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## CHARACTERS

**MICHAEL:** *15 years old.*

**RUTH:** *10 years old; MICHAEL's sister.*

*They are city kids, bright and literate for their ages.*

## TIME

*The present day.*

## SETTING

*A remote, pristine natural environment, at least from the perspective of modern urban people. MICHAEL and RUTH look out across a lake at some hills. RUTH carries binoculars, which she looks through intermittently. She has a notepad and a big funny pencil sticking out of the back pocket of her brightly colored pants.*

**RUTH:** *It's so beau-tee-ful.*

**MICHAEL:** *Yeah.*

**RUTH:** *It's just—so—beautiful. [Pointing.] Look at the snow up on the mountain.*

**MICHAEL:** *Yeah. Yeah.*

**RUTH:** *The lake. It's so blue.*

**MICHAEL:** *[Looking at it, nodding.] Yeah. Yeah. Really glad Mom let me bring you today.*

**RUTH:** *[Gesticulating.] There's so much sky.*

**MICHAEL:** *So glad you finally got to see Bear Mountain.*

**RUTH:** *It's so perfect!*

*[Beat.]*

**MICHAEL:** *[With a slight touch of ambivalence.] Yeah.*

**RUTH:** *You don't think so?*

**MICHAEL:** *No. I do. It's really beautiful.*

**RUTH:** *But you've seen more beautiful places?*

**MICHAEL:** *Oh, no. [Shaking head.] No, Ruthie. I don't—think so. It's really—awfully beautiful.*

RUTH: So?

[*Beat.*]

MICHAEL: It's [*Beat.*] just—

RUTH: What?

MICHAEL: I don't know.

RUTH: You *don't know*?

MICHAEL: I'm not sure. I'm—

RUTH: Mikey!

MICHAEL: Sometimes when you say—some kinds of—things—  
they can—change—the way—how—other—people—see—things.

RUTH: What do you mean?

MICHAEL: I really like telling you stuff, but—sometimes—it's hard  
to know what's—good—to say.

RUTH: You mean like when you told me how Grandma used to  
chase Mommy and Aunt Muriel around the house with a hairbrush  
when they were little?

[*Beat.*]

MICHAEL: Well—yeah—maybe.

RUTH: Or—that stuff about [*Giggling.*] girls in your class?

MICHAEL: [*Nodding.*] Yeah. [*Beat.*] Maybe. Sometimes I think  
maybe I should be—a—little—more—careful.

RUTH: Did Mom or Dad say that?

MICHAEL: No. [*Beat.*] No.

RUTH: [*Trying to look at him through binoculars.*] This is getting like  
a Nancy Drew mystery. Like I was trying to figure out before you  
told me we were coming here. [*Beat.*] Come on, Mikey. Tell me!

MICHAEL: It is incredibly beautiful. I really don't want to—spoil  
anything—for you, Ruthie. Ever.

RUTH: What do you mean, exactly?

MICHAEL: I just don't know if—

RUTH: Mikey!

MICHAEL: It's—kind of—hard—to explain.

RUTH: Tell me!

MICHAEL: I've only told this before to Mom—and Doctor Stein,  
you know, the eye doctor. [*Beat.*] I *tried* to tell 'em. I don't really  
know if either of 'em had any idea what I was talking about.

RUTH: *What?*

MICHAEL: [*Hesitantly.*] This may not make any sense—okay—  
Look—it's like—when—I—look real hard—at anything—close—  
you know, like, with my eyes—it's kind of, like, inside everything, I  
kind of see—kind of—like, this motion—going around—this move-  
ment—inside my vision—bits—of—movement, like.

[*Beat.*]

RUTH: Bits of movement?

MICHAEL: I'm kind of used to it already. Almost. But not [*Beat.*]  
quite.

RUTH: Like—things moving [*Gesticulating.*] around?

MICHAEL: And—in a place like this—I guess—I just notice it  
more—'cause—everything's so beautiful, and—light—you know,  
still. You want to really be able to see everything—perfect—beauti-  
ful—the way it really is.

RUTH: [*Squinting, looking around closely, covering each eye quickly in  
turn.*] But what does it *look* like?

MICHAEL: [*Gradually gaining momentum.*] It's kind of hard to  
describe. I mean, it seems like a—kind of—movement, inside—  
things, more when it's darkish, less in the light, but motion, kind  
of floating around in the air—like—little—bits running around,  
but not—exactly.

RUTH: Little *bits* running around? Really?

[*RUTH, covering each eye in turn, looks out into the distance, with  
and without binoculars.*]

MICHAEL: So you know, especially when I just want to be totally  
seeing how beautiful something is—I wish they could just go away.  
So I could concentrate. And really see, feel it completely, what I'm  
really looking at, how beautiful it is, like, get lost in it. If some-

thing's totally in the sunlight, at the right angle, sometimes—it feels almost—like, for a second—the—movement—it kind of goes away—but—not [Beat.] quite.

RUTH: [Squinting intermittently.] That's so—strange. [Beat.] Isn't it?

MICHAEL: I dunno.

RUTH: How old—I mean—were you when you first saw this—stuff—about? [Beat.] I mean, [Looking away, as if feigning indifference.] you weren't ten—like me—right?

MICHAEL: [Very deliberately.] Oh, no. No. No. [Beat.] Maybe I was [Beat.] nine. Or—maybe [Beat.] eight. Yeah—it feels like—I must've been—eight. [Rotating hand back and forth.] Or—nine.

RUTH: [Pulling out notebook and pencil and writing briefly but feverishly.] But not ten?

MICHAEL: No. [Shaking head.] No way. [Beat.] I just have a very strong feeling—I couldn't have been ten.

RUTH: That's interesting. [She is squinting and looking around energetically, then gradually settling down. Long pause.] Isn't it great how quiet it is here?

MICHAEL: Yeah. Yeah.

RUTH: It's just like so—so quiet. Like we're totally alone. [Looking all around with her binoculars.] No one else in [Excited.] the whole wide world!

MICHAEL: Yeah.

RUTH: Isn't it incredible?

[Beat.]

MICHAEL: [Without fully believing it, nodding.] Yeah. [Beat.] Yeah.

RUTH: You don't think so?

MICHAEL: No, I do.

RUTH: You do?

MICHAEL: Yeah.

RUTH: But really truly?

MICHAEL: Well—yeah—I mean [Beat. Rotating hand back and forth.] Kind of.

RUTH: You've been places that are even *more* quiet?

MICHAEL: No. [Beat.] No. [Beat. Shaking head.] I really—shouldn't—

RUTH: What?

MICHAEL: No. You know—like, sometimes—it's really not such a good idea to talk about everything you know or you—think, or—like—you—think [Beat.] you—know.

RUTH: Pretty please?

MICHAEL: This stuff won't do you any good. Believe me.

RUTH: I wanna know what *you* do, Mikey. [Contemplating.] What would Nancy Drew do at a time like this?

[Pause. Environment should be as silent as possible.]

MICHAEL: Okay. Listen. When we're completely quiet. [Pause.] You hear that?

RUTH: What?

MICHAEL: That sound. Off in the distance.

RUTH: *What* sound?

MICHAEL: That distant—low—humming sound. [Pause.] Hear it now?

[Beat.]

RUTH: [Looking confused.] May [Beat.] be.

MICHAEL: It's kind of like this—very—low—humming sound. It's almost like you can't hear it. But you *can*. It's like [Very softly.]: "HMMMMMM." [Beat.] Hear it now?

RUTH: I'm not—sure. [Beat.] I—think—I—thought—that was part of the—silence.

MICHAEL: But it's different.

RUTH: But not *so* different?

MICHAEL: If it was really part of the silence, you couldn't hear it.

RUTH: But Mom always says, When you can't sleep, listen to the silence.

MICHAEL: Right. How do you think I started *hearing* all this stuff?

She told me that when I was three. I don't think I ever heard silence again! [Beat.] You know at home sometimes, like at night, it seems completely quiet, but then *behind* the quiet, if you really listen, you can always hear stuff. [Beat.] All the time.

RUTH: Really?

[RUTH is intermittently trying to listen intently, then scouring the landscape with her binoculars.]

MICHAEL: It could be, like, in the kitchen maybe, or behind the walls. You go outside sometimes—even in the middle of the night when it's supposed to be quiet—but there's all these noises . . . sometimes you can tell where they're from but sometimes you can't. It could just be the wind, or foghorns, or the highway, or just some giant monster thing in the distance, humming or pounding or something that doesn't sound like anything you know. When you don't hear one thing, it's like there's always something *else* further away, or deeper, like, *behind* it. It's as if your ears are always trying to hear *something*. So behind all the sounds you know, it's like there's always another one, then another behind that, further away, and then even another behind that one.

RUTH: [Holding her ears.] Behind it? Really? I don't know about this.

MICHAEL: So when you're trying with all your might to listen to the silence, just when you think you're finally hearing it, what you thought was the silence turns out to be—the refrigerator! It never stops! Or maybe cars far away on the highway, on and on and on all night long—or water running somewhere—the pump of a generator or a bunch of plants blowing in the wind or even the racket from crickets rubbing their legs together like maniacs! (I learned about *that* at camp!) I'm not sure any more if you're ever really able to hear true silence. [Beat. He seems exhausted.] I don't even know what silence sounds like any more!

[Beat.]

RUTH: Are you *sure* about all this?

MICHAEL: Maybe. [Beat. Shrugging.] I don't understand it all. I wish I *could* hear the silence. And be sure that's what it is. And sleep better.

RUTH: But that now [Pointing.]—that's the wind, right?

MICHAEL: [Turning.] Yeah. That's the wind.

[Beat. She writes something down.]

RUTH: You sure know a lot—about—stuff.

MICHAEL: [Shrugs, sadly.] Maybe *too* much. Or not enough. Of the right things. I sure know I have trouble sleeping. [Beat.] As you get older—you know, things go wrong, too. You can find out too much that—doesn't do—you—any—good. [Beat.] I always tell you things I don't tell anyone else. Most people won't listen. If it's anything they don't know already. [Beat.] I hope we can always tell each other—stuff. Important—stuff. But [Looking at her.], you know how I get really worried about—things. I—I—just—wonder sometimes [Trailing off.] . . .

[Pause.]

RUTH: Maybe we should go soon.

MICHAEL: Really?

RUTH: Yeah.

MICHAEL: Already?

RUTH: May—be.

MICHAEL: How come?

RUTH: Haven't we been here a pretty long time?

MICHAEL: It doesn't seem so long to me. But we can go any time you want. [Looking around.] You're right, though. This place is magical. [Looking out over the scenery, as if trying to fix it in his mind.] I hope I always remember it.

RUTH: [Nervously peering into the distance, covering her eyes each in turn, looking through binoculars while intermittently making special efforts to listen hard.] I bet I will.

MICHAEL: How come?

RUTH: I don't know. [Slightly annoyed.] What is that sound?

MICHAEL: What sound?

RUTH: That sound. I hear it now.

MICHAEL: I told you I shouldn't say anything.

**STEVE KOPPMAN**

RUTH: But I hear it.

MICHAEL: Pretend like you don't.

RUTH: But I *do*, Mikey.

MICHAEL: *Forget* about it.

RUTH: But it's *there*.

MICHAEL: It won't do you any good. Believe me.

RUTH: Isn't it?

MICHAEL: [*Quietly.*] You'll be sorry.

RUTH: [*Starting to tear up.*] I'm *already* sorry.

MICHAEL: [*Mournful.*] Oh, no, Ruthie! Don't be sorry *yet!* You're much too young!

RUTH: [*In tears.*] Why do you always end up *telling* me stuff like this?

[MICHAEL *hugs* RUTH, *sadly*. *Pause.*]

MICHAEL: [*Voice shaking.*] What do you think of the way everything—*smells* here?

END OF PLAY

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## **SHOW AND TELL**

Jenny Lyn Bader

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