating a book)*
Gobble-wobble-dobble-mobble. UGH!
(He throws the book down on her desk). I
think it’s time you asked HER a question.

MS. JESSE

Exactly. You might eat some things you
see but not all of them. And do you see
everything that you eat?

RAY

What if she dies before I see her again?

MR. HATTER

Yes, good. Let's get to the bottom of this.

MS. JESSE

What?

RAY

What if she dies when she's at...at jail?

MS. JESSE

She won't.

MR. HATTER

Won't she?

RAY

Are you sure?

MS. JESSE

It's very unlikely.

RAY

But it could happen.

MS. JESSE

She's not going to die, Ray.

MR. HATTER

Oh how adults lie!

MS. JESSE

Do you want to take a break?

Ray nods.

RAY

Can I go to the bathroom?

MR. HATTER

(leaping up)

Ooh goody the bathroom!!

MS. JESSE

Sure, bud.

She hands him a bathroom pass and he exits.

As he walks to the bathroom Mr. Hatter dances along behind him.

Ms. Jesse is illuminated for a moment. She doesn't know what to do with what just happened. Finally she sits at her desk.

Ray ushers them into the bathroom, closing the door, looking both ways like a scout. Once the door is closed:

RAY

Tell me everything.

MR. HATTER

You already know your mission.

RAY

Yes but...I need...tell me what to do!

MR. HATTER

Can't I take a pee first?

RAY

Is she okay?

MR. HATTER

Oh yes, very very. But she needs your helpfulness.

RAY

I knew it.

MR. HATTER

She's worried about you, worry-blurry-furrying all the time!

RAY

Tell her I'm okay.

MR. HATTER

You can tell her yourself when we get there.

Ray's eyes go wide.

RAY

When are we leaving?

MR. HATTER

As soon as we find the portal. The portal will take us right to her.

Mr. Hatter goes to relieve himself. Ray goes into the stall next door. This can be indicated with light and noise, their backs to the audience.

RAY

What portal?

MR. HATTER

The portal to Wonderland. They're hidden all over, right under your nose. Or maybe your toes. Just look for the bunny. Excuse me, rabbit. We're supposed to call them rabbits once they graduate from kindergarten. There are always rabbits near portals. When we see a rabbit, we're close.

RAY

A white rabbit?

MR. HATTER

Blue, actually. With gold teeth. They used to be white but one ate a bottle of paint and never recovered. Sad story.

Ray flushes the toilet. They go to wash their hands.

MR. HATTER

But there will be clues along the way. You'll have to pay attention to the truths. The grown-ups know and grow things, I can tell. Like your "teacher."

RAY

Ms. Jesse?

MR. HATTER

So that's her name. Sounds like a boys name. Is that a first name or a last name?

RAY

I don't know.

MR. HATTER

You should ask her. Especially if she's promising to tell you the truth.

RAY

Why?

MR. HATTER

What if she tells you the WRONG truth?

RAY

If it's the truth it has to be right.

MR. HATTER

WRONG! The truth comes in all kinds of sizes and shapes and colors Ray, dear --oh, sorry-morry, forgive me! "Prince Raybor".

RAY

Prince?

MR. HATTER

Prince in training. Which is why we must make a MAN out of you! Not just a prince, but a knight with a sword of gold and eyes as focused as laser beams! You must never cry. Never show them your pool of tears. Stuff it down and swallow it forcefully the way you might eat broccoli.

RAY

I hate broccoli.

MR. HATTER

It's awful stuff.

RAY

It's bad for you too. A lot of people don't know that but it's true.

MR. HATTER

Truly. Now listen, my prince. Despite what Ms. Resse wants you to believe, the truth isn't always what's true. In fact, many things can be true at once, all at the same time. Take this apple, for *exapple*:

He procures an apple.

MR. HATTER

Is it a circle?

RAY

Yes.

MR. HATTER

WRONG! See this dip here? It's LIKE a circle, but it isn't really a circle. And technically here, it's a sphere.

RAY

I learned about spheres in math class.

MR. HATTER

Excellent. You'll understand perfectly then. Let me ask you, *is* it truly a sphere?

Ray thinks.

RAY

No.

MR. HATTER

RIGHT!

RAY

Because it has a stem. And a bump.

MR. HATTER

Now you're getting it! The apple to some might be a circle or a sphere but it is also truly in the most truth NOT a circle NOR a sphere. Which brings me back to Ms. Gesse.

RAY

Jesse.

MR. HATTER

Whatever.

RAY

I like her.

MR. HATTER

And that's why she's dangerous. It's easy to believe the people you like.

RAY

I guess that's true.

MR. HATTER

I only speak the truth. And will Ms. Pesse tell you that an apple is a sphere? Or will she tell you it's a circle, or a murcle, or a blear? Will she even tell you it's a fruit?! If you like her too much, you'll believe any lie she tells you, even if she too believes her lie to be true.

Ray nods in knowing agreement.

RAY

I can't trust anyone.

MR. HATTER

Not until we get to Wonderland, and until then it's just you and me.

Mr. Hatter looks at his watch, which is massive.

MR. HATTER

Let's go then. We've been in the bathroom exactly one hundred and eighty three seconds.

RAY

Follow me.

They exit the bathroom and walk back to class,
Mr. Hatter still dancing a bit in his step.

RAY

Will you make sure my mom doesn't die? I don't want them to kill her like a Dodo.

MR. HATTER

Who? The queen?

RAY

Yeah.

MR.HATTER

I'll murder them all.

RAY

Only if they're bad, though.

MR. HATTER

Naturally.

They're almost to the classroom.

RAY

And don't let her see you.

MR. HATTER

Who, Ms. Fesse? She's too old to see me.

RAY

I think she's thirty.

MR. HATTER

That's ancient in child years.

They enter the classroom. Ray takes his seat. Mr. Hatter sits at Ms. Jesse's desk and puts his feet up. He pulls out a kid's chocolate milk and opens it loudly, banging the straw on the table.

MS. JESSE

I'm thinking we should do something else.

She hands him a piece of paper.

MS. JESSE

Lewis Carroll also wrote poems. Do you know what a poem is, Ray?

RAY

It's like a song.

MS. JESSE

Right. We're going to read a poem he wrote about a monster called "The Jabberwocky"

Mr. Hatter chokes on his chocolate milk. Ray watches him as Ms. Jesse gets the poem.

RAY

What's a...what's that?

MS. JESSE

You'll see.

MR. HATTER

Pure evil. The most terrifying creature alive. This will be your first test of manhood. I wish we'd had more time to prepare, but...well, I believe in you, Raybor.

MS. JESSE

Are you ready?

MR. HATTER

Are you ready?

Ray nods.

MS. JESSE & MR. HATTER

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogroves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.
 Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
 The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
 Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
 The frumious Bandersnatch!’”

The Jabberwocky appears, biting and snarling.
 It is indeed terrifying, and very real to Ray.

He took his vorpal sword in hand;

Mr. Hatter pulls out a real sword and hands it to
 Ray, who takes it.

Ms. Jesse watches him get up and decides to let
 him.

Long time the manxome foe he sought--
 So rested he by the Tumtum tree
 And stood awhile in thought.
 And, as in uffish thought he stood,
 The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
 Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
 And burbled as it came!

The Jabberwocky comes whiffing and burbling.
 Ray battles it.

One, two! One, two! And through and through
 The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!

He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

Mr. Hatter hands the “head” to Ray. The
Jabberwocky’s body falls lifeless to the ground.

And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!

MR. HATTER

Callooh! Callay!

Ray starts jumping up and down, rocking back
and forth, out of control, clapping his hands.

RAY

CALLOOH! / CALLAY! CALLOOH CALLAY!

MS. JESSE

Ray. Sit down, Ray. RAY!

He sits, still rocking.

RAY

I killed it! I killed it!

MS. JESSE

You want to write one yourself?

RAY

Write what?

MS. JESSE

A poem. Maybe about a dragon?

RAY

YEAH!

Ms. Jesse hands him a piece of paper and pencil,
as Ray giggles, still rocking.

RAY

Okay, okay, okay, okay. Okay okay. Can you send it to my mama?

MS. JESSE

Of course! What's your dragon's name gonna be?

RAY

Is Bob good?

MS. JESSE

Jabberwocky is much more fun to say than Bob. Can you to play around with the sounds...like "Bobbletoo" or "Bobber-Bing"?

MR. HATTER

Blankenwolly Bumbleblanket Zoogletoogle booger bus!

RAY

"Booger-bus!"

MS. JESSE

Try another one.

RAY

Boogle-pop. Bingle-Pop. Bingle Poop!

MS. JESSE

No poop.

MR. HATTER

Bingle-pop wasn't terrible.

RAY

The Bingle-pop goes fast.

Ray starts writing.

MS. JESSE

Can you take the word "fast" and change it so that it *sounds* like we're going fast? We know what "galumphing" is even though it isn't a real word.

She "galumphs" a little. Ray laughs.

MS. JESSE

What's a new word for fast?

RAY

Whoosh!

MS. JESSE

Whoosh could work. It sounds like wind.

MR. HATTER

Boosh, poosh, foosh

RAY

Foosh! I like Foosh. The Bingle-pop goes foosh!

MS. JESSE

Great. Can you make it rhyme?

Gianna is illuminated in her cell, opening Ray's poem. She begins to read it.

RAY

His tail...and his toosh!

GIANNA

The Bingle-pop is red like fire. But nice in his heart.

MS. JESSE

Now can you give us a new detail?

RAY

He doesn't like his cage.

GIANNA

He really wants to rage and scream

RAY

And eat ice cream.

GIANNA

And fart.

On the last line, Gianna giggles. Ray breaks out into hilarious laughter at his own cleverness. They share a laugh together, while apart.

RAY

She's gonna like that part.

Ms. Jesses smiles. The bell rings.

MS. JESSE

Do you want to say anything else to her? You can take a minute.

Ray writes as Gianna reads. The lights fade on Ray and Ms. Jesse.

GIANNA

Dear Mama,

Are you in trouble? If you're in trouble let me know and I'll come help. I know about wonderland now. I know I can find the portal where you fall down in. If you tell me where it is I can come faster.

Love, Ray.

He gives the letter to Ms. Jesse. Gianna keeps reading it, touching it.

MR. HATTER

Make sure she knows the address.

RAY

You know the address in Wonderland?

MS. JESSE

I can find it.

He doesn't want to leave, but he does.

MS. JESSE

Bye, Ray.

Immediately, Ms. Jesse goes to her desk. She sits down and starts to write a letter of her own.

Gianna pulls a second letter out of the envelope.

MS. JESSE

Dear Ms. Torrence. My name is Jesse Green

GIANNA

I am Ray's special ed teacher.

MS. JESSE

I have loved teaching your son.

GIANNA

He is brilliant and hilarious and an excellent poet.

MS. JESSE

I'm writing because I'm concerned...about his understanding of where you are. I know you have told him you're in

GIANNA

Wonderland, and I think I understand why.

MS. JESSE

But it is starting to confuse him in ways that confuse me. I'm concerned for his...mental health...if he believes a ~~lie~~

Ms. Jesses erases "lie"

MS. JESSE

Story.

GIANNA

Story.

GIANNA

That isn't true. I think he'll have a hard time accepting the truth.

MS. JESSE

I think the truth will be even more hurtful. I think he needs to understand that you

GIANNA

...may not be coming back for a long time.

MS. JESSE

I was thinking that it would be wonderful if he could come visit you. I think it would do him a ton of good to see you in person,

GIANNA

to hug you, to know that his mom is okay and...still here.

MS. JESSE

Even if she isn't in Wonderland. Let me know if it would be okay for us to visit. I would have to get permission to drive him there. Please just think about it and let me know.

GIANNA

I know it would mean the world to him.

MS. JESSE

And I would love to meet you. With love,

GIANNA

Ms. Jesse.

Ms. Jesse puts her letter in the envelope with Ray's poem. She packs her bags. The lights fade on her.

Gianna picks up a pen and pad.

GIANNIA

Dear Ray Ray,

~~You poem is wonderful. I can't wait until we can write some together...~~

She stops writing. She pulls out a new piece of paper and tries again.

GIANNA

Dear Ray Ray,

~~I'm ok. I am in trouble but I've been talking to the Queen.~~

She stops again. A new paper...

GIANNA

Dear Ray Ray,

~~I lied to you. I'm so sorry, but wonderland isn't real. I told you that because I didn't want you to worry, but I'm...I am in a lot of trouble. I love you and I'll...I'll see you very...~~

She can't write another lie.

She throws the pen across the room.

She wants to cry, but too many people are watching.

OFF WITH HER HEAD.

Ray sits in Ms. Jesse's classroom reading from the book.

Somehow, the classroom is bigger, and Ray seems just a bit smaller than he used to. The door in particular huge.

RAY

““Off with their heads!” and the procession moved on, three of the soldiers remaining behind to execute the unfortunate gardeners, who ran to Alice for protection.”
Wait...she's gonna cut off their heads?

MS. JESSE

Now you see why this is a sixth grade book.

RAY

The Queen can do that?

MS. JESSE

In this story, which is *fiction*, yes.

Ray is horrified.

MS. JESSE

Ray, this Wonderland is not a real place. I need to make sure you understand that. Do you understand that?

MR. HATTER

She promised to tell you the truth.

RAY

You promised to tell me the truth.

MS. JESSE

I am telling you the truth. I know your Mom has told you she's in Wonderland, but it's...a different Wonderland. It's not this one.

RAY

Then how do I get there? To **her** Wonderland?

MS. JESSE

You...you have to wait.

MR. HATTER

She knows things...

RAY
Wait for what?

MS. JESSE
You have to be invited.

RAY
Who invites me?

MS. JESSE
I...I don't know, Ray.

RAY
Are you lying?

MS. JESSE
No.

MR. HATTER
Yes.

Ray sulks in his chair. Ms. Jesse decides to close the book.

MS. JESSE
I'm sure you know more than I do, bud.

RAY
I don't know anything.

MS. JESSE
There might be clues. You might be able to find some answers if you...if you ask the right questions.

RAY
Like...like I have to be a detective?

Ms. Jesse nods.

RAY
How? Tell me how.

MS. JESSE
Just...think about what you already know.

RAY
That she's in Wonderland.

MS. JESSE
You don't know that.

RAY MR. HATTER
Yes I do. Yes you do.

MS. JESSE
Have you seen her there? With your own eyes?

RAY & MR. HATTER
Yes.

Ms. Jesse gives him a questioning look.

MS. JESSE
Think about what you have seen. Yourself. In the real world. When was the last time you saw her?

Ray thinks.

RAY
In the hospital.

MS. JESSE
Why were you in the hospital?

RAY
Because I hurt my arm.

MS. JESSE
How'd you hurt it?

RAY
I don't know I just hurt it.

MS. JESSE
Was she there when you hurt it?

RAY
Yeah.

MS. JESSE
Well what happened?

RAY
...I fell.

MS. JESSE
Okay. And so your mom took you to the hospital?

Ray nods.

MS. JESSE
That day?

RAY
No.

MS. JESSE
...And the doctor came to look at it?

Ray nods.

RAY
And then she disappeared. (*His eyes go wide*) The doctor!! He looked at her like...like he didn't like her. Then he asked her to talk. And then she...she went to talk to him and... He took her! The doctor took her!

MS. JESSE
You don't **know** that.

RAY
Yes I do!!

Ray starts packing his back pack frantically.

MS. JESSE
There's still five minutes of class, Bud.

RAY
I have to go.

MS. JESSE
Go where? Ray. You're not leaving this room.

RAY
I have to go to the hospital!

No.

MS. JESSE

RAY

YES! I have to go NOW!

He heads toward the door. Ms. Jesse **swiftly locks it**. The lock is high, high up on this bigger door, where Ray can't reach it.

MR. HATTER

Did she just lock you in?!

RAY

You promised to help me!!

MS. JESSE

You can ask your aunt and uncle to take you. / We have five more minutes--

RAY

They won't take me!!

MS. JESSE

They might. You need to ask them first.

MR. HATTER

She's against you.

RAY

I thought you were gonna help me.

MS. JESSE

I'm trying, bud. But there are rules.

MR. HATTER

RAY

Did she even mail your letter? Did you even mail my letter?

MS. JESSE

Of course I did.

RAY

Then why didn't she write back?

MS. JESSE

I don't know. The letter might have gotten lost / or she might not have gotten it.

MR. HATTER
Are you listening to this?!

Ray jumps up.

RAY
YOU DIDN'T MAIL IT!

MS. JESSE
Yes I did!

MR. HATTER
It's probably still in her desk.

Ray runs to Ms. Jesse's desk and starts opening her drawers, looking for the letter. Ms. Jesse runs after him.

MS. JESSE
Get away from my desk, Ray. RAY!

RAY
WHERE IS IT?! WHERE IS MY LETTER?!

Ms. Jesse **pries his fingers** off of her drawers and **carries him away from her desk**. He starts kicking the air. Finally he **kicks her in the shin**.

MS. JESSE
OW! Ray that HURT!

She sets him down as he runs away.

MR. HATTER
Good work.

RAY
You're a bad guy!

MS. JESSE
Sit down at the table. RIGHT NOW.

MR. HATTER
Don't let her control you.

Ray runs to the other side of the room. He starts **tearing the classroom apart**. He pulls posters off of the walls, he throws pencils all over, destroys stacks of paper, etc. She goes toward him and he runs to the other side. **She decides not to play chase.**

MS. JESSE

Stop it, Ray. STOP THAT. I know that you're angry, bud. I get it. But I'm only here to help you. That's all I'm ever here to do.

RAY

LIAR!

He runs to a new part of the room to continue with his path of destruction.

MS. JESSE

No, we're not doing that.

She goes to him and grabs his hands. She tries to move him over to the "safe place".

MS. JESSE

You know what to do if you're at school and you feel angry. You go to the safe place and you take deep breaths.

MR. HATTER

I hate that ducking schmafe place!

MS. JESSE

We're gonna walk over there and you're going to calm yourself down. And then we're gonna talk about this.

MR. HATTER

Talkie-talkie all the TIME!

MS. JESSE

You can read a book, you can draw, you can write a letter * if you --

At the * Ray bites her hand.

MS. JESSE

OW! RAY!

He runs to the door and tries to get out. He starts kicking it furiously. She goes over and stands over him, suddenly a terrifying force.

RAY

Let me out! LET ME OUT!

MS. JESSE

SIT YOUR ASS DOWN AT THAT TABLE RIGHT NOW!

Ray stops, shocked, still shaking.

MS. JESSE

(through her teeth with crazy eyes)

I said NOW.

MR. HATTER

Told you she was a bad guy.

RAY

You said ass.

MS. JESSE

Sit down.

RAY

No.

MS. JESSE

Then I have to call auntie.

She goes to her desk to find the number. At this Ray dissolves into the floor.

RAY

NOO! NO, no PLEASE! Please don't call AUNTIE!

MS. JESSE

You can't bite teachers, Ray.

RAY

I won't, I won't, I'm sorry. I said I was sorry. I'll sit down. I'm sorry I'm sorry. Please don't call Auntie! PLEASE!

He sits down and rocks.

MS. JESSE

(firmly)

You don't bite me. Understand? You don't bite anyone. Have I ever bitten you?

RAY

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry--

Ms. Jesse watches him, hating the world. Then she goes to him.

MS. JESSE

Look at me. (*He doesn't*) LOOK AT ME. (*He does, reluctantly*). I need you to understand that I'm on your side. I'm not here to hurt you. I know you're feeling sad and angry and lots of hard feelings right now but you are NOT gonna come in here and hurt me. Do you understand me? (*He nods*). I don't want this for you. I don't want this for your mom. / But there are limits to what I can do. I can't solve everything for you, and I don't know everything. All I can do is be on your team.

MR. HATTER

Want WHAT for your mom, exactly?

MS. JESSE

And I did mail your letter. I promise.

Beat.

MR. HATTER

She promised.

The bell rings.

Ms. Jesse goes to her desk.

MS. JESSE

I'm writing you a yellow slip for your behavior today.

RAY

Are you gonna call Auntie?

Beat.

MS. JESSE

No. (*His body calms*). But you won't get recess today. And if you act like that in here again, I will call home.

Ray nods. Slowly, still sniffing, he packs the book into his back pack, takes his yellow slip, and exits, Mr. Hatter right behind him.

Ms. Jesse goes to her desk and considers things.

MR. HATTER

(patting him on the back)

Don't worry, Raybor. We'll get her back. You killed the Jabberwock. That means you can do anything.

RAY

Right. Right...We just need...we need to get to the hospital.

MR. HATTER

Roger Dodger, prince-amundo. To the portal!

Ray nods, restoring his confidence.

Another bell rings.

MR. HATTER

So many dismissal-whistles!

They exit the bathroom.

Ms. Jesse picks up her cell phone and dials a number.

I DON'T LIKE WAITING.

Ray and Mr. Hatter approach the hospital, weary from a long walk in the middle of the night. Mr. Hatter has a pair of "binoculopores" (Wonderland-esque binoculars) and is limping dramatically.

MR. HATTER

Why is a leg like a jelly fish?!

RAY

You'll be okay.

Ray looks through the binoculopores into the hospital.

RAY

Oh no. There's a wrecketary.

MR. HATTER

A who-what?

RAY

She guards all their sick secrets. See the folders behind her? So we'll have to be sneaky. No more talking until we're in our seats. Come on.

Ray ushers Mr. Hatter into a waiting room and takes a seat in the back.

The Receptionist shuffles through paperwork as they enter, barely noticing Ray.

RAY

This is the waiting room.

MR. HATTER

What are we waiting for?

RAY

We're just...deciding where to go next.

They take a seat. Neither knows what to do.
They look around. The Receptionist finally
notices Ray.

RECEPTIONIST

Do you need help, Sweetie?

MR. HATTER

Look small against the wall.

Ray presses his body against the wall.

RECEPTIONIST

Where's your mother, dear?

MR. HATTER

I think she sees you.

RECEPTIONIST

Dear?

MR. HATTER

Answer her!

RAY

I'm just waiting.

The Receptionist accepts this and goes back to
her paperwork.

Relief.

RAY

We have to look for signs.

MR. HATTER

Yes, yes. Mom signs. Portal signs.

RAY

Okay...what do they look like?

MR. HATTER

I don't know.

RAY

You're supposed to know.

MR. HATTER

I don't know everything. And you're the Prince!

RECEPTIONIST

Dear? Who are you talking to?

RAY

I'm not talking.

RECEPTIONIST

You are talking.

RAY

No I was...I was...

MR. HATTER

You were singing.

RAY

Singing.

RECEPTIONIST

Can you come here, sweetie?

MR. HATTER

She might know where the portal is.

Slowly, Ray approaches.

RECEPTIONIST

You said you're waiting for you mom?

Ray nods.

RECEPTIONIST

Do you know where she is?

MR. HATTER

What an insensitive question!

RAY

In the portal. Do you know where the portal is?

RECEPTIONIST

You mean the door?

The DOOR is the portal?
MR. HATTER
Ray stares at the door leading into the hospital.

Are you alright, dear?
RECEPTIONIST

Tell her you're sick.
MR. HATTER

I'm sick.
RAY

More sick.
MR. HATTER

Bad sick.
RAY

Act sick.
MR. HATTER
Ray doubles over. The receptionist isn't buying it.

What's your name?
RECEPTIONIST

Tell her you're a prince.
MR. HATTER

Prince.
RAY

Well Prince, I can't do anything for you without a parent here.
RECEPTIONIST

She's coming.
RAY

Why didn't she come in with you?
RECEPTIONIST

MR. HATTER
Because she's already here, nimwit!!

RAY
She...she's already here.

Just then a man bursts into the waiting room, holding his neck, from which **he's bleeding heavily.**

PATIENT
Help me, please. Please....I've been shot.

Ray and Mr. Hatter get out of the way, staring in shock. The Receptionist jumps up and dials an alarm. A series of beeps and intercoms can be heard. She rushes to open the doors for him.

Right this way, sir.

RECEPTIONIST

Ray is frozen. Mr. Hatter starts for the open doors.

Un-freeze yourself, Raybor.

MR. HATTER

Ray stares after the bleeding man.

Courage, Now! People get shot all the time!

MR. HATTER

Ray sees a blue rabbit in the distance, inside the hospital.

A rabbit...

RAY

He snaps out of it, gathers courage, then sneaks through the doors before they close.

The hospital is even bigger than his classroom was.

Ray takes in the place, somewhere he's been before. He remembers and looks to the right, going toward a door.

RAY
Here! This was my room!

They enter. Ray closes it behind them.

MR. HATTER
Are you certain-mertain?

RAY
Yeah it...it had that...smiley cat.

There's a massive picture of a tiger on the wall.

Mr. Hatter starts looking at the tiger as Ray starts investigating the room, opening drawers and looking in the sink.

MR. HATTER
I've seen that face before. I know I have... I just can't...I just can't place it.

The tiger's face comes to life. **It smiles.**

TIGER
Have you now?

Mr. Hatter screams and jumps back, tipping over a table of medical supplies.

TIGER
Hellooooo Mr. Hatter.

RAY
Are you the Cheshire?!

TIGER
His great great granddaughter, actually.

RAY
So there must be a portal! Do you remember me? I was here before, with my mom.

TIGER
Which mom?

RAY

My mom. She has long pretty hair. And bouncy eyelashes. And she's funny. We were here because my arm hurt. And she...we were laughing about...How you looked like a...

He starts to giggle. As he laughs, Gianna enters at the bedside looking at Tiger in the memory, laughing.

Ray sees her and runs to take his place in the memory on the hospital bed. He beams at his mother.

TIGER

Like a what?

RAY

Like a man.

At this Ray and Gianna giggle.

GIANNA

I think it's the eyebrows. They look like bathroom rugs. No offense, Mr. Tiger.

TIGER

MRS. Tiger.

RAY

Or brooms.

GIANNA

Or sponges. Or caterpillars.

They giggle together.

GIANNA

Maybe it isn't a tiger, maybe it's a man in a tiger costume.

RAY

Noooo.

GIANNA

Yes! Look at his feet, Ray!

TIGER

HER feet!

He's got people feet.

GIANNA

Ray laughs even more.

TIGER

I beg your pardon!

The Doctor comes in.

DOCTOR

I've got the X rays.

MR. HATTER

Who is this one?

RAY
(solemn)

The Doctor.

DOCTOR

I'd like to review them with you in private, Ms. Torrance.

GIANNA

We can't look at them in here?

DOCTOR

No.

Gianna's face falls, then turns grave.

GIANNA

I can't leave him in here alone.

DOCTOR

The nurse is standing outside.

Beat.

GIANNA

...I'll be right back, Ray Ray.

They all watch her exit.

TIGER

Ah yes, the X-Rays...

Mr. Hatter runs to the door to see where they went.

MR. HATTER

They cannot X you, RAY! I WON'T LET THEM!

TIGER

Was it left or was it right?

MR. HATTER

I can't see.

TIGER

Ray saw.

MR. HATTER

You did?

RAY

No I didn't.

TIGER

Don't lie.

MR. HATTER

Where did they go?

RAY

I don't know!

TIGER

Oh yes you do. You ran out to find her.

RAY

No.

TIGER

Yes.

MR. HATTER

No or yes?

RAY

That part didn't happen.

MR. HATTER

Which part?

TIGER

The part where he saw where she went. You have to face the real truth, now. That's the only way to find her. Was it right or was it left?

Ray gathers courage and goes toward the door.

RAY

Right.

He looks. In the hallway stands Gianna, talking to the doctor. She is gesturing, but we can't hear her.

RAY

The doctor was talking to her.

TIGER

What was on his face?

RAY

Quiet.

TIGER

And what was on hers?

RAY

She...she started to have tears.

TIGER

The happy kind?

MR. HATTER

They don't look happy.

RAY

And her arms got mad.

Gianna starts gesturing.

RAY

But the lady came in.

As a nurse enters, Ray is pushed back into the room.

Gianna is ushered down the hall and into a different room by the doctor. The light on her fades.

Lie down, little guy.

NURSE

Who's she talking to?

RAY

No one.

NURSE

That's a funny name.

MR. HATTER

She'll be back in a minute. You need to rest.

NURSE

She ushers Ray back into the bed.

But she--

RAY

She'll be back in a minute, sweetheart.

NURSE

But that was a lie.

TIGER

It wasn't a minute. It was infinity minutes!

RAY

Ray lies down. The minute she's gone he jumps up and looks out the door again.

She was...she was gone.

RAY

Not gone, just not **here**.

MR. HATTER

TIGER

Somewhere else. Was it right or was it left? Or right behind or left alone. Or right below or left behind. Or-

RAY

The portal. Do you know where the portal is?

TIGER

(smiling)

I suggest you find the doctor.

MR. HATTER

Doctor No One?

TIGER

No One knows how to find your mom. The mom with the bouncy eyelashes. Good luck.

Mr. Hatter and Ray nod. They exit the room and start creeping along the corridor.

The doctor is illuminated, looking through files.

Ray creeps in his direction. The doctor sees him.

DOCTOR

Excuse me.

MR. HATTER

Get the vorpal sword!

DOCTOR

You need to be in your room.

Ray pulls a blunt kitchen knife out of his backpack and brandishes it at the doctor.

RAY

WHERE IS SHE?!

The doctor backs up, laughing uncomfortably.

DOCTOR

Whoa, whoa little guy! Where's your mom?

RAY
THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO KNOW!

MR. HATTER
THAT'S WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW!

Ms. Jesse enters with the receptionist and sees him.

RAY!
MS. JESSE

He turns to see her.

MS. JESSE
Put that down right now. *(He doesn't.)* RAY!

He starts to breathe heavily.

RAY
He...HE TOOK HER!

DOCTOR
Took who?

RAY
MY MOM!

MS. JESSE
No he didn't, bud.

RAY
How do you know?!

MS. JESSE
Because doctors don't take people to jail.

RAY
THEN WHO DID?! *(Beat)* WHO TOOK HER?!!

MS. JESSE
Let's just get to the car.

RAY
TELL ME!!!

Beat.

MS. JESSE

A police officer.

Ray's body wants to cry, but he won't let himself. He starts to rock, wiping away any tears that fall out. Finally it starts to erupt and he starts to hyperventilate.

He drops the knife. Ms. Jesse goes to him and holds him, swiftly handing the knife to the receptionist.

MS. JESSE

It's okay to cry, bud.

MR. HATTER

No it isn't. We're losing time. No pool of tears, remember? Look at you...you're a plucking PRINCE!

MS. JESSE

Just breathe.

She tries to coach him. He calms down a bit, then breaks himself out of Ms. Jesse's hug. He wipes his face.

RAY

Princes don't cry.

MS. JESSE

You wanna go?

He shakes his head "no".

MS. JESSE

Your mom isn't here, Ray.

He stuffs down another eruption of tears.

RAY

How do you know?!

MS. JESSE

Because I know where she is. *(Beat)*. Come on, let's go.

She stands and takes his hand. Nodding to the receptionist and the doctor.

MS. JESSE

Thanks Anne. I'm sorry.

They make their way out.

TELL ME MORE.

Ms. Jesse drives Ray in her car. Mr. Hatter sits next to him in the back seat.

Silence for a moment. Ray is noticeably still.

RAY

How did you know I was there?

MS. JESSE

I asked the receptionist to call me if a little boy showed up alone.

MR. HATTER

Pfff. "ALONE".

Ray thinks about this.

RAY

Is she your friend?

MS. JESSE

She's my uncle's girlfriend.

Beat.

RAY

How do I get to jail?

MS. JESSE

An adult would have to drive you.

RAY

Can you drive me?

MS. JESSE

Maybe. Teachers aren't supposed to drive students.

RAY

You're driving me now.

MS. JESSE

I'm breaking the rules.

A moment. She looks at him briefly.

Mr. Hatter starts to drift off to sleep.

RAY

I don't think you're bad.

MS. JESSE

What?

RAY

Cause you're breaking the rules.

MS. JESSE

(smiling)

Most people aren't "bad" Ray. Most are just trying to do good.

RAY

That's your opinion?

MS. JESSE

(nodding)

My "opinion". Yes.

They arrive at Auntie's house. They look at it.

MS. JESSE

How did you get out of the house?

RAY

Through my window.

She nods, trying to decide what to do.

She turns the car off. She unbuckles her seat belt.

RAY

I can do it. I don't want you to get in trouble.

Before she can stop him he jumps out of the car. The sound of his car door shutting wakes Mr. Hatter, who sluggishly exits after Ray.

Ms. Jesse waits, watching as he sneaks back into the house.

A moment by herself. No lights come on in the house.

She starts the car.

YOU'RE GOING TO COURT.

The sun rises. Ray sleeps in his bed, Mr. Hatter on the floor.

Auntie bursts in.

AUNTIE

Wake up, Ray. Wake up, you're going to court.

He doesn't move. She shouts in his ear:

AUNTIE

RAY!

Both Ray and Mr. Hatter bolt awake. Mr. Hatter puts the pillow over his head.

AUNTIE

Put these on.

She throws a pair of clothes on the bed. Ray rubs his eyes and moves slowly.

AUNTIE

NOW. We're already late.

He starts to put on the clothes.

RAY

These are...fancy clothes.

AUNTIE

That's right you're going to court.

RAY

Court?

AUNTIE

Court. They're gonna ask you some questions about your mama.

Now he really wakes up. Mr. Hatter opens his eyes.

RAY

Is mama gonna be there?

AUNTIE

She should be.

Ray starts jumping up and down in excitement.
Mr. Hatter boogies down.

RAY

YES! YES! YES! Thank you! Thank you!

He hugs Auntie. She takes in his joy, softens.

AUNTIE

You know it's not a party, right?

RAY

I'm gonna get my mama back!

AUNTIE

I hope you're right, Ray. I really hope you're right.

She exits. He high-fives Mr. Hatter, then grabs
the book and eagerly opens it, looking for a
clue.

RAY

Court court court court.

MR. HATTER

Might be at the end. All the good stuff usually happens at the end.

Ray flips to the end. He finds something.

RAY

Yes...YES! "Call the first witness," said the King; and the White Rabbit blew three blasts
on the trumpet, and called out "First witness!" The first witness was...the Hatter."
Wait...you've been to court?

MR. HATTER

No. That...that must have been my great great grandfather.

Beat. Ray gives him a mistrustful look.

MR. HATTER
(aghast)

Would I lie to you?!

RAY

...I don't think so.

MR. HATTER

Keep reading.

RAY

"I'm a poor man, your Majesty," he began. "You're a very poor speaker," said the King." That's not nice.

MR. HATTER

Kings aren't usually nice. Don't tell the king I said that.

RAY

I won't.

Ray rushes to put his clothes on while reading the book, as Mr. Hatter styles his hair in the mirror.

RAY

Will the king be mean to me?

MR. HATTER

Not if you tell the right truth. *(Beat)*. Don't worry. I'll help you.

A blue rabbit runs across the stage as the lights fade. They chase after it.

WONDERLAND.

The blue rabbit runs across the stage again, followed by Ray, pursuing it as he reads the book feverishly, Mr. Hatter behind him. Down the rabbit hole they go, as Ray scours the text for answers.

Finally the blue rabbit leads him to a grand set of doors, looks back and smiles a big smile of gold teeth. The doors open and Ray enters the court room.

It is huge. The Judge's bench is as tall as a skyscraper. The Judge peers down at Ray below, **walrus-like**.

Above him, the ceiling is a deep purple sky full of **glittering stars**. Flowers with triangle petals pop out of cracks in the woodwork. Calm, reverent music plays.

The jury box is filled with **puppets, or people in masks**, or a strange combination. Something is off.

Ray enters and walks down the aisle toward the judge, Mr. Hatter behind him. When the jury sees him, they start writing on notepads, clearly observing his every move. He takes it all in.

RAY

Are you the king?

JUDGE

Something like that. I'm the judge. You must be Ray.

Ray nods.

RAY

Is my mama coming?

JUDGE

She'll be here soon, son. Do you know why you're here?

RAY

To get my mama back.

JUDGE

Well, not exactly. We're going to ask you some questions.

MR. HATTER

There they go again with the Question-questions.

RAY

Okay.

JUDGE

I need to ask you first if you understand the difference between a truth and a lie.

RAY

Uh-huh.

JUDGE

Good. If I told you that I was a mouse, would that be a truth or a lie?

RAY

Do you feel like a mouse?

The jury writes, Ray notices.

JUDGE

No.

RAY

Because it could be a metaphor.

The judge chuckles. Then the jury too.

JUDGE

Yes. Yes it could. But we don't mean things as metaphors in here. We mean everything we say, literally. The exact pure truth must be found. Is it the exact pure truth that I am a mouse?

RAY

No.

JUDGE

Good. Do you promise to tell the jury and everyone in the courtroom the truth?

RAY

Uh-huh.

JUDGE

Alright, good. Take a seat right here next to me.

Ray takes his seat at the witness stand. The Prosecutor enters in a bright red suit. She takes her seat in the front.

RAY

Is that the queen?

MR. HATTER

Oh yes. Queenie-weenie. Be careful of her.

Gianna enters in handcuffs, lead by a guard.
Ray jumps up.

RAY

Mama!

GIANNA

Hi, baby.

He runs to her and hugs her.

JUDGE

Sit down, Ms. Torrance.

GIANNA

I missed you, Ray Ray.

RAY

I missed you too, Mama. Why are you wearing bracelets?

JUDGE

No touching in this courtroom! ORDER!

The guard peels him away.

RAY

Why is she wearing bracelets?

MR. HATTER

GIANNA

Go sit down. (*He doesn't go, she gets nervous*). Sit down, Ray.

The guard starts to pull him back with more force.

RAY

But I wanna sit with you.

JUDGE

You can't sit with her.

RAY

Why not?

GIANNA

It's just the rules here, baby. (*Commuincating the gravity:*) We have to follow the rules here.

Ray obeys.

MR. HATTER

I told you the king was a jerk.

JUDGE

Ms. Torrance, any idea where your lawyer is?

GIANNA

I fired him.

A flurry of murmuring and writing from the Jury.

JUDGE

You what now?

GIANNA

I'll be representing myself.

The judge groans, leans back in his chair, rubs his eyes.

JUDGE

You know that's a terrible decision, right?

GIANNA

I think it's the best decision I've ever made.

RAY

(whispering)

What's happening?

MR. HATTER

(whispering)

I think she's in trouble-double...

GIANNA

I know my character. He didn't.

JUDGE

But you don't know the laws. And if you don't know the laws then...

GIANNA

Then I'm more likely to be guilty?

The jury shifts. The judge leans forward,
squinting down at her.

JUDGE

It will be harder to prove you're innocent.

MR. HATTER

Innocent-minnocent!

RAY

She is innocent!

JUDGE

Silence from you.

GIANNA

That seems like a problem with the court, your honor. Not me.

JUDGE

Indeed. But unfortunately here we are, bound to certain...ways.

GIANNA

All I am bound to is my son. I don't think there's anyone here who could show you that better than me.

JUDGE

Ms. Torrance. Even educated people don't know the rules we have. You won't know the timings, the procedures. You won't know the definitions of words. And we'll have to EXPLAIN everything to you, bit by bit. It'll be a painstaking, irritating process.

GIANNA

I'm not in a rush. Are you?

JUDGE

We're already behind schedule.

GIANNA

I didn't know truth had a schedule.

JUDGE

The court does, Ms. Torrance, the court.

GIANNA

Well if the court is here to help my son, I know they'll take all the time they need.

A sour beat. The jury members look at one another. The judge sighs heavily.

JUDGE

Very well. But if you lose, it'll be your fault.

RAY

Lose what?

MR. HATTER

Lose the...lose the game.

RAY

What game?

JUDGE

I told you to STOP TALKING.

Ray shrinks.

JUDGE

Prosecution.

The Prosecutor rises and goes to him. Her tone is sugary sweet...too sweet.

PROSECUTOR

Hi Ray. It's nice to meet you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions.

Ray eyes her nervously.

RAY

Why?

JUDGE

No more questions from you, kid. All you do is answer.

Ray tentatively nods.

PROSECUTOR

Can you tell me about your mom, Ray?

RAY

You know her.

JUDGE

Answer her.

RAY

She's funny. And she helps people. Like me. And the cats.

PROSECUTOR

The cats?

RAY

You know, because of the rabbit tails.

PROSECUTOR

I don't know.

MR. HATTER

Don't let her lie to you!

RAY

Yes you do know.

PROSECUTOR

About rabbit tails?

Your honor--
GIANNA

SILENCE FROM YOU!
JUDGE

RAY
(jumping up)
Don't you talk to her like that!

MR. HATTER
HOW DARE HE?!

RAY
Ray!

Her eyes bore into him. He sits.

GIANNA
Don't speak to him like that again. Take your deep breaths.

Ray breathes.

PROSECUTOR
Can you tell me more about the cats and the rabbit tails?

RAY
You...you put the cats in jail. Mama was asking you to free them. They're innocent. The rabbits wanted to give the cats their tails.

PROSECUTOR
Interesting.

RAY
Are you going to free the cats? If you free the cats my mama can come home.

The jury and judge laugh. A few stars go out.

MR. HATTER
Why are they laughing? WHY ARE YOU LAUGHING?!

PROSECUTOR
I think it's more complicated than that.

MR. HATTER
Of course it is.

RAY
Why?

JUDGE
Answers only.

RAY
But...how does my / mama come home?

PROSECUTOR
Was there ever a time when you were mad at your mom?

Ray rocks, quiet.

GIANNA
Just tell her the truth.

PROSECUTOR
I'll be more specific. Were you mad at your mom when she pulled your arm?

MR. HATTER
Don't tell her about that.

RAY
I think I have to.

PROSECUTOR
Excuse me?

Ray looks to his mother who nods to him.

RAY
I was sad at her.

PROSECUTOR
Sad?

RAY
It wasn't her fault.

PROSECUTOR
Why not?

RAY

We were...she was trying to get me to go faster.

PROSECUTOR

Why?

RAY

Because...JJ was being mean.

PROSECUTOR

Did you like living with JJ?

RAY

No.

PROSECUTOR

Why not?

MR. HATTER

Don't tell her everything.

RAY

But I...I have to!

MR. HATTER

You don't have to tell the whole truth. Just pick the best bits.

RAY

But that's...that's lying.

JUDGE

Who is he talking to? Who are you talking to, boy?

RAY

Mr...Mr. Hatter.

Mr. Hatter waves hello.

JUDGE

Mr. Who?

RAY

He's...You can tell them. We're in Wonderland now.

MR. HATTER

We've met before your honor, playing croquet with the frogs. It's a pleasure to meet you and greet you. Again.

JUDGE

I said, WHO is Mr. Hatter?!

RAY

He just told you.

JUDGE

Does the child have an imaginary friend?

The jury laughs. More stars flicker out.

MR. HATTER

Imaginary?!

JUDGE

If he's delusional there's no use examining him.

GIANNA

He's not delusional.

JUDGE

He seems to think there's a "Mr. Hatter" here, Ms. Torrance. Do you see a Mr. Hatter?

GIANNA

I don't, / but I think I understand why he might...

MR. HATTER

Tell them I'm real!

RAY

He's real!

More laughter from the Judge and Jury. More stars flicker out and the flowers begin to wilt.

MR. HATTER

Stop laughing! STOP LAUGHING!

GIANNA

I told him I was in Wonderland.

JUDGE

You what?

GIANNA

Instead of jail...I told him I was in Wonderland. I think Mr. Hatter...is a character he made up to help him deal with...me being gone.

MR. HATTER

I don't like it in here, Raybor.

JUDGE

Why on earth would you do that?

GIANNA

To protect him.

MR. HATTER

So she lied to you?

RAY

She didn't lie!

MR. HATTER

Oh yes she did. And now I'm not even "real".

RAY

(to Gianna)

But...this is Wonderland! We're in Wonderland!

GIANNA

No, Ray. This is just a courtroom.

MR. HATTER

See?

JUDGE

This doesn't reflect well on your parenting skills, Ms. Torrance.

MR. HATTER

And you believed her lie. You, the Prince, you were supposed to find the truth.

RAY

YOU promised to always tell me the truth!

MR. HATTER

And I have.

RAY

No you.../ you lied!

GIANNA

Ray, take a breath.

RAY

You're the one who told me about the portals! And the Jabberwocky!

JUDGE

This boy is unfit for this courtroom.

RAY

You promised to tell me the truth!!

GIANNA

RAY STOP TALKING. Look at me.

Ray looks at her.

GIANNA

Mr. Hatter isn't real.

MR. HATTER

HA!

GIANNA

Wonderland isn't real.

MR. HATTER

LIES!

GIANNA

I need you to focus on what's real right now.

MR. HATTER

I'm as real as anything.

GIANNA

Me, the courtroom, the JUDGE...

MR. HATTER

Shuck that guy!

GIANNA

...who will decide if I ever...if we get to be together. I'm in trouble, baby.

MR. HATTER

What did you DO exactly?

RAY

What did you do?

Beat.

GIANNA

Remember when I pulled your arm? / I need your help, Ray. All I need you to do is tell the truth.

PROSECUTION

Objection!

JUDGE

Sustained.

Ray looks from his mom to Mr. Hatter and back.

GIANNA

Just tell them what happened. All of it. Tell them the truth.

MR. HATTER

She didn't tell **you** the truth, did she? Wonderland isn't "real" apparently.

RAY

Then what are you doing here?

MR. HATTER

Me?!

JUDGE

Alright that's enough.

MR. HATTER

I'm your guide!

GIANNA

I haven't cross-examined him yet!

RAY

You didn't guide me!

GIANNA

Stop talking, Ray.

RAY

You were supposed to help me get her out!

JUDGE

You can't get her out.

RAY

YES I CAN! I have to! I have to get her out! She's supposed to be with me!

Ray rocks violently. Everyone watches him.

RAY

(quietly)

She's supposed to be with me.

GIANNA

Let's take a break. I can help him calm down. Take three breaths Ray. In, out. There you go.

JUDGE

His testimony is already null after that display of hysteria.

GIANNA

He's just a kid.

JUDGE

A crazy kid. With a mother who encourages it.

GIANNA

Let him calm down and come back another day.

MR. HATTER

Great job, Raybor. You ruined it.

RAY

GET OUT!!

The judge strikes the gavel.

JUDGE

ORDER!

Mr. Hatter tips his hat and exits. All of the stars go out. All of the flowers die. The Jury box is filled with people, instead of puppets, or else unmasked. It's a regular courtroom now.

JUDGE

It's time you learned who's in charge here, Ms. Torrance. The witness is unfit for court. Court dismissed.

A guard comes to remove Ray. He tries to run to his mom, but is stopped.

RAY

No! I want to go with her!

GIANNA

I'll see you soon, Ray Ray.

RAY

NOO!!

GIANNA

It'll be okay.

RAY

I want to go with you!

The guard pulls him away from her.

GIANNA

Please, just give us one minute. Please.

The guard stops pulling him but holds him tight.

GIANNA

You can come visit me, Ray. I'll tell Auntie to bring you to me. And you can read me your poems. I love your poems. And we can go to wonderland together. The way we used to.

RAY

Will you ever come home?

GIANNA

Yes. I hope so.

RAY
When?

GIANNA
It might...it might be a long time.

Ray starts to cry.

GIANNA
I need you to be strong, baby. Be strong. I'm gonna do my best but you...Oh, Ray. *(She starts to cry herself, then swallows it.)* Trees, tell me about the trees. Ray Ray, the trees.

He stuffs his tears back, too.

RAY
They're blue.

GIANNA
And the grass? *(Beat)* Come on.

RAY
Bubble grass.

GIANNA
And an ocean. And we'll take a boat out where no one can find us. To an island. And we'll play basketball and eat tacos.

RAY
And drink coke.

GIANNA
Maybe we could go to the beach.

RAY
We can really go to the beach. Like in real life.

GIANNA
One day. I'll see you soon, baby.

The guard leads Ray out.

RAY
I love you, Mama.

GIANNA
I love you too, Ray Ray.

She watches him go.

GET HER BACK.

Days later, Ray sits at a desk in Ms. Jesse's room, ripping a piece of paper into tiny bits.

MS. JESSE

Do you want to read, Ray?

He's quiet.

MS. JESSE

We can just be quiet for an hour if that's what you need.

No response. She goes to her desk.

RAY

How do I get her out? ...in real life?

MS. JESSE

...I don't know that you can, Ray.

RAY

I have to.

MS. JESSE

You might not be / able to.

RAY

I HAVE TO.

Beat.

MS. JESSE

It isn't that easy, Ray.

RAY

Why?

MS. JESSE

There are laws. Rules. Rules aren't easily changed. If the law says she'll be in jail for ten years, then...

RAY

10 years?!

MS. JESSE

It might not be that long.

Ray stuffs down an upwelling of panic.

RAY

It won't be that long. It won't be. *(Beat)* How do I change the laws?

MS. JESSE

You could...convince people that this is unfair.

RAY

The judge?

MS. JESSE

Yes. And the people who make the laws. You could show them what it feels like for you.

RAY

(jumping up)

I could write a poem! My poems are good.

MS. JESSE

They are good.

RAY

He'll let her out when he reads it, I know he will.

MS. JESSE

Ray...I promised to always tell you the truth. You might have to accept that she's going to be there for a long time.

RAY

No, no. I don't believe that. That's not my opinion.

MS. JESSE

Opinion?

RAY

Yeah.

MS. JESSE

The truth isn't a matter of opinion, bud.

RAY

But it hasn't happened yet. So it could still be the truth.

Ms. Jesse smiles, accepting it. She hands him a pen and paper.

MS. JESSE

Let's work on this poem. Can you give it a first line? Show them what it feels like.

He thinks.

RAY

I'm sad...I'm angry...and I'm trying to find her.

MS. JESSE

Why are you trying to find her?

RAY

She used to make me laugh.

MS. JESSE

Can you rhyme with laugh?

RAY

She used to give me half.

MS. JESSE

Of?

RAY

Of her pizza.

MS. JESSE

Good. Keep going.

RAY

She used to hug me when I cried. She used to...make me snacks...

Ms. Jesse points to "cried".

MS. JESSE

Sighed? Ride?

RAY

Tried! She...used to smile when I tried! She still does that.

MS. JESSE

Keep going. You don't need my help.

Gianna, The Judge, and The Prosecutor are illuminated in their own spaces. Each holds a copy of Ray's poem.

I don't want her to be gone.	RAY
It isn't fair.	JUDGE
She's the one I want,	GIANNA
to tell me jokes	PROSECUTOR
and brush my hair.	GIANNA
And sing when I'm sad	JUDGE
and when I really want to...punch the air.	RAY
Have you ever lost your mama?	GIANNA
If you did you'd know.	PROSECUTOR
It's like...being left all alone	RAY
No jacket.	JUDGE
In the snow.	PROSECUTOR
And you know	GIANNA
Deep down in your...shoe.	RAY

That you deserve to be with her,

GIANNA

and she deserves to be with you.

RAY

END OF PLAY.