

# Scaffolding

by Jeff Blumenkrantz

*Place: The living room/kitchen area of a subsidized one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan. This is also where she sleeps, so there should be a fold-out couch or Murphy bed or convertible day bed, but we don't have to see it opened for sleeping.*

*Time: October 2017 (Part One) and September 2018 (Part Two)*

## PART ONE

*(The sound of keys in the door. A woman in her mid to late forties enters with a wet umbrella, a personal shoulder bag, and a couple of shopping totes. Throughout the next few minutes, she hangs up her coat, opens up her umbrella to dry, puts away the items in the totes, changes her shoes, etc.)*

THANKS, NEW YORK CITY,  
FOR YET ANOTHER EXERCISE  
IN NOT COMMITTING MURDER!  
OR SUICIDE!

THAT WAS MAYBE THE WORST BUS RIDE OF MY LIFE!  
GRIDLOCK, YES, BUT WORSE THAN THAT,  
THAT CHILD,  
THAT POOR CHILD.

I MEAN, HOLY COW!  
DID I MISS A MEMO?!  
IS THIS CONSIDERED OK NOW?  
A KID IN FULL MELTDOWN ON A CITY BUS,  
AND TWO PARENTS,  
TWO,  
NEITHER OF WHOM CAN MANAGE TO LIFT THEIR HEAD?  
IT MADE ME WISH I WERE DEAD.

Made me wish they were dead.

WHEN MY KID HAD A MELTDOWN  
(AND MY KID HAD WORLD-CLASS MELTDOWNS),  
I GOT HIM OUT OF THERE.  
WHEREVER IT WAS.

THE SECOND IT STARTED.  
EVEN IF IT MEANT GETTING OFF A BUS.  
IN THE RAIN.  
I GAVE NO ONE A REASON TO COMPLAIN.

MEANWHILE, THIS KID HIJACKS AN ENTIRE VEHICLE  
FOR THIRTY BLOCKS,  
AND THERE THEY SIT,  
IGNORING IT!  
TEXTING AND PLAYING  
CANDY  
CRAP  
CRUSH  
CHEESE 'N' RICE!

I GET SO ANGRY,  
AND SAD.  
RAGE TOWARD THE PARENTS,  
BUT FOR THE KID, I FEEL BAD.  
WHAT IS HE LEARNING FROM THIS?  
AND HOW FAR WILL HE HAVE TO GO  
THE NEXT TIME HE WANTS ATTENTION?

Two parents? Healthy kid? No excuse.

*(Throughout the rest of part one, she does various household tasks: she might set up her iron, ironing board, and spray starch to iron Kevin's interview shirt, she could polish his shoes, prepare his favorite dinner or snack or sweet treat, fill snack-sized Ziploc bags with baby carrots or pretzels or jerky, plug devices into chargers, fill an aromatherapy diffuser, erase a to-do list on a dry erase board and rewrite another list, write out some affirmation post-its, moisturize with lotion, do some yoga, etc.)*

I MEAN, I'M DOING IT SOLO,  
I HAVE FROM THE START.  
NO BACKUP.  
JUST LITTLE OL' ME.  
AND YEAH,  
IT TAKES UP ALL MY ENERGY,  
OCCUPIES MY EVERY THOUGHT,  
DICTATES EVERY CHOICE I MAKE.  
BUT SO WHAT?  
I LOVE IT!

HAVING MY SON  
IS THE BEST THING I'VE EVER DONE.

He's my masterpiece. My Kevvy. Now, Kevin would not have tolerated that gridlock.

HE KNOWS THE CITY COLD,  
EVERY SINGLE WORKAROUND.  
ON THE STREETS AND UNDERGROUND.  
THAT'S HIS "THING."

He's like a human Google Maps. Since he was four or five. I couldn't tear him away from the subway map. Remember those big fold-up maps?

HE'D OPEN IT UP,  
SPREAD IT OUT ON THE FLOOR, AND STARE.  
HE'D BE SO QUIET,  
YOU WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW HE WAS THERE.  
I ASSUMED HE LIKED THE COLORS AND DESIGN.  
MEANWHILE, HE'S LEARNING EVERY STOP ON EVERY LINE.

In order. Kevin's very bright.

WHEN FRIENDS WOULD BE OVER  
AND TIME CAME FOR THEM TO LEAVE,  
BEFORE THEY COULD GET AN ARM  
IN A JACKET SLEEVE,  
HE'D ASK WHICH SUBWAY STATION  
WAS THEIR FINAL DESTINATION,  
THEN RECITE THE STOPS THEY'D PASS ALONG THE WAY.  
BROOKLYN, BRONX OR QUEENS.  
ALL THE IN-BETWEENS.  
MY LITTLE PRINCE OF THE M.T.A.

THEY'D TRY TO STUMP HIM.  
COULDN'T BE DONE.  
I WAS SO PROUD  
OF MY GENIUS SON.

Still am.

AND NOW IT'S NOT JUST NEW YORK,  
HE ALSO KNOWS THE TRANSIT LINES IN:  
CHICAGO,

SAN FRANCISCO,  
L.A.,  
D.C....

... what am I forgetting? Oh!

BOSTON, OF COURSE!

Duh.

WE WERE THERE JUST LAST MONTH.  
BOSTON, OF COURSE!  
VISITING WHAT I HOPE AND PRAY  
WILL BE KEVIN'S ALMA MATER ONE DAY:  
M.I.T.!

It's the top-rated urban planning department in the country. He's had his heart set on it since he was this tall.

Can you imagine?

WHADDAYA WANNA BE WHEN YOU GROW UP, JIMMY?

"A fireman."

WHADDAYA WANNA BE WHEN YOU GROW UP, LISA?

"A ballerina."

AND WHADDAYA WANNA BE WHEN YOU GROW UP, KEVIN?

"An urban transportation planner."

Not joking. Could you die?

HE'S NEVER WAVERED,  
NEVER STRAYED  
FROM THIS VISION  
AND THESE PLANS HE LAID.  
AND THE PLACE HE'S ALWAYS LONGED TO BE?  
M.I.T.

We just sent off his application. Early action.

THE ESSAYS!  
OH MY GODDESS, THOSE ESSAYS!  
WE HIRED A COACH FOR HIM,  
WHAT A WASTE.  
BAD IDEAS,  
WORSE TASTE.  
I DIDN'T DISCOVER MY MISTAKE  
UNTIL THE DEADLINE WAS ONLY HOURS AWAY,  
SO IT WAS UP TO ME TO SAVE THE DAY.

And no, I did not write the essays. I just took what he wrote, and I edited it.

*(with a wink)* A lot.

AND TOMORROW'S THE INTERVIEW!  
THE DREADED INTERVIEW!  
ONCE THAT'S OVER,  
THEN I PRAY  
A GIANT SCHOLARSHIP COMES HIS WAY.  
'CAUSE ON MY MEAGER TEACHER'S PAY,  
I'LL NEVER MAKE IT!

BUT I WILL FIGURE IT OUT.  
WHATEVER IT TAKES  
I WILL CALL IN EVERY FAVOR OWED TO ME.  
BECAUSE GOING TO M.I.T.  
IS THE ONLY THING THIS BOY HAS EVER WANTED  
(OTHER THAN THE OCCASIONAL IPHONE)  
AND IF THAT'S WHAT MAKES HIM HAPPY,  
THEN THAT'S WHAT THERE IS TO DO.

He's such a good kid. I'd do anything for him.

THESE OTHER KIDS I TEACH,  
MY HEART BREAKS FOR THEM.  
TRULY, IT ACHES FOR THEM  
AND WHAT THEY GO THROUGH.  
THEY'RE STILL FIGURING OUT WHO THEY ARE,  
WHICH IS TOTALLY APPROPRIATE,  
RIGHT ON PAR.  
SO WHY ARE THEIR PARENTS SO IMPATIENT,

SO OVERBEARING?  
EXERTING SO MUCH PRESSURE,  
YET SO LITTLE CARING?  
THESE KIDS ARE GETTING CRUSHED BY THE WEIGHT.  
AND WHAT CAN I DO BUT COMMISERATE?  
THE IRONY IS,  
IF KEVIN WERE STILL SEARCHING,  
I'D BE FINE.  
SO OF COURSE THE ONE KID WHO KNOWS  
EXACTLY WHO HE IS  
ENDS UP BEING MINE.

Oh goodness, am I making him sound like the Christ child?

He's not. He's mortal.

In fact...

He's....

I DON'T TALK ABOUT THIS AT SCHOOL BECAUSE...  
WELL, BECAUSE OF A LOT OF THINGS.  
I GUESS I'M STILL A LITTLE SELF-CONSCIOUS...  
JUST THAT I MISSED IT FOR SO LONG.  
WHEN YOUR SON IS SO GIFTED,  
THE LAST THING YOU THINK  
IS THAT SOMETHING COULD BE WRONG.

Not "wrong." Bad choice of words.

JUST...  
NOT TYPICAL.  
"NEUROTYPICAL."  
WHEN DID WE START SAYING THAT ONE?  
"NEUROTYPICAL."  
OH BUZZWORDS,  
GOTTA LOVE 'EM.  
ONE DAY THEY DON'T EXIST.  
THEN THEY'RE THE WORDS OF THE YEAR.  
CAN'T GO A DAY WITHOUT HEAR-  
ING THEM A LOT.  
"NEUROTYPICAL" IS WHAT I SUPPOSEDLY AM  
AND WHAT KEVIN IS NOT.

I don't think you'd suspect it, if you met him. I mean, you might describe him as sweetly awkward, socially. But I don't think you'd jump to Asperger's.

OOPS, I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO SAY THAT ANYMORE.  
THAT WAS THE NAME BEFORE  
THEY REWROTE THE *DSM*.  
NOW, THAT ONE IS A GEM.

Do you even know what the *DSM* is? It's the *Diag...* uh *Diagnostic...* it's basically the Bible of criteria for diagnosing a bunch of "disorders." Let me tell ya', it's a real page-turner.

NOW IN THE LATEST VERSION, THEY DECREE  
WE ARE TO CALL IT "A.S.D."

"Autism Spectrum Disorder."

Honestly, I liked "Asperger's" better.

YES, IT IS A RIDICULOUS NAME,  
BUT IT DESCRIBED HIM PERFECTLY:  
HIGH-PERFORMING,  
SUPER-BRIGHT,  
AND MILDY SYMPTOMATIC.  
NOW REPLACED BY THE EXTREMELY DEMOCRATIC  
(BUT IF YOU ASK ME, OVERLY INCLUSIVE)  
"A.S.D."

But you didn't ask me. So I'll shut up.

But here's the funny thing:

THEY SAY THE BIGGEST IMPACT YOU CAN MAKE  
IS INTERVENTION WHEN THEY'RE YOUNG,  
AND THAT'S A WINDOW THAT CLOSED A LONG TIME AGO.  
IT TURNS OUT,  
THE THINGS THE SPECIALISTS WOULD HAVE DONE,  
LIKE EXPLAINING RULES,  
BREAKING DOWN PROCESSES,  
INVENTING TOOLS  
THAT EXPLOIT AREAS IN WHICH HE'S STRONG:  
I WAS DOING THAT ALL ALONG.

Dumb luck. I thought it was Parenting 101...

THEY CALL IT “SCAFFOLDING.”  
THERE’S ANOTHER BUZZWORD FOR YOU:  
“SCAFFOLDING.”  
BUT THIS ONE, I ACTUALLY LIKE.

I mean, what New Yorker can’t relate to that? At any given time, there’s scaffolding on pretty much every street in this city.

AND THAT’S WHAT I WAS DOING FOR MY SON.  
SCAFFOLDING.  
BUILDING STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT,  
STRUCTURES THAT CONNECT,  
PLATFORMS THAT IMPROVE  
AND PROTECT.

So... we worked on social skills: the basics, obviously: “please” and “thank you,” but also, how to be more considerate of other people.

HE’D DO THIS THING  
WHERE ONCE HE FINALLY STARTED TALKING,  
NO ONE COULD STOP THE FLOW.  
ON HE’D GO.  
CHATTING ABOUT SOME TRAIN LINE, OF COURSE.  
LIKE A RUNAWAY HORSE.

SO I TAUGHT HIM A TRICK  
TO HELP HIM BE MORE AWARE.  
BECAUSE HE’S SO VISUAL,  
HE SHOULD FIND A CLOCK SOMEWHERE,  
THEN MAKE A NOTE WHAT TIME HIS CONVERSATIONS BEGIN.  
AND IF TWO OR THREE MINUTES PASS,  
WITH NO ONE CUTTING IN,  
THEN IT’S TIME TO TAKE A BREAK,  
ASK A QUESTION,  
LET THEM SPEAK,  
AT LEAST MAKE SURE THEY’RE STILL AWAKE.

It sounds overly formulaic, but it totally worked. Works.

AND THEN THERE’S BODY LANGUAGE:



I'D SHOW HIM WHAT PEOPLE LOOK LIKE  
WHEN THEY'RE INTERESTED.

*(she leans forward)*

OR BORED.

*(leans back)*

BORED.

*(checks her watch)*

BORED.

*(crosses her legs and looks away)*

HE GOT IT RIGHT AWAY,  
LIKE A PRO.

I DIDN'T KNOW...

I JUST DIDN'T KNOW

THAT OTHER KIDS WERE LEARNING THIS INSTINCTUALLY.

I DON'T REMEMBER LEARNING IT INSTINCTUALLY,

STILL I GUESS WE LEARNED THOSE KINDS OF THINGS

INSTINCTUALLY.

BUT MY KEVIN, HE NEEDED TO BE TAUGHT.

And thanks to my inadvertent "scaffolding," he slipped under the radar.

Until around tenth grade.

AS HIS CLASSMATES GREW OUT OF THEIR AWKWARDNESS,  
KEVIN SANK DEEPER INTO HIS.

IT'S NOT THAT HE DIDN'T GET ALONG WITH THEM,

HE JUST WASN'T A PART OF THEM.

NO GROUP.

CERTAINLY NOT THE JOCKS,

BUT NOT THE BRAINY KIDS EITHER.

WATCHING MY SWEET BOY,

WITH SO MUCH TO OFFER,

SITTING AT LUNCH ALONE

WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS PHONE.

I WAS A WRECK,

BUT HE DIDN'T SEEM TO MIND.

HE WAS EITHER OBLIVIOUS

OR DECIDEDLY RESIGNED.

And I couldn't tell which. So, I had him evaluated.

AND THERE IT WAS.

I did not handle it well.

My first thought was:

WHAT DID I DO WRONG?

Kevin was conceived on a European tour of the musical *Hair*. As you can imagine, it was a very... unique time in my life.

DID I DANCE TOO HARD?

I had just ended a long (and torturous) relationship, so I jumped at the chance to escape New York for some European travel, naked flailing, and hairy legs and armpits.

WAS IT SOMETHING THAT I ATE?  
OR SOMETHING THAT I SHOULD'VE EATEN?

I wish I had some great story, like Kevin's father was a Hungarian Count or French zillionaire. But no, it was just Klaus, the show drummer, from Stuttgart. Sweet guy, but not someone I'd ever want to marry, let alone co-parent a kid with...

WAS IT HIS GENES?  
WAS IT MINE?

By the way, Kevin doesn't know anything about Klaus. It was easier to tell him I used a sperm donor, which is basically the truth. Not that I was trying to get pregnant. It was more like a happy accident.

I JUST DIDN'T WANT KEVIN TO TRY TO FIND HIM ONE DAY.  
THAT GUY HAS NO IDEA HE HAS A KID,  
AND I WANT TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.

Of course, someday Kevin's going to go on ancestry.com with his DNA results and find out he has all these relatives in Germany. Or maybe not. He's not particularly curious.

BUT WHAT DID I DO WRONG?

I eventually stopped looking for reasons why and just accepted the diagnosis at face value. Of course, that journey took me the better part of a year. I could only imagine how long it would take for my Kevin.

AND WHAT WITH THE PRESSURES OF HIGH SCHOOL MOUNTING,  
AND STANDARDIZED TESTS BEGINNING,  
AND APPLICATIONS JUST AROUND THE BEND,  
IT SEEMED IT MIGHT BE TOO MUCH  
FOR MY SWEET, SWEET BOY  
TO DIGEST OR COMPREHEND.

So I didn't tell him.

I HAVEN'T TOLD HIM STILL.  
I SUPPOSE ONE DAY I WILL...  
WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT...  
WHEN HE'S NOT WORKING  
HALFWAY THROUGH THE NIGHT.  
I CAN'T AFFORD TO SHAKE HIM.  
I'D NEVER WANT TO MAKE HIM  
SECOND-GUESS HIMSELF.  
THERE'S NO REASON TO TELL HIM.  
NOT NOW.  
MAYBE NEVER.  
WHATEVER.

But there was one benefit to his diagnosis that I did want to make use of: getting extra time on the SAT. The trick was how to explain it to Kevvy without invoking the A word?

“YOU KNOW HOW SMART YOU ARE WITH MATH?  
IT'S LIKE YOU HAVE MAGIC MICROSCOPE MATH VISION,  
YOU SEE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS  
LARGER AND SHARPER  
THAN ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE.  
BUT BECAUSE YOU HAVE THAT SPECIAL MATH VISION,  
IT MAKES IT HARDER FOR YOU  
TO FOCUS ON THE OTHER STUFF  
THAT MOST PEOPLE CAN SEE  
EASILY,  
LIKE THE VERBAL SIDE OF THINGS.  
AND SINCE IT TAKES YOU LONGER TO FOCUS,  
ON THOSE KINDS OF THINGS...  
THEY THINK IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR YOU  
TO GET EXTRA TIME ON THE TEST.”

He didn't even question it.

AND HIS VERBAL SCORE JUMPED UP  
TO WHERE IT NEEDED TO BE!  
HERE WE COME, M.I.T.!

THE ONLY THING LEFT IS THE INTERVIEW.  
THE DREADED INTERVIEW!  
SO MANY PRACTICE RUNS,  
ALL THOSE PRACTICE RUNS,  
AND HE GETS BETTER AND BETTER EVERY TIME.  
ON PAPER, HE'S FLAWLESS,  
BUT FACE TO FACE WITH A STRANGER,  
IT'S AN UPHILL CLIMB.

AND BLESS HIS HEART,  
HE'S OBLIVIOUS,  
SO HE'LL HAVE NO IDEA HOW IT WENT.  
IF ONLY I COULD BE THERE  
EVEN FROM AFAR,  
TO WITNESS THE EVENT.

HE WANTS IT SO BADLY,  
SO VERY BADLY,  
AND I WANT IT THAT BADLY FOR HIM TOO!  
ALL THOSE YEARS OF PLANNING,  
SO MUCH PLANNING,  
AND NOW WE'RE ALMOST THROUGH!  
TOMORROW WE'LL BE THROUGH!

Oh geez, the tailor! I forgot to pick up his pants!

*(She puts her shoes back on and grabs her umbrella and keys.)*

This whole college thing is getting so real...

What am I going to do when my little cuddlebunny is gone?

*(She exits. Blackout. Musical interlude. There is a passage of time.)*

PART TWO

*(The sound of keys in the door. It's a year later. She enters with totes.)*

FUCKING TOURISTS.

IT'S SEPTEMBER, THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE GONE BY NOW.  
MEANWHILE, EVERYWHERE I GO,  
THERE SEEMS TO BE A FAMILY OF FIVE FROM ITALY,  
WALKING ABREAST,  
CLAIMING THE ENTIRE SIDEWALK.

I MEAN,  
IF YOU'RE WALKING SIDE BY SIDE IN A GROUP  
AND A PERSON IS COMING TOWARD YOU,  
YOU FALL IN LINE.  
YOU MAKE ROOM FOR THEM TO PASS.  
IT'S A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RESPONSE.  
YOU WOULD THINK.

MY BIG RUSH TO GET HOME.  
TO WHAT?  
TO A PILE OF WORK I WON'T DO.  
'CAUSE I CAN'T STOP THINKING OF YOU.

Kevin did The Walk for Autism today.

I only know this because I follow him on Instagram.

From a fake account.

If he knew it was me, I suspect he'd block me.

IT'S BEEN QUITE THE YEAR.

It all started with the MIT interview.

I HAD TO GO.  
I HAD TO SEE FOR MYSELF.  
I HAD TO KNOW,  
HOW IT WENT.

So I went... in a scarf and sunglasses. Corny, I know. Carrying a NY Times for full cover. Thankfully it was one of the bigger Starbucks, big enough for me to disappear into the background.

BUT WHY IS IT SO BRIGHT?

At least it's crowded.

FIVE MINUTES 'TIL THREE.  
LAST CHANCE TO RUN AWAY...  
I STAY.

Meanwhile, no sign of Kevin.

WHY ISN'T HE EARLY  
FOR SOMETHING AS IMPORTANT AS THIS?

He walks in, right under the wire. On time, but just.

From behind my paper, I watch him scanning the room. A middle-aged businessman with a bad toupee waves him over. They shake hands. It's awkward, but it's not the end of the world. They sit.

I'M SAFE.

I can tell Kevin's nervous. He's barely talking, giving one-word answers. The guy is having to do all the work. Kevin, we practiced this!

IT'S EXCRUCIATING,  
WATCHING HIM UNDERPERFORM,  
WITH NO WAY TO HELP.

Then... the guy says something that makes Kevin laugh! There's a shift. And off he goes. Kevin's talking now!

IT'S LIKE WATCHING A BIRD TAKE FLIGHT  
FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.  
PRIDE AND JOY.  
MY BOY!

He's on a roll, probably talking about the app he's developing, this New York City trip planner thing that incorporates real time information with some other... blah blah blah techno speak.

HE'S BEING ENGAGING,  
MAKING EYE CONTACT,  
HE'S DOING SO WELL!

And then, just like I taught him, he scans the room for a clock.

WHAT DID I DO WRONG?

He looks right at me. It happens so fast, I don't have a chance to hide. At first, he looks confused. Then, something I don't recognize.

SADNESS?  
BETRAYAL?  
CHAGRIN?  
LIKE THE FALLING OF EDEN  
TO ORIGINAL SIN.

He sits there, silent.

I WANT TO APOLOGIZE,  
I WANT TO CHEER HIM ON,  
I WANT HIM TO START TALKING AGAIN,  
BUT INSTEAD, WE STARE  
AND STARE,  
LIKE THERE'S NO ONE ELSE THERE.

I grab my things and leave.

I go home and wait for the fallout.

I expect he'll be angry, that perhaps I've even inspired my son's first fury.

BUT NO.  
HE JUST LETS HIMSELF INTO THE APARTMENT  
AND GOES STRAIGHT TO HIS ROOM.  
NO YELLING,  
NOT EVEN A SLAM OF THE DOOR.  
I CALL HIM FOR DINNER,  
AND HE COMES.  
OBEDIENT,  
BUT ABSENT.

I explain to him why I thought it was a good idea.

HIS EYES ARE EMPTY.

I ask him how the interview went, and he says: Fine.

HE'S LYING TO ME.  
MAYBE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE.

What happened after I left? I ask.

NOTHING, HE SAYS.

I'm sure this sounds like your average teenager conversation, but not for Kevin. Not with me.

HE WAS OPEN,  
AND EXPRESSIVE,  
SHOWED HIS COLORS FEARLESSLY.  
NOW THERE'S JUST GRAY.  
MY BABY DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO COPE,  
AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

"I MADE A MISTAKE."

"I know," he says.

"I'M SORRY."

"I know," he says.

"DO YOU ACCEPT MY APOLOGY?"

M.I.T. decision day comes and goes. Kevin's silence speaks volumes. My sweet boy who used to tell me everything, has made himself a stranger to me.

WHAT USED TO BE TWO OR THREE HOURS  
SEQUESTERED IN HIS ROOM  
BECOMES ENTIRE WEEKENDS.

What is he doing in there?

That soon became clear...



I'M SURE IT WAS AN INNOCENT DISCOVERY,  
CLICK ON THIS,  
CLICK ON THAT,  
WHO KNOWS WHERE YOU'LL END UP.  
HOWEVER HE GOT THERE,  
HE STUMBLED ON THIS BRITISH GIRL'S  
YOUTUBE CHANNEL  
AND STARTED DEVOURING HER VIDEOS.

SHE'S CUTE.  
GREAT ACCENT.  
ASPERGER'S.  
SHE HAS HOURS AND HOURS OF EPISODES  
WHERE SHE TALKS ABOUT HER DIAGNOSIS,  
HER TREATMENT,  
HER SYMPTOMS,  
HER FRUSTRATIONS,  
HER PARENTS,  
HER CAT,  
HER DEPRESSION.

Honestly, I find her stultifyingly boring.

BUT KEVIN WAS OBSESSED.  
OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS,  
HE QUIETLY WATCHED EVERYTHING SHE'D POSTED.  
THEN HE STARTED GOOGLING  
AND CONNECTING THE DOTS.

*Mom, am I on the spectrum?*

Do I lie and go even deeper down the rabbit hole?

No.

I tell him.

He seems to take it well, silently. No questions, no push back, just the empty eyes and the now-predictable retreat to his room. Was it really going to be that painless?

No, it was not.

First I hear him talking to himself, then yelling. Things falling, breaking. Like there's a cyclone in his room. The door bursts open, and out comes a person I don't recognize. Red face, pinched voice...

*"WHY DON'T YOU TRUST ME?!"*

"Of course I trust you! It's everyone else I don't trust!"

*"BUT WHY DID YOU THINK  
I COULDN'T HANDLE  
KNOWING THIS ABOUT MYSELF?!"*

"I didn't want to upset you unnecessarily!"

*"YOU DON'T GET TO TELL ME HOW TO FEEL!"*

"I would never!"

*"YOU THINK THERE'S SOMETHING  
WRONG WITH ME!"*

"That's not true! I think you're perfect, exactly how you are! I just want you to be able to see yourself like that, too!"

*"I DO SEE MYSELF LIKE THAT!  
EXACTLY LIKE THAT!  
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO DOESN'T SEE ME LIKE THAT!"*

Now that Kevin knew about his diagnosis, he finally felt complete.

IT'S ODD  
I NEVER CONSIDERED IT BEFORE...  
THAT HIS DIAGNOSIS MIGHT FREE HIM,  
MAKE SENSE OF HIS MIND FOR HIM.  
I THOUGHT IT WOULD ONLY SEPARATE HIM MORE,  
BUT IT CONNECTED HIM TO A WORLD,  
A NEW WORLD.  
WITH NO PLACE FOR ME IN IT.

Funny thing, scaffolding.

STRUCTURES THAT CONCEAL,  
PLATFORMS THAT OBSTRUCT,

AND ONCE THEY'VE DONE THEIR JOB,  
THEY GET CHUCKED.

Like me.

Kevin started at Hunter College last month. When he moved out, he didn't take just his clothes. He took everything. I don't think he's coming back.

He doesn't return my calls, my texts. I think he's blocked me. The school tells me nothing. I'm not on his "list."

WHO'S MAKING SURE HE'S EATING?  
BATHING?  
DOING HIS HOMEWORK?  
WHO WILL EVER LOVE HIM AS MUCH AS I DO?

I used to imagine that when he left for college, I might be reinvigorated.

I'D HAVE THE BEDROOM AGAIN.  
I COULD EVEN START DATING AGAIN.

But being back in the bedroom just makes me think about him. Not very sexy.

I WONDER WHAT HE THINKS  
WHEN HE THINKS ABOUT ME.  
IF HE THINKS ABOUT ME.

Am I now the villain in his life story?

WILL HE BE A FATHER ONE DAY  
AND UNDERSTAND THE AGONY AND JOY  
OF WANTING WHAT'S BEST FOR HIS LITTLE GIRL OR BOY?

AND IF SO,  
WILL HE LOOK BACK  
AND THINK MORE GENEROUSLY OF ME THEN?

*(Her phone vibrates. She checks it. No, not him. Blackout.)*