

# **Animals**

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**Introduction:**

Nick notices that people around him are like animals, and he cannot understand their "language". This gives him a lot of fear. As the plot develops, the relationship between Nick and his mother gradually reveals an understanding and support for his special abilities, while also reflecting the complex emotions families face when dealing with the challenges of autism. Through metaphors and music, we are invited to enter the world experienced by those with autism.

## Scene 1

*Piano music (played whenever Nick feels calm) begin to play.*

**Nick (audio):** We all live in this world, this WORLD. It's all confusing...It's like a big, messy puzzle that's missing some pieces. At least that's what mom says. And I think, I think for me, it's like a puzzle that is missing even more pieces, and...I don't know.

Sometimes, it feels really scary. It's like being lost in a wild jungle where everything is loud and chaotic. There are lions roaring, dogs barking, deer running, and pigs snorting. It's like they're all speaking a different language, and I'm the only one who doesn't understand.

*A spotlight for the boy beside the streetlight on stage left. Nick, wearing a hoodie and trousers (of any color), is standing underneath a streetlight. He is staring at the light.*

People do all these strange things that I don't get. Like drinking coffee, driving cars, and reading books. How do they even do that? It's like they have some kind of special powers that I don't have.

*Nick sits down, taking a bag of cookies out. He wraps the package and starts to eat the cookies.*

**Nick (audio):** It's complicated. It's like being lost in a zoo: no friends, no family. Just strange faces and loud noises. You know, the kind of roaring and barking and growling that animals make. They sometimes overwhelm me.

But there was this one animal that I loved with all my heart. It was a puppy I got when I was ten. The bond between us has brought me immense joy. But... [recalling] ... my heart sunk when she was scolded for eating my medicine. But I know it wasn't true. The medicine was simply too bitter for the puppy to even touch it.

*Music fades to the sound that the cars make; it is in low volume. The spotlight disappears and the dim yellow light is on. The audience can see the animals, which are people wearing animal masks, standing on the street. Nick stares at the cars and those animals with curiosity. The sound of cars became a bit louder to a medium volume. Nick took a deep breath and stepped away from the streetlight, trying to cross the road.*

*As he walks, the sound that the cars make increases. Some cars honk at him, and the animals make sounds/speak in the language he does not understand/make movements that make sound, making the boy feel overwhelmed.*

*Tense music began to play.*

*Nick collapsed. The dim yellow lights slowly fade and change to red light. A lion (a man with an animal mask) stepped out of his car and roared at him. Nick is scared and confused, and he is trying to call someone for help. He opens his mouth, but he cannot make any sound. After he tries several times, he finally makes a sound.*

**Nick:** Mom? Mom? Mom?!

*His mother runs on the stage and hands a blue pill to him (Matrix allusion). He quickly takes it and swallows it. The music, sound of the cars, and roaring of the animals are in the maximum sounds now.*

*Blackout.*

## Scene 2

*Grey, blue lights on. It washes away the chaos that the stage used to have, giving a comfortable feeling. Piano music plays. All those animals, who are people with masks, are gone. The audience can see the animal masks lying on the ground. People's shadows appear in the background. Nick lies at the downstage center, and people (shadows) around him are staring at him with concern and a sense of blame.*

**1 (murmur & audio):** I'm sorry, I did not mean to

**2 (murmur & audio):** Are you ok?

**3 (murmur & audio):** Do you need any help kid?

**4 (murmur & audio):** I like your shirt

**5 (murmur & audio):** I hope you will feel better

**6 (murmur & audio):** Where are you from?

**7 (murmur & audio):** How old are you?

**8 (murmur & audio):** I can drive you home.

*Grey, blue light is still there, but a spotlight on Nick. Nick is surprised by how kind these people are.*

**Nick (nervously):** It's alright. My mom is here.

*Mom enters the stage, and Nick comes closer to her. All actors exit from the stage right. Soft engine sounds.*

**Mom:** Nick?

**Nick:** We can go home now.

*Lights off.*

### Scene 3

*This scene takes place in a small room. Furniture and props are placed in a neat order. At the center of the stage is a blue sofa with a table in front of it. A pair of chairs is placed on each side of the sofa with a folded blanket on one of them. A lamp and several water cups are on the table. On the wall at the back of the stage hung animal drawings by Nick.*

*The stage light is dim and in a warm color.*

*The scene begins with Nick and Mom's entrance into the room.*

**Mom:** Nick? Do you want to sleep now?

**Nick:** Yes mom, but can you please make ginger tea for me first?

**Mom:** Of course! Warm milk might be better for you. What about a cup of chocolate milk for you before going to bed?

**Nick:** OK.

*Nick left the stage to enter his room.*

*Mom takes the milk on the table and pours some of them into a pot. She adds chocolate powder into the milk. As she stirs the milk with a wooden stick, she hears someone knock on the door indicated by stage audio.*

**Mom:** I'm coming in a second.

*Mom goes to open the door (and leaves the stage)*

**Mom (audio):** You're back.

**Dad (Tired, audio):** Roger told me to stay at the office until 9:00 because he wanted to talk to me today. Sorry for being late.

*MOM and DAD enter the stage. MOM comes back to stir the milk, and DAD takes off his coat and places it on the sofa.*

**Dad:** How's Nick?

**Mom** (*stops stirring the milk*): He's alright.

**Dad:** Alright? I heard he almost caused a car accident today at Wallstreet number 3.

**Mom:** Starting from when did you start to care about him?

*Beat*

**Dad:** Roger witnessed the incident. The one caused by our son.

*DAD takes his computer out.*

**Dad:** He says I can apply for a pass at the office, so I can leave the office whenever Nick needs help.

**Mom:** Roger is kind.

**Dad:** Yeah. But the problem is, I don't know...I don't know if this will be helpful.

**Mom** (*stops stirring and turns around*): Of course it will be helpful. What do you mean?

**Dad:** Carol, he is already 16 and will be an adult soon. When will it all end?

**Mom:** End?

**Dad:** We cannot take care of him forever! He needs to learn to live by himself!

**Mom:** But he is different. (*beat*) He is special! We can't just do nothing and let him--

**Dad:** Nothing? We fed him ever since he was born. We took care of him whenever he was ill. We've taught him everything he needs to survive! We did what we can do. Carol, what will Nick become when we are gone one day?

**Mom:** He has AUTISM, Bill. I don't know what we can do in the future, but we must try our best to take care of him now, making sure he feels happy every day.

**Dad:** Don't you know (*beat*) Diane's boy, I knew them before, has autism too, but he recovers from it already--

**Mom:** Where did you hear this from?

**Dad:** Didn't you watch the news? The organization interviewed Diane, and she said her boy's condition became better. He is just as normal as the others now.

**Mom** (*coldly*): No one can recover from autism. Diane's maid told me that Diane never came to visit her son after his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. She's just a careless liar who ignored her child.

*Beat*

**Dad** (*shocked*): How could she...

**Mom:** That's why we cannot do the same. I know it has been tough for both of us, but he is our son.

*She turns around and turns off the fire. She uses a spoon to take the milk out and pour it into the cup.*

**Mom:** I tried to find a doctor for him, and I got him a special medicine that could temporarily alleviate his pain. His condition is worsening. Can you imagine? He said he could see no humans but animals, and I was the only human that he could spot before. But now, he said I'm also fading away, transforming into a tiger. (*In pain*)

*Beat*

**Mom:** We cannot just leave him like this. We cannot.

*She takes the cup of milk and leaves the stage. The audience can hear her knock on the door.*

**Mom:** Hi Honey, here is your milk. Good night!

*She returns to the stage.*

**Dad:** I still have lots of work to do tomorrow. I will go to sleep now.

*He leaves the stage but turns around.*



**Dad:** You should take some time to rest too.

*He leaves the stage. Mom takes out Nick's medicine, stares at it, and sighs.*

#### Scene 4

*This scene takes place in Nick's bedroom. A bed is placed at the center stage. A small table is next to the bed on stage right with an off lamp and a cup filled with unfinished milk. Three wardrobes are arranged orderly at stage left, a bit further away from the bed. Similar animal drawings are placed on them.*

*Nick is lying on his bed, sleeping. The stage light is dim.*

9 (murmur & audio): Nick?

10 (murmur & audio): Nick?

*Blue stage light is gradually turned on.*

11 (murmur & audio): -Hey! We are calling you! –

10 (murmur & audio):- Nick? We are talking to you!-

12 (murmur & audio): -Can he ever hear us-

11 (murmur & audio): -Such a freak-Your deaf-

*Blue stage light gradually transforms to red light as the following audio plays the same music whenever Nick feels overwhelmed by fear.*

13 (murmur & audio): -such a weirdo-

9 (murmur & audio): -Leave him alone-

14 (murmur & audio): -You would even defend this freak-

12 (murmur & audio): -Hahaha-

13 (murmur & audio): Just why don't you talk? Normal beings all talk-

9 (murmur & audio): -Stop it-this is rude-

17 (murmur & audio): You will never be like us!

**Mom** (*murmur & audio*): -Nick?-

**15** (*murmur & audio*): -because he deserves it-

**Dad** (*murmur & audio*): -Stop it Nick!-

**16** (*murmur & audio*): You are disgusting!

**14** (*murmur & audio*): -Nick?-

**10**(*murmur & audio*): -Nick?-

*The sound of people laughing and calling Nick's name echoes on the stage, and their sounds slowly turn into animals' roaring. The red lights become darker. The music is in the maximum volume now. Nick wakes up in a panic as the music stops and lights off.*

*A dim, yellow stage light is turned on.*

*Nick is sitting on his bed, breathing quickly. He looks around his room, gets off his bed gently, and puts his feet into his shoes. He picks up the cup and goes to the living room (leaving the stage at stage right).*

*Lights off*

*Same living room setting as in scene 3.*

*MOM is making a sandwich at the stove. The audience can hear the collision of the pan and the sandwich. Her back is shown to the audience. Nick enters from stage left with a cup in his hand.*

**Nick:** Mom?

*Stage light slowly fades to red light. Silence.*

**Nick:** Mom?

*Music is played. (This music always plays when he feels overwhelmed) Mom stops what she is doing, and she turns around. She has a tiger mask on her face.*

**Mom** (*audio & unclear & sounds like an animal is roaring*): Good morning darling, the sandwich is (after this, makes weird, animal sound) 8&^0%%^&\*&.\*.

**Nick:** Mom?! Mom?! Is this you? Mom?!! Help me! Somebody, help!

*Blackout. Nick screams.*