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Family Plays

The Boy Who Talked to Whales



Comedy/Fantasy
by
WEBSTER SMALLEY

The Boy Who Talked to Whales

A charming, comedy-fantasy for the entire family about a boy and a girl who save a friendly whale from whalers and bring about an international crisis. *The Boy Who Talked to Whales* was acclaimed in its Northwest Coast production following its premiere at the University of Texas.

Comedy/Fantasy. By Webster Smalley. *Cast: 7m., 3w., or 6 (4m., 2w.) with doubling.* Jerry Johnson has secretly taught himself to talk to Ooka, a 50-foot whale that has fled from whalers into Puget Sound. With the help of Meg, a neighbor girl, he devises a plan to save Ooka from those who want to hurt or use her, and more importantly, Jerry and Meg help Ooka combat the foreign whalers. The plan succeeds so well it causes a great international crisis, which the two children help the President of the United States resolve. *The whale's songs and Jerry's whale talk are created musically. Unit set. Two-channel sound system (to create the whale). Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: BF6.*

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Characters

Jerry Johnson: A boy, 10, energetic, questioning.

Meg Meyer: A girl, 11, a bit of a tomboy.

Betty Johnson: Jerry's mother, mid-thirties.

Harry O'Connell: Late thirties, prosperous, big, ex-football hero.

Dr. Arthur Meyer: Meg's father, 40, a psychologist.

Ooka: A fifty foot Sperm Whale. Heard, not seen.

Regina McLean: National television newscaster.

Judge: Formidable, from Jerry's point of view.

Commander Willoughby Rock: Regular Navy, firm, humorless.

President of the United States: Not a president we have seen.

Secret Service Man: Standard, dark glasses, non-speaking.

Time and place: The near future, near the water on Puget Sound in the State of Washington.

The play is primarily intended for children from eight to twelve.

Production note: The whale sounds are created musically. Any temptation to use real whale sounds should be suppressed. It is suggested that a tuba or bassoon be used to make whale songs for the whale and for Jerry. These sounds are essential in creating a comedy-fantasy style for the play. Ooka's voice, splashes, etc., are heard from a speaker in the house; Jerry's sounds, from an on-stage speaker.

With doubling, the play can be produced with four male and two female actors. Jerry and Meg continue throughout the play and should be cast for youthful vitality. The actress playing Betty can double as Regina McLean; Dr. Meyer as the President; the Judge as both Rock and Secret Service Man. The actor playing O'Connell could double as either the President or Secret Service Man, but is likely to have qualities that make this undesirable.

Jerry and Meg are written to be played by adult actors, preferably of small stature. Adult actors are readily accepted by a child audience since the "whale talk" early in the play establishes that it is not fully realistic. The psychological probability of the children (the direct and simple logic and pretending they are whales) is more important than physical size or voice change for Jerry. Any suggestion of sexual interest should be avoided (Meg's costume should minimize budding womanhood), and a simple suggestive set should aid in this convention.

The Boy Who Talked to Whales

The stage is simply set to serve as several playing areas. Levels upstage will become several interior scenes, but the principal playing area is downstage near a small pier that projects into the audience and is so constructed as to allow the audience to see JERRY when he hides beneath it.

Props are brought onstage by actors. The setting should suggest a cartoon of reality, not actuality, just as the music for OOKA suggests a musical whale, but does not attempt to imitate a real whale.

Shortly before the lights fade, we hear OOKA's song. It has the attractive musical quality of a tuba or bassoon.

JERRY is discovered at the end of the pier as OOKA's song continues. HE is holding a piece of plastic pipe about three inches in diameter and five feet long. He puts the pipe to his mouth, the other end in the "water" at the end of the pier, and we hear a sound surprisingly like OOKA's song. This is from the on-stage speaker.

JERRY is ten, a very active boy, mentally and physically. He is pleasant looking, neither handsome nor plain, who can move quickly and has great powers of concentration.

A woman's voice is heard, and the whale song ends.

BETTY

(Off)

Jerry!

JERRY, startled, quickly conceals the pipe beneath the pier, starts off, then changes his mind and hides under the pier in view of the audience.

BETTY enters, R. She is in her mid-thirties, mentally energetic, attractive, and quite capable of handling most situations. Her husband, a civil engineer, is often away and she has to cope with raising an unusual child, a boy who sometimes mystifies even her. She is quite capable of fighting for Jerry's right to be a little different, but at times she must be a conventional mother. This is one of those times.

BETTY

Jerry! Come and eat. I'm hungry and you must be . . . Jerry, we can fix something special if you come now. Potato pancakes.

(Firmly)

I am not going to fix dinner at eight o'clock like last night.

(Sits on edge of pier)

All right, I am going to stay right here . . . If you don't come in now, you can make yourself a peanut butter sandwich — without peanut butter if you wait too long.

(Hears noise L)

Jerry!

MEG

(Entering)

It's just me.

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

BETTY

(Stands)

Oh, Meg. Have you seen Jerry?

MEG is eleven, but is in Jerry's class. She is dressed in jeans and a sloppy blouse. She is attractive and bright, a bit of a tomboy.

MEG

(Simply)

I was eating dinner.

BETTY

Well, I want Jerry to have his dinner.

MEG

Yeah, I heard. I wish my dad'd fix interesting things. We just had crummy old steak.

BETTY

Do you know where he might be?

MEG

He might be anywhere.

BETTY

I think you know most of his hiding places.

MEG has been through this before. She uses evasive tactics, picks up rocks (imaginary) and "skips" them toward the audience.

BETTY

(Understands Meg's motive)

Meg, what are you doing?

MEG

Skippin' rocks. You gotta hit between the waves or —

BETTY

I see you are skipping rocks.

MEG

(Innocent)

Then why ask?

BETTY

Because —

(Realizes she is falling into Meg's trap)

Meg, you are changing the subject because you don't want to tell me where Jerry might be.

MEG

There are lots and lots of places.

BETTY

That's why I want help. You and Jerry know almost every rock and tree on or near this beach. Last night it was almost eight o'clock — and the night before, it was —

MEG

(Interrupts)

He forgets. You know how he is, he gets thinkin' about somethin'.

BETTY

I know, but he needs to eat. Will you find him for me?

(She starts to walk off.)

MEG

What if I can't?

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

BETTY

I'm sure you can, if you want to.

MEG

Not if he doesn't want me to, I can't.

BETTY

(Stops)

Why wouldn't he want you to find him? You haven't had an argument, have you?

MEG

No, but when he's sort of unhappy, he —

BETTY

(Concerned)

Why would he be unhappy? Did something happen?

MEG

He didn't say anything about school?

JERRY frantically tries to signal MEG, but she fails to see him.

BETTY

I hardly saw him when he came in, late as usual. He dropped his books and came to the beach. I was on the phone.

MEG has strolled away and is on her knees sorting through rocks on the beach.

BETTY

Meg, stop that. You are not really looking for agates. You and Jerry have found every last agate on this part of the beach years ago. You are trying to change the subject.

MEG

The trouble with you, Mrs. Johnson, you always know what I'm doin'. My dad doesn't, and he's sposed to cause he's a psychologist.

BETTY

I was a girl once, Meg. It helps.

(Half to herself)

The problem is, I was never a boy. Now, tell me. What happened in school?

MEG

You better ask him.

BETTY

Meg Meyer, you are not going to tell me that something happened in school and then not tell me what.

MEG

It would be snitchin'.

BETTY

(Pauses a moment, realizing Meg's problem, then)

No. No, it wouldn't. I understand how you feel. But I know something happened, and I'll find it out anyway, won't I? So you might as well tell me now.

MEG

(Reluctantly)

Well, I didn't talk to him after he was sent to the office.

BETTY

Oh, no! Not to the office again?

JERRY is signalling MEG to be quiet.

MEG

(Not seeing Jerry)

Yeah. An' after havin' to stand in the hall. It wasn't his best day.

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

BETTY

(Resigned)

What did he do this time.

MEG

Oh, it wasn't bad. He was just practicin' noises. He forgot.

BETTY

Noises? What kind of noises?

MEG

You know. The kind he makes all the time. Code noises.

BETTY

(Mystified)

Code noises? What do you mean?

MEG

(A series of dot-dash sounds, then)

Like they told us in school. Samuel F. B. Morse invented the telegraph and dots and dashes and —

BETTY

(Impatiently)

I know Morse invented the telegraph and the code. What did Jerry do?

MEG

He talks in it. Morse code.

(Looking at Betty curiously.)

I thought you knew that.

BETTY

(Remembering)

That's what those strange sounds were.

MEG

(Matter of fact)

Sure. Morse code. He tried to teach me, but it was too hard.

BETTY

Funny, he didn't tell me. Why would he want to learn the Morse code?

MEG

I asked him that, too. An' did he give a dumb answer. "Because it's there," he said. I think he read that somewhere. He reads a lot — an' not every kid can talk in Morse code.

(She is trying to be helpful.)

BETTY

(Trying to put it all together)

Does Miss Franklin know it was Morse code?

MEG

Naw. Jerry doesn't try to explain things to her. He said it just gets him in more trouble.

BETTY

I've tried to explain Jerry to Miss Franklin, but —

MEG

You can't explain Jerry to Miss Franklin.

BETTY

It's the kinds of trouble he gets into. It isn't — the usual kind of trouble.

MEG

Like the mice, huh?

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

BETTY

I think she almost understood about the mice. Lots of children like animals.

MEG

Your car engine?

BETTY

(A bit defensive)

That was in the summer. I don't think she knows about that.

MEG

She knows all right. That's why she sends him to sixth grade science class. How many ten-year-old kids could put a car engine back together?

BETTY

(Smiles with a certain pride, but —)

Not many, I admit — but it's things like that — and the noises that get him sent to the office.

MEG

(Not meaning to say this)

It was the fight that got him sent to the office.

BETTY

Fight!? What fight?

MEG

(Explaining. Realizing she has let something slip out)

Noises aren't bad enough to get sent to the office.

BETTY

Meg, did someone start a fight with Jerry?

MEG

(Pauses. Struggle between loyalty and honesty)

No.

Jerry's signals become more frantic.

BETTY

You just said there was a fight.

MEG

Sure, but — Jerry started it. Fred O'Connell said something about that whale, and Jerry just — Boy, you should have seen him!

(She has finally seen Jerry signalling, and the last words suddenly slow down.)

BETTY

What are you talking about? Whale? Jerry started a fight with —

(Realizing with horror)

Do you mean Fred O'Connell, that great big, huge —!?

MEG

(Fully aware of Jerry. Very reluctant)

Well, yes — but you ask Jerry. I gotta go now.

(And she starts off.)

BETTY

(Rushing to block Meg's exit)

Meg Meyer, you are not going to stop there. You tell me everything that happened. If Jerry's in trouble, I can't help if I don't know about it, can I?

MEG

(Caught between Betty and awareness of Jerry)

Well — no — —

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

BETTY

(Firmly)

Meg?!

MEG

(Closing her eyes, blurting it out, a tumble of words)

I didn't hear it all. It was something about Fred's dad going out after the whale, and Jerry got all shook. It didn't last long. Fred's lots bigger than Jerry.

BETTY

(Disbelieving)

Meg, Jerry doesn't start fights. He doesn't fight.

MEG

He sure did this time. He just closed his eyes and waded right in, both arms goin' like windmills. He's tougher'n you think. Wild! But Fred stopped him pretty quick — then, Miss Franklin came. But it was too late. I dunno why he did it.

BETTY

Calm down, Meg. You said something about a whale? What did a whale have to do with it?

MEG

How do I know? You know how Jerry is about some things? Funny.

BETTY

Some people may think so. Miss Franklin and the principal, but you know and I know he usually has some good reason for what he does. I need you to help me find out what that reason is. Will you?

MEG

I guess —

(Remembers Jerry's presence)

But what if he doesn't want you to know?

BETTY

(Starting off)

You just find him. Tell him I'm making something special for dinner. I'll do the rest.

MEG

(Reluctantly)

O. K.

Betty exits. MEG makes sure she has gone for good, then —

MEG

Jerry, she's gone.

(As he climbs on the pier)

Why didn't you stay down? She almost saw you.

(No answer. Apologetically)

I'm sorry about what I said. She kept asking things. I couldn't help it.

(Still no answer)

You better go in . . . Aren't you going to talk?

JERRY

It was bad enough before. Now she'll ask questions all night.

MEG

She wasn't really mad. Anyway, she knows you weren't hurt.

JERRY

Naw, I know. She just gets curiouser and curiouser. It's even worse since she took those psychology courses at the college. Is your dad like that?

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

MEG

(Thoughtful)

He asks some questions, but he's an adult psychologist. I don't think I have to worry til I grow up . . . Anyway, it's your own fault. Why'd you fight about a stupid old whale?

JERRY

It's not stupid, it's smart. Maybe the smartest, most intelligent whale in the world.

MEG

What're you talkin' about?

(As JERRY gets pipe from under pier)

Hey, what's that?

JERRY

A pipe. I need to practice.

MEG

Practice? Practice what?

JERRY

I can't talk about what.

MEG

I don't get it.

JERRY

I can't talk about this. It's too important.

(Accusing)

You told her about the Morse code.

MEG

I thought you'd told her yourself. I had to say something about the noises you make. You know something? They don't even sound like the Morse code anymore.

JERRY

I know

MEG

You mean they're not the Morse code? What are they then?

JERRY

Can't tell. It's a secret.

MEG

(Indicating pipe)

Like that?

JERRY

That's right. I can't tell even you.

MEG

I won't tell anyone — not anyone — not ever. Who else can you tell besides me . . . Not anyone, that's who . . . Please?

JERRY

(Realizes the truth of this)

It's so hard to keep it all inside me.

(Deadly earnest)

You really promise? Not a little promise, probly the biggest promise you ever made, ever in your life.

MEG

I promise — biggest ever in my whole life.

JERRY

(A pause, then decides)

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

All right. I'll show you.

MEG

(Lost)

Show me? Show me what?

JERRY

The secret. Watch! And listen.

At the end of the pier, he places one end of the pipe in the water and puts his mouth to the other.

MEG

What are you doing?

JERRY

Wait! You'll see.

Puts his mouth back to pipe and, with much effort and breath, he begins to make strange and wonderful deep musical noises. MEG watches, puzzled.

MEG

Good grief! What are you doing?

JERRY

(Breathless)

Sh-hh. Wait.

He makes more noises, then listens to the pipe.

MEG

(Can't stand the wait)

You have to tell me. I can't guess.

JERRY

(Still listening)

Sh-h-h.

He gestures for quiet, then a distant splash is heard on the house speaker. JERRY makes more noises. Other splashes as he holds his hand up for silence. Then, a short whale song from OOKA.

MEG

(Whispers in wonderment)

Holy cow, what is it?

JERRY

(Simply, just explaining a fact)

A whale. The biggest whale you ever saw. Her name is Ooka.

MEG

(Astounded, but not doubting Jerry)

A real whale? A genuine, big whale—that sings? (gen-u-wine)

JERRY

Of course. They all talk like that. An' she isn't a killer whale, or even a grey whale like they think. She's a Sperm Whale.

(Ooka's answering song is heard)

I have to warn her—about Mr. O'Connell's boats. That's what's so important.

(He makes sounds into pipe.)

There!

(Whale sounds diminish in distance as he gets his breath.)

Now, she won't be there if Mr. O'Connell goes after her.

(And he moves to hide the pipe)

MEG

She—won't be there?

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

JERRY

(Simply, as he hides pipe)

I told her to go away from here for a while.

MEG

(Following him as he moves away from pier)

You—told—her?

JERRY

That's what I was saying into the pipe.

(Simple explanation)

Oh, she can't hear me without the pipe. You see, it goes under water and —

MEG

(Interrupting. One thing at a time)

You talked—to a—whale?!?!)

JERRY

(Worried)

You promised—really promised—not to tell. I'm in enough trouble. On top of everything, I ripped my jeans when Fred O'Connell knocked me down—and Mom hasn't found them yet. More questions!

MEG

You really talked to a whale?!

JERRY

Yeah, I did, but it's only going to get me in more trouble, especially after Mr. O'Connell finds—

(Stops suddenly. He shouldn't have said that.)

MEG

(Suspicious)

Mr. O'Connell finds out what?

JERRY

Nothin' you need to know. Remember, you promised not to tell!

MEG

Ye-es, but—

(No nonsense. Looks him in the eye.)

How do you know it's a whale? A Sperm Whale?

JERRY

She told me—or tried to. Then, I got some whale books from the library—after she jumped. She jumped once—real early in the morning so I could see her. No one was around.

MEG

(Doubtful, now that it has come to details)

How do you understand—and talk to a whale? Tell me that.

JERRY

(At a loss. He doesn't fully understand, himself.)

I don't know. I just—**can**. . . You see, I sneaked out here one Saturday morning, about a month ago—it was too early for Mom to let me go swimming, and—

MEG

(Scolding)

You went swimming alone. That was dumb.

JERRY

(Quickly)

I didn't go out deep. Nobody else was up—not even you. So be still and let me talk.

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

(Acting it out as he remembers. Lies on back.)

I was floating on my back—with my ears under water—and I heard this sound—boo-oo, boo-oo. It was **in** the water. Then, I heard it again, boo-oo. I was scared. The **water** was making a noise. I stood up quick—and listened. You know what?

MEG

For gosh sakes, tell me.

JERRY

I didn't hear anything.

MEG

(Annoyed)

That's not all, and you know it.

JERRY

I ducked my head, and there it was again. All around. **In** the water.

(Another dramatic pause)

MEG

You make me mad. Either tell me or I'm going home.

JERRY

O.K., O.K. I couldn't stay with my head under all day, could I? Besides, I was getting cold. So I put on my clothes and tried to figure it out. That's why the pipe.

MEG

You don't make any sense, Jerry Johnson. Sometimes I think you're as nutty as lots of people think you are. What does a pipe have to do with noises in the water?

JERRY

(Gets the pipe)

Don't you see? I remembered this old plastic pipe in the garage. It's like a glass you put on the floor or wall—and you can hear on the other side. Like those things doctors use to listen.

MEG

Stethoscope?

JERRY

Yeah. So, when I put one end in the water, I heard the sounds again. With the pipe.

MEG

(Takes pipe and listens in water)

I don't hear anything.

JERRY

She's gone away. Remember? Anyhow, with the pipe, it wasn't so scary. I could listen—slow—and there was a kind of pattern—like in Morse code. I'd come down at night—and real early, even before the sun. I began to understand a little—and I tried to talk with it—and I practiced the sounds. I practiced a lot—even at school.

MEG

I know. You made Miss Franklin want to fly out the window, an' she sort of likes you.

JERRY

You think I'd tell her? Or the principal?

(Imitating principal)

"Why were you making strange noises, young man?" — Well, sir, I was practicing talking whale. — "Bonkers, young man. You are bonkers. Sorry,

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

we will have to send you away to the Bonkers Farm.”

MEG

(Giggling)

I can just see Mr. Moffet.

JERRY

Grown ups wouldn't understand. Maybe even kids'd think I was crazy. But it's true, I can—

(Grabs her arm, excited)

I can understand, and talk it a little. You should hear her. Wow! Sometimes she just sings. Ooka likes to sing, just for the fun of it. She has a good voice, don't you think? For a whale?

MEG

(Thinks a moment)

I guess. I haven't heard any other whales.

JERRY

She's pretty young.

MEG

(Suspicious again)

How do you know it's a girl?

JERRY

It's partly a guess. She wants to have baby whales—like her mother. Her mother got hurt—killed maybe—by a whaler. It's hard to understand what she means. First, I have to try to understand **what** she is saying . . . Then, I have to pretend I'm a whale to figure out what she means.

(He begins imitating a whale, using his arms as flukes, and looks up, as if from beneath a boat.)

A boat looks a lot different to a whale than to us.

MEG

(Imitating JERRY, looking up as if at boat)

Yeah—gee, I hadn't thought of that.

JERRY

(Excited. Acting it out)

She loves the big ocean. Go down deep, way down into the dark—then up fast—like flying—and swish—way up in the sunlight. Then **splash**—a big breath and down again and find a nice big, tender octopus to munch—whish—up into the sun and good, fresh air to breathe.

MEG

Octopus—ugh!

JERRY

When she jumped for me, you should have seen her. She is big—I mean, **BIG!**

(Eyes alight)

She's bigger than a— a house trailer. When she jumped, she just kept coming out of the water, and coming out—almost forever.

(Earnestly. Tears almost come)

She is the most wonderful thing I have ever seen. I love her!

MEG

(Impressed, but not knowing quite how to respond)

Jerry, you— —You're something!

JERRY

(Darkly)

But she's scared.

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

MEG

What could a big thing like that be scared of?

JERRY

Whalers. That's why she's in Puget Sound, to get away from whaling ships. Then, old Mr. O'Connell—

(A reminder of a big worry)

Oh—no—

MEG

What?

(As JERRY sits despondently)

What's the matter? You said something before about Mr. O'Connell.

JERRY

When he finds out, I'm in real trouble.

MEG

When Mr. O'Connell finds out what?

JERRY

When Fred said his dad was going to take his boats and go after Ooka—try try to catch her—something terrible might happen to her. Oh, they couldn't catch her—not her. They don't know how big she is. They think she's an old grey whale. But they'd scare her, even hurt her maybe. Boats are always hurting whales.

MEG

O.K. So what'd you do to Mr. O'Connell?

JERRY

I—I sort of took something.

MEG

(Puzzled)

You took something? What? Who from?

JERRY

From Mr. O'Connell's boats. Something from their motors. They won't go, now.

MEG

(Shocked)

You stole something from Mr. O'Connell's boats? From all three of them?

JERRY

Don't say it like that. I sort of—borrowed some—fuel pumps.

(Hastily)

I'll give them back as soon as—

MEG

You sto—I mean took the fuel pumps from all three of his boats?

JERRY

(Nods)

I don't think he can get replacements right away. But Ooka's in trouble. I had to do it.

MEG

But you told Ooka to go away. She's gone! You didn't have to do that.

JERRY

I wasn't sure I could get her to go. She doesn't always understand. I had to do everything I could, didn't I? Besides, I don't know how far she's gone. See?

MEG

I guess.

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

(A horrible thought)

Jerry, he'll know who did it. After you told Fred you'd stop his father.

JERRY

(Sadly. Resigned.)

I know. Fred saw me leaving the boats, too. I told you it was worse than my torn jeans.

The lights fade quickly and come up on the area on a level UR, which suggests the Johnson living room. A chair and a small table for a phone are all that are necessary. **BETTY** enters with phone, in middle of a conversation.

BETTY

And he talks in Morse code . . . That's what I said. Meg told me . . . That's not why I called. I think Jerry's in trouble again. He got in a fight of all things . . . Yes, I'm talking about Jerry, your son . . . I know he doesn't fight, but he did. . . . Something about a whale in the bay . . . Yes, whale, that's what I said . . . I haven't been able to talk with him, you know how he disappears . . . I wish you could come home this weekend. I'll be so glad when that bridge is finished . . . Well, try, for next week . . . Maybe Jerry can call you, but it's not the same.

(Door bell rings)

Someone's at the door, maybe Jerry. No, he wouldn't ring.

(Bell again)

O.K., bye, dear.

SHE moves to (imaginary) door and is confronted by **O'CONNELL**, a big man, bluff and direct. **O'CONNELL** is a former high school football hero who has made a success chartering boats to sports fishermen. At the moment, he is furious.

BETTY

Why—Mr. O'Connell.

O'CONNELL

(Entering and looking about room)

Where is he? Your kid? You know where he is?

BETTY

(Annoyed)

That's no way to —

O'CONNELL

I don't care, lady. Where is he? My kid, Fred, saw him on my boats this afternoon.

BETTY

Now, wait a minute, Mr. O'Connell. Jerry's down on the beach. He couldn't possibly have been on your boats.

O'CONNELL

Oh, he couldn't possibly, huh? Did you follow him around today? Oh, I've heard about him. Takes cars apart—

BETTY

(Not really slowing him down)

He put it back together—

O'CONNELL

Stole the mousetraps at school—fed the mice oatmeal.

BETTY

Jerry's a bright boy—and he likes animals—a lot. Now, I think that's—

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

O'CONNELL

There are no animals on my boats. And after getting my kid in trouble with the principal, he has the guts to—

BETTY

(Tops his tirade)

Ca-alm down, Mr. O'Connell! He's down on the beach. He wouldn't go on your boats.

O'CONNELL

Wouldn't huh? Fred saw him, an' he sure ought to know, cause the little shrimp picked a fight—

BETTY

(Backing down a little)

I just heard—about that. I'll find out about that—but he wouldn't go on your boats. What reason would he—

O'CONNELL

Reason? What reason would that shrimp have to light into Fred? Crazy, that's what. Of course, Fred wiped up the sidewalk with him . . . And he was on my boats.

BETTY

(Holding her ground)

I'll talk to him.

O'CONNELL

You do that.

(He turns to go as telephone rings)

And I want to hear some answers. I think that kid's flipped his lid. Makes funny noises. You know that?

BETTY

He has an inquiring mind, he—

(Phone rings again)

Excuse me.

(On phone)

Hello — — Why, yes, he is.

(Surprised)

It's for you.

O'CONNELL

What?

(Moving to phone)

Who'd call me here?

(On phone)

Yeah? . . . Yeah, Fred, what's the rush? I'm just comin' home . . . What?! . . . All three??? That little brat! . . . Call the cops, and . . . and I'll meet you at the dock . . . As soon as I find that kid!

(Slams phone down)

Somebody just stole the fuel pumps from all three of my boats.

BETTY

Now, Mr. O'Connell, you don't think . . . Why Jerry would have no reason to . . . Mr. O'Connell, he's just a child!

At this moment, JERRY enters from outside. He is ready to make a simple excuse for being late and starts to say —

JERRY

Mom, I'm sorry, but —

He sees O'CONNELL, stops dead in his tracks, and the two stare at each

THE BOY WHO TALKED TO WHALES

other a long moment. This tells them both all they need to know. JERRY says, "Oh, no!" and runs headlong off R. After a beat, O'CONNELL'S reflexes recover and he rushes in pursuit. It takes another moment for BETTY to realize what has happened, then she, too, rushes after them, calling, "Jerry!, Mr. O'Connell!"

The lights go down on this area and come up at a level Left. It is the Meyer living room. All is needed is a chair for Dr. Meyer. Lighting separates this area from the rest of the stage which is dimly lit.

Meyer is wearing reading glasses and is totally absorbed in his paper. MEG hovers, getting up courage to get his attention. MEG's movement and vitality are essential to regain the audience attention in each of these subscenes. MEG and her father are oblivious of the action outside their cozy house. Timing is essential.

MEG

(Moves to her father)

Dad?

MEYER

(Not really hearing)

Hum-m?

At this moment, JERRY appears, R, running for his life. He is followed by O'CONNELL, then at a slower pace by BETTY. It is MEG's increasing frustration and strong sense of purpose that will bring the audience back to their scene.

MEG

Dad, will you listen to me?

MEYER

(He isn't really)

I'm listening.

MEG

Do you think it would be wrong—No. Do you think it would be bad if someone did something—not very good, kinda wrong—to do something good?

MEYER

That depends, I suppose.

MEG

On what?

MEYER

On how bad and how good.

MEG

I mean if—let's say one of your patients did something pretty bad—maybe really bad—but meant it, you know, to be good?

MEYER

Hard to say.

MEG is exasperated and turns away just as JERRY runs on from UL and exits DR. O'CONNELL enters, looks about, then exits as BETTY enters, looks about and exits the same direction she entered.

Note: The details of this chase may vary according to the stage plan and the theatre. The only stipulation is that the chase not overlap the Meg-Meyer conversation.

MEG

(Returning to the attack)

Dad, will you listen to me?