



BOY

BY ANNA ZIEGLER



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are of course many different ways to play any given character. But in the case of Adam, it feels crucially important that in his adult scenes, from the top of the play, he is really trying to make an effort to be a man. We need to feel he is full steam ahead, rather than tentative or awkward. He has made a decision to change. Then in the midst of this effort, he—and we—can get blindsided by those things his body or psyche simply won't let him do.

The world premiere of BOY was co-produced by Keen Company (Jonathan Silverstein, Artistic Director) and Ensemble Studio Theatre (William Carden, Artistic Director; Paul A. Slee, Executive Director), in New York City, opening on February 23rd, 2016. It was directed by Lindsay Firman; the set design was by Sandra Goldmark; the lighting design was by Nick Francone; the sound design was by Shane Rettig; the costume design was by Sydney Maresca, and the production stage manager was Rhonda Picou. The cast was as follows:

ADAM TURNER Bobby Steggert
DR. WENDELL BARNES Paul Niebanck
JENNY LAFFERTY Rebecca Rittenhouse
TRUDY TURNER Heidi Armbruster
DOUG TURNER Ted Koch

CHARACTERS

ADAM TURNER: early/mid-20s, working class but self-educated, gentle, raw.

DR. WENDELL BARNES: 40s–50s, warm and genial. He's passionate about his work and his ideals; he's the smartest guy in the room but tries hard not to show it.

JENNY LAFFERTY: Adam's girlfriend (early–mid-20s), Jenny is a bit toughened and wary but still hoping for wonderful things, working class.

TRUDY TURNER: Adam's mother (30s–40s); warm and lost and hopeful, trying to make sense of a confusing world and doing her best.

DOUG TURNER: Adam's father (30s–40s), a man of not very many words, working class and in over his head, just trying to get by.

SETTING

Davenport, Iowa, and Boston, Massachusetts.

TIME

The play spans many years—from 1968–1990.

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

This play should be performed without an intermission.

*Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example,
how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much
happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world,
than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.*

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

*There is no surer way to screw up an experiment than to be certain
of its outcome.*

—Stuart Firestein, *Ignorance: How it Drives Science*

*Neither in environment nor in heredity can I find the exact
instrument that fashioned me, the anonymous roller that pressed
upon my life a certain intricate watermark...*

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*

*Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me Man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?*

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

BOY

Darkness.

Then against the darkness, a projection: 1989. Halloween.

And then the lights slam on, hard; a door opens and with it come the loud sounds of a party—music, yelling. Adam and Jenny fly through the door and slam it shut, at which point the noise stops as abruptly as it began. Adam is dressed as Frankenstein's monster and Jenny as a bunny. Adam wears a half-mask over his eyes.

Adam and Jenny are breathless and talk too loudly because they can't hear each other—their ears are still ringing.

JENNY. Oh my lord!

ADAM. I know!

JENNY. I'm so sorry! Cindy... usually she's got better music... I mean, usually it's not so loud!

ADAM. (*Still shouting.*) Hey, do you recognize me?

JENNY. What??

ADAM. I know you! Do you know me?

JENNY. Can *you* hear anything?

ADAM. I can hear you.

JENNY. I can see your mouth moving but oh my gosh, I can't hear you. This is so weird!

ADAM. You still look the same.

JENNY. What?

ADAM. Wanna sit?

JENNY. (*She hasn't heard him; she still speaks very loudly.*) I think I'm just gonna sit down!

ADAM. Great! (*They sit.*) So you really don't, um—

JENNY. If I can't hear you, I guess we can't really talk.

She does something flirtatious, putting her hand on Adam's leg or arm. Adam's longing is heartbreakingly clear, but he moves

away from her.

ADAM. (*Really loud.*) You know you probably shouldn't dress like that.

JENNY. What?

ADAM. (*Then louder.*) I said—you really shouldn't dress that way.

JENNY. No I can hear you now. You don't have to shout.

ADAM. Okay.

JENNY. It's just that it's Halloween. Everyone's dressed like something.

ADAM. Here, let me just...

He takes off his jacket and drapes it over her shoulders.

JENNY. (*Weirded out.*) Really?

ADAM. If you don't mind.

JENNY. Well, what are you supposed to be? Frankenstein?

ADAM. Frankenstein was the guy who made the monster. I'm just the monster.

JENNY. If you say so.

ADAM. I wouldn't want to be Frankenstein.

JENNY. Doesn't matter. It's a good costume.

ADAM. It is?

JENNY. I always wear this. I've been the same thing since the tenth grade.

She removes the jacket.

Sorry, but it's kinda warm in here.

ADAM. (*Pretending he doesn't know.*) It's Jenny, right?

JENNY. Did I tell you that?

ADAM. You must have.

JENNY. Or Jen. Jen or Jenny. Doesn't really matter.

ADAM. Well, which do you...

JENNY. In high school there was this teacher, Mr. Giannopoulos; he was such a dick, he started calling me Jen even though I corrected him so many times, and then suddenly everyone was calling me Jen. It just stuck.

ADAM. You could un-stick it.

JENNY. That's actually pretty hard. People start thinking about you in a certain way maybe.

ADAM. I don't know. You seem like a Jenny to me.

JENNY. Yeah?

ADAM. When I saw you, I thought, I bet that's Jenny.

JENNY. (*Smiling.*) You didn't.

ADAM. I did.

JENNY. Where are you from again?

ADAM. Oh. Um... Estherville.

JENNY. Shut up!

ADAM. (*Not understanding.*) Okay...

JENNY. No, I mean... why don't I know you?

ADAM. I don't know.

JENNY. We used to go to Estherville all the time. I went to school there. I grew up in Spirit Lake. You know Spirit Lake, right?

ADAM. Yeah, I—

JENNY. You probably never even went it's so tiny. Where'd you go to school?

ADAM. Oh, just this small... Catholic school. Outside the city.

JENNY. I was so happy to get away from there, weren't you? When Cindy told me about this job, I didn't think; I just left. Drove half-way across the state. She found me this shithole of an apartment next to hers—

ADAM. (*Hiding his interest.*) You live next door?

JENNY. Yeah I think my bedroom is on the other side of this wall. (*Laughing to herself.*) Good thing you can't see into it; it's a fucking disaster.

ADAM. I bet it's great.

JENNY. (*Matter-of-fact.*) No it sucks. And the job *really* sucks. At Quick-Rite. There's this Trekkie kid Eric who's sixteen but we have the exact same job. It's like... embarrassing. And all day long, it's Captain Spock this, Captain Spock that. I can't stand it.

ADAM. Captain Kirk. Spock is a first officer.

JENNY. Excuse me?

ADAM. Nothing.

JENNY. And Cindy took off after I was there two weeks. I guess she thought there were better jobs out there or something.

ADAM. (*A bit too aggressively.*) Cindy is such a bitch. I hate her.

JENNY. ... Whoa... I was joking, okay? There *are* better jobs out there. Basically any job...

Just lighten up, Mister Monster. You are a strange one, aren't you.

ADAM. (*Really asking.*) Am I strange?

JENNY. (*"Take what I say with a grain of salt."*) I'm drunk.

ADAM. Yeah there's just... can I just... you've got a little foam kinda over your lip—

He reaches towards her face but doesn't actually touch her.

JENNY. Oh!

Jenny wipes it off.

ADAM. Sorry, that was—it was sort of like a little mustache.

JENNY. Oh god! You thought I had a mustache?

ADAM. Like Charlie Chaplin.

JENNY. Who's that?

ADAM. Charlie Chaplin?

JENNY. I'm awful; I don't know any current pop anything. Ask me anything and I won't know it.

ADAM. Well, it's not so current.

JENNY. (*Suddenly remembering.*) Hey! Cindy told me you know a lot about cars.

ADAM. Yeah, I—

JENNY. Well, God bless you. I hate my car. It craps out on me all the time.

ADAM. What kind of car?

JENNY. '82 Honda Accord.

ADAM. That's pretty nice—front-wheel drive, four-cylinder engine, four-wheel independent suspension—that's a good car.

JENNY. I don't know any of that, but sure.

ADAM. How does it crap out on you?

JENNY. Like the battery dies a lot. Just stops dead.

ADAM. You must not be turning off your dome light.

JENNY. My dome light?

ADAM. Yeah—the light above the dash. You might think it goes off automatically, but this one doesn't. You have to turn it off manually. Otherwise, it drains the battery like crazy.

JENNY. Really?

ADAM. Really.

JENNY. Gosh, that might be it.

ADAM. That's definitely it.

JENNY. How'd you get to know so much about cars?

ADAM. I guess I sort of taught myself.

JENNY. (*Flirty.*) So as a little boy you were always under the family car, that kinda thing?

ADAM. I don't know. I think if you love something enough you can pretty much learn it.

Breath. She takes this in. He gazes at her, then puts his hand on her leg.

You can teach yourself almost anything, I think.

JENNY. You really think that?

ADAM. Yeah.

She really looks at him.

JENNY. You wanna teach *me* about cars?

ADAM. Oh—um, sure—

JENNY. I'd go under a car with you, I think.

ADAM. What?

JENNY. You could take me under a car with you. I'd go.

Beat. She takes off Adam's mask, and then whispers:

You wanna kiss me, Adam?

ADAM. Yeah.

She leans in, but he doesn't move.

JENNY. You can then, if you want to.

He doesn't move.

(Recoiling, hurt.) I mean, you don't have to.

ADAM. *(Quietly.)* No, I want to.

Then, from across the stage.

WENDELL. *(Warmly.)* Samantha, can you come and sit down now?

ADAM. *(To Jenny.)* I want to.

*He crosses into the scene with Wendell, where he now enacts
Samantha, his younger self.*

Projection: 1973. Samantha is 6.

A tape recorder is whirring.

WENDELL. All right! Let's have you sitting up straight. Yes—that's good. Oh—remember to cross your legs—like this.

She obliges.

Good. Now for the benefit of the recording, I'm just going to say: This is our first visit of Samantha's first-grade year.

SAMANTHA. Last year I was in kindergarten.

WENDELL. That's absolutely right.

SAMANTHA. You said I was your favorite kindergartner.

WENDELL. And now you're my favorite first-grader. Tell me: How are you liking it so far?

Wendell checks that the recording is working, then turns back.

SAMANTHA. It's okay.

BOY

by Anna Ziegler

3M, 2W

Inspired by a true story, Anna Ziegler's *BOY* explores the tricky terrain of finding love amidst the confusion of sexual identity, and the inextricable bond between a doctor and patient. In the 1960s, a well-intentioned doctor convinces the parents of a male infant to raise their son as a girl after a terrible accident. Two decades later, the repercussions of that choice continue to unfold.

"Ziegler... takes a delicate, restrained approach to her provocative subject matter. ... When, at the end, the character achieves a modicum of peace and a chance for happiness, you won't be thinking about gender. You'll be thinking about humanity." —**The Hollywood Reporter**

"With uncommon empathy and startling insight, BOY gets to the heart of the conflict between medicine and science..."
—**TheatreMania.com**

"Captivating... insightful, gut-wrenching, and beautiful... dazzlingly, deliciously alive from start to finish... expect it to be a long while before there's another play more rewarding, more moving, and more magical than BOY."
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