

SCIENCE NIGHT
a play in one act

CHARACTERS

LAUREN, 17 - a high school student about to graduate, angry
MR. SANDERS - her old science teacher, trying and floundering

A dark stage, the sound of glass shattering. Lights up on MR. SANDERS's science classroom. It's an average-looking classroom with lab stations and desks; a door leading to the supply closet is ajar, another door leading to the hall outside is wide open. LAUREN, 17, stands at a desk covered in glassware, with a cardboard box, looking at the ground, where she has just dropped a petri dish.

SANDERS

(from the supply closet)

Everything okay out there?

Lauren continues to place beakers, bottles, test tubes into the cardboard box.

SANDERS

Lauren?

He exits the supply closet. He looks tired.

SANDERS

Lauren.

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

I asked you a question.

LAUREN

I'm fine.

SANDERS

I heard something break. What was it?

(he sees the glass on the floor)

Oh – God. Okay, don't – Don't touch it, I'll get a broom –

Lauren leans down to sweep up the glass with her hand.

SANDERS

Don't! Don't – do that. I don't want to have to call your parents after you go home and explain why your hands are all cut up. Are you okay?

LAUREN

I'm fine.

SANDERS

Okay, good. What happened?

LAUREN

It fell.

SANDERS

It fell? Did you knock it off the desk accidentally?

LAUREN

No. I – It fell! It did. It fell.

SANDERS

Okay.

Did you have a good time tonight? I thought it was pretty fun. Did you go to Gurshan's spectrum station? He was explaining how the water in the pan worked with the mirror to separate the light that was reflected on it. We never got to talk about stuff like this when you were in my class, but the water in the pan acts like the air and atmosphere, that's why light doesn't reflect in space, because there's no air.

Please tell me you stopped by on your break.

LAUREN

Sorry, didn't get a chance.

SANDERS

People were loving it, everyone looked like they were having such a good time. How were the kids at your station?

LAUREN

Fine, I guess.

SANDERS

"Fine." Everything's just *fine* to you, isn't it?

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

You can't come up with a word other than fine?

LAUREN

It was good.

SANDERS

That's it? Just fine? Just good?

LAUREN

You asked me what I thought, I'm telling you what I thought!

SANDERS

"Fine" and "good" aren't thoughts, Lauren, they're what you say when you don't want to answer a question.

LAUREN

I'm just telling you what I –

SANDERS

(angering)

And I'm telling you, if your attitude doesn't shape up–!

I have you for another... half an hour, almost. Can we just get along until then?

LAUREN

Fine.

SANDERS

(sighing)

Fine...

Mrs. Kelley in the office told me you worked the spelling bee at the elementary school last weekend.

LAUREN

Uh huh.

SANDERS

And the ticket stand at the basketball game the weekend before that?

LAUREN

And last weekend. They're making me do it for the whole month.

SANDERS

Tomorrow night, too?

LAUREN

Yeah.

SANDERS

Are you having a good time?

(she laughs)

What?

LAUREN

Yeah. Right.

SANDERS

At least you get to go to all the games for free.

LAUREN

I hate basketball. They should count that as part of the punishment.

SANDERS

You hate basketball? How can you hate basketball? It's high school! Isn't everyone supposed to like basketball?

LAUREN

Well of course *you* like it.

SANDERS

What's that supposed to mean?

LAUREN

Nothing.

It's pointless. I don't want to waste my Friday nights watching a bunch of idiots from my computer class snort and grunt and sweat over a stupid piece of plastic. I get enough of that during class.

SANDERS

Sounds like the perfect punishment for you, then.

LAUREN

It's bullshit.

SANDERS

Hey! Not in here. Talk how you want outside of my classroom, but not in here.
Besides. It's not supposed to be *fun*. That's the point of a punishment.

LAUREN

Explains the hell of a time I had tonight.

SANDERS

Ouch.

LAUREN

I don't even know – I mean, why I am even doing this? I'm not taking a science class. I don't know why they made me do this.

SANDERS

I needed the help, can't expect to run this thing by myself.

LAUREN

Miss What's-her-face, Queen of the Science Club was here.

SANDERS

Amanda Curtis?

LAUREN

Yeah, and however-the-hell-you-pronounce-his-name, with the spectrum.

SANDERS

Gurshan?

LAUREN

Whatever.

SANDERS

You know, Amanda and Gurshan were happy to give up their Thursday night to help. The club's been putting on Science Night once a term for the past three years. Those two have been helping me run it since the beginning. They love it.

LAUREN

Yeah, well, they aren't being punished for something they didn't even do –

SANDERS

What?

LAUREN

There was barely anyone even here. I did the milk-soap-food-coloring thing for the same kid maybe, like, seven times. And then he came back and did it three more. He said he recognized me from the goddamn spelling bee.

SANDERS

A fifth-grader used “goddamn” in front of you? Where were his parents?

(Lauren smiles, despite herself)

And I’m not surprised he kept coming back, that’s such a fun experiment! The way the dish soap weakens the chemical bonds in the proteins and fats in the milk –

LAUREN

Yeah. I know how it works. I had to explain it a million times. To the *same kid*.

SANDERS

I guess there weren’t too many people here, a little less than last year, but it was still a pretty good turnout.

(beat)

You know, I – I asked Mrs. Kelley what it was, exactly, that you did to get all these detentions –

LAUREN

You what?

SANDERS

I was just thinking, maybe if I knew why you were in trouble, I could help make this a little easier for you.

LAUREN

You had no right to do that.

SANDERS

Lauren, it’s not a big deal –

LAUREN

It is to me! God.

She shouldn’t have told you. It’s none of your business, I’m not in your class, you’re not my teacher anymore –

SANDERS

Okay. Okay.

I’m sorry.

LAUREN

What did she say to you?

SANDERS

She just told me that if you didn't complete the specified number of school service hours, you wouldn't be able to graduate.

LAUREN

Yeah. Can you believe that crap?

SANDERS

It might seem a little drastic, but it makes sense to me.

LAUREN

You're obviously not the one in trouble.

Did she say anything else?

Mr. Sanders shakes his head "no,"
unconvincingly.

LAUREN

Yeah, right! What the hell! What did she say to you?

SANDERS

Nothing! Lauren, look, I don't care –

LAUREN

Well I do! I want to know what she said about me!

SANDERS

She just said – She said she caught you – in a compromising position with someone who wasn't a student.

A pause.

LAUREN

Oh my god! Ugh! She makes it sound like – Ugh!

SANDERS

What?

LAUREN

I didn't fuck a teacher, if that's what you're wondering.

SANDERS

No, that's not what I –

LAUREN

She wasn't supposed to tell anyone. The only people who were supposed to know were her and the principal and my parents. I can't believe this –

SANDERS

Lauren, I'm not going to say anything –

LAUREN

YOU SHOULDN'T EVEN HAVE ASKED.

A pause.

SANDERS

I'm sorry.

LAUREN

Good for you!

Not like it matters now.

The room is silent, and Lauren picks up the box of lab supplies and take them to the closet, leaving Mr. Sanders at his desk.

LAUREN

(from inside the closet)

Where does this go?

SANDERS

What is it?

LAUREN

A bunch of glass stuff.

SANDERS

Like?

LAUREN

I don't know, like – test tubes and shit.

SANDERS

Please don't use that word.

LAUREN

What, like you don't?!

SANDERS

Lauren.

LAUREN

I'm sorry!

So where does this go?

SANDERS

Top shelf, to the right.

LAUREN

By the pigs?

SANDERS

Yes, by the pigs.

(Lauren doesn't respond)

Lauren?

(still, no response)

Did you find it?

Lauren exits the closet, boxless.

LAUREN

Yeah, I found it. You shouldn't put the glass stuff on the top shelf.

SANDERS

Why not?

LAUREN

If it falls? There'd be glass everywhere.

Just saying. Are you still dissecting pigs? Didn't we do that freshman year? Well, I didn't.

SANDERS

I think I remember that. Why didn't you do it?

LAUREN

Got a note from my parents. Who wants to cut up little baby pigs anyway? Not me. The way you keep them in that plastic box –

SANDERS

Well, they're pickled! They have to be in order to preserve their original –

LAUREN

It's awful! The first day of class you made me sit right next to it. I asked what it was, and you said –

(shudders)

Ugh, gross. I thought I was going to throw up.

Besides, it's *human* physiology, not mammal.

SANDERS

Lauren, humans *are* mammals.

LAUREN

I know that, I meant, like – you were teaching *human* phys, not pigs. Humans aren't pigs.

SANDERS

Well, it really depends on who you ask...

You know, I really liked having you in my class that year.

LAUREN

Yeah, right.

SANDERS

I'm serious! I mean, I would've loved if you'd raised your hand a little more, but you always did really well on the tests.

LAUREN

What happened, right?

SANDERS

No, it – it just makes me sad to see you not liking science anymore. I was really hoping you'd keep taking classes. You were so smart. You are so smart.

LAUREN

I guess. I took Mr. Randall's environmental science class sophomore year –

SANDERS

Oh, no. That's not *real* science. Randall likes to think it is, but trust me, it's not.

LAUREN

I heard he's not coming back next year. Is that true?

SANDERS

Mr. Randall? Who told you that?

LAUREN

I don't remember. I just heard a bunch of teachers were getting laid off.

(pause)

So can I go home now?

SANDERS

Can you count some tickets for me first?

LAUREN

Do I have a choice?

SANDERS

(he hands her the cash box)

Here. Just – take this and sit down.

Leave the cash. I'll count that. Just count the number of tickets we sold.

LAUREN

And then can I go home?

SANDERS

And then you can go home.

LAUREN

I have this paper I need you to sign.

SANDERS

What paper?

LAUREN

The principal gave me a paper you need to sign when we're finished. To prove that I came and helped.

SANDERS

(cheerfully)

Well, when we're finished, then.

Lauren starts counting out tickets while Mr. Sanders counts cash next to her. They do this for a moment or two, before Lauren speaks.

LAUREN

You know, I don't know why it's such a big deal.

SANDERS

What is?

LAUREN

Graduating.

SANDERS

What do you mean? Don't you want your family to see you?

LAUREN

I don't care. All it is is wearing a stupid robe and hat and walking in front of a bunch of people I hate, to grab a piece of paper that doesn't even mean anything anyway.

SANDERS

That's not true. Dropout rates are increasing day by day, but it's getting harder and harder to have a stable life as an adult without completing high school. High school dropouts make almost half the money college graduates do. How do you expect to get a job in the real world without graduating high school?

LAUREN

God, I hate that! "The real world, the real world." You make it sound like that shitty TV show. It's all you teachers ever talk about.

SANDERS

Well, some of "us teachers" consider our students' futures very important.

LAUREN

Yeah, I really get that when the principal threatens to expel me.

SANDERS

We're just trying to make sure you don't make stupid mistakes.

LAUREN

So you're punishing me?! For something I didn't even do?!

SANDERS

But you did do it, you just told me earlier –

LAUREN

You don't know! You weren't there!

SANDERS

This is how it WORKS, Lauren. You do the crime, you do the time.

Lauren is near tears.

SANDERS

Look, I –
Are you hungry?

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

I have these – Sometimes I like to – Look.

Sanders goes to his desk and pulls out a packet of thin popsicle sticks and a bag of marshmallows. He pulls out a bunsen burner from one of the cupboards, places it in front of Lauren, hooks it up, lights it. He opens the marshmallows and the popsicle sticks, and begins roasting a marshmallow.

SANDERS

Want one?

LAUREN

This is weird.

SANDERS

Yeah, well.

LAUREN

And against the rules.

She points to the wall, where hangs a sign reading “DO NOT EAT IN LAB AREA.”

SANDERS

I make the rules, I can break ‘em, too.

Lauren slowly takes a marshmallow and does the same.

LAUREN

Do you do this a lot?

SANDERS

Every now and again.

LAUREN

Enough to have a bag of them in your desk.

SANDERS

Aah, you caught me. I’ve got a fire-extinguisher if we need it.

Lauren eats a marshmallow.

LAUREN

It tastes kinda weird...

SANDERS

Oh, yeah. It’s the gas. From the burner.

LAUREN

What?!

SANDERS

(laughs)

It’s safe! It’s safe, it’s fine. I promise. It just makes it taste a little different, at first.

They continue to roast.

SANDERS (cont)

You know, I almost didn’t graduate, either.

LAUREN

Yeah right.

SANDERS

I'm serious! My grades were terrible, I was in detention almost every day after school— Detention was my extracurricular, detention was my Science Club.

LAUREN

But you ended up walking?

SANDERS

Yup. My mom threatened to kill me if I didn't graduate, so I managed to get my grades up in time. We had a pretty small class so everyone packed into the auditorium. They did the speeches, I sat through all the names. I didn't think they were ever going to make it through all those Sanchez-es, but finally they got to me. So I walked onstage, grabbed the paper, shook my principal's hand, and sat down. And that was it. That was graduation.

It was very, very typical. I thought about playing a prank the day of but didn't want to give them any excuse not to pass me.

LAUREN

What were you going to do?

SANDERS

Someone suggested streaking during the basketball game, but we figured since it was inside the gym we'd be more likely to get caught.

LAUREN

Streaking's so dumb, everyone tries that.

SANDERS

And someone else said lizards in the salad bar at lunch, but Tommy was the only one of us who owned a lizard and we couldn't afford to buy more of them from the pet store – and then Gary came to school the last day with a box of crickets but Lisa got upset because she only ever ate salad.

We had lots of ideas, but were too lazy to actually do any of them.

LAUREN

That's so cool.

SANDERS

The teachers *hated* me.

LAUREN

What a coincidence. They hate me, too.

SANDERS

That's not true.

LAUREN

Please. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't.

SANDERS

Trust me. It's not true.

LAUREN

So you graduated high school.

SANDERS

Yes.

LAUREN

With terrible grades.

SANDERS

Yes.

LAUREN

But you still graduated. And went to college?

SANDERS

Yes.

LAUREN

And became a teacher.

SANDERS

It wasn't my original plan, but yes.

Pause.

LAUREN

So why does it matter?

SANDERS

Why does what matter?

LAUREN

Graduating. Prom. *High school*. It's so... lame. You barely graduated and you're fine. Why does it matter?

SANDERS

I don't know. Some things just do. However stupid or trite or "lame," they seem, they matter.

LAUREN

Well I'm just glad it means I'll be able to get out of this town.

When my parents found out... Mrs. Kelley called them as soon as it happened and when they came to pick me up... I dunno. My mom just had this look on her face like... like I had died or something and Mrs. Kelley was telling her they found my body. We met with the principal the next day after school and he told me I could either get expelled or do a lot of detention. My mom didn't even let me say anything, she just told him I'd help out. Anything not to get expelled. I was so mad. I mean, I would've chosen the same thing, but still – I don't know. They don't – they don't let me do anything. My dad won't give me permission for anything without saying "Ask your mom" first. I mean, sometimes I just wanna *do* stuff just to – I don't know, shock them?

(pause, then a thought)

Why is there a suitcase and a sleeping bag in the supply closet?

SANDERS

What?

LAUREN

I just saw them. When I put the beakers and stuff away. They were right there on the floor, next to the pig box.

SANDERS

I –

LAUREN

Are you going somewhere?

SANDERS

No, I – just have them there. In case.

LAUREN

In case of what?

SANDERS

Emergencies.

LAUREN

Like... "I just spilled liquid nitrogen on my pants and I can't go home at lunch"
emergencies?

SANDERS

Yeah.

LAUREN

I don't believe you.
But okay.

SANDERS

Believe what you want, it doesn't matter to me.
Wait a minute. Liquid nitrogen?

LAUREN

Yeah.

SANDERS

What do you know about liquid nitrogen?

LAUREN

You talked about it in class once.

SANDERS

What? During human phys?

LAUREN

Yeah. It was mentioned in the video we were watching and someone asked about it, so
you explained it. It freezes stuff, right?

SANDERS

I can't believe you remember that.
But we don't have any of that here.

LAUREN

Why not?

SANDERS

Oh, I'd have to train everyone in proper safety techniques and there's a whole bunch of supplies and equipment that the school doesn't want to pay for. Plus I'd rather not have to deal with any icy crotches.

A lengthy pause.

LAUREN

Mr. Sanders, I know you don't believe that I didn't have sex with a teacher, and the only reason you're asking is because you want to know who it was.

SANDERS

What?

LAUREN

And I think it's pretty shitty that you think just because you're a teacher means you're in charge of me. And I'm sorry for being rude but whatever the reason you have a suitcase and a sleeping bag in the closet is, doesn't make it okay for you to be a dick to me—

SANDERS

How am I being a dick to you?

LAUREN

All that— that crap about being smart, and doing good in your class— You don't need to coddle me, or— or lie to me.

SANDERS

Lauren, I'm not lying to you. I really do believe that.

LAUREN

Bullshit.

SANDERS

Lauren, please don't use that word—

LAUREN

Why not? Why? If it's so bad, tell the principal. Tell Mrs. Kelley. Go ahead.

SANDERS

Maybe I will!

LAUREN

Fine! I don't care! Hear that? Another thing I don't care about! Tell Mrs. Kelley, so she can tell the security guards, and the history teacher, and the PE teacher, too, while she's at it, and the principal, and then I'll get expelled, and then everyone will be so gosh darn *sad* that Lauren Edwards isn't at the graduation ceremony and doesn't get to go to college.

SANDERS

Won't they be?

LAUREN

No. They won't care. You think I don't care? Talk to every other asshole who goes to this school.

SANDERS

Why are you so angry?

LAUREN

Why are *you* having a sleepover in your broom closet?! You've got an entire suitcase of extra pants in case you freeze your crotch on liquid nitrogen you don't even have? Yeah right.

SANDERS

It doesn't concern you.

LAUREN

Neither did anything Mrs. Kelley told you.

Beat.

SANDERS

I think it's time for you to go home.

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

We're done here. You can go home now.

He clicks off the Bunsen burner.

LAUREN

No, wait a minute—

SANDERS

I can get the rest of the stuff from the gym and see if there are any more tables to pack up, so you go ahead and go home.

LAUREN

This isn't fair.

SANDERS

You're right. It's not fair that I have to stay later to clean up an event that's supposed to be a part of your punishment, but really, Lauren, please, go home.

LAUREN

I need you to sign my paper.

SANDERS

Excuse me?

LAUREN

I can't leave if you don't sign my paper.

SANDERS

I'm sorry, I don't know what to tell you.

LAUREN

Mr. Sanders, that's not fair, it won't count if my paper's not signed!

SANDERS

That's your problem, not mine!

LAUREN

I can't believe this! I'm not leaving until you sign it.

SANDERS

Fine! Fine. Stay here, then, and wait. But I'm going to the gym.

LAUREN

I'll tell you a secret if you tell me yours.

SANDERS

I don't negotiate with terrorists, Lauren.

LAUREN

Come on. I've been told I'm a good listener.

Why do you have that stuff here? Are you sleeping here, is Mrs. Sanders mad about something?

SANDERS

Lauren, I don't need your relationship advice.

LAUREN

Well, I know how hard relationships can be.

SANDERS

Oh yeah?

LAUREN

Yeah! I dated this guy once, well, I guess— I mean— we're still dating, sort of—

SANDERS

Oh my *God*, that's not the same, Lauren! I'm an adult. I'm not some— *teenager*.

LAUREN

Well, it's still love, isn't it?

SANDERS

No, it's not.

Beat.

LAUREN

I dropped it.

SANDERS

What?

LAUREN

I dropped it. On purpose.

SANDERS

Dropped what?

LAUREN

The dish. The dish, whatever you call it. The thing that broke.

The petri dish. SANDERS

Yeah. LAUREN

Why? SANDERS

I dunno, I was – angry? I thought if I cut myself you’d let me go home early. LAUREN

That’s your secret? SANDERS
Lame.

Someone smiles.

So... you have a boyfriend. SANDERS

Yes. LAUREN

Do I know him? SANDERS

No. LAUREN

I haven’t had him in a class? SANDERS

He doesn’t go to school here. LAUREN

Oh. SANDERS

He’s not a student. LAUREN

Pause.

Oh. SANDERS

Yeah. LAUREN

So what school does he go to? SANDERS

He doesn't, he – graduated. A couple years ago. LAUREN

How old is he? SANDERS

...twenty-three. LAUREN

Geez. What does your dad think about that? SANDERS

Whatever. LAUREN

So they saw you and him– SANDERS

Yeah. Which is why I'm getting punished for it and he's not. Because he doesn't go to school anymore. LAUREN

They could get him for trespassing. SANDERS

Do you *want* him to get in trouble? LAUREN

Yeah, actually, a little bit. Do you? SANDERS

No, of course not. He's my *boyfriend*. LAUREN

Pause.

SANDERS

Why did you say earlier, when you were talking about the basketball game— You said you were being punished for something you “didn’t even do.” What’s that supposed to mean?

LAUREN

I didn’t say that.

SANDERS

Yes you did. Multiple times, in fact.

LAUREN

No I didn’t.

SANDERS

Yes, you did. I heard you.

LAUREN

I just –

SANDERS

Lauren.

LAUREN

I already told you my secret.

SANDERS

I don’t care about that. Lauren, please. What happened?

LAUREN

We just wanted to run around campus for a little while, he never went to school here, so he wanted to see what it was like.

(pause)

I don’t – I don’t know what happened.

(pause)

I didn’t want to do it, but – he kept asking, and I tried to leave, but – I couldn’t –

SANDERS

Oh, *fuck*.

LAUREN

It's not a big deal!

SANDERS

Oh, God.

LAUREN

And Mrs. Kelley saw us – so it stopped, but –

SANDERS

What did Mrs. Kelley do?

LAUREN

She grabbed me and took me to the office and then called my parents.

SANDERS

And your boyfriend?

LAUREN

He left.

SANDERS

He *left* you there?! You got caught and he ran away?! Mrs. Kelley didn't–?
When was the last time you saw this asshole?

LAUREN

Mrs. Kelley?!

SANDERS

No! No, your – your boyfriend. When was the last time you saw your boyfriend.

LAUREN

When it happened.

SANDERS

When it *happened*? Lauren, you – This isn't okay! You got threatened with expulsion and your boyfriend's out there doing whatever he wants, that's not okay –

LAUREN

He's not a student, so –

SANDERS

There are so many other things he could get in trouble for. I have half a mind to call the police just because he ran away!

LAUREN

He didn't run away!

I was gonna break up with him anyway. If you would just sign my paper, I would know for sure that I'm getting out of here. It's not like he could come with me. He keeps saying he wants to, but—

(Mr. Sanders scoffs)

What? What's so funny?

SANDERS

(an apology)

He doesn't want to come with you.

LAUREN

And what would you know about it? He told me he loved me and that he wanted to come with me when I move away.

SANDERS

He told you he loved you?

LAUREN

Yeah.

SANDERS

And you love him?

LAUREN

...I don't know.

It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter because I'm leaving, and – freaking Lindsay Myers – God.

SANDERS

What about Lindsay Meyers?

LAUREN

She used to go out with him. And I saw – the other day, on her phone, she sent him – pictures.

SANDERS

Does Lindsay know about what happened with you and him?

LAUREN

Who cares? It's none of her business. She's been sexting *my* boyfriend and he won't even return any of my calls, I've called him like hundred times just this past week and he won't pick up. But he'll answer her text messages!

SANDERS

Lauren, I'm so sorry –

LAUREN

It's so stupid, it doesn't even matter.

SANDERS

(slowly)

Lauren. You need to promise me you'll tell someone you were raped.

LAUREN

Don't say that! It wasn't like that at all! He didn't–! He didn't.
You don't get it.

SANDERS

Yes. I obviously don't.
God...

Mr. Sanders starts crying, quietly.

LAUREN

Stop it. Stop.

He doesn't. Lauren moves closer, like she's going to put her arm around him.

SANDERS

Don't! Don't touch me!

LAUREN

I wasn't – I won't. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry about whatever's going on with you.

SANDERS

It's none of your business, Lauren.

LAUREN

So stop crying about it in front of me! I know shitty things happen, trust me, I know, but you get over it. You sell some basketball tickets and you clean up after Science Night and then you get over it! You sleep in your closet for a few days and then you go home already. You don't tell your student something's messed up at home but don't bother to explain and then start crying in front of them.

SANDERS

Are you going to tell anyone?

LAUREN

That you were crying?

SANDERS

No! No... What you just told me.

Lauren shakes her head no.

SANDERS

Lauren. You have to tell someone.

LAUREN

Why?

SANDERS

Because—! What do you mean, why?

LAUREN

It's not a big deal.

SANDERS

Lauren!

LAUREN

He's – he's my boyfriend.

SANDERS

You're not still seeing this guy?

LAUREN

Well he hasn't picked up the phone so I can break up with him!

(beat)

It's what you do, it's fine.

SANDERS

Lauren, it's not "what you do," it's *not* fine. If you said *no* –

LAUREN

Why don't *you* go home?

SANDERS

Lauren, this isn't about me –

LAUREN

Well I'm making it about you! Why don't you go home.

SANDERS

... I can't.

LAUREN

Why *not*.

SANDERS

I don't... have a home... to go home to. Exactly.

LAUREN

What does that mean? You're homeless?

They hold each other's gaze for a moment.
Mr. Sanders breaks away first. Beat.

SANDERS

Shit.

LAUREN

Wow.

SANDERS

That *word*... I've been trying not to s-...

LAUREN

For how long?

SANDERS

It's been – happening...

LAUREN

You're homeless.

SANDERS

Don't say that, please. I just – I can't...afford it anymore.

LAUREN

So find a cheaper apartment.

SANDERS

Lauren, *I don't have any money*. It doesn't matter, anyway. Mr. Randall's not being laid off next year. I am. I'm going to get paid through until graduation, and then – then... I don't know.

You're not the only one being punished for something you didn't do.

LAUREN

So you don't have any money and you won't have a job in a few weeks.

Wow.

SANDERS

That's why I've got a suitcase in the closet.

LAUREN

That's why you've been sleeping here.

SANDERS

Uh huh.

LAUREN

And that's why you took money from the cash box.

SANDERS

Uh huh – Wait. What?

LAUREN

I saw you earlier. When you got the marshmallows, you put it in your pocket, I saw you.
I'm not an idiot.

SANDERS

I never said you were.

LAUREN

Is that why you do this? These stupid Science Nights. Is that why we've never had a decent microscope?

SANDERS

Oh come on. You haven't used a microscope in years.

LAUREN

How much money have you taken?

SANDERS

That – doesn't matter. Anyway, it's still not enough.

LAUREN

I feel so – stupid. I thought it was something with your wife.

SANDERS

I'm not married.

LAUREN

Typical.

SANDERS

What's that supposed to mean?

LAUREN

You ask me to spill my guts and you can't even do the same for me.

I'm sorry this is happening to you. I'm sorry. But I feel like you expect me to do something about it and how the hell am I supposed to—?

It's not fair.

SANDERS

I'm sorry you said no.

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

No, that's not what I meant – I mean – I'm sorry you were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

LAUREN

It's not a big deal.

SANDERS

But you have to tell someone.

LAUREN

I don't have to *do* anything!

SANDERS

And if I told someone?

LAUREN

Oh please.

SANDERS

You have to say something. If you don't, I—
I won't sign your paper.

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

I won't sign your paper.

LAUREN

That's not fair. You can't— *Nothing happened*. You can't threaten me—!

SANDERS

I'll do what I like.

Beat.

LAUREN

Fine. I don't care. Don't sign it. Don't sign it, and I'll tell my parents you're the reason I'm getting expelled, and when they ask why I'll tell Mrs. Kelley you've been stealing from the school. I'll keep your secret, if you keep mine.

(she softens, slightly)

Mr. Sanders. I really am sorry. Really. But I don't know what you want me to do. I'm going to break up with him, I will — I just — I don't want anyone to know. Especially Lindsay.

SANDERS

Oh, God, Lauren — *forget about her!*

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

Some friend she is! Don't let some stupid girl from high school stop you from getting the help you need.

LAUREN

But I don't need help! That's the point.

You know what's gonna happen if I tell people? If I tell my parents, it's going to turn into some stupid huge lawsuit against some guy who they like to pretend doesn't even exist. It means pregnancy tests and STD tests and therapy that my parents can't afford but will make me go to even if I don't want to. It means every kid at school will find out and call me a slut, or a whore, but every teacher will treat me like I'm some fucking piece of glass. It means not getting to go to college anyway because my parents won't be able to leave me on my own anymore. My dad'll buy a gun. My mom will cry herself to sleep every night.

If I tell people, I will be *that* girl. That's all I'll ever be! That's not fair. You don't get it – I can't tell anyone! Keeping it a secret means it goes away, it means no one ever finds out, ever, because none of what happened back at home will matter.

Mr. Sanders, it's exhausting being ignored. I'm tired of teachers ignoring me and parents being mad at me for no reason and having absolutely no one ever give a shit about me. But I'm not going to pretend to have been raped in order to get people to notice me.

SANDERS

Are you pretending?

LAUREN

The way my mom looks at me... I don't want her to see this, too.

(beat)

I had a good time.

SANDERS

What?

LAUREN

I had a good time tonight. Thank you for – for saying – the things you said. You're a good teacher. I mean, I don't understand what you're saying in class most of the time, but – I don't know why they're making you leave.

SANDERS

Lauren, I need you to know that none of the things you said are true. Your parents love you very much, I know they do, and I know people who actually do give a shit about you. I'm one of them, for example.

You're so smart. And so talented. And I am so sorry that no one has ever told you that.

Pause.

LAUREN

I have to go home now. My mom'll be wondering where I am.

Lauren gathers her backpack to leave, then stops.

LAUREN

You know I – I don't care.

SANDERS

So you've been telling me all night.

LAUREN

No, I mean – about the money. I don't care that you took it. The school has a ton of money. Why are they even firing you?

SANDERS

Something about... minimizing the departments... And since I've got the least seniority, or *whatever* – I'm the first to go.

LAUREN

What do you mean, whatever?

SANDERS

It doesn't matter. That's what you've been saying all along isn't it? It doesn't matter.

LAUREN

But – it does. It's your job, it's your life! You can't let them get away with that.

SANDERS

Lauren, there's nothing I can do.

LAUREN

I don't believe you.

I'm sorry. I get it. I'm sorry you have to leave. But maybe – maybe you'll find somewhere nicer. A better school. A better town. This one sucks. That's why I'm leaving.

SANDERS

Are you?

LAUREN

Yes. The only thing graduation's good for.

Anyway. I'll see you around.

Lauren goes to leave. Sanders stops her.

SANDERS

Lauren?

Give me the paper.

LAUREN

What?

SANDERS

The paper. I'll sign it.

LAUREN

Really?

SANDERS

Yes.

She gives him the paper. He signs it, slowly.

SANDERS

I know I don't have you in any of my classes anymore, but – if you ever need anything – I'm usually in here by myself during lunch, if you ever want to stop by, or talk. Or whatever you need.

Lauren smiles kindly at him.

LAUREN

No thanks.

I like you a lot, Mr. Sanders, but it's probably better that we're not friends.

SANDERS

Oh. No, yeah, of course.

LAUREN

Sorry.

SANDERS

No, I get it. Teachers and students, they aren't – Yeah. Yeah. This is fine.

But please. Just consider it. Just promise me you'll at least *think* about telling someone.

LAUREN

If I tell, then you need to give the money back.

SANDERS

I'll do whatever you want me to do, just promise me you'll seriously consider talking to someone.

Pause.

LAUREN

Okay.

SANDERS

I'll see you in school.

LAUREN

Thank you.

Lauren exits. Mr. Sanders watches her go. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a small wad of cash, and thumbs quickly through it. He places it on the desk, near the cash box, just for a moment. He can't. He puts it back in his pocket.

END OF PLAY