



## Trophy Kid (a short play)

Steven Hill

### Synopsis

Ashley, an 18-year-old star basketball player, is graduating from high school and being eagerly recruited by top universities. But she desires to break free of her overbearing parents' pressure over sports. She and her mother go for a college interview—but it doesn't go quite as intended.

### Character list and setting

**ASHLEY**, an 18-year-old star basketball player, graduating from high school who is applying for colleges

**CARMELA**, mid-30s to late 40s, ASHLEY's mother

**MRS. (or MR.) HARRISON**, mid-30s to late 40s, Stanford University administrator (can be played by either a woman or man)

**SETTING:** MRS. HARRISON's office at Stanford University, with a desk, book shelves, chairs. Family photos on the desk.

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*(ASHLEY and CARMELA are sitting on the other side of the interview desk in a college interview. They speak to an interviewer who the audience cannot see. The initial interactions between ASHLEY and her mother should have an amusing tone, but increasingly less so as the play progresses.)*

ASHLEY

It's hard to say...everything has been happening SO fast lately...my senior year has been like...

CARMELA

A whirlwind, honestly. First there was the All-American honors, then Player of the Year. Everything's looked so bright and...she's had offers from more universities than—

ASHLEY

Mo-om...

CARMELA

I'm sorry...her father and I are just so proud. Understand, we're from small town New York. Upstate.

ASHLEY

Like I was saying, basketball is just one part of my life. *(To interviewer)* I also was chosen Scholar-Athlete—

CARMELA

Of the Year, that's right. We mustn't forget that.

ASHLEY

Mother!

CARMELA

And that's why we're leaning towards Stanford. We wouldn't have flown all the way here unless—scholastically tops, and a Pac-10 champion. Final Four three out of the last four years. Right Ash? She's gotten used to playing on championship teams.

*(Ashley rolls her eyes impatiently.)*

ASHLEY

Ummm...how often does the team practice? Is it every day? Including Sundays?

CARMELA

She's practiced on Sundays throughout her high school career. She's used to that.

ASHLEY

During the season, when the team is on the road...how do the players keep up with their studies?

CARMELA

Whatever the schedule is, my daughter will adjust. She's very good at juggling things...basketball, studies, social life.

ASHLEY

Hardly. I've had no social life at all!

CARMELA

I'm sure you don't need to go into those details, Ash.

ASHLEY

Why not? This *is* an interview, isn't it? I'm interviewing them, and they're interviewing me.

CARMELA

*(forced laugh)* She's...a little nervous. We *both* are, frankly.

ASHLEY

*(to the interviewer)* You might as well know...I'm a star basketball player, but a loser at everything else. I have no friends, no hobbies—

CARMELA

Don't write that down. She...she's only joking. What a sense of humor, right? Ash?

ASHLEY

I'm not joking. I haven't looked at Instagram or SnapChat in...probably six months. I had a boyfriend for all of three weeks. In my sophomore year. My father scared him off...egged him on to play me one-on-one!

CARMELA

My, Ash, you aren't usually so chatty...she's just being... informal. That's how so many young people are today. They call their teachers by their first names! Can you imagine?

ASHLEY

My father can be one scary dude. One time I missed a foul shot that would have sent the game into overtime. I was so nervous that I laughed – I just did, I don't know why – nerves do that to me sometimes--

CARMELA

Her father and I have exposed her...both our children...to a broad outlook and education--

ASHLEY

He screamed at me. I mean SCREAMED. I thought he was going to *hit* me!

CARMELA

Don't write that down. *(to Ashley)* OK, I should have known you'd -- Ashley had a bit of an accident a few months ago. Right, Ash?

ASHLEY

He made me go to my room without dinner. Anything to get away from him. I re-read Hunger Games. I love that book.

CARMELA

Why don't you tell about what an avid reader you are. In the car, back and forth to practice and school. Always has her nose in a book.

ASHLEY

It's nothing special, Mom. Trashy detective and romance novels. You know?

CARMELA

My husband and I believe in a liberal arts education, balanced by athletic endeavor. Education, teamwork, leadership...

ASHLEY

You can't blame the things you don't like about me on the accident.

CARMELA

Well-rounded...is that the word?

ASHLEY

Whatever. You can quit trying so hard now.

CARMELA

Ash! OK, OK, you know what? This is your interview. Why don't I not say another word. OK?

ASHLEY

I'll believe *that* when I see it.

CARMELA

No, you go ahead. You be...the person I know you can be.

ASHLEY

OK, what if I said– are you ready? – I don't want to play basketball in college. I'm done. Yep, I said it. There.

*(CARMELA tries not to say anything.)*

I want my life back.

*(ASHLEY looks at her mother defiantly, gauging her reaction. CARMELA is trying hard not to say anything).*

No more 24-7 workouts – *(to the interviewer)* Did I tell you that one time my father got me out of bed at three in the morning to shoot three-point jumpers? After I had one...off...game.

*(CARMELA is still trying hard not to say anything.)*

ASHLEY

No more never-ending practices, workouts, drills, practice, drills, workout, practice, workout, drills, drills...do you understand? You can't blame this on the accident, Mom. You just can't. I want time to hang out with friends who...who don't talk about basketball! I want to...have time for a boyfriend. What a concept!

*(CARMELA is still trying hard not to say anything.)*

I want time to be able to go horseback riding, like I used to when I was, like, nine.

CARMELA

When you were nine? Oh please, Ashley, you sound like... six! I want I want I want. Do you know how many things I want? Should I give you a list?

ASHLEY

Be a *fan*, not a *fanatic*! I just want to be a normal college student...without a full-time job playing basketball. As if I'm gonna be the next Caitlin Clark, a complete fantasy Dad has fed me since--

CARMELA

Excuse us for a moment. Sure, I'll let you tell your father that one. You know the score, kiddo. You know what your father always said.

ASHLEY

If I don't play...

CARMELA

You've always been free to quit whenever you want...

ASHLEY

He won't pay. Then how am I supposed to afford college? Huh? He backed me into a corner. A desperate corner.

CARMELA

She doesn't mean that. Don't write that down. Obviously she wants to play basketball. At Stanford. She wants to play for the Cardinal.

ASHLEY

No, I don't. I really don't. I'm finished with it. I've been on Dad's basketball plantation since I was nine.

CARMELA

It's been a long year. The season seemed to last forever. And then to lose the state championship game at the buzzer?

ASHLEY

What do I have to do? Sweat blood? Is that what you want?

CARMELA

And then Ash's little accident...

ASHLEY

Sure, you can blame it on the accident...or... possibly the other way around.

*(CARMELA reaches out to calm ASHLEY, but ASHLEY moves away.)*

CARMELA

Will you stop punishing me? Please? I can't control your father. Yes, he can be a bit extreme. But I'm not the evil one here. I'm not.

*(ASHLEY gives her a look).*

CARMELA

Things were going too good, weren't they? The season was over, you fulfilled all your goals...even your father was walking lighter.

ASHLEY

I miscalculated...I was never good at chemistry or... measuring things out. Maybe I should have taken more Home EC.

CARMELA

I'm not saying it was your fault.*(to the interviewer)* You have children. It's hard, isn't it? *(starts to weep)*

ASHLEY

OK Mom, really. Now look who's...I'm sorry, this is so embarrassing.

CARMELA

Quite right Ash, quite right. There's no crying in basketball, is there?

ASHLEY

Yeah...no crying...

CARMELA

Honey—

ASHLEY

Shhh. She's coming.

CARMELA

What? Who's coming?

ASHLEY

It's OK, Mom. You mustn't blame yourself. It's not your fault. Remember that.

CARMELA

Yes, your father's had—her father was a—he was raised by his older brother. A drunk. He worked so you and your brother wouldn't—

ASHLEY

Some things you have to let go of, Mom.

CARMELA

Oh, so suddenly you're the expert?

ASHLEY

One thing I've learned—

CARMELA

I get lectured to by everybody...Even your brother, only 15. The accident was hard on him, Ash. You were his favorite.

ASHLEY

You can't control me anymore, Mom. You have to pull it together. *(Pause.)* Shhh, she's here.

*(MRS. HARRISON enters and CARMELA stands.)*

MRS. HARRISON

Hello, Mrs. Lopez? It's so very nice to meet you. I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long.

CARMELA

No no, not at all. I've been...admiring your office.

MRS. HARRISON

Oh, well, not much to admire, I'm afraid. Typical Stanford college issue.

CARMELA

*(points to photos, choking up)* Are those...your children?

MRS. HARRISON

Why yes, my two daughters and son. One of my daughters is the same age as Ashley. Who I'm dying to meet. Where is she?

CARMELA

Thank you. I—um—

MRS. HARRISON

Judging from her application—especially her essay—she seems like quite a special person.

*(CARMELA closes her eyes and pauses, takes a deep breath.)*

CARMELA

Actually, I came here today, Mrs. Harrison, because I wanted to tell you—in person—that we are withdrawing—have withdrawn—Ashley’s application.

MRS. HARRISON

Oh, no. Heavens. Why? She seems like such a good fit here. Is there a problem or concern or—

CARMELA

No, no, it’s not your school. Stanford is perfect, but, ummm, well...we had an accident a few months back. Ashley...had an accident. We...lost her...right after the season. It was one of those freak things...She was on special medication...pain killers for a basketball injury. And she, um, swallowed, well, not sure how many and...combined with the alcohol she—

MRS. HARRISON

Oh, Mrs. Lopez. I’m...I’m so, so sorry.

CARMELA

I wanted to come here and explain in person. Cause... Ashley had been SO excited to come here. It was her dream. I just – I had to come here and see for myself. I can almost picture her, walking around this golden campus and—

*(CARMELA is fighting back tears.)*

MRS. HARRISON

Certainly, Mrs. Lopez. I’m truly sorry. I can only imagine how hard it must be...you’re very brave.

CARMELA

I keep wondering if...I could have done something, or...as a mother...

MRS. HARRISON

Of course, of course. That's only natural. Mothers are always on trial.

CARMELA

I'm so embarrassed. I don't usually...but thinking about her here, talking to you. Makes it so real. I'm sorry for taking your time.

MRS. HARRISON

No, no, not at all. Feel free to spend as much time as you need, I—

*(CARMELA stands to leave. She looks back and sees ASHLEY, and they exchange long looks.)*

CARMELA

As parents, we push so hard sometimes. You want...the best for your children. You want it so bad that...we forget they're children...Where we end, and they start...we forget...to listen.

*(CARMELA looks down, nods sadly, exits.)*

**END OF PLAY**

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Steven Hill is a Caveat Lector principal and contributing writer. He is a journalist and the author of seven books of political non-fiction. His essays, articles, and media interviews have appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, The Atlantic, Wall Street Journal, Wired, Guardian, Le Monde, Die Zeit, NPR, PBS, BBC, C-SPAN, Democracy Now, and many others. He is the chief editor and contributor to the online publication [DemocracySOS](http://DemocracySOS). He has published short fiction and poems in a number of publications, including the Columbia Journal, Minnesota Review, San Fernando Poetry Journal, Struggle, Prophetic Voices, and the anthologies Sparkle and Blink, Grasp the Rainbow, and Poets for a Livable Planet. His plays have been produced in New York City (Off Off Broadway), Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. His website can be found at <https://www.Steven-Hill.com>.