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A Mother's Love: A Screenplay

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Abstract

A Mother's Love is a sixty-eight page feature-length dramatic screenplay. The story attempts to answer the following question: How far should a mother go to ensure her child's overall happiness and acceptance in the world? In the screenplay, Emily is the mother of Aden, a child with autism. Aden's autistic condition is about in the middle of the autistic spectrum. When a new doctor recommends putting Aden on an experimental treatment that promises to eliminate Aden's autistic symptoms, Emily agrees to follow the program. Although the revolutionary treatment begins to radically ease Aden's autistic symptoms, the drug comes with severe side effects that almost kill Emily's son.

To write this screenplay, I used Celtx, a freeware pre-production software that automatically formats scene headers, descriptions and dialogue to the generally accepted screenplay format. If produced, the screenplay's length is meant to translate into a ninety-minute live-action film. Although the screenplay and characters are not based on anyone or anything in real life, the idea of a new drug that affects a certain part of the brain in children and adults with autism is currently being discussed in scientific circles. Although no drug has yet been produced, this screenplay plays out one what-if scenario. The screenplay is meant to analyze the possibility of a potential cure for autism.

A Mother's Love does not provide a definite answer to the main question it leaves with its readers. Instead, it is meant to open a dialogue about autism, its place in today's society, and the new research into autism's biological causes. These topics of conversation include discussions about the potential overuse of drugs to treat psychological disorders, the lack of research that goes into certain "miracle cures" and how children and adults with autism are still fighting to be accepted into mainstream society. Autism is becoming a hot button topic in the media today, and *A Mother's Love* is meant to add to the current discussions about autism and its place in today's society.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Coryell for all of his stories and inspiration and for convincing me to continue my writing, Professor Quin for sweetening the audio in my screenplay, and my mother for unknowingly saving Aden's life.

Advice to Future Honors Students

If you're reading this, it must mean that you too are attempting to write the next great American screenplay. Remember though that first and foremost, we are storytellers, and unless you love your characters, no one else will give a hoot about them either. FYI, about halfway into the screenplay, you will no longer have control of your characters, so just let them do what they do best. And don't be discouraged if, with ten pages left to go, you write your main character into a corner, literally or figuratively. Give it a week or two and they'll escape on their own, I promise. Happy writing!

A Mother's Love

By

Marie Hankinson

INT. ER ENTRANCE. DAY

ADEN (V.O.)

(over the ER action)

Doctor Bennett said I should write because people wanna know all about me. He says I'm special. My mom calls me special too, but my name is ADEN. I am 12 years old. I couldn't write a few months ago. Dr. Bennett taught me. I can't write very well, but I'm learning. I can talk better. I've talked almost a year now. I like talking. My mama likes me talking too. I wanna talk forever.

SLOW MOTION: Several MEDICS wheel a gurney through the emergency room sliding doors. The wheel's SQUEAK is musical, like a single held note. ADEN (12 yrs, an autistic boy with youthful features) is lying unconscious, sweating profusely. His BREATHING is labored. One NURSE is giving him oxygen. Her squeezing of the oxygen bag is RHYTHMIC. ADEN's mother EMILY (late 30's, her features aged from worry and stress) runs in after them, but is stopped by a nurse who grabs her. EMILY breaks down on the floor.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY. DAY

The MEDICS fly down the hall pushing the gurney. One DOCTOR YELLS are MUFFLED. He says something to the NURSE, who breaks off from the group and runs down another hall.

INT. ER ROOM. DAY

The MEDICS begin piling bags of ice around ADEN. The ice CRACKLES and SPITS as it melts. One NURSE is checking a heart monitor that ADEN is hooked up to. His heartbeat is erratic.

END OF V.O.

Suddenly, the monitor shows that his heart has stopped. The HEAD DOCTOR pushes through the other MEDICS and brings a defibrillator. He presses down on ADEN's chest and ADEN's body jumps once and THUDS back on the table. Nothing changes. The HEAD DOCTOR tries again and ADEN's body jumps and THUDS. Nothing. The HEAD DOCTOR tries for a third time. As ADEN's body jumps again and THUDS, CU on ADEN's eyes as they spring wide open.

Blinding white light takes over the screen.

EXT. PLAYGROUND. DAY

ROLL CREDITS

OPENING MUSIC: Somewhere Over the Rainbow - "IZ"
Kamakawiwo-ole

Text appears on screen: ONE YEAR EARLIER

A perfect, picturesque playground. Colorful metal equipment gleams and SQUEAKS in the sunlight. Green trees and grass

surround the black astroturf. Every child is elated, SCREAMING and LAUGHING. Parents sit on park benches TALKING gaily; some have prams. The children enjoy swings, jungle gyms, a merry-go-round, and a park sprinkler. Everything is full of color and life.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM. DAY

The playground scene is viewed through ADEN's ajar window. CAMERA PULL reveals ADEN's bedroom. The room is neat and clean. There are both children's books and medical journals on the shelves. There's a detox machine sitting in one corner collecting dust. There are pill bottles and salves scattered on the dresser. Everything seems to be half-used or not even opened. The walls are covered in hand-drawn pictures of trees.

INT. HALLWAY. DAY

FADE OUT OPENING MUSIC.

Distant MUMBLING of a conversation. Various SIZZLES and CLANGING of pots come from the kitchen. The walls are lined with pictures of ADEN and EMILY, but there isn't much furniture otherwise.

EMILY (OS)

There's a new doctor at the hospital that we're going to try.

CHRISTINE (OS)

You shouldn't be dragging Aden through this again.

EMILY (OS)

Mom, this doctor's different.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

EMILY is scrambling around the kitchen trying to cook 5 dinners at once. There's Tupperware all over the counters, some filled and labeled. EMILY'S mother CHRISTINE (60's, with graying hair and a tough exterior but gentle heart) is sitting at the kitchen counter drinking hot tea.

CHRISTINE (OS)

In what way?

EMILY

He's got some new ideas.

CHRISTINE

And you're going to trust him? Who ever said that new is always better?

CHRISTINE gives her daughter a mocking smug look.

EMILY

The other doctors told me he may be able to help. We've already tried everything else that's out there. Why not try him?

CHRISTINE

The other doctors probably just didn't want to deal with you anymore.

EMILY

I'm not giving up on Aden.

CHRISTINE

Who said you're giving up? He just needs a break from the doctors for a while. Heck, you could use a break too. Look at you. You're labeling Tupperware. I'm not even that crazy.

EMILY gives her mother a doubtful look. Then she realizes she's labeling another Tupperware and stops herself.

EMILY

When else am I supposed to have time to do all of this? I cook now, I don't have to cook for another month and I can spend more time doing stuff for Aden.

CHRISTINE

You're still young for crying out loud. Go out, have some fun, act your age for once. You're driving yourself to your grave.

EMILY

Oh stop being so dramatic Mom.

CHRISTINE

You've got enough to worry about right now as it is. The school won't keep him for another year. Why not finish off the semester and take a vacation somewhere? When's the last time you went to the beach with Aden? He loves it there.

EMILY

I wish we could Mom, but work won't give me any extra days off. Besides, Aden's got a schedule and he's doing well with it. I wouldn't want to take it away from him. We'll take a vacation when I can find some extra time.

CHRISTINE

What extra time? Honey, whenever I'm over here you've always got something important to finish up. Come on, take a break. There's tea on the stove. Come on. Right here.

CHRISTINE pats the stool next to her at the counter.

EMILY thinks it over and, sighing, takes a mug from the cabinet, fills it with tea, and sits down next to her mother.

CHRISTINE

You do everything for that boy honey. Do a little something for yourself. Heck, enjoy my company for once.

EMILY

Do I have a choice?

CHRISTINE

No.

Christine gets up to clean her mug.

CHRISTINE

So you really think this doctor will have anything new to say?

EMILY

It's worth a shot.

CHRISTINE

Well then I guess you can go ahead and try him.

Christine looks up at the kitchen clock.

CHRISTINE

Doesn't Aden's school get out about now?

EMILY

Damn it, I'm not even close to finishing all this.

Christine places her mug in the drying rack.

CHRISTINE

Don't worry honey. It makes me feel good to be needed for something other than my opinion.

Christine picks up a rag and begins cleaning off a counter. EMILY hurries to grab her purse and rushes out the door.

CHRISTINE

(chuckling to herself)
You still need me don't you?

INT. PRINCIPLE'S OFFICE. DAY

EMILY is sitting nervously in front of the principle's desk. Her knees are shaking up and down and she's feverishly TAPPING on her handbag. PRINCIPLE ANDREWS opens his office door and walks in.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

I'm sorry to keep you waiting Miss Campbell.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS leisurely makes his way over to his chair and reclines back.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

What can I do you for?

EMILY

I was hoping I could talk to you about Aden's class situation.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Aden...Aden...I'm not quite sure I know who you're talking about.

EMILY

Aden's in the E-L-P class here and...

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Oh right, right. Well that is unfortunate, isn't it? Yes, very unfortunate. But what can we do? The district's losing money and we have to make tough cuts at all of the schools in this county.

EMILY

But why the E-L-P class?

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Well, it wasn't an easy decision to make, but I was told that there would be plenty of room for your son at Saint Paul's school up in Ashford.

EMILY

But that's two hours away from here.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Saint Paul's has a great reputation with students...students like Aden, who just don't quite fit into a regular classroom environment. We have to think about the other students as well as your son, and they would be put at a disadvantage if a teacher had to teach at a slower and...um...different pace.

EMILY

There are plenty of students at this school who aren't as smart as Aden. It just takes him a little while longer to get things right, you just have to be patient.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Like I said, the school board's had to make some tough decisions over the past few months, and we've had to cut some serious programs from our school.

EMILY

Like what exactly? I haven't seen any changes around here lately.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Well...they haven't exactly been officially made yet, and therefore I can't disclose to you what they could or will be, so...

EMILY

So really all you're doing is cutting the E-L-P program because you just don't see the need for it anymore?

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

If your son could somehow be...more like the other students here, I wouldn't see a problem in re-enrolling Aden for the fall semester. But at the moment, I would assume that that won't be possible.

EMILY

So you're not even going to try?

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Like I said, it would be unfair to the other students if I allowed Aden into their classes.

SECRETARY KNOCKS quickly and enters the office.

SECRETARY

Mister Andrews? Trisha Atwater is here with the monthly P-T-A report.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Ah excellent. Send her in, send her in.

TRISHA (30's, perfect, with an over-the-top theatrical air)walks in with a large binder and an even larger smile.

TRISHA

Principle Andrews, good to see you again.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Ah. Trisha. Excellent. Um, Miss Campbell, I'm sorry to cut this short, but I do have to deal with this right now. I wish there was something I could do for your son.

EMILY gives PRINCIPLE ANDREWS a great big fake smile.

EMILY

Of course. Baking cookies is definitely more important than this.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS doesn't notice this last remark, having already focused on TRISHA.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

I just love having your daughter at this school. How is she?

EMILY gets up to leave and TRISHA immediately flies into her monthly report as EMILY is still leaving.

TRISHA

Oh Ashley's doing just fine. She loves it here.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

That's good to hear.

INT. FRONT OFFICE. DAY

SECRETARY is POUNDING away at a keyboard. She doesn't even look up to address EMILY. EMILY stares dumbfounded at the closed office door.

SECRETARY

If you're finished talking with Mister Andrews, the door's that way.

SECRETARY points to a door at the other end of the room.

EMILY huffily leaves the office.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND. DAY

EMILY is sitting down on a bench watching ADEN in the play area. ADEN is sitting on a brance of a large oak tree. He has one hand out stroking the tree. A school bell RINGS and dozens of children run out the front doors of the school to meet their parents at the carpool lane. TRISHA sees EMILY and walks toward her. She is holding her daughter ASHLEY's hand, (8 yrs, and naively cute), and tugging her along.

TRISHA

Emily! You ran out of Mister Andrew's office so fast I didn't get to say hi. Go play Ashley. Mommy's talking.

ASHLEY rushes over to the playground area. TRISHA sits down next to EMILY and pats her leg.

TRISHA

Wow Emily, I haven't seen you around in ages.

EMILY

I'm here at two every day to pick Aden up.

TRISHA

Oh I'm sure you are. But I mean, I don't see you around otherwise.

EMILY

Well Aden certainly keeps me busy.

TRISHA

I'm sure he does. He must be such a handful.

TRISHA turns to EMILY in an over-the-top, dramatic way.

TRISHA

Oh Emily, I heard about Aden not being able to attend Northside Elementary anymore.

EMILY

Yeah, it's...

TRISHA

But then again, I've known about it for a while now. The school's been losing money and what with all the budget cuts we just had to cut anything that wasn't necessary for our students.

EMILY

I would think the E-L-P class is very important to students.

TRISHA

M-m, not students Emily, just your son. Honey the math just didn't make sense. One teacher for one student just wasn't fair to all of the other children here. We just had to let the program go.

EMILY

Wait. Who's we?

TRISHA

Why the P-T-A of course! Principle Andrews looks to us to help make important financial decisions for the school and this was just one of the many that we had to make. Sad really, but necessary. Aden will be

so much better off at another school anyway.

TRISHA looks over at Aden, who hasn't moved an inch.

EMILY

Well why not keep him here in a regular class instead of sending him out of the city for school?

TRISHA

Saint Pauls is such a wonderful school for children like Aden. And besides he wouldn't do well in a class like Ashley's. It's too advanced for him and he would just...

TRISHA spies her daughter Ashley SPLASHING in the mud and getting very dirty.

TRISHA

Ashley! You do not play in the mud!

TRISHA bolts off the bench and marches over to her daughter.

TRISHA

We do not play in the mud!

TRISHA grabs her daughter's hand and violently swats at the mud on her dress. She pulls her toward the carpool lane.

TRISHA

Think about it Emily. Aden will be a lot better off with other children like him.

TRISHA storms off with ASHLEY. EMILY walks over to ADEN and leans against the tree branch. ADEN continues to stare at the tree trunk.

EMILY

Maybe it's a good thing we're getting you out of this school.

EMILY smooths her son's hair and kisses his head.

EMILY

Come on, it's time to go home.

EMILY helps ADEN out of the tree. ADEN touches the tree one more time then waves good-bye and follows EMILY. EMILY holds his hand and leads him to the car. ADEN stares back at the tree.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM. DAY

ADEN is sitting on the floor playing with a toy electronic keyboard. He presses the keys and it plays some SCRATCHY NOTES. CHRISTINE is sitting next to EMILY reading a magazine. EMILY finishes filling out her paperwork and walks over to the front desk. BETTY (mid 50's, a smiling maternal kind of woman) looks up and immediately begins to smile.

BETTY

Why Miss Campbell, I haven't seen you in over a week! Where have you been hiding my baby?

BETTY looks over EMILY's shoulder at ADEN.

EMILY

Just been busy with other things at the moment.

BETTY

I'm so glad you've found some time to visit this old lady. I've missed you around here.

EMILY

We heard that there's a new doctor in the children's wing and we wanted to come and talk to him.

BETTY

Oh you mean Doctor Bennett? I've seen him a couple of times in the hall, great looking fella. You should see the way he struts that cute little butt of his. Mmm, Mmm.

EMILY

Well if what the other doctors are saying is true, he's got brains to back all of that up.

BETTY

Damn, if that's not my favorite kind of man.

A NURSE opens a side door and CALLS OUT:

NURSE

Aden Campbell.

ADEN knows the drill. He picks up his keyboard and walks right passed the NURSE and down the hallway. EMILY and CHRISTINE follow.

BETTY looks as the four of them disappear into the hallway as the door shuts.

BETTY

Brains and a body. Good lord, I sure did pick the right job.

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE. DAY

ADEN is sitting up on the patient bed playing with the small electronic piano. He holds it up to his ear as he presses the keys. The notes RING in his ear. EMILY and CHRISTINE are sitting in chairs, CHRISTINE reading a magazine and EMILY looking at her son.

The door opens and DR. BENNETT (30s, with a knowledgeable and trustable air) walks into the room. He's all smiles.

DR. BENNETT

Hey there Aden.

DR. BENNETT extends his hand to ADEN, but ADEN doesn't respond.

DR. BENNETT

A little shy are we?

DR. BENNETT turns his attention over to EMILY and Christine.

DR. BENNETT

Hello. I'm Doctor Bennett, missus?

EMILY

Emily. This is my mother Christine. I'm really glad you could see us today Mister Bennett.

DR. BENNETT

Well you made it pretty clear on the phone that no wasn't an option.

EMILY

I'm sorry if I sounded a bit intense.

DR. BENNETT

No hard feelings Emily. I've heard a lot worse from other mothers. At least you're willing to keep trying, and that's what's important. But we're getting sidetracked. We're really here for this little man.

EMILY

Aden.

DR. BENNETT

Right, Aden.

DR. BENNETT takes a clipboard from the table and flips through ADEN's charts.

DR. BENNETT

Let's see. Eleven years old.
Autistic. Any other medical
conditions I should know about?

EMILY

Not that I'm aware of.

DR. BENNETT

We'll just have to verify that
before we start Aden on anything.

EMILY

I've already got him started on
several things already.

DR. BENNETT gives EMILY a confused and concerned look.

DR. BENNETT

Really? Through this hospital?

EMILY

Let's see. He's on a gluten-free
diet. We've got several detox
machines at home. Pills, creams,
one of those air purifying
machines. Mom, can you think of
anything else that I'm missing?

CHRISTINE

Honey, I have no idea what you've
got that boy on right now. There's
so many contraptions lying around
you could start your own store.

DR. BENNETT

All of that and not much change in
his behavior?

EMILY

Nope. Aden has his better days, but
for the most part he's about the
same as he's always been.

DR. BENNETT

Well I'm going to need a list of everything Aden is currently on and using.

EMILY

That won't be a problem.

DR. BENNETT

While we're here though, might as well take a quick look at Aden here.

DR. BENNETT approaches ADEN with his stethoscope, but ADEN pushes himself away from him. He keeps the keyboard up against his ear.

EMILY

He really doesn't like to be touched. It took ages to get him to sit near his teacher at school.

DR. BENNETT

Has he ever been able to talk?

EMILY

No, but I've pretty much learned what he wants without words at this point. It works for us.

DR. BENNETT

Non-verbal communication is typical of children like Aden.

EMILY

But he definitely understands just about anything I say.

CHRISTINE

He's got sass when he wants to use it.

DR. BENNETT

Is that so young man?

DR. BENNETT thinks for a moment and crouches down next to ADEN.

DR. BENNETT

Do you like music?

ADEN continues to focus his attention on the keyboard, but he makes sure that DR. BENNETT doesn't get too close to him.

DR. BENNETT

Can you play anything for me?

ADEN lowers the keyboard to his lap and, very hesitantly and keeping his focus on the keyboard, begins to press a few keys in no particular order. The disjointed NOTES don't sound very pleasing, but they make DR. BENNETT smile. DR. BENNETT slowly reaches over to the piano and hits one of the keys, making a LOW NOTE sound. ADEN flinches at what DR. BENNETT has done, not expecting that he would have touched the keyboard. ADEN then presses the same note. DR. BENNETT smiles and hits another NOTE. ADEN follows suit.

DR. BENNETT

Give it some time and I think Aden
and I will get along just fine.

DR. BENNETT stands up and grabs his chart again, writing on one of the pages.

DR. BENNETT

Why don't you bring Aden back in
next week with that list of his
current medications and we'll see
where to go from there. It'll give
me time to call up a few colleagues
and figure out what'll be best to
start Aden on.

EMILY

That sounds fine. Thank you very
much Doctor Bennett. We'll be sure
to come back next week.

DR. BENNETT

You do that for me. Come back in,
and we'll see what we can do for
him.

EMILY

Thank you Doctor Bennett.

DR. BENNETT

My pleasure.

EMILY

Come on Aden. It's time to go home.

ADEN gets off the patient chair and walks behind EMILY,
still holding the music player.

DR. BENNETT flips through the charts.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION. DAY

ADEN, EMILY, and CHRISTINE are leaving the reception area.

BETTY waves as ADEN leaves.

BETTY

Bye Aden.

DR. BENNETT approaches BETTY as she continues to file paperwork.

DR. BENNETT

Betty, can I ask you a question?

BETTY

Shoot.

DR. BENNETT

How often is Aden and his mother here?

BETTY

Oh just about every week to be sure.

DR. BENNETT

Without fail?

BETTY

Aden's always coming here to see one doctor or another. His mom's had him on everything this hospital could think of and more. Poor girl won't give up on that boy. They haven't missed a week since I've been around.

DR. BENNETT (OS)

There's something about Aden that I...I just can't put my finger on it. He seems to understand everything that I say to him.

BETTY

He's a wonderful kid to be sure. He's got his ways of making you laugh, most people just don't quite understand him is all.

DR. BENNETT

You seem to know him pretty well.

BETTY

Like I said, in and out of this hospital like clockwork.

DR. BENNETT

It's seems like you know pretty

much everyone at this hospital.

BETTY

Mhmm, you best go on and remember that now. I know everything that happens in this hospital and everyone too. Don't you go and get on my bad side. I don't forget anything around here.

DR. BENNETT

I'll have to remember that. Could I see the rest of Aden's file?

BETTY hands DR. BENNETT a few thick manila files. He studies the pile.

BETTY

S'long as you remember who you're dealing with.

INT. EMILY'S DINING ROOM. EVENING

MUSIC CUE

EMILY and ADEN are sitting at a small dining room table. There are a few empty Tupperware containers on the table. ADEN is focused on his food, but EMILY is looking lovingly at her son.

INT. DR. BENNETT'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING

DR. BENNETT is sitting on his couch, surrounded by paperwork and books from the hospital. There's a half-eaten plate of dinner next to him on an end table. He's rifling through some of ADEN's papers and making notes on a legal pad.

INT. EMILY'S KITCHEN. NIGHT

EMILY and ADEN are washing the dishes. ADEN makes a soap bubble with his hands and blows it. EMILY LAUGHS and makes a soap bubble of her own. ADEN follows the bubble with his eyes and POPS the bubble. ADEN LAUGHS.

INT. DR. BENNETT'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

DR. BENNETT intensely looks between one of ADEN's files and his legal pads. He looks quickly back and forth between the two. He realizes something and gets up off the couch.

INT. ADEN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

EMILY is tucking ADEN into his bed. She hands him a glass of water and several pills on her outstretched hand. He takes them one at a time and begins swallowing the pills.

FADE OUT MUSIC

INT. DR. BENNETT'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING

DR. BENNETT dials a number and waits through some DIAL TONE. He finally connects on the phone with JOHN LIVINGSTON, a fellow doctor and friend.

DR. BENNETT

John? I've got a new patient and I was wondering how you were coming along with that research you were working on?

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE. NIGHT

JOHN LIVINGSTON (50's, graying hair but with an extremely knowledgeable air), is in his doctors office. There are several plaques and certificates lining his walls. He's the head of his department.

JOHN

Which research are you talking about? I've got too many projects to keep track of right now.
CHUCKLE.

DR. BENNETT (VO)

Your autism research. On symptom management. I was noticing in a patient of mine earlier today some possible evidence that supports your theory on symptom management.

JOHN

You mean symptom reversal?

DR. BENNETT

Yes, symptom reversal. He's fully aware of everything going on around him, he just doesn't have the capability of expressing his awareness, verbally at least.

JOHN

We're well beyond the research stages now and what we're creating still blows my mind

DR. BENNETT

Are you saying you actually have something ready to test?

JOHN

We've actually got F-D-A backing on its production right now. We still have some final testing to do, but we're sure it'll be marketable within a few years if not less.

INT. DR. BENNETT'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING

JOHN (VO)

Why the sudden curiosity?

DR. BENNETT

What kind of testing?

JOHN (VO)

Human trials.

DR. BENNETT

Any chance you're still needing subjects?

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE. DAY

ADEN is sitting on the edge of the patient bed swinging his legs. CHRISTINE and EMILY sit nearby. DR. BENNETT walks in all smiles. EMILY shoots up to greet him.

EMILY

Hello Doctor Bennett.

DR. BENNETT

Afternoon Emily, Christine. Let's jump straight into the good news, shall we? I've talked with one of my colleagues, Doctor John Livingston, who's in the human trial stage of a new autism treatment that I'd like Aden to try.

EMILY

Human trials?

CHRISTINE

What do you mean human trials? My grandson isn't going to be a guinea pig.

DR. BENNETT

It will be perfectly safe for Aden. The drug is waiting on final F-D-A approval before it goes to market.

EMILY

What are the chances that the F-D-A

won't approve of the drug?

DR. BENNETT

Doctor Livingston assures me that there are very few side-effects. Minor nausea, tiredness, loss in appetite. Nothing to get worried about. But if this new drug does what Doctor Livingston says, Aden could be speaking in a month, maybe two.

EMILY begins to CHUCKLE in disbelief.

EMILY

Right, Aden talking. Good one, Doctor Bennett.

DR. BENNETT

I am being completely serious here. The drug is meant to block a receptor in the brain that affects Aden's autistic symptoms. Fix the receptor, fix the problems. Speech, emotion recognition, social interaction. All of Aden's symptoms will practically disappear overnight.

EMILY stares in disbelief. She slowly falls into her chair.

DR. BENNETT

Your son's chances of living completely a normal life are high, Miss Campbell. I've got a feeling that he's been learning this whole time, he just hasn't been able to express it yet.

EMILY quietly SOBS into her hands.

DR. BENNETT

Miss Campbell?

EMILY takes a moment, then walks over to ADEN. She takes his face in her hands and begins to happily CRY. She holds her son's body.

EMILY

We're ready Doctor Bennett. I'm ready to do whatever you say.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION. DAY

EMILY, smiling brilliantly, leaves the hospital, hugging

ADEN every few steps. CHRISTINE follows. BETTY looks on at the scene. DOCTOR BENNETT walks up to the reception desk to hand over some files/paperwork.

BETTY

Good Lord, Doctor Bennett. I have never seen that woman smile this much since Aden was born.

DR. BENNETT

You've known her that long?

BETTY

She delivered Aden right in this here hospital eleven years ago. That woman was smiling through the whole thing.

DR. BENNETT

Strong woman.

BETTY

Mhmm. And don't you go ruining her life now. I don't know what you've gone and told her, but anything happens to her baby and you better watch your back 'cause I'm coming after you.

DR. BENNETT

You don't need to worry Betty. In two months she'll be smiling for the rest of her life.

INT. EMILY'S KITCHEN. DAY

EMILY and CHRISTINE are surrounded by multiple pill bottles. Her face is furrowed as she tries to understand the labels. ADEN is sitting in front of the television, watching cartoons.

EMILY

Two blue pills at breakfast, green pill at noon, then the little pink thing at bedtime... Oh wait, then there's the whitish one for breakfast too.

CHRISTINE

Then what do we do with these clear ones?

EMILY opens a weekly pill box and puts the right pills in the first box. She continues counting and storing.

CHRISTINE

I don't even take this many pills
and I'm as blind as a bat and old
to boot.

EMILY counts out a last pile. Filling a cup with water from the tap, she walks over to Aden.

INT. EMILY'S LIVING ROOM. DAY

EMILY

Honey, can you take this pill for
Mommy?

ADEN squirms away from the pill and EMILY to see the television screen.

EMILY

Please, sweetie.

ADEN swats EMILY'S hand and the pill goes flying.

EMILY

Aden!

ADEN SCREAMS and keeps looking at the television. The NOISE from the cartoon is obviously flustering and frustrating EMILY.

EMILY

Aden, please!

ADEN SCREAMS again. He scooches to the other side of the couch.

EMILY

How about some pudding?

ADEN quiets down.

EMILY

I thought so.

INT. EMILY'S KITCHEN. DAY

EMILY goes back to the kitchen and gets a new pill from the pillbox. She opens the fridge and takes out a pudding cup. When she closes the door, Aden is standing right behind her, staring at the pudding cup. EMILY deftly puts the pill into the pudding and hands ADEN the pudding cup. ADEN immediately starts licking the pudding and races out of the kitchen.

EMILY

Spoon Aden!

ADEN races back to grab a spoon from the drawer. The phone RINGS. EMILY picks up the kitchen phone.

EMILY

Hello?...

INT. PRINCIPLES OFFICE. DAY

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS (OS)

Hello, am I speaking with Miss Campbell?

EMILY

Yes, who's calling?

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS (OS)

Principle Andrews, from Northside Elementary. I'm calling in regards to your son Aden.

EMILY

And what could you possibly have to say now?

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS (OS)

I'm sorry to inform you that Aden's E-L-P class will not be meeting next week. The county school board has decided to immediately cut some of our funding in preparation for next school year. We have the paperwork for Saint Paul's here in the office for you to fill out on Monday. They're willing to accept Aden on such short notice...Miss Campbell?

During the conversation, EMILY slides down the kitchen wall. She has reached the floor and is sitting down in disbelief.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS (VO)

Miss Campbell?

ADEN rushes back into the kitchen with pudding all over his mouth. He hands EMILY the empty pudding cup. EMILY shakily takes the pudding cup. ADEN quickly races back to the couch and his cartoons.

EMILY

Aden will not be returning to any school this year, especially Saint Pauls.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS (VO)

I'm sorry Miss Campbell, I don't

think I heard you right.

EMILY

You heard me fine. Aden will not be going to any school, not unless you accept him into your regular classes.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

We've discussed this already and my answer is no. It would be a disadvantage to the other students.

EMILY'S MOTHER worriedly wipes the counter tops.

EMILY

That's the only way my son is returning to school.

EMILY hangs up the phone with a SLAM.

CHRISTINE

Who was that dear?

EMILY

Aden's principle.

CHRISTINE

Anything good this time?

CHRISTINE sets her rag down on the counter.

EMILY

They've already cut his classes and they won't let him into the normal ones. Mom, let me help you with that.

CHRISTINE

I like to feel useful from time to time. Let an old lady help her daughter for once. Sit, sit. Let me make you some tea.

CHRISTINE fills a kettle with water and sets the kettle on the stove to boil. She opens the fridge to grab some milk when she notices all of the pudding cups.

CHRISTINE

I swear that kid's made of chocolate with all the pudding you let him eat.

ADEN runs into the kitchen and grabs a pudding cup.
CHRISTINE grabs him and wraps her arms around him in a hug.

She deftly grabs the pudding cup from his hand. With a concerned look, she feels his forehead.

CHRISTINE

You're feeling pretty warm there kiddo.

EMILY

Are you feeling alright Aden?

CHRISTINE

He's pretty hot Emily.

Suddenly the kettle begins to WHISTLE violently. ADEN lets out a scream and runs out of the room.

INT. ADEN'S BEDROOM. DAY

ADEN'S nearly hidden under blankets on his bed. He has a thermometer in his mouth. EMILY has her hand on his forehead and CHRISTINE is holding a cold compress in her hands. EMILY takes the thermometer out of ADEN'S mouth and holds it up to the light.

EMILY

Hundred and one. I'm gonna call Doctor Bennett.

EMILY leaves the room and CHRISTINE places the compress on ADEN'S forehead. She sits down on the edge of the bed.

EMILY (OS)

Can I speak to Doctor Bennett please? Sure I'll hold.

CHRISTINE

One day out of school and already you're causing trouble mister.

CHRISTINE CHUCKLES as she brushes ADEN'S hair out of his face. He's pretty sweaty and miserable, WHIMPERING.

EMILY (OS)

Hello, Doctor Bennett?..Yes, this is Emily Campbell...Right, Aden's mother...Actually, Aden's not doing

too well. He has a fever...Mhmm...I gave him his medicine this morning and his pill at lunchtime...It was, hang on...

EMILY pokes her head into ADEN'S bedroom.

EMILY

What was his temperature again?

CHRISTINE

One-o-One.

EMILY

Hundred and one.

EMILY walks into the hallway again.

EMILY (OS)

That's right. Just started this
afternoon...Could you
please?..Thank you Doctor Bennett.

CLICK as EMILY hangs up the phone. She returns to Aden's
bedroom.

EMILY

Would you be able to hang out for
an hour or so? Doctor Bennett's on
his way over and I have to head to
work.

CHRISTINE

Of course.

EMILY

Thanks Mom.

EMILY heads over to the bed and kisses ADEN'S forehead.

EMILY

Be good sweetie. I'll be back soon.

EMILY hurries out of the room.

CHRISTINE

I hope at least you understand just
how much your mother still needs
me.

ADEN has already begun to drift off to sleep.

INT. ADEN'S BEDROOM. LATER THAT DAY

DR. BENNETT is sitting on the edge of Aden's bed. He is
examining a thermometer while CHRISTINE looks on.

DR. BENNETT

His temperature spike is perfectly
normal on this new medication.

CHRISTINE

And why would a fever ever be a

good thing?

DR. BENNETT

Well simply put, the area of the brain that this new medication is targeting is also responsible for temperature regulation in the body. There's nothing that you guys should be worrying about right now.

CHRISTINE

So just let him sweat it out? Don't you have anything for him right now?

DR. BENNETT

Nothing that he could take safely, no. He's going to have to be a trooper for now. If it gets any worse though, just give me a call.

DR. BENNETT stands up from the bed edge.

INT. ADEN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

ADEN stirs and wakes up. The only sounds are from outside: CRICKETS, FAINT TRAFFIC, RUSTLING TREES, ETC. Nothing eerie, just PEACEFUL. Aden climbs out of bed and walks out of his bedroom.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

ADEN sleepily SHUFFLES across the kitchen tiles toward the refrigerator.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM.

EMILY is lying wide awake in her bed, the sheets chaotic around her. The sound of the REFRIGERATOR OPENING jolts her. She jerks up in bed, hears someone RUMMAGING through the fridge, and slowly creeps out of bed. She grabs a baseball bat next to her bed and creeps out of her room.

INT. HALLWAY. NIGHT

EMILY hides behind the corner of the kitchen and reaches her hand around the corner to turn on the kitchen light.

CHRISTINE SNORES and EMILY flinches at the sound, but then looks over at the living room couch and spies her mother sleeping there.

With a CLICK the kitchen light turns on and she rounds the corner, bat at the ready.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

ADEN is standing in front of the open fridge, mouth covered in chocolate pudding. There are open pudding containers scattered across the floor.

EMILY grabs at her head and drops the bat with a CLUNK. She GASPS for air and begins to feebly LAUGH.

EMILY

You scared me Aden.

EMILY LAUGHS herself to the floor. Without looking at ADEN...

EMILY

What in the world are you doing up right now?

ADEN

Pudding.

EMILY immediately stops laughing. The only sound heard is the fridge HUMMING. She slowly looks up at ADEN in shock and confusion.

EMILY

What did you say?

ADEN looks up at his mother. Their eyes meet for the first time ever.

ADEN

Pudding.

EMILY puts her hand over her mouth and begins to GASP in amazement. She YELPS in excitement.

ADEN has a surprised and almost scared look on his face. He's not sure if he's in trouble or how to react.

INT. EMILY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

CHRISTINE is wide awake. She hears the YELP and hurries off the couch, getting caught in seat cushions and blankets.

INT. EMILY'S KITCHEN. NIGHT

EMILY scurries over to ADEN, KNOCKING empty pudding cups with her body as she gets to ADEN. She grabs him in a big hug and refuses to let go. She's CRYING HYSTERICALLY right now and kissing ADEN feverishly.

CHRISTINE slides into the kitchen out of breath.

CHRISTINE

What in the world is going on?

EMILY, happily CRYING, keeps hugging her son.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION. NIGHT

BETTY is sitting at the front desk FILING her nails and watching a small, MUTED television at her desk. The hospital is EMPTY.

Faintly, a woman's SCREAMS and LAUGHTER can be heard outside the hospital. BETTY looks up. As the NOISE gets LOUDER, she stands up in confusion, looking around the reception area. She can faintly hear a woman yelling, "HE TALKED."

She quickly jerks her head over to the sound of the AUTOMATIC DOORS that lead into the hospital.

EMILY

(repeatedly)

He talked!

EMILY runs through the reception area, passing by BETTY.

BETTY

Slow down girl, what's all this about?

EMILY SKIDS to a stop, turns to face BETTY, and then runs toward her, grabbing her in a hug.

EMILY

He talked! He talked! He talked!

BETTY

Who, who you talkin' 'bout?

EMILY

Aden! He talked! Aden talked!

EMILY runs off toward the doctors' offices, still YELLING and LAUGHING.

EMILY

(repeatedly)

He talked!

BETTY lets it sink in for a second before she realizes what has just happened. Suddenly, she begins to LAUGH and HOLLER just as much as EMILY. She dances around her desk area.

INT. DR. BENNETT'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

DOCTOR BENNETT is sitting down at his desk, working through

large stacks of paperwork. There's a large cup of coffee sitting next to him that he brings to his mouth when a loud KNOCKING on his door makes him spill it all over himself. With some UNDER BREATH CURSING he yells...

DR. BENNETT

What?

EMILY attempts a few times to get the doorknob to turn. She finally succeeds and SMACKS the door into the wall with her force. She runs up to his desk, but abruptly stops.

DR. BENNETT is glaring up at her and EMILY's been stopped cold by his glare.

DR. BENNETT

Just what the hell are you doing in
HERE at this time of night?

EMILY

Doctor Bennett? Aden, he...he...

DR. BENNETT

Well what the hell is wrong with
Aden?

EMILY

He talked.

A look of realization washes over DR. BENNETT'S face.

EMILY

Aden talked. He talked to me.

DR. BENNETT slowly falls into his chair.

EMILY

I didn't know what else to do, so I
ran over here. He, Aden...

DR. BENNETT leans over his desk and takes both of EMILY's hands.

DR. BENNETT

It's going to be just fine.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY

A swarm of television reporters are outside the hospital in the parking lot. There are dozens of cameramen, equipment, and trucks. The NOISE of everything is so overwhelming that nothing takes precedence in the confusion.

REPORTER #1

Hospital employees received the

news around eleven o'clock last night when Aden's mother Emily Campbell...

REPORTER #2

Doctors haven't released much information yet, but from what we do know Aden Campbell will be the first autistic child to ever begin to recover to a normal state...

REPORTER #3

And now even though Aden Campbell is eleven years old, it wasn't until last night that he was able to talk at all...

REPORTER #4

Doctors here at Saint Andrews Hospital confirmed that Aden Campbell is the first successful human trial of the new drug. The new drug is meant to reverse the symptoms of autism and it wasn't until last night that doctors were able to confirm the recovery. The F-D-A is currently reviewing the new research to decide whether or not to market the new drug to other children with autism...

INT. EMILY'S LIVING ROOM. DAY

ADEN and DR. BENNETT are sitting on the couch together. DR. BENNETT is showing picture flashcards to ADEN and ADEN is answering DR. BENNETT's questions. EMILY and CHRISTINE are leaning over the kitchen counter looking at ADEN, smiling.

DR. BENNETT

And this is a...?

ADEN

Lion!

DR. BENNETT

And what is the lion doing?

ADEN

Uh...

DR. BENNETT

What sound is he making?

ADEN

Raaaaarr!

DR. BENNETT

That's a very good roar Aden.

ADEN

Thank you.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

ADEN's and DR. BENNETT's conversation continues in the background.

CHRISTINE

What's going to happen with Aden now? Summer's almost up.

EMILY

He's going to need to go back to school I suppose.

CHRISTINE

But you're not going to send him to that Saint Andrews are you?

EMILY

I'm not sure.

CHRISTINE

It would be a very long drive for you and Aden everyday. And just look at how he's doing now.

EMILY

But I'm not sure if Northside would take him back, not after everything they've said and done.

CHRISTINE

Oh codswallop Emily.

EMILY begins to take out various pill containers and divide the pills out for the day.

EMILY

He's made a lot of progress. But I still don't think the school would accept him. They know who he is and they'll use that against him.

CHRISTINE

That's no way to think Emily. You've gotta hit them over the head

a few times. Get rough with them. They'll come around. I promise.

EMILY

Aden!

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

ADEN turns his head toward EMILY. He scrambles off the couch and trots over to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

ADEN walks over to the counter and stares at the pills on it. EMILY RUMMAGES in the fridge and grabs a pudding cup.

ADEN

All?

EMILY

Yes sweetie. All of them.

EMILY sets the pudding cup on the counter. She takes the lid off. She begins mashing the pills into pieces with the back of a spoon and scooping the pills into the cup.

ADEN

I can do it.

EMILY

Alright.

EMILY gives ADEN a spoon and a small pill. ADEN pushes down on the counter and the pill breaks in two.

EMILY

Good job Aden!

ADEN smiles and grabs another pill to cut up.

EMILY

I'm not sure if I even want Aden to go back to that school.

CHRISTINE

Of course you want him to go back.

EMILY takes all of the pills, puts them in the pudding, stirs, and gives the cup to ADEN. ADEN takes it and a spoon and runs back to the living room.

DR. BENNETT (OS)

Go back where?

DR. BENNETT walks into the kitchen.

EMILY

Aden's old school.

DR. BENNETT

I'm going to have to agree with your mother on this one, Emily. It's best for Aden to have structure in his life even with all of his progress. Change too much and he might regress. He's done so well. Besides, you're good at screaming and getting your way. Why stop now?

ADEN (OS)

Mom! Mom! School!

EMILY, CHRISTINE, AND DR. BENNETT leave the kitchen to look at the TV.

INT. EMILY'S LIVING ROOM. DAY

On the television screen, a TV REPORTER and TRISHA are standing outside of Northside Elementary. EMILY grabs the remote and turns the volume UP.

TV REPORTER

And what made you decide to set up this new scholarship fund?

TRISHA

Well, when the school board contacted me about closing the E-L-P programs in our public schools I was devastated! All of those poor children would have to travel hours to schools in other counties! So me and all the other P-T-A moms got together and raised enough money to re-start E-L-P classes right here at Northside Elementary.

TV REPORTER

And do you have any students signed up for this new class?

TRISHA

Yes we do. This year we had to send one very special student, Aden Campbell, home after the school board was no longer able to fund his special needs.

EMILY gapes in shock.

TRISHA

So this fund is dedicated to that special little boy whom we all love here at Northside Elementary. Northside Elementary is going to make sure that Aden will remain here with us. In his own E-L-P class of course. We're setting an example for all other schools that even with a disability, every child is still important.

TV REPORTER

Thank you very much Trisha. For more information or to give to the scholarship fund please call the number listed at the bottom of the screen—

EMILY

(over TV REPORTER)

That Bitch! She's not going to let Aden into any regular classes if it kills her!

TV REPORTER

or join Trisha this Monday for the school's weekly P-T-A meeting.

CHRISTINE

Well why don't you just tell her yourself?

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA. DAY

TRISHA and the P-T-A moms are all sitting in the school cafeteria. TRISHA is standing at the front behind a wooden podium, holding a gavel. About two dozen women are sitting in folding chairs in front of the podium all CHATTERING about noting serious. Their voices sound SHRILL and FAKE. Everyone is wearing soccer mom clothing and bright colors.

TRISHA CLEARS her throat and GENTLY BANGS her gavel on the podium.

TRISHA

Ladies! Ladies! It's time to get started.

The CHATTERING dies down to only some RUSTLING of blouses and skirts.

TRISHA

Thank you ladies. I would like to ask Marcia to open the floor with a

fundraiser update.

MARCIA stands up and addresses the group.

MARCIA

So far we've been able to raise four thousand and eighty-three dollars for the E-L-P scholarship!

POLITE APPLAUSE follows.

MARCIA

And now that TRISHA has been on the news, we're sure to get even more donations by the beginning of next school year.

POLITE APPLAUSE and CHEERS again.

TRISHA

Thank you Marcia. And now let's move on to getting the school ready for September.

The cafeteria doors CREAK open as EMILY and ADEN walk in the room.

TRISHA

Oh Emily! It's so nice to see you again! Everyone, this is Aden, the special little boy who will be receiving our scholarship this year.

The women at the meeting all stand up and CLAP.

EMILY

We're not here for your scholarship.

TRISHA

Oh Emily, there's no need to be so modest. We did all of this fund raising for Aden.

EMILY

He won't be needing it, will you sweetie?

ADEN

No, thank you.

TRISHA gasps. The other moms look around confused and begin to WHISPER.

TRISHA

Why Aden. When did, how did he?

EMILY walks down the aisle of seats to an empty one near the front.

EMILY

Aden's actually pretty smart, did you know that Trisha? And I'd like to think I'm pretty smart too. Tell me Trisha, just why did you decide to restart the E-L-P program here?

TRISHA

Well I, um...

EMILY

Do you think it had anything to do with all of the media coverage Aden's been getting?

TRISHA

Of course not Trisha, don't be so silly.

EMILY

Really Trisha? Because I'd like to think that you have Aden's best interests at heart, but I'm not so sure about that.

TRISHA looks on horrified.

EMILY

It turns out that he's been learning this whole time. Just couldn't get the words out. But now that's all over. Aden won't be needing the scholarship, because he will be returning to Northside Elementary this year on his own.

TRISHA

And why is that? Aden is still far behind the other students here. An E-L-P class for him would be just fine.

EMILY

But it's not what I want for Aden. I want this school. I want a normal life for Aden. Now that he's beginning to talk, you'll see that he is just as smart as any of your children. You just didn't know it.

And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to be a P-T-A mom too.

TRISHA

Well then. Um alright. But it won't get past Principle Andrews. You can be sure of that. Aden will be just fine in his own E-L-P class.

EMILY

No he won't!

TRISHA

He would just hurt the learning environment of every other student here at Northside Elementary. He's different Emily! He's just different!

EMILY

We'll just have to see about that won't we Trisha? After all, you only want what's best for Aden right?

TRISHA

Of course.

EMILY

Aden. Why don't you go outside and play?

ADEN.

Okay.

ADEN hops off his chair and half-runs, half-jogs out of the cafeteria, his sneakers SQUEAKING on the floor. TRISHA attempts to readjust herself. Hair flyaway, heart pounding, and nerves unraveled, she picks up her gavel again.

TRISHA

Well ladies.

EXT. PLAYGROUND. DAY

ADEN climbs up one of the branches of the oak tree. All around him are other children YELLING, LAUGHING, and having a good time. There are SQUEAKS in the air from the playground equipment. Some mothers are on the outskirts of the playground, CALLING to their children.

ADEN sits on a large branch near the jungle gym set. Children run past him, STOMPING on the plastic playground.

ASHLEY walks up to the bottom of the tree and looks up at

ADEN.

ASHLEY

Hi.

ADEN doesn't respond. ASHLEY tries to climb up the trunk but is too small. She finally manages to climb up and sit next to him. ADEN scooches a bit away from her and looks back at the tree.

ASHLEY

I'm Ashley. What's your name?

ADEN

Aden.

ASHLEY

What'cha doing Aden?

ADEN

Sitting.

ASHLEY

Well I know that. But what'cha doing up in a tree?

ADEN

Saying hi.

ASHLEY

To a tree?

ADEN

Yep.

ASHLEY

You're kinda weird Aden. I like you. Do you wanna play?

ADEN shakes his head vigorously no.

ASHLEY

Okay then.

ASHLEY hops off the branch and runs off to another part of the playground. ADEN sits on the branch, swinging his legs. Soon, ASHLEY returns to the base of the tree.

ASHLEY

Are you sad? Cause you look sad.

ADEN looks down briefly, but then looks back at the tree.

ASHLEY

See...

ASHLEY climbs back up the tree, on her own this time, and sits next to him.

ASHLEY

I'm happy.

ASHLEY gives a huge grin.

ASHLEY

And you're sad.

ASHLEY gives a huge frown.

ASHLEY

Why are you so sad?

ADEN

I'm..sad...?

ASHLEY

Look happy, like this.

ASHLEY grins again. Then she frowns. She repeats the cycle several times. ADEN stares at her face moving. He begins to look concerned, then confused, then scared/frustrated. He lets out a huge YELP and covers his ears. He begins to rock back and forth and making unintelligible SOUNDS, as if he's talking to himself.

ASHLEY

What are you doing Aden?

ASHLEY is looking worried.

TRISHA (OS)

Ashley!

ASHLEY jerks her head over as she sees her mother storming through the grass across the playground.

TRISHA

What have you done now Ashley?

TRISHA pulls ASHLEY off of the tree branch and grips her hand tightly.

TRISHA

We do not play with Aden. Do you hear me.

ASHLEY

But why not Mommy?

TRISHA

He's not like you. Do you hear me?

ASHLEY

Why not?

TRISHA

He's just not like you okay?

ASHLEY

But he's my friend.

TRISHA drags ASHLEY away from the jungle gym and toward the parking lot.

TRISHA

You are not to play with Aden again, do you hear me?

ASHLEY continues to try to crane her neck to look at ADEN, but her mother keeps jerking her straight again.

EMILY is now racing over the grass toward ADEN. When she reaches her son, she grabs him in a defensive hug as she watches TRISHA and ASHLEY leave.

TRISHA

You keep your son away from my daughter, do you hear me?

EMILY looks concerned at ADEN and begins to fret and worry.

EMILY

What did she do to you Aden? What did Ashley do to you honey?

ADEN doesn't respond. He looks just as alarmed and confused as he did before. EMILY just stands there hugging and comforting him.

INT. ADEN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

EMILY and ADEN are sitting on ADEN'S bed. They have a small child's notebook on ADEN'S lap. The window is open and a slight breeze RUSTLES the room.

ADEN

The bird. Is. Very. H...H...

EMILY

Happy.

ADEN

Happy. To be out...out.

EMILY

Outside.

ADEN

Outside.

EMILY

That's really good Aden. Did Doctor Bennett ask you to write this?

ADEN

He said write everyday. I write everyday, I'll get really good at it.

EMILY

Yes you will, but it's bedtime now. So let's put that tablet away and get some sleep.

EMILY takes the book from ADEN and saddles her way off the bed. She returns the book to the shelf.

ADEN

Mom.

EMILY

Mhmm.

ADEN

What's happy?

EMILY

Well you know, happy is, when you feel good inside.

ADEN

I know that, but, what is happy?

EMILY

I'm not sure I understand what you're asking Aden.

EMILY sits back down on the bed.

ADEN

Today, Ashley said this was happy.

ADEN makes a ridiculous grin. EMILY laughs.

EMILY

Well that is certainly happy.

ADEN

But how is that happy too?

EMILY

Here, let me show you.

EMILY pulls a small mirror off the dresser and holds it up in front of herself and ADEN.

EMILY

That is what you look like when you're happy. When you feel good inside, your face does this.

EMILY makes the same ridiculous face that ADEN made earlier. ADEN copies the face.

EMILY

So when you see someone doing that, it means they feel happy.

ADEN

And when they do this?

ADEN makes a ridiculous frown.

EMILY

They feel bad inside. They feel sad. It's time for bed now Honey.

EMILY puts the mirror back on the dresser and turns off the light. She is about to leave when...

ADEN

Mom.

EMILY

Yeah Aden.

ADEN scrunches his face up in concentration.

ADEN

Are you happy or sad?

EMILY

I'm happy Aden.

ADEN

Oh yeah, I see your face.

EMILY

Good night Aden.

EMILY quietly SHUTS the door.

ADEN gets out of bed and grabs the mirror. He begins to make happy and sad faces.

ADEN

Happy. Sad. Happy. Sad.

INT. EMILY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

EMILY is on the phone, pacing the floor. The lights are all out except for one lamp. Her FOOTSTEPS mark time on the floor. When the call is picked up she jumps a bit in fright.

EMILY

Hello, Doctor Bennett?

DR. BENNETT (OS)

Yes Emily, what is it?

EMILY

I was just wondering about something that happened to Aden today. I'm a bit worried.

DR. BENNETT (OS)

What happened exactly?

EMILY

Well, it's not that something happened exactly as something...well, didn't happen.

DR. BENNETT (OS)

I'm not sure I follow you.

EMILY

On the playground today Aden became very scared when a girl he knew began to make faces at him.

DR. BENNETT (OS)

What kind of faces?

EMILY

Well, big smiles and frowns. Nothing special or anything, just really big. It scared him.

DR. BENNETT (OS)

Well that's perfectly understandable Emily. Aden hasn't been fully aware of facial expressions for all of his life. He couldn't really tell if someone was happy, or angry, or sad just by looking at them. When he saw the little girl smiling, it probably just sent his brain into overload.

EMILY

And you're sure that was it?

DR. BENNETT (OS)

I'm sure Emily.

EMILY

Are you sure it wasn't some side effect that you hadn't told me about...

DR. BENNETT (OS)

Emily, I can assure you, the drugs that Aden are taking are perfectly safe.

INT. NORTHSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. DAY

A bell is RINGING. Students are running up and down the halls LAUGHING and SCREAMING. Some teachers are roaming the halls chastising students. ADEN is head and shoulders taller than all of the other students and stands out in the crowd. He has a backpack on and is grandly smiling. He's looking at students running past him in the hall.

EMILY (OS)

Aden!

EMILY is making her way through the throng to get to Aden.

EMILY

We need to go to Mister Andrew's office right now.

ADEN

But, school.

EMILY

You'll be going to school today, I promise. We just have to see Mister Andrews first.

EMILY grabs ADEN's hand and pulls him back toward the principle's office.

INT. PRINCIPLE'S OFFICE. DAY

EMILY, ADEN, and DR. BENNETT are sitting opposite of PRINCIPLE ANDREWS. EMILY looks determined. ADEN looks over at her face and copies her expression and gives it to PRINCIPLE ANDREWS.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

So what you're telling me is that

the school board has allowed Aden to come back to this school?

EMILY

That's right. We sent them letters, From myself and Doctor Bennett, explaining the new circumstances. And they didn't see a problem with his returning.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

But is this really what is best for Aden? Think about it, he'll be in classes with kids half as young as he is.

EMILY

He wants to be here, right honey?

ADEN

I want go to school Mister. Please.

DR. BENNETT

Aden's made significant progress in his verbal and writing skills over the past few months.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

But the other kids...

EMILY

Will not lag behind because my son is in their class. He'll learn just as fast as they will.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS RAPS his fingers on his desk and looks out the window. He gets up with a GRUNT and walks over to the window. He notices a frenzy of reporters on the front lawn slowly edging to the window. With a GRUNT, PRINCIPLE ANDREWS pulls the shade down.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

And where am I supposed to put Aden? He's almost twelve.

DR. BENNETT

I recommend starting him out in the 1st grade, just like every student does when they first enter school.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

But the kid's twelve!

DR. BENNETT

And if we find that his progress

exceeds that grade's expectations,
we'll advance him. It's as simple
as that.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

As simple as that?! Can you hear
yourselves? Aden will never be a

good student at this school. He's
just not...not...

DR. BENNETT

I assure you, Aden will do just
fine.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS takes a peak out the window and notices
that the reporters are creeping around the corner now.
PRINCIPLE ANDREWS gives a loud SIGH of defeat.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Very well Miss Campbell, Doctor
Bennett. I'll allow Aden to be here
for now.

EMILY

Oh thank you Mister...

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

But the moment he disrupts a class
or falls behind I'll write a letter
to the school board and have him
placed back in an E-L-P class. Is
that clear?

EMILY

Perfectly.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS sits back down on his chair with a THUMP.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

Have Aden talk to Missus Carter at
the front desk to fill out his
paperwork.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS puts his hand on his temple and shoos
EMILY, ADEN, and DR. BENNETT out of the office with his
other hand.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS takes another peak out the window and
notices that one of the reporters is giving his cameraman a
boost on his shoulders up to a second story window. With
another grunt, PRINCIPLE ANDREWS WHIRLS out of his seat and
STORMS out of the office.

INT. FRONT OFFICE. DAY

EMILY proudly walks up to the receptionist's desk.

EMILY

Aden would like to be registered
for this school year please.

The SECRETARY doesn't even look up to address EMILY.

SECRETARY

You'll need to fill all of this
out.

The SECRETARY slams a tall pile of papers in front of EMILY.

EMILY

All of it? Right now?

SECRETARY

Aden. You'll be in Miss Venning's
class. Room seventeen. Got all
that?

EMILY

Yes.

ADEN

Yes. Thank you.

SECRETARY

Don't mention it.

EMILY begins to adjust ADEN's clothes, hair, and backpack.

EMILY

Now you have fun at school today,
okay Aden?

DR. BENNETT

I'll take him to his classroom.

EMILY

And you be good, do you hear me?

ADEN

Yes.

DR. BENNETT

Better get to class now kid-o.

ADEN

Bye mom.

EMILY

Bye sweetie.

DR. BENNETT and ADEN leave the front office. EMILY turns to stare at all the paperwork. She lets out a sigh and looks around for a pen. She finds one and begins filling out the paperwork.

TRISHA walks in the front office and suddenly stops at the sight of EMILY.

TRISHA

My goodness me. Look who it is!
Don't tell me you're still trying
to get your son registered here?

EMILY

I'm not trying anymore.

TRISHA

Well that's a relief.

EMILY

He's registered.

TRISHA

Well I'll be...Oh Emily, don't be
ridiculous.

EMILY

I'm not.

TRISHA

Well who in the world let him back
into this school?

EMILY

The school board.

TRISHA

Well...well I. Argh! How could you
do such a thing? Aden would be a
lot better off in the new E-L-P
class here. What's going to happen
to the other students who have to
learn with him?

EMILY

Aden's friendly enough. Besides, if
he bites, he's had all of his
shots.

TRISHA

Emily, you're impossible! This is
serious! I have a reasonable worry
about the example your son will set
for all the other impressionable

students! What class did they have
put him in anyway?

INT. MS. VENNING'S CLASSROOM. DAY

ADEN and ASHLEY are sitting next to each other at a table for four. There are six such tables in the room, each with four students sitting at them. The room is colorful and bright. MS. VENNING (mid 40's, sweet natured) is at the blackboard pointing at chalk alphabet letters. The class is reciting them back to her.

CLASS
(in unison)
S. T. U. V. W. X. Y. Z

MS. VENNING
That's very good kids. Now who
would like to come up to the board
and write a few words for me?

The entire class raises their hands in earnest, CALLING OUT to be chosen, except for ADEN. He looks around in confusion.

MS. VENNING
How about you Abby?

Abby (6 yrs, hair in pigtails) eagerly walks up to the board.

ASHLEY leans over to ADEN and cups one of her hands around her mouth.

ASHLEY
(whispering)
You're supposed to raise your hand.

ADEN
Why?

MS. VENNING
Alright Abby. Can you write cat for us please?

ASHLEY
Because then Miss Venning will pick you.

ADEN
Pick me for what?

ASHLEY
To do things.

ADEN

What kind of things?

ASHLEY

All kinds of things.

ADEN

But why would I want to do them?

MS. VENNING

That's very good Abby. Go have a π seat.

ABBY puts down the chalk and skips back to her seat.

ASHLEY

It's what we're supposed to do.

MS. VENNING

Who else would like a shot?

ASHLEY

Just do it!

ADEN quickly shoots up his hand.

MS. VENNING

Aden. Would like to try?

ADEN looks up at the teacher in alarm.

MS. VENNING

Aden?

ASHLEY

Go!

ASHLEY pushes ADEN and he stumbles out of his seat. Hesitantly, and worried, he walks to the front of the classroom. All of the other kids in the class begin to WHISPER to each other, point, and CHUCKLE.

MS. VENNING

Can you write the word tree for me?

ADEN stares at the teacher, then back at the class. ASHLEY gives him a big grin. ADEN gives a smile back. He takes a piece of chalk and moves his hand up to the board.

MS. VENNING

That's right Aden.

ADEN writes out the word tree in not so straight of hand-writing. The chalk SCRATCHES at the board. When he finishes, he looks at MS. VENNING for approval.

MS. VENNING

That's right Aden! Very good!

MS. VENNING smiles at ADEN and ADEN smiles back.

ADEN

You're happy.

MS. VENNING

Yes I am. You did a very good job.
Now go back to your seat and give
someone else a turn.

EXT. PLAYGROUND. DAY

All of the children from MS. VENNING'S class are out on the school playground. ADEN is separate from them, sitting up in his tree, but he is watching them out of the corner of his eye. ASHLEY skips up to the tree and starts to pick flowers. She spies ADEN above her and waves cheerily. ADEN hesitates, then mimics her greeting. ASHLEY picks flowers for a bit longer and then skips off again. ADEN follows her with his gaze.

INT. PRINCIPLE'S OFFICE. DAY

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS and TRISHA are standing in the office concerned. PRINCIPLE ANDREWS is looking out the window at the playground. TRISHA looks extremely cross. She sits erect in a chair, jingling her leg in agitation.

TRISHA

He can't be allowed to do this
Principle Andrews. There have to be
some rules that will put an end to
this nonsense.

PRINCIPLE ANDREWS

I assure you Missus Atwater that
there aren't any school regulations
that prevent a twelve year old
student from attending first grade
classes if that is where his
intelligence level places him.

TRISHA

But you agree about how crazy this
whole thing is?

PRINCIPLE

I do. The camera crews haven't left
this school alone in over a month.

TRISHA

Well can't they be stopped?

PRINCIPLE

Afraid not. They have their own ethical codes that allow for this kind of nonsense. We can't do anything unless they cross onto school property. Something about a sidewalk being free or whatnot.

TRISHA

Preposterous.

PRINCIPLE

As long as the boy doesn't do anything to physically disrupt the classroom in any way I'm afraid there isn't anything that we can do.

TRISHA

Of course he's disrupting the class! I mean look at him, he can't even socialize with the other students. He's setting a bad example for them.

PRINCIPLE

Or teaching diversity. Call it whatever you like Missus Atwater, but the school board will find a way to call it something else.

EXT. PLAYGROUND EDGE. DAY

EMILY and DOCTOR BENNETT are standing on the outside perimeter of the school playground watching ADEN.

ASHLEY has joined ADEN on the tree branch. She's swinging her legs.

DR. BENNETT

He'll learn to socialize with the other kids soon, don't worry. It's all new to him remember.

EMILY

I just want to see him happy Doctor Bennett.

DR. BENNETT

He is Emily, and he will be even more once his social skills begin to level out the playing field. He's never had to interact with other students before and it's a

very different way of living for him.

EMILY

I just want him to be a happy, normal kid for once in his life. And for some reason no one is wanting to give him a chance. They don't even want him here.

DR. BENNETT

The hype will die down after the media forgets about this story and moves on to something else. You just need to focus on getting everything that Aden needs right now.

ASHLEY runs up to EMILY and begins to tug on her sleeve.

EMILY

What is it sweetie?

ASHLEY

Are you Aden's Mommy?

EMILY

Yes. What's wrong?

ASHLEY points to ADEN.

ASHLEY

I don't think he's feeling too well.

EMILY

Why do you say that sweetie?

EMILY gives a worried glance over at ADEN.

ASHLEY

He's really really hot. Like super hot.

EMILY

Aden!

EMILY quickly hops the fence and hurries over to her son. DR. BENNETT is quick to follow behind her.

When EMILY arrives there is a small cluster of students circling him. EMILY pushes them out of the way and gets to her son.

EMILY

Aden! What happened honey? Look at
mommy. Look at me.

ADEN doesn't respond.

EMILY
Somebody get help.

INT. ER ENTRANCE. DAY

ADEN (V.O.)
(over the ER action)
Doctor Bennett said I should write
because people wanna know all about
me. He says I'm special. My mom
calls me special too, but my name
is ADEN. I am 12 years old. I
couldn't write a few months ago.
Dr. Bennett taught me. I can't
write very well, but I'm learning.
I can talk better. I've talked
almost a year now. I like talking.
My mama likes me talking too. I
wanna talk forever.

SLOW MOTION: Several MEDICS wheel a gurney through the
emergency room sliding doors. The wheel's SQUEAK is musical,
like a single held note. ADEN (12 yrs, an autistic boy with
youthful features) is lying unconscious, sweating profusely.
His BREATHING is labored. One NURSE is giving him oxygen.
Her squeezing of the oxygen bag is RHYTHMIC. ADEN's mother
EMILY (late 30's, her features aged from worry and stress)
runs in after them, but is stopped by a nurse who grabs her.
EMILY breaks down on the floor.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY. DAY

The MEDICS fly down the hall pushing the gurney. One DOCTOR
YELLS are MUFFLED. He says something to the NURSE, who
breaks off from the group and runs down another hall.

INT. ER ROOM. DAY

The MEDICS begin piling bags of ice around ADEN. The ice
CRACKLES and SPITS as it melts. One NURSE is checking a
heart monitor that ADEN is hooked up to. His heartbeat is
erratic.

END OF V.O.

Suddenly, the monitor shows that his heart has stopped. The
HEAD DOCTOR pushes through the other MEDICS and brings a
defibrillator. He presses down on ADEN's chest and ADEN's
body jumps once and THUDS back on the table. Nothing
changes. The HEAD DOCTOR tries again and ADEN's body jumps

and THUDS. Nothing. The HEAD DOCTOR tries for a third time. As ADEN's body jumps again and THUDS, CU on ADEN's eyes as they spring wide open.

Blinding white light takes over the screen.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY. DAY

EMILY is pacing the hallway outside of a bunch of rooms. She's worried beyond belief. A DOCTOR opens a door nearby and comes out, softly CLOSING it behind him. EMILY sees him and stares, unable to speak, asking him questions with her eyes.

DOCTOR

I wish I had better news for you Emily. We're not sure what caused him to fall in the first place, but he's suffered a minor concussion and a broken wrist. His temperature is still hovering around a hundred and three. Beyond that there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with him, but strangely, he's not responding. We're not sure what's causing it, but we're running several tests to try and figure it out. It might be neurological, it might be physical, we're just not sure yet.

EMILY still doesn't speak.

DOCTOR

Would you like to see him?

EMILY gives a slight nod and slowly shuffles into the room that the DOCTOR just left.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY

The first thing that EMILY notices is how dark the room is. The blinds are pulled down and the lights are off. It's absolutely still in the room, with only a slight MUFFLED sound of hospital activity outside the room. EMILY slowly walks over to the bed that ADEN is sleeping on. She pulls up a nearby chair and sits down right next to the bed. She begins to brush his hair slowly out of his face and begins to QUIETLY sob. She looks at the IV sticking out of his hand and the machines surrounding him.

EMILY

What's going on with my Baby?

EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY

Several reporters are clustered around the entrance of the hospital with their news cameras and crews. Lots of NOISE and CONFUSION as several reporters are TALKING AT ONCE.

REPORTER #1

Doctors are still unsure as to why Aden suddenly collapsed in the school's playground yesterday afternoon.

REPORTER #2

Rumors are flying about the potential side effects of the new drugs. Although doctors have neither confirmed nor denied such side effects as high fevers and sudden loss of motor control, the public is concerned.

REPORTER #3

Were doctors too eager to try such a new drug on a minor? We can only guess at this point what harm the drug has caused to Aden Campbell.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION. DAY

EMILY and BETTY are both peeking out of some blinds, looking at the reporters.

EMILY

They don't seem to be leaving.

BETTY

Child they won't leave until they've had a good long talk with you about how you're being a terrible mother and all that rubbish.

EMILY

Do you think I am?

BETTY

Lord I don't think I've ever seen no better mother than you are to that boy Emily. They's just all crazy. Ain't got nothing better to do than to harass a mother and her son.

EMILY

Well, looks like we're here for a while then.

BETTY

Would you like some coffee Emily?

EMILY nods.

BETTY

Thought so.

BETTY hurries out of the reception area on a mission.

CHRISTINE comes barging into the reception area from the front door, feet SLAPPING the floor. It looks like she's almost jumped over the reporters to get in.

CHRISTINE

Lord have mercy Emily.

EMILY

They didn't say anything to you did they?

CHRISTINE

Thank goodness no. They don't seem to care about me, probably don't know who I am anyway. It's for the best though, got me in here didn't it?

EMILY nods dejectedly.

CHRISTINE

How's Aden doing?

EMILY doesn't respond. She returns her attention to the reporters outside.

CHRISTINE

Doctors' said how long?

EMILY shakes her head dejectedly. CHRISTINE holds her daughter close.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION. NIGHT

MUSIC CUE

Through a window reporters can still be seen on the front lawn. There are now floodlights and camera lights covering the front lawn and parking lot. A low RUMBLE from their conversations can be heard inside the hospital. The reception room itself is dimly lit with no activity.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT

ADEN is asleep in his bed, hooked up to an IV. EMILY and CHRISTINE are asleep on nearby chairs. Their clothes are rustled. There are several empty pudding cups on nearby tables and chairs.

INT. DR. BENNETT'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

DR. BENNETT sits at his desk, hands raking through his hair. Two F-D-A OFFICIALS are sitting in chairs on the other side of his desk. Their serious looks mean business. FDA OFFICIAL #1 opens his briefcase and pulls out several sheaves of paper. He leafs through them, pulls out one stapled bunch, and hands them to DR. BENNETT. DR. BENNETT takes the packet and begins to read.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY

REPORTERS are still swarming outside the hospital. The glares from all the extra lighting equipment has turned everything a glaring orange.

REPORTER #1

Reports confirm that the drugs are now under investigation by the Food and Drug Administration. We are told that doctors are currently talking to F-D-A officials, trying to figure out what went wrong for Aden Campbell.

INT. DR. BENNETT'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

DR. BENNETT is still reading the packet of papers. The two FDA OFFICIALS haven't moved.

FDA OFFICIAL #1

Do you understand everything?

DR. BENNETT

I think so.

FDA OFFICIAL #2

Any questions?

DR. BENNETT

What happens next?

FDA OFFICIAL #2

Once you've signed that agreement, it gives us permission to start looking into the allegations being levied against you and this hospital.

FDA OFFICIAL #1
 No charges have been filed as of
 yet. This is just a preliminary
 investigation.

DR. BENNETT
 Investigation. Right.

FDA OFFICIAL #1
 That's right. Anything else?

DR. BENNETT shakes his head no, sighs, and then returns his
 attention to the paper packet.

FDA OFFICIAL #1
 We appreciate your time Dr. Bennett

The two FDA OFFICIALS stand up and shake DR. BENNETT'S hand.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT

ADEN, EMILY, and CHRISTINE are still asleep in the room.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY. DAY

DR. BENNETT looks in on the sleeping family through the
 room's door window. He shakes his head.

O.S. PHONE DIAL TONE

JOHN (OS)
 Hey Michael. What's up?

DR. BENNETT (OS)
 I'm not sure how to say this.

JOHN (OS)
 Say what Michael?

DR. BENNETT starts walking down the hall away from the
 hospital room.

DR. BENNETT (OS)
 Your drug isn't working.

JOHN (OS)
 How so?

DR. BENNETT
 Aden's here.

JOHN (OS)
 In the hospital?

INT. DR. BENNETT'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

DR. BENNETT stares out his window at the night sky.

DR. BENNETT

Yeah.

JOHN (OS)

What's going on?

DR. BENNETT

He's stable now, we think. We're still running tests on what actually went wrong today.

DR. BENNETT sits down in his chair.

JOHN (OS)

What do you think our next step should be?

DR. BENNETT takes his head in his hand and begins to shake.

FADE OUT MUSIC

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY

ADEN is still sleeping in his hospital bed. EMILY and CHRISTINE are trying to keep busy. The television is on without any sound. EMILY tries to watch it, but her attention isn't kept for very long. CHRISTINE has a magazine in her hands, but the idle shuffling indicates she's not paying attention either.

DR. BENNETT opens the hospital door. The sudden NOISE startles the two women. They immediately jump out of their chairs and eagerly look at DR. BENNETT.

DR. BENNETT

Please, sit back down.

EMILY and CHRISTINE slowly do so. DR. BENNETT takes a seat too, pulling his chair close.

DR. BENNETT

I've been up all night calling every doctor that I know trying to figure out what might be best for Aden. All we know for sure is that we don't know anything at all. Aden appears stable, but he's not responding. I'm assuming he hasn't woken up yet this morning?

EMILY shakes her head no.

DR. BENNETT

I figured as much. We've run several brain scans without any results either. I'm afraid we just haven't seen this before.

CHRISTINE

Then what are we supposed to do now?

CHRISTINE becomes agitated, raising her voice and leaning toward DR. BENNETT, hands flying as he gestures her frustration.

CHRISTINE

Are you saying that there's nothing we can do? Are we just supposed to give up? After everything you promised us we're just supposed to give up?

DR. BENNETT

Not yet. I've been going over Aden's test data and I think, although it's just a hunch, that his problem is neurological, regardless of what the scan results show. Something's been triggered in his brain that's tuned him out to the world. We can't know for sure, but that's what I've suggested.

CHRISTINE

Well if he's been shut off there's gotta be a way to turn him back on right?

DR. BENNETT

Again, we can't know for certain. But, my colleagues and I have come to the conclusion that there's one potential solution.

CHRISTINE

And that is?

DR. BENNETT

We put Aden into a medically induced coma.

At this EMILY finally shows some emotion: shock and fear.

DR. BENNETT

We've done this with several other

patients in the past. Aden would be given a controlled dose of barbiturates that would put him in a coma-like state. The theory is that by inducing a coma, the brain has a chance to rework itself back to normal.

CHRISTINE

In theory?

DR. BENNETT

We don't have consistent data to support it.

CHRISTINE

So if it doesn't work you can just take Aden out of the coma?

DR. BENNETT

Yes we can, but unfortunately, if we did have to take Aden out of the coma, there isn't anything else I can do for him.

CHRISTINE

Good Lord.

DR. BENNETT

After we induce a coma, it's up to Aden to come out of it. There, of course, is always the chance that something will go wrong and Aden won't wake up again. We've...never tried this with a patient like Aden. We can't know what the barbiturates will do.

EMILY slowly rises from her chair and walks over to ADEN'S bed. She sits down at his side and starts to caress his hair. She looks imploringly at her son.

DR. BENNETT

Emily, you have the final word on this matter. There are definite risks involved, but it's up to you whether or not we should go through with this.

CHRISTINE

Emily?

EMILY doesn't respond. It's as if she's stopped listening to the conversation. All of her focus is on ADEN.

DR. BENNETT
I'll give you some time to think it
over Emily.

DR. BENNETT gets up to leave. He opens the door and starts
to walk out.

EMILY (OS)
Wait.

DR. BENNETT walks back into the room. He looks over at
EMILY. CHRISTINE does as well.

EMILY takes a moment and a BREATH. She looks up at the
doctor, then down at her son.

EMILY
Okay.

DR. BENNETT
Okay?

EMILY
(looking at ADEN)
Okay.

MUSIC CUE

EXT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

REPORTERS are still camped out around the front of the
hospital. There's a somber air about them. It doesn't feel
or sound like a circus anymore. Lights are dimmer and
there's an EERIE HUSH surrounding them.

REPORTER #1
It's been two days since doctors
put Aden Campbell into a medically
induced coma. Doctors are unsure if
this radical approach...

REPORTER #2
Aden's mother Emily Campbell gave
the okay to doctors to perform what
looks like Aden's only hope.
Doctors are unsure if the induced
coma will help Aden's condition,
but they are giving...

REPORTER #3
Doctors are giving Aden three days
until they begin to decrease the
barbiturates used to keep Aden in a
coma-like state. After that, we can

only guess what will be next for
Aden.

Camera pans to reveal a large group of townspeople holding a candle vigil near the reporters. There are many elementary-age students placing candles, cards, and other things underneath a window. TRISHA is there with her daughter ASHLEY. TRISHA leads her daughter up to the window where ASHLEY places a flower.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT

EMILY and CHRISTINE are looking down at the candlelight vigil from ADEN'S hospital window. The glow of the candles and lights bounces around the room.

CHRISTINE

Just one more day sweetie. One more
day.

CHRISTINE gently wraps her arms around EMILY. The both continue to stare out into the crowd.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY

EMILY and CHRISTINE are still watching the group outside. They haven't moved an inch from the previous night. O.S., a door slowly SWINGS open. HEAVY FOOTSTEPS come toward the two women.

DR. BENNETT appears at EMILY'S side.

DR. BENNETT

Are you ready?

EMILY gives out a long and deep BREATH.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY-MONTAGE

Throughout the montage, EMILY restlessly moves around the room.

NURSES comes in several times and fiddle with the I.V., reducing the amount of drugs.

Finally, EMILY makes her way to ADEN'S bed and falls asleep next to her son. She's holding him close to her.

FADE OUT MUSIC

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT

We view the room through the door's window.

ADEN still appears to be asleep. EMILY is wide awake,

stroking her son's hair.

INT. HOSPITAL HALL. NIGHT

DR. BENNETT and CHRISTINE are standing outside of ADEN'S room, looking in through the window.

CHRISTINE

Have they stopped the drugs yet?

DR. BENNETT nods.

CHRISTINE looks back through the window.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT

CU of EMILY and ADEN. EMILY is talking to ADEN, even though she knows he won't answer back. Like how a parent talks to her kid even though she knows he's asleep.

EMILY

And we're gonna sit down in the sand and build sandcastles. We'll wait until the tide comes in and watch it wash the castle away. We'll eat ice cream and wake up late and do so many things. I promise Baby, I promise. You just have to wake up Honey. I really want you to wake up Honey. I miss you Sweetie. I'm never gonna let go of you, I promise. You just have to wake up for me.

EMILY breaks down into barely audible SOBS. The tears are streaming and she's shaking uncontrollably. She grabs ADEN close and starts to cry into his back.

EMILY

(muffled)

I love you Aden.

SILENCE for a few seconds, except for her sobs, then...

ADEN

I love you Mom.

EMILY continues to sob, not realizing that her son has actually talked. Then she slowly pulls her head up and looks over at ADEN. His eyes aren't open, but once she moves, he gets more comfortable in her arms. EMILY covers her mouth and begins to CRY uncontrollably.

SLOW ZOOM OUT.

ADEN (O.S)

My name is Aden Campbell. Doctor Bennett told me that I should write as much as I can because people will wanna know all about me. My mom likes that I'm writing now too, so I write for her. She tells me every day how much she loves me. She likes to hear me say I love you too. It's my favorite thing to say.

FADE TO BLACK

Reflective Essay

I can't take all the credit for how a story and its characters develop and evolve. Because in the end, if it's a great story, the characters begin to take over, basically telling me what they want to do next. They begin arguing with each other, revealing their deepest fears to me, and writing themselves into both metaphorical and physical corners. I lose control around the second act and just hang on for the ride. That's exactly what happened toward the end of *A Mother's Love*. I couldn't stop Aden from falling out of that tree, that's just what ended up happening.

Every screenplay, of course, begins with a blank piece of paper and that stupid, mocking, blinking cursor. At this point in the writing process the characters don't exist yet. And since they don't exist, it's up to the writer to begin the conversation, which is very tough for me. Just like in a relationship, I worry about saying the wrong thing. What if I start writing and ten pages in I find out that the story isn't going anywhere? This fear results in a drawn-out staring contest between the computer and me.

I knew that I wanted to write a drama, because I had already written a feature-length family comedy. At the time I was very interested in reading books and articles on neuroplasticity. According to new theories and research, scientists now see the brain as constantly changing and evolving its physiological structure; it can actually heal and repair itself, even after severe brain damage. Neuroplasticity was revolutionizing the sciences and psychology, and I was hooked on miracle stories about blind people who

could finally see and deaf people who could finally hear. The research made it sound as if anything was possible.

Scientists were at the same time testing out the theory that there might be a link between a certain part of the brain, the locus coeruleus, and autistic symptoms. This area of the brain controls a person's attention, fight-or-flight response, and surprisingly, fevers. I remembered reading stories and blog posts by parents claiming that, when their autistic child were suffering high fevers of over a hundred-and-one degrees, their children would magically start speaking, in complete and grammatically correct sentences. It was as if the child had been learning all along, but something in the brain was preventing him or her from communicating this knowledge.

I knew that I wanted to write a screenplay that dealt with both neuroplasticity and the locus coeruleus, but I didn't understand these topics nearly well enough to write an in-depth scientific article on the matter. I didn't understand the complexities and specifics about how the brain works, I just knew that it was an interesting topic. What's great about writing Hollywood screenplays though is that I don't have to explain how everything works. The audience needs just enough information to know that, for instance, scientists have created a cure for autism. They don't need to know how the drug actually works, they'll just believe that it does.

This realization was the first important step in being able to write *A Mother's Love*. I now had an inciting action that would kick-start the

screenplay writing process and get me one step closer to creating autonomous characters. I planned to write about a miracle cure for autism.

It took a while for me to realize that this would be an excellent topic for a dramatic screenplay. Why not pose a simple what-if hypothetical and see what happens? What if there was a cure for autism? What if a child who had never talked all of a sudden could? What if the drug hadn't been thoroughly tested yet? With all the new research out there, a cure for autism isn't that far-fetched of an idea. The news media has been giving autism a good bit of attention recently, and I'm sure I'm not the only one asking these questions anymore.

When I began writing *A Mother's Love*, I didn't have answers to these what-if questions. I did know that, by the end of the writing process, I would have one possible scenario fleshed out. There are, however, hundreds of thousands of ways that this story and its characters could have developed. I didn't, however, want *A Mother's Love* to give satisfactory answers to my what-if questions. I wanted to instead open a dialogue between the reader and myself about the many facets of autism that the news media and general public are currently silent about. Are doctors over-medicating children without considering the potential future side effects? Is it best to treat autism with drugs, homeopathic remedies, or special diets? How far should a mother go to ensure her child's happiness and acceptance in his or her peer group? Every year the percentage of children born with autism is increasing according to medical reports and news coverage, but what are we doing to

accommodate these children? The facets listed above boil down to the main themes of *A Mother's Love*.

Theme Question #1: Are doctors overprescribing medication to children and adults, especially prescriptions meant to treat psychological illnesses?

At the beginning of *A Mother's Love*, I envisioned Aden's room to be filled with pill bottles, ointments, machines, and other contraptions that Emily has procured over the years. Aden's room is the audience's first glance into the Campbell's everyday life; it is meant to establish Emily as a woman who buys the latest "miracle" cure, whether or not the drug has any medical testing to back it up. This room, coupled with Emily's immediate agreement to try Doctor Bennett's new drug, mirrors the general public's naïveté about what they see on TV and read about online. If it's on TV it must be true. If my doctor says it will work it must be true. Many people don't stop to think about the consequences of their actions; they just want a quick solution to their problems.

Theme Question #2: What is the best treatment for autism: prescription drugs, homeopathic remedies, special diets, or something else?

Although I do not focus a lot on this theme, it is apparent in the opening shot of Aden's bedroom. Emily has tried many drugs, diets, etc, but all to no effect. This does not mean that some medications or special diets on the market do not have a positive or negative effect on autistic symptoms. I

just wanted to point to how there are very few all-encompassing plans for treating autism. Those who rally behind medication agree that diets can help, but they claim that the main contributor is the drug itself. Conversely, many dieticians who support special diets for autistic children do not believe in the use of medication at all. Emily embraces an all-encompassing plan to treat Aden's autism, but because she has very little knowledge about what she is giving Aden and about Aden's condition itself, she cannot maximize the potential of all that is out there on the current market.

Theme Question #3: How far should a mother go to ensure her child's happiness and acceptance in the world?

This is probably the most morally ambiguous question of the three themes because it is based on a set of morals, and since no one views the world in exactly the same way, I could never even begin to answer this question for anyone other than myself. Of course I have my own personal opinions on the topic, but that doesn't mean that someone else will read this screenplay and think differently than I do. Some readers will agree with Emily's actions, some will disagree, and many will pick through her personality traits and actions and choose what they like and dislike piecemeal.

For Emily, it is her responsibility as a mother to make sure that her child is as "normal" as possible. Of course, no one can define what "normal" is, but for Emily, it is simply having Aden accepted by both his peer group and the staff at his school. A normal life is being able to go to regular school

classes and being treated the same way as everyone else. She eagerly chose to try the new medication because she saw it as a way to obtain all of this for her son. Readers may view her actions as amoral and terrible. Why would a mother ever do that to her child? Before you come to your own conclusions, at least look at the situation through Emily's eyes. It may not seem right to you, but to Emily, it's what she has to do.

Because *A Mother's Love* focuses on how family and society interact with those in the autistic spectrum, I didn't want to focus the story on just Aden and his condition. Instead, I chose to focus on Aden's mother Emily, and everything that she goes through in helping her son. She embodies every mother that cares for her child. She only wants what she thinks is best for him, and just like every mother, Emily doesn't always make the smartest and most logical decisions.

I knew that I wanted to write about a strong female character. There has been a growing trend in Hollywood to write screenplays about strong female leads, but in many of these stories the woman's struggle is against a masculine society. The obstacles that she has to overcome are predominantly from male characters in her environment. I didn't want to write just another screenplay about a woman conquering her male counterparts. Emily has to overcome herself and her own ways of dealing with the world around her, not any men around her. Besides Aden, there are only two other male characters: Doctor Bennett and Principle Andrews. And even though

Principle Andrews is against everything that Emily is fighting for, it has nothing to do with the fact that she's a woman. Plus, it's really Trisha who fights the hardest against Emily, not Principle Andrews.

In a way, Emily represents how I would probably deal with a similar situation. I've never been a mother, but I do know that I can't stand not having the answers to life's hardest questions. I'm a bit neurotic too, and I find that doing something, even if I don't know much about it, is better than doing nothing at all. This is the main reason why I chose to write from a woman's perspective instead of a man's. I'm much more familiar with how the female brain works and, let's face it, I have no idea how the male brain even functions sometimes. I can't begin to imagine how a single father would handle a similar situation, although I know that there are plenty of men out there doing exactly that. The story, in my opinion, became more believable when I added a lot of myself into it.

Aden was more difficult for me to conceptualize as a multi-dimensional character. Once the story kicked off into high gear, he was perfectly able to direct the story where he wanted it to go, but I first had to gently push him in the right direction. But what was the right direction? I wasn't sure. There are plenty of stereotypes in the media about what it is to be autistic. And it seems as if there's a new documentary every week on Netflix that tells the story someone on the autistic spectrum. I wanted to do justice to Aden's character. I didn't want him to be flat. I wanted him to be a multi-dimensional and relatable character, even if he does have autism.

A few years back, I took a government job working for the Pinellas Association for Retarded Children, or PARC. Here I had the incredible opportunity to take care of mentally and physically disabled children and adults, and many of them were autistic.. Even though most of them couldn't talk, they had their own ways of getting my attention and telling me what they wanted to do. My favorite kid, I'll call him Sam since I'm not allowed to disclose his actual name, was one of the happiest kids I had ever met. Not only was he autistic, but paraplegic and mentally retarded too. And yet he was, like I said, one of the happiest kids I had ever met. He had his favorite videos and favorite toys. He loved being outside and he especially loved his cat.

I knew that if I could imagine Aden to be even remotely similar to Sam, I would have created a character that my audience would fall head over heels for, regardless of his mental condition. And that's how I first developed Aden's character. I just imagined what Sam would do whenever I was stuck writing about Aden and presto, no more writer's block!

In order for the miracle cure to be as miraculous as it was, I knew that Aden could neither talk at the beginning of the story nor interact with those around him on a "normal" social level. But I didn't want him too far down the spectrum to make him un-relatable to the audience. I wanted to present a happily curious child that the audience could fall in love with the moment they met him. So even though Aden never looked into his mother's eyes until the "miracle cure" kicked in, he certainly loved his pudding and cartoons, just

like any boy his age. He's also a very vulnerable character, which allows readers to envision themselves as his protector. They're now invested in Aden's happiness and well-being.

I based Trisha Atwater's character on Hilly Holbrook from *The Help*. Simply put, I loved the character (not what she represented, but how she was able to make me so furious). And even though I knew I could never do the character of Trisha as much justice as Kathryn Stockett did for Hilly, I really wanted to try. When one of my friends read the rough draft of *A Mother's Love*, he suggested that I tone down Trisha's character. He thought that she came off as too aggressive, overbearing, and almost unreal. I did agree with him at first, until I reread the script and found that I liked Trisha just the way she was. I especially liked how she says one thing and does something else entirely, without realizing the irony of her actions.

At first, I didn't know quite where to go with her character. After her first two scenes, I wasn't sure if I even needed her anymore. But just like all of my other characters, she found a way to tell me what she wanted to do too. The fundraising scholarship was all her idea. Once I began asking myself, "What would Trisha do?" I found her hitting me over the head with this idea. That was her fundraising for the starving children in Africa (Hilly reference). Even though she didn't want anything to do with Aden, she saw nothing wrong in setting up a scholarship fund for autistic children.

Doctor Bennett's character was the difficult character for me to write because I didn't have the slightest idea about being a medical professional. I

didn't know the jargon or any fancy disease names in Latin. One of my readers pointed out to me that in my first draft his character wasn't quite believable. He needed to come off as more knowledgeable, so that the audience understood why Emily trusted her son into his care. He had everything going against him, good looking, young, and charismatic, unfortunately, not trustable as a medical professional.

Because of this, I did decide to elaborate more on Bennett's medical explanations about both the "miracle cure" and the medically induced coma. I knew that I would never be able write a completely believable doctor, solely because I didn't have much experience with those types of characters. So I hope that, at least to the readers, the addition of medical jargon adds to Doctor Bennett's overall credibility, because otherwise readers will think that Emily was crazy to ever trust him with Aden's safe being.

As I mentioned earlier, my characters tend to write themselves into corners. For Aden, he wrote himself into an actual corner when he decided to fall out of that tree. It was here that I had already decided that the medication was going to adversely affect Aden's help, but I didn't even know that his concussion would be so severe. There I was, with a kid in a hospital bed with a fever over one hundred who wasn't responding to anything in the outside world. I was screwed! Just like with the script before this, my characters wrote themselves into a corner that I couldn't get them out of. For over two weeks I kept trying to come up with a solution to Aden's medical problem.

Yes A Mother's Love is a fictional story, but I had to make his recovery seem believable. I couldn't just magically cure him. There had to be at least a bit of science to it all.

So I racked my brain and I racked by advisor's brain. No luck. I also decided to rack my mother's brain as well. I had a feeling that she wouldn't be able to come up with any ideas, but she likes to feel useful from time to time so I figured I'd at least let her try. Of course she didn't come up with any plausible solutions. She just directed me to other movies whose plots had nothing to do with what I was writing about. So Aden remained in that hospital bed for weeks while the FDA's investigation of Doctor Bennett was paused. Out of all the times I would have liked my characters to tell me what to write next, they were silent on all fronts.

Then a weekly web chat with my parents led to an unexpected answer. My mom had wrapped up her list of movies that I should watch for inspiration and we had moved on to other topics. I don't remember what we were even discussing but she started talking about medically induced comas. And that's when I became eerily silent. I think I even scared my mother a bit. She had solved Aden's dilemma without even knowing it!

As I've mentioned earlier, I didn't have to go into a lengthy discussion of what a medically induced coma is for my readers to understand what it was all about. I might have even stretched the truth about what a medically induced coma is used for. But as long as the idea sounded plausible to readers, that was good enough for me. The procedure remained true to fact:

doctors induce a coma in patients with brain trauma with barbiturates in order to let the brain heal itself. After a few days or weeks, doctors will then begin to decrease the barbiturate dosage until the patient is out of his or her coma. And who knows, maybe medically induced comas will play a role in eliminating autism. The brain is a constantly changing organ that is constantly surprising doctors and researchers.

To summarize my creative process from beginning to end:

- I bang my head against a computer for a while
- I decide to write about whatever I'm passionate about at the moment.
- I draw inspiration for my characters from my own personal life.
- My characters take over the story for a while.
- My characters write themselves into a corner and I can't get them out
- I have an epiphany that saves their lives

There are writers who jot down a million ideas on sticky notes and plaster their office. There are writers who create an entire outline, complete with plot details and dialogue. I take a more organic approach to writing. I can't come up with an entire story before I actually write it all down. Not only does this make it difficult for the story to develop naturally, but also by the time I've come up with an entire story I don't have any more motivation to keep writing about it. That's why I like to keep myself guessing through the entire process. That way, I'm never bored with what I'm writing about and I'm flipping pages just like a reader who's dying to know what happens next.

Summary of Capstone Project

A Mother's Love is a seventy-one-page feature-length dramatic screenplay. If produced, the final film's length would be approximately ninety minutes, the current precedent for the running time of Hollywood films. I wrote the script using Celtx, a pre-production freeware that automatically formats scene headings, descriptions and dialogue. The script contains some musical cues, but most of the film's score would be written for the work.

A Mother's Love is set in an average suburban American town in the twenty-first century. Emily, a young mother whose fifteen year old son Aden has autism. Aden's condition is about in the middle on the autism spectrum. He is unable to speak and struggles with interpersonal skills. Emily has tried every treatment on the market, from prescription pills to special diets to homeopathic remedies. All Emily wants is a normal life for herself and her son.

Because of funding cuts, Aden's school principle and PTA decide to cut the school's ELP class. This means that Aden will have to be bussed to a school district far away from his home. Instead of enrolling him, Emily decides to keep her son at home in the hopes that she can convince the school to accept Aden into the regular class.

When Emily hears of a new up-and-coming doctor, she takes Aden to see him. Doctor Bennett prescribes Aden a new pill that has yet to be approved by the FDA. The pill works miracles, allowing Aden to gradually

learn to speak and interact with other children and adults. Doctor Bennett even suggests re-enrolling Aden in his old elementary school. The principle and PTA are against this idea, but because Aden's story has become a local news headline, they do not dare turn him away.

Unbeknownst to Doctor Bennett, the drug has several life-threatening side effects. Aden's body has such a negative reaction to the drug that he ends up in the hospital. His body does not respond to any traditional treatments. Emily has to decide if she is willing for doctors to try a medically induced coma. The procedure could, if unsuccessful, cause severe brain damage and even death. Emily decides to go ahead with the procedure, and Aden does reawaken for a brief second in order to say 'I love you.'

The central message of Emily and Aden's story is intended to leave the reader without a definitive answer to the question: How far should a mother go to ensure her child's overall happiness and acceptance in the world? From this question, several themes tie Emily and Aden's story to current sentiments and research about autism. Although there is a happy ending, *A Mother's Love* is a hopeful, yet cautionary tale intended to bring about awareness to autism research and the autistic community.

Emily's overuse of medications, diets, and homeopathic remedies reflects today's glut of medication on the market intended to treat psychological disorders. Doctor Bennett's eagerness to try a new medication without waiting for FDA approval parallels the dangers of "miracle cures" that promise success with little to any scientific research or testing. Principle

Andrew and Trisha's treatment of Aden because of his condition reflects how today, many people have yet to fully accept children and adults with autism into mainstream society.

There is current scientific research that suggests that autistic symptoms arise from the locus coeruleus, a section of neurons located in the brain stem. This part of the brain regulates fight-or-flight responses, the ability to pay attention, and fevers. Over the years, many parents of autistic children claim that during high fevers, their child's autistic symptoms subside for a time, as if they have been learning and understanding all this time but were unable to express it. Current scientific theories suggest that by fixing whatever is wrong with the locus coeruleus, autistic symptoms will abate or even disappear entirely.

I do not claim to be a scientist, or to have a great understanding of how the brain works, but I gave readers, through this script, several what ifs: What if there was a cure for autism that came from this current research? What if children and adults with autism could live 'normal' lives? What if scientists have it wrong, and their medications end up hurting consumers?

Through this screenplay, I hope to bring awareness to the autistic community, and to how children and adults with autism struggle to live in a world where interpersonal connections and speech, for example, are the norm. Diagnoses of autism are on the rise, and in a world where anyone can buy, sell, and tweet on the internet, it's important to make sure that the right information and messages are out there. I also wanted to bring a bit of hope

to those parents who have autistic children for whom they have an unconditional love. There may one day be a cure for autism, but until then, there is so much that we can learn from an autistic child, if we only know how to listen.