From Footlights to Flashlights

Ten conceptual plays that

reach and teach teens

Gwyn English Nielsen

Preface

To the Drama Director or Teacher

In today’s world, a popular assumption is that theater exists merely to entertain. Superficially, it may; however, more profoundly, theater purports to mirror society and to reach – to teach – each audience member so that when he or she exits the house, he or she is changed in some way. Even if he or she is merely persuaded to examine his or her own stance on a controversial subject while mulling over his or her own ethical viewpoint, a transformation should occur. The theatergoer should learn something; otherwise, the playwright has not fulfilled his or her responsibility to the art form. Didacticism belongs to drama and has since its birth in Greece thousands of years ago. Therefore, in order to be true to tradition, it must occupy a place in plays penned not only for adults, but also for adolescents, which is the rationale behind this collection.

 All of the plays in the anthology – most of them one acts – speak volumes and yes, are entertaining, suitable for secondary-school assemblies, formal and informal evening performances, as well as in-class presentations. (All the plays can be produced sans royalty fees.) Touching upon the human experience, the themes presented within are current, yet timeless. Set and costume requirements are pragmatic, yet creative – minimal, in fact, so that the budget-conscious can stage the plays virtually for nothing. In the title, the “footlights” metaphorically represent the plays with traditional staging, whereas the “flashlights” refer to the more avant-garde pieces. (Actually the term is more literal than figurative as in three of the plays, the actors use flashlights for purposes of illumination and emphasis.) What is important, though, is that all who participate in the production of the plays shall find the original plots, characters, and settings relatable, relevant, and revealing. (As an aside, three of the plays were performed in two middle schools and in one high school and were met with outstanding reviews.)

 Thank you for preserving the dramatic arts and for inspiring young actors to join your zealous quest.

 Long live theater arts!

For all of you students, teachers, and directors who delight in swimming in the all-consuming, passionate waters of the theater: May you “relish” the experience for as long as you inhabit the earth. (Thanks to Harvey Powers for the “relish”!)

And for Pat Pedro, the definition of Superman: Dear friend, always remember that life is just a slightly elongated version of *Our Town.*

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Chapter 1: Morality

 Unfortunately, the fine line that separates right from wrong tends to be blurred so that what is commonly known as “the gray area” dominates. In a society that prefers to maneuver in this comfortable, noncommittal place, traditional ethics take a backseat and are often nearly forgotten. “Allegorical Chairs,”a contemporary morality play, politely reminds the audience that ethical considerations are still significant even in a world wherein tolerance for what was once condemned as “amoral” has met its highest threshold. Each character represents a divergent moral concept, and a referee exists to separate dualities whenever their exchanges become heated. What makes this one-act play a bit out of the ordinary is that some of the dialogue is scripted while some is improvised, featuring audience participation. In effect, “Allegorical Chairs” combines the children’s game Going to Jerusalem, or Musical Chairs, and a verbal boxing match while showcasing an ensemble that often functions like a Greek chorus. Arena staging is suggested, and natural lighting should be employed to create a realistic, unaffected atmosphere in which the audience feels a part of “the game.” Although the one act is suitable for a religious group’s production, the director who believes in what it conveys can stage it anywhere for anyone.

Allegorical Chairs

Characters

Love Hate Referee

Justice Injustice Audience Member #1

Generosity Greed Audience Member #2

Modesty Arrogance Audience Member #3

Good Evil Audience Member #4

*At rise:* *Ten chairs are placed center stage, back-to-back, indicative of Musical Chairs. Four actors, posing as audience members, are planted in the house, which encircles the playing space.*

*Costumed accordingly, the* REFEREE *enters stage right, carrying a feather duster.* REF*, the comic relief, is reminiscent of a mime. He hums an audible, cheerful tune and begins to dust off the chairs. As the* REF *progresses around the chairs, the humming evolves into a recognizable song (“I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” by The Rolling Stones).* *His movements, which began small, have now become* *exaggerated, almost angry. Dancing about the playing space, he interacts with the audience.*

LOVE *enters stage left, wearing white pants and a white T-shirt with large, red hearts sewn onto it.*

LOVE. (*Clearing her throat*.) Huh, hum. Excuse me. (REF *stops singing and dusting and* *freezes.*) We’re ready to begin Allegorical Chairs. (REF *turns to* LOVE *and bows dramatically.*)

REF. Yes, of course. Right away. Absolutely, sir, oops, uh, Miss Love. (*To audience*.) Don’t worry. It’s not very complicated this game. It’s a lot like Musical Chairs. You’ll catch on right away.

(*As* REF *turns to leave, the nine other members of the* COMPANY *enter stage right. They are without expression - silent, almost mechanical.* REF *pushes his way through them like a salmon swimming upstream and he exits. Each of the others takes a seat, except for* LOVE *who stands watching, left of the chairs. She notices there is one chair vacant, her own.*)

LOVE. (*Calling*.) Oh, Ref! You forgot something!

(REF *rushes in from stage right and takes off the chair, dragging it left. As he does, it makes a harsh, scraping sound. The* COMPANY *reacts to the cacophony by cupping their ears while* REF *exits stage left.*)

LOVE. (*Calling after* REF.)Thank you very much. (*She turns to notice the audience as if for the first time.)* Why, hello! So glad that you could join us! Nice to see you! (*She crosses to the audience, shaking hands, etc. Much of what she says to them can be improvised.*) I have something here that I’d like to read to you. (*She takes out a pocket copy of the* New Testament *from her pants, opens it to a marked page, and begins to read with pronounced feeling*.)‘If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It isn’t rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails.’

(HATE *clad in all black and seated with the* COMPANY*, has been groaning periodically throughout the reading.*)

HATE. (*To* LOVE.)I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but we’re not at a Christian wedding. Some of us on stage and in the audience may take offense to such pontificating.

LOVE. (*To him*.) Yes, I know we aren’t at a wedding, and I apologize if I have offended anyone. I just wanted all of you (*She gestures to the other characters and the audience.*)to know who I am and what is important to remember about me. (*She crosses down to the audience.*) This passage from first Corinthians depicts me precisely. (*To the audience.*) You do know who I am, right?

HATE. How utterly ridiculous you are. It’s so obvious because you just said it at least twenty times.

LOVE. (*Giving him a dirty look.*)Only about seven, actually, if you are counting correctly. (*To the audience.*) Raise your hand if you think you know who I am. (AUDIENCE MEMBER#1 *raises her hand.*)Yes, you, Miss. Who am I?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1. You are Love?

LOVE. Correct!

HATE.Oh, Ref! (REF *enters from left.* HATE *rises to meet him and begins to imitate a host of a game show.*)Tell the girl what she’s won. (REF *just stares at* HATE *blankly.*)

LOVE. (*Crossing to* REF.)Never mind. He’s just being sarcastic and hurtful, as usual. (LOVE *ushers* REF *back off stage, right.*)

HATE. (*Crossing to* LOVE *and gesturing to the audience.*)Since you seem to know me so well, Love, what else can you tell them about me?

LOVE. Why don’t we just formally introduce you to the audience members and let them give you their insights as to your true, despicable nature?

HATE. Fine. Some of them may know me better than you anyway.

LOVE. Hopefully not, but we’ll see. (*To audience.*)Ladies and gentleman, please allow me to introduce my direct opposite. His name is Hate.

(*At this time, there is an improvised exchange – about five to ten minutes – between the actual audience and the two characters. The planted audience members may help to stimulate the conversation. A discussion of what hate is begins.)*

LOVE. Most realize how detestable you are.

HATE. (*Laughing*.)Ah, yes, I am detestable and proud to be. Just think. Without me and everything I represent, the world would be completely boring. There wouldn’t be any wars, any crime, any homeless individuals, any sick, neglected souls, any unhappiness, any evil…(EVIL *rises.*)

EVIL. Here, here!

LOVE. Not yet. You’ll have your chance later…much later. (GOODNESS *applauds and* EVIL *sits reluctantly.*)Since when do those things make the world a more interesting place? I, Love, am the answer to all questions.

HATE. Oh, please. You’re a farce! Just how many loving people do you know, Love?

LOVE. I know quite a few.

HATE. And do they really know how to love as your book dictates?

LOVE. As the Bible dictates? Yes.

HATE. Oh, I so strongly disagree. If you are so right, why is, why is…(*He hesitates, trying to think of examples.*) Okay, why is the divorce rate so high? About fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. (*To the audience.*)Those who are divorced raise your hands.

LOVE. (*Interrupting him.*)No, that’s not necessary. Don’t embarrass anyone in the audience. When it comes to your statistic, you’re thinking pessimistically. I’m an optimist, so to me, the glass is half full, not half empty. I’m sure the other fifty percent of all marriages are content – joyous, in fact.

HATE. Really? (*To the audience.*)Okay, then, if you happen to be happily married, raise your hand.

LOVE. Stop with the personal questions.

HATE. I’m trying to prove a point.

(REF *enters right with a triangle, striking it repeatedly.*)

REF. Sorry, time’s up. Hate, the audience has had enough of you. You’re becoming too belligerent. Leave, please.

HATE. But belligerence is one of my best qualities!

REF. I’ll escort you out. (*He exits stage left.*)

LOVE. (*To the audience*.)Well, it was sure nice meeting you. Don’t mind Hate. He’s not happy unless everyone despises him. Remember what I am, practice who I am; and if you just happen to be unhappy, your life will improve. I guarantee it. Sorry, but I have to go, too.

*(*LOVE *crosses up right, motions for the* COMPANY *to rise, takes a chair, and exits with it stage right, singing The Beatles’ “All You Need Is Love.”*)

COMPANY. (*Circles around the existing chairs, chanting and clapping in unison.*)Love and Hate the world doth possess. Which will dominate? Take a lucky guess.

(*At the end of the chant, all scramble for the chairs.* JUSTICE *is about to sit down when* INJUSTICE *takes her seat.* JUSTICE *is left standing, wearing a headband and T-shirt with balanced scales printed on it.*)

JUSTICE. I suppose there‘s not much justice left in the world. (*To* AUDIENCE MEMBER #2*.*)Did you see what she just did? She stole that chair from me.

INJUSTICE. What a crybaby! You’re so self-righteous!

JUSTICE. I am, but in a good way because I’m fair and just.

INJUSTICE. (*Singing to the tune of “Bingo.*”) And Justice is my name-o.

JUSTICE. You just gave it away! (*She gestures to the audience.*)I wanted them to guess my name.

INJUSTICE. What do you expect from me? I’m your archrival! (INJUSTICE *is wearing the same T-shirt as* JUSTICE*, but there is an ‘x’ over the balanced scales.*)Heck, I only know how to be unfair and unjust.

JUSTICE. Right, Injustice. Sorry, I forgot. I wish you could understand where I’m coming from.

INJUSTICE. (*Mimicking her.*)‘There is not much justice left in the world.’ So what? Who needs justice? Right, wrong, white, black…what’s the difference? (*To the audience.*)You’ve all heard of the gray area, right? (*She directs the question to*

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3.)You, over there! What do you think of justice? Is it worth preserving?

(*Again, there is improvisation here. A discussion of ethics begins and lasts for about five minutes.*)

JUSTICE. Okay, okay, the bottom line is I’m important. The righteous will inherit the earth.

INJUSTICE. I thought it was the meek doing the inheriting. Even so, you won’t while we’re around. As long as my friends Evil, Greed, and Arrogance are here (*She gestures at the remaining* COMPANY. *Each nods upon mention.*)*,* I’d say you and your proponents are going to have a rough time of it.

JUSTICE. It has never been easy, but we’re not about to throw in the towel. In the end, I, Justice, will always prevail. I am the backbone of democracy, the reason why most republics are great.

INJUSTICE. You’re so subjective like everything else. When it comes to you, it ‘s not what you know; it’s whom you know. A high-powered lawyer with connections can get anyone who’s guilty exonerated – which is when I step in.

JUSTICE. That’s not true. What kind of proof do you have?

INJUSTICE. I have plenty of proof. Would you like me to start listing all the court cases that had unjust outcomes?

JUSTICE. No, you’d just bore the audience. Okay, I’ll admit that I’m not always consistent, but most still believe that I’m possible.

INJUSTICE. Possible, just not probable.

JUSTICE. All right, I’ve had just about enough of your negative attitude. Put ‘em up! (*She assumes a boxer’s stance with both hands clenched in fists.*)

INJUSTICE. (*She ignores her.*) If you don’t mind, this discussion is getting a tad tiresome. I’m going to take my chair and go.

JUSTICE. That’s not your chair. It belonged to me first! (*A physical squabble over the chair ensues.* REF *enters stage left – this time ringing a bell. He grabs the chair from them and runs off right*. INJUSTICE *and* JUSTICE *chase after him in hot pursuit of the chair.*)

COMPANY. (*Standing and circling the chairs.*) Justice is just and rightly so, but when Injustice competes too strongly, both must go.

(*When the chant ends, the* COMPANY *races to the chairs*. GENEROSITY *is left standing. She does not seem to be unnerved. In fact, she takes advantage of it. Costumed in a loosely flowing, floral dress, she carries a bouquet of paper flowers.* GENEROSITY *moves about the space industriously, handing the other characters and audience members flowers as she speaks.*)

GENEROSITY. I’ve always believed that giving is far better than receiving. (GOOD *acknowledges her.)* Thank you, Good. (*She crosses to* AUDIENCE MEMBER #4.)You seem to think so as well. Do you? You probably know me, yes? You are correct. I’m Generosity. (*Some improvised dialogue with the audience can begin here.*)

*(During* GENEROSITY*’s dialogue,* GREED, *who is wearing a T-shirt reading “Any Takers?” and cargo pants stuffed with things, rises and begins to take back all of the flowers from the characters and audience members.* GENEROSITY *notices this and stops conversing with the audience.*)

GENEROSITY. Excuse me. Pardon me. Just what do you think you’re doing?

GREED. What does it look like I’m doing?

GENEROSITY. Greed, why can’t you sit still for once?

GREED. Sorry, but I can’t allow this gratuitous giving. No one in this group of people has given you anything, so there’s no reason for you to be so generous. Ugh, this selfless, kind business makes my stomach cringe!

GENEROSITY. So, you have to take back my flowers to feel better?

GREED. Absolutely. Taking and hoarding make me feel at peace with my inner being.

GENEROSITY. However, by taking and hoarding, you’re not allowing me any room to be myself. If I can’t be magnanimous, then I’m lost. I have no definition.

GREED. (*Crossing to her.*)You know, Generosity, you just gave me a great idea. Since you now have no ‘definition,’ why don’t you just vanish, as in *disappear*? The game needs one less chair to continue. You’d be doing us all a big favor. You like doing favors for people, right?

GENEROSITY. Correct, but I’d be removing a chair. I don’t take anything. But you do. Say, there’s a nice chair over there, Greed. It’s all yours. You can walk away with it now. I’ll even help you if you’d like. In fact, you can even take mine as well.

GREED. Now don’t start resembling Good. One of her is definitely enough. (GOOD, *who has been smiling, turns to give* GREED *a suspicious look*. GREED *crosses to the chair.*) *This* is *my* chair. I absolutely won’t let anyone else touch it. (*He pulls it aside and places it away from the others.*) Maybe I’ll just sit here for a while and enjoy these beautiful flowers that no one else can get to now that they are mine too! (*He laughs sinisterly.* EVIL *joins in as well.*)

GENEROSITY. You two are so predictable. I have a better idea. (*She crosses to him.*) Why don’t you give me back my flowers, take both chairs, and leave us? That way, you won’t have to witness any more of my character traits. At least your stomach will feel relieved.

GREED. Well, all right – I’ll take the chairs, but don’t expect me to give these back to you. (*He holds up the flowers.*)

GENEROSITY. Come on. What are you going to do with a bunch of measly, dusty paper flowers?

GREED. Hoard them like everything else.

GENEROSITY. Can you make an exception this time? Please? Pretty please with sugar on top?

GREED. Fine, as long as you put a lot of sugar on top.

GENEROSITY. (*Pantomiming sprinkling sugar.*) Okay. You now have a lot of sugar on top.

(GREED *drops the flowers onto the floor, takes the chairs, and exits left.)*

GENEROSITY. (*Sighing to the audience*.)Boy, what a relief! I never thought he’d leave. It’s stupid, fighting over chairs. Guess it’s contagious around here. You’d think Greed would have learned something from the confrontation between Justice and Injustice. Well, back to business. (*She picks up the flowers and passes them out to the audience.*)Thank you. You have been wonderful.

(*Once all the flowers are gone,* GENEROSITY *curtsies, blows kisses, and exits right.* COMPANY *rises, and* REF *comes on to take off another chair. There should only be three chairs left.*)

COMPANY. (*Circling chairs*.)In our lives, there must be a balance of give and take. To think otherwise would be a huge mistake.

(*When the chant ends,* ARROGANCE *is left standing. She is dressed elaborately.*)

ARROGANCE. (*Sarcastically.*) That’s just great. I’m left without a chair. How could this happen to me? I’m intelligent, beautiful, and far, far superior in every way to any of the others. Yet I am standing. I wish Justice were still here. She’d see that I am deserving of a place in this game.

MODESTY. (*Wearing a very simple shift and standing.*)Arrogance, you may have my chair.

ARROGANCE. Thank you, Modesty. Generosity would be impressed. But I’m surprised Good didn’t offer first. (*She glares at* GOOD *who shrugs.*)

MODESTY. I’m always glad to help.

ARROGANCE. How nice. Just don’t start thinking you’re perfect, though. I’m the only one who is.

MODESTY. No, I’d never think that. I have very little compared to you, Arrogance.

ARROGANCE. Naturally, I have it all. I make a huge pay check for doing relatively nothing, live in the largest, most pretentious, twice-mortgaged home in the neighborhood, drive a solid gold Porsche – I also own a rare, antique Jaguar that I rarely drive – possess closets full of designer clothes, shoes, and accessories. But the problem is, I always want more.

MODESTY. Funny, you sound like Greed. As for me, I’m happy with very little. Although I seriously don’t like talking about myself, I live a very simple, humble lifestyle and don’t consider it proper to boast.

ARROGANCE. That’s probably because you have nothing to boast about.

MODESTY. True, but I really don’t want anything.

ARROGANCE. (*Astounded.*) Unbelievable! How could you not want anything? I mean where have you been? This is a self-centered, materialistic world. A person’s possessions give him or her identity. Look at Hollywood celebrities, for instance. Why do you think they are so admired? Everyday people envy them because of what they own. Maybe the fans think they’re talented, too, but I think it is really because they can buy anything they want. Obviously, in this society if you have nothing, then you’re worthless. (*She looks at a random audience member.*) *You,* what do you think about this whole thing? (*There is improvised dialogue between* ARROGANCE *and audience members until…*)

MODESTY. I disagree. I don’t live in your superficial world. I don’t want to. Everything that money can buy is not important to me. Do you even know the definition of humility?

ARROGANCE. I would assume it is the opposite of arrogance? If that’s the case, I’m not interested in adding it to my vocabulary. (*As an afterthought.*) You know, you could stand to have your hair done. No offense, but who does your tailoring?

MODESTY. (*Looking down at his faded, baggy pants.*)No one, and I thought I made it clear that vanity is not my thing.

ARROGANCE. Too bad! (*She sighs, pausing to glance at the remaining characters.*)You know, the whole concept of Allegorical Chairs is way beneath me. I have better things to do than play redundant games with insipid people. I’m gone.

(ARROGANCE *throws her head in the air and exits in a haughty fashion.*)

MODESTY. (*Following her, stage right.*) Wait, Arrogance! You forgot to take a chair with you. Oh, well, someone has to do it, so it may as well be me.

(MODESTY *takes two chairs, leaving* EVIL *and* GOOD *sitting in the middle of the space. They stand and chant*. REF *enters left to take yet another chair so that only one chair is left.*)

EVIL/GOOD. Because Arrogance so enjoys the sound of her own voice, she never gives Modesty much of a choice.

(GOOD *bends down to sit in the last chair, but* EVIL *pulls it out from underneath her so that she falls on the floor.* GOOD *is dressed in a white choir robe, whereas* EVIL *dons a black one.*)

EVIL. (*Laughing sinisterly.*) *Gotcha!*

GOOD. I had a feeling you’d do that.

EVIL. I am just so bad, aren’t I?

GOOD. (*Picking herself off the floor.*)The worst – completely satanic.

EVIL. Thanks for the compliment.

GOOD. I don’t consider it one.

EVIL. Well now, Miss Goody-Two-Shoes, it’s hard for me to phantom that you have never even been tempted by me.

GOOD. I wouldn’t touch you with a ten-foot pole. You are composed of elements far too heinous for me.

EVIL. Try them. You’ll like them.

GOOD. No, thank you. I think I’ll continue to bask in the light. Do me a favor; don’t cast any shadows my way, okay?

EVIL. Oh, come on, Good, where’s your sense of humor? I find death, destruction, profanity, intolerance, avarice, prejudice, lust, betrayal, etc., etc. so entertaining. Where would the human race be without the seven deadly sins?

GOOD. Heaven, probably. You are one sick puppy, Evil. I don’t think any of those things are funny. Eliminate all of them, and this world would be nearly perfect, good – like me. Peace, purity, loyalty, patience, generosity, equality, kindness, and love would be a few of the beautiful ideals that we would have left. If there were more people who embraced me, there wouldn’t be a place for you at all.

EVIL. Ah, but there is, of course. I’m all around you. Take a long look. I’m everywhere: in homes, industries, governments, schools, even on street corners. Those pushers are doing a swell job of getting kids addicted to drugs, don’t you think? (*He approaches one of the planted audience members and improvises.*)

GOOD. (*Interrupting.*)Oh, no you don’t. I refuse to allow you to convert any of these good people.

EVIL. Convert? I’m not introducing anything new or different. Each of these people has a complete understanding of who I am. I’m hidden within all of them.

GOOD. Yes, perhaps, but each has a preference for me.

EVIL. This could turn into quite a debate. Why don’t we take a quick tally? All those in favor of me, Evil, raise your hands!

GOOD. Wait a minute! If you insist upon a democratic vote, let’s have a consequence attached.

EVIL. What do you mean by that?

GOOD. Simple. If these people cast a vote in my favor, YOU must leave, and I win the game.

EVIL. If on the other hand, they vote for me, you must surrender and declare me the official winner.

GOOD. Sounds all right to me, almost like that TV show *Survivor* - in which case, why don’t we bring back the other players so the vote won’t be unanimous in my favor?

EVIL. Careful, careful, Good. You’re starting to sound a little like Arrogance who is sure to be on my side. Don’t be so sure of yourself.

GOOD. Like Justice, optimism is one of my less obvious qualities.

EVIL. And like Injustice, pessimism is one of mine.

GOOD. Yes, I noticed. (REF *enters from stage right.*)Bring back the other players, please.

REF. You mean all of them?

EVIL. (*Darkly.*)Yeah, and do it now.

REF. (*Unnerved.*) Yes, sure, whatever you say. (REF *exits right and reenters with the remainder of the ensemble. They stand where their chairs once were*. REF *stands slightly apart from them.*)

GOOD. (*Surveying the lot.*)It looks like everyone is present and accounted for, but I better call roll just to be sure. (*The* COMPANY *stands, discussing why they are suddenly back on stage.*)

EVIL. I’ll do it. All right, everyone, quiet down. The referee has brought you back so that you can help us decide who deserves to win this game - Good here, or me. To be fair – not that I really understand the concept – I need to call roll so that I’m sure that everyone is here. I need to have at least half of you on my side from the get-go. Raise your hand when I call your name: Love? Hate? Justice? Injustice? Generosity? Greed? Modesty? Arrogance? (*Each raises his or her hand.*)

Okay, then, everybody’s here.

GOOD. Great. Let’s not forget the referee. Ref? Will you vote?

REF. I guess so. This is not exactly how the game is played, you know.

EVIL. (*Edging up to him ominously.*)I know, but you will vote, won’t you?

REF. (*Intimidated.*) Yes, yes, of course, sure thing. Who cares how the game should be played?

GOOD. Now, Evil, I won’t have you threatening anyone, subtly or blatantly. This process must be fair and impartial. (JUSTICE *throws up her arms and hoots*. GOOD *shoots her down with a glare.*)Otherwise, we’ll call it off, and I’ll win by default. Is that clear?

EVIL. Perfectly. Let’s get on with it.

GOOD. You first.

EVIL. All in favor of me winning this game and conquering Good, raise your left hand!

(INJUSTICE*,* HATE,ARROGANCE*, and* GREED *raise their hands along with any of the planted actors in the audience.* EVIL *counts votes aloud.*)

GOOD. Those of you who believe that I, Good, should occupy the last chair, ultimately reigning over Evil, raise your right hand! (*She counts the votes.*)

GOOD. Well, Evil, I’m afraid you have lost, fair and square. It’s time for you and your buddies to say adios.

(EVIL, INJUSTICE, HATE, ARROGANCE*, and* GREED *survey the crowd, see they are outnumbered, concede to defeat, and exit. All applaud, especially* JUSTICE *who goes wild. All but* EVIL *and* GOOD *begin to leave the space. The followers of* EVIL *exit in one direction – to the left – and the friends of* GOOD*, to the right.*)

EVIL*.* Good, although you’ve won the game of Allegorical Chairs, don’t think you’ve purified the planet. You haven’t, nor will you – ever. (*He laughs. Both characters freeze*. REF *reenters from left, standing between* EVIL *and* GOOD*.*)

REF. And so it ends as it began. Truth emanates from the yin and the yang. Knowledge here may distract, yet opposites most surely attract. (*He exits right.*)

BLACKOUT

Chapter 2: Identity in Crisis

 It is no secret that adolescence involves the search for identity, yet finding a comfortable sense of self may take many years. Often when identity-bereft teens feel hemmed in by the increasing demands of contemporary society, they may feel compelled to adopt unorthodox habits as a means of taking control of their lives. Bulimia, a common eating disorder among teens, is an affliction that germinates from the hopelessness and insecurity that teens may feel growing up in a complex world. “Chain Link” exposes bulimia and its effects with the intention of stimulating awareness, and perhaps even change. The first portion of the play employs symbolic staging, and the second requires little in the way of scenic elements. The “highlighting” of facial expressions can be done through use of simple flashlights. If the director and actors are open to doing some research on bulimia and other eating disorders beforehand, this piece is perfect for a school assembly since it allows time for a question-and-answer session afterwards.

Chain Link

Characters

Cynthia Kette

Lyle Kette

Courtney Kette

Lydia Kette

Candy Kette

Luke Glied

Grandma and Grandpa, otherwise known as Connie and Lou Kette

SCENE 1*: The stage is virtually empty except for the four pairs of characters, standing back-to-back downstage center so that their profiles are distinctly clear. Each couple has his/her arms linked suggesting a bond that transcends the superficial. All characters’ heads are bowed and eyes, closed to suggest sleep or possible torpor. Couples can be organized from left to right in somewhat of a partial triangle:* COURTNEY/LYDIA; GRANDMA/GRANDPA; LYLE/CYNTHIA; CANDY/LUKE. *Upstage of the characters is a long, rectangular table with six chairs on the upstage side and one on each end, totaling eight in all.*

(*The lights come up, or a sole spotlight can be directed on the first couple from the left,* COURTNEY *and* LYDIA. COURTNEY *can be described as a thin, attractive, mean teen about fifteen. Conversely,* LYDIA, *about thirteen, is plump and puritanically plain.* COURTNEY *breaks free from* LYDIA *and crosses center.* COURTNEY *takes a piece of white chalk from her pocket and draws a discernable, vertical line separating stage right from stage left.* LYDIA *crosses downstage to the audience.*)

LYDIA. (*Gesturing upstage, aside to the audience.*) Just in case you were wondering, most of these people are members of my insane family. The one who is drawing with the chalk is my obnoxious sister and the rest you’ll figure out as we go along. (*She crosses upstage to follow* COURTNEY.) What do you think you’re doing?

COURTNEY. I’m just creating a permanent solution to all our problems. When I’m finished, you won’t be able to steal anything from my side of the bathroom anymore.

LYDIA. (*Defensively.*)I don’t ‘steal’ your stuff!

COURTNEY. (*She stops drawing to laugh sardonically.*)Oh, yeah? Sure. If that’s the case, how come things just seem to disappear around here?

LYDIA. What do you mean by ‘disappear’?

COURTNEY. Take yesterday, for example. I brought a brand new brush home from the pharmacy, put it next to my sink, and within seconds, it was gone! I never even got a chance to use it!

LYDIA. How do you know I took it? I’m not your only sister, you know.

COURTNEY. (*Gesturing to* CANDY.) Candy can’t do much of anything in case you haven’t noticed.

LYDIA. (*Desperately.*)How about Mom?

COURTNEY. I don’t think so.

LYDIA. Grandma! Grandma probably borrowed it and forgot to return it! She’s losing her short-term memory, you know.

COURTNEY. Duh! Grandma doesn’t have enough hairs on her head to use a brush without it causing her extreme pain.

LYDIA. (*Resignedly.*)Well, I didn’t take it.

COURTNEY. Too bad I don’t believe you. (*She finishes the line and points to it.*)There you go, Pudgy. That’s your side of the bathroom, and this is mine. There’s no crossing over for any reason whatsoever. (COURTNEY *pushes* LYDIA *over the line so that she is on “her” side.*)

LYDIA. (*Agreeably, yet with a touch of sarcasm.*)Okay. Have it your way, Courtney. You always do. But there’s just one minor detail that you seem to be forgetting.

COURTNEY. What’s that?

LYDIA. The toilet.

COURTNEY. *What?*

LYDIA. The toilet is on your side of the bathroom.

COURTNEY. (*Defensively.*)So? The bathtub is mostly on your side.

LYDIA. Not quite. It’s in the middle, which is neutral ground, so we can share it. But how am I supposed to use the toilet?

COURTNEY. (*Pausing to think.*)You’re not. Use Mom and Dad’s bathroom.

LYDIA. (*Adamantly.*)No way!

COURTNEY. (*Pulling for straws.*)Hey, it’s not like you’ve never used their bathroom before. I’ve seen you go into it after stuffing your face at dinner. So what’s the big deal?

LYDIA. (*Rationally, but with some passion.*)Mom and Dad bought a house with four bathrooms for a good reason: so that we’d have one, they’d have one, our spoiled-to-death older sister would have one, and Grams and Gramps would have one.

COURTNEY.Tough bananas. The boundary stands, fat girl.

COURTNEY/GRANDMA. (GRANDMA *breaks free from* GRANDPA.) I’m sorry.

(COURTNEY *and* LYDIA *resume their linked position as the spot travels stage right to* GRANDMA *and* GRANDPA. GRANDMA *and* GRANDPA KETTE *are octogenarians, married over sixty years. They have weathered more storms than most, but have doggedly refused to divorce, mainly because they are both as obstinate as a jammed screen door on a hot, humid summer’s day.* GRANDMA *crosses down stage.*)

GRANDMA. (*Stubbornly but with concern.*) I can’t let you do it, Lou.

GRANDPA. (*Angrily.*)We are talking about my body, aren’t we?

GRANDMA. (*Good humoredly.*)Yes, yes, I know, but I can’t allow you to desecrate something I’ve always adored. (*She playfully pinches him on the arm.*)

GRANDPA. Ouch! (*He just is not in the right mood for flirtation.*)For Pete’s sake, it’s not as though I’m going to feel the surgeons cutting out the organs. And you’re not going to be watching!

GRANDMA. (*Horrified at the thought.*) Do you *have* to paint me an explicit picture, Lou? You know how I faint at the mere sight of blood. Remember when Candy fell down the front steps and split her chin when she was five? I took one look at all the blood gushing out all over her little white pinafore and passed out. I believe you were at work at the time. Your daughter-in-law called you, and you wouldn’t come home to us…

GRANDPA. (*Frustrated, he shouts at her.*) I couldn’t! I was in an important meeting at the time. Besides, there’s no blood here now! (*Pause*.) Listen, Connie. (*He crosses to her and puts both hands on her shoulders.*) Donating one’s body parts to sick people that need them is a very good thing. After I pass on, I’ll be saving more than one life and that means something to me. It’ll make me somewhat immortal.

GRANDMA. (*Perturbed*.) Oh, don’t try to be Superman! There are plenty of people out there doing the same thing. They don’t really need you to jump on the bandwagon. Besides as my own mother used to say, ‘Charity begins at home.’ Just take a look around you. Your own granddaughter Lydia is starting to look a tad pasty. And no one, with the exception of yours truly, has even bothered to notice.

GRANDPA. (*Ignoring her.*) You know, I get the feeling that this whole thing is more about control than anything else. (*Turning to her and pleading.*) Connie, why, *why* do you have to be so manipulative? I’ll be dead, and you’ll still feel as though you’ll have to run the show. (*Suddenly frustrated.*) I don’t know why I’m even arguing with you. You’re too late, Connie.

GRANDMA. (*Confused*.) Lou, what are you saying? (*He walks away from her.*) Lou, don’t you walk away from me! Lou, what did you do?

GRANDPA. (*Slowly*.) I already signed the papers.

(*At this point,* GRANDMA *resumes her linked position with* GRANDPA, *and a spotlight focuses on the next pair,* LYLE *and* CYNTHIA. LYLE *and* CYNTHIA, *parents of* COURTNEY, LYDIA, *and* CANDY, *are a typical suburban couple, married just long enough to realize their mutual love has waned. They have become roommates who listlessly attempt to solve their domestic problems together.*)

CYNTHIA. (*Apologetically.*) I wasn’t one hundred percent sure at the time.

LYLE. (*Annoyed*.) You just told me you heard her vomiting in our bathroom.

CYNTHIA. (*Hesitating*.) I thought that maybe she had a stomach virus, or that she had food poisoning.

LYLE. (*Angry*.) Food poisoning? She was poisoned consecutively? Five nights in a row?

CYNTHIA. (*Frustrated.*) Oh, I don’t know what I thought! I just don’t want to jump to conclusions, Lyle. Bulimia nervosa is a serious thing.

LYLE. (*Patronizing her.*) I realize that, but I will not have an anorexic daughter, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. (*Matter-of-factly.*) Anorexia and bulimia are both eating disorders, but they aren’t the same thing. I know because I Googled them. In both cases, the afflicted think they are fat when they may not be. To lose weight, anorexics tend to starve themselves while bulimics force themselves to vomit after each meal, thinking they are purging themselves of excess calories when they are really doing a lot of damage to their systems. Bulimia results in low blood pressure, fainting spells, tooth and gum problems, digestive disorders, and heart malfunctions. Psychologically speaking, experts say both are really about control. The afflicted feel as though they have no say in governing their own lives. Eating disorders tend to be about hopelessness.

LYLE. (*Resigned.*) Fine, so I’m not a shrink, but obviously, you must be. (*He throws her a fierce look. She mirrors the glance and turns away. Crossing to her.*) The fact of the matter is, there is something not right with her, and as parents, we can’t ignore it.

CYNTHIA. (*Rationally.*) Lyle, if it *is* bulimia, maybe *we’re* to blame. Psychologists also link eating disorders to undue stress. Maybe we should stop bickering so much. (*Slowly, pensively.*) Maybe you should stop picking on me in front of everyone.

LYLE. Since when do I pick on you?

CYNTHIA. You criticize me constantly, especially in front of the girls.

LYLE. When was the last time?

CYNTHIA. Last night after I had burned the baked potatoes. You said I was an incompetent cook, and I should stick to making reservations, not potatoes.

LYLE. Perhaps you’re right. We do tend to be unkind to each other.

CYNTHIA. What do you mean, ‘we’? *You’re* the bully. I just defend myself constantly. You find fault with everything I do these days.

LYLE. (*Softening.*) Well, Cynthia, if you feel as though I’m to blame, then…

(CANDY *breaks from* LUKE *and crosses downstage.*)

LYLE/CANDY. (*Simultaneously to their mates.*) Forgive me.

(LYLE *and* CYNTHIA *link arms while the spotlight travels to* CANDY *and* LUKE, *stage* *right.* CANDY, *twenty, is perfectly pretty but a tad nonsensical.* LUKE, *also twenty,* *is* CANDY’*s patient, adoring boyfriend.*)

LUKE. (*Pleadingly*.) I won’t let you do it, Candy. I won’t allow you to walk away from me. We’ve been together for over a year now, and there hasn’t been a day that we haven’t seen each other. Not only are you my girlfriend, you’re my best friend. I just don’t understand the change of heart. (*Pauses. Slowly.*) Is there someone else?

CANDY. (*Annoyed at the idea*.) No, Luke, there has never been anyone else but you. (*Consolingly.*) You know how I feel about you. I consider you one of my best friends, too. It’s just…I don’t think I should be in a relationship right now.

LUKE. Why not? You’re a beautiful, twenty-year-old woman. It would be abnormal *not* to be in a relationship.

CANDY. (*Sighs, hesitant to explain.*) Oh, Luke, try to understand. I can’t be your girlfriend. There are too many problems at home. It’s like my entire family is at war. My sisters are constantly at each other for the smallest things; my grandmother tries to dictate my grandfather’s every move, and I honestly think my parents are on Divorce’s front doorstep.

LUKE. (*Not quite listening.*) So? What do all your relatives have to do with us?

CANDY. (*Aggravated.*) Luke, don’t you get it?

LUKE. (*Naively*.) What’s there to get?

CANDY. (*Still annoyed.*) Fighting runs in my family; and one day, after a few stupid frays, you and I are going to start hating each other the same way they do! In a few short years from now, we’re going to wake up together, look in the mirror, and see my parents – or even worse – my grandparents! (*Dramatically*.) The thought of it makes me want to throw up!

LUKE. (*Pacifying her*.) Candy! Stop! When did you become such a drama queen? Get a hold of yourself. Listen, you and I have never had one microscopic argument.

CANDY. (*Exploding*.) Yeah, except for the one we’re having right now! Don’t you see? Contentiousness is contagious!

LUKE. (*Pensively, crossing right.*) Contentiousness and contagious are big words, Candy. But I get it. Alliteration. I remember learning it in Ms. Nielsen’s seventh-grade language arts class. (*Back to her.*) Do you really want to break up over something that hasn’t even happened and may never, ever happen? Don’t be crazy. We aren’t like your parents or grandparents. The whole scenario is completely hypothetical.

CANDY. Yeah, I do want to break up! And no, it’s not hypothetical. It’s real!

LUKE (*Throwing up his hands with a you-are-really-a-nutcase kind of expression on his face*.)/LYDIA (*Together*.) Fine, if that’s what you want!

(*At* LUKE *and* LYDIA’s *mutual “Fine,”* LYDIA *breaks again with* COURTNEY *and crosses downstage so that she is on the same plain as* LUKE. LUKE *reluctantly returns to the linked position with* CANDY.)

COURTNEY. (*Crossing down to her*.) Listen, this is the best possible way to settle this thing. You’ll see, Miss Pudgy. (*Noticing her weight and changing the subject*.) Say, how’s that diet coming along anyway? Seriously, I don’t know why you bother. You’ll always be fat and ugly no matter what.

(*The lights come up on the entire stage. Couples break from their “chained” positions and exercise their stiff arms.*)

LYDIA. (*Indignantly.*) Oh, to heck with your ridiculous borderline! (*She takes her hand, smudges the line, crosses to* COURTNEY *and smears the chalk on her face.* COURTNEY *grabs* LYDIA’s *hair.* LYDIA *opens her mouth to scream just when* CYNTHIA *steps downstage and shouts…)*

CYNTHIA. Time for dinner, everyone!

(*Mechanically,* COURTNEY *lets go of* LYDIA.)

SCENE 2: *All characters cross to the dining room table. Each sits, unpleasantly ignoring the person next to him/her.* LYDIA *should be seated at the center of the upstage side of the table.* LYLE *and* CYNTHIA *sit at each end.* GRANDMA *is next to* LYLE.

LYLE. (*Sarcastically.*) Well, now. It is just so gratifying to see such joyous faces at the dinner table.

GRANDMA. (*She leans over and excitedly addresses* LYLE.) Your father’s a lunatic, Lyle. He’s willing his body to science.

LYLE. (*Not surprised.*) Oh?

GRANDMA. Yes. He went ahead and did it without my permission. He didn’t even consult me.

LYLE. Really. The nerve of him…

GRANDMA. Stop being sarcastic. I’m serious.

LYLE. (*Intent on shocking her*.) Think of it this way, Mother. Willing your body to science is far better than having it rot in a deep, worm-infested grave now, isn’t it?

GRANDMA. (*Almost under her breath.*) Like father, like son. You’re both lunatics!

CYNTHIA. (*Quickly*.) Excuse me! Excuse me! I won’t have gruesome topics discussed while I’m eating dinner, thank you.

LYLE. (*Obsequiously and sardonically*.) All right. What would *you* like to discuss, dear? How about your daughter Lydia’s bulimia?

(*At the mention of the word, all freeze and then focus on* LYDIA *who is dumbfounded with embarrassment.*)

CYNTHIA. (*Calmly*.) Actually, now that you mention it, Lyle, we really should clear the air and voice our concerns. Lydia, why have you been throwing up in our bathroom, night after night?

LYDIA. (*Shocked, but trying to make light of it*.) Because Courtney won’t let me throw up in our toilet?

LYLE. (*Not amused*.) That’s not an appropriate response, young lady!

LYDIA. (*Regaining her composure while looking at the others, her gaze lands on* COURTNEY.) Well, if you must know the truth, I’m tired of all the fighting around here. Sick and tired.

CANDY. (*Agreeing enthusiastically*.) Me, too!

LYDIA. Sorry, Candy, I should have the spotlight right now. (*All the characters bend to pick up flashlights under the chairs, turn them on, and focus them on* LYDIA, *who is now standing.*)There is so much fighting in this family that I can hardly breathe! Everyone fights all the time! No one can seem to have a decent conversation anymore. It’s always pick, pick, pick, all the time, day and night! And to be perfectly honest, I hate the fact that I’m not skinny and gorgeous like Court and Candy. (*They realize her speech has not been as dramatic as they would have liked and shut off the flashlights, returning them to their original spots under the chairs.*)

GRANDPA. That’s no reason to force your fingers down your throat. (*Everyone reacts to* GRANDPA’s *obvious lack of sensitivity by cringing.*)

COURTNEY. (*Trying to be funny*.) Gosh, Pudgy, and I thought you were on a legitimate diet. Maybe you should write your own book. Let’s see. I think *Pudgy’s Puking Plan* would be a really catchy title. (*She laughs loudly while everyone shoots her a look of pure distain.*)

LYDIA. (*Ignoring her*.) And I can’t stand your constant bullying anymore, Courtney. Since when is it okay to tell anyone they’re fat and ugly? And I’m your sister! We’re related! You’re supposed to love me! (*She looks at all of them.*) Can’t you see? Can’t all of you see? All I want is peace, kindness, and happiness all the way around. (*She gesticulates to all with her hands and then sits.*) Why is that so hard?

CANDY. (*Rising*.) I want the same things, Lydia. But are they possible in this pathetic family? Mom? Dad? Gramps? Gram? Courtney? Can you just reach inside your souls and latch on to your own humanity? (*She sits.*)

LUKE. (*Standing*.) I know I’m not part of this family, but Candy just broke up with me because she believes we’ll morph into people like you. I may not be the smartest guy on the planet, but I know I don’t want to lose her. She’s everything to me. So, can you all just call a truce, *please?* (*He sits.*)

(*Each family member looks thoughtfully at the other seated next to him/her.*)

LYLE (*Clearing his throat while rising*.) I think we all have to get along. I know I love each and every one of you. I also know that you share the same love, and if you let it, that love will guide all of us through the tough moments in life. (*He sits.*)

GRANDMA. (*Enthusiastically clapping*.) Bravo, Lyle. Maybe you aren’t a nutcase like your father after all. (*She shoots* GRANDPA *a nasty look.*)

LYLE. Mother, you did hear what I just said, didn’t you? Apologize to Dad. Now, please.

GRANDMA. (*Somewhat sincerely*.) I’m sorry, Lou. (*She takes his hand in hers.*)

GRANDPA. (*Smiling*.) Apology accepted, Connie.

(*All release an exaggerated, collective sigh.*)

CYNTHIA. (*Rising*.) Lydia, I’m positive your dad, your grandparents, your sisters, and I will do everything we can to save you from yourself. But you need to see someone outside, a specialist, who will try to undo the damage that we may all be responsible for doing. Will you agree to see a psychologist?

LYDIA. (*Hesitating*.) A shrink? (*Pause*.) Sure, Mom. I’ll do whatever it takes.

COURTNEY. I guess I forgive you for stealing, Pudge. As proof, you can throw up in my toilet, uh, our toilet, anytime you want, okay?

LYLE. (*Strongly*.) No, that’s definitely not okay, Courtney Cassie Kette. Lydia may only vomit legitimately in your toilet from now on. (*Turning to* LYDIA.) There will be no unusual acts of desperation committed in any of the bathrooms in this house. Is that clear, Lydia?

LYDIA. Yes, Dad.

LYLE. That’s my girl. How about it, everybody? Luke said something about calling a truce. That works for me. I know this sounds a little hokey, but let’s all stand, join hands, and surrender to one another. Ready? (*All stand and join hands.*) On the count of three…one, two, three!

ALL. Truce!

SCENE 3: *All freeze. Slowly and silently, all characters cross downstage and return to their original partners and positions; however, this time, the couples – with the exception of* LYDIA *and* COURTNEY *who stand a few feet apart - are holding hands and facing the audience.* LYDIA *crosses down to the center of the apron. As* LYDIA *discusses each character, he or she can come alive and react accordingly.*

LYDIA. (*To the audience.*) Time passed and things changed for my family and me. Now I no longer visit the bathroom to lose my breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, thanks to months of therapy. Luckily, mainly for my sake, my family broke the chains of anger and hostility. (*She crosses to* GRANDMA *and* GRANDPA.) Right now, Grandma and Grandpa are actually pretty sweet to each other. In fact, just the other day, Grandma said she’s starting to fall for Grandpa again. Apparently, she must’ve forgotten what it was like to be in love. Maybe senility hasn’t set in after all. (*She crosses to her parents.*) Of course, Mom and Dad don’t always agree with each other all the time, but Dad doesn’t pick on Mom anymore either. I guess you can say they’re lukewarm toward each other. (*She crosses to* LUKE *and* CANDY.) Which reminds me – Luke and Candy didn’t break up, and I’m starting to think they never will. For some strange reason, that kind of scares me. (*She crosses to* COURTNEY.) As for Courtney (COURTNEY *shoots her a disturbing glance*.), well, as the saying goes ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day,’ right? (*Motioning toward them.*) But as you can see, most of my family members now hold hands. Even though this took awhile to happen, the important thing is it happened. Under the circumstances, our truce was a downright miracle. But miracles are possible, you know. You just have to believe in them.

(LYDIA *smiles, crosses to* COURTNEY, *and reaches for her hand. All characters join hands, move down to the apron, and take a company bow.*)

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 3: Peer Pressure

 When it comes to teenagers, peer pressure still rules the roost – or so it seems. Following the leader is something teens with little self-confidence tend to do almost automatically. “To Be – or Not to Be – One of Us” was first written as a musical, however, was later revised to conform to the conventions of a dramatic one act. Some of the characters may border on stereotypes, yet they still ring true. The moral of the play is crystal clear: No matter what, be yourself and do not fall to temptation even if it means you may be standing alone – or nearly alone. In the end, Polonius’s aphorism from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, “To thine own self be true” is important to remember since mere survival may depend on it. As the play is a bit short, the director and actors may wish to host a discussion about the hazards of peer pressure with the audience after the performance.

To Be–Or Not to Be–One of Us

Characters

Ms. Doogen

Pepper

Reggie

Jade

Kaylie

Allison

Victoria

Background actors

SCENE 1*: A classroom in Will Rogers High School, East Coast, U.S.A. It is early in the morning before the official start of school. There are about ten desks for students on stage; one is placed center while the others are located up right, down right, up left, and down left in rows. A large teacher’s desk and chair are positioned up right; however, more desks with student extras in them can be added to create a bigger class.*

MS. DOOGEN, *or “Ms. D,” an impeccably dressed, somewhat staid, but not altogether “uncool” English teacher, enters reluctantly from up left. She carries a capacious pocketbook, a canvas bag brimming with students’ essays, and a glossy, black, imitation-alligator briefcase containing her laptop computer, and a black umbrella. Waited down, she struggles to the desk and pretty much collapses on it, sending a tower of textbooks stacked on top crashing to the floor.*

MS. DOOGEN. Geez! It’s definitely Monday. (*She surveys the mess she has just made.*) No question about that.

(MS. DOOGEN *bends down to pick up the books, returning them to the desk. She then hangs the umbrella on the back of the desk chair. Afterward, she unpacks her baggage and organizes the top of her desk while humming the song “What’ll I Do?” Opening the top drawer, she finds a stick of chalk and crosses down center to write on an imaginary chalkboard that faces the audience. She writes the invisible homework on the board, steps back, and reads it orally.*)

MS. DOOGEN. ‘Read the first thirty pages of *The Great Gatsby*. A pop quiz is a distinct possibility.’ That’s good enough.

(*Just then,* PEPPER *is forcefully pushed into the classroom from up left. He is far from what one would call studious since he has a penchant for petty theft and other decadent behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use. Despite obvious weaknesses, he thinks rather highly of himself and has a small following of friends that tend to emulate him.*)

PEPPER. (*Laughing while addressing a boy who is off stage.)* Pizza-face! Watch it! Just wait till gym! Then we’ll see who’s the boss! (*He makes a crude gesture but then notices* MS. DOOGEN *who has been eyeing him disdainfully from down right.*) Oops. Ms. D! What up?

MS. DOOGEN. (*Patronizingly.*) Excuse me, Pepper. I believe you want to ask, ‘What is up?’ What is up – up on the board, that is – is the homework assignment. Why don’t you sit down, take out your agenda, and start copying it so that you don’t forget to later?

PEPPER. The bell hasn’t rung yet. Besides, I never do the homework. So why should I bother to write it down?

MS. DOOGEN. (*A bit exasperated.*) Wishful thinking, I suppose? (*Suddenly remembering something*.) Shoot, I almost forgot. Pepper, I have to run downstairs to give Mr. Hall my lesson plans. It’s a Monday-morning thing. (*She rushes up stage to her desk.*) I don’t mind if you stay in the room, but don’t touch anything on my desk.

PEPPER. (*Innocently.*) Since when do I take anything of yours, Ms. D?

MS. DOOGEN. I didn’t say ‘take;’ I said ‘touch.’ Just don’t. And make sure if anybody else walks in, he or she doesn’t either. (*She takes a few papers from inside her bag and exits left.*)

PEPPER. (*Following her out, he speaks with a Spanish accent.*) Have no fear, senorita, Senor Peppy is in charge! (*He laughs dramatically*.)

(*When he is absolutely certain that* MS. DOOGEN *is gone, he slithers over to her desk and starts to finger some of the papers on top. He opens the center drawer and takes out a pen. Unnoticed,* REGGIE *enters from up left, carrying a notebook and a textbook. ‘Reg’ is* PEPPER*’s best friend who would like to be* PEPPER *when he grows up. Not coincidentally,* REGGIE *is a sophomoric sophomore who lacks ethics, and hence, feels no remorse when he cheats on tests. Seeing the umbrella,* REGGIE *sets down his notebook and textbook on one of the student desks, picks up the umbrella, and sneaks behind* PEPPER.)

REGGIE. (*Pointing the umbrella at* PEPPER *as if it were a sword.*) On guard!

PEPPER. (*Honestly surprised, he drops the pen on the floor*.) Holy crap! You are such a moron, Reggie. Why the heck did you do that? (*He picks up the pen and conveniently slips it into his back pocket.*)

REGGIE. (*Playfully, he twirls the umbrella like a baton and drops it by the desk.*) No reason. Just messin’ with you. (*Suspiciously.*) I see you’re up to no good again, huh? Stealin’ from innocent teachers. Tisk, tisk. (*He shakes his finger at* PEPPER *accusingly.*)

PEPPER. You’re one to talk, pea brain. When was the last time you *didn’t* cheat on a test?

REGGIE. Okay, so I copy answers from a smart kid’s paper once in awhile. At least I’m not gonna get arrested someday for petty theft. (*He pokes* PEPPER’s *shoulder.*)

PEPPER. (*Taking* REGGIE’*s finger and twisting it.*) Shut up. It’s not like she doesn’t have enough pens or anything. (REGGIE *cries out in pain and retracts his finger.*) Check out this drawer, dude. (*He takes out a handful of black pens.*) There must be fifty of the same pen. There’s no way she’s gonna notice I took one, little, totally insignificant, cheap one.

(REGGIE *puts his hand into the drawer to remove a pen when* PEPPER *shuts the drawer unexpectedly.*)

REGGIE. (*In pain.*) Ouch! What the heck is wrong with you?

PEPPER. (*Matter-of-factly*.) I believe it’s called ‘poetic justice.’ We’re even now, bud.

REGGIE. You know sometimes you can be a real sociopath.

PEPPER. Whoa, big word. Sociopath. Ha! Look who’s talking! Jerk!

(*Giggling,* JADE *and* KAYLIE *enter from up left.* JADE, *from Brooklyn, is the quintessential “bad girl.” As* PEPPER’s *steady, she is sixteen going on twenty-five.* JADE *is jaded; however, she manages to mask her apathy beneath a cloak of sarcasm, and often, profanity. Other sophomore girls in the school would consider her intimidating – downright untouchable. She is not stupid, just conniving.* KAYLIE *is the female equivalent of* REGGIE. *She has no definition without her closest friend,* JADE, *but she can and does cut classes well.* KAYLIE *is not too bright and relies on* JADE *to make her appear somewhat intelligent. They both wear clothing with attitude and carry notebooks and small, jeweled purses for no apparent reason other than to look pretentious. Noticing the boys by the desk, they continue to their own desks, located stage right and stage left.*)

JADE. (*Playfully, with a clear New York accent.*) Hello, boys. Pillaging through Ms. D’s desk? I’m sure she’s on to you, Peppy La Pew.

PEPPER. (*Moving away from the desk and down to* JADE, *flirtatiously.*) What makes you think that, my pet?

KAYLIE. (*Almost as an afterthought.*) She’s always giving you dirty looks behind your back.

PEPPER. (*Turning to her, with hostility*.) Funny, I don’t remember asking you for your opinion, Miss In-Your-Face, Know-It-All, Can’t-Mind-My-Own-Business, Total Airhead. Why don’t you just cut this class today and make us all happy?

KAYLIE. (*Defensively.*) Cause, like, I never cut first period. I don’t get seriously bored until sixth period.

PEPPER. Oh, guess that blows for us.

JADE. (*Rolling her eyes and crossing to him.*) Pep, just chill, all right? It’s too early in the morning to get on anyone’s case. Anyway, she’s right. Doogen knows you steal from her because I’ve seen the way she looks at you, too. It’s obvious that she doesn’t trust you for anything.

PEPPER. (*Defensively.*) Oh, yeah? A few minutes ago, D trusted me enough to let me stay in here without her.

JADE. God knows why she did that. Momentary lapse of reason? Temporary insanity?

PEPPER. Geez, I just pinched a pen, not a roll of twenties. Besides, I really don’t give two cents what D thinks. She’s got a stick up her…

KAYLIE. (*Interrupting, sarcastically.*) Ooh, my virgin ears.

REGGIE. Yeah, that’s the only part of you that’s virgin!

JADE. Shut up, Reg! Leave her alone.

REGGIE. I find it…what’s the word? Doogen wrote it on the board yesterday. Oh, yeah. I find it *ironic* that you’re sticking up for her.

PEPPER. (*Threateningly.*) Just what are you implying about my girlfriend?

REGGIE.(*Intimidated.*) Nothing, Peppy. Nada, dude. (*Petting* PEPPER.) Nice, Peppy, nice boy. Down, boy. (PEPPER *pushes him and laughs.*)

PEPPER. Fool.

JADE. Listen, you guys. My parents are going out of town this weekend. How about coming over, bringing some (*She creates quotation marks with her fingers.*) herbal essence, and raiding the liquor cabinet with me?

KAYLIE. Just how are we going to do that? Even if we can, like, break into that lead box cleanly, your parents are gonna notice that some of the bottles are like, um, missing.

JADE. (*With calculated ease.*) It’s not as complicated as you think. I found the key to the cabinet. And while my dad was lost in Home Depot last Sunday, I had a copy made. As for them noticing, if either of my parents sees that a bottle is missing, the blame always falls on the other. It hasn’t registered to them that I could be a possible suspect, which just proves they’re total freaks.

PEPPER. (*Flirtatiously.*) I wouldn’t go that far. They just aren’t as bright as you, babe.

REGGIE. (*Pulling* PEPPER *aside.*) Pepper, what are you doin’? You’ve already made it crystal clear that she’s your girlfriend. You don’t have to keep sucking up to her. You’re making me nauseous.

PEPPER. Yeah, well, go puke somewhere then and leave me alone. (*He crosses to* JADE *and places his arm around her.*) So, I’m thinking Saturday night would be cool for a little *partay* at your place.

KAYLIE. (*Cautiously interrupting* PEPPER.) Wait a minute. Not so fast. What about the smoke? Between the dope and the tobacco, the place is like, gonna reek for days!

JADE. No worries, Kay. I’ve got that covered, too. That spray-on, air-freshener junk really works. I’ve smoked in my room plenty of times. A few squirts of that stuff, and it’s like, you know, the first day of spring. My parents won’t even notice. My mother will think that she already sprayed the stuff around and just forgot that she did it.

PEPPER. (*To* KAYLIE.) See that, Miss Paranoia. As usual, Jade’s thought of everything. (*He hugs and kisses* JADE.) So, other than the four of us, who should we include on the guest list?

(*As if on cue,* ALLISON *enters the classroom from up left. She is the new kid on the block and a bit wet behind the ears, yet suspicious of her new surroundings. Every mother’s dream daughter, “Allie” has a strong sense of moral decency and a flawless conscience. She carries what looks like a beach bag, filled with notebooks and textbooks and a slip of paper. Since she is new, all eyes go to her. Obviously not the kind of girl who would even consider going to an illegitimate party, she is fair game to the others.* ALLISON *crosses to center.*)

PEPPER. Hi!

ALLISON. Hi! (*Reading from the slip of paper.*) Is this room 27? Ms. Doogen’s English class?

REGGIE. (*Slightly amused with her innocence.*) Yeah, you got it.

PEPPER. You new or something?

KAYLIE. Like, obviously, idiot.

PEPPER. (*To* KAYLIE.) What *is* your problem?

KAYLIE. Sorry, Pepper. Guess I’m in a bad mood. It’s Monday morning, and I’d still rather be in bed. (*She notices that* REGGIE *is just about to add something profane to the statement and interrupts him.*) Reg, don’t even go there!

REGGIE. (*Acting innocently.*) Go where? Your bed? With you? Do I want an STD? No, thanks. (KAYLIE *pushes him aside.*)

ALLISON. (*Ignoring him*.) Yes, to answer your question, I am new.

(PEPPER *eyes her up and down as if to rank her. When he is satisfied, he takes the pen from out of his back pocket and offers it to her.*)

PEPPER. (*Rapidly, as if to imitate a game show host.*) Well, congratulations! Just for being the fifth student to arrive in this class today, you just won a brand new, too-good-to-be-true, shiny, all-purpose, totally expensive, generic pen!

(*Everyone glares at* PEPPER *and then chuckles collectively after realizing it must be the pen that he took from* DOOGEN.)

ALLISON. (*Sincerely.*) Why, thank you. That’s awfully sweet of you. (*She accepts the pen, dropping it and the piece of paper into her pocketbook while quickly surveying the group.*) I hope I wasn’t interrupting anything.

JADE. No, not at all. We were just making some weekend plans, like, a little early.

ALLISON. (*Surveying the room*.) Is Ms. Doogen even here today?

PEPPER. Yeah, she just had to go to the main office to deliver a few papers. She left me in charge. I’m Pepper, and these are my friends, Jade, Reg, and Kaylie.

ALLISON. (*Waving awkwardly*.) Hi, I’m Allison.

KAYLIE. (*Noticing her conservative clothes.*) Where are you from, Allison?

ALLISON. I’m from Iowa.

(JADE, PEPPER, REGGIE, *and* KAYLIE *glance at each other, stifling giggles.*)

REGGIE. Ah, cow country. That’s cool. Whattaya do for fun out there? Sneak out into the pastures at night and tip over a steer or two while they’re asleep? (*He laughs and the others snicker.*)

ALLISON. (*A bit embarrassed.*) No, we actually do pretty normal things. You know, stuff like you do.

JADE. You mean go to parties?

ALLISON. (*Relieved.*) Yes, exactly. Parties.

KAYLIE. (*Hedging*.) What kind of parties?

ALLISON. (*Matter-of-factly.*) You know, pop parties.

PEPPER. (*Surprised.*) What? *Pot* parties? You’ve got pot parties out there in the sticks?

ALLISON. (*Embarrassed.*) Oh, no! No, of course not. I said pop, p-o-p, not p-o-t. Sweet Lord, no! Never, not marijuana, not me. Me and my friends just lounge around and drink soda pop. You know, like Pepsi, Sprite…(*She leans on a chair for support as she is quite anxious while the four laugh hysterically at her provinciality.*)

PEPPER. Nah, we don’t have those kind of parties around here.

ALLISON. Well, what kind of parties do you have?

(JADE *pulls* KAYLIE *aside.*)

JADE. (*In a loud whisper.*) Is she for real or what?

KAYLIE. Iowa sounds like a totally different planet – like Amish land or something.

JADE. Yeah, for sure. (*Scheming.*) We’re just gonna have to show her what it’s like to live on Earth in the new millennium. Get my drift?

KAYLIE. (*Surveying* ALLISON *and nodding.*) Yeah.

(*Neither girl realizes it, but* ALLISON *did overhear their conversation and makes an obvious grimace of dread, front.*)

JADE. (*Crossing right of* ALLISON.) Listen, I’m having a big party this weekend. You should definitely come.

PEPPER. (*Crossing left of* ALLISON.) Yeah, you may find yourself in a totally different frame of mind. We have amazingly delicious refreshments that can do more for you than Sprite or Pepsi. Right, guys? Watch this. (*He pretends to smoke and then take a drink from an invisible glass. He staggers about, feigning intoxication. Picking up the umbrella, he pretends to use it as a crutch, but loses his balance and falls into* DOOGEN’*s chair.*)

(*All except* ALLISON *laugh on cue as a few more students enter the classroom and sit at their desks.* DOOGEN *finally appears up left. A late bell rings suddenly. All freeze, except* PEPPER*, who leaves the umbrella on the desk and runs to his own desk, right, awaiting direction from* DOOGEN.)

DOOGEN. (*Ignoring* PEPPER *and addressing the group.*) All righty, class. That’s the late bell. You know the routine.

(*Again, all except* ALLISON *find their assigned seats.* ALLISON *finds herself standing awkwardly center left.*)

DOOGEN. (*Looking at* ALLISON.) I’m sorry. You must be…

ALLISON. (*Nervously.*) New. I’m new…today, ah. (*She pauses, taking a deep breath.*) I’m Allison Fender from Iowa. (*Crossing up to* DOOGEN *who is by her desk.*) You want to see my schedule? (*She fumbles with her pocketbook.*)

DOOGEN. (*Amused at her simplicity.*) No, that won’t be necessary. Yesterday, guidance e-mailed me everything I need to know about you, my dear. Just take a seat; anywhere is fine. (*This strikes* ALLISON *as amusing as there are only two desks available. She smiles and sits at one, center.*) Okay, let me take attendance. (*She starts to count heads aloud.*) One, two, three, four…where’s Victoria? Has anyone seen Vicky?

PEPPER. Nope. (*Slowly surveying the room, he responds with a sense of mystery.*) Vic’s nowhere to be seen.

DOOGEN. Thank you for stating the obvious, Pepper.

PEPPER. (*With zeal.*) Anytime, Ms. D!

DOOGEN. (*Winking at him, she crosses to the imaginary chalkboard.*) I think I’ll wait till the end of the period to send down the attendance. I’m thinking that Vicky may show up. Mondays are hard on everyone. (*The class nods in agreement.*) Okay, then.(*With vigor.*) Let’s get down to business. As you can see, the homework for tonight is already posted. Please write it down.

KAYLIE. Excuse me, Ms. D.

DOOGEN. Yes, Kay?

KAYLIE. It says to read thirty pages. Isn’t that, like, a bit too much for a Monday night?

DOOGEN. No, I don’t think so. Once you start reading Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, you’ll find it hard to put down.

JADE. (*Almost to herself.*) I doubt it.

DOOGEN. Sorry, Jade? Did you want to add something?

JADE. I’m with Kaylie. It just seems extreme to me, especially the bit about the pop quiz. Like you wouldn’t do that to us, would you, Ms. D?

DOOGEN. Oh, it sounds ‘extreme,’ does it? How about if I make it fifty pages and an actual quiz? (*Pantomiming, she starts to erase the word thirty.*)

REGGIE. (*Rising.*) No, Ms. Doogen, wait. (*Turning to* JADE *and* KAYLIE.) Shut up, you two! (*To* DOOGEN.) Thirty sounds fair to me. And what’s so bad about the possibility of a pop quiz? It’s not as though it’s guaranteed or anything. (*He sits.*)

DOOGEN. (*Crossing up center.*) Right, Reggie. One more word from anyone else, and the quiz will become a definitive reality. I promise you. (*She pauses, waiting for any more comments.*) Anyone? I thought not. Now, everyone should have a copy of the novel, right? I handed them out yesterday.

PEPPER. Yeah, except for Allison.

DOOGEN. Ah, yes, sorry, Allison. (DOOGEN *walks to her desk, notices the umbrella on the floor, gives it a quizzical glance, and hangs it on the back of her chair. She opens a drawer, removes a copy of the book, and crosses to* ALLISON*, handing it to her.*) This is yours. As you’ll soon see, I already took the liberty of writing your name on the inside cover.

ALLISON. (*Taking it gingerly, she opens the cover and sees her name within.*) Thank you, Ms. Doogen.

DOOGEN. Just call me Ms. D. Everybody else does. (*To the class.*) Now, what I’d like to do is give you all some exposition on the author, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Please take notes on this information, people. You never know. It may appear on the next assessment, meaning test. (*The students move to take out their pens and notebooks.*)

REGGIE. (*Starting to write*.) How do you spell Fitzgerald?

DOOGEN. It’s on the cover of your book, which you probably don’t have with you, so I’ll write it on the board. (*She crosses down to the invisible board and pretends to write the name.*) F-i-t-z-g-e-r-a-l-d. Okay, Reg?

REGGIE. Thanks, Ms. D.

DOOGEN. All righty, then. (*During the following monologue,* DOOGEN *can be circulating about the space.*) Before we get to basic exposition that anyone can find on the Internet, I just want to enlighten you with a few facts not considered common knowledge. Many do not realize this, but Mr. Fitzgerald was quite close to Ernest Hemingway, who, of course, was another noteworthy author. We’ll be reading his novel, *The Sun Also Rises,* later on in the year. Both Hemingway and Fitzgerald lived in Paris for a time and perhaps considered themselves expatriates. I believe it was politically fashionable to be divorced from the United States after World War I. Hemingway was not especially fond of Zelda, Fitzgerald’s highly possessive, destructive wife. She was an alcoholic, and Scott often felt as though he had to keep pace with her, drink for drink. However, he had a low tolerance to alcohol…

(*Toward the beginning of the above lecture,* ALLISON *slowly starts to yawn. By its end, she is sound asleep as the lights dim. All characters except for* ALLISON *exit the stage.* REGGIE *and* KAYLIE *exit to the right and* PEPPER, JADE, *and* DOOGEN, *to the left. The background characters leave, alternating between exits. After they have all left, the lights come up slightly. A different colored lighting gel, red or yellow, can be used to suggest a dream sequence.* REGGIE *and* KAYLIE *re-enter, shuffling in from upstage right while* PEPPER *and* JADE *re-enter, shuffling in from upstage left. Holding umbrellas and dressed all in black, the characters stand with their backs turned toward the audience. Then one by one, each turns and opens his/her umbrella to mask his/her face and upper torso. The ominous characters twirl the umbrellas slowly as each reveals himself/herself one at a time.*)

REGGIE. (*Moving the umbrella downward to reveal only his face.*) Al…

KAYLIE. (*She duplicates* REGGIE’*s actions.*) Isss…

JADE. (*She, too, works her umbrella down.*) Son…

PEPPER. (*Moving the umbrella down and yelling.*) Wake up!

(*At this,* REGGIE, KAYLIE, JADE, *and* PEPPER *reposition their umbrellas so that they are above their heads.* ALLISON *wakes up abruptly as the four others slide downstage to surround her.*)

ALLISON. (*Surprised.*) What, what are you guys doing? What’s with the umbrellas?

(REGGIE, KAYLIE, PEPPER, *and* JADE *surround* ALLISON *and close their umbrellas in unison.* ALLISON *attempts to get up, but* PEPPER *gestures threateningly with his umbrella as she sits back down. Each character can do something aggressive with the umbrella as he or she speaks the dialogue.*)

REGGIE. If you wanna good grade, cheaters have it made. Join us!

KAY. If you wanna be cool, cut a day of school. Be like us!

JADE. If you wanna fit in, touch a bit of sin. Be one of us!

PEPPER. If you wanna get drunk, don’t be a funk! Join us!

ALL FOUR. If you wanna get high, we’re standing by. Be like us.

(*The four assailants all open their black umbrellas and surround* ALLISON *like a scene from a Busby Berkeley musical. They stand at attention around* ALLISON *with the umbrellas’ tips pointing at her, menacingly.* ALLISON *rises with confidence and approaches each tormentor, grabbing his/her umbrella forcefully and tossing it and then pushing each person aside during the following response.*)

ALLISON. No, I am very sorry, but I don’t want to be one of you. There’s nothing you can sell me that I’d want to buy. No, I don’t want to cheat, cut school, or get high. And I definitely don’t want to get drunk. Who cares if I’m a funk? What does that even mean? I don’t want to taste your brand of sin. I like the skin I’m in. I don’t want to be one of you. Thanks, but no thanks. Now get out of here! All of you! Leave me alone!

(REGGIE *and* KAY *pick up their umbrellas and exit left as* PEPPER *and* JADE *take their umbrellas and exit right.* ALLISON *returns to her seat as the lights dim.* *A bell sounds; the white lights come up, signifying reality.* REGGIE, KAYLIE, PEPPER, *and* JADE *are back in their respective seats, wearing the clothes they wore at the top of the first scene. All of the students start to prepare for dismissal.*)

DOOGEN. (*Her voice rises over the din of students’ voices.*) All righty, then, people. Tomorrow we’ll discuss two of the novel’s themes – carelessness and materialism –

as well as symbolism. I hope you remember what symbolism means. Quickly, before you leave, what is a symbol, Jade?

JADE. (*Rapidly.*) A symbol has concrete and abstract levels of meaning. An example would be the American flag representing freedom.

DOOGEN. Excellent! Excellent! I’m so impressed. Thank you, Jade. Don’t forget about the homework, everyone. Enjoy the day!

(*Just then as the students are leaving, a tall, attractive girl enters from up right.* VICTORIA *is studious and self-confident – what some would call a “goody-two-shoes.” She is every teacher’s pet. Surprisingly, she looks and dresses quite a bit like* ALLISON*.* VICTORIA *saunters up to* DOOGEN *carrying her books and a late pass.* PEPPER, JADE, REGGIE, *and* KAYLIE *push past* VICTORIA *on their way out of the classroom.* ALLISON *is still at her desk, gathering her things.*)

VICTORIA. (*Sincerely.*) Sorry I missed class, Ms. Doogen.

DOOGEN. That’s all right, Vicky. I didn’t bother to send down the attendance since I had a feeling you’d saunter in here late. Let me just finalize this sheet, and then you may take it down to the attendance office. Why don’t you copy down the homework in the meantime? Maybe you can get the notes from a classmate.

VICTORIA. Sure. (*She crosses to an empty desk, takes out her agenda, and starts copying down the homework from the invisible chalkboard, which is down center.*)

DOOGEN. (*Looking up.*) Allison, you’d better hurry. You don’t want to be late for your next class. By the way, Vicky, meet Allison. She is new as of today. Allison, Vicky is a good friend to have. She’s the president of Student Council and an excellent student.

VICTORIA. (*In earnest.*) Really nice to meet you, Allison.

ALLISON. Likewise.

DOOGEN. All righty, girls, you’d better hurry. You don’t want to be late to your next class, Allison. Vicky, here’s the attendance. One of the officers down there will write you a pass to your next class. Have a splendid day, girls.

VICTORIA/ALLISON. You, too, Ms. D.

(*On her way out of the classroom,* ALLISON *bumps into the up-left chair. The black umbrella crashes to the floor. Hesitantly, she picks it up, pauses as if remembering the myriad, black umbrellas in her dream, and then hangs it back on the chair.* VICTORIA *exits up left.* ALLISON *follows her. The lights dim as the curtain closes.*)

\* \* \* \* \* \*

SCENE 2: *A hallway just outside* DOOGEN’*s classroom.* PEPPER, JADE, REGGIE, *and* KAYLIE *are loitering as if they have nowhere else to go. The scene should be played on the apron of the stage in front of a closed curtain.* ALLISON *and* VICTORIA *pause center stage.*)

ALLISON. Gosh, Victoria, I think I’m going to be late for my math class.

VICTORIA. (*Confidently.*) Don’t worry. Come down to the attendance office with me. I’ll tell them to give you a pass. Because I’m in charge of student government, I have a lot of clout around here.

ALLISON. (*Smiling.*) Thanks. I appreciate it.

(PEPPER, JADE, REGGIE, *and* KAYLIE *approach* ALLISON *and* VICTORIA, *preventing them from continuing across the apron.*)

PEPPER. Hey, Allison, so what’s the deal? Are you chilling with us at Jade’s house on Saturday night, or what?

ALLISON. Actually, no, I don’t think so.

JADE. Why not?

ALLISON. I have to be honest with you. Your idea of partying is not my idea of partying.

REGGIE. I think she’s got a point. We stopped getting a sugar rush from Sprite in fifth grade, right guys?

KAYLIE. (*To* ALLISON.) Your kind of partying is like totally uncool, you know.

JADE. Yeah, you aren’t ever going to be at the top of the social hierarchy if you stay clean every weekend.

VICTORIA. If being popular means being accepted by your crowd, Jade, maybe she doesn’t want to be popular.

PEPPER. What makes you think she wants to hang with you and your troop of snobs?

VICTORIA. I’m not choosing her friends for her. Allison is a big girl. She can do that herself.

PEPPER. Okay, fine. That sounds fair to me. Allison, what’s the deal? (*Putting his arm around her.*) Tell me you don’t want to be a part of Hitler Youth. Vicky and her crew may see us as ‘burnouts’ or ‘stoners.’ But deep down inside, even she knows we’re the coolest kids in the school. Everyone else is a dork, a geek, or a nerd.

JADE, REGGIE, KAYLIE. Yeah, totally.

ALLISON. To tell you the truth, I’m thinking about my future. I’d really like to get into a decent college in a couple of years. Smoking pot at any age and drinking alcohol at sixteen are against the law. I can’t afford to have a police record. No school will look at me then.

REGGIE. Pepper, based on Allison’s testimony, I think we can rest our case. It sounds like Allison here is guilty of being a hopeless nerd.

PEPPER, KAYLIE, JADE. (*Snickering.*) Yeah, right. Totally.

JADE. Well, at least we tried. Once a nerd, always a nerd.

KAYLIE. Yeah, like see you around. Maybe.

PEPPER. Like who really wants to?

REGGIE. Yeah, like ciao, nerds.

(PEPPER, KAYLIE, JADE, *and* REG push past VICTORIA *and* ALLISON, *exiting stage left.* VICTORIA *and* ALLISON *stand center, watching them leave.*)

VICTORIA. (*Appraising* ALLISON.) Are you all right?

ALLISON. I guess so. They just reminded me of this weird dream I had in Ms. Doogen’s class.

VICTORIA. You fell asleep on your first day of Doogen’s class?

ALLISON. I guess so. I didn’t mean to, but I was so nervous last night, I didn’t sleep well. Ms. Doogen was just rattling away about Hemingway and Fitzgerald. I should’ve been taking notes, but I couldn’t keep my eyes open.

VICTORIA. Well, that would save you from the nerd classification. I’ve never seen a nerd fall asleep in English. (ALLISON *shoots* VICTORIA *a dirty look.*) Just kidding!

ALLISON. Anyway, my dream was really weird - like a musical, but with no music. Pepper, Jade, Reggie, and Kaylie were all in it, talking in rhyming couplets and so was I! All four of them were trying to convince me to do bad things that would get me into major trouble. Pepper wanted me to get drunk; Jade wanted me to commit sinful acts – I guess like have sex; Reggie wanted me to be dishonest, and Kay wanted me to skip school. At the end, they all wanted me to get stoned.

VICTORIA. (*Amazed.*) Wow, that’s unbelievable!

ALLISON. Why?

VICTORIA. ‘Cause according to popular belief, each one of them has been guilty of doing exactly what you just said. I wonder how you knew.

ALLISON. I don’t know. Pepper made his vice pretty clear to me just before the start of Ms. Doogen’s class. As for the others, I guess I must’ve stereotyped them in the back of my mind.

VICTORIA. That makes sense because they are stereotypes. But how did you react to them in the dream?

ALLISON. I wound up pushing them all away.

VICTORIA. Like you did just now?

ALLISON. No, forcefully. I pretty much got in their faces and chased them away.

VICTORIA. It sounds to me as though the dream gave you the courage to stand up to them just now.

ALLISON. Maybe, but I still don’t feel right about it.

VICTORIA. Meaning?

ALLISON. Well, if I decided to join them, I’d probably wind up destroying my self-respect and my body.

VICTORIA. True. And you could end up with a police record, like you said.

ALLISON. Yeah, but if I don’t somehow become friends with them, they may start to make fun of me in front of everybody. (*She sighs audibly.*) It’s as though I’m holding a double-edged knife. No matter what I do, I’m going to get cut.

VICTORIA. Understandable, but the solution to your problem is pretty obvious: Just drop the knife.

ALLISON. What do you mean?

VICTORIA. (*Earnestly.*) I mean, keep being you. Only you know what makes you feel comfortable. Be confident. Continue to hold your ground, like you did just now, or humor them. But always look them straight in the eyes. They won’t make fun of you if they sense how strong you are. Besides, Pepper and his posse would never be your true friends, even if you joined them. They’d always make you feel like you were gripping the knife. And they might wind up putting a real knife in your hand at some point. The thing is they only need you to follow them so that they can feel better about themselves. Powerful. They’re really just your basic bullies when you get right down to it.

ALLISON. Yeah, nobody likes bullies. But how do you know that being confident will work?

VICTORIA. Experience. You think they never tried to invite me to their parties? Once upon a time, I was standing exactly where you are now. Two years ago, I moved here from Ohio. They surrounded me on the first day of school. I told them I wasn’t interested in joining them because I needed a clear head to run for Student Council. All they did was call me a geek, and that was that. They pretty much left me alone after that because I made other friends and stayed out of their way.

ALLISON. Do you think that I’ll make other friends – the right friends?

VICTORIA. I don’t see why not. Hey, wait. I’m organizing the first-ever Sub-Junior Women’s Club here at Will Rogers. It’s a service organization. If you want to join, we can make new friends together. And I can introduce you to some of my friends. Wouldn’t that be awesome?

ALLISON. That sounds perfect! Thanks. I’d love to get involved in a charitable group. I was in 4H back in Iowa.

VICTORIA. Of course you were.

(*The girls are about to exit right when* DOOGEN *comes running from stage left, carrying the black umbrella.*)

DOOGEN. Victoria! Vicky!

VICTORIA. Yes, Ms. D?

DOOGEN. (*Out of breath.*) Vicky, is this your umbrella?

VICTORIA. (*Smiling, taking the umbrella.*) Why yes, it is. Thanks.

DOOGEN. I’ve been carrying it around with me for days because I thought it was mine. I have a similar one at home. Sorry, I have to run. I have a duty, and I can’t be late. Don’t forget about the attendance!

VICTORIA. I won’t. We’re on our way to the attendance office now.

DOOGEN. Good girl.

(*Running,* DOOGEN *exits stage right.*)

ALLISON. That’s your umbrella?

VICTORIA. Yeah, why? Are you okay, Allison? You look a little pale.

ALLISON. (*Nodding.*) In the dream I just told you about, Pepper and company were all twirling black umbrellas.

VICTORIA. (*Amused.*) Really? That’s hysterical! (*She laughs.*) Sounds a bit like my grandfather’s favorite movie musical, *Singing in the Rain.*

ALLISON. But after awhile, all four of them came at me and tried to hurt me with the umbrellas until I defended myself. (ALLISON *gives* VICTORIA *a suspicious look.*)

VICTORIA. (*Perturbed.*) Whoa, wait a minute. I know what you are thinking. Don’t start over analyzing and morphing into Ms. Doogen. There is no connection between this stupid umbrella and your dream or between Pepper’s gang, and me. The reason why black umbrellas turned up in your dream is probably because you had noticed this one somewhere in Doogen’s classroom before you fell asleep. If you somehow don’t trust me and think what I just told you about my experience with the others is a lie, that’s your choice although it’s not. I would never force you into doing something you don’t want to do. Join my club, but only if and when you want to, okay?

ALLISON. Okay, Vic. Everything you just said makes a lot of sense. I don’t know why I’m so paranoid. I never used to be.

VICTORIA. You’re just new here, that’s all. It’ll take awhile for you to feel comfortable – to find your own niche – and maybe even to trust people.

ALLISON. I feel funny asking you this because I know I only met you a few minutes ago, but do you think I can count on you as a friend?

VICTORIA. (*Really looking at her, seriously.*) You can, absolutely. Now let’s go get those late passes. (VICTORIA *pretends to hook* ALLISON *with the umbrella.* ALLISON *laughs as they exit.*)

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 4: Companionship

 Life is about love, companionship. People young and old yearn for meaningful relationships. At one time or another, who does not envision a soul mate, a person made for him or her? Clearly, “Cup of Random Joes” pays homage to Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*. However, this contemporary reflection is more about finding the perfect Joe than the precise Ernest. Unlike the others in the collection, this play is meant to be more entertaining than didactic. Sure, it unveils the superficial, selfish aspects of modern romance, but it also suggests that there is someone special out there for everyone and that no one necessarily needs to look that hard to find “Mr.” or “Miss Right.” In some cases, who – or even what – an individual needs may just be staring him or her in the face.

Cup of Random Joes

Characters:

Manager Joe Maude Roger

Suzette Harry Joe, Number Two

Maryanne Joe, Number One Joe, Number Four

Alessie Heidi

*At rise: The stage is sparsely furnished and simply lit, but it is obvious that the scene takes place in a coffee shop perhaps in Middle America since there are few sophisticated signs of corporate ownership. Connecting upstage center to upstage left, there is a chalkboard with the words CUP OF JOE’S COFFEE BISTRO written in uppercase letters at the top. A litany of alliterative cocoa creations, such as Elegant Espresso, Elite Espresso, Café Karma, Café Comfort, etc., are written beneath the heading in lowercase followed by the prices by size: small, medium, large. Further left, there is a small, makeshift kitchen, workstation, and counter with a cash register on top* *of it.* *To the right is a separate station for customers to mitigate the strength of their coffees with cream, half and half, or milk.*

JOE*, a tall, attractive, nineteen-year*-*old young man with high cheekbones, wire-rimmed eye glasses, and a medium, healthy build, stands behind the workstation, busily brewing the different types of coffee while humming the theme song “Gonna Fly Now” from the movie* Rocky*. He is a self-motivated, hands-on type of young man who is completely confident, totally congenial, and rhythmically rapid in his movements. Various bistro tables are arranged upstage right, downstage right, and downstage left. At this time, it is clear that the store is not yet open since the tables are unoccupied. His humming has now turned to the song, “Eye of the Tiger*,” *as* JOE *jogs in* Rocky *fashion from behind the counter with a small stack of napkins. He places them neatly on each table. When it is clear that he has finished, he lifts his clenched fists above his head as if victorious, spins slowly around while mimicking the sound of thunderous applause, and then stops abruptly to notice the time on an imagery clock on a vacant wall at stage left.*

JOE. (*He stops suddenly and stands to address the audience, somewhat sarcastically.*) Ladies and gentlemen, the invisible wall clock tells me that it is now time to open the world-infamous Cup of Joe’s Coffee Bistro for yet another day of unexpected pleasure from assorted people I don’t have time to get to know. What could be more thrilling? (*He goes to an invisible door, which is downstage left, and pantomimes unlocking and opening it. He leans out, yelling, using a voice of a hyperactive radio DJ.*)Good morning, Smithfield, Ohio! (*Stopping to digest it.*)And what a lovely morning it is! (*To the audience.*) I stand corrected. Maybe today won’t be a day of unexpected pleasures after all. In fact, perhaps something extraordinary is waiting just outside the doors of this fine establishment? (*Seeing that there is no one in sight, he shrugs, pantomimes closing the door, and crosses up left to return to his coffee-brewing duties. While he does this, he begins to sing “Something’s Coming” from* West Side Story*: “Something’s coming, I don’t know what it is but it is going to be great,” but falters as he can no longer remember the rest of the lyric. As he works,* JOE *hums the rest of the song. Seconds later, customers come rushing into the store all at once and line up in front of the counter up left.* JOE *calmly, patiently, and methodically waits on each customer. After a minute or two,* SUZETTE, *an attractive, intelligent, curvaceous, eighteen-year-old girl enters the store and crosses down center while talking on a hot-pink cell phone.)*

SUZETTE. (*Speaking loudly into the phone.*) Mom, I’m at Cup of Joe’s. (*Pause.*) Yes, I got enough sleep last night. (*Pause.*) Mom, I’m fine; trust me. I told you; I’m meeting someone here for a cup of coffee. (*Pause.*) I know about the addictive nature of caffeine, Mom. I’ll get decaf if it makes you happy, all right? (*Pause.*) Yes, I’m meeting a boy. (*Pause.*) No, it’s not too early in the morning. It’s never too early to meet a nice boy, right? Listen, I’ll be home later, okay? Bye. (*She casually flips the phone shut and sits center at a vacant bistro table. Just then,* MARYANNE, *an intelligent, selfish and slightly frumpy friend of* SUZETTE’*s, pays for her coffee up left, turns, and spies* SUZETTE, *seated center.* MARYANNE’*s* *very thin, pretty, but not-so-bright companion,* ALESSIE *does the same. Simultaneously, they rush down center and stand behind the up-right and center-right bistro chairs, opposite* SUZETTE*.*)

MARYANNE. (*With an air of affectation and perhaps a fake British accent.*) Fancy meeting you here.

ALESSIE. (*Trying too hard to be amusing.*) Yeah. Look what the cat dragged in. (SUZETTE *and* MARYANNE *shoot* ALESSIE *dirty looks.*) I’m sorry!I mean, yeah, it’s great to see you, Suzette.

SUZETTE. Oh, hi, Maryanne*. Hello*, Alessie. (ALESSIE *smiles weakly*.) What are you two doing here at this time of the morning?

MARYANNE. We’re going to drink obscene amounts of coffee to get a frantic caffeine buzz, of course. What else do people do here?

ALESSIE. In other words, we’ve got nothing better to do.

MARYANNE. May we join you?

SUZETTE. (*Looking up at the imagery clock.*) Well, all right, but just for a few minutes because I’m meeting a blind date.

ALESSIE. (*Hedging.*) A guy?

MARYANNE. (*Practically in her face.*) Yeah, a *guy*.

SUZETTE. (*Sheepishly.*) Yeah, a guy.

ALESSIE. (*Curiousl*y.) Anyone from school?

SUZETTE. No, I met him on-line.

MARYANNE. Really? On Teendate.com?

SUZETTE. Yep.

MARYANNE. Wow, you don’t waste any time, do you? We’ve only been out of school two days this summer, and you have a date already at (*She looks quickly at her cell phone.*) 8 a.m.

SUZETTE. Yeah, I know. I have to start early because I’m meeting more than one date here today.

ALESSIE. Are you kidding?

SUZETTE. (*Methodically.*) No, I actually have an agenda of dates today. Four guys, all named Joe! I have them coming in intervals, one after the other.

ALESSIE. Gosh, Suzette, you’re going to be sitting here half the day.

SUZETTE. (*With mock enthusiasm.*) Very good, Alessie.

ALESSIE. (*Smiling, oblivious to her sarcasm.*)Thanks, Suzette.

MARYANNE. (*Ignoring her.*) Geez, you’ve got this all figured out, haven’t you? (SUZETTE *nods with a somewhat perverse smile on her face.*) May I ask why you chose only Joes to meet you?

SUZETTE. (*Innocently.*) I’ve always liked the name Joe.

ALESSIE. Why? It’s kind of common, you know. Personally, I like unusual names, like Kavon, for example.

MARYANNE. Alessie, this is not about you. But speaking of Joes, I know you like one. In fact, I just got you a date on-line with your celebrity crush, Joe Jonas.

ALESSIE. (*Extremely excited.*)Really? *Really?* Oh, my gosh! Oh, my gosh!

MARYANNE. (*Loudly.*) Not! Alessie, you’re so gullible!

ALESSIE. No, Maryanne, I’m sorry, but you’re mistaken. I don’t live in a gully. My house is on the side of a hill.

MARYANNE. What? No, Alessie, gullible has nothing to do with gullies or even sea gulls for that matter. It means that you tend to believe everything people say.

ALESSIE. No, I don’t.

MARYANNE. Forget it, all right? (*To Suzette.*) Now, wait a minute, Suzette. Your plot isn’t entirely original. It reminds me of something. (*She thinks hard for a moment.*) Some play, I think.

ALESSIE. (*Immediately as if on the TV game show*, Jeopardy!)What is *The Importance of Being Earnest*! *(The two girls look at her in amazement that* ALESSIE *came up with an insightful, correct response.)*

MARYANNE. Wow, Alessie! For once, I’m impressed. (*To* SUZETTE.) She’s exactly right! You’re ripping off Oscar Wilde’s play, *The Importance of Being Earnest.* We read it in Mrs. Smoot’s English class in October. Remember?

SUZETTE and ALESSIE. (*Simultaneously.*) Right!

MARYANNE. (*Slowly, intellectualizing.*) In the play, the character of, of what’s her name? Oh, yeah, Gwendolen is fixated on the name Ernest, which she feels (*She forms quotation marks with her fingers.*) ‘inspires absolute confidence.’ Her reasoning makes sense because earnest means trustworthy. Suzette, are you copying the play on purpose?

SUZETTE. No, not at all. (*With serious concern.*) I really had no idea I was plagiarizing a classic. I hope I don’t get in trouble for it.

MARYANNE. I seriously wouldn’t worry about it.

ALESSIE. Wait, you haven’t answered my question. Why did you pick a boring name like Joe?

SUZETTE. It’s not boring, Alessie. It’s Biblical. Joe is short for Joseph; you know, St. Joseph, Jesus’s father?

MARYANNE. Since when are you super Catholic?

SUZETTE. I’m not, actually, but speaking of ‘absolute confidence,’ you have to admit that saints tend to do no wrong. Am I right? And besides, where would I find more than one Kavon – if that - in this vicinity, Alessie?

ALESSIE. (*Slightly confused.*) I’m not one-hundred-percent sure, but I think she has a good point, Mare. I wouldn’t mind dating a saint for a change or just any Joe who looks like Joe Jonas. As you know, I tend to attract losers. (*She makes an L with her thumb and forefinger and places it up to her forehead.*)

MARYANNE. You can say that again. (ALESSIE *opens her mouth to say it again.*) Don’t, Alessie. It’s just a figure of speech.

SUZETTE. (*She takes her cell phone and notices the time.*) Ladies, I don’t want to be pushy and obnoxious, but you really have to sit somewhere else now. My first Joe should be walking into this place any minute now.

MARYANNE. Better a Joe than a John. (MARYANNE *and* SUZETTE *laugh at the joke, but* ALESSIE *makes a quizzical face.*)

ALESSIE. (*Dumbfounded.*) I’m sorry, butI don’t get it.

MARYANNE. Never mind. (*To* SUZETTE.) How are your Joes going to find you?

SUZETTE. Well, I told them exactly where I’d be sitting: right smack in the center of the shop. And do you know the funny part? I’ll be having more than one cup of Joe at Cup of Joe’s!

ALESSIE. That’s very punny! Get it? Not funny, punny? Maryanne, do you know what a pun is?

MARYANNE. (*Making a perturbed face.*)Of course I do. I’m just amazed that you do. (*Changing the subject.*) Suzette, do you know what all these Joes look like?

SUZETTE. No, I’ve decided I want to be surprised. Besides, it was hard enough trying to find all the guys named Joe. By the time I found them, I was too exhausted to ask each to upload a photo. Appearance shouldn’t matter anyway because really handsome guys tend to be narcissistic.

ALESSIE. Yeah, she’s right. The hunky ones *are* usually drug addicts.

MARYANNE. What? No, Alessie, narcissism has nothing to do with narcotics! A narcissist is full of himself. (*Pause.*) You know, sometimes I wonder why you and I are such close friends. (ALESSIE *shoots* MARYANNE *a grimace.*) Well, good luck and may the best Joe at Cup of Joe’s win. (*To* ALESSIE.) Okay, Alessie, let’s move over there. (*She points to a table upstage right. As an afterthought to* SUZETTE.) Do you mind if we stay and spy on you?

SUZETTE. (*Turning to survey the other customers.*) I’d rather have you listening in than strangers.

ALESSIE. I like the way you think, Suzette.

MARYANNE (*As an aside to* SUZETTE.) Yeah, she’s hoping to live vicariously through you since she’s too much of an airhead to think for herself. (MARYANNE and SUZETTE *laugh.* ALESSIE *is once again left in the dark.*)

ALESSIE. (*Pleadingly.*) Guys, what are you laughing at?

MARYANNE and SUZETTE. (*Innocently.*) Nothing.

MARYANNE. (*Nudging* ALESSIE.) Let’s go, skinny.

(MARYANNE *and* ALESSIE *take their coffee cups, cross to the upstage right bistro table, and sit down. The second that they do, two people in their forties,* MAUDE *and* HARRY*, cross downstage left from the coffee counter to sit at the bistro table left of* SUZETTE. MAUDE *is rather plump, but not unattractive;* HARRY *is a tidy businessman, starched to the brim. During their exchange of dialogue,* MARYANNE *and* ALESSIE *drink their cups of coffee somewhat awkwardly while* SUZETTE *toys with her cell phone. Meanwhile,* MANAGERJOE *stands behind the coffee counter preparing more coffee while unobtrusively listening to the conversations.*)

MAUDE. I don’t know if I mentioned this last week on our first date, but I’ve decided to get my master’s degree on-line. It’s been a long time coming, but I think I’m finally ready to commit to the decision.

HARRY. (*Seemingly interested.*) Oh? I’ve heard that those on-line programs are quite worthy of merit. Some of the top colleges are now offering them.

MAUDE. Well, I don’t think my Internet site is a top school, but it does sound like it’s legitimate.

HARRY. What’s the name of it? Maybe I’ve heard of it.

MAUDE. Mangesh Matel’s University of Divinity.com.

HARRY. (*Trying to hide a look of disbelief.*) No, I don’t believe I *have* heard of it. Is it out of Bombay? It sounds Indian.

MAUDE. No, Los Angeles, which is a lot closer.

HARRY. (*Not knowing quite what to say.*) Yes, definitely, not that it matters. Do you intend to study divinity earnestly?

MAUDE. (*Seriously.*) Yes, I do. Spirituality is very important to me.

HARRY. Ah, huh. Do you want to become a minister, some kind of priest, Maude?

MAUDE. No, not really. Maybe some kind of universal guru, like the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. You know, have an on-line chat room or blog. I think I may really be able to touch and reach more people that way, but I would have to charge them, of course. (*Rambling.*) That is, for the advice I give them on the path to enlightenment. I was thinking I could start out advertising in magazines with decent demographics. You know, like *Maxim* or *Cosmopolitan* and then go with local TV spots, something like the Oxi Clean commercials, but a lot deeper intellectually.

HARRY. (*With apparent disinterest.*) Ah, huh. I see. (*He looks down at his coffee mug.*) Well, what do you know, Maude? It looks as though I am flat out of caffeine. Let me just go up to the counter and get a refill of Café Comfort. I’ll be right back.

(HARRY *crosses upstage left to the counter, places his mug on it, and quickly moves down left, making sure* MAUDE *does not notice. He exits. As* SUZETTE *puts her cell phone down on her table,* MAUDE *takes hers from her pocketbook to check her messages. Just then,* JOE, NUMBER ONE *enters from downstage left. He is about eighteen, relatively short, plump, and pimply. He wears baggy pants, a ripped T-shirt and a baseball cap that is on backwards.* SUZETTE *notices him right away and grimaces, secretly hoping he is not her Joe. She looks at her friends with an exaggerated, horrified expression, which they return, picks up a napkin, and places it over her head to shield her face so that he will not see her and leave. However, he notices her right away and crosses to her.*)

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Lifting the napkin off her head and setting it on the table.*)Would you happen to be Suzette?

(SUZETTE *smiles weakly and nods.*)

JOE, NUMBER ONE. What’s with the napkin?

SUZETTE. (*Quickly.*) I have terrible, horrible hay fever. I was just preparing for a possible sneezing attack. Sometimes it gets really messy, if you know what I mean.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. Yeah, I bet the snot runs really out of control.

SUZETTE. (*Disgusted, sarcastically.*) Thanks for painting me such a vivid picture. You must be Joe.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Matter-of-factly.*) Joe it is.

SUZETTE. Nice to meet you, I think.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. The pleasure is all mine. (*He tries to take her hand to kiss it, but she withdraws it suddenly. It doesn’t seem to bother him.*)How about I go up and get us some coffee?

SUZETTE. Sure. I’ll take a Café Mocha, please.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. Be right back, cutie.

(JOE *crosses upstage left to the coffee bar.* MARYANNE *and* ALESSIE *point at his back and giggle.* ALESSIE *makes an L with her thumb and forefinger and puts it up to her forehead.* SUZETTE *nods to confirm and then sticks her right forefinger into her mouth to suggest that she feels like gagging. All three laugh but cease abruptly the second* JOE *turns front to cross back downstage to* SUZETTE’s *table.*)

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Smiling.*) So what’s up, Suzette? Like, where have you been all my life?

SUZETTE. I seriously don’t know. Joe, are you still in high school?

JOE, NUMBER ONE. Yeah, why? Do I look older?

SUZETTE. No, I just don’t remember whether I asked you many questions on-line.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. Nah, you didn’t. I’ll be a senior at West Morris. I guess you can say that my one claim to fame is baseball.

SUZETTE. Oh, really? You play for West Morris?

JOE, NUMBER ONE. Nah, I just watch baseball games on TV all the time. I’ve got about ten sports channels on cable so that I can always connect with a game at any hour of the day or night.

SUZETTE. But baseball isn’t played year-round, is it?

JOE, NUMBER ONE. Nah, but the channels always broadcast older games. You know, like the World Series from twenty years ago. It’s really cool. Wanna come over and watch a game with me sometime?

(*By the expressionless look on her face,* SUZETTE *is obviously disinterested*. ALESSIE and MARYANNE, *who have been listening in, desperately try to contain their laughter. While this is going on, it occurs to* MAUDE *that* HARRY *is nowhere to be seen. She rises and begins to explore the bistro, making sure he is not hiding under the tables. After she has explored every nook and cranny of the restaurant, she sits at a table, takes out a cell phone, and begins to text.*)

SUZETTE. No, that’s all right. I’m not into sports, actually. (*She pauses for a moment, trying to think of something that may really be a turn-off.*) But I, I absolutely *love* classical music. Go to orchestral concerts all the time.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Confused.*) You mean like Metallica? They play with violins and stuff, right?

SUZETTE. (*Sensing how really shallow he is.*) No, more like Beethoven and Mozart.

JOE, NUMBER ONE. I’ve never heard of those groups. Have they had any recent hits?

SUZETTE. (*Getting really aggravated*.) No, they are classical composers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries!

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Now really confused.*) Oh, you mean like the 1700s and 1800s?

SUZETTE. Yes!

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Disappointed.*) Oh, wow. Sorry, but I can’t go back that far. That’s further back than rock n’ roll. Not in my ballpark.

SUZETTE. (*With a pleasant, but affected air.*) Well, Joe, to tell you the truth, you’re not in my *ballpark* either. We obviously have nothing in common. So, I’m going to have to say good-bye now. (*She stands suddenly and extends her hand in order to shake his.*)

JOE, NUMBER ONE. (*Casually.*) Okay, babe, no problem. (*He raises the palm of his hand.*) High-five me.

(SUZETTE *reluctantly gives him an awkward high-five, and* JOE, NUMBER ONE *turns to* *exit left.* MARYANNE and ALESSIE *wait till he is completely gone before they immediately rise and rush over to* SUZETTE’s *table. While this is occurring,* HEIDI, *an oddly dressed, petite woman in her late twenties enters the restaurant from left. She is carrying a digital camera. As she surveys the shop, she takes photographs of just about everything in the shop indiscriminately as if she were a tourist in a foreign land. Oddly enough, no one seems to notice.*)

MARYANNE. (*Giggling.*) Suzette, if the first Joe is a preview of what’s coming

Joe-wise, you’re in big trouble!

ALESSIE. (*Giggling.*) Yeah, and I thought *I* attracted losers!

SUZETTE. (*A bit put-off.*) Well, I didn’t think he was *that* bad, just not my type.

MARYANNE. Are you kidding? He was a pimply, ignorant, jock-wanna-be. Is there anything worse?

SUZETTE. Well, my Joes have got to get better from this point. I mean they can’t all be heinous like Joe Number One, right?

ALESSIE. I’m sorry, but I didn’t think his bottom was so big.

MARYANNE. (*Frustrated.*) Alessie! Heinous doesn’t refer to someone’s butt! Geez, heinous means really horrible!

ALESSIE. Okay, never mind then. I’m sorry, but I thought she said hi-nee. (*They laugh*.) Well if all the Joes turn out to be like the first, your morning is going to be pretty long, Suzette.

MARYANNE. Long, maybe, but a lot of fun for us. (*She elbows* ALESSIE *and laughs.*)

SUZETTE. (*Smiling.*) You two better go back to your table before you lose it - the table, I mean. You’ve already lost it mentally! (*Glancing at the invisible wall clock.*) Joe Number Two should be walking through the door soon.

ALESSIE/MARYANNE. Okay. Good luck.

(ALESSIE *and* MARYANNE *retreat to their table stage right as two male customers enter from stage left. Although they do not appear to know each other, they both head upstage left to the coffee bar. The second male,* ROGER*, a thin, blonde of about twenty-five, stops in his tracks to notice* HEIDI *who is still busy taking photos. He stands center stage to observe her. As she is trying to focus her camera on an invisible subject mounted on the stage-right wall, she inadvertently backs into* ROGER*. Turning around awkwardly to look up at him, she loses hold of her camera, but* ROGER *miraculously catches it just before it drops to the floor.*)

HEIDI. (*Amazed.*)Wow! How did you do that?

ROGER. (*Handing the camera back to her.*) I don’t know, actually. I didn’t think my reflexes were all that quick anymore, but this is the first time they’ve been put to the test in awhile. So, I’ve been standing here, watching you take shots of this place. Are you some sort of professional?

HEIDI. (*Honestly.*)No, I’m a dilettante. I just like to take pictures.

ROGER. I see. You document the fine points of life in midstream and open people’s eyes to images they would otherwise never take time to notice.

HEIDI. (*Clearly interested.*) Um, I never thought of it that way before, but that sounds a lot more sophisticated and poetic than ‘I just like to take pictures.’ I’ll have to remember that the next time around when someone asks or when some fresh kid starts to make fun of me.

ROGER. (*Surprised.*) You mean to say that someone as pretty and unassuming as you is ridiculed?

HEIDI. Yes, but I have to admit that I may be deserving of it. I’m obsessive when it comes to this camera, and sometimes I just don’t know when to stop. The beauty in each everyday object and face is my fuel for creativity.

ROGER. Why not become official, then? You know, move to L.A. and become one of Hollywood’s elite paparazzi?

HEIDI. Funny that you should mention that. When I was in college, I actually wanted to, but I remembered hearing about how Sean Penn had viciously attacked a paparazzo outside a restaurant once, and I balked. Obviously, I didn’t want to become some rich and famous guy’s punching bag.

ROGER. (*Seriously.*) I doubt anyone in his right mind would hit you, though.

HEIDI. Well, celebrities aren’t always in their right minds, you know.

ROGER. (*Chuckling.*) True, true, my name is Roger by the way.

HEIDI. I’m Heidi.

ROGER. (*Animatedly.*) Hi, Heidi! Oops, you probably get that a lot.

HEIDI. (*Lightly.*) I do, but I’ve become immune to it.

ROGER. (*Embarrassed, changing the subject.*) May I buy you a cup of coffee?

HEIDI. Yes, I’d like that.

(HEIDI *and* ROGER *cross to the coffee bar.* SUZETTE *notices the time on the imaginary clock, rises, takes the first Joe’s cup of coffee, and quickly returns it to the coffee bar. She returns to her seat as* JOE, NUMBER TWO *enters the shop from left. He is about nineteen, tall, lanky, with brown hair and tortoise shell eyeglasses.* JOE, NUMBER TWO *crosses down right to* SUZETTE. HEIDI *and* ROGER *find a table, up to the right.*)

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Awkwardly, clearing his throat.*) Um, oh, excuse me. Miss? (*He takes out a small piece of paper from his pocket, unfolds it, and reads.*) Would you happen to be Suzette?

SUZETTE. (*Slightly amused by his gauche façade.*) Why, yes, I am.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Stuffing the paper into his pocket and then extending his hand nervously.*) How are you? My name is Joseph. (*Stuttering.*) Mo, mo most people call me Joe, although some call me Joey. I basically answer to anything. (*He pauses.*) Well, almost anything.

SUZETTE. (*Smiling affectedly.*) I’ll just call you Joe.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. That’s fine. (*Looking down at the table.*) I see that you have a cup of coffee already. Mind if I buy one myself?

SUZETTE. No, Joe. Go ahead.

(JOE, NUMBER TWO *crosses upstage left to the coffee bar while* MARYANNE *and* ALESSIE *gesticulate their opinions of him.* MARYANNE *strongly* *shakes her head indicating her disapproval while* ALESSIE *enthusiastically* *nods her head to indicate her approval.* SUZETTE *makes an exaggerated, sour grimace to suggest that* JOE, NUMBER TWO *is not her type.* JOE, NUMBER TWO *crosses back down to the table.*)

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Sitting down.*)They have a few pretty interesting choices up there.

SUZETTE. I noticed. What did you get?

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Café Comfort. I hope it lives up to its name ‘cause I’m a bit nervous. (*He spills some of the coffee on the table and rushes to wipe it up with a napkin.*) Oh, you’ve been here before? (*She nods.*) I don’t come here at all.

SUZETTE. Why not?

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Too busy studying.

SUZETTE. But it’s summer. School ended.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. I know; isn’t it depressing? You may think I’m a bit idiosyncratic, (MARYANNE *mouths the word* idiosyncratic *to* ALESSIE *who seems to be held spellbound by this boy.*)but I guess you could say I have a fetish for knowledge. I spend a lot of time on my PC, Googling just about everything under the sun.

SUZETTE. Oh? Well, at least you’re never bored. (*She notices* ALESSIE’s *enamored expression and smiles.*)

JOE, NUMBER TWO. No, never. I invent projects when I’m not on the computer. Last summer, I created a very intricate ant farm. Actually, it was more like the megalopolis of ant colonies. The whole thing was about the size of my backyard, which is quite large.

SUZETTE. (*Sarcastically.*)Fascinating.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Excitedly.*)You think so? That’s great! Would you like to come over my house sometime and study the remains of the dead ants?

SUZETTE. Dead ants?

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Yes, sorry to say, my mother claimed that they had been invading the house, so she bombarded the entire colony with mega doses of Raid.

SUZETTE. (*Almost sympathetically.*) That’s too bad.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Enthusiastically.*) That’s okay because this summer is still young, and I still have a lot of time to rebuild. (*He pauses.*) Hey, I have an idea.

SUZETTE. What?

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Since you seem to like ants, why don’t you come over tonight and start helping me renovate. It’ll be like the Sims, yet with insects and not people.

SUZETTE. (*Hesitantly.*)Well, that’s awfully kind of you, but to tell you the truth, Joe, ants and I don’t get along. In fact, I may just be allergic to them. I’m afraid to say that I’m siding with your mom on this one.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Oh? Well, would you like to come over anyway and meet my mom? I’m absolutely positive she’d like you, especially since you’re on her side about the ants. (*He smiles weakly.*)

SUZETTE. (*Sipping her coffee.*) No, thank you. I’m sure she’s wonderful, though. (*She pauses.*) Joe, I don’t know how to say this without hurting your feelings, but you and I don’t seem to have a lot in common.

JOE, NUMBER TWO (*Dejectedly.*) Oh?

SUZETTE. No, and I am sorry because you really seem like a genuinely nice guy.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Recovering.*) Do you have a friend who might like me?

SUZETTE. (*A little taken back.*) Ah, let me think. (*She gazes stage left to meet the eyes of* ALESSIE *who nods excitedly*.) As a matter of fact, Joe, I may know someone.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Really? Who is she?

SUZETTE. She’s here, sitting right behind you.

JOE, NUMBER TWO (*He turns around to look at* ALESSIE *who smiles and waves at him*.) You mean the thin girl with brown, curly hair?

SUZETTE. Yes, that’s Alessie. She tends to attract guys like you.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Stepping out of his nervousness.*) She’s hot! (*Embarrassed at his forthrightness.*) I mean, extremely attractive. Do you think I should go over there and introduce myself?

SUZETTE. I don’t see why not. She seems like she likes you already. (ALESSIE *nods excitedly.*)

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*Standing with his coffee mug.*) Well, thank you, Suzette. I must say that it was a glorious occasion meeting you. (*He offers her his hand.*)

SUZETTE. Hope to see you around with my friend Alessie over there.

(JOE, NUMBER TWO *smiles and crosses to just behind* ALESSIE *and* MARYANNE’*s* *table.* MARYANNE *shoots* SUZETTE *a disgruntled look, and she just smiles questioningly.*)

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Excuse me. Your friend Suzette sent me over here to meet you.

ALESSIE. (*Shyly.*) I know.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. My name’s Joseph, Joe for short.

ALESSIE. I know.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. You do? You must be clairvoyant. The rare ability to read minds completely enthralls me. Coincidentally, it just happens to be one subject that I’ve Googled recently.

ALESSIE. Me, too! (*Hesitantly.*) I think.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. If your friend here doesn’t mind, would you like to go somewhere else where we can converse in relative peace? I’d really like to get to know you better, Alessie.

ALESSIE. Maryanne, you wouldn’t mind if me and Joe left, would you? (*She leans over to whisper.*)I think he wants to talk about his sneakers, Converse, Cons. I like them too, so we have something in common already!

MARYANNE. (*She smirks.*) Go. Whatever.

ALESSIE. I mean you can always go sit with Suzanne until her next Joe arrives.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. What?

ALESSIE. (*Dismissively.*) I’m sorry, never mind. We can go and talk about your sneakers now.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. (*He looks down at his shoes, totally confused*.)Okay. I think.

MARYANNE. (*Insisting.*) Just go, Alessie. Have fun. I’ll text you later.

ALESSIE. (*Rising.*) Okay. (*To* JOE *enthusiastically.*) Let’s blow this joint, Joe.

JOE, NUMBER TWO. Okay. (JOE *takes* ALESSIE *hand and they cross left to exit.*)

ALESSIE*.* (*Loudly*.) Good-bye, everyone! See you!(*The assorted customers and* MANAGER JOE, *who is behind the counter, wave to her involuntarily as the couple leaves.* MARYANNE *crosses to* SUZETTE *and sits opposite her.*)

MARYANNE. Well, well, well. Seems like Alessie just found a replacement Joe. It’s my guess that she’ll be ripping that poster of Joe Jonas off her bedroom wall soon.

SUZETTE. (*Disappointedly*.) I can’t believe that Alessie just walked out of here with one of my Joes.

MARYANNE. Well, what do you expect? You introduced them. He doesn’t seem to be that much of a loser. I mean, he’s a definite step up from her last date. At least he’s not dumb, like she can be. (*Noticing* SUZETTE’*s* *visible dismay, dramatically.*)Oh*,* don’t despair, devotee of Joes! Your dream Joe will arrive soon. What do you have, two left?

SUZETTE. Yes.

MARYANNE. Well, there you go. The love of your life will be arriving soon.

SUZETTE.(*Taking out a compact from her purse and opening it.*) How do I look?

MARYANNE. The same as you did an hour ago.

SUZETTE. (*Smiling into the mirror*.) *Amazing!* (*She closes the compact, returning it to her purse.*) After those two lost souls, I feel slightly wilted.

MARYANNE. Just keep drinking the coffee. It’s definitely a lot stronger here. It’ll perk you up, get it? Perk as in coffee perk?

SUZETTE. (*Smirking.*) Right. What’s with the puns today?

MARYANNE. Just trying to make you laugh.

(*Just then,* SUZETTE*’s cell phone makes a strange buzzing sound in her purse. She hears it and quickly retrieves it.*)

SUZETTE. It’s an incoming text. I can’t seem to read it. Let me step outside and see if that will make a difference.

(SUZETTE *rises from the table and exits stage left. In the meantime,* MARYANNE *decides to buy another cup of coffee, rises, and crosses up left to where* MANAGER JOE *is cleaning up the work station.*)

MARYANNE. Excuse me, whoever you are. What’s your name? (*She squints her eyes to read his nameplate.*)Joe. (*He does not seem to hear her.) Joe, hey, Joe!* I need another cup of coffee here! (*Aside.*) Joe seems to be the name of the day today.

MANAGER JOE. (*Apologetically.*) I’m terribly sorry, miss. You just want a cup of regular coffee, then?

MARYANNE. Yeah, the strongest you’ve got. (*She yawns.*) I woke up too early this morning. Don’t ask me why.

MANAGER JOE. Right away.

MARYANNE. Thank you.

(MANAGER JOE *pours her a cup and hands it carefully over the counter to her. She reaches into her jeans pocket and hands him two dollars. He thanks her briefly and smiles. At this point in time,* SUZETTE *comes rushing back into the shop and returns to her table.* MARYANNE *crosses down to her.*)

SUZETTE. (*Disappointedly.*) The text was from Joe, Number Three. He can’t make it. Seems his favorite guinea pig just died, and he has to take care of the funeral arrangements.

MARYANNE. Well, from the sound of it, he sounds like a twin of the last Joe, some sort of science or animal geek.

SUZETTE. Why do you say that? I love guinea pigs! They’re so cute with their fat, little, pushed-in faces. (*She imitates the look of a guinea pig.*)

MARYANNE. (*Looking around.*) Okay, okay, enough already. You don’t want the customers to think it’s the coffee you’re reacting to, do you?

SUZETTE. Oh, why the heck not? Maryanne, I have only one more Joe to meet! What if he is just as bad as the other two? (*She closes the cell phone and returns it to her purse.*)

MARYANNE. What if he is? (*She inconspicuously glances at* MANAGER JOE.) Suzette, your Mr. Right is probably right under your nose, and you just haven’t noticed him. Look what just happened to Alessie. She imagined herself meeting a Kavon, but wound up with a Joe.

SUZETTE. Oh, I don’t know. Maybe I’m just trying too hard.

MARYANNE. Maybe. What kind of guy is your perfect type, anyway? It has been hard to tell based on your last few boyfriends.

SUZETTE. Hmmm. Well, he needs confidence and congeniality. Oh, and a sense of humor.

MARYANNE. Looks don’t make a difference to you?

SUZETTE. No, as long as his looks don’t make me want to lose my lunch. What sort of guy would you date?

MARYANNE. I’d like a strong, determined, assertive, but at least somewhat intelligent guy. He doesn’t have to be as smart as I am. After all, I can’t ask for miracles. Oh, and not too tall, but muscular, like a stereotypical lifeguard.

SUZETTE. I see; you want a guy who can sweep you off your feet!

MARYANNE. Why not? We’re going for the fantasy, right? We may never find these guys, so we may as well enjoy ourselves describing them.

SUZETTE. True. I’m making way too big a deal about wanting the ideal Joe because he just doesn’t exist.

MARYANNE. (*Looking down at her cup of coffee.*) Do you like your coffee?

SUZETTE. (*Confused.*) Yes.

MARYANNE. Well, then, you found your perfect Joe without even trying!

SUZETTE. Would you stop with the puns already?

MARYANNE. Okay, but I may not be referring to the coffee.

SUZETTE. Maryanne, what are you talking about?

MARYANNE. (*Slyly.*) Nothing. I’m going back to my table. I’ll try to text that little minx Alessie! By now, she’s probably got her hands deep in the soil rebuilding Joey’s mega ant colony.

SUZETTE. Hopefully, she’s enjoying herself.

MARYANNE. Suzette, I’m probably going to have to leave soon, but I’ll stay to check out the final, on-line Joe of the day.

SUZETTE. Great. Hope he’s worth your while - and mine.

(MARYANNE *rises, waves good-bye silently, crosses back to her table, sits, takes out her cell phone, and begins to text wildly. Just then,* JOE, NUMBER FOUR *waltzes through the door, left, with an air of utter confidence. He is ‘cool, calm, and collected.’ Physically, he is relatively short, but muscular. He sports an intricate tattoo of a red rose on his left bicep, and his movements are quick but measured. In short, he is the incarnation of* MARYANNE*’s fantasy man. Ignoring* SUZETTE, *he spies* MARYANNE *across the room and moves toward her.* MARYANNE *looks up from her cell phone and* *notices him right away; her mouth drops wide open when she realizes he is heading her way.* SUZETTE *watches the transaction, stunned.*)

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*Standing behind the table between* MARYANNE *and the empty chair.*) Hello, may I join you?

MARYANNE. (*Dumbfounded as to why he would.*) Sure. Absolutely. Why not?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. I didn’t think I’d find you so easily. Am I a little early?

MARYANNE. For?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. For our date.

MARYANNE. Date? Have I met you before?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. No, we met on the Internet the other night. Remember?

MARYANNE. (*Coming out of her trance.*)Oh, no, oh, you must be Joe.

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. Oh, no, I *am* Joe. Are you disappointed?

MARYANNE. Sort of. I mean, you must think I’m Suzette, right?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. Aren’t you?

MARYANNE. No, unfortunately, I’m Maryanne. (*She stands to indicate* SUZETTE *who waves shyly at him.*)

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. You aren’t my date?

MARYANNE. No, sorry. Believe me, I wouldn’t mind being your date.

SUZETTE. (*Crossing to their table.*) Oh, hello, Joe. I’m Suzette. Happy to meet you. Would you like to join me at my table over here?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*Clearly confused.*) I guess so. (*To* MARYANNE.) I am so sorry, Maryanne, is it? (*She nods.*) Maybe we’ll meet again sometime.

MARYANNE. (*With a half smile filled with disappointment.*) It was nice to meet you, Joe.

(JOE *and* SUZETTE *cross to the stage-left table and sit down as* MARYANNE *slumps down into her chair, obviously downtrodden.* JOE, *mesmerized by* MARYANNE, *keeps looking over his shoulder at her continuously while* SUZETTE *makes a desperate attempt to hold his attention.* MARYANNE *sees that he is still interested in her and responds by smiling, occasionally batting her eyelashes, and primping her hair.*)

SUZETTE. (*Enchanted.*) Joe, what a wonderful name you have!

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*Sensing she is affected.*) I wouldn’t call it that. Joe must be the most common name for males in the country right now.

SUZETTE. (*Completely elated.*) You think? It’s just mesmerizing.

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. I suppose the idea of millions of Joes could be somewhat daunting, but mesmerizing? I doubt it.

SUZETTE. Tell me, Joe, what are you doing this summer?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. I’m a lifeguard at the public pool.

SUZETTE. (*Waking up out of her trance and realizing he is* MARYANNE’*s* *precisely perfect man.*)Oh, that’s, that’s interesting. (JOE *is staring at* MARYANNE.) Hmmm, you seem to be distracted a bit.

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*Turning to face her slowly.*) I am sorry, but I just can’t seem to take my eyes off Maryanne. I know that I agreed to meet you, and I know that you may think I’m a jerk for this, but I’ll take that risk. Would you mind if I went back to Maryanne’s table? There is just something about her that I can’t resist. It’s as though I’ve met her before.

SUZETTE. You sound like you just stepped out of a Hollywood movie.

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. I know, cheesy, right? (*Gazing at* MARYANNE.) Again, I’m totally sorry, but I’ve never been turned on by anyone like this before.

SUZETTE. Jeez, just go over there!

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*To* SUZETTE.) Are you sure?

SUZETTE. Of course, it’s not like I can stop you. Besides, *someone* has to experience a Hollywood ending.

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*Standing.*)Thanks! Keep in touch.

(SUZETTE *gives him a brief, but slightly annoyed smile as he crosses to join an ebullient* MARYANNE.)

MARYANNE. (*Effusively.*) Joe, don’t take this the wrong way, but I feel like I just got a tremendous deal on a slightly used, designer coat!

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. (*Smiling.*) I’d prefer to see myself as nearly new if it’s all the same to you.

MARYANNE. (*Returning his smile.*)Sure. Listen, I really have to go, or my mother will start to think I fell down a manhole or something. I didn’t exactly tell her where I was going, and I’ve already been here for too long. Would you like to walk me home?

JOE, NUMBER FOUR. Absolutely.

(JOE, NUMBER FOUR *and* MARYANNE *rise, say their good- byes to* SUZETTE, *and exit left. Other customers begin to do the same as* SUZETTE *sits sulking.*)

SUZETTE. (*To* HEIDI *who is heading for the exit.*)Can you believe it? Two of the dates I met on Teendate.com just walked off with my closest girlfriends.

HEIDI. I’m really sorry. Bad luck, maybe? (*She exits with* ROGER*.*)

SUZETTE. (*Mimicking her.*) *Bad luck, maybe?* You bet your bottom, sweetie. *You* obviously don’t have bad luck, now do you, bit*…* (*She stops herself from cussing as* MAUDE is *glaring at her.*) Airhead!

(MAUDE *rises and* *shakes her head before leaving while* MANAGER JOE *chuckles quietly to himself.* SUZETTE’S *cell phone rings, and she answers it quickly with expectation in her voice.*)

SUZETTE. Hello? (*Disappointed.*) Oh, hi, Mom. No, I haven’t left. I’m still here, but I’m about to leave. What happened to the boy I was meeting? Well, it’s a long story, Mom. Okay, I’ll be home soon. All right. Bye. (*Looking down at her coffee cup.*) What a waste of a full cup of coffee. (*To audience.*)I am going to need some sort of pick-me-up consolation prize before I leave. Maybe I can get a refill to go? It’s probably never been done before, but it’s worth a try.

(SUZETTE *stands and walks up to the coffee bar. At this point, there is no one left in the shop except for* SUZETTE *and* MANAGER JOE *who pretends that he hasn’t been spying on* SUZETTE *over the past hour or so.*)

MANAGER JOE. Hello, what can I do for you?

SUZETTE. Listen, this is probably a tall order, but I was so busy trying to get myself a date for Saturday night over there that I never got a chance to drink my coffee. Do you think you can give me another cup to go? I really need to leave now.

MANAGER JOE. (*Sensing that she is on the verge of tears.*) Yes, I can. What kind of coffee would you like?

SUZETTE. Anything as long as it’s strong. I sure could use a good kick in the pants right now.

MANAGER JOE. (*Chuckling.*) Your wish is my desire, but I’ll skip the kick if that’s all right with you.

SUZETTE. (*She begins to realize his good looks and smiles flirtatiously.*) Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

(MANAGER JOE *quickly concocts the coffee potion, puts it into a paper hot cup, seals it, and hands it to* SUZETTE *who manages to say thank you. She crosses down right to the side table. She opens the lid and pours some cream into the cup; however, she pours too much. As it is about to overflow, she bends down awkwardly to take a sip of it.* MANAGER JOE *sees her dilemma. Thinking that he can somehow help* SUZETTE*, he crosses down to stand right behind her. Sensing his presence, she turns, spilling the cup of coffee onto the floor.*)

MANAGER JOE. (*Taking a few napkins from the bar and bending to clean up the spilt coffee.*) Oh, I’m terribly sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.

SUZETTE. (*She takes another napkin and bends down to help him.*) It’s not a big deal, really. I can’t cry over spilt coffee, right?

MANAGER JOE. (*Standing.*)There, all done. (*He puts the sodden napkins in a trash- can and reaches to take her cup.*) Allow me to throw this out for you. I’ll just pour you half a cup so that you’ll have enough room for the half and half.

SUZETTE. Thanks so much. You are so nice.

MANAGER JOE. Hey, it’s my job. Besides, it’s the least I can do. I was the cause of the accident, remember?

SUZETTE. Yeah, I guess so, but you just seem like a really good person. There just aren’t too many chivalrous guys out there any more.

MANAGER JOE. You think?

SUZETTE. I know. I just wasted my entire morning on a random bunch of retards all named Joe at a coffee bistro called Cup of Joe’s. How ironic! (*Resignedly.*) The whole idea was ridiculous anyway.

MANAGER JOE. (*Curiously.*) What idea?

SUZETTE. You mean you didn’t pick up on anything while watching us?

MANAGER JOE. (*Innocently.*)Only a few words here and there. You’ll have to fill in the blanks for me.

SUZETTE. Okay, but we should probably sit down for this. (*They cross to center and sit at a bistro table.*) Where should I start?

MANAGER JOE. Anywhere is fine.

SUZETTE. (*Looking around.*) You aren’t going to get in trouble sitting here with me, are you?

MANAGER JOE. No. Rush hour is over. I doubt there’ll be any more customers now. Besides, I pretty much have free reign whenever I work.

SUZETTE. Good. I mean we have a little bit of time. Well, you see, I have this stupid attraction to the name Joe, so I decided to go on-line and connect with as many Joes as possible, hoping to find the right one to date.

MANAGER JOE. (*Slowly.*) Oh? And you didn’t?

SUZETTE. No. In fact, two of them made off with my girlfriends, which you probably witnessed.

MANAGER JOE. Yeah, I did notice that. Bad luck, eh?

SUZETTE. (*Annoyed.*) Don’t even go there!

MANAGER JOE. (*Honestly.*) Sorry, didn’t mean to touch on a sore spot. Hey, listen, I know you don’t know me all that well, but why don’t you and I go out sometime?

SUZETTE. You and I? Go out?

MANAGER JOE. Sure.

SUZETTE. You don’t even know my name.

MANAGER. Okay, what’s your name?

SUZETTE. Suzette. What’s your name?

MANAGER JOE. Read the nametag.

SUZETTE. (*Dumbfounded.*) You’re joking, right?

MANAGER JOE. No, my name actually is Joe. My dad owns this place and thought he was being punny by naming it Cup of Joe’s Bistro. You know: Joe as in me and Joe as in coffee.

SUZETTE. Punny? Oh, yeah, punny, as in pun. I seem to be getting hit with a lot of them lately. Gotcha! I guess you really belong here.

MANAGER JOE.(*Slowly, thoughtfully.*) I know this sounds a bit premature, but I’m hoping I may just belong with you, Suzette.

SUZETTE. (*She looks at him wistfully, smiling...*) Wow. I’m blown away, Joe.But something tells me that could just be a real possibility.

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 5: Inequity

 In general, much of life can be said to be unfair. Often inequity tends to be blatant, such as in ubiquitous racial discrimination or so subtle that it can be nearly invisible, except if the target of the bias happens to be you. For example, in the New Jersey high school where I teach, half the building is air-conditioned and half is not. Curiously, the main office where the administration holds court is always comfortable 365 days a year, although the actual climate may be far from calm during the 180 days that the school is in session. The other, tolerable areas are cooled at random, ensuring that at least a fraction of the overworked, overheated faculty and students experience some relief from relentlessly oppressive, late spring temperatures. Despite the seemingly trivial nature of this particular instance, it does prove that varying degrees of unfairness do run rampant in society.

 Many years ago, I was a reluctant witness to an injustice that occurred to a student of mine. Rather than wallow in unproductive anger, I decided to write the following play, which is mainly a work of fiction, yet very loosely based on reality.

**Two Guys and a Guillotine**

Characters

Guy Aarons Gaby Stein Mrs. Aarons

Guy Walter Ms. Nelson Mrs. Laser

Sharon Wiley Mr. Barber Dr. Harris

*At rise: The main curtain is closed while the house lights can remain on.* MS. NELSON, *who is about forty years old,* *is seated in the middle of the first row of seats before the stage. Believing in the value of honesty, she can see the goodness in everyone, which makes her quite popular despite her flamboyant appearance. Teaching English and directing drama are her two passions, and she feels she can save teen troublemakers by enticing them into acting.* GUY AARONS, *age thirteen,* *stands before her slightly center on the apron of the stage. An inveterate liar, he is the “problem child,” rarely getting along with many of his classmates. Most of his teachers are impressed with his impeccable manners, and hence, rarely find fault with him. His two loves are theater and* MS. NELSON.GABY STEIN *and* GUY WALTERS *stand to the left of* GUY AARONS. GABY, *thirteen, is one shady character, especially as most of her crimes are committed on-line.* GUY WALTERS, *twelve, is also on the deceptive side. When given the opportunity, he cuts class, plays practical jokes on unsuspecting teachers, and feigns illness if he thinks he can win a trip home.* GUY *and* GABY *whisper and alternately poke at one another during the following exchange. From the positioning of the characters, it is clear that they are engaged in some sort of play rehearsal. The students wear school clothes typical of the present-day while* MS. NELSON *is clothed in a hip miniskirt, fishnet stockings, and spike heals. She has a healthy mop of platinum blonde hair, and her face is covered with make-up. A plain wash of lights illuminates the characters on the apron.*

MS. NELSON. (*Loudly, with enthusiasm*.) Okay, Guy A., that’s perfect. I think you have really nabbed the essence of your character in this scene. I can’t imagine anyone portraying Goodwin better. Great job!

GUY AARONS. (*Smiling, shyly.*) Thank you, Ms. Nelson. I appreciate it.

GUY WALTERS. (*Stepping forward*.) Excuse me, Ms. Nelson, but how did me and Gaby do?

MS. NELSON. (*Slowly with* emphasis.) Gaby and I. How did Gaby and I do? And the answer is mediocre, merely mediocre.

GABY. (*With attitude.*) Sorry, Ms. Nelson. Please refresh my memory here. What does *mediocre* mean, exactly?

MS. NELSON. (*Matter-of-factly.*) Funny how you can’t remember, Gaby, especially as it was featured on our last vocabulary test in language arts. It means average, lackluster.

GUY WALTERS. (*Taking offense.*) Average? Lackluster?

MS. NELSON. Yes, sorry to say.

GABY. (*Crossing to sit on the edge of the stage.*) Well, what can we do to match Guy A’s obvious brilliance?

MS. NELSON. For one, you can stop whispering and poking one another while I’m giving notes.

GUY WALTERS. But that has nothing to do with our acting.

MS. NELSON. (*Perturbed.*) It has everything to do with it. When you’re on stage, you should be in character consistently, and that involves a substantial amount of concentration. There is no time for fooling around in theater. (*She looks at her watch.*) Okay, it’s 3:30. Some of you need to catch the late bus. We’ll continue from this page in the script tomorrow. Thank you. (NELSON *turns and begins to walk down the left aisle of the house.* GUY AARONS *jumps off the stage to follow her.*)

GUY AARONS. Wait up, Ms. Nelson. I need to ask you a question about Goodwin. I’m not sure how he feels about his father in the next scene.

MS. NELSON. Sure, Guy. Just talk while you’re walking. I have to get back to my classroom. I’ve got papers to grade. (*They feign conversation as they exit the rear door of the house.* GUY WALTERS *crosses down stage to sit next to* GABY *on the edge of the apron.*)

GUY WALTERS. What a suck-up that kid is!

GABY. Seriously. He’s the biggest attention whore in the school. I don’t get it. The kids hate him because he is such a loser, but the teachers are beginning to think he’s God’s gift to mankind.

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, *they* think he is, but Barber hates his guts.

GABY. What makes you say that? Principals aren’t allowed to hate kids.

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, well, Barber hates Guy Aarons. Haven’t you noticed all that kid has to do is say, ‘Boo!’ and he gets booted into the reflection room?

GABY. True, but the teachers aren’t bothering to report his evil deeds anymore because they think he’s ‘well mannered.’ I know because I overheard Mrs. Laser talking to Nelson in the hall the other day just before the first bell.

(*At this point, the two freeze* *as* MS. NELSON *and* MRS. LASER *enter from downstage right and left.* MRS. LASER, *who is about 55,* *has been teaching for thirty years. Yet she is still on top of her game. Clever and sagacious, she still remains objective when it comes to managing a classroom.* MS. NELSON *and* MRS. LASER *stand slightly up left of* GUY WALTERS *and* GABY.)

MRS. LASER. (*With curiosity.*)So, how is Guy doing in your play?

MS. NELSON. Guy Walters?

MRS. LASER. No, Guy Aarons.

MS. NELSON. (*Ebulliently.*) Oh, he’s just fabulous. I wish the rest of the cast were as insightful and as focused. But he really loves acting; it’s in his blood. It’s as though he lives for the stage.

MRS. LASER. Too bad he can’t get excited about my social studies class. Do you know what I caught him doing the other day?

MS. NELSON. I have no idea.

MRS. LASER. (*Matter-of-factly.*) He threw one of my seventy-five-dollar textbooks out the window.

MS. NELSON. No! I can’t believe it!

MRS. LASER. At first, he thought he could get away with lying and pointing his finger at someone else, but I kept grilling him until he pleaded guilty. I thought about sending him down to Barber.

MS. NELSON. Did you?

MRS. LASER. No. Lately that man is suspending him for every little infraction. I feel sorry for the kid. He’s always so polite to me – a real smoothie. I hate to admit it, but despite his mischief, I like him.

MS. NELSON. I’ve always liked him. (*A bell rings.*) Well, that’s the late bell. I better get in there and take attendance.

MRS. LASER. See you at lunch.

MS. NELSON. See you.

(*Both teachers turn and exit from the same locations as they entered.* GUY *and* GABY *come back to life.)*

GUY WALTERS. (*He pauses to scheme.*) We’re just going to have to do something about Aarons. If we don’t, he is going to keep getting away with everything.

GABY. (*After a pause*.) I know! I’ve got an awesome idea!

GUY WALTERS. What?

GABY. I’ll tell you on the bus. We should hurry, or we’ll miss it. (*Both jump off the apron and run down the right aisle of the house.*)

SCENE 2: *It is the following day. The curtain rises on a nearly empty stage.* SHARON *and* GABY *sit at two desks placed down right while both* GUY WALTERS *and* GUY AARONS *sit at two others, positioned downstage left.* SHARON*, age twelve*, *tries to be accepted in the worst way and will tag along with the worst of her classmates just to feel liked. However, because she is spineless, she will back out of collusion to avoid punishment. Facing the audience, all four students appear to be engaged in some sort of project. A sole, portable chalkboard stands upstage center. Various sentences related to creative writing are scribbled across it.* MS. NELSON *stands before the board holding a piece of chalk in her right hand and reading what she has just written. After a few seconds, she begins to add more information. When she finishes, she addresses the class.*

MS. NELSON. Class, I’d like to have your full attention before you continue writing. (*She pauses until the students turn to face her.*) Thank you. Remember, you are composing a short story about your original superhero. Characterization, plot, and setting are important and require development. By the end of the period, I’d like to see a rough draft from each pair of you. Any questions? No? Good. Work diligently. Accountable talk only, please. I don’t want to hear any unnecessary discussion since it only wastes time, and you don’t have too much of it. (*She crosses right to sit at a desk.*)

GUY WALTERS. (*Pulling on Aaron’s sleeve*.)Guy, I’ve got a great idea for the climax of our story.

(GABY *and* SHARON *stop what they are doing and listen to the boys’ conversation.* GUY WALTERS *is very much aware of this, so he speaks very loudly on purpose.*)

GUY AARONS. (*Annoyed.*) Don’t touch me! Yeah? What is it?

GUY WALTERS. Well, we can change the male villains to females, right? And after they commit their last crime against society, we’ll have Super-Awesome-Marvelous Guy capture them and chop off their heads!

GUY AARONS. Yeah? I don’t know. Ms. Nelson may think it’s violent.

GUY WALTERS. Hey, it’s a superhero adventure. Look at Batman and Superman. You mean to tell me those comics aren’t violent? Haven’t you seen the movie versions? They’re even worse.

GUY AARONS. Yeah. Okay, I get your point.

GUY WALTERS. (*He catches the gaze of one of the girls.*)Let’s call the femme fatales Gross Gaby and Slick Sharon.

GABY. Wait a minute! You can’t use our names!

GUY WALTERS. Why not? Your names are common, and besides, our characters are fictional. They aren’t you; they are ‘reasonable facsimiles’ of girls your age, as Ms. Nelson would say.

SHARON. Well, you don’t have to take our names! Use other girls’ names, like Rachel or Nicole. Those are realistic. We don’t have a Rachel or Nicole in this class, so no one’s feelings can be hurt.

GUY AARONS. (*Teasingly.*) We’ll think about it.

GUY WALTERS. (*Shooting him a look of distain.*) No way! We’re using their names because we like them. Right?

GUY AARONS. Okay, it’s a done deal. I’m thinking we can get more creative in terms of the decapitations.

GUY WALTERS. The what?

GUY AARONS. You know, the chopping-off-their-heads part.

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, I knew that. Hey, I have an idea! What is that French

head-chopping machine called? You know, the one they used back in the olden days?

GUY AARONS. You mean the guillotine?

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, the guillotine. We’ll send the vicious, destructive, Gross Gaby and Slick Sharon to the guillotine!

GABY. No! That’s disgusting. You can’t do that to us!

SHARON. We’ll tell Ms. Nelson. And you’ll get in big trouble!

(*The two boys laugh uncontrollably.* GABY *and* SHARON *rise, crossing to* MS. NELSON*, who is busy grading papers at her desk.*)

GABY. Ms. Nelson, the two Guys are bothering us.

MS. NELSON (*Looking up from her papers.*) What did they do this time?

SHARON. They’re using our names for the villains in their story.

GABY. Yeah, and they’re going to send us to the guillotine to get our heads chopped off.

MS. NELSON. Really? That’s too violent for my taste. Let me speak to them. You go back to your desks and continue writing.

(GABY *and* SHARON *return to their desks while* MS. NELSON *crosses down to the boys who suddenly stop laughing and feign industry.*)

MS. NELSON. Boys, I don’t want you using Gaby’s name and/or Sharon’s name in your piece, all right?

GUY WALTERS. Okay, Ms. Nelson. We were just joking around, just trying to get a rise out of them.

MS. NELSON. I figured that, but I also don’t want these stories to be overly violent. Squash the guillotine concept.

GUY AARONS. All right. (*He looks at* GUY WALTERS *in a persuasive way.*) We can come up with something different. Right, Guy?

GUY WALTERS. Sure thing.

MS. NELSON. You better get right on it because you are running out of time. Remember, I want a completed first draft by the end of the period.

(*Both nod their heads and return to work.* GABY, *who has been listening to the entire conversation, beckons for* MS.NELSON.)

GABY. Whoa, wait a minute! Ms. Nelson!

MS. NELSON. (*Crossing to her.*) Yes, Gaby.

GABY. You aren’t going to give them detention?

MS. NELSON. No, I handled it. They won’t be using your names in their story, and I vetoed the guillotine as well.

SHARON. Aren’t you going to at least get them to apologize?

MS. NELSON. All right, Sharon. Fair enough. Mr. Walters and Mr. Aarons!

GUY/GUY. Yes, Ms. Nelson.

MS. NELSON. Apologize to these young ladies for getting them so upset.

GUY AARONS. Sorry, girls. We didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, we apologize.

MS. NELSON. Thank you. Now all of you should get back to work now. (*She returns to her desk. Suddenly, a bell rings.*) Oh, no, you’ve just run out of time. If you are finished, put your names on your papers and turn them in to me on your way out, please. If you aren’t finished, I’ll give you ten minutes of tomorrow’s class. Thanks, everyone!

(GUY WALTERS, GUY AARONS, SHARON, *and* GABY *rise, gather their papers, and cross upstage to* MS. NELSON, *who collects their work. The students exit as the curtain falls.*)

SCENE 3: *The following short scene takes place in front of the curtain on the apron of the stage.* GABY *and* SHARON *enter from left.*

GABY. (*To* SHARON *confidentially.*)I can’t believe they got away with it.

SHARON. Well, maybe it wasn’t that big a deal after all.

GABY. Are you kidding? I’m going to report them to Barber right now. He should know about threats to human life.

SHARON. They didn’t exactly threaten our lives.

GABY. Maybe not, but the way I’ll tell it, it’ll seem like they did.

SHARON. You mean you’re going to get them into trouble on purpose?

GABY. Not both of them, just Aarons. I hate that Nelson always lets him get away with murder. He needs to be put in his place.

SHARON. Well, you can count me out, then. I’m not going to lie just so that you can get back at him.

GABY. Fine. Don’t come with me. I’ll go by myself.

SHARON. Fine. If you ask me, Walters was the one who came up with both ideas, not Aarons. And since when does Nelson favor him?

GABY. Just forget it, all right? I told you. I’m going to Barber alone. I don’t need you.

(SHARON *turns abruptly and exits to the right and* GABY*, to the left.*)

SCENE 4: *The curtain rises to reveal a large desk positioned at center stage with the principal* MR. BARBER *seated behind it in a large, black-leather chair. About fifty, he is known to have a split personality: on the one hand, he can be jovial, congenial, and solicitous; on the other, he can be downright vicious, self-possessed, and stubborn. His problems most likely emanate from low self-esteem. He appears to be on the telephone when* GABY *enters from stage left. She sits down in a wooden chair that is positioned down left of the desk.*

MR. BARBER. Yes, Ms. Smith, I’ll review my observation with you tomorrow during your prep, seventh period. (*He pauses, glancing at* GABY.) I have a student in my office right now, so I’d prefer to answer that question tomorrow if that’s all right with you. (*Pause.*) Good. See you tomorrow. Thank you. (*To* GABY.) Yes, young lady, what can I do for you?

GABY. (*Nervously, but with an air of confidence.*)Something just happened last period in Ms. Nelson’s class that I think you should know about. It involves Guy Aarons.

MR. BARBER. Why doesn’t that surprise me? What did he do this time?

GABY. Well, he is writing a short story and is planning on using my name, Gaby Stein, and Sharon Wiley’s for characters that he is going to send to the guillotine.

MR. BARBER. That is grotesquely despicable. I’m sorry to hear of it. But didn’t you go to Ms. Nelson with this information?

GABY. I did and she just told Guy not to use our names. She didn’t even get mad or give him detention.

MR. BARBER. I see. Well, I’ll have to get to the bottom of this. Other than Miss Wiley and Ms. Nelson, who else is involved?

GABY. Well, Guy Walters overheard the conversation.

MR. BARBER. (*He takes a pen and scribbles the names down on a piece of paper.*) Okay, that’s Wiley and Walters. Thank you, Gaby. You may go to your next class. My secretary, Mrs. Bonavito, will write you a pass.

GABY. Are you going to suspend Guy Aarons?

MR. BARBER. I haven’t quite decided yet. Thank you again, Miss Stein.

(GABY *rises and exits to the left while* MR. BARBER *picks up his phone.*)

MR. BARBER. Mrs. Bonavito, find out where Sharon Wiley and Guy Walters are this period and have their teachers send them down, please. Together? Yes, I’ll speak to them together. Thank you. (*He hangs up the phone and begins to toy with some of the frames on his desk. After a minute or two,* SHARON *and* GUYWALTERS *enter from stage left.)* That was quick. Have a seat. (*The two sit down in chairs downstage of the desk.*)

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, we both have class together right next door with Mr. Christy in the art room.

MR. BARBER. How convenient. Anyway, your friend Gaby Stein was just here, and she informed me of last period’s travesty involving Mr. Aarons. I would like to hear your sides of the story before I bring in the culprit. Miss Wiley?

SHARON. (*Petrified, stuttering.*) Well, I’m sure Gaby told you all about it, but I guess Guy Aarons was going to write a violent story including our names in it. He was going to make us into the femme fatales and behead us at the end of it.

MR. BARBER. All right. Thank you. Mr. Walters, is this true?

GUY WALTERS. Yes, sir, I was sitting right next to Guy Aarons, sir, so I heard the entire conversation.

MR. BARBER. You weren’t involved in the writing of this story?

GUY WALTERS. No, sir, I was writing my own.

SHARON. (*She shoots* GUY WALTERS *a dirty look, but* MR. BARBER *does not notice.*) May we go now, sir?

MR. BARBER. Yes, you may. Thank you for your sincere testimony. I’ll call you down again if I need anything further.

(SHARON *and* GUY WALTERS *cross left, out of* MR. BARBER’s *earshot.* MR. BARBER *is on the phone during the following interchange.*)

SHARON. (*To* GUYWALTERS, *in shock*.) *You lied!*

GUY WALTERS. (*Slowly, with emphasis.*)So did you. (SHARON, *flabbergasted, exits left, followed by* GUY WALTERS*.*)

MR. BARBER. (*On the phone, gruffly.*) Mrs. Bonavito, find Aarons and tell his teacher I need to see him immediately. Thank you. (*Again, he fiddles awkwardly with the frames.*) I’m so glad all my children are girls. This Aarons kid is going to send me to an early grave.

(GUY AARONS *enters from left.*)

MR. BARBER. (*Sarcastically.*) Ah, if it isn’t my dear friend, Mr. Aarons. Please come in and take your usual seat. Undoubtedly, it is still warm from your last visit.

GUY AARONS. (*Meekly.*) Yes, sir, I’m sorry to disturb you, sir.

MR. BARBER. (*Sardonically.*) I’m sure you are. Why don’t you tell me everything that happened last period involving you, Gaby Stein, Sharon Wiley, and Guy Walters?

GUY AARONS. In Ms. Nelson’s English class?

MR. BARBER. Yes.

GUY AARONS. Oh, well, me and Guy Walters were writing a superhero story together, and he thought it would be funny to make Sharon and Gaby into the bad characters in it. He came up with the idea. I approved it, though, and thought that they should die, you know, like dramatically. Guy came up with the guillotine idea. We didn’t write anything down because we were just trying to get the girls’ attention.

MR. BARBER. That’s very interesting because Mr. Walters said he had nothing to do with the story since he was writing his own at the time. As you have lied to me on numerous occasions, Mr. Aarons, my tendency is to believe him over you.

GUY AARONS. I understand that, Mr. Barber, but I’m not lying this time. I can show you the story. It has both our names on it, and there is no mention of the girls or the guillotine in it.

MR. BARBER. (*Angrily.*) I don’t want to see the story, Mr. Aarons! But I do want to see you in in-school suspension tomorrow! I shall be informing your mother of the infraction and its consequence shortly.

GUY AARONS. But, Mr. Barber, I didn’t do anything wrong!

MR. BARBER. (*Incensed.*) I believe I have heard that sentence from you before, Aarons. Please leave now. Otherwise I may say something that could just cause me to lose my job.

(GUY AARONS *stands and exits left.*)

MR. BARBER. (*Picking up the phone and speaking into it.*) Yes, Mrs. Bonavito. Get me the phone number of Mrs. Aarons. I should have it memorized by now, but I don’t. Thank you.

SCENE 5: *The curtain closes.* GUY WALTERS *and* GABY *enter the apron from left. They each carry large, wooden hall passes.*

GABY. So far our plan is working out perfectly.

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, Barber ate up everything. Wiley was so nervous that she didn’t even realize she was repeating your bogus side of the story until I reminded her of the fact as we were leaving.

GABY. And she didn’t even want to get involved in the first place. Well, good, at least I don’t have to torture her now in Nelson’s class.

GUY WALTERS. Aarons is getting in-school suspension.

GABY. How do you know?

GUY WALTERS. Just now when he was leaving the office, he almost punched me after he told me. I ducked and said that he really didn’t need to get out-of-school suspension on top of his in-school suspension.

GABY. Wait a minute. We may be in trouble here.

GUY WALTERS. What do you mean?

GABY. What if Nelson tells her side of the story to Barber?

GUY WALTERS. So what? Barber already believes us. He’s going to think she’s making up a version to save Aarons because he’s her pet.

GABY. I don’t know. Don’t administrators always believe teachers over students?

GUY WALTERS. You would think so, but Barber is a different animal. Besides, I think he definitely hates Aarons and would like to see him sent to a school for juvenile delinquents. If Aarons keeps getting suspended, he’ll definitely get into it.

GABY. I hope you’re right. I can’t afford to get into any more trouble. Barber doesn’t remember, obviously, but he suspended me two years ago for cyber bullying. My parents grounded me for six months after that.

GUY WALTERS. Just hope he doesn’t remember because if he does, your side of the story will be flushed down the toilet. And you’ll be the one in in-school suspension, not Aarons.

GABY. Right, but you’re no angel, either. You’ll be in there with me, too.

GUY WALTERS. True, but I don’t have a previous record on file. I’ve just gotten teacher detentions for being late and taking my time in the boys’ room. You know, minor stuff like that, so Barber probably doesn’t even know anything. He might let me off with a warning.

GABY. Well, let’s not think about it because right now, we’re okay.

GUY WALTERS. Right. Let’s celebrate after school at my house. My parents won’t be home till late. Maybe we can sneak a beer or two from the garage!

GABY. (*She high-fives him.*)Sounds like a plan! Let’s get back to class before our teachers notice how long we’ve been out.

GUY WALTERS. Yeah, I told Mrs. Laser I needed to find my homework for her in my locker. Too bad I didn’t do it! (*He snickers.*)

(GABY *and* GUY WALTERS *exit, walking down the aisle of the house into the lobby.)*

SCENE 6: *The curtain rises once again to reveal* MR. BARBER*’s office. He is seated behind his desk.* MRS. AARONS *is seated to his right,* *and* MS. NELSON *is seated to his left.* MRS. AARONS, *who is about 49, adopted* GUY *when he was three. Because of his consistent behavioral problems, she has had to endure a lot. Consequently, she has become realistic, yet jaded. Although nothing* GUY *does surprises her, she feels* MR. BARBER *treats him unfairly.* GUY *appears left. He is carrying his composition.*

MR. BARBER. Mr. Aarons, please join us.

(GUY AARONS *crosses to an empty chair next to his mother.*)

MR. BARBER. Mrs. Aarons, I am indeed sorry to report yet another infraction. What disturbs me the most is that Guy lies perpetually. According to his classmates, he has been writing a heinous story, which includes the names of two girls from his English class. Apparently, they are explicitly decapitated in the guillotine. Guy seems to want to implicate a boy in his class as a confederate, but his classmate told me that your son came up with all the horrific ideas.

GUY AARONS. Mr. Barber, I’m telling you the truth. (*He attempts to give* MR. BARBER *his paper.*) Please read the story, and you’ll see I didn’t include anything upsetting.

MR. BARBER. I told you, Guy. I am not interested in your story, just the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

MRS. AARONS. Just tell him the truth, Guy.

GUY. Mom, I did. (*To* NELSON.) Ms. Nelson, please tell them I’m telling the truth.

MS. NELSON. I believe you, Guy. But I didn’t hear the conversation that you had with the girls and Guy, so I can’t be a valid witness. (*To* MRS. AARONS.) Mrs. Aarons, I can say that your son is absolutely amazing on stage in my play. He comes to all the rehearsals and is always very polite and compliant. In fact, I have to add that he is probably the most talented actor in the school.

MS. AARONS. Thank you very much, Ms. Nelson. I appreciate it. You are always so kind to Guy.

MR. BARBER. (*Covering his anger.*) Yes, thank you, Ms. Nelson. You may return to your class now.

(NELSON *rises and exits left.*)

MR. BARBER. Well, I’m sorry to say that as Guy won’t tell me what I feel is the truth, he must accept his punishment. He will report to in-school suspension tomorrow.

MS. AARONS. (*Rising.*) Although I disagree with the severity of the punishment, Mr. Barber, Guy will report tomorrow only because he must learn the importance of respecting his elders.

MR. BARBER. Thank you.

SCENE 7: *The curtain falls on the scene.* MS. NELSON *appears stage left and begins to walk right, across the apron.* MR. BARBER *appears right and intercepts her, center.*

MR. BARBER. (*Angrily, taking her by the arm.*)Ms. Nelson, I must speak to you immediately!

MS. NELSON. (*Calmly, imperatively.*) Mr. Barber, please let go of me. (*He does.*) I simply must get back to my class.

MR. BARBER. Not before you hear what I have to say.

MS. NELSON. Fine.

MR. BARBER. You undermined me in there just now! I was trying to get that boy to tell the truth, and you purposely weakened my position.

MS. NELSON. If I did, I didn’t do it intentionally. Couldn’t you see the tragic look on that woman’s face? She’s the child’s mother, and she’s been through hell and back with that boy! Seriously, she needed to hear something decent about him!

MR. BARBER. (*Calming down a bit.*) I’m sorry. Perhaps I’m being premature. Aarons just brings out the worst in me. He’s lied to me on numerous occasions.

MS. NELSON. Devin, I wish you could see Guy Aarons after school, rehearsing for the play. You wouldn’t recognize him. He comes consistently on time every day, gets along with all the other cast members, is polite and agreeable to me; plus, he learns his lines on time. I can’t say enough positive things about him.

MR. BARBER. (*Matter-of-factly.*)Well, be that as it may, he isn’t at his best during school hours.

MS. NELSON. (*Vehemently.*) I know that, but I’m not going to lie to the mother and tell her he’s dishonest for your sake. Devin, excuse me for saying this, but you too could stand to see the goodness in others.

MR. BARBER. (*Slowly, deliberately.*) I apologize for not being Anne Frank, but right now I have a job to do. So do you. We’ll speak again. (*He crosses in front of her and exits stage left.*)

MS. NELSON. (*Facing left.*)I’m sure of it. (*She exits, right.*)

SCENE 8: *The curtain rises. The scenery has changed.* MR.BARBER *and* DR. HARRIS, *the superintendent of schools,* *are seated side by side at a long table in the conference room of what is supposed to be the guidance office.* DR. HARRIS*, about 65, tries to be as non-partial as possible, able to disguise her prejudice remarkably well through her euphemistic rhetoric.*

DR. HARRIS. Mr. Barber, I just received a very disturbing telephone call from Mrs. Aarons, Guy Aarons’ mother. Once again, she was incensed at your decision to suspend her son. Apparently, her husband feels that you are unjustly bullying Guy, and he is threatening a lawsuit. Unfortunately, as superintendent, one of my responsibilities is to mitigate tumultuous situations such as this one.

MR. BARBER. I am indeed sorry to hear that Mr. Aaron’s feels the way he does. On the contrary, I thought I had managed the problem well, considering the boy has lied to me consistently.

DR. HARRIS. Well, you did not. Now just in case Mr. and Mrs. Aarons do pursue a course of litigation, I shall have to interview all parties involved, recording their depositions by hand. Of course, you must see that I’m not happy about it.

MR. BARBER. Yes. Again, I apologize.

DR. HARRIS. I accept your sincere apology, but it will do nothing to mitigate the circumstances. You may return to your duties as principal. Send in Ms. Nelson on your way out. I had her summoned previously, so she should be waiting outside the guidance office. I may have time to speak to you again after I’ve finished.

MR. BARBER. Thank you, Dr. Harris. I’ll send her in.

(MR. BARBER *exits right.* MS. NELSON *appears and crosses to the table.*)

DR. HARRIS. (*Standing.*) Oh, Ms. Nelson, how nice it is to see you. Please sit down.

MS. NELSON. Nice to see you, too, Dr. Harris. Thank you. (*She sits at the table, right of* DR. HARRIS. DR. HARRIS *sits behind the desk, center.*)

DR. HARRIS. I am assuming you are aware of the situation concerning Guy Aarons?

MS. NELSON. Somewhat. Two girls in my class accused him of threatening to use their names in a violent short story, but I thought I had managed well on my own. To tell you the truth, I didn’t think the situation warranted a suspension.

DR. HARRIS. Did you tell Mr. Barber?

MS. NELSON. No, he never called me down to hear my side.

DR. HARRIS. He did not?

MS. NELSON. No, he did not. I was only present at the parent-student conference, but never once did he ask me to present my recollection of the incident. I wasn’t even aware that Gaby had spoken to him.

DR. HARRIS. Well, I’ll have to discuss that matter with him later. A principal should always hear the teacher’s perspective first. In your own words for the record, tell me what happened.

(*As* MS. NELSON *speaks,* DR. HARRIS *scribbles down every word on a long, yellow, legal pad.*)

MS. NELSON. It’s really simple. I told the students to work on their superhero stories and gave them class time to do so while I graded papers at my desk. A few minutes later, Sharon Wiley and Gaby Stein approached me and told me that Guy Aarons and Guy Walters were planning on using their names for the villains in their story and that the punishment for crimes committed against society would be the guillotine. Immediately, I told the boys that their ideas were inappropriate and that they should think of an alternative ending, omitting the unnecessary, explicit violence. They agreed and wound up apologizing to the girls as the period ended. Personally, I didn’t think the matter was of much concern because the assignment itself does lend itself to a certain amount of, should we say, action?

DR. HARRIS. Action, yes, but not the guillotine. Seriously, Ms. Nelson, there is too much violence in the world today as it is. Couldn’t you just come up with a more suitable topic for a short story?

MS. NELSON. I could have, but the assignment is part of the curriculum.

DR. HARRIS. Well, we must see about changing it then. Now, you mentioned that Guy Walters was writing the story as well?

MS. NELSON. Yes, I allowed students to write in pairs. If Mr. Barber had agreed to read the composition, he would’ve seen the two boys’ names on the paper as well as no sign of the girls’ names and the guillotine.

DR. HARRIS. But Aarons was the only one punished?

MS. NELSON. I suppose so. I wasn’t aware of what actually happened until I found myself in Mr. Barber’s office.

DR. HARRIS. I’ll have to confirm this with Mr. Barber after I hear Mr. Walters’s side of the story. Thank you, Ms. Nelson. You may go. Send in Miss Stein and Mr. Walters on your way out.

MS. NELSON. Thank you. I shall. One last thing, though: off the record, I don’t believe Guy Aarons is the pathological liar that Mr. Barber may think he is.

DR. HARRIS. Please, Ms. Nelson, Guy Aarons has been involved in misdeeds for years, and he has always pleaded innocent when we have definite proof otherwise.

MS. NELSON. Yes, but he behaves beautifully for me. You should see him act in my play. He is so believable. Please come. The performance is this Friday during seventh period.

DR. HARRIS. Touché, Ms. Nelson. Guy is obviously a wonderful actor in real life as well. He definitely has you fooled. Besides, there is always one teacher whom the culprit likes enough to behave well for. (*She stands, extending a hand.*)Again, it was a pleasure to see you again, Ms. Nelson. Unfortunately, I cannot attend your play as I have a previous commitment. I do wish you well, however.

MS. NELSON. (*Shaking her hand.*) Thank you. I appreciate it. (*She turns to leave but then stops.*) Oh, and just one more thing that you may wish to know. Mr. Barber may not remember, but he suspended Gaby Stein for cyber bullying a couple years ago. And Guy Walters is forever getting detention for deceptive, petty crimes. I know these things because the two are the talk of the teachers in the faculty room. So, I don’t know how credible their testimonies will be.

DR. HARRIS. I’ll soon see, but thank you for telling me. I’ll keep the information in mind when I’m interrogating them. (*She smiles deviously.*)

(GABY *and* GUY WALTERS *appear at stage right.*)

MS. NELSON. (*As she is exiting.*)Be honest you two. (GABY *and* GUY WALTERS *ignore her.*)

DR. HARRIS. (*Rising.*) Please come in and sit down, children.

(GABY *and* GUY WALTERS *cross and sit to the right and left of the table.*)

DR. HARRIS. (ToGABY.) Now you must be Gaby Stein, correct?

GABY. Yes, Dr. Harris.

DR. HARRIS. (*To* GUY WALTERS.) And you are Guy Walters?

GUY WALTERS. Yeah.

DR. HARRIS. (*She scribbles their names in her pad.*) Good, all present and accounted for. We can get started. Mr. Walters, please tell me what you know of this controversial superhero story.

GUY WALTERS. Well, I was sitting next to Guy Aarons and saw he was writing a paragraph involving Gaby and another girl in our English class, Sharon Wiley. He told all of us that he was planning to chop their heads off in a guillotine.

DR. HARRIS. Interesting. (*She continues to scribble.*) You weren’t writing the composition with Mr. Aarons?

GUY WALTERS. No, I was writing my own story, Dr. Harris.

DR. HARRIS. I see. Gaby, how did you know that Mr. Aarons intended to include you in his piece?

GABY. Well, Guy read the part of the story including me and my friend Sharon out loud so that we could hear it.

DR. HARRIS. All right, then, what happened next?

GABY. I pleaded with Guy Aarons not to include us in the story. When he said it was a ‘done deal,’ I reported him to Ms. Nelson, who basically just blew off the whole thing. That’s when I went to Mr. Barber.

DR. HARRIS. Okay, thank you. I must say that I am amazed at how well you both lie.

GUY WALTERS. Excuse me?

DR. HARRIS. You heard me, Mr. Walters. Ms. Nelson was just in to give her account. What makes you think that I would believe your story over hers? Especially as you both seem to have prior, devious infractions on record? I shall contemplate your punishments and telephone your parents personally! You may be excused. Please return to your classes punctually. There will be no dilly-dallying in the hallways, thank you.

GABY/WALTERS. (*Sheepishly.*) Yes, Mrs. Harris.

(*At this moment,* SHARON *enters stage right.*)

GABY. (*To* GUY WALTERS *as they are exiting.*) I knew she’d believe a teacher over us. Now we’re really in deep!

WALTERS. Oh, shut up! (*They exit.*)

DR. HARRIS. (*Rising.*)Hello, you must be Sharon Wiley.

SHARON. (*Timidly.*)Yes, I am.

DR. HARRIS. Don’t be nervous. Come in and sit down, please.

SHARON. (*Obeying, she sits down.*)Thank you.

DR. HARRIS. Your classmates made the dubious decision to lie to me, so I hope you’ll tell me the truth, Miss Wiley. I’m starting to get a massive headache.

SHARON. I will, Dr. Harris.

DR. HARRIS. Excellent. At least one of you has a conscience.

SHARON. The two Guys were writing the story together, but it was Guy Walters who came up with all the ideas, not Guy Aarons. Guy Walters pressured Guy Aarons into including Gaby and me as characters, and he even brought in the idea of the guillotine. After Gaby and I told on them, Ms. Nelson corrected the boys and they apologized. But after class, Gaby told me she was going to Mr. Barber and change things around so that Guy Aarons would get in trouble. She wanted me to go to Mr. Barber with her, but I told her I wouldn’t. I didn’t want to lie to the principal. But later, when Mr. Barber called us down, I didn’t exactly tell the truth either. I was so nervous. I got a bit confused.

DR. HARRIS. I understand. But why would Gaby and Guy Walters want to see Mr. Aarons punished?

SHARON. They don’t like him because Ms. Nelson likes him a lot.

DR. HARRIS. (*Shaking her head.*) Then their motive was jealousy. That’s a shame. Well, thank you for telling me the complete, honest version of the ordeal, Miss Wiley. You may return to your class now.

SHARON. Yes, Dr. Harris.

DR. HARRIS. Oh, and if you happen to see Mr. Barber skulking about out there, kindly tell him I’d like to speak with him.

SHARON. Yes, Dr. Harris.

(*As* SHARON *exits right,* MR. BARBER *enters.*)

MR. BARBER. Sorry to disturb you, Dr. Harris, but you had a telephone call before from the president of the school board.

DR. HARRIS. I’ll get back to him later. Please sit down, Devin. I believe the ordeal has been resolved.

MR. BARBER. So soon?

DR. HARRIS. Yes, fortunately. It seems that Gaby Stein and Guy Walters framed Guy Aarons since the two boys *were* writing the story together. It was Mr. Walters, not Mr. Aarons, who came up with all the lurid details. Apparently, Stein and Walters are jealous of all the positive attention Aarons has been getting from Ms. Nelson, and they want to see him hurt.

MR. BARBER. Well, Ms. Nelson did mention how talented he is as an actor.

DR. HARRIS. He certainly is, but maybe not in this case. It seems that he has been telling the truth after all. (*She smiles.*) Now, you and I have to decide how we intend to tie up the loose ends so that we can save face, especially with the parents. This entire dilemma has been blown completely out of proportion, and it is going to be your responsibility to defuse the bomb as it stands right now.

MR. BARBER. I’ll do everything humanly possible.

DR. HARRIS. Good. But first, please tell me what you could have done initially that you obviously had not done to prevent the situation from escalating?

MR. BARBER. I’m not quite sure what you want me to say.

DR. HARRIS. Well, after Gaby Stein told you her side of the story, wouldn’t it have made sense to bring in Ms. Nelson to hear her side?

MR. BARBER. I suppose so. I should’ve, and I’m not sure why I didn’t. I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.

DR. HARRIS. Yes, indeed, it won’t happen again! I like you, Devin, and I’d like to keep you gainfully employed, but I can’t afford to have parents threatening me with lawsuits. And another thing…

MR. BARBER. Yes?

DR. HARRIS. Try to be somewhat compassionate to all these misfits, especially when dealing with Aarons. Clearly, he has been bullied unjustly in the past. Of course, due process is also important. Never disregard material evidence. And don’t assume that just because testimony is coming from a female that it is accurate. If you had done your homework, you would’ve found that both Stein and Walters have had prior misdemeanors.

MR. BARBER. Again, I apologize.

DR. HARRIS. I accept. Now, get on the horn with Mrs. Aarons, rescind Guy’s punishment, and suspend Walters and Stein instead. Make sure you apologize profusely to both Mrs. Aarons and her son. Oh, and don’t forget to inform the other two sets of parents of your decision concerning their children.

MR. BARBER. I shall, earnestly.

DR. HARRIS. Wonderful. I better get back to my office and call the president of the Board of Ed before he gets impatient with me. (*She rises, taking her pencil and legal pad, and extends her hand.*)Until next we meet.

MR. BARBER. (*Rising to shake her hand.*) Until then, good-bye.

DR. HARRIS. Good luck. (*She exits.*)

(MR. BARBER *stands watching her leave as the curtain closes.*)

SCENE 9:GUY AARONS *enters the apron from stage left. The lights dim to signify the passage of time.* MS. NELSON *enters from the rear of the house, walks up to the first row of seats, and sits.*)

GUY AARONS. Where do you want me to take it from? My monologue in the second scene? Gaby and Guy aren’t here today.

MS. NELSON. Why not?

GUY AARONS. Didn’t you hear? Mr. Barber apologized to me because Superintendent Harris told him it was Guy Walters’s idea to change the plot of our superhero story. Gaby was somehow in on it. So he suspended Gaby and Guy instead of me.

MS. NELSON. Good. I’m glad Mr. Barber did the right thing. Hopefully, Guy and Gaby will as well. Speaking of Guy and Gaby, I think I’m going to recast this play. I can’t have dishonest students acting in a play that is fundamentally about honesty. Although it might be a learning experience for them, it would just be too ironic.

GUY AARONS. Believe it or not, I have a couple of honest friends in mind that just might want the roles.

MS. NELSON. Excellent. Tell them to see me tomorrow morning in my room. I’ll give them scripts.

GUY AARONS. Okay, so, what do you want me to do as Goodwin?

MS. NELSON. (*Rising.*) To tell you the truth, I don’t feel much like directing today. Let’s reconvene tomorrow.

GUY AARONS. (*He jumps off the stage and into the house.*)Okay with me.

MS. NELSON. (*She joins him.*) Need any help with your homework?

GUY AARONS. Come to think of it, I could use some help. Thanks.

MS. NELSON. Go get your English textbook and meet me in my classroom.

GUY AARONS. Sure thing, Ms. N. And thanks.

(*They exit out the back of the house.*)

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 6: Manners

 In the new millennium, socialization does not seem to include an emphasis on etiquette and decorum, known otherwise as manners. Because adults have forgotten the importance of politeness, so have their children. Unfortunately, perhaps due to the complexity of today’s society, individuals have retreated into their own worlds, often ignoring others around them.

 “Trilogy of Rude Behavior” looks at three brief scenes featuring impolite, selfish behavior. Although each vignette may be occasionally comic, the message is clear: rudeness is unacceptable, and there is always a price to pay for self-centeredness. Staging for these pieces can be arena, thrust, or proscenium. Once again, there is very little scenery employed as the emphasis is on physical action and dialogue. The gender of the characters is not important. Either sex can play roles interchangeably. Because the entire piece runs about fifteen minutes, it can be performed along with student-composed one-acts on the same topic. (On a personal note: I premiered “Trilogy” at a young playwrights’ festival that I had produced and directed at a middle school. The three plays were performed along with about five other dramatic shorts, written by students in my language arts classes. The event turned out to be very well received, especially considering it cost absolutely nothing to produce.)

Trilogy of Rude Behavior

1. Rudeness in the Minimart

Characters

Clerk

Customer

Customer Two

Customer Three

Marty

*At rise, there is a* CLERK *positioned behind a makeshift counter. Behind the* CLERK, *there are shelves containing items that could be found in a minimart. The* CLERK *is rearranging and dusting the items with a large feather duster. On the counter is a short stand of magazines. In front of the counter, down left and right, are freestanding shelves, filled with various boxes of cereal, laundry detergent, and miscellaneous canned goods. A* CUSTOMER *enters from stage left and pretends to be looking for a particular product in the store. Several others enter behind him and look around the store.*

CUSTOMER. (*Crossing to* CLERK.) Excuse me, but I’m looking for a highly specific item. You probably don’t have it, but it’s worth a shot. Do you know your inventory here?

CLERK. (*Curtly, without looking at him.*) I’d like to think I do. It seems like I’m here 24-7.

CUSTOMER. Well, I guess that’s a good enough answer.

CLERK. (*Turning and addressing the* CUSTOMER.) Good enough? I’d say so. I’m just about flunking out of college because of this stupid job. I have to work to pay part of my tuition bills, so I can’t quit. But if I don’t quit, I’ll probably never graduate. Does that make sense?

CUSTOMER. (*Cutting her off.*) I’m sorry to hear of your woes, but I’m looking for a somewhat rare brand of chili and beans. Gosh, I can’t remember the product’s name offhand. I’m pretty sure the label is red and black. Under the brand name on the front, there’s a color photo of a bowl with a lot of chili in it. Does that ring a bell? (*At this, the ring of a cell phone can be heard.*) Golly, gee whiz. What timing, eh? Just give me a sec. (CUSTOMER *opens his jacket and takes out a huge cardboard replica of a cell phone, which is about twelve inches long, and pretends to hit one of the buttons marked on it.*) Hello? Hi, hi. How are you? I’m great, great. Gosh, it’s been ages. I can’t believe you kept my cell number.

(*During the above conversation, two more customers enter from down left and begin to look for items in the store. They bring the boxes, cans, etc. to the counter where they patiently stand behind the* CUSTOMER*, who continues to babble on and on, totally unaware that he is in anyone’s way. The* CUSTOMER *leans on the counter, knocking off the stand of magazines. The* CLERK *runs around to the front of the counter, hurriedly picking up the magazines and putting them back on the stand.*)

CLERK. Pardon me. Sir, there is a line of other customers behind you. Would you mind moving aside so that I can help them?

CUSTOMER. (*Ignoring her.*) How are the kids? Gosh, golly, gee whiz. They must be huge. (*To the* CLERK.) What did you say? Did you find that can of chili for me?

CLERK. (*Obviously perturbed.*) Sir, if you would kindly step aside, I can help these customers while you are on the phone.

CUSTOMER. (*Still on the phone.*) Get together? I’d love to. Absolutely. (*To the* CLERK.) I was obviously here before them. Why don’t you run and find that chili for me?

(*At this point, the other customers on line begin to complain to each other and then to the* CUSTOMER.)

CUSTOMER TWO. Come on already! Step aside.

CUSTOMER THREE. We haven’t got all day, you know.

CUSTOMER. (*Ignoring them, he is still on the phone, but stares at the* CLERK *who has returned to her position behind the counter.*) I’m sorry, Lydia. I’m at one of those Quickie Marts, and the people here are extremely rude.

CLERK. (*Angry.*) Excuse me? EXCUSE me? Who is being rude here? (*All the other customers agree audibly.*)

CUSTOMER. (*Into the phone.*) Lydia, I’m having a little problem here. The clerk and the other customers in the store are ganging up on me. Hold on, would you? Thanks. It’ll just be a second. (*To the* CLERK *and others, annoyed.*) Listen, I’m not budging from this spot until I get some kind of decent service here. (*The other customers and the* CLERK *stare at him, stupefied that he could be so unbelievably self-centered.*) Okay? Okay. By the way, where is your manager? Maybe he can help me because you don’t seem to want to do your job.

CLERK. He’s in the back. Are you sure you want to see him?

CUSTOMER. Yes, of course I do. Call him out here. I have a complaint to issue about you. We’ll see if you still have your job tomorrow. (*To the other customers.*) There is no such thing as decent customer service today, that’s for sure. (*Into the phone.*) Lydia, are you still there? Hon? Great, I should have this mess resolved in a minute or two, and then you can tell me what you’ve been up to lately.

CLERK. (*Crosses up left and yells.*) MARTY! There’s a guy on a cell phone out here.

(MARTY, *a huge, football player of a guy, enters and crosses left of the* CLERK.)

MARTY. Yeah? This is the guy? (*He points to* CUSTOMER, *who is still talking on the cell phone.*)

CLERK. Yep, he’s the one.

(MARTY *takes a large plastic mallet from behind his back and hits the* CUSTOMER *over the head with it.* CUSTOMER *falls to the floor, dropping the phone, which* CUSTOMER THREE *rushes to pick up. He folds it in half and pockets it discretely.* MARTY *takes* CUSTOMER *by the feet and drags him upstage left.*)

MARTY. Third one today. You’d think people would just read the sign. (*He exits.*)

CUSTOMER TWO. What sign?

CLERK. (*She takes a large sign from behind the counter and reads it.*) ‘No cell phones permitted in the store. A severe consequence will result if request is ignored. Thank you. The Management.’

 BLACKOUT

1. Rudeness in the Subway

Characters

Businessman

Old Man

Old Woman

Pregnant Woman

Nine passengers

Thug

Second Thug

Third Thug

Voice of train operator

*The scene takes place on a subway car. Actually, there is no real scenery, just six chairs aligned horizontally with an assortment of characters sitting in them. Magazines and newspapers mask their faces. Four passengers stand sideways in front of those seated, pretending to hold onto hanging straps. All sway gently to create the illusion of motion.*

TRAIN OPERATOR. Next stop, 34th Street, 34th Street.

(*As the train jolts to a stop, all passengers reflect this movement physically. The passengers that have been standing exit the train. A very pregnant woman enters. She looks about the space, hoping to find an empty seat. While her back is to them, a few of the seated passengers peer over their periodicals to see who has entered. Upon seeing the pregnant woman, they quickly raise their newspapers/magazines, hoping that she did not catch them looking. The train starts to move, and the passengers again begin to mimic the motion of the train. While swaying in front of the* BUSINESSMAN*, the pregnant woman places her one hand over her belly and groans. The* BUSINESSMAN *clears his throat, and he rustles his newspaper to cover the repugnant sounds. Others around the* BUSINESSMAN *mimic him. This goes on for a minute or two. As each groan from the pregnant woman becomes louder and more exaggerated, so does each vocal reaction from the seated passengers until…*)

TRAIN OPERATOR. Forty-second Street. Forty-second Street. Change here for the B and D lines.

(*The train jolts to a stop, and the* PREGNANT WOMAN *walks slowly to one of the doors.*)

PREGNANT WOMAN. (*Grabbing the* BUSINESSMAN’*s newspaper and throwing it to the floor. In a thick Spanish or New York accent, she speaks.*) You, sir, are no gentleman! (*She exits. The* BUSINESSMAN *dashes for his newspaper and then sits while the other passengers react slightly but basically ignore the situation.*)

(*Just before the train begins to move again, two elderly people enter the train. Both the* OLD MAN *and* OLD WOMAN *are hunched over and can hardly walk. They survey the train for available seating. When they see there is nothing, they cross to the center of the train and pantomime trying to reach the straps. The* OLD MAN *has a difficult time due to arthritis, so his wife lifts his arm with exaggerated strain. Again, the seated passengers peer over their papers, but no one is polite enough to offer his/her seat to either of them. The train lurches forward, twisting and turning as it negotiates the bends of the underground tunnels. Through this, the older couple finds it hard to stand upright. At one point, the* OLD MAN *falls, and his wife bends down to help him. As she does, she loses her balance as well and falls on top of her husband. The two become an exhausted heap on the floor of the subway train, but both laugh awkwardly. The* BUSINESSMAN *looks over the top of his newspaper and rolls his eyes. Shaking his head from side to side, he mumbles, “How pathetic,” and continues to read.*)

TRAIN OPERATOR. Fifty-third Street. Please watch your step when leaving the train.

OLD MAN. May, this is our stop. You have to get off me, darling girl.

OLD WOMAN. (*Reluctantly.*) All right, Harry. (*She rises slowly.*) Give me your hand, you old coot. (*He laughs and manages to rise. They shuffle off and exit stage left.*)

(*At this time, all passengers but the* BUSINESSMAN *look at their watches, fold their papers, gather their belongings, and exit right and left. The* BUSINESSMAN *is alone as the train begins to move again. He spreads the paper over the available seats and continues to read.*)

TRAIN OPERATOR. Sixty-eighth Street.

(*The train stops and three thugs enter from stage left. They are dressed in black and look very menacing. They see that the* BUSINESSMAN *is the only passenger left on the train. Two sit to the left of him; the other slides the paper off the seats and sits to the right of the* BUSINESSMAN *as the train begins to move.*)

BUSINESSMAN. Excuse me, but I was reading that newspaper.

THUG. So what? You think we care?

SECOND THUG. You was taking up two seats with that paper.

THIRD THUG. (*Laughing, mocking.*) That wasn’t very nice, old man. (*He pokes the* BUSINESSMAN.)

BUSINESSMAN. (*Shrugging him off.*) Stop it! That was very brazen of you, not to mention impolite and downright rude!

THUG. (*Very ominously.*) Oh, yeah, and what are you gonna do about it? Huh?

BUSINESSMAN. I, I um…

THUG. He ain’t gonna do nuthin’ ‘bout it. Right, boys?

SECOND AND THIRD THUGS. Yeah, right. Nuthin’!

BUSINESSMAN. (*He drops to the floor and crouches in fear.*) What are you going to do to me? No! Get away from me. Help, somebody! Help me! Please!

(*The* SECOND *and* THIRD THUGS *walk over to the paper.* THIRD THUG *picks it up and hands a side of it to* SECOND THUG. *They walk over to the* BUSINESSMAN *and hold it in front of him, covering him from the waist up.* THUG *rises and makes a fist. The lights flicker on the train as his fist moves downward in slow motion toward the* BUSINESSMAN *whose shadow can be seen behind the newspaper.*)

TRAIN OPERATOR. One-hundred-and-twenty-fifth Street. Be careful exiting and watch the closing doors.

 BLACKOUT

1. Rudeness at the Movie Theater

Characters

Girl

Boy

Man

Date

Manager’s voice

(*Note: The only set props necessary for this scene are two centered rows of six chairs, facing the audience.)*

 *At rise, a* GIRL *and a* BOY *are sitting quietly in the first row of chairs and are watching what appears to be a movie. Both are about seventeen. Both are attractive, mature, and assertive. They hold hands innocently.*  MAN *and his* DATE *enter from up left. He carries a large tub of popcorn. She carries a large, black pocketbook. About forty,* MAN *is loud, vile, and uneducated.* DATE*,* MAN’*s girlfriend, has so much make-up on her face that she looks like she is wearing a tribal mask. Although* DATE *is not overly bright, she has a traditional, somewhat quixotic, yet jealous nature. The space is dimly lit. Periodically, a spotlight can flicker on and off to suggest movement on the “screen” before them.*

MAN. (*He moves downstage right with his date following him. He speaks loudly with a thick New York accent.*)Hey, Sandy, over here. This is close enough, right?

DATE. (*Chewing gum visibly and audibly.*) Yeah, it’s okay.

MAN. I didn’t think the movie had already started, did yous?

DATE. No, they didn’t tell us that when we bought the tickets. You think we should try to get our money back?

BOY. (*Leaning over.*)Shhh!

MAN. (*Ignoring him.*) Nah, they don’t do that sort of thing these days. That’s all right. I just saw this movie with my mother last week, so I can tell yous what we missed. (*Both sit.*)

(BOY *and* GIRL *roll their eyes and slide down into their seats.*)

DATE. (*Annoyed, loudly.*) You didn’t tell me that. We could’ve gone to see another movie.

MAN. (*Without a clue.*)Nah, that’s okay. I knew you wanted to see this one.

DATE. (*Changing her tone.*) Aw, you are such a sweetie. (*She leans over and kisses him surreptitiously on the cheek.*) So unselfish. Always thinking about others.

MAN. Yeah. Me and yous make the perfect couple.

(BOY *and* GIRL *simultaneously lean back and say, “Shhh!”*)

DATE. (*Just noticing the other couple.*) We better shut up now.

MAN. Yeah, okay.

(*The* MAN *starts to eat huge handfuls of popcorn very loudly, spilling some on the* BOY *in front of him.* DATE *is cracking her gum loudly.*)

BOY. (*Turning profile, with a sullen attitude.*) Hey, do you mind not spilling your popcorn on me?

GIRL. (*To* DATE *irately.*)And can you stop cracking your gum? It’s very rude. (DATE *ignores her.*)

MAN. (*Sarcastically.*) Sorry, kids. (*To* DATE.)Oh, yeah, Sandy. I gotta tell yous what just happened; otherwise, yous ain’t gonna get it.

DATE. Okay.

BOY. (*Turning around.*) Listen, man, we don’t want to know what happened because we just saw it. Do you mind not talking? We paid over twenty dollars to see this movie. It would be nice if we could hear it.

MAN. Hey, don’t get wise with me, kid. I just paid over twenty bucks, too!

DATE. (*Nervously, looking around.*)No, it’s okay. It’s okay. Don’t get uptight, Ant. We’ll all be thrown out. We better just watch the movie, right?

MAN. (*Sweetly.*) Well, okay, Pumpkin; but I don’t usually let some jackass of a kid push me around.

DATE. (*With a babyish voice.*) I know you don’t, my big, strong, hulky guy. (*She pinches his cheeks and rubs her nose against his. Just then, a twinkling sound emanates from her pocketbook.*) A text message! (*She opens her enormous bag and digs into it, searching for the phone.*)Now if only I could find the damn phone!

GIRL. (*To* BOY.) I’m thinking we should move.

BOY. Yeah, me too, but where? This place is pretty packed.

GIRL. I know. Maybe if we explain the circumstances, the management might give us our money back.

BOY. Fat chance. If they refunded money to everyone who complained about rude people, the place would be out of business.

GIRL. Yeah, good point.

DATE. (*Loudly, waving the cell phone in the air.*) Hooray! I found it!

BOY/GIRL. Shhhhh!

(BOY *and* GIRL *sit uncomfortably throughout the following exchange, rolling their eyes, etc.*)

DATE. Oh my gawd, I can’t friggin’ believe it! (*To* MAN.)It’s your mother!

MAN. *My* mother? What the hell is she texting you for?

DATE. (*Annoyed.*) I don’t know. Did you forget your cell?

MAN. (*Feeling his pockets.*) Yeah, I guess I did. What does she want?

DATE. It says, ‘Make sure you two pick up some milk on the way home. Love you, Ant, Mom.’

MAN. That’s real sweet of her, ain’t it? I mean to remind me like that.

DATE. On my phone? I don’t think so. It’s a freakin’ invasion of privacy! She’s always butting into your affairs, Ant. And how did she get my cell number anyway?

MAN. (*Innocently.*) I gave it to her.

DATE. (*Irately.*) Why did you do that?

MAN. Shhh! Can’t you see that you’re disturbing the peace here?

GIRL. Excuse me, ma’am, but the light from your phone is distracting.

BOY. (*Interrupting.*) Among other things.

GIRL. (*Politely.*) Do you think you can turn off your phone like the preview messages asked? Didn’t you hear that ‘Silence is golden’ and ‘Don’t add your own soundtrack to the movie’?

DATE. No, we didn’t. (*To* MAN *in a sardonic, disgruntled fashion.*) *We* missed the previews.

BOY. (*Leaning over to address* DATE.) Well, technically according to the management, you’re not supposed to be using cell phones during the movie.

MAN. (*Sarcastically.*)There he is again, big man, making a scene in the movie theater.

BOY. Me? What about you two? You’re the obnoxious ones. You act like you’re at home on your plaid, covered-with-plastic couch.

MAN. (*To* BOY.) Don’t get fresh with me, punk. Remember, I’m the adult here. What happened to the idea of respectin’ your elders? I guess that went out with video games, i-Poddies, and all the rest of the junk out there for kids these days.

BOY. (*Ironically.*) I-Poddies? Sure, old man.

MAN. (*Feeling apprehensive.*) What did you say?

BOY. I said, ‘Sure, old man.’ (*Both* BOY *and* MAN *rise. A scuffle breaks out. Both women try to separate the men until the movie, or flashing light, stops.*)

DATE. (*Looking out at the audience or “screen.”*) Hey, look, Ant, Ant! Something just happened to the movie.

GIRL. (S*taring ahead, blankly.*)It looks like the film is burning up.

(*At this, the men stop fighting and look at the screen, dumbfounded.*)

BOY. (*In a state of disbelief.*) Gosh, I’ve never seen that happen before.

MAN. That’s because yous still wet behind the ears, like a new-born babe. That’s happened to me before. You see, genius, the projector got too hot, that’s all. They’ll fix it.

(*The lights come up abruptly.*)

MANAGER’S VOICE. (*Without emotion.*)Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the management, I’d like to apologize. Unfortunately, we are experiencing technical difficulties and will be unable to continue showing tonight’s feature film. However, full refunds are now available at the box office. Again, we are sorry for the inconvenience and hope that you will patronize American Theatres again in the near future.

MAN. (*Disappointed.*) That sucks. I guess we’ll have to rent a DVD from Redbox and go home and watch it with Ma.

DATE.Yeah, with the twenty bucks, we can rent ten DVDs. (*She changes her tone capriciously*.)What’s this about your mother? I ain’t watchin’ no movies with your mother on the couch. (*The* MAN *turns and starts to walk up the aisle while* DATE *follows him, continuing to harangue him regarding his mother.*) Forget about it. She just sits there, talks, and cracks gum the whole time. Who could put up with that? Ant, are you dating your mother or me? I gotta know right now. Am I wasting my time here?

(*Meanwhile, the* GIRL *and* BOY *stay standing by their seats, watching the whole scene.*)

GIRL. (*In disbelief.*)Wow! They’re totally unbelievable.

BOY. Yeah. Promise me we’ll never grow up to be like they are.

GIRL. Cross my heart and hope to die. (*She crosses her heart as she speaks.*)

BOY. (*Starting to cross up center.*)Let’s get our money and get out of here. We’ll do this movie again some other time. (GIRL *turns and follows* BOY, *exiting up center.*) Hey, feel like getting some ice cream at Scoops of Cream?

GIRL. Definitely. That would be awesome!

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 7: Communication

 Today, communication has become complex. With all of the recent innovations in technology, people have a variety of options when it comes to connecting. Thanks to these wonders, individuals can be in perpetual touch with one another. Ironically, though, as human nature would have it, most people still have a difficult time getting their points across despite the sophistication of their gadgets. “Hold the Phone” is based on the once popular game, “Chinese Whispers,” also known as “Telephone.” The staging of the piece is also borrowed - from Thornton Wilder’s classic play, *Our Town.* “Hold the Phone” seems to suggest that although technology has changed, people – in this case, teenagers – and their habits tend to remain the same.

Hold the Phone

Characters:

Jesse Ericka Julia Courtney

Suzy Marsha Brianne Kate

Bob John

*The curtain rises to reveal five stepladders of various heights. Each ladder is a perch for two characters – teenagers – who are frozen into assorted positions, each with a piece of cardboard cut to resemble a large telephone receiver. Down right are* BOB and SUZY; *up right,* MARSHA *and* ERICKA; *center,* KATE and JOHN; *up left,* COURTNEY *and* BRITNEY *and down left,* BRIANNE *and* JULIA. *A spotlight comes up on a girl,* JESSE*, who is clothed in a rain slicker, sporting a backpack. She stands with her back facing the audience. Slowly she turns, profile right, to direct an imaginary teacher who is off stage right.*)

JESSE. (*Sincerely.*) Thank you, Mr. Brown. I really appreciate your help. Algebra is so hard for me, but I think I get it now. In fact, I know I do. (*She pauses.*)Yes, I missed the bus. It’s okay. I’ll call my mom from the phone in the office. (*Pause.*) I don’t know if she’s home, but I’ll give her a try. Don’t worry. (*Pause.*) You don’t have to give me a ride, but I appreciate the offer, Mr. Brown. I’ll get someone to pick me up. Thanks again! See you tomorrow.

(JESSE *turns and crosses down to center stage, stopping to stand between two ladders.*)

JESSE. (*Nervously.*) I have a real problem with math. None of it makes any sense to me, so I had to stay after school to get extra help from Mr. Brown, my teacher. He’s so nice. I wish I could be a better student in his class. Well, if I really work at it, maybe I will be…someday anyway. If not, that’s okay because I doubt I’ll have to use algebraic equations as the wife of a very rich, intelligent man. Just in case they ever come up, he can do them for me. (*Pause.*) I guess I should call my mom right away. She’s probably worried about me. What if she decided to meet me at the bus stop and saw that I wasn’t there? Would she call the school? Would she call the police? (*Suddenly paranoid.*) Would she report me to Missing Persons? Oh no! I hope Mom wouldn’t do that; otherwise my face might wind up plastered on the back of a milk carton. How depressing is that? I can’t waste any more time. I hope she’s home because if she’s not, I’ll have to walk home in the rain. And with my luck, I’ll probably drown. (*She crosses down right to address an imaginary secretary.*)Hi, Mrs. Beano! Can I use the phone? I have to call my mom. (*Pause.*) No, my mom won’t buy me a cell phone. She says it’s because I lose everything. (*Pause.*) What? Has she tried attaching things to me with Velcro? Ha, ha! You’re very funny, Mrs. Beano. (*Pause.*) Thanks for letting me use the phone.

(JESSE *reveals a large mock-up of a phone receiver made from gray or black cardboard that she has been holding in one hand. She pantomimes dialing a number. Off right, a telephone rings. A woman’s voice can be heard saying, “Back Street Market. May I help you?*”)

JESSE. Oops! Sorry. I must have dialed the wrong number. (*She hangs up the phone.*) Yikes, how did I manage that? What a spaz. I must be losing it. (*She pantomimes dialing another number. This time, an answering machine clicks on and broadcasts in a low, rich woman’s voice, “Hello, Jesse and I can’t come to the phone right now. Please leave a message.”*)

JESSE. Hi, Mom? It’s Jesse. I had to stay after school to talk to Mr. Brown about the fact that I have no idea what I’m doing in his class, so I missed the bus. Can you come and pick me up? Mom? If you are there, please pick up the phone. (*Pause.*) I’ll hold.

(JESSE *turns her back to the audience abruptly as the lights dim. A spotlight comes up, focused down left. Two kids,* BOB *and* SUZY*, are perched on different levels on opposite sides of a stepladder. As the spot comes up on them, they are frozen into position.* SUZY *holds an exaggerated flip phone receiver in one hand and a vocabulary book in the other, and* BOB *has a receiver that resembles a hockey stick balanced on one rung of the ladder.* BOB *wears a hockey jersey.* SUZY *wears a very conservative outfit since she is a bit of a nerd.* BOB *remains frozen on the ladder while* SUZY *leaves her position on the ladder and crosses down to address the audience.*)

SUZY. Hmmm. I have to come up with a decent excuse to call Bob. I can’t just call him without a good reason like I did yesterday and the day before. He’ll get suspicious. I don’t want him to know that I like him. The second he suspects, it’ll be all over school, then on Facebook and Twitter and he’ll wind up hating me. Not only that, everybody who is anybody will make fun of me. I’ll become a complete social outcast, not that I’m not already; but this time, it’ll be written on the girls’ room wall, literally! I can’t afford that kind of negative press. I’m better off flying under the radar. (*Pause, swooning.*)Oh, Bob! He’s so cute, not to mention athletic and funny. (*She looks at her vocabulary book.*) I know! I’ll pretend I forgot my vocabulary book. We’re having a test tomorrow in English. I’ll tell him I need the words and definitions, so I can study for it. Okay, I’m ready. Now what’s the number? Oh, yeah. 867-5309. (*She pantomimes dialing the number and freezes. In the meantime,* BOB *comes to life and leaves his position on the ladder to address the audience.*)

BOB. I have a hockey game tonight, but if I don’t do my homework, I probably won’t be able to go. I flunked my last vocabulary test, and there’s another one tomorrow. Of course, I haven’t told my dad yet about my bad grade, but I should before he looks on my teacher’s grading program. But then again, if I tell him myself when he comes home from work, I definitely won’t be able to play tonight. I’m already skating on thin ice with him because I broke off his car’s side mirror when I was playing street hockey with the boys. You should’ve seen his face! His skin was the color of a tomato on top of a tossed salad. Smoke was just about coming out of his ears, no exaggeration. Needless to say, I won’t be getting an allowance for the next couple of months. I better not tell him about the test. He might be so mad that he could take me off the team. Plus, he could possibly explode all over the new carpet in my room. It wouldn’t be a pretty sight: tomato red on beige, not the best color combination. I just can’t take that kind of chance, so I better not tell him. Maybe my teacher didn’t record the score on the computer yet. If I study for this test and get an A, at least I’ll have a chance of staying on the team. Okay, I’ll start studying now. (*Phone rings.*) Oh, heck! This better not be that Suzy geek. She’s really starting to bug me. As if I have time for this kind of thing? (*He picks up his receiver and speaks into it.*)Yo!

SUZY. (*Innocently.*) Hello? Is Bobby home?

BOB. (*Annoyed because he knows it is* SUZY.) Who wants to know?

SUZY. Bobby? (*Excited, but she tries to hide it.*)It’s you, isn’t it? It’s me, Suzy, Suzy Simpson.

BOB. Yeah, right. What do you want now?

SUZY. (*Rapidly, nervously.*) Did you play hockey today? I’ve been to all of your games. At the last game against the Bucks, I screamed when you made the last goal. Did you hear me? Did you hear me scream? I was sitting right behind Principal Schwartz. He turned around and gave me a look so terrifying that I thought I would die and go to heaven. No joke. Gosh, I was petrified! I’m surprised that he didn’t give me lunch detention or something like that, but I was lucky, I…

BOB. (*Interrupting her.*)Whoa, slow down. Jeez, no, to answer your question: no, I didn’t play hockey today. I may never play hockey again if I don’t get off the phone with you and study for this darn vocabulary test tomorrow. Look, why did you call me again? You called me yesterday and the day before that, and to tell you the truth, I’m afraid to turn on my cell. You haven’t been leaving me text messages, have you?

SUZY. (*Holding up her vocabulary book and smiling deviously.*) Well, err, no, not really. But that’s why I called you today – the vocabulary test tomorrow. I left my vocabulary book in my locker by mistake. I was wondering if I could get the words and definitions from you?

BOB. (*Hesitantly.*) Okay, I guess. Hold on.

(BOB *sets the phone down and moves up the ladder pretending to look for the vocabulary book.* SUZY *moves to her side of the ladder, sits on the stage floor, leans up against the ladder, smiling, and sighs audibly.* BLACKOUT.)

(*A spotlight comes up, focused on stage right. Two girls,* COURTNEY *and* BRITNEY *are seen frozen in place, costumed identically in chic clothing. Both own ornately decorated phone receivers. The girls move off their ladder as the lights reach their full intensity. Each girl positions herself on opposing sides of the ladder. One can be sitting on the bottom rung.* COURTNEY *turns to the audience while* BRITNEY *remains frozen.*)

COURTNEY. I don’t know who to call first. This is awesome news! Imagine. Suzy having a crush on Bob! I think that is absolutely hysterical. They are so mismatched. Suzy and Bob together would be like wearing a pair of cheap sneakers from Walmart with a Gucci gown! Like, what’s wrong with this picture, right? Well, I’ve got to hand it to her; she’s got a lot of nerve chasing a hunky guy like Bob. As if he’d even notice her, Miss Plain Jane of the century! I have to admit it, though. I had a crush on Bob once. I think every girl in the school has. He’s gorgeous. But alas, I’m much cuter than he is and that can be a real problem for some boys. They can get so insecure if a beautiful girl like me finds them attractive. (*She pauses to fuss with her hair.*) Well, I think I’ll call my best friend, Britney. I’m sure she doesn’t know about Suzy and Bob yet. Yuck, Suzy. That poor guy! (*She picks up her receiver and freezes.* BRITNEY *comes alive.*)

BRITNEY (*Looking at her wristwatch.*) It’s 3:30. Courtney is due to call any minute with the latest gossip. She’s my best friend, but I have to admit that she can be a little much at times. Courtney is so conceited. She’s just totally in love with herself. Okay, she *is* pretty, but I know for a fact that the boys like me better. They might even think I’m better looking. Oh, did I show you my new Fendi designer cell phone? (*She picks it up off one of the rungs of the ladder and shows it to the audience.*) I know; it’s fabulous with a capital F. Fabulous Fendi. It’s a limited edition. I’m not sure what that means, but I think Fendi has decided not to sell any more now that I, Britney Lake, own one. Ha! Oh, I am just so funny! (*She pauses to fluff her hair.* COURTNEY *awakes. Telephone rings.*)I bet that’s Courtney now. (*She puts the phone to her ear.*)Hello?

COURTNEY. Brit? It’s Court.

BRITNEY. Hey, I knew it was you. What’s going on?

COURTNEY. Not a lot. Mrs. Smith gave us too much homework, as usual.

BRITNEY. Yeah, I have a ton, too. I have to write a paragraph for history. It usually takes me about two hours.

COURTNEY. That sounds pretty awful. I have a few pages of math problems. I’m thinking of persuading our favorite honor student Tommy Zee to let me copy from him, so I don’t overly tax my brain. I may need it to get into college someday. But that’s not important. Guess what?

BRITNEY. What?

COURTNEY. Rumor has it that that beastly girl Suzy has a crush on our favorite hunk, Bob.

BRITNEY. No! Really? I can’t believe it. It’s as though she’s invisible. She’s says absolutely nothing in history class.

COURTNEY. Well, I guess she says a lot more at home. Marsha told me in English today that Suzy makes up reasons to contact Bob. She calls or texts him everyday!

BRITNEY. No! How does Marsha know all of this? (*Voice of mother is heard off left: BRIT!*)What? Listen, Court, my mom’s calling me. Can you hold on a sec?

COURTNEY. Yeah, okay.

(COURTNEY *and* BRITNEY *freeze. As the lights dim, they return to their previous places on the ladder. BLACKOUT. Up left,* MARSHA *and* ERICKA*, dressed in ordinary school clothes, begin to move off the ladder as the lights come up on them.* MARSHA *addresses the audience while* ERICKA *freezes.*)

MARSHA. I’m feeling a little stressed out today. I have a stupid dance class that I really don’t want to go to. I’m so spastic compared to the other girls in the class. It’s like I have two left feet. I do all I can just to blend in; but the other day, right in the middle of a tough combination, I actually tripped over the feet of the girl next to me. I went flying, I mean, flying over her. And I landed snack in front of the instructor, Miss Barbie-Doll, who didn’t even flinch. But the rest of the class practically fell over laughing. Talk about humiliating! My parents won’t let me quit because they already paid the tuition. In fact, now I have to call one of the other girls in the class to see if I can get a ride there. I’m amazed she even likes me. Or at least she seems to like me. I don’t know. Maybe she doesn’t like me. Oh well. What was I saying? Oh yeah, I have to call her for a ride since my mom and dad are both working late. Ugh. I better get to it now. (*She picks up the phone and stares at it. She freezes.* ERICKA *comes alive.*)

ERICKA. I saw Marsha, my friend from my dance class, talking to Courtney Rogers today in gym. I’m so upset about it. Courtney belongs to a clique of very popular girls, and they don’t like me because I refuse to wear designer clothes that look like theirs. I have no idea why Courtney would even want to be seen with Marsha. Yeah, she’s my friend, but she can be awkward and clumsy. Last week, she practically killed herself in dance class by falling over one of the other dancers. How embarrassing! Guess Courtney’s clones didn’t tell her, or she would’ve ignored Marsha altogether. Maybe Marsha wants to join Courtney’s group? Fat chance of that ever happening. I better call her to see what happened. (*She picks up her receiver.* MARSHA *freezes as the phone rings.*) Hi, Marsha? It’s Ericka.

MARSHA. Who?

ERICKA. Ericka, your friend from dance class?

MARSHA. Oh yeah. Sorry, only kidding. I was just about to call you. Are you going tonight?

ERICKA. Yeah, why? Do you need a ride?

MARSHA. Yeah. Is that all right?

ERICKA. Sure. I have to check with my mom, but I doubt that it’ll be a problem.

MARSHA. So, what did you call me about?

ERICKA. Oh, yeah. Um. What were you talking to Courtney Rogers about today in gym?

MARSHA. Nothing really.

ERICKA. Oh, come on, Marsha. Since when are you two B.F.F.s?

MARSHA. Okay, okay. Give me a break. I’m not one to spread rumors, but Suzy has a crush on Bob.

ERICKA. Oh, wow! Are you positive? I can’t picture her having a crush on someone like Bob. I mean, she’s so smart, and he is, well, a jock, if you know what I’m saying. (*A doorbell rings off stage.*)

MARSHA. Yeah, well. The doorbell is ringing. Can you hold on?

ERICKA. Okay.

(*The two freeze. BLACKOUT. Down right,* JOHN *and* KATE *begin to move off their ladder as the lights come up on them. Wearing a football jersey,* JOHN *balances a football in one hand.* KATE *appears to be athletic as well, wearing a shirt with a large soccer ball printed on it. Both have exaggerated phone receivers placed on their ladder.* KATE *freezes as* JOHN *speaks.*)

JOHN. Boy, am I bummed. I just heard there’s no football practice. The coach told my mom that not enough guys could make it today. It probably has something to do with the rain. Wimps! That means that I have to wait an entire week till the next practice. It is going to be a boring week. What else do I have to do? Oh, yeah, I can always play video games or check out what’s going on with various celebrities on Twitter. Or I can bounce my football off the wall a few times and see just how angry my mom can get. Yeah, well, that’s probably not such a great idea considering my mom’s in bed with a migraine right now. I’ll just, you know, throw it up and down like this. Up and down. Down and up. (*He throws the ball up and then catches it.*)Hey, I heard a little something in school today that my friend Kate would love to hear. I’ll give her a call. After all, I can’t just toss this ball up and down forever. (*He puts down the ball, picks up his receiver, and pretends to call* KATE. *He freezes;* KATE *comes to life.*)

KATE. (*Addressing the audience.*) I can’t believe practice is canceled today because of the rain. We’ve played in the rain before! All right, so it gets a little messy and kids start falling all over the place. It’s not like we’ll melt or anything. Okay, maybe someone could get hurt, but that happens anyway. Half the team is benched right now with broken wrists, sprained hamstrings, and twisted ligaments…the usual. Goodness knows why I haven’t gotten hurt. Oh yeah, that’s right. I’m second string. I forgot. Basically, the coach never plays me, but it’s not like I don’t have any talent or anything. When I think about it, I just don’t believe in pushing to the front of the line, if you know what I mean. I’d rather be invisible. Oh well, maybe I can go outside in the backyard and kick the ball around. I just can’t see staying in the house and doing nothing but homework or playing stupid video games or going on Facebook or… (JOHN *comes to life. The phone rings.*)Hmmm, I wonder who this could be. It could be Ally or some stupid recording of a telemarketer. Maybe I shouldn’t answer it and let the machine get it? Oh well… (*She picks up the phone.*)Hi!

JOHN. Hello? Kate? It’s John.

KATE. (*Pleasantly surprised.*) Oh, hi John. Aren’t you supposed to be at football practice?

JOHN. It was cancelled. The coach said that too many players couldn’t make practice. Aren’t you going to soccer practice?

KATE. No, it was cancelled too. Coach said something about a muddy field. Personally, I think we could’ve played. I mean mud and rain never killed anybody. What’s up with you? Why did you call me?

JOHN. Well, don’t tell anybody. I’m not even sure it’s true, but I heard that Bob has a crush on Suzy.

KATE. No way!

JOHN. Yeah, I heard it from a reliable source that Bob makes up reasons to call or text Suzy everyday.

KATE. I can’t believe it! Wait till I text Ally! She thought Bob had a crush on *her*! (*She hears a click on the phone line.*) Oh, John, can you hang on? I have call waiting, and I’m getting another call.

JOHN. All right. (JOHN *picks up his football with one hand and starts to toss it up and down as he waits.*)

KATE. Hello? (*Pause.*) Yeah, I’ll tell you, but I’ve got John on the other line. Hold on. (*Pause.*) John? Are you still there?

JOHN. Yeah.

KATE. It’s Ally on the other end. I’ll talk to you later.

JOHN. I’ll hold if you want, or put me on speaker. But listen, don’t tell…

KATE. Okay, John. (KATE *cuts him off.* JOHN *freezes in place.*)Ally? Are you still there? You are not going to believe this! (KATE *freezes. Both appear to be on hold. BLACKOUT.*)

(*At center stage,* BRIANNE *and* JULIA *begin to move as the lights come up on them.* BRIANNE *is dressed in a robe, slippers, and she has a towel wrapped around her head.* JULIA *wears sweats and a jacket.* JULIA *has a cell phone, and* BRIANNE *has the receiver of a princess-style phone. Both receivers are exaggerated in size.* BRIANNE *addresses the audience while* JULIA *remains frozen.*)

BRIANNE. Jeez, where did I put my brush? I hate it when I get out of the shower and can’t find anything. Where’s my mousse? How am I going to get my hair to look good if I can’t find my styling products? Maybe my little sister borrowed them and didn’t put them back. She’s always taking my stuff, and half the time I either never see it again, or it takes on an entirely different form. A while ago, she decided to take my favorite brown velvet dress right out of my closet just for the sake of playing dress-up with something more realistic. Obviously, she didn’t bother to ask for my permission. Somehow – and I have no idea how this happened – she tore a huge hole in the back and didn’t want to admit to the mistake, so she rolled up the dress into a ball the size of a basketball and stuffed it under my bed. Well, I was looking for it for months before I finally found it. Needless to say, I was absolutely furious when I unrolled it and saw the crater in the back. My mom even started calling me Hurricane Brianne after that. Oh, why do I have a kid sister? Did I ask my mother to have her? No. Maybe if she’d been a boy, things would’ve been different. At least a brother wouldn’t be interested in wearing my dresses, or at least I’d hope he wouldn’t. Life can be so complicated sometimes. (*She freezes and* JULIA *comes to life.*)

JULIA. Wow! I love my new toy! This cell phone is the best. It’s way better than any other gadget on the market because of its cool features. I mean this thing can do just about anything, except walk my dog. For one, on Fridays between the hours of 5 p.m. and midnight, I can press this one button here and open the garage door! Isn’t that awesome? Then on Monday mornings, I can hit the same button and turn on the coffee machine right from my bed. I don’t even have to get up and walk around! The only problem is that I don’t drink coffee, but I still think it’s awesome. And it’s nice to know that it can do it, especially if I suddenly start to want caffeine. I can’t wait to text all my friends. But don’t tell my mom, though. She thinks I’m only contacting Brianne. If she finds out I’m going to get to the entire population of my school, it may be the last time that I use it. But something really terrible happened today, and I have to tell everyone. I heard it was a true disaster. The whole school is talking about it. I didn’t see it happen, but my friend Deb did. I don’t think Brianne knows. I better call her now and tell her. (JULIA *picks up the receiver and the phone rings.* BRIANNE *comes to life.*)

BRIANNE. (*Picking up the receiver.*) Hello, Julia.

JULIA. How did you know it was me?

BRIANNE. I have you on my cell’s speed-dial, duh!

JULIA. Oh, yeah, I forgot. Guess what?

BRIANNE. What?

JULIA. I’m calling you from my new cell phone. It’s awesome. I can control almost anything. I can even turn on the TV from outside the house!

BRIANNE. Wow! Amazing. But I just got out of the shower, and as usual, I can’t find anything to fix my hair. What’s going on? I mean, other than the remote-control cell phone.

JULIA. Actually, I called to tell you that something really horrible happened in the cafeteria today during lunch.

BRIANNE. Really? What?

JULIA. (*Seriously and slowly with emphasis.*) Bob crushed Suzy. I heard he slipped on someone’s peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich and fell right on top of her. It’s even posted on Facebook. No one’s admitting to ownership of the sandwich, though. Anyway, the teachers on duty had to call the nurse down and everything. I think they actually put Suzy in a wheelchair! Deb said the fire department came and an ambulance.

BRIANNE. Why would the fire department come?

JULIA. I have no idea. Don’t they always show up at accidents?

BRIANNE. Sometimes, but usually if there’s some kind of gas or toxic waste involved.

JULIA. No, I don’t think there was, unless you could consider the peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich toxic waste.

BRIANNE. No, but I wouldn’t rule out the cafeteria’s food.

JULIA. Very funny, Brianne! Maybe I have it wrong. Do you think the police department came instead?

BRIANNE. Yeah, probably, that sounds right. Keep that in the story. Oh, no! I can’t believe it. Poor Suzy. Is she going to be all right?

JULIA. I don’t know. Somebody else said she broke her neck and is in traction up at the hospital. She may never return to school again.

BRIANNE. Listen. I’m still dripping wet. Can you hold on a sec?

(*The lights come up on the entire stage.* JESSE *turns and crosses down center as the spot follows her.*)

JESSE. Mom? Mom? Are you home?

(*Simultaneously, the following characters cross down to the apron of the stage, holding their phones out and peering into them. The other characters remain frozen in their positions.*)

SUZY
COURTNEY
ERICKA I CAN’T HOLD ON ANY LONGER!
JOHN
JESSE
KATE

(*All five pantomime hanging up their respective receivers.)*

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 8: Sexism

Of all the “isms” present today in American society, sexism seems to be the least apparent to the average observer. However, just because it may not be obvious, it does not mean it is not there. Unfortunately, in the world of sports, sexism is a starting player, particularly in the arena of baseball.

 At present, fathers all over the country are signing up their daughters to play alongside their male counterparts in Little Leagues and then rescinding the offer once the girls hit puberty. Softball, the fathers feel, is the same as baseball, making the transition relatively painless. Yet is softball, baseball? For those who are aware of the rules of both, it is not. Is the forced entry into another sport easy on the girls whose dreams may include playing in the World Series? No, it is not. In fact, the change is not welcome, and many of the young, female baseball players quit rather than switch to a game that is only superficially equivalent. Often these girls are confused, angry as to why they cannot continue to play a sport at which they are genuinely gifted.

The reason why I decided to explore this topic in dramatic form is, of course, a personal one. My daughter once belonged to the small, but expanding club of girls who excel in baseball, but who become unwelcome in the sport over time. The question remains: If baseball is truly “America’s pastime,” and America is populated by two different sexes, why are women excluded from success in the sport? The answer may be found within the following play, which is a fictionalization of a reality.

Baseball: America’s Pastime

Characters

Sunny Mother Jamie

Joe Father Coach Ralph

Alex Umpire Johnson Coach Itolli

Katie Penny Roxy

Jill John

SCENE 1: *At rise: The stage is simply set and lit. At center stage is a slightly raised platform about five feet square with a mesh backstop behind it.* PENNY*, sixteen, the catcher, is dressed in padded, black gear with a facemask. She squats with her mitt outstretched in a position of readiness. Slightly behind her stands* UMP JOHNSON, *about fifty. He is* *wearing basic black clothing, a facemask and protective chest gear. Just beyond the backstop, hardly visible, sixteen-year-old* SUNNY*, wearing a uniform with a hard, protective cap, is on deck, warming up by swinging her bat. She was once a gifted baseball player at the age of twelve but has chosen to play on her high school’s softball team because she was unfairly cut from the boys’ team in eighth grade.*

*Placed down left is a bench about four feet long, angled up to the left. On it sit* KATIE *and* JILL, *dressed in softball uniforms. Another identical bench is positioned down right, angled so that the right end is slightly up to the left.* KATIE, *also sixteen, is* SUNNY*’s classmate*, *who knows little of her* (SUNNY’*s*) *former success in baseball, yet* KATIE *recognizes that there is something special about her.* JILL *is envious of* SUNNY*’s talent, but sees herself as being above* SUNNY *since* JILL *is the coach’s pet.*

*From stage right,* JOE *and* ALEX *enter, wearing clothes they would wear to a baseball practice. They carry a couple of bases and a bat.* JOE, *sixteen, is obsessed with baseball and played with* SUNNY *on a summer tournament team when he was eleven. He was also on the middle school team with her.* ALEX, *seventeen, plays baseball only because his father thinks it is a ticket to college. He, too, played with* SUNNY*, but in the regular season of their town’s Little League and also on the middle school team. Pantomiming conversation, the two boys find a seat on the bench stage right, placing gear bags, bases, and bats beside the bench.*

*Off stage left,* COACH JAMIE’*s shrill voice can be heard.* COACH JAMIE *is the high school’s softball coach.* SUNNY *stops swinging and listens. All areas of the stage can be lit equally, or single spots can be used to illuminate the primary areas.*

COACH JAMIE. Batter, batter, batter up! Sunny, you’re up! Remember, choke up, and keep your eye on the ball!

(SUNNY *nods her head and crosses down left of the raised platform. As she steps up onto the platform,* KATIE *and* JILL *react excitedly while* SUNNY *ignores them.*)

KATIE. (*Rising.*) Hey, Sunny! We’re waiting for a grand slam! Don’t disappoint us, now!

JILL. (*Somewhat sarcastically.*) Yeah, but don’t forget to touch’em all! (KATIE *sits and elbows* JILL.) Ouch! Was that *really* necessary?

KATIE. (*Strongly.*) Don’t be a total idiot. Sunny would never miss a base. I’ll never understand why you’re so jealous of her. Coach Jamie adores you. She rarely even notices Sunny.

JILL. Except when she makes a round tripper.

KATIE. I wouldn’t worry about it. It’s not like you can’t hit.

JILL. (*Sincerely.*) I just don’t like sharing the glory.

KATIE. Right. At least you admit to total self-absorption. Gosh, but you’re full of yourself!

JILL. Oh, shut up.

(*At this, the spotlight that is focused on stage left dims, and the spot on stage right brightens, illuminating* JOE *and* ALEX.)

JOE. Where is everybody? Didn’t the coach say practice was at 4?

ALEX. Beats me.

JOE. (*Looks to his left and rises, nudging* ALEX.) Hey, Alex, check out the girls’ varsity softball game over there.

ALEX. (*Turns slightly left and then back.*) Yeah, so what? What’s the big deal? You mean you’ve never seen girls play softball before?

JOE. Yeah, I have, but look who’s up. Come on, get your butt off the bench and take a good, long look. (JOE *bends over to pull up* ALEX *from his sitting position.*)

ALEX. (*After a glance.*) It looks like Sunny Southland.

JOE. Yeah, ‘cause it is Southland.

ALEX. So? She’s a girl, and she’s playing softball. What’s so flipping unusual about that?

JOE. What’s so ‘flipping unusual’ is that Sunny *hates* softball. Geez, don’t you remember? When Itolli cut her from the baseball team in eighth grade after Steinway - who couldn’t even hold the bat - made the cut, she vowed never to play any game remotely similar to baseball again. She was so mad that I thought she would take one of her trophies and shove it up Itolli’s…

ALEX. (*Bending down to look into his gear bag.*) Aspirin! That’s what I forgot. I knew I forgot something. I can’t pitch well without it these days. There’s just too much pain in my bicep.

JOE. Yeah, I’ll show you pain, you wimp! (JOE *raises his fist as if to punch* ALEX. ALEX *winces and slides over on the bench to avoid* JOE. *After a slight pause,* JOE *looks over at* SUNNY.) I wonder who talked Sunny into playing softball.

ALEX. Don’t ask me. It’s not like I talk to her anymore. I don’t even see her in the hall, probably because she’s in all accelerated classes. How someone could be that smart and incredible at baseball is like an oxymoron.

JOE. What the heck do you know about an oxymoron, moron! Ha! (JOE *laughs at his own joke.*)

ALEX. More than you think, you jerk. I just can’t figure out why a girl like Sunny would even bother with a dead-end sport like baseball to begin with.

*(The lights on the stage-right bench dim gradually, and* MOTHER *enters from downstage left. She is neatly dressed in a cotton shift and wears an old-fashioned apron.* MOTHER, *about forty, is* SUNNY*’s mom, a loyal fan who noticed her daughter’s talent at a young age.* MOTHER *is a bit of a talker and could be comic if presented as a fifties housewife with a New York accent.*)

MOTHER. (*Addressing the audience informally as though she knows each and every member.*) I always knew Sunny would play ball. She was just a natural at it. Believe it or not, her legendary career all started with a simple game of Wiffle ball. Her dad and I had just gotten divorced, and Sunny and I moved into a rented ranch house on the north side of town. The tenants before us had left a Wiffle ball set in the garage. Since it was a beautiful spring day, and there was nothing better to do, I showed her the set and said, ‘Sunny, let’s hit some balls.’ I think she must’ve been about four years old at the time. Well, I pitched a ball, and whoosh! I swear that ball flew higher than some of the trees! And it must’ve gone four houses up the street. No kidding. I would never lie about something like that. (*After her tour of the proscenium,* MOTHER *freezes, standing downstage left.* FATHER *enters from downstage right.* FATHER *is* SUNNY*’s dad who is controlling in a very vocal way. Meanwhile,* SUNNY *surveys an invisible pitch center.*)

UMP JOHNSON. Ball one!

KATIE. (*To* JILL.) I thought this pitcher was an ace. She sucks.

(*The lights come up on* FATHER *who has been waiting impatiently downstage right.*)

FATHER. (*Loudly to* SUNNY *who ignores him*.) That’s right, Sunny. Keep your head in the game and look’em over! Wait for one that is right down the pipe! (*He turns to address the audience.*) Speaking of the truth, the absolute truth (*He motions toward* MOTHER *who is standing left.*) *I’m* the one who got her involved in the sport. If it wasn’t for me, she wouldn’t be half as good as she is today. I signed her up to play T-ball with the boys. She was an instant sensation. Had more ribbies than half the boys on the team. And, I’m the one who furthered her career by making sure she played with the best of the best in the Little League! (*Gesturing toward* MOTHER *who comes to life* *again*.) Her mother knows nothing about baseball!

MOTHER. Maybe, but what is this about ‘furthering her career’? She isn’t playing baseball, anymore, is she?

(SUNNY, *center, takes a hit at an invisible ball as though to avenge her mother’s stinging words.*)

UMP JOHNSON. Strike one! The count is one and one. (SUNNY *steps aside;* PENNY *rises, pulls her left ear, touches her left shoulder, and then returns to her squatting position behind home plate.*)

FATHER. (*To* SUNNY *who continues to ignore him*.) Don’t swing at that! (MOTHER *and* FATHER *turn and exit to the left and right.*)

JILL. (*To* KATIE.) This ump doesn’t know what he’s talking about. That wasn’t a strike. That was a swing called “Excuse me.”

KATIE. That’s a baseball term.

JILL. So? It’s when the batter makes contact when trying to check her swing.

KATIE. (*Slightly perturbed.*) Since when do you know anything about baseball? And no, she wasn’t checking her swing. Sunny *meant* to swing at that, but I don’t know why. That pincher’s delivery was way inside. That should’ve been ball two. (*To* SUNNY.) Nice cut, Sun!

COACH JAMIE. (*Off left.*)All right, now, Sunny. Swing at the next decent one and then dig!

(*The lights dim out on* KATIE *and* JILL *and increase on* JOE *and* ALEX*.*)

JOE. (*Turning to look at* SUNNY*.*) I can’t exactly tell, but it looks like Sunny is hanging in there. (*To* ALEX.) Wasn’t she on your team at one point?

ALEX. Yeah, the Twins. Coach John, Dave’s dad, was in charge. He sure believed in Sunny, enough to put her on second base. Even back then when we were ten, she never made an error, and her batting average was something like the third best in the Little League. That year we made the finals, almost went to the Series, but Coach John threw the game.

JOE. (*Shocked*.) Wow, no kidding! Why would he do a thing like that?

ALEX. I have no idea. In the middle of the eighth when the score was 2-1 in our favor, he took Sunny out, and she road the pine the rest of the game. You should’ve seen us. We all had our rally caps on and were screaming our lungs out, ‘Put Sunny in; put Sunny in!’ I think most of the stand was right behind us, too. But Coach wouldn’t listen. Sunny was in tears. We all were because we knew she would’ve made the difference. To this day, I know that if John had put Sunny in, we would’ve gone to the Series and won it. This is one example of why I’m not all that keen about baseball anymore. There’s so much that goes on behind the dung-out that is so wrong.

(*The lights dim slightly as* COACH JOHN *enters from stage right. About 45, he was SUNNY’s first baseball coach. He crosses center to address the audience.*)

JOHN. I did do it, you know. I threw that pivotal game that would’ve taken the Twins to the Little League World Series. It was wrong, totally, and I still feel bad about it to this day. Honestly, I don’t know what else I could’ve done. I remember that at the top of the eighth inning, one of the umpires called me over and said one of the fathers had approached him at some point. The ump said something to the effect that if I didn’t replace the girl on second with this guy’s son, he’d make a big stink about it. Apparently, this dad was friends with my boss and threatened to make up some lie to get me fired. I didn’t want to take Sunny out, but I wasn’t going to lose my job over some insignificant, Little League game! But the kids on the team sure hated me after that. At the end-of-the-season barbecue, not one of them spoke to me. Not one could even look at me. (*Before exiting,* JOHN *turns to* SUNNY*, who is oblivious to him. Remorsefully.*)I’m sorry, Sunny. Please forgive me. (*He exits left.*)

(*The lights brighten over center stage.*  SUNNY *eyes another invisible ball and steps back as she lets it go.*)

UMP JOHNSON. (*Mechanically.*) Outside! Ball two! The count is two balls, one strike.

COACH JAMIE. All right, Sun! Way to stay in the game!

(*The lights come up on the stage-left bench.*)

KATIE. Way to look’em over, Sun!

JILL. This pitcher sure can throw heaters.

KATIE. Yeah, they may be fast, but they aren’t where they should be. I hope Sunny walks.

JILL. What? Are you losing confidence in your hero?

KATIE. (*Quietly*.) No, I want to get up.

JILL. Oh, look who is being selfish now? (KATIE *shoots* JILL *an exasperated look.*) Besides, that isn’t going to happen. Don’t forget that we’re in the bottom of the seventh. If Sunny strikes out, the game’s over.

KATIE. Geez, I sure don’t feel like losing today. (*To* SUNNY.) Come on, Sunny! Slug it!

(*Lights dim on stage left and come up on the stage-right bench.*)

JOE. (*Positively*.) That’s too bad about Coach John, but not all coaches listen to selfish parents, you know. When I was in fifth grade, I played on a summer tournament team with Sunny, and I think the coach was pretty fair. He noticed Sunny’s natural ability and really took advantage of it. Gosh, I remember this one game as though it were yesterday. The coach put Sunny out in center field, a position she had never played, and she seemed on the nervous side. Well, some fence-buster managed to pound this slurve, and it would’ve definitely been a home run if Sunny hadn’t caught it. I honestly don’t know how she did catch it without breaking her hand. That thing must’ve been going a hundred miles an hour, no joke, but she just put her skinny, little hand in the air; and a split second later, she had that ball cradled in the glove. The impact of the ball put her flat on the ground, but she had it all right. I think everyone in the entire park held their breath. No one could believe that anyone, no less a girl, could catch a ball hit that hard and that fast. I’m telling you, it was one rare and beautiful moment in the sport. (JOE *pauses as though in a trance.*)

ALEX. (*Making a hissing sound and changing his voice to resemble a radio announcer’s*.) Earth to Joe, Earth to Joe. Come in, Joe.

JOE. (*Coming out of his trance.*) Huh? Oh, yeah. All I can say is you should’ve been there, Alex.

ALEX. I guess so, but I do have some of my own decent memories. Do you remember when Sunny tried out for the seventh-grade boys’ team?

JOE. Yeah, I do. She was probably the one and only girl in the whole county ever to try out for an all boys’ middle school team. What was really amazing was that she wasn’t intimidated by anyone, even the school nurse, Ms. Barton, who was desperately trying to convince her to go out for the girls’ softball team. Barton had tried to switch forms at the last second, but Sunny noticed that what she handed her was a physical form for softball. Well, Sunny tore it up right in old Bartie’s face. Sunny said the Bart was so stunned that she took a baseball form, gave it to Sunny, and asked her to leave right away before she, Barton, called the vice principal’s office. Sunny just grabbed the form, laughed, and left.

ALEX. (*Laughing*.) That’s hysterical! Wish I could’ve seen Bartie’s prune of a face when Sunny made confetti out of her stupid form, but I bet she still tells the story in the faculty room at lunch.

JOE. No doubt. That incident with Sunny was probably the highlight of her nursing career.

ALEX. Yeah, I remember when Sunny made the team. Coach Ralph scribbled her name in pencil on the team roster the day after try-outs. He was probably lost in a sea of confusion as to whether he should really put a girl on the team, and at the last possible minute, bam! He made the historical leap to include her. I’m not sure if Sunny noticed the fact that her name was in pencil while all the other boys’ names were typed, and I doubt she cared. She was totally stoked to be with us guys on the team.

(*The lights dim slightly over the stage-right bench as the boys freeze.* COACH RALPH, *a slight man of about 29 wearing a baseball cap, enters from stage left.*)

COACH RALPH. (*Glancing at Sunny who is taking a few practice swings before the next pitch.*)There’s my girl, Sunny. (*To the audience*.) What an awesome athlete! She’s one in a million. And to think I wasn’t even going to put her on my boys’ team. I have to admit, without her, that particular season would’ve been a bit easier, but certainly not as entertaining. My personal favorite memory is of an away game. We had just defeated our archrival, Hunterville, and the team was already on the bus, ready to go, when all the Hunterville boys surrounded us, shouting, ‘We want Sunny! Come out of the bus, Sunny, and talk to us!’ Well, it was as if she were some big Hollywood celebrity or something. I had never seen anything like it, and frankly, I wasn’t so sure of how to handle it. Mob scenes aren’t my forte, but I kept my composure, opened a window on the bus, and yelled out to them angrily, ‘Sorry, gentlemen, Ms. Southland won’t be signing any autographs today, so get lost!’ Fortunately, they took my tone of voice seriously enough and scattered like a bunch of threatened ants on an anthill. As the season progressed, there weren’t any repeat performances; but still, it was something I’m never going to forget. It’s too bad she’s playing softball. Baseball will never be the same without her. (*To* SUNNY.) Hey, you go, girl! Burn the cover off that ball!

(RALPH *exits right as the lights brighten on home base and the girls’ bench.* SUNNY *takes a powerful swing at her next invisible pitch.*)

UMP JOHNSON. STRRRIKE TWO! The count is two and two.

KATIE. (*Defiantly.*) No way! (*To* JILL.) Sunny should’ve never even moved. That pitch was way out of the strike zone.

JILL. I don’t know. It looked all right to me.

KATIE. Whose side are you on, anyway?

JILL. Don’t get hyper. I want to get up as much as you. It seems as though Sunny’s head is not in the game today.

KATIE. You may be right. I wonder what’s wrong with her.

(*The lights on the bench stage left dim as those on stage right brighten.*)

JOE. Coach Ralph was the best, but I wonder why he decided to leave after only one year?

ALEX. I don’t know. I wish he had stayed because if he had, Sunny would still be playing baseball.

JOE. You got that right, and Itolli would’ve stayed in East Ellington. I hate it when the Board of Ed brings in coaches from out of district. They’re completely clueless.

ALEX. (*Befuddled*.) Why do you think Itolli cut Sunny? I mean it was clear that she was one of the best of the players trying out.

JOE. I think that is what they call a ‘no-brainer,’ dude.

ALEX. Why?

JOE. (*Forcefully*.) He cut Sunny because she’s a girl, stupid! (*He looks over at* SUNNY.) And a hot one at that.

(*The lights on* JOE *and* ALEX *dim as* ITOLLI *enters from stage left.* SUNNY *is once again taking a few practice swings while waiting for her next pitch.* ITOLLI, *about 26, is the quintessential ‘male chauvinist pig,’ thinking women belong in the kitchen, rather than on a baseball diamond.*)

ITOLLI. (*Glancing sideways at* SUNNY.) Well, if it isn’t that pain-in-the-butt Sunny Southland girl. It’s about time she decided to play softball. (*To the audience*.) She had some nerve trying out for the eighth-grade boys’ team. As if I’d put a female on my team! Granted she was good, but too darn pretty. I wasn’t going to deal with any nonsense between her and the boys. That would’ve made my job way too complicated, and it would’ve put me at risk. After all, I was responsible for those kids! If something unforeseen happened, the parents would’ve hauled me off to court. No, thanks. (*Singling out someone in the audience.*) Don’t look at me like that. (*To all.*) If you ask me, little girls shouldn’t even be allowed to join any baseball team! Not even T-ball. They have softball! Same game, different rules. Have you ever seen a boy go out for an all-girls’ softball team? No, that would just be ridiculous! They know where they belong. Girls shouldn’t have preferential treatment. Softball is perfect for them. Keep them out of the boys’ locker room; that’s my opinion. (*To* SUNNY.) Choke up, Southland!

(*The lights come up slightly on the boys on the bench as* ITOLLI *exits stage right.*)

ALEX. Weren’t Sunny’s parents upset about that? I mean her dad could be pretty beastly at times, and I don’t mean that in the positive sense.

JOE. Yeah, I think they were. I mean, wouldn’t your parents be annoyed? Look at the guys who made it over Sunny: Steinway, Hemmings, Martial. None of them could hit or field. They were totally useless.

ALEX. (*Sadly*.) We lost just about every game with them on the team. Remember?

JOE. Yeah. If I were one of Sunny’s parents, I would’ve taken the situation to the superintendent.

(*The lights over* JOE and ALEX *dim, and* MOTHER *enters from left*.)

MOTHER. (*To audience.*) You know, up until eighth grade, Sunny had had a memorable career in baseball, and she would’ve had the confidence to continue if it weren’t for that Itolli guy. He completely destroyed her level of confidence. I remember that apocalyptic day so clearly. When Sunny came home that day, she was inconsolable. I never thought I’d get her to stop crying long enough so that she could tell me exactly what had happened. Finally after a box of tissues and about an hour of listening to her sobs, she told me. ‘Mom,’ she said, ‘I was cut from the baseball team.’ I didn’t what to believe her. ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘I don’t know, Mom. I did everything right. There were boys who made it who had never even played before.’ That was it. I was pissed! My daughter who had a bedroom full of trophies was cut from a team when there were inexperienced boys who made it! I knew it was sexism right then and there, but I felt powerless. How could I prove it? The coach could make up some bogus reason related to her skill, and he’d be off the hook. Of course, I would just hear ‘softball’ from the superintendent. ‘Have her play on the softball team.’ What could I say? I doubt she would even understand that softball isn’t baseball.

(*During the course of* MOTHER’s *tirade,* FATHER *enters from stage right.*)

FATHER. (*To* MOTHER*.*) I’ll have to agree with you there.

MOTHER. (*Sardonically.*) That’s a first.

FATHER. I’ll ignore that. (*To audience.*) Sunny called me that night and told me the tragic tale. I was so mad I wanted to rip the phone off the wall and throw it at someone, preferably Itolli, the jackass. How dare he cut my decorated daughter from the team? At that moment, I wanted to toss all Sunny’s trophies, including a plaque stating her average with the Tigers in ’03 – ‘.594, 21 runs, 19 hits’ – into my truck and dump it all on his front lawn. Even if Itolli knew about her successes, I doubt he would’ve changed his mind, the stubborn fool. He paid for his prejudiced decision, though, by losing his job due to his team’s poor record at the season’s close. Huh! It serves him right. Chalk one up to karma.

MOTHER. (*Matter-of-factly*.) Well, Itolli didn’t get fired soon enough because I saw him at the awards’ ceremony that spring. Never in all my life had I wanted to hit a man so badly that it gave me stomach cramps. I kept shooting him dagger glances the entire night while holding my hands in tight fists. I was ready to punch him in the gut. Boy, was I ready! And I’m not a violent person, but this man… I don’t think I’ll ever get over my anger concerning Itolli.

FATHER. Ditto.

(MOTHER *and* FATHER *exchange reconcilable glances and exit stage right and left.*

SUNNY *takes an angry strike at an invisible pitch as though the ball has a picture of* ITOLLI *etched into it.*)

UMPIRE JOHNSON. (*Without expression*.) Strike two! Full count: three and two!

JILL. (*Disappointedly*.) Well, this is it. We’re going down.

KATE. Don’t be so sure. It ain’t over till it’s over.

JILL. (*Sarcastically*.) Well, one more pitch means it’s almost over for our star, Sunny Southland.

KATE. (*Confidently*.) Sunny can hit it or walk. There is a good chance she’ll do either, so don’t be so pessimistic.

JILL. At this point, I just want to go home. Maybe Coach will trade Sunny to the boys’ baseball team next year.

KATE. You know, I think she’d like that. I don’t know much about it, but I think Sunny played with the boys for a long time.

JILL. Well, if that’s the case, I wonder who convinced her to play softball?

(KATIE *shrugs as the lights over the stage-left bench dim.* MOTHER *enters downstage right as* COACH JAMIE *comes on stage from the left.*)

MOTHER. (*To audience*.) After Sunny was cut from the eighth-grade boys’ team, she pretty much forgot about playing anything remotely related to baseball, yet I knew that it was still her passion. Fortunately her freshman year in high school, she tried out for the girls’ varsity basketball team and made it, which thrilled her. I was glad since she really needed a giant boost in self-confidence.

COACH JAMIE. (*To audience*.) I felt it was fate that I sat behind Mrs. Southland at Sunny’s opening basketball game. Coach Ralph, who happens to be a friend of mine, told me about Sunny. Around all the coaches in the district, she’s somewhat of a legend because of her athleticism.

MOTHER. Well, at the opening of the basketball season, I just happened to be sitting in front of Coach Jamie. I didn’t know who she was at the time, but she seemed to know me.

COACH JAMIE. Coach Ralph had shown me a photo taken of all the seventh-grade players standing in front of their parents at the end of that season, and I remembered Mrs. Southland’s face. This is how the conversation played out.

(COACH JAMIE *and* MOTHER *cross to center stage and reenact the conversation at the basketball game.* MOTHER *stands facing downstage left, away from* COACH JAMIE.)

COACH JAMIE. (*Tapping* MOTHER *on her shoulder.*) Excuse me, Mrs. Southland?

MOTHER. Yes?

COACH JAMIE. You don’t know me, but I’m Jamie Lynn. I coach the girls’ varsity softball team. Coach Ralph is a good friend of mine.

MOTHER. Oh? I always liked Coach Ralph. I hope he’s well?

COACH JAMIE. (*Sincerely*.) Yes, he is. In fact, he speaks often about the outstanding athleticism of your daughter, Sunny.

MOTHER. Isn’t that nice?

COACH JAMIE. Yes, well, he told me all about Sunny’s prowess in baseball.

Quite frankly, I’d love to have her try out for my team this spring.

MOTHER. No offense, Miss Lynn, but Sunny hates softball more than mustard on pizza.

COACH JAMIE. (*Wincing at the thought.*) Oh, sorry to hear that, but I’d be willing to make concessions. Sunny would be a starting player, and as a freshman, that is quite an honor. She’d have her choice of positions.

MOTHER. (*Impressed*.) That is a very generous offer. I’ll speak to Sunny.

(MOTHER *and* COACH *return to their prior positions.* As COACH *is crossing, she addresses the audience.* MOTHER *exits right. Meanwhile* SUNNY *takes a few final practice swings before her final pitch.*)

COACH JAMIE. (*To audience*.) Apparently, Mom successfully convinced Sunny; otherwise, she wouldn’t be up right now. (*She turns slightly upstage to* SUNNY.) Swing at anything close, Sunny!

(COACH JAMIE *exits as* SUNNY *takes her final swing at the invisible ball.*)

UMP. STRIIIIIIKE three! You’re out!

FATHER’S VOICE. (*Angrily*.) Sunny! Open your eyes next time, kid!

(*At this*, JILL, KATIE, JOE *and* ALEX *freeze on their respective benches with exaggerated expressions of dread and/or disappointment on their faces.* SUNNY *drops her bat on the stage and ashamedly crosses to sit next to* KATIE *on the bench, stage right.* PENNY *and* UMP JOHNSON *shake hands and exit the stage. The lights come up on* ALEX *and* JOE *who are downstage left.*)

ALEX. (*Rising and turning to his left*.) Whoa! What happened over there?

JOE. (*Rising and glimpsing in* SUNNY*’s direction*.) Sunny must’ve struck out because the game is clearly over. The other team is packing up.

ALEX. Oh, well. (*He shouts*.) Better luck next time, Sunny!

JOE. There’s no way she can hear you. (*Suddenly remembering*.) Hey, Alex, what day is it?

ALEX. Monday, why?

JOE. Monday? Oh, no. For some strange reason, I thought it was Tuesday. We don’t have baseball practice today; we have it tomorrow.

ALEX. You mean you got me out here for nothing, doofis?

JOE. Sort of, but not really. It wasn’t a total waste. I mean we got to see Sunny at bat again, didn’t we?

ALEX. Yeah, I guess. (*Sarcastically*.) And take an unexpected trip down Memory Lane.

JOE. Yeah, let’s get out of here before I start to wail on you, loser!

ALEX. Me? You’re the one who forgot what day it was! Doofis!

(JOE *and* ALEX *exchange a couple of quick shoves and then bend down to pick up their equipment and gear bags*. ALEX *exits right. Just as* JOE *is about to exit behind* ALEX*, he turns to look at* SUNNY *one last time*.)

JOE. (*Shouting*.) Adios, comrade! You can come back and play with us guys anytime!

(*None of the girls on the other bench hear him, so he exits.*)

SCENE 2: *All of the characters except for* JILL, KATIE, *and* SUNNY *have exited. The lights dim on downstage right and come up on the downstage-left bench*. JILL *is in the process of picking up her equipment and putting it into her gear bag while* KATIE *and* SUNNY *sit together on the bench*. KATIE *has her arm about* SUNNY*, comforting her.*)

JILL. (*Sympathetically*.) Sunny, don’t sweat it. Everyone has a bad day. Listen, I have to go. I’ll see you two sluggers at practice tomorrow, okay?

SUNNY/KATIE. Yeah, see you.

(JILL *exits left, leaving* SUNNY *and* KATIE *to inhabit the stage alone.)*

SUNNY. (*Mournfully.*) I wish I never tried out for this pathetic team.

KATIE. We’re not so bad. Sunny, listen, you just weren’t on today, and the ump made some unfair calls.

SUNNY. (*Resentfully*.) Softball is crap! Baseball is the only ball game worth playing.

KATIE. You used to play baseball with the boys, didn’t you?

SUNNY. (*Strongly*.) Yeah and I’d give my right arm to be on the boys’ varsity team right now.

KATIE. (*Playfully*.) Nope, you can’t do that. Even a southpaw needs a right arm, you know.

SUNNY. (*Doubtfully*.) You can’t know much about baseball.

KATIE. I know next to nothing, but I do know what a southpaw is. So, why can’t you play baseball?

SUNNY. Why do you think?

KATIE. Do you think the coaches would keep you off the team just because you’re a girl?

SUNNY. I don’t think; I know because one did it before. Look at me, Katie; I’m a distraction.

KATIE. (*Laughing.*) Yeah, you’re Marilyn Monroe with Joe DiMaggio’s swing. Are you sure you aren’t the daughter of their unknown lovechild?

SUNNY. You’re too funny!

KATIE. What makes baseball better than softball?

SUNNY. Poetry and the past.

KATIE. What?

SUNNY. Have you ever seen the movie *Field of Dreams?*

KATIE. Can’t say I have.

SUNNY. It’s an older movie made in the 1980s, starring Kevin Costner and James Earl Jones.

KATIE. Wasn’t James Earl Jones the voice of Darth Vader in *Star Wars*?

SUNNY. (*Impressed*.) Very good! Well anyway, *Field of Dreams* is basically about a farmer from Iowa that finds a relationship with his dead father through understanding his passion for baseball. At the end, James Earl Jones, who plays this radical author similar to J.D. Salinger, gives this awesome monologue about baseball after Costner’s daughter tells him to keep the baseball field he built to find his father’s spirit. Costner’s character is going broke because he plowed down his cornfields in order to build a baseball field. Basically, he wants to reconnect and resolve his troubled relationship with his dad.

KATIE. That sounds a little bizarre.

SUNNY. It’s a fantasy.

KATIE. Okay, like what does James Earl Jones’s character say that’s so spectacular?

SUNNY. (*Earnestly*.) He explains that we Americans love baseball because baseball is the one constant we have. The metaphors and similes the character uses that are related to the idea have always stayed with me. For example: ‘Memories so thick they’ll have to brush them away from their faces’ and ‘America’s rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It’s been erased like a blackboard and rebuilt again.’ The game and the field are part of our past, and they remind us of all that was ‘good and could be again.’

KATIE. All right, I understand now. Baseball is poetic because it has a romantic past. But that doesn’t mean softball isn’t altogether different from baseball. The field is almost the same, and it’s beginning to have somewhat of a history.

SUNNY. No, it isn’t the same.

(*At this point, a little girl,* ROXY, *who is about nine, enters from stage left. She is wearing a baseball uniform, is dragging her gear bag, and has a bat slung over her upstage shoulder. She crosses downstage right, kicks the bag off to the side, and starts taking practice swings while* KATIE *and* SUNNY *watch her curiously.*)

KATIE. Look, isn’t she cute? She looks so much like you, Sunny.

SUNNY. I started playing baseball for the same team, the Suns.

KATIE. (*Playfully*.) Sunny was on the Suns? How funny is that? The Suns and another Little League team must have a practice on the field now. Maybe we should go before someone tells us to anyway.

SUNNY. (*On the brink of tears*.) Someone should tell that innocent, little girl. Someone should warn her that someday her dreams of playing in the big leagues will be destroyed, and she’ll be heartbroken and forced to play on a stupid softball team just like I do.

KATIE. Okay, Sunny, if baseball is a constant, it’s only because people don’t like change, but change is healthy. Look at you. You’re not that little girl anymore; you’re a beautiful young woman. Maybe softball isn’t America’s favorite sport, but it’s something to cheer about. (*Hauntingly*.) ‘If you build it, they will come.’

SUNNY (*Confused*.) What? That’s a line from *Field of Dreams.* You just told me you had never seen it.

KATIE. Well, I lied. I also saw *A* *League of their Own*, so I know pretty women can play baseball well, but America’s just not willing to let go of its all-male constant, not yet anyway.

SUNNY. So what are you saying?

KATIE. (*Dramatically*.) ‘If you build it, they will come.’ Sunny, you weren’t in the game today partly because you hate it so much. If you give it your all and start hitting moon shots again, the word will get out. ‘People will come; they most definitely will come.’ So forget about the little girl, Sunny. She’s gone. She’s almost all grown up. Women can’t alter overnight what men have built, but if you play hard, you can still show people that what you are made of is just as solid as any Derek Jeter on the field. Baseball may be America’s pastime, but softball is all we girls have got; and we’ve got to show all the good-ole-boys out there that we’re just as good as they are! Sunny, look! Our own Field of Dreams is right in front of you! Dip yourself in its ‘magical waters’!

SUNNY. Gosh, what a drama queen! And quit plagiarizing already. All right, I see what you mean. From now on, I’ll give softball – and the team – my best effort.

KATIE. All right! (*She gives* SUNNY *a high-five, picks up her things, and crosses in front of* SUNNY*.*)Hey, listen, I’ve got to run. I promised my mother I’d make my famous surrealistic chicken tonight for dinner. See you at practice?

SUNNY. Yeah, I’ll be there.

(KATIE *exits right. As she passes* ROXY*, she smiles.* SUNNY *picks up her things, and she is about to exit left when she suddenly changes her mind. She crosses center.*)

SUNNY. Hey, kid!

ROXY. (*She stops swinging and turns to face* SUNNY*.*) Are you talking to me?

SUNNY. Yeah. Come over here a second.

(ROXY *crosses center to* SUNNY*.*)

SUNNY. You play baseball for the Little League, right?

ROXY. (*Defensively*.) Yeah, so what? You don’t.

SUNNY. Well, I did. I play softball now.

ROXY. Why?

SUNNY. Softball is way cooler, you know. How about if you and I get together sometime, and I’ll show you how to hit some softballs?

ROXY. I’d have to ask my mom first, you being a stranger and all, but I guess it would be okay.

SUNNY. (*Happily*.) Great! I’m Sunny, Sunny Southland.

ROXY. (*Proudly*.) I’m Roxy. Roxy Roth.

SUNNY. (*Looking left*.) Well, it looks like the rest of your team is coming, so I better let you practice. I’ll meet you here sometime after one of my softball games. Would you like to come to one of my games?

ROXY. Sure, I guess so. Are you playing on Friday?

SUNNY. Yeah. Come after school. Bring your mom and dad if you can.

ROXY. I don’t know if they can, but I’ll ask them.

SUNNY. See you, Roxy! (SUNNY *exits left.*)

(ROXY *follows* SUNNY *with her eyes.*)

ROXY. (*Excitedly*.) Wow! So that was Sunny Southland, the legendary girl baseball player. And I’m going to be just like her. Cool.

(ROXY *picks up her bat and takes a few practice swings as the curtain falls.*)

 BLACKOUT

Program notes may include a glossary of some unfamiliar baseball terms.

Here are some of the obscure ones used in the play:

1. “Nice cut!” - Nice swing.
2. “Dig!” – Run fast.
3. heater – fast ball.
4. “Touch-em all!” – Touch all the bases.
5. moon shot – homerun.
6. “Riding the pine” – Sitting on the bench.
7. ribbie – runs batted in.
8. “Right down the pipe” – pitch in the middle of the strike zone.
9. round-tripper – homerun.
10. “fence buster” – heavy hitter.
11. ace – best starting pitcher.
12. slurve – slow, big-breaking curve ball.
13. “rally caps” – baseball caps worn inside out for luck.
14. on deck – player who hits next.
15. southpaw – leftie pitcher.
16. delivery – pitch.

Chapter 9: Grief

Benjamin Franklin once said, “The only things certain in life are death and taxes.” Yet often, people tend to be more prepared to pay taxes than to accept the finality of death. In particular, adolescents have a difficult time overcoming human loss, which is why so many teen grief centers have sprung up over the past decade. Overall, adults seem to be more resilient when it comes to grief, and they do not understand that it takes adolescents and young children longer to recover from a substantive loss, particularly if they lose one of their parents. The expectation is that they will just “get over it,” when in fact, that is not the case.

 “Within and Without Magic,” the longest play in the collection, tells the story of one boy’s successful journey through the process of grieving. Due to the spiritual aspects, the play may be an excellent choice for church groups to perform. The scenic elements described are more complex, but they can be simplified depending on the creativity of the director. Again, what is important is the message of the play, not its appearance.

Within and Without Magic

Characters

Daniel Rogers

Joanne (Mom) Rogers

Charlotte Rogers

Pastor Elijah Graham

Reverend Jones

Mrs. Shelton

SCENE 1: *It is the end of September in a commonplace bungalow somewhere in New Jersey.*

*At rise, the lights come up on a simple, sparse interior. Stage right, there is a door suggesting the front entrance to the home. Down left of the door is a black leather loveseat flanked to the left by a worn, oak, end table – most likely products of Salvation Army Thrift Store. Up right, center, there is an alcove, with an opening of about six by three feet, and just beyond, a bare, ebony stairwell leading up to a second floor. To stage left of the alcove is a small kitchen with mismatched appliances: a stark, white refrigerator, avocado gas oven, and stainless steel sink with a framed print of Matisse’s* Portrait of Madame Matisse *above it. Down left of the kitchen is a rectangular, pine table with four wicker chairs. The walls are wallpapered with a floral pattern, which has faded to sepia over time.*

*At center, there is a door into* DANIEL*’s room, which is also sparsely furnished with a twin bed, partially covered with a scarlet red coverlet in the center of the space; an inexpensive, black dresser with three drawers to the left of the bed; and an overstuffed arm chair that is covered hastily with a beige slipcover. On the chair rests what appears to be a homemade, stuffed effigy of a man, Ronnie, his makeshift face, a mask of Ronald Reagan. The effigy is dressed in a navy blue, flannel shirt, a pair of jeans, torn at the knees to reveal his newspaper stuffing, and dark blue sneakers. The dresser is littered with random “boy stuff,” including a jar of soap bubbles, a lava lamp, and a framed photo of* DANIEL*, his father, and granddad. Various items of clothing drip out through partially open drawers. The walls are papered in Yankee pinstripe, and a few prints of Roger Dean’s fantastic creations break up the monotony of the consistent pattern.*

*Footsteps are heard off stage.* DANIEL *and his sister* CHARLOTTE *enter stage right.* DANIEL *is an irresponsible, yet creative eleven-year-old boy who finds the concept of reality difficult to accept.* CHARLOTTE, *sixteen, is intelligent and very mature for her age.* DANIEL *wears a Yankees baseball cap, brown jacket, jeans, sneakers, and carries a red and blue plaid backpack.* CHARLOTTE *is in a purple sweatshirt, blue jeans, and cowboy boots, and she carries a pink backpack. Pushing* DANIEL *aside,* CHARLOTTE *takes a set of keys from her pocket and fiddles with the lock on the front door. Once inside,* CHARLOTTE *crosses to the kitchen table, dropping her backpack on one of the chairs.* DANIEL *cuts in front of her and lopes to his bedroom door, kicking it open.*

DANIEL. (*Chuckling, holding up the backpack.*) Now you see it. (*As if it were a bowling ball, the backpack is hurled under his bed.*) And now, you don’t! Magic! (*He dives enthusiastically on top of his bed, turning to address the effigy on the chair.*) Hey, Ronnie Boy! What’s happening? And how was your day today? (*Pausing for a response.*) Cool! I’m glad you had a good time counting the stripes on the wall. And how many were there today? (*Pausing.*) A thousand? Funny, yesterday there were 943. Awesome, dude! (*He leans over to lift the effigy’s stuffed arm, giving it a high-five, and he takes off his jacket and cap, dropping them to the floor.*) What did *I* do today? The usual: nothing. I didn’t understand a thing in any of my classes, but that’s because I’m stupid. (*Pausing.*) Hey, I got an idea. You wanna see a cool coin trick? You’re gonna be the first person to see me perform this coin trick called “Spellbound” from this book Gramps got me. I’ll do it for you now so that the next time Gramps comes over, I can show it to him, and maybe he’ll let me perform it at the kids’ birthday parties with him. (*He takes out a book from under his bed, opens it to a specific page, and puts it on top of the bed.* DANIEL *pulls Ronnie in his chair so that he is facing the bed slightly.*) For this trick, we’ll need a penny and a quarter, which I definitely have somewhere. (*He searches in the various pockets of his jeans and finds a penny and a quarter.*) Okay, Ronnie. Watch me now. (*He looks down at the book occasionally as he performs the trick.*) The first thing that I have to do is put the quarter in my left hand under my thumb so I’m clipping it in my palm. (*He does, largely.*) Next, I have to turn my hand, palm side down, to make it look empty while I’m holding the quarter. Then I take the penny in my right hand and hold the edges with my first two fingers and thumb. Next, I move my hand to show the penny to you. See? Okay! (*He looks back down at the book.*) Time for what the book calls ‘the special move.’ I hold the penny with my fingers pointing up, and I need to bring my left hand with the hidden quarter in front of the right hand to hide the penny. Like that. Okay. Then I lift my right thumb and let it drop into my palm. Okay. Then I take my right thumb and clip the quarter between it and my right fingertips. Next, I let my left thumb go like this, and then I move my left hand back to show the quarter that the penny has become! All right! I did it. Did you see that, Ronnie?

(*While* DANIEL *has been performing for Ronnie,* CHARLOTTE *has been puttering in the kitchen, making herself a cup of tea. Seeing her cell phone, she picks it up to send a text to her mother and then sets it down. Then she crosses down to the kitchen table with a mug.* DANIEL *enters the kitchen.*)

CHARLOTTE. Catching up with Ronnie?

DANIEL. Yeah. So, why did you walk all the way over to Terror Middle to pick me up today? Does Mom have to work late again, figuring out Victoria’s secret?

CHARLOTTE. (*Sardonically.*) Ha, ha! You’re such a comedian. Why don’t you sit down for a sec? I’ll make you a cup of tea.

DANIEL. Tea? You know I hate tea. I won’t even drink it when I’m sick. How about a glass of Pepsi? (*He sits at the table.*)

CHARLOTTE. Okay, you got it. (*She crosses up to the refrigerator, takes out a bottle of Pepsi, and crosses down to set it on the table.*)

DANIEL. And why are you being so nice to me?

(CHARLOTTE *crosses up to a cupboard, takes a tall glass, brings it down to the table, and pours her brother a glass of Pepsi. She sits down in front of him in one of the wicker chairs.*)

CHARLOTTE. All right, I’ll level with you, kid. Gramps is in the hospital ‘cause he had a heart attack. Mom’s over there with him.

DANIEL. (*Disturbed.*) No way! Heart attack! Is Gramps gonna die like Dad?

CHARLOTTE. I don’t know. I texted her before when you were in your room, but I haven’t gotten an answer from her yet. You’re not supposed to use cell phones in hospitals. I’m sure everything will be all right, and she’ll call or text when she gets a chance. (*Rising to clear the table.*) Well, I’m not just going to stare at my cell phone screen. I’m going to get started on my homework to take my mind off Gramps and Mom. Maybe you should, too.

DANIEL. I don’t have any homework.

CHARLOTTE. Liar!

DANIEL. Shut up! I’m going to lay down. Just tell me when you hear from Mom.

(DANIEL *exits into his room.* CHARLOTTE *opens her backpack and takes out some books, papers, etc.* DANIEL *crosses to his bed and lies down on it.*)

DANIEL. Ronnie Boy, what up? I got bad news, dude. Gramps is in the hospital. Yeah, I know he’s old and fat and all, but magicians – even small-time guys like Gramps who give little kids goose bumps – should be able to get themselves out of anything – even death. Life should be more like it is in the movies, you know? Remember that movie, *Freaky Friday*? The daughter and the mom switch bodies. If I could, I would do something like that. (*Sometime during the monologue,* CHARLOTTE *overhears* DANIEL *talking to Ronnie and positions herself near the door so that she can hear him.*) Yeah, I’d take some of his years so that he could be young again, and I could be older so I could beat up Charlotte whenever she’s a jerk to me. It would be kinda easy – not to beat up Char – to help Gramps. Actually, it would be easy to beat up Char, too. Anyway, I’d take my Yankees cap to the hospital, put it on Gramps’s head while he’s in bed, say a few magic words, and poof! He’d be fine. He’d get up, say ‘Adios’ to everybody, and walk with me into the sunset.

CHARLOTTE. (*Entering the room.*) When are you going to come out of the clouds and deal with reality?

DANIEL. Quit spying on me!

CHARLOTTE. Answer the question.

DANIEL. I deal with stuff.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, no, you don’t. You just get everyone pissed off ‘cause you and Gramps live on Mars most of the time. You and your stupid magic! Does it ever do anything real for you – like your homework? Mom has taken just about everything away from you as punishment for managing to get F’s across the board in school, but still, you do nothing. Don’t you want to do well and get good grades just so that Mom can be proud of you?

DANIEL. (*Rising, he begins to push her.*) Charlotte, it’s September. I got time, so you need to get out of my face and out of my room ‘cause no one asked you to come in anyway.

CHARLOTTE. Fine, suit yourself, jackass. (*She exits into the kitchen and starts to go through some papers on the table.*)

DANIEL. Good. The Wicked Witch of the East can go and be the nerd, geek, dork, or whatever she is just to get what she wants from Mom. I could care less. Ronnie, you and me are gonna build a house of cards ‘cause it’s something I can do good. (*He goes over to the dresser, opens it, and takes out a deck of cards. Sitting on the floor in front of his bed, he begins to build a house of cards.*)

(JOANNE, *or* MOM, *a petite woman of about 45, enters the living room from down right. She crosses to the couch and collapses on it.*)

CHARLOTTE. Mom, you’re home. Why didn’t you text me? (*No response.*) Mom? (*She crosses to the couch and sits down beside her mother.*) Mom? Are you okay?

MOM. (*In tears.*) No, honey, I’m not right now, but it doesn’t mean I won’t be eventually.

CHARLOTTE. What do you mean? What happened at the hospital? Is Gramps going to be all right?

MOM. Charlotte, sweetheart, Gramps passed away. I’m sorry I didn’t text you or call you, but I needed to tell you in person. (*Finding strength.*) Where’s your brother?

CHARLOTTE. (*Starting to cry.*) He’s in his room.

MOM. (*Holding her.*) Honey, it’s going to be all right. You, Danny, and I are going to be just fine because we have each other, and we will always have each other. Right now, I have to get your brother in here. (*She rises and crosses, center.*) Daniel! (*Just then,* DANIEL*’s right hand reacts to the sound of his mother’s voice as he is putting a card on top of the house of cards and the entirety collapses.*)

DANIEL. (*Quietly.*) Crap!

MOM. Danny, please come in here now.

(DANIEL *appears from inside his room.*)

MOM. Daniel, sit down. (*Seeing something is amiss, he crosses to the table and sits quietly on the couch.*)

DANIEL. He’s dead, isn’t he? Gramps died?

MOM. (*Nodding slowly.*) Yes, Danny, I’m sorry.

DANIEL. (*Erupting in tears.*) No! He can’t be! He just can’t be!

MOM. (*Crossing to him, she stands behind him, rubbing* DAN*’s back gently.*) Danny, honey. Listen, Gramps will be all right. He’s just experiencing a new beginning – a magical transformation of his own. (*Trying to calm him.*) Just think. He’s going to be with Dad now and will probably have a heck of a good time wherever they both are, showing all the dearly departed some bizarre magic trick he stole from Penn and Teller.

DANIEL. (*Turning to her.*) Yeah, Mom. I guess.

MOM. I’m sorry, sweetie. You know, despite the fact that you don’t always do what you are supposed to, you’re a good kid, and I love you and your sister very much.

DANIEL. I know, Mom. But what am I gonna do without him? Gramps and me…we were a team.

MOM. I know. The three of us are just going to have to survive without the fourth musketeer somehow.

(*All three rise, converging for a group hug as the lights dim to black.*)

SCENE 2: *It is several days later. The lights come up to illuminate what appears to be a funeral reception.* JOANNE, MOM, *is speaking with* MRS. SHELTON, *a family friend, while* DANIEL *and* CHARLOTTE *sit at the kitchen table, picking at a tray full of tea sandwiches.* REVEREND JONES, *the primary minister at Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, reminiscent of John Houseman, and* ELIJAH GRAHAM, *a much younger, congenial associate, stand at stage right, quietly conversing.*)

DANIEL. (*Surveying the room.*) Who’s that old lady Mom is talking to? I’ve never seen her before.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, you have. You just don’t remember ‘cause you were too little. She’s one of the deacons from church, Gramps’s friend. I think the last time you saw her was at Dad’s funeral. Her name is Mrs. Shelton.

DANIEL. Mrs. Smell-ton? You mean, she smells?

CHARLOTTE. No, I said Shelton, not Smellton, you idiot!

DANIEL. I know. I was just kidding.

CHARLOTTE. Only you could fool around at Gramps’s funeral reception.

DANIEL. If I don’t try to laugh, then I’ll just want to run into my room, lock the door, and start crying again – if I even have any tears left. Ronnie isn’t doing too great either. After all, Gramps made him, meaning he’s really Mom’s brother when you think about it. Uncle Ronnie. I like how that sounds. Maybe I’ll call him that and see how he reacts.

CHARLOTTE. You’re such a lunatic.

DANIEL. (*Looking around the room again some more.*) So who’s that guy standing by the couch with Reverend Jones?

CHARLOTTE. You mean the guy with Dad’s nose?

DANIEL. What?

CHARLOTTE. Look closely. He has the same nose as Dad. If you don’t believe me, check out that picture of you, Dad, and Gramps in your room.

DANIEL. I will, but not now ‘cause Mom’s coming. We better look like we’re doing something; otherwise, she’ll make us do something.

CHARLOTTE. We are doing something. We’re eating. (*Hurriedly, she picks up a finger sandwich, hands it to her brother, and takes one herself. As she starts to eat, the filling of the sandwich drops out and falls in her lap. She grabs a napkin to remove it.*) Gross!

(MOM *crosses up center to the kitchen table.*)

MOM. I don’t want you two to sit here all day like bumps on a log talking to each other when you’re supposed to be mingling. Here’s an idea. Charlotte, you circulate with the plate of sandwiches, and Daniel, you can take that bottle of Pepsi on the kitchen counter and ask people if they need refills of soda.

CHARLOTTE. Mom, you should’ve bought wine.

MOM. Booze? It’s only two in the afternoon. Most people, particularly church people, don’t drink before five. Now go, take the stuff, and circulate! Talk to people.

DANIEL. Mom, look around. Most people left already.

MOM. It doesn’t matter. Just do what you’re told and don’t embarrass me.

(DANIEL, *followed by* CHARLOTTE, *crosses up stage and takes the bottle while* CHARLOTTE *takes the tray. They start roaming about the room, offering people food and Pepsi.* MOM *crosses up stage to the kitchen.* DANIEL *approaches* REVEREND JONES *and* ELIJAH GRAHAM, *standing down left of the couch. He offers them soda.*)

DANIEL. Excuse me. Would either of you like more soda?

ELIJAH. I would. Thanks. (DANIEL *pours.* REVEREND JONES *sees that* MRS. SHELTON *is by herself, so he crosses up to her.*) You must be Richard Reynold’s grandson.

DANIEL. Yeah, I’m Daniel, but most people call me Dan or Danny.

ELIJAH. (*Extending a hand.*) Hi, Danny. I’m Pastor Elijah Graham, the associate minister at Redeemer Lutheran. Your grandfather liked to brag about you whenever he came to the coffee hour after Sunday services. How are you? Are you managing to get through this all right?

DANIEL. You mean Gramps dying and all?

ELIJAH. Yes.

DANIEL. I’m okay. I cried my eyes out at first, and I got teary in church today. Actually, I was just saying to my sister over there that I think I’m kinda dried up now. Like I don’t think I could cry right now even if I wanted to.

ELIJAH. I know what you mean. So, how come you and your family never came to church with your grandfather?

DANIEL. Mom isn’t religious. She believes like when you die, you go somewhere with everyone else, but that’s about it. Besides, she’s a manager at Victoria’s Secret in town, and sometimes she has to be at work around 11 on Sunday mornings. Me and my sister like to sleep in till about the time she leaves.

ELIJAH. Oh, well, maybe we can figure out a way to get you to Redeemer somehow. Your granddad told me that you and he had a common interest – magic.

DANIEL. Yeah, well. Gramps showed me a few tricks, but nothing too hard. I was sort of his assistant when he performed a little at kids’ parties. I can’t do any of the really tough stuff, like taking a dove out of a hat or anything.

ELIJAH. Well, that’s all right. He probably wanted to keep those secrets from you so that he could explain them to you later on when you got a little older. I’m sorry that he didn’t get a chance. Believe it or not, I grew up with an interest in magic, too. Do you know a card trick that features a rising card?

DANIEL. No, but can you teach it to me?

ELIJAH. Now? Would your mother mind?

DANIEL. Nah. I happen to have some cards in my room. Follow me.

(DANIEL *and* ELIJAH *cross up stage of* MOM, *who is chatting at the kitchen table while* CHARLOTTE *is mingling, carrying the plate of sandwiches.* DANIEL *places the bottle of soda on the kitchen counter, and* ELIJAH *tosses his cup into the trash. The two disappear into the bedroom.*)

ELIJAH. (*Looking around.*) So this is your room. I like the Roger Dean prints. Who got you interested in him? He hasn’t been in the spotlight since the 1970’s, way before your time.

DANIEL. Yeah, I know. My dad and mom were like big fans of the rock group *Yes,* I guess. At least that’s what Mom said. She dug up the pictures and gave them to me after my dad died. I don’t remember much ‘cause I was like five at the time.

ELIJAH. I was a fan of *Yes* and Roger Dean myself for a little while. Then I discovered someone way more inspiring. (*Pointing to the effigy.*) Who’s that over there? It can’t possibly be Ronald Reagan.

DANIEL. Yeah, it sort of is. He’s my uncle, Ronnie. He used to be just a friend, but since I just remembered that Gramps made him for me after my dad died, I figure that he’s more of an uncle. My dad died like just after Halloween. I remember Gramps telling me that he was Ronald Reagan that year just to spook the trick-or-treaters that came to the door. And the mask gave him the idea for the face and dummy.

ELIJAH. I see. He’s your imaginary friend.

DANIEL. Most would think so, but he’s not really imaginary ‘cause I talk to him about everything that I can’t talk to my sister or mom about. He’s a guy. He understands. Like I think Gramps made him for me so he wouldn’t feel so guilty not being around for me all the time. He had some real jobs when he wasn’t being a magician. At one point, I wanted Gramps to move in with us, but Mom said no way – that he would wind up driving her nuts, or something like that. But I think it would’ve been cool to have him around. Know what I mean?

ELIJAH. Yes. Your grandfather had the gift of congeniality. (*He notices the photo of the three.*) I like that photo. Is that your dad in the center?

DANIEL. Yeah. My sister Charlotte thinks you two have the same nose.

ELIJAH. (*Chuckling.*) I don’t know. Maybe she’s right. (*Pause.*) You said you had playing cards?

DANIEL. Yeah, there’re right here on the floor. I was building a house of cards the other day, but my mom screamed for me and my hand slipped. It was right before she told me about Gramps dying. It’s too bad because it was looking pretty awesome.

(*At this point,* MOM *escorts* REVEREND JONES *to the door while* CHARLOTTE *stands with* MRS. SHELTON, *offering her a sandwich.*)

ELIJAH. Okay, let’s play 52 Pick-up and get the cards off the floor. (*The two bend down to pick up all the cards scattered on the floor down center of the bed.*) Got them all? (DANIEL *nods.*) Here, give them to me. (DANIEL *does, and the two sit on the edge of the bed.*)

MRS. SHELTON. Thank you for offering me these luscious-looking sandwiches, my dear.

CHARLOTTE. Mrs. Shelton, before you take one of these, I have to warn you. There’s a trick to eating these sandwiches safely. One false move, and the filling will be all over your dress. The secret…

ELIJAH. …is all in the hands, which I’ll show you. The whole idea is to locate the spectator’s missing card. So you show the spectator the deck, he picks a card, and you place it on top of the deck – like this. You hold the deck in your left hand and point the first finger, the pointer finger, of your right hand just above the deck.

CHARLOTTE. Next, you bring the pointer finger of your right hand down…

ELIJAH. …until it is sitting on top of the deck. As you slowly lift your right pointer finger, the spectator’s card rises with it. When you rest your right pointer finger on the top of the deck, you extend your right pinky until its tip is resting on the back of the top card. You do this behind the deck so the spectator can’t see the move. Get it?

DANIEL. I think so. How do you get the card to rise?

ELIJAH. You press your pinky into the back of the top card. To the on-looker, it will seem like the card is rising with your right pointer finger. When the card is half way out of the deck, grab the top edge with your right pointer finger and thumb and quickly curl your right pinky in. You can then show the card to the spectator and allow him to look at it. There’s nothing to find.

CHARLOTTE. Yes, just squeeze the bread together with your thumb and pointer finger. That’s right, Mrs. Shelton. You should be okay now, but here’s a napkin just in case. (CHARLOTTE *takes a napkin from the top of the tray and hands it to* MRS. SHELTON *who eats the sandwich successfully.*)

MRS. SHELTON. Thank you so much. It’s just yummy!

(MOM *notices that* DANIEL *is absent from the party. She approaches* CHARLOTTE.)

MOM. Excuse me, Charlotte. But have you seen your brother?

CHARLOTTE. No, Mom, but he’s probably in his room with Uncle Ronnie.

MOM. Uncle Ronnie?

(*There is a pantomimed explanation from* CHARLOTTE *while the focus shifts to the bedroom where* ELIJAH *is finishing up with his card trick.* CHARLOTTE *then puts down the tray on the table, and she and* MOM *help* MRS. SHELTON *find her purse, and they escort her to the door.* MRS. SHELTON *exits.*)

DANIEL. Wow! That’s really intense. You’re really good! Like how come you became a minister and not a magician like Gramps?

ELIJAH. My dad was a minister. At first, I didn’t think Christianity was anything special, but then my dad gave me a simplified version of the Bible, which was easier to read than the King James edition, so I started to read it. When I got to the part that described Jesus’s miracles, I couldn’t put it down.

DANIEL. Yeah? Like what did he do?

ELIJAH. Let’s see…well, for one thing, he brought a man named Lazarus back from the dead; for another, he cured people that had the disease leprosy; he was able to feed thousands of people with several fish and a few loaves of bread; and he walked on water. Not only that, he could turn water into wine.

DANIEL. My sister would like that. She’s fated to be an alcoholic ‘cause she usually has to put up with me a lot since my mom works all the time.

ELIJAH. I hope she doesn’t become one.

DANIEL. Wow! Then Jesus was a better magician than Houdini!

ELIJAH. Yes, it seems that way, but there wasn’t any illusion involved. It all just happened since his magic was real, God given. The proof is that the apostles witnessed the many supernatural miracles and documented them in the Bible.

DANIEL. But there’s just one thing I don’t understand. If Jesus could bring Lazarus back to life, why didn’t he save Gramps?

ELIJAH. (*Handing him the cards.*) That’s a good question. I’m afraid I can’t answer you truthfully, but I’m guessing that your grandfather was needed up in Heaven. It was simply his time to be with God.

DANIEL. (*Rising and putting the cards on the dresser.*) Oh. Maybe. Like what else do you know? Any coin tricks? I was practicing one the day Gramps died.

ELIJAH. I only know the basic one. You know, the one where you take a quarter, hide it in your sleeve, and pull it out from behind someone’s ear.

DANIEL. Yeah, Gramps did that one, but he never showed me how.

ELIJAH. It’s easy. I’ll show you.

(MOM *escorts* REVEREND JONES *out the front door and heads for the bedroom.*)

MOM. That’s that. Now to see what your brother is up to.

(MOM *crosses into the bedroom. As she does, she catches* ELIJAH *in the midst of the coin trick. But because* ELIJAH *has his right hand positioned so that it looks like he is caressing the back of* DANIEL’*s head, it looks unnatural, suspicious.*)

MOM. (*Gasping, horrified.*) Jesus Christ…

DANIEL. …did amazing stuff like magic, Mom!

MOM. I don’t care. (*To* ELIJAH.) What have you been doing to my son?

DANIEL. Nothing, Mom. He was just showing me a card trick.

MOM. (*Ignoring him.*) I don’t know who you are, but you better leave this house immediately before I call the police and press charges.

ELIJAH. (*He extends his hand, but* MOM *ignores it.*) Elijah. Elijah Graham. I apologize sincerely if I did anything you consider wrong. Actually, I thought I was helping your son…

MOM. (*Interrupting him.*) No, I’m sorry, but you definitely weren’t. (*She escorts* ELIJAH *to the door.* DANIEL *follows them into the living room.*)

ELIJAH. (*Just before exiting.*) Again, Mrs. Rogers, I didn’t mean to upset you. Forgive me. (*Turning to* DANIEL.) Daniel, take care of your mom, sister, and most importantly, yourself. Good-bye.

(*Once* ELIJAH *is out of the house,* MOM *slams the door, turning to her children.*)

MOM. (*Rushing to* DANIEL.) Danny, I think I should call the police.

CHARLOTTE. Whoa, what did I miss?

DANIEL. Why? What for?

MOM. (*Rushing to find her cell phone.*) Inappropriate behavior. That man was touching you in an inappropriate way.

CHARLOTTE/DANIEL. What?

DANIEL. Mom, Mom, hold on. I told you. He was just showing me a coin trick. You know, the one where the magician hides the coin in his sleeve and pulls it out from someone’s ear.

MOM. Are you telling me the truth? Or are you lying? Because you do lie, you know.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, Danny.

DANIEL. Shut up, Char. I’m not lying this time. Honest, Mom. You can’t call the police to report a guy that was just showing a kid a magic trick!

MOM. Well, that’s it then. It’s that magic crap. It’s evil. No more magic tricks of any kind in this house. It’s time that you start concentrating on doing your homework instead. That bunk never did much for my father except keep him in the poor house, depending on me to foot his bills whenever some mother wouldn’t pay him for a magic show he did for her kids.

CHARLOTTE. Mom, the guy has Dad’s nose. He’s really good looking! Don’t you think so?

MOM. (*To her.*) What guy? (*Gesturing to the door.*) That guy? I don’t care if he is innocent. I never want to see him around here again. There is nothing worse than an adult male who is just a bad influence. I couldn’t keep my father from showing you worthless, impractical junk that’s never going to make you any money because he never listened to me anyway, but I can certainly stop outsiders from doing the same thing.

DANIEL. But Mom, he came with Reverend…

MOM. No, never mind. I don’t even want to hear it. I can’t deal with it right now. I’m emotionally and physically exhausted – haven’t slept for days. I’m going to attempt to take a long nap right now. Do me a favor and clean up this place.

CHARLOTTE. Yes, Mom.

(MOM *exits via the stairs.* CHARLOTTE *and* DANIEL *start to clean up the various cups and napkins left about the main rooms.*)

DANIEL. Geez, Mom’s really turning into a psycho. Like I can’t believe she threw out a normal guy she doesn’t even know.

CHARLOTTE. She’s not a psycho! She just doesn’t trust people she doesn’t know – not since Dad died anyway. Besides, you’re the psycho, bringing some stranger into your bedroom. Are you sure he wasn’t doing anything sick to you?

DANIEL. Yeah, I’m sure.

CHARLOTTE. Good-looking perverts are everywhere these days. (*She pauses.*) So who was Dad’s Nose anyway?

DANIEL. You heard him. His name is Elijah Graham, and he’s an ass-something minister at Redeemer Church.

CHARLOTTE. He’s an ass-something? Like a jackass? Like you? I don’t think so. You must mean associate.

DANIEL. Yeah, associate. That’s some kind of assistant, right?

CHARLOTTE. Ah, huh. It’s kind of weird because in the Old Testament of the Bible, there was a guy named Elijah, and he was a prophet and performed miracles.

DANIEL. Yeah, so could Jesus. Anyway, this guy was probably named after him because his dad was a minister. Wow, I guess everybody could do awesome things back in the olden days. How do you know stuff about the Bible?

CHARLOTTE. I’m a dork. Actually, I got it off *The History Channel* one night. How do you know anything about Jesus? You sure as heck don’t watch *The History Channel*.

DANIEL. Pastor Elijah told me.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, what else did he tell you? Is he married?

DANIEL. I don’t know – probably not ‘cause he was by himself with Reverend Jones. Why? He’s too old for you.

CHARLOTTE. I *know* he’s too old for *me.* I wasn’t thinking about me, fool!

DANIEL. You can’t be thinking about Mom then either because you just saw that she hates him.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, never mind. Listen, kid, we’re going to school tomorrow, meaning I still have to finish a paper for English, or Ms. Weisel will wind up flunking me. The woman has no soul.

DANIEL. Neither does Mom. Maybe they should go out for Happy Hour.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, Mom’s all right. She tries. And what do you know about Happy Hour?

DANIEL. I heard some teachers at school talking about going to Happy Hour. Don’t all adults go to Happy Hour? What exactly is it? Is there only one hour each day for adults to be happy? (CHARLOTTE *shoots him an incredulous look and then shrugs.* DANIEL *crosses to his room.*) Okay, so you don’t need to give me an answer. Like I’m too young to know these things anyway. Okay, I’ll go into my room and hang out with Ronnie.

CHARLOTTE. You mean that after what Mom just threw at you, you’re going back into your cave to talk to some old clothes stuffed to look like a guy? Great, sure, that sounds just like you. Have fun. (*She exits, disappearing up the stairs.*)

DANIEL. (*Returning to his room, he lies on his bed.*) So, Ronnie, how was your day? Recounting the pinstripes again? My day started out crappy ‘cause it was Gramps’s funeral and all, got pretty decent ‘cause of Pastor Elijah – you met him – and then got even crappier than it was before it got good. Go figure. But I have an idea of how to make the crappier a bit better. You wanna hear my plan?

(DANIEL *starts to pantomime his ‘plan’ to Ronnie as the lights dim and curtain closes.*)

SCENE 3: *It is the next day after school.* CHARLOTTE *and* DANIEL *enter the living room of the house from the front door.*

DANIEL. So why did you pick me up again today? Is someone else in the hospital?

CHARLOTTE. No, Mom texted me that she needed to do something. Guess she went back to work to take her mind off Gramps.

DANIEL. (*Sarcastically.*) Lucky me that I got to walk home with you again – twice in two weeks.

CHARLOTTE. You know, I was thinking. (*She takes off her jacket, throws it on the couch, and heads for the kitchen.*) You really like that Elijah guy, right?

DANIEL. Yeah, but I already know how I’m going to see him again. (DANIEL *takes off his jacket and throws it on the couch. He crosses to the table and sits down on the couch.*)

CHARLOTTE. Yeah?

DANIEL. We’ll invite him over for dinner – there are leftovers from yesterday that Mom wants to get rid of, right? He can help me with my homework. When Mom gets home, she’ll see that I’m doing something that she’s been wanting me to do forever, right? Then she may start to trust the guy, thinking that he’s not all that bad. And after a while, maybe if she starts to like Elijah, he can tell her that magic is cool. And she’ll believe him.

CHARLOTTE. Doubtful, but for you, that’s actually a pretty good plan. I’m impressed. You really want to replace Dad and Gramps in the worst way, huh?

DANIEL. I just don’t want to lose my magic ‘cause if I do, I lose Gramps altogether. Do you think Mom will throw Pastor Elijah out if he comes back?

CHARLOTTE. I don’t know. After all, he is a minister. Maybe some priests aren’t trustworthy, but there hasn’t been anything in the news about ministers molesting kids. They seem to be cool ‘cause they’re allowed to get married and priests aren’t. And Mom doesn’t know he’s a minister, right? She threw him out and shut you up before you could say anything. This time, tell her he’s a pastor right away. But just don’t make the mistake of calling him ‘Father Graham.’ Otherwise, you’re screwed.

DANIEL. Okay. But why would I call him father anyway? He isn’t my father.

CHARLOTTE. Never mind. If anyone could use some magic in her life, Mom definitely could.

DANIEL. Yeah, except Mom hates magic. Remember?

CHARLOTTE. That’s not the kind I mean. I mean she needs another man in her life. Someone like Dad, and Elijah already has the right nose. We’ll just have to find out if he’s already married.

DANIEL. Okay, you call the church and invite him over.

(*Just then,* MOM *enters from stage right, takes off her coat, and puts it on the couch.*)

MOM. Hi, kids. What are you up to?

CHARLOTTE. Hi, Mom. You’re home early. Me and Danny were just going to get a snack.

MOM. Sounds good. Eat the leftovers from yesterday. Char, do me a favor and make me a cup of tea. I need to unwind and a little Celestial Seasonings always does the trick.

(*There is a knock at the front door.*)

MOM. I wonder who that is. Are either of you expecting anyone?

DANIEL. No.

(MOM *crosses to the front door and opens it.*)

MOM. Reverend Jones? How are you? Please come in.

REVEREND JONES. (*Entering.*) I’m sorry to disturb you, but I was in the neighborhood and wanted to check in with you. How are you feeling, Joanne?

MOM. I’m all right. I went in to work for a little bit today just to do something constructive. Won’t you sit down? Charlotte is making me some tea. Would you like a cup?

REVEREND JONES. No, no thank you. I appreciate your asking, though. Hi, kids!

CHARLOTTE/DANIEL. Hi!

REVEREND JONES. Would you two mind if I spoke to your mother alone?

CHARLOTTE. No, not at all. Danny, let’s go play a game in your room.

DANIEL. Okay, I guess. (*Quietly.*) Like since when do we play games in my room?

CHARLOTTE. Shut up.

REVEREND JONES. Thank you.

(CHARLOTTE *and* DANIEL *exit into his room. Once they are in it,* CHARLOTTE *motions for* DANIEL *to stand next to her side by the open door so that they can listen in on the conversation.*)

REVEREND JONES. Joanne, I am concerned about something that happened here last night after I had left.

MOM. Oh?

REVEREND JONES. Yes. Apparently, you accused one of our associate ministers of inappropriate conduct involving Daniel.

MOM. One of your…?

REVEREND JONES. Yes, there was a gentleman with me here last night, one Elijah Graham. He happens to be one of the youth ministers at Redeemer and is also a talented grief counselor. Wonderful person and creative as well. He uses magic tricks to help children deal with loss.

MOM. Oh?

REVEREND JONES. Yes, he does. In fact, years ago when your husband was killed tragically and you lost your faith, your father reached out to Elijah because he was so concerned for the well being of you and your children. The topic of magic came up since your dad and Elijah had that in common. To make a long story short, because of your father, Elijah decided to incorporate magic into his sessions with children.

MOM. That’s about when my dad decided to teach Danny magic tricks.

REVEREND JONES. Yes, your father was trying to help your son cope with his dad’s passing just as Elijah was attempting to quell any anxiety in Danny last night when you mistook his coin trick for something perverse.

MOM. I am so sorry, Reverend Jones. I had no idea that he was – is – affiliated with Redeemer.

REVEREND JONES. Joanne, I understand that what you went through was terrible, and I can also understand that an unsolved hit-and-run accident like that can make one distrust, but pushing people away who can help you and your children is not necessarily the right course to take.

MOM. I already told you that I didn’t know who he was.

REVEREND JONES. Would it have made a difference? Joanne, do you trust me?

MOM. Yes, but it’s only because you were there for me when my mom died. Lately, I don’t trust anyone. Heck, I’m not even sure if I trust myself half the time.

REVEREND JONES. Then you and your children need a man like Pastor Graham.

MOM. You are entitled to your opinion. Personally, I think we are doing just fine without any intervention from you or anyone else.

REVEREND JONES. You just said you are finding it hard to trust yourself. Don’t you think that’s a problem?

(*There is a brief, but uncomfortable pause.*)

MOM. So what are you suggesting – that I invite that man over to my house after I blatantly threw him out?

REVEREND JONES. Pastor Elijah is an ordained minister who understands and practices a rare abstraction, forgiveness. I’m sure ‘I’m sorry’ will do the trick. Joanne, I know it will take you a long time to embrace a stranger, but I think someone like Elijah, who has dedicated his life to Christianity, may just be someone whom you may grow to trust.

CHARLOTTE. (*Whispering.*) I told you he wasn’t married.

DANIEL. He didn’t say he wasn’t married.

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, but he implied it.

DANIEL. Like how?

CHARLOTTE. Never mind!

MOM. What if I say no, Reverend?

REVEREND JONES. Knowing how tenacious Elijah is, he’ll show up on your doorstep anyway. When it comes to helping others, I doubt he’ll take no for an answer.

MOM. All right. Fine. When is he free?

REVEREND JONES. He’s waiting out in the car.

MOM. You’re joking.

REVEREND JONES. I told you he’s persistent.

MOM. (*Rising.*) Okay, then. I suppose I don’t really have a choice here.

REVEREND JONES. (*Crossing to the front door.*) Marvelous! Joanne, you are taking a step in the right direction!

MOM. (*Following him to the door.*) I wouldn’t go that far. You’re lucky I’m taking a few steps to the door.

REVEREND JONES. (*Laughing.*) Oh, Joanne, you can be quite entertaining! (*Becoming reserved.*) Regardless, hear him out. I’ll send him in.

MOM. Aren’t you coming back in with him?

REVEREND JONES. No, you two need space. Besides, I need to visit Edna Fox, one of our parishioners who recently returned from a trip to the hospital. Poor thing fell and broke her hip while making chicken soup in her kitchen. Don’t worry. I’ll swing back around to retrieve him in about fifteen to twenty minutes. (*He exits.*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Crossing to the bed.*) Quick, where are some cards? We’re supposed to be playing a game.

DANIEL. (*Finding the cards on the dresser and jumping on the bed.)* Now what? Plan A is not going to work.

CHARLOTTE. (*Hopping onto the bed.*) Well, we’ll just have to wait and see what happens.

(MOM *crosses from the front door to the bedroom.*)

MOM. Kids, we have another unexpected visitor.

DANIEL. (*Innocently.*) Yeah? Who?

MOM. Your Pastor Graham.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, I guess you found out that he works for Redeemer?

MOM. You already knew?

DANIEL. You didn’t give me a chance to tell you yesterday.

MOM. Well, just because he is a minister, doesn’t mean I automatically trust the man. He’s probably just another one of those legitimate Jesus freaks desperate to share his disillusions of grandeur so that he can convert poor, lost infidels like us.

DANIEL. I don’t get what you just said, but Jesus was cool, Mom. He did a lot of awesome things.

MOM. (*Sarcastically.*) Great! He’s already been filling your head with a load of insubstantial stories – myths!

DANIEL. No, all the stories are true. The apostles saw what miracles Jesus did and wrote them down.

MOM. That’s what he told you?

DANIEL. Yeah.

MOM. The apostles were a bunch of Middle Eastern hippies who drank too much homemade wine. Besides when it comes to the Bible, a lot has been lost in translation over the centuries, so that means it is just a best-selling work of fiction!

DANIEL. (*Rising from the bed.*) That’s what you think, Mom. You don’t believe in anything that you can’t see with your own eyes.

MOM. That’s right, Daniel. Jesus was an amateur magician who perfected sleight of hand and fooled multitudes of naïve people – that’s all.

CHARLOTTE. Just like Gramps and his kindergarteners?

MOM. Just like Gramps and, most likely, your divine Pastor Graham. (*A knock is heard at the door.*) There he is now. You two stay in here, and let me do the talking. I’ll send him chasing good Reverend Jones’s car as soon as possible. (*She exits the room and heads right to the front door.*)

DANIEL. Now what do we do? We can’t let Mom kick him out again.

CHARLOTTE. We’ll do what we did before – just listen. Have a little faith. (*They hop off the bed and crouch by the bedroom door that has been left slightly ajar.*)

MOM. (*Opening the front door.*) Good evening, Pastor Graham.

ELIJAH. Good evening. (*Handing her a box.*) I bought you what I’m calling a conciliatory cake – Angel Food.

MOM. (*Taking the box.*) Naturally, except that our favorite cake is Devil’s Food.

ELIJAH. (*Stepping into the room and removing his coat.*) Well, I’ll just have to remember that for next time. (*He crosses to the couch and lays his coat across the top of it.)*

MOM. You are a confident man, Pastor Graham. (*She crosses left to the kitchen and places the box on the counter.*)

ELIJAH. Please, call me Elijah. I’m rather informal. May I call you by your first name?

MOM. Why not? Why be formal? Call me Joanne.

ELIJAH. (*Surveying the room.*) May I sit down?

MOM. Sure. Have a seat at the kitchen table. (*Pause while* ELIJAH *crosses left to the table.*) I suppose I owe you an apology for my rash behavior last night. But you can’t blame me. I didn’t know you were a minister, but even if I did, professional titles don’t seem to mean a heck of a lot these days – if you know what I’m saying. The Catholic Church has had its share of controversies when it comes to priests being pedophiles and what not.

ELIJAH. I’m neither a Catholic nor a pedophile.

MOM. Your boss pretty much told me. Can I get you a cup of tea?

ELIJAH. No, but you should have one.

MOM. No, it’s getting too close to dinner.

ELIJAH. It’s only 4:30.

MOM. It is?

ELIJAH. You don’t trust me. Do you, Joanne? In fact, it seems like I make you feel rather uncomfortable.

MOM. Pastor, I don’t trust a lot of people, particularly those who attempt to meddle in other people’s business. As for the ‘uncomfortable’ part, I threw you out of my house last night and am just getting used to viewing you as normal – as opposed to perverted.

ELIJAH. I am here to help, not meddle. I’m sorry. I should have asked your permission to show Danny some tricks.

MOM. (*She crosses to the table.*) You’re damn right you should have. And you should have never gone into his room. (*Pause.*) Oh, sure. I get it now. You’re probably here to escort me back to God.

ELIJAH. Not if you don’t want to go.

MOM. What if I tell you that I don’t need your help?

ELIJAH. I can’t tell you what to say, but I think you do need my help. Reverend Jones told me about the hit-and-run accident that took your husband’s life. I’m sorry. I’m particularly sorry that you lost your faith as a result. He said you were once a member of Redeemer and quite an avid one at that.

MOM. That’s ancient history. I was doing my mother a favor. Take a look at that print up there.

ELIJAH. *Madame Matisse*?

MOM. Very good! Not only are you confident, you’re well educated. Well, I feel exactly like she looks – divided - with a green stripe going down the middle of my face. Split in half. There’s one side of me that feels compelled to stay home with my kids, yet the other part of me needs to make a living so that I can provide for my kids and myself. It isn’t easy being a single mother, you know. God doesn’t pay the bills.

ELIJAH. God helps those who help themselves.

MOM. Oh? You sit there, all prim, trying to be proper, thinking you know how it feels to struggle.

ELIJAH. (*Standing.*) I have struggled. I wasn’t always a man of God. In fact, when I was a little older than Danny, I had a serious drug problem. I smoked a lot of pot and pretty much did everything I could to push my father and the rest of my family away from me because I was vacant inside. But then, for some strange reason, I found Jesus through my dad. I’ve felt a sense of purpose ever since.

MOM. Well, goody for you. But Jesus hasn’t done a heck of a lot for me. Did Reverend Jones tell you anything about my father? Well, he was never around much when I was growing up. He flitted from job to job, and it drove my mother crazy. In fact, she probably got cancer from all the stress and unhappiness he caused her. All she had was the church and her belief in God, and look where it got her? My father took up magic as a sideline after my mom died. It was probably an escape from the guilt and grief he was feeling. When my husband died by accident – you already know that story – my father felt compelled to invite Daniel into his personal defense mechanism. ‘Misery loves company.’ But all it has done is prevent Danny from being a responsible kid living in the real world. It’s all a load of crap!

DANIEL. (*Rushing out of his room.*) That’s not true, Mom! (CHARLOTTE *follows meekly and stands just outside of the bedroom door, listening.*)

MOM. Danny!

DANIEL. No, I’m not gonna let you tell Pastor Graham magic is crap! It was the part of Gramps that I loved best, and it helps me – magic and Ronnie. If it wasn’t for them, I’d kill myself!

MOM. Danny, stop being so dramatic.

ELIJAH. Excuse me, but he needs to speak his mind. (MOM *shoots him a dirty look but remains quiet.*)

DANIEL. Mom, you’re so busy working that you don’t even notice what’s going on in my life. It’s always ‘Charlotte this, Charlotte that,’ ‘cause she’s the smart one, and I’m the dumb one. I’m so stupid that I can’t even do my homework. Yeah, Mom, it’s not like I don’t do it ‘cause I’m lazy or anything. I can’t do it ‘cause I don’t get it. Sixth grade is not like fifth grade – it’s hard and scary and the teachers are mean. I don’t even see my old friends anymore ‘cause they’re all in different classes. (*Tearing up.*) I’ve only been in school for a few weeks, and I’m flunking every class so far.

MOM. (*Crossing to him.*) How come I haven’t heard from your teachers?

DANIEL. I wipe out all the messages in the voice mailbox before you get home. Like I gave all my teachers the wrong e-mail address on the first day of school so all the letters of doom are going to some kid I used to know who moved to Alaska.

MOM. Danny, why have you waited until now to tell me?

DANIEL. I didn’t think you cared.

MOM. (*Hugging him.*) Of course, I care. Of course I do. Danny, you’re not stupid, honey.

CHARLOTTE. I’m probably the one to blame for his low self-esteem, Mom. I pretty much call him stupid all the time.

ELIJAH. Thank you for admitting that, Charlotte. That took a lot of courage, but as you may know, if you call someone stupid long enough, he may just start to believe it’s true. Danny, it seems to me that what you could use is a different kind of magic.

DANIEL. You mean it’s possible to use magic?

MOM. No, not magic, please. We are not going that route!

ELIJAH. It’s not the kind you’re thinking of, Joanne. It’s the kind that comes from within and travels without.

MOM. Please don’t start up about Jesus. My son doesn’t need to be converted!

ELIJAH. That’s not where I’m going, Joanne. Danny, it seems to me that you need to believe in yourself, meaning what you are capable of doing. You do know what

self-confidence is, don’t you?

DANIEL. I know I don’t have any.

ELIJAH. Exactly. Joanne, he lacks self-confidence not so much because of Charlotte’s harsh words, but perhaps because he never quite got over the death of your husband. Maybe none of you have, and now you have to overcome the death of another family member. Denying that you need help will only make things worse over time.

MOM. All right. I’ll admit that maybe Danny could use some help, but Charlotte is fine.

CHARLOTTE. Mom, I’m not. And you aren’t either. All you and I do is work. It is as though we are both obsessed with it because it takes us away from our feelings, our unhappiness. The work I do for school is the only thing in my life that makes me feel whole. I don’t even want to go out with any of my friends anymore.

ELIJAH. People devoid of spirituality – especially those lost in grief – often feel empty – as though their lives have no meaning.

MOM. Oh, no! Here it comes. The inevitable conversion: the praise-the-Lord-I’m-saved segment of the evening. Okay, fine. Lay it on us!

ELIJAH. Joanne, again, I didn’t come here to resurrect your deceased belief in the Lord. I came here to offer my assistance as a grief counselor and perhaps, a tutor.

MOM. Tutor?

ELIJAH. Danny could use someone to help him with his homework, right?

DANIEL. Yeah, Mom, I have this really hard quiz on sixty prepositions tomorrow, and I know nothing.

ELIJAH. Well, if you can learn to perform a card trick, you can learn prepositions – easily –with a positive attitude and some kind of ball. Joanne, would you mind if I showed Danny a little game that will help him learn prepositions?

MOM. (*Suspiciously.*) It’s not sleight of hand, is it?

ELIJAH. No, but you really should try to open your mind. I can understand why you personally don’t like magic, but as Danny said, it has helped him to cope. And it’s done wonders for my kids at church.

MOM. I just don’t want him to turn into my father and kill off his future wife.

ELIJAH. You said your dad’s interest in magic came after your mother’s death.

MOM. Yes, but I want him to be more focused in reality so that he can hold an actual, full-time job someday. He’s so much like my father in so many ways.

ELIJAH. Magic does great things for concentration. In fact, I bet that Danny has the ability to focus quite well because of it. I’m sure that once I show him his little trick, he’ll be able to use it to remember all the prepositions.

CHARLOTTE. Hey, I’m even curious about this game, Mom. I don’t remember learning prepositions. How about it, Mom?

MOM. Fine, but I’m not going anywhere except to the kitchen. I don’t know about you three, but I’m famished. Anyone care for some leftovers from yesterday?

ELIJAH. Sounds delicious!

MOM. Charlotte, help me in the kitchen. (*They cross up into the kitchen area where they begin to prepare food.*)

ELIJAH. Danny, do you have a ball – one of those soft ones?

DANIEL. You mean like a Nerf ball?

ELIJAH. Exactly.

DANIEL. Yeah, hold on. I think I do. (*He crosses to his bedroom, bends down to look under his bed, and produces a soft, green ball, which he brings back into the kitchen.*)

ELIJAH. Great! That’s perfect. Are you open to the magic of believing in yourself?

DANIEL. Yeah, but what are you going to do with the ball?

ELIJAH. Okay, I’ll show you. Some prepositions when enclosed in phrases act as adverbs. To translate: adverbs describe verbs, actions, right?

DANIEL. Yeah, I sort of remember that. How come you know so much about English?

ELIJAH. I had a fabulous sixth-grade teacher who was a bit strange, but very creative. She used to wear a different, crazy hat every day. Well, anyway, I am going to show you what she showed us thirty years ago. I’m going to perform a series of actions with this ball, and you are going to tell me what I’ve done with it, all right?

DANIEL. Okay. Seems easy enough.

ELIJAH. (*Putting the ball under the couch.*) Where did I just put the ball?

DANIEL. Under the couch.

ELIJAH. Exactly. ‘Under’ is a preposition, and ‘couch’ is the object of the preposition. Get it?

DANIEL. I think so, that doesn’t seem hard at all. Do something else with it.

ELIJAH. Okay. (*He takes the ball and puts it on top of the kitchen counter.*) Where is it now?

DANIEL. On top of the counter. ‘On top of’ is a preposition?

ELIJAH. Yes, a long one, but yes, it is.

DANIEL. Okay, cool. I’m getting this. I can do this. It’s a lot like magic.

ELIJAH. It is magic – just like I said – within and without. ‘Within’ and ‘without’ are prepositions also.

DANIEL. Okay, this time, I’ll go by the door.

ELIJAH. ‘By’ is a preposition.

DANIEL. Awesome! Like I’ll go by the door, and you throw the ball to me.

ELIJAH. Okay. ‘To’ is also a preposition.

DANIEL. Yeah, I get it. It doesn’t seem hard at all.

MOM. (*To* CHARLOTTE *as an aside.*) Why am I starting to like this guy who tried to molest my son?

CHARLOTTE. ‘Cause he didn’t and he’s cute and he reminds you of Dad.

MOM. But that doesn’t mean I trust him. I’m not taking my eyes off him.

CHARLOTTE. Mom, Danny was right. Not only are you psycho, you’re positively paranoid.

MOM. Danny said that? What the heck does an eleven-year-old kid know anyway? (*Crossing down to the table with plates and utensils, she is impressed in spite of herself.*) That’s a great way to learn prepositions, Elijah.

CHARLOTTE. (*Crossing down with the plate of sandwiches.*) Yeah, Danny, after dinner, I would be up for a continuation of the game.

DANIEL. (*Sitting at the table.*) You would? You would play it with me?

CHARLOTTE. (*She crosses up to get glasses of soda.*) Yeah, why not? I finished that paper I was writing.

ELIJAH. (*Sitting at the table.*) Maybe Danny doesn’t need me as a tutor after all. It seems to me that he has a built-in one in Charlotte.

MOM. (*Sitting.)* Charlotte, would you be willing to help your brother on more of a regular basis?

CHARLOTTE. (*She crosses down to set the glasses on the table and sits.*) Sure, why not? I guess I owe him that for making fun of him for years.

(*During the conversation, they all help themselves to the food and soda.*)

ELIJAH. Sounds perfect, except for one thing.

MOM. What’s that?

ELIJAH. Your grief. How you’re going to deal with your mutual losses.

MOM. You know, Charlotte. You were right about his nose. It is a lot like your father’s. You’re a handsome man, Elijah.

ELIJAH. You’re trying to unnerve me so that I change the subject, Joanne.

MOM. (*Coyly.*) Maybe.

ELIJAH. You can’t tell me you enjoy being a workaholic? Being away from your kids fifty to sixty hours a week?

MOM. All right. There is something about you that’s starting to hypnotize me. My kids will attest to the fact that I’m not easy to persuade.

ELIJAH. I’ve noticed.

MOM. Reverend Jones knows that I have issues trusting people.

ELIJAH. I think you made that obvious yesterday at the reception.

CHARLOTTE. Mom, just shut up and listen to the guy!

MOM. Charlotte! There’s no room at this table for disrespect. (*To* GRAHAM.) All right. Fine. Get on with it.

ELIJAH. Studies show that grief subsides when the affected reach out to other people who are in need.

CHARLOTTE. That makes sense. You forget about your own problems when you are helping people with larger ones.

MOM. Okay, I’m still listening.

ELIJAH. Are you open to getting involved in a charity at Redeemer?

MOM. It depends on what it is. We won’t be around Jesus freaks, trying to convert us all day, will we?

ELIJAH. No, again, no one is interested in converting you, Joanne, especially since you clearly don’t want to be. We just want a little of your time and muscle.

MOM. Well, I don’t have much of either, I’m afraid.

DANIEL. Mom!

MOM. Okay, I hear you.

ELIJAH. Have you heard of Habitat for Humanity?

CHARLOTTE. I have. My friend Amy works for it, and I’ve always wanted to do it, too.

ELIJAH. Well, it’s simple. I take a group of parishioners – many of whom are just like you – to the south end of town two afternoons a week where we are helping to build a ranch-style house for a homeless family.

MOM. We don’t know a thing about carpentry. I don’t even think I own a hammer.

ELIJAH. That’s all right. Most of the volunteers do simple things, like assist the more skilled workers. Would you like to join us?

MOM. I don’t know if I’d be able to with my tight work schedule and all.

DANIEL. Mom…

CHARLOTTE. Mom, we all need this.

MOM. I’ll see if I can get off. It’s iffy, but I’ll try. Is that good enough, kids?

CHARLOTTE. Yeah, Mom, it sounds like the project could be sort of like a real kind of magic for Danny as well as for you and me. We can use our hands to change people’s lives.

DANIEL. Yeah, Mom, like Je-

MOM. (*Quickly interrupting him.*) Don’t say, ‘Like Jesus.’ We’ll see. The thing is, Charlotte, you have to continue to help Danny with his homework. And Danny, your grades have to go up.

DANIEL. No problem, Mom. Are you sure you are going to help me, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. (*Rising to clear the table.*) I guess so.

DANIEL. That’s what I call ‘strange magic’! Charlotte turning it around and being nice to me! And Mom thinking about letting me do something other than just homework.

CHARLOTTE. Hey, I didn’t say I’d be nice to you all the time; I said I’d help you with your homework, idiot!

ELIJAH. Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE. Sorry, I know. It’s just a reflexive action. I’ll have to work on it.

DANIEL. And what about my magic, Mom?

MOM. What about it?

DANIEL. Can Pastor Elijah teach me some more card tricks?

MOM. I don’t know, Danny.

ELIJAH. If you are comfortable with it, I entertain pre-school children during Sunday school at the church. Danny could be my assistant. He told me he used to help his grandfather with his act. Joanne, there will be a lot of other people present, particularly parents of the children.

DANIEL. (*Very excited, rising.*) Really? Really? Are you serious? I’d love that. I’d really love that! Mom, would that be all right? Like can I work for Habitat and be Pastor Elijah’s assistant?

MOM. I need time to think about it, Danny.

DANIEL. Mom, please, please!

MOM. (*Insistently.*) I just said I’d think about it.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

MOM. (*Rising.*) That must be your ride, Pastor.

ELIJAH. (*Rising.*) Elijah.

MOM. Elijah. (*She rises and crosses stage right to the door and opens it.*)

REVEREND JONES. (*Entering.*) I’m back. How did things go?

ELIJAH. Reverend, I think we made a lot of progress here this evening.

REVEREND JONES. Excellent!

MOM. Reverend Jones, how about I wrap up a few sandwiches for you? (*She crosses hastily back to the table, left, taking sandwiches to the kitchen and finding some plastic wrap.*) You should take the Angel’s Food cake with you as well. We’re not big on cake.

DANIEL. Mom! I like cake.

JONES. I’ll take the sandwiches, but not the cake, thank you. You seem like you need the presence of an angel in any form.

(MOM *crosses stage right to* JONES, *handing him the sandwiches.* ELIJAH *rises from the table and crosses down center to the couch where he picks up his coat and puts it on*.)

ELIJAH. (*Finding a business card in his coat pocket, he crosses to* MOM.) If you make a positive decision, here is my card. My cell phone number is at the bottom. Call me about Habitat.

DANIEL. (*Rising from the table.*) Bye!

CHARLOTTE. Good night.

MOM. Good-bye, gentlemen.

(JONES *and* ELIJAH *exit as the lights dim.*)

SCENE 4: *It is a few weeks later just before the end of October, one day after school.* CHARLOTTE, DANIEL, *and* MOM *are rushing about the house, finding materials needed for work on the Habitat for Humanity project.*)

MOM. Danny, Charlotte, have you seen my hammer?

DANIEL. Yeah, I think it’s in the first drawers. I’ll find it. (*He opens one of the kitchen drawers and finds it.*) Got it, Mom.

MOM. Good, Danny. Thanks. Just hold onto it for me.

DANIEL. Nope. I’ll leave it here on the counter for you. Don’t forget to take it with you.

CHARLOTTE. (*Standing by the couch, down right, fiddling with her jacket.*) Mom, I’m amazed that you were able to get off to work on the ranch house today.

MOM. (*Buttoning her coat, down left of the kitchen table.*) Well, I asked one of the other managers to come in for me. I’ve subbed for her time after time, so she owes me big time. Besides, I need to finish putting up some trim.

DANIEL. Geez, Mom, you’re a regular Bob Villa.

CHARLOTTE. Bob Villa? Who’s he?

DANIEL. Some carpenter who had a TV show in the 80’s called *This Old House*. Like I went on this site on the Internet ‘cause I wanted to know about dry wall, and his name came up. By the way, Mom, can Tommy Daab come over Saturday night?

MOM. Tommy Daab? As in the boy you went to kindergarten with?

DANIEL. Yeah, he’s in my social studies class.

MOM. His mom and I went to high school together. She was always nice to me. Well, since I checked with all your teachers, who told me that you turned in all your homework this week, yes, you may ask him to come over.

DANIEL. Thanks! (*He exits left into his room.*)

CHARLOTTE. (*Crossing right to her mother.*) What about me?

MOM. What about you?

CHARLOTTE. Can I ask Amy over to watch a chick flick upstairs?

MOM. Okay, just as long as you don’t stay up too late.

CHARLOTTE. Awesome! Do you and Elijah have plans for Saturday night?

MOM. No. Why would Elijah and I have plans?

CHARLOTTE. I’ve been noticing the way that you two have been giving each other the look while working on the house lately.

MOM. What exactly is ‘the look’?

CHARLOTTE. You know, the ‘look of love.’

MOM. (*Crossing down left to the table.*) I don’t know about that, Charlotte. He just reminds me of your dad sometimes. To tell you the truth, I’m just not ready to date anyone right now.

CHARLOTTE. Why? You need someone special in your life.

MOM. I already have two special people: you and your brother.

CHARLOTTE. I mean someone new, someone male who’s around your age.

A romantic interest.

MOM. You watch too many chick flicks, sweetheart. You’re sixteen, very intelligent, but still naïve.

CHARLOTTE. Maybe in some ways, not in others.

MOM. What do you mean by that?

CHARLOTTE. I’m in high school, Mom! Do you have any idea what kids talk about in the hallways these days? And don’t forget that my birthday is like in two weeks. We need to go to the DMV to get my permit.

MOM. A. I don’t want to know. B. I haven’t forgotten! (*Pause.*) Hon, I hate to burst your bubble, but life doesn’t always have a Hollywood ending. A woman with trust issues isn’t ready to pursue any kind of a relationship with a man she met a few weeks ago. But that doesn’t mean she won’t ever. (*She crosses up left of the couch.*)

CHARLOTTE. Why are you using third person?

MOM. Because I don’t quite feel comfortable talking to you about my problems.

CHARLOTTE. (*Following her.*) Well, if not me, who? Danny?

MOM. No, obviously not.

CHARLOTTE. You can always pour your heart out to Uncle Ronnie like Danny does. Ronnie will listen to you for hours and won’t say a word.

MOM. (*Laughing.*) Actually, confiding in Ronnie wouldn’t be such a bad idea, and a couple times when I was cleaning Danny’s room, I was definitely tempted to. He’d sure be a lot cheaper than my therapist. (*She crosses down to sit on the couch.*)

CHARLOTTE. You’re seeing a therapist?

MOM. I wasn’t planning on telling you for a while, but yes, I am – one that my friend Rebecca sees. So far, so good. She’s the one who persuaded me to get everyone involved in Habitat and got me to accept Danny’s craving for fantasy, especially magic.

CHARLOTTE. (*Crossing to the couch and sitting beside* MOM.) I was wondering who made up your mind for you. Well, when you get past your issues, do you think Elijah may be ‘the one’?

MOM. I don’t want to disappoint you because you have been hinting that you’d like it if we got together ever since day one, but honestly, I can’t say.

CHARLOTTE. (*Hugging her mother.*) Mom, I just want you to be happy, and personally, I wouldn’t mind being a member of a real family again. You know, one with a mom and a dad. The pain-in-the-butt kid brother I could definitely lose, though.

MOM. (*Rising.*) Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE. Just kidding, Mom.

MOM. (*Crossing left to kitchen.*) I understand how you feel, but you can’t force something like that. And besides, I like our little, unconventional family just fine. On the other hand, I will say that I’ve always been a sucker for a pretty face, and Elijah sure as heck has one and with Dad’s nose at that! (*She begins to sing* Heart’s *‘Magic Man’ as her daughter chimes in.*) ‘He’s the magic man, an, an, an, an.’

CHARLOTTE. (*Rising and crossing to her mother.*) Now we’re getting somewhere.

MOM. (*She putters in the kitchen, putting things away.*) Speaking of getting somewhere, where is your brother? We have to leave soon; otherwise, we’ll miss the van and wind up getting nowhere.

(*The lights dim on* MOM *and* CHARLOTTE *and come up on* DANIEL *who* *is in his room, putting on his jacket and talking to Ronnie.*)

DANIEL. Well, Uncle Ronnie. Sit right there for a sec. Before I have to go, lemme just practice my coin trick on you, the one Elijah almost got in trouble for. (*Finding a quarter, he crosses to the dummy.*) It’ll only take a sec. Notice that I’ve put the quarter in my sleeve. (*He pulls up his arm, lowers it, and pulls the quarter out from behind Ronnie’s head.*) Awesome! I did it right the first time. Am I getting good or what? (*Pausing, he looks at the effigy very hard.*) Listen, dude, I’ve been doing some serious thinking lately. Your sitting here day after day, counting the pinstripes on the wallpaper is like pretty boring stuff. I like that you are always here for me and all, but to tell you the ‘unvanquished truth’ – as this character Freak would say in the book I read in language arts – you gotta get a life of your own. You know I love you and you’re family and all, but I’m trying to be a better person by working on the magic – ‘within and without’ as Elijah would say. If your father was still here, he’d like that, too. I haven’t been around you much lately, I know. I joined Homework Club so that Charlotte could do her own homework without worrying about me anymore – not that she ever really does; I’m doing this Habitat stuff, and I got the magic act with Elijah during Sunday school like whenever Mom can tag along with me. (*Pause.*) Yeah, I know. I feel just as sad as you do. But we all gotta grow up sometime. (*He crosses up to remove the mask from the effigy’s head.*) You know, Uncle Ron, you just gave me an idea, but it’s gonna mean good-bye for a while. It’s okay, though, ‘cause it won’t be forever. When I get real old, get married, and have a kid like me, you can come back and visit so that you could be Great Uncle Ronnie to him and help him through all the crap he has to go through, especially in sixth grade. How does that sound? And me and you can teach him all the tricks we learned from Gramps and Elijah – if I still can remember them all. But you’ll remember. I know you will.

(*The lights come up on* MOM, *who begins to the front door. She is holding the hammer.*)

MOM. (*Calling.*) Danny, we need to leave now! (*To* CHARLOTTE.) Go get him, please. I’ll wait for you two in the car. (*She exits.*)

DANIEL. (*Taking the faceless effigy and shoving it under the bed.*) Okay. It’s under the bed you go. Now you see him. Now you don’t! Magic! (*Pause.*) I’m coming!

CHARLOTTE. (*Entering the room, seeing the empty chair.*) Hey, where’s Uncle Ronnie?

DANIEL. Palm Springs. He decided to meet up with some old guys and play golf there. I told him he should just stay there. Palm Springs is like a really beautiful place, you know. He could live with one of his friends out there. I’m sure there’s room. Those Californians have a ton of cash. I’ll see him again when I have a kid of my own.

CHARLOTTE. (*Somewhat ruefully.*) Okay, Danny. (*Noticing the mask peering out form under the bed, she picks it up.*) The only problem is he left his face here.

DANIEL. Nah, that’s not his face. That’s my Halloween mask. I’ve decided to be Ronald Reagan for Halloween next week. I think Gramps would like that, don’t you?

CHARLOTTE. I think Gramps would like a lot of things.

 BLACKOUT

Chapter 10: Tolerance

 When it comes to down to wanting, there probably is not a person on the planet that does not desire world peace. Yet is it obtainable? It is – but only through tolerance. If people would only accept cultural, racial, religious, and political differences in others and learn to “live and let live,” the world might just be a perfectly benign place. “Rainbow Blue” is slightly longer than most of the other plays and should be produced as written due to make-up requirements: the character of Rainbow needs to be bathed in blue base! Overall, the piece teaches the wrong of bullying and the right of tolerance in an offbeat, yet intelligible way. Produced for a minimal amount, the play was staged as a fifty-minute assembly in two different middle schools in 2005 and received rave reviews. The year of its premiere is irrelevant, though, especially when the theme is considered. Tolerance is a timeless concept that needs constant re-visitation until the human race can really understand what it means and apply it to everyday life.

Rainbow Blue

Characters

Mr. Dickens Eric Steven

Mrs. Hilfen Erin Sean

Rainbow Blue/Reilly Dawn Anthony

Chelsea Michele Ashley

Kimberly Tilly Sunshine

Joe Gail

 ACT I

SCENE 1: *An English classroom at Globe Middle School, Anywhere, U.S.A., sometime at the end of September in the early 2000’s. At rise,* MR. DICKENS, *a humorless, middle-aged, middle school English teacher who has never had much of a life outside the classroom, is writing a journal prompt on the chalkboard, up center. Clearly, he takes his subject matter very seriously and is consequently a bit stiff and overly formal. He instructs by the book, rarely smiling because he does not understand the concept of happiness. Talking and laughing, some students are seated at their desks. Others filter in from up left and slowly find their seats. A bell sounds. Some students hesitate to take their seats until…*

MR. DICKENS. (*Turning from the chalkboard.*) All right, people. That was the late bell. Take your seats, quickly and quietly. Thank you. (*He pauses until they do.*) Anthony, come up and call roll, please. (*He takes a clipboard from the top of his desk and hands it to* ANTHONY *as he crosses down left.* ANTHONY *is the teacher’s pet. He is very officious and a bit of an airhead. He tends to keep away from the popular kids although he gets along with everyone.*)

ANTHONY. Sure, Mr. D. Chelsea? (*While* ANTHONY *is taking attendance,* MR. DICKENS *finishes writing the assignment on the board, up center.*)

CHELSEA. (*In an affected voice.*) Here, sweet boy.

ANTHONY. (*Trying to hide his embarrassment.*) Yeah, right. Kim?

KIM. Over here, you gorgeous hunk! (*She blows a kiss in his direction.*)

(CHELSEA *and* KIM *are best friends. They like to be in their closed clique of popular girls and are snooty and often mean.*)

ANTHONY. (*Annoyed.*) Stop. Joe?

JOE. Yo.

(JOE *is a stereotypical slacker. He is not bright and has little to no motivation as a student.*)

ANTHONY. Ashley?

ASHLEY. Here.

(ASHLEY *is smart and popular.* ASHLEY *is a follower and will say anything to be accepted, mirroring the pack leaders,* CHELSEA *and* KIM.)

ANTHONY. Sean?

SEAN. Hey, dude. What up?

(SEAN *tries to be the class clown. He is the quintessential show-off who does not get any attention at home because he comes from a big family.*)

MR. DICKENS. (*Turning down stage to face the class.*) People, please answer appropriately. A simple ‘here’ or ‘present’ will do just fine. Geez, it’s not as though you have never done this before! (*He continues writing on the board.*)

SEAN. Right. Sorry, Mr. Dickens.

ANTHONY. Eric?

ERIC. (*Rising dramatically.*) Precisely present. (MR. DICKENS *turns to give* ERIC *a dirty look.*) Sorry, Mr. Dickens, but it’s an example of alliteration.

MR. DICKENS. (*Still a bit perturbed.*) Yes, Eric, I realize that. (MR. DICKENS *crosses to his desk down left.*)

ANTHONY. Erin?

(ERIN *raises her hand. She and* ERIC *are practically twin Goths.* ERIC *sees himself as a beat poet/actor from the 1950’s. He thinks he is larger than life and acts like he is.* ERIN *is a good sidekick. Although she thinks for herself,* ERIC *always contradicts her. She likes to be a Gothic girl because she is not really accepted elsewhere. It is the only way she can be noticed since she knows that any attention is better than none at all.*)

ANTHONY. Dawn?

DAWN. Here.

(DAWN *is obsessed with fashion. She needs to be since she is not as pretty as some of her friends. Yet they like her because she comes from a wealthy family and always wears the latest outfits.*)

ANTHONY. Michele?

MICHELE. I’m here although I wish I weren’t.

(MICHELE *is a contemporary Valley Girl who is into the latest expressions. She can be obnoxious, loud, and sarcastic. Yet the popular students accept her because they secretly fear her.*)

MR. DICKENS. (*He is now at his desk, pushing papers.*) What did I say, Miss Jones?

MICHELE. Sorry.

MR. DICKENS. This shouldn’t take all morning, people.

ANTHONY. Okay, sorry. I’ll speed it up. Tilly?

TILLY. (*Picking her head up from inside a book.*) Present.

ANTHONY. Gail?

GAIL. (*Picking her head up from inside another book.*) I’m here.

(TILLY *and* GAIL *are intellectuals. They live to study, making the honor roll every marking period, and have no lives outside their books.*)

ANTHONY. Steven?

STEVEN. Sure thing.

(STEVEN *is a stereotypical bully and can be a smart Alec like his buddy,* SEAN. STEVEN *has low self-esteem but hides it well by making fun of others.*)

ANTHONY. And of course, I’m here. All present and accounted for, Mr. Dickens.

MR. DICKENS. Thank you, Anthony. You may take the form down to the attendance office. (ANTHONY *removes the form from the clipboard, hands the board to his teacher, and exits up left.*)

MRS. HILFEN. (*Her voice can be heard over the P.A. Although she cannot be seen yet, she is about forty. Quirky, unorthodox, yet creative, she has a sense of humor but knows when to stop laughing.*) Good morning, Globe Middle School. Welcome to yet another Monday. (*The class groans.*) This is your favorite new guidance counselor, Mrs. Hilfen, standing in for Principal Gardner, who is out sick. Please rise for the pledge. (*All rise and salute the flag that is protruding from the chalkboard. After saying the Pledge of Allegiance in unison, all sit, including* MR. DICKENS.) There is only one announcement today, and it is indeed an unfortunate one. Due to lack of interest, the meeting of the newspaper staff that was originally scheduled for today has been cancelled. Have a nice day, everyone!

(*There is some reaction to this.* MR. DICKENS *stands, objects, and silences the group while crossing center.* ANTHONY *returns upstage left and crosses down right to find his seat.*)

MR. DICKENS. (*Yelling above the din.*) Enough already! (*The class quiets down.*) Our plans for today have changed slightly. As I mentioned on Friday, Mrs. Hilfen was going to visit today and give us a lecture on tolerance; however, as you just heard, she won’t be able to since she is substituting for Mr. Gardner. So, I have just put a writing prompt on the board. Let’s look at it. (MR. DICKENS *crosses to the board and reads.*) ‘If you could be one of the colors of the rainbow, which would you be and why?’ I’d like for you to come up with something creative here. Use your imaginations, that is, if your video games haven’t already stolen them from you. Really become your choice of color. Think about how the color would affect the way you feel, the way you act, etc., etc. Obviously, you are expressing personal opinion here, so you can use first person point of view, which means the pronoun ‘I.’ Do the prewriting exercises first and then write your first drafts. Questions? (JOE, KIM, *and* SEAN *raise their hands.*) Yes, Joe. (*The other hands go down.*)

JOE. Yo. Like how long does it have to be?

MR. DICKENS. (*Exasperated.*) Why do you ask the same question every time I assign written work? Joe, you are writing for the entire period. It has to be longer than a paragraph.

JOE. Okay, I get your drift, yo.

MR. DICKENS. And I have a question for you, Joe. Are you ever going to speak English properly?

JOE. Yo?

MR. DICKENS. Never mind. (SEAN *and* KIM *raise their hands again.*) Yes, Sean.

SEAN. What if you’re color blind like me? (*The class laughs.*)

MR. DICKENS. Don’t be smart. You and everyone else in here can recognize colors. Are there any questions of a serious nature? (KIM *still has her hand up.*) Kim?

KIM. I don’t feel like a color today, Mr. Dickens. May I pick another topic?

MR. DICKENS. No, missy. All right. If there are no more questions, get started. (MR. DICKENS *returns to his desk. He sits and starts grading a stack of papers.*)

CHELSEA. Pisst, Ashley!

ASHLEY. What?

CHELSEA. Is this a completely juvenile topic or what?

ASHLEY. Yeah, I think my third grade teacher assigned it a hundred years ago. I remember choosing green because I felt like I was going to throw up that day. (*They both giggle.*)

MR. DICKENS. Chelsea? Ashley? Is there a problem, ladies?

BOTH. No, Mr. Dickens.

MR. DICKENS. I want to see a completed first draft composition from each of you by the end of class. Don’t waste time, please!

(*At this, there is a knock at the door.* MRS. HILFEN *enters up left.*)

MRS. HILFEN. Excuse me, class. I’m sorry to interrupt. May I see you for a moment, Mr. Dickens?

MR. DICKENS. Of course.

(MR. DICKENS *crosses left to* MRS. HILFEN *who whispers something into* MR. DICKENS’*s ear. He responds by nodding.* MR. DICKENS *crosses center to address the class while* MRS. HILFEN *exits up left.*)

MR. DICKENS. I am sorry to disturb you, class, but Mrs. Hilfen has just informed me that we have a new student, and ironically, her name is Rainbow Blue. (*A few students snicker and whisper.*) That’s enough, please.

(RAINBOW *enters up left. She is precisely what her name suggests – blue, the blue found in a prism or rainbow – even her hair is blue although she is wearing normal school clothes. Unbeknownst to all except her mother,* RAINBOW *is really* REILLY, *daughter of* MRS. HILFEN, *a normal girl of thirteen who is good at deception and a very believable actress.* REILLY *puts up with her mom and her outrageous experiments because she admires her ingenuity.*)

RAINBOW. Hello, everyone.

(*Each character reacts in accordance with his or her personality. All freeze in their exaggerated poses. At this time, the natural stage lighting dims and is replaced by blue to suggest a transition from the conscious to the subconscious. Each character rises and speaks his/her thoughts directly to the audience, unbeknownst to the other characters on stage that remain frozen until they, too, share their thoughts individually.* *A spotlight can be directed on each character as he or she speaks, or each character may possess a flashlight to shine on his or her face.*)

CHELSEA. (*Breaking and standing at her seat.*) You gotta be kidding me! Since when do they let Smurfs into school! (*She sits down and resumes her frozen position. Each character does the same thereafter.*)

ERIC. What a visual marvel! She is quite the dauntless damsel to come to school for the first time looking like that! I’ll write a poem about her, ‘Rainbow Blue, your azure hair is filled with spring dew; could I possibly fall in love with you?’ (*He pauses while looking at her carefully.*) No, definitely not.

KIM. I wonder how she got her hair to be that shade of blue? I tried to dye my hair red once, and it turned fluorescent pink!

ASHLEY. She really looks gross. Is there such a shade as vomit blue?

SEAN. Geez, I wonder what she looks like in shorts? Gym is third period. (*He laughs.*) I can’t wait!

ERIN. What kind of name is Rainbow? She must have hippies for parents. Her brothers and sisters probably have names like River, Moon Unit, or Seed Pod. Very cool!

JOE. Yo. I mean, like yoooo! A blue babe. I wonder what my parents would say if I brought her home and told them she was my girlfriend?

DAWN. Just keep her away from me. Her skin color clashes with her blouse. She’s a fashion emergency! Help! Call in the *Fashion Police*!

TILLY. I wonder if she gets depressed a lot since she’s blue and all.

GAIL. Is that her true skin color? It can’t be.

JOE. Yo!

STEVEN. Did they change the date of Halloween to September 30th?

MICHELE. (*Sarcastically.*) Shut up! She can’t be serious! I can’t believe her mom lets her out of the house looking like that! That is, unless her mom looks like that too! OMG!

ANTHONY. I guess I’ll have to add her to the attendance roster. Bummer. How do you spell Rainbow Blue?

(*Normal lighting is restored. Everyone loosens up.*)

MR. DICKENS. (*He is still in shock but pretends that being blue is perfectly ordinary.*) Hello, you must be Rainbow. Why don’t you have a seat over here? (*Nervously, he leads her to an empty desk down right. Everyone around her moves back a little but still stares at her dumbfounded.* MR. DICKENS *looks at the board, realizes the inopportune nature of the assignment, and quickly trots over to it. He begins to erase it madly. The class does not notice as they are still staring at* RAINBOW.) Class, I think that rather than write today, we’ll start reading John Steinbeck’s novel, *Of Mice and Men.* Okay? Anthony and Steven, please pass out the books.

(*The lights dim as the curtain closes.*)

SCENE 2: *A hallway just outside* MR. DICKENS’*s classroom. The scene can be played in front of the curtain on the apron of the stage, front of curtain. At rise,* STEVEN, JOE, *and* SEAN *are down left, loitering, laughing, and talking.* CHELSEA, KIM, *and* MICHELE, *followed by* DAWN*, enter down right. They stand down center and down right, laughing and talking.*

CHELSEA. (*Entering, right.*) I swear. I could hardly keep from cracking up. I mean, she really looks like a total Smurf! (*All laugh. The boys respond as well.*)

DAWN. If I were Rainbow, I’d tone down the blue a little and maybe add a little pink, especially around the cheekbones.

KIM. You can’t be serious, Dawn. Don’t you think she is beyond a makeover? (*All laugh.*)

MICHELE. I just hope she stays away from us. She can hang out with the Goths when she gets lonely.

DAWN. Yeah, black and blue always go well together.

KIM. Enough with the fashion trash already, Dawn.

DAWN. (*Raising a fist.*) I ought to make you black and blue!

KIM. (*Sarcastically.*) I’m so scared!

(*Enter* GAIL *and* TILLY *left. They walk across the apron while speaking and exit right.*)

GAIL. Do you think the blue coloration of her skin is the result of a chemical reaction of some kind?

TILLY. I’m not sure. Let’s look it up on the Internet.

STEVEN (*As they pass him.*) Hey look, everyone! It’s the Geeky Girls Club! (GAIL *and* TILLY *turn and give him a dirty look.*) Have a nice day, girls! (*They exit.*)

JOE. Yo! Here she comes!

(RAINBOW *enters down right, and she almost bumps into* GAIL *and* TILLY.)

SEAN. (*He follows* RAINBOW *and sings mockingly while holding his nose.*) ‘I’m blue; my life is through. I thought I had a date with you. I guess I just don’t rate with you. I wish I were dead and buried…’ (*All laugh.*)

RAINBOW. If you’re trying to introduce yourself, that’s an odd way of doing it.

JOE. Yo, Sean is our token odd ball.

SEAN. Yeah? If I’m odd, what does that make her?

MICHELE. Like totally out there? (*All laugh.*)

CHELSEA. She looks like she comes from another planet.

KIM. Yeah, one at the far end of the universe. Totally weird.

(ERIN *and* ERIC *enter down left, unnoticed.*)

STEVEN. I don’t know. She looks a little sad to me. Why so blue, Rainy? (*All laugh.*)

RAINBOW. You’re so original. (*She starts to cross stage right.*)

STEVEN. Sometimes. Hey, what color do you turn when you’re choking?

ERIC. (*Crossing to him.*) Let her be, you scurvy nave!

(*A bell rings.*)

STEVEN. (*Sarcastically.*) Saved by the bell, huh? We’ll just leave you freaks alone. You deserve one another. Come on, everybody! Let’s go to class.

(STEVEN *takes his fist to* ERIC’*s shoulder. A scuffle breaks out.* SEAN *and* JOE *intervene, breaking it up.*)

JOE. Yo, chill! He’s not worth it.

(*All exit down left and down right, except for* ERIN, ERIC, *and* RAINBOW.)

ERIN. It’s okay, Rainbow. It takes a while to fade into the woodwork around here.

RAINBOW. Thanks for sticking up for me. Unfortunately, I get that sort of attention everywhere I go. I wish people would just accept me for who I am on the inside. They just can’t seem to get beyond my skin color. What are your names?

ERIC. I’m Eric, and this is Erin. Listen, you seem as though you’re a nice person and all, but we like to keep a low profile.

ERIN. Yeah. Those guys just stopped making fun of us, thanks to you.

ERIC. We like the peace and quiet if you know what I mean. (*They turn to exit down left.*)

RAINBOW. (*Following them.*) You mean you don’t want to be my friends? We probably have a lot in common.

ERIN. No, sorry. We like to hang out alone together.

RAINBOW. I’m from California. Don’t you want to hear about what it is like to live there? There are lots of Goths there.

ERIC. No, that’s all right. We’ll do the research if we ever get curious. No offense, really. Bye. (*They exit left.*)

RAINBOW. (*Shouting after them.*) Gee, thanks. Thanks a lot. (*To the audience.*) Alone again, naturally. (*She exits as the lights dim.*)

SCENE 3: *A few hours later in the cafeteria. At rise, there are six tables staggered about the stage floor. Some characters are seated while others enter from different areas of the wings and make their way to the following tables:*

*Table 2:* STEVEN, JOE, *and* SEAN

*Table 3:* CHELSEA, KIM, MICHELE, DAWN, *and* ASHLEY

*Table 4:* ANTHONY, GAIL, *and* TILLY

*Table 5:* ERIC *and* ERIN

RAINBOW *enters last, down right, and sits at the first table alone.*

ASHLEY. (*Loudly so that* RAINBOW *can hear her.*) Let’s see. Did Mom include anything blue in my lunch today?

KIM. What can she possibly include that is blue?

CHELSEA. That’s easy. Blueberries.

MICHELE. Blueberries aren’t really blue, you know.

KIM. Yes, they are.

MICHELE. They’re only blue on the surface. They’re *disguised.* (RAINBOW *and the other girls echo the word ‘disguised’ in unison. A spot can be positioned on* RAINBOW *so that the audience can see her reactions to the various conversations.*) Yeah. They’re really purple.

CHELSEA. Are you suggesting that Rainbow Blue is purple?

MICHELE. No. Did I say that? I said that blueberries are really purple. Haven’t you ever eaten a piece of blueberry pie and afterwards looked at your teeth in the mirror?

KIM. What’s your point, Michele?

MICHELE. (*Impatiently.*) My point is your teeth turn purple. (*Yelling.*) *Blueberries are actually purple!* (*Everyone in the cafeteria reacts to her outburst.*)

ASHLEY. All right already. Geez. Do you want to get us in trouble? (*Pause.*) Hey, I know something that’s really blue and can be found in a lunch box.

ALL. What?

ASHLEY. Moldy bread!

(*All of the girls say, ‘Gross!’ simultaneously and then break into gales of laughter.*)

GAIL. I couldn’t find anything about blue skin color and chemical reactions on the Internet. (*Mystified.*) It just confounds me.

TILLY. I didn’t really have enough time, but I Googled ‘Blue Skin,’ and The Blue Man Group came up.

GAIL. Aren’t they drummers?

ANTHONY. Something like that. Magicians, maybe? I just know that they play Vegas a lot. Hey, do you think that Rainbow is related to them?

TILLY. I don’t know. Maybe she’s their cousin or something. Or, maybe she was once part of the group, and they kicked her out because someone discovered she’s a girl.

ANTHONY. Yeah, that’s probably it. I mean, they couldn’t change the name of the group to ‘The Blue Man with Blue Girl Group.’ It just wouldn’t go over.

GAIL. Yeah, right.

ANTHONY. It’s way too long. (TILLY *and* GAIL *give him an annoyed look.*)

GAIL. I have a theory as to why she’s blue.

TILLY. Really? What is it?

GAIL. Rainbow is a blue blood.

ANTHONY. We all have blue blood.

GAIL. That’s not what I mean. She’s royalty – royalty of a different color.

ANTHONY. Royalty gone wrong.

GAIL. So wrong that she was ostracized from the House of Windsor.

TILLY. I doubt it. She doesn’t have a British accent.

ANTHONY. (*With a British accent.*) By Jove! I say, Governor. She’s quite right, you know. Quite right.

(GAIL *gives* ANTHONY *a dirty look.*)

ANTHONY. Hey, wait a minute.

GAIL/TILLY. What?

ANTHONY. I know why she’s blue. It just hit me.

GAIL/TILLY. Why?

ANTHONY. Last year, I read this book for English about this guy who turned blue after he had taken a strange drug. He couldn’t get a job or anything, so he wound up in a freak show. Rainbow must’ve taken the same drug!

TILLY. That’s got to be it. That’s the only reasonable explanation!

GAIL. So what you’re saying is that Rainbow is on some bizarre medication, and we’re the weird ones!

ANTHONY. Absolutely!

GAIL/TILLY. (*Sarcastically.*) Yeah, absolutely! (*They take scraps of food and throw them at* ANTHONY.)

SEAN. (*Crosses down to* RAINBOW, *singing.*) ‘Somewhere over the rainbow, blue birds fly. Birds fly over the rainbow, why then oh why can’t I?’

STEVEN. You are too much, Sean. (*He grabs* SEAN, *dragging him back to his seat.*) How many songs with *rainbow* or *blue* do you know anyway?

SEAN. A few. (*He sings.*) ‘Blue, blue, my world is blue. Blue is my world without you.’ And then there’s ‘Blue moon, I saw you standing alone…’ I forget the rest of it.

STEVEN. I’ll drink to that. (*He picks up his milk container and drinks.*)

JOE. Sean, you’re such a buffoon, yo.

SEAN. And you’re not, ‘yo?’

JOE. Shut up.

ERIN. Look at Rainbow, Eric. She’s sitting all by herself. Don’t you feel sorry for her?

ERIC. Why?

ERIN. No one likes her because she’s radically different.

ERIC. Obviously. And I suppose people adore us?

ERIN. That’s what I’m trying to say. We’re different, too. Maybe we should join forces with Rainbow and show the popular kids that we matter as much as they do.

ERIC. It would be our three voices against their fifteen. No one would hear us. (*Emphatically.*) We would simply *drown* in their *sound.*

ERIN. Thanks for the discouraging bit of poetry.

ERIC. You’re welcome.

(*A teacher’s voice is heard over the P.A. ‘Okay, eighth grade, time to clean up and get back to class.’ All students – except for the boys at the second table and* RAINBOW *– rise at slightly different times and begin to throw away their trash.*)

JOE. Yo. Wait. I’ve got an idea.

SEAN. (*Sarcastically.*) Hold on! Stop the presses! Joe’s got an idea!

STEVEN. That’s pretty earth shattering. Since when do you think, Joe, you yoyo?

JOE. Just cap it and come here, both of you.

(JOE, SEAN, *and* STEVEN *fall into a huddle just as a football team would at a decisive moment in the game. We hear* SEAN *say, ‘I’ll do it.’* STEVEN *says, ‘I will, too!’ They clap, laugh, and separate.* RAINBOW *crosses to the garbage can down left. The boys follow her and create a semi-circle around her.*)

SEAN. Hi, Rainbow. How’s it flying? (STEVEN *steps behind her.*)

RAINBOW. (*Nervously. She sees that she is nothing but a caged bird.*) What do you guys want?

STEVEN. Well, we were just wondering whether you are really the color blue.

JOE. Or if you’re just painted blue. (*They creep up on her.*)

RAINBOW. Stay away from me! All of you!

STEVEN. Not if we can help it. (*He grabs her from behind and slams her down into a chair. Taking her arms, he ties them to the back of the chair with his hands and holds her there. Meanwhile,* JOE *grabs her ankles to prevent her from kicking either of them.*)

SEAN. (*Taking a plastic knife conveniently left on one of the tables, he approaches* RAINBOW *in a threatening manner.*) Here comes the boogieman. Ooh! She looks scared!

RAINBOW. (*To* STEVEN *and* JOE.) Take your filthy hands off me! Let me go!

(*Just in the knick of time,* MR. DICKENS *appears up right.*)

MR. DICKENS. (*Crossing down to them.*) Just what do you think you’re doing, boys?

(SEAN *freezes where he is, and* JOE *and* STEVEN *release* RAINBOW. *She stands up abruptly.*) Rainbow, what have they done to you?

RAINBOW. Nothing, yet. I think Sean wanted to scrape my skin with a plastic knife to see if my skin color would come off.

MR. DICKENS. Is this true, Sean?

SEAN. Yeah, but it was Joe’s idea.

JOE. Yo, you agreed to it.

MR. DICKENS. Come with me, all of you. You boys have just won yourselves a visit to the vice principal’s office. Rainbow, you come as well. I’ll need you to tell your side of the story.

 BLACKOUT – CURTAIN

(*There is a ten-minute intermission to allow for costume changes.*)

 ACT II

SCENE 1: *Two days have passed. It is morning. Students are walking to school, front of curtain. All enter in small groups and slowly walk from down right to down left.*)

KIM. Now wait a minute. What happened to them?

ASHLEY. You mean you didn’t hear about it?

KIM. No.

MICHELE. No one told you?

KIM. No. Come on. Just tell me, somebody. The suspense is killing me.

CHELSEA. Steven, Joe, Mike, and Sean were suspended for two days. They’re coming back to school today.

KIM. Wow! What did they do?

ASHLEY. They tried to attack Rainbow after lunch in the cafeteria on Monday.

KIM. Why?

DAWN. They wanted to see if the blue would rub off, so Sean took a plastic knife and came at her while Steven and Joe held her down. Guess he was planning to scrape off the skin on her face.

MICHELE. It was Joe’s idea.

KIM. Joe’s idea? Since when does Joe have ideas? (*They laugh collectively.*) That’s awful. I mean, yeah, the girl is a total nut case and all, but I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.

ALL. Yeah, you’re right.

(*Enter* SEAN, JOE, *and* STEVEN *as well as the remaining students. They all stand in their respective groups. Enter* REILLY, *a gorgeous ‘new girl,’ whom no one recognizes as* RAINBOW. *All react with ‘Wow!’ or ‘Who’s that?’ ‘She’s gorgeous!’ ‘She must be new.’* REILLY *crosses to* JOE.)

JOE. Yo, babe. Where have you been all my life?

REILLY. Far from you.

JOE. Aw, come on. Why are you so cold? I could help you warm up really fast, yo.

REILLY. No, thanks.

JOE. Yo, the Halloween dance is coming up. Let’s make it a date.

REILLY. Let’s not and say we did.

JOE. Yo, Okay, but if you change your mind…

REILLY. I doubt it. (*Ignoring him, she crosses to the group of girls.*)

STEVEN. (*Crossing to* JOE.) Ooh, shot down. Is that a first, Yoyo?

JOE. She’ll come around. You’ll see. Just give me a couple weeks, yo.

REILLY. Hi, girls. My name is Reilly. I’m new to these parts. My family just moved here from California.

MICHELE. Really? (*Other than the group of girls, the students on stage gradually exit.*)

CHELSEA. Too cool! Glad to meet you, Reilly.

ALL. Yeah, cool.

ASHLEY. I hope you are in our first period class.

KIM. Yeah, you can sit next to me. I’m the prettiest.

DAWN. (*Sidling up to* REILLY.) No way. She’ll want to sit next to me. She and I have fashion sense.

ASHLEY. Let her decide where she wants to sit.

REILLY. Please, I’m flattered, but you don’t have to argue over me.

MICHELE. I think what we are trying to say is we’d love it if you’d join our group of friends. You could tell us about California and stuff. Are the people like the characters on some of the TV shows?

REILLY. (*Laughing.*) Some of them. Thanks for the invitation. I’ll think about it. (*She continues to walk down left.*)

CHELSEA. (*Insulted.*) Really. She’ll change her mind when she meets all the other losers in Globe. Well, we’d better hurry. The first bell must’ve rung. I don’t want to be late for first period. Mr. Dickens already hates me.

ALL. Yeah. (*All exit left.*)

SCENE 2: MR. DICKENS’*s classroom. Students are seated.* ANTHONY *has just finished taking attendance. He stands center and then turns to face* MR. DICKENS *who is seated at his desk.*

ANTHONY. Mr. Dickens, Rainbow is the only one absent.

MR. DICKENS. All right, Anthony. You may take the attendance down to guidance. (*Facing the class.*) Good morning, class!

ALL. Good morning, Mr. Dickens.

MR. DICKENS. Fortunately, your new guidance counselor, Mrs. Hilfen, will be in this period to speak on the importance of tolerance. I say ‘fortunately’ because in light of what happened two days ago, you all need to hear what she has to say. Am I correct in this assumption? (*Pause.*) Well, am I?

ALL. Yes, Mr. Dickens.

MR. DICKENS. I’m sorry that Rainbow isn’t here today. From what I have been hearing lately, most – if not all of you – owe her an apology.

(*The students hang their heads.*)

ERIN. Psst! Eric! I wonder why Rainbow is absent today.

ERIC. I don’t know. It is possible that she was traumatized. I certainly wouldn’t want to be threatened with a lethal weapon, even if it was plastic.

ERIN. Yeah, maybe she was too scared to come to school – or just too sad. We should’ve made friends with her. If we had, then she wouldn’t have been alone in the cafeteria. Those guys wouldn’t have attacked her if she had been with other kids.

ERIC. You know what they say, ‘Hindsight is 20/20.’

ERIN. Maybe it’s not too late. Maybe when she gets back, we can ask her to be part of our group.

ERIC. Perhaps. I’ll ponder the possibility.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

MR. DICKENS. That should be Mrs. Hilfen. (*He crosses up center.*) Come in.

(MRS. HILFEN *and* REILLY *enter up stage center and cross down.*)

MRS. HILFEN. Good morning, class.

ALL. Good morning, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. Before we get started, I’d like to introduce you formally to my daughter Reilly although you have already met her.

CHELSEA. Some of us met her this morning on the way to school.

MRS. HILFEN. Actually, you all met her three days ago.

JOE. Yo. No way. I would’ve remembered her. (*The boys all react with an ‘Ooh!’*)

MR. DICKENS. Pipe down, boys!

MRS. HILFEN. Girls and boys, three days ago Reilly was your classmate; and from what she and others have told me, you weren’t particularly nice to her.

KIM. What do you mean, Mrs. Hilfen? I never saw her before this morning.

MICHELE. I definitely have never seen her before.

DAWN. I would’ve remembered her clothing style, Mrs. Hilfen. Definitely.

MRS. HILFEN. Okay, Reilly. I think it is time to tell them who you are.

REILLY. I’m Rainbow, Rainbow Blue, minus the blue, of course.

(*There is a collective gasp.* MR. DICKENS *realizes, comprehends the ruse, and just smiles.*)

MRS. HILFEN. Reilly, you may have a seat. I have some explaining to do. (RAINBOW *crosses down to her seat.*) You see, everyone, Rainbow Blue was an experiment that I came up with, and thankfully, Reilly agreed to be my guinea pig. When Mr. Gardner called me on Sunday night and told me he was planning to be out for a few days, I figured I’d come up with something creative, something interactive. Let’s call it a test of tolerance, which unfortunately, you all failed miserably. Can someone explain what the word ‘tolerance’ means? Tilly, how about you?

TILLY. Tolerance means acceptance.

MRS. HILFEN. Exactly. Mr. Dickens, may I borrow a dictionary?

MR. DICKENS. Absolutely. (*He takes a dictionary off the desk and crosses down to hand it to her.*)

MRS. HILFEN. Joe?

JOE. Yo!

MRS. HILFEN. Do you think you can look up the definition of ‘tolerance’ for us?

JOE. Yo. What’s it start with?

MRS. HILFEN. Never mind. Gail, you’ll look it up for us, won’t you?

GAIL. Okay, sure, Mrs. Hilfen. (HILFEN *hands* GAIL *the dictionary.*)

MRS. HILFEN. Thank you. Tolerance does involve acceptance, particularly the acceptance of individual differences – no matter how offbeat they may be. Gail, do you have a definition for us?

GAIL. Yes, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. Please read it to the class.

GAIL. OK. ‘Tolerance – noun – recognition of and respect for the opinions, practices, or behavior of others.’

MRS. HILFEN. Yes, respect is key here. You do know the meaning of respect, right? (*All nod.*) I should hope so. It is a shame that you give so little of it to others, as well as to yourselves. To me, tolerance also includes kindness. You all know what it is, but most of you don’t practice it. And you most certainly didn’t exhibit it toward Rainbow. Erin and Eric, what happened to you? Reilly told me you stood up for Rainbow, but ironically, refused to be her friends. Now why was that?

ERIN. Well, Mrs. Hilfen, I wanted to be her friend, really, but Eric was too scared.

MRS. HILFEN. Eric, what were you afraid of?

ERIC. Well, as you can see, Mrs. Hilfen, Erin and I are of the Gothic persuasion. I happen to be a very literate Goth with a dramatic flair. (*A few students react to this negatively.*) We were always the focus of ridicule before Rainbow, uh, your daughter touched ground, uh, arrived. When the noise was suddenly heading for another target, we were able to exist quietly for the first time in two years. Being a poet, I appreciate solace, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. That sounds a little self-centered to me, not to mention cowardly.

ERIN. But Mrs. Hilfen, just before you came, I suggested that we really should be friends with Rainbow. Didn’t I, Eric?

ERIC. She did at that, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. Well, I’m sorry to say then that your suggestion came too late. Rainbow could’ve used a few friends, especially in the cafeteria. (ERIN *mouths ‘I told you so’ to* ERIC.) Chelsea, what about you and your gal pals?

CHELSEA. Well, Mrs. Hilfen, you’re new, so you probably aren’t aware of our reputation in Globe Middle. We are the popular, pretty girls – obviously. Let’s just say that blue is not one of our favorite colors. But of course, Mrs. Hilfen, Reilly is perfectly welcome to join our group.

MRS. HILFEN. You mean your clique? Chelsea, girls, how could you be so superficial? Can’t you see that other than color, there is no difference between Rainbow and Reilly? (*Getting angry.*) They are the *same person*! Yet you ridiculed Rainbow but accepted Reilly. Why is any sign of difference repulsive to you? If an attractive girl like Reilly carried a backpack that wasn’t considered chic, would you alienate her as well?

DAWN. Well, that all depends, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. (*Crossing to her.*) Depends on what, Dawn?

DAWN. It depends on whether the backpack matches her outfit and whether it is a designer backpack. You know, like a Coach bag. I don’t know. Does Coach make backpacks?

MRS. HILFEN. Dawn, I’m sorry to hear that you judge girls based on their material possessions. I suggest that you try looking beneath the surface next time. If it is all about color to you, Dawn and Chelsea, attempt to uncover the true hue of a person’s soul.

ERIC. (*Standing and applauding.*) Brava, Mrs. Hilfen! May I echo your words in my next poem?

MRS. HILFEN. I’ll ignore that request, Eric.

ERIC. Sorry to interrupt.

SEAN. (*Rises and crosses to* DAWN *angrily.*) Dawn, you’re such a snob! That’s the trouble with you and your girls, Chelsea. You can’t stand to see a hair out of place on anyone. If a person isn’t as perfect as you are, she’s trash for the can.

CHELSEA. (*Rises to face* SEAN.) Yeah, well, at least we don’t go around jumping innocent people and waving plastic knives in front of their faces!

MR. DICKENS. Sit down, you two!

MRS. HILFEN. Thank you, Mr. Dickens. I’m afraid I’ll have to agree with you, Chelsea. Sean, you and your gang of bullies should be ashamed of yourselves! (*Crossing to* STEVEN.) Steven, aren’t you aware that holding someone down against her will is considered assault? We could’ve brought up charges against you!

STEVEN. We were just joking – fooling around. It wasn’t a big deal.

JOE. Yo. Like where is your sense of humor?

MRS. HILFEN. Instilling fear in another person is *not* a laughing matter!

ERIN. Yeah, you scared her so much that she stayed home from school today!

MRS. HILFEN. Excuse me, Erin?

ERIN. Oops, I forgot that Rainbow is really Reilly, or Reilly is Rainbow. Uh, forget it! I’m so confused. (*All laugh.*)

STEVEN. I’m sorry, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. You’d better be. In fact, I think you all owe Reilly, a.k.a. Rainbow, an apology.

ALL. Sorry, Reilly.

MRS. HILFEN. Girls and boys, just because a person is different, it does not make him or her a freak of nature. Prejudice and bullying add up to hatred, whereas tolerance is love. (*Crossing to* JOE.) Joe, do you think you can remember the difference between the two?

JOE. Yo?

MRS. HILFEN. Everybody?

ALL. Yes, Mrs. Hilfen.

MRS. HILFEN. That’s great! That’s what I like to hear. From now on, I shall expect senseless acts of kindness from all of you. Don’t disappoint me, now. I’ll be watching you and so will the vice principal.

MR. DICKENS. (*Crossing to* HILFEN.) Thank you very much, Mrs. Hilfen. That was a very creative and effective experiment, not to mention an insightful lecture. I’m certain we will try our best to maintain a level of tolerance. In fact, the writing prompt for today is ‘Envision an act of kindness. Describe it. How will you carry it out? Who will benefit from it? How will it help change the person’s life?’ (*The class groans.*)

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

MR. DICKENS. Come in. (*A totally orange girl with blazing red hair enters from up left.*)

SUNSHINE. Hi, everyone! I’m Sunshine Burns. My family just moved here from Florida. (*All react in amazement and freeze in place.*)

 BLACKOUT

About the Playwright

 Gwyn English Nielsen was born in Westfield and raised in neighboring Mountainside, New Jersey. Gwyn graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English with concentration in theater and education from Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. She holds a master’s degree in creative writing and literature from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey.

 Ms. Nielsen began her career in performance as a vocalist at the age of ten and quickly discovered the theater, playing Portia in a very abridged version of William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in fifth grade. For years thereafter, she had leads in numerous plays and musicals and appeared on television and in film, having worked with Academy-Award winners Morgan Freeman, John Avildsen, and Arthur Penn. As a singer, she toured with *The Mark Channing Show Band*, sang in various wedding bands, and still performs classical pieces in community choruses. She is affiliated with Dudley Moore’s charitable organization *Music for All Seasons*, and through it, regularly sings for abused women and children in safe houses in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

 Over the past ten years, she has been writing, producing, and teaching on the secondary school level. In addition to *Footlights,* she has three other books in print. *Torey the Turkey Goes Skiing,* a children’s picture book about a skiing turkey that learns love lessons on the slopes, has sold well all over the country, particularly at ski resorts. *Teaching Love Life* isa collection of autobiographical poetry for adolescent and adult readers, and *Serendipity and the Dream Catcher,* a chapter book for middle readers, features the theme of identity. When not teaching, Gwyn, as a dramatic storyteller, has brought her books to many schools and bookstores throughout the country.

 Gwyn is the founder of CGS Press, a small publishing company – which she established when she owned and operated two video stores – is a member of The Academy of American Poets and is a past recipient of a HEART grant from the Union County Chosen Board of Freeholders in New Jersey. She is included in National Register’s *Who’s Who in Executives and Professionals* as well as 2004’s *Who’s Who in America* (Marquis)and 2006’s *Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers.*

 At present, Ms. Nielsen teaches secondary English and lives in Northern New Jersey with her daughter Saxony. When opportunity beckons, Gwyn performs in community theater productions just to keep her passion for theater alive.

Acknowledgements

The playwright gratefully acknowledges the following sources for their education and inspiration:

I. Allusions to Songs

“All You Need Is Love,” The Beatles. Written by John Lennon (McCartney/Lennon),

 1967. Produced by George Martin on Parlophone Records and featured on the

 album, *Magical Mystery Tour.*

“Blue Moon” by Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart, 1935.

“Eye of the Tiger,” by Frankie Sullivan and Im Peterik, 1982. Produced by Frankie

 Sullivan on EMI Records.

“Gonna Fly Now” (“The Theme from *Rocky*”) by Bill Conti, Carol Connors, and Ayn

 Robbins, 1977. Produced by Bill Conti, United Artists.

“(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” The Rolling Stones. Written by Mick Jagger and Keith

 Richards, 1965. Produced by Andrew Loog Oldman and featured on *Out of Our*

 *Heads* (London Records).

“Love Is Blue” or “L’amour est bleu” by Andre Popp and Pierre Cour, 1967. Lyric of

 the English version by Brian Blackburn.

“Magic Man” by Ann and Nancy Wilson of the band Heart, 1975. Produced by Mike

 Flicker and featured on *Dreamboat Annie* (Mushroom Records).

“Something’s Coming” by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, 1957 from the

 Broadway musical, *West Side Story*.

“Somewhere Over the Rainbow” by Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg, 1939 and

 written for the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz.*

“What’ll I Do,” by Irving Berlin, 1923.

II. Works Consulted or Referenced

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Robinson, Phil Alden, dir. *Field of Dreams*. Universal Pictures, 1989. Film.

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Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men.* New York: Penguin Books, 1993. Print.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest.* New York: New American Library

 (Signet Classic),1985. Print.

III. Allusions to Individuals

Beethoven, Ludwig von, (1770-1827), timeless composer

Berkeley, Busby (1895-1976), Hollywood director/musical choreographer

Costner, Kevin, (1955), consummate American actor

Dean, Roger, (1944), British fine artist

Frank, Anne, (1929-1945), iconic Jewish/Dutch teen known for her tenacity and diary of life while in hiding during the Holocaust

Houseman, John, (1902-1988), classic actor/director

Jeter, Derek, (1974), Yankees baseball hero

Jonas, Joe, (1989), American teen icon/musician

Jones, James Earl, (1931), American actor

Mozart, Wolfgang A., (1756-1791), Austrian composer

Penn Jillette, (1955) and Teller, (1948), stellar American magicians

Penn, Sean, (1960), American film actor

Reagan, Ronald, (1911-2004), American actor; fortieth president

Salinger, J.D., (1919-2010), American writer

Villa, Bob, (1946), televised carpenter

IV. Allusions to Products/Corporations

Celestial Seasonings, Hain Celestial Group, founded in 1969

Coach Leatherware, Inc., Lewis Frankfort, CEO, founded in 1941

Converse, a division of Nike, Inc., founded in 1908

*Cosmopolitan* magazine, Joanna Coles, ed., Hearst Corporation, founded in 1886

Fendi, a subsidiary of Gucci Group, founded in 1921

Google, (Googled), Larry Page and Sergey Brin, founders, 1998

Gucci, Gucci Group, founded in 1921

Habitat for Humanity, Jon Reckford, CEO (Americas), founded in 1976

*The History Channel*, A&E Network (Hearst, Walt Disney), founded in 1995

Jaguar Cars, Jaguar Land Rover, Tata Motors, Whitley, Coventry, England, founded in 1922 by William Walmsley and William Lyons

Little League Baseball, Carl E. Stotz, founder, Williamsport, PA, 1939

*Maxim* magazine, Dan Bova, ed., Alpha Media Group (USA)

Nerf, Parker Brothers, founded in 1969

OxiClean, Church and Dwight Company, Inc., founded in 1846

Pepsi, PepsiCo. Inc., founded in 1965

Porsche Automobil Holding SE, Stuttgart, Germany, founded in 1931 by F. Porsche

Raid insecticide, S.C. Johnson, founded in 1956

Redbox, a subsidiary of Outerwall, founded in 2002

Sims computer game, Electronic Arts, founded in 2000

Smurf, Belgian comic franchise, Dupuis, 1958

Sprite, trademark of Coco-Cola Company, founded in 1961

Twins of Minnesota, American League, Central Division, Ron Gardenhire, manager

Victoria’s Secret, Roy Raymond, founder, Georgia, 1977

Walmart, Sam Walton, founder, 1962

Yankees of New York, American League, Eastern Division, Joe Girardi, manager

V. Miscellaneous Allusions

Batman, comic superhero, *DC Comics*, created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, 1939

The Blue Man Group, avant-garde theater group: Chris Wink, Matt Goldman, Phil Stanton, founders, 1987

*Fashion Police,* American TV talk show, E! Entertainment Television, Jonathan X, director, debuted 2010

Hitler Youth or Hitlerjugend, 1933-1945; Hitler’s youth organization

*Jeopardy!* American TV quiz show, founded by Merv Griffin on NBC, 1964

Metallica, American heavy metal band (Kirk Hammett, Lars Ulrich, James Hetfield, Robert Trujillo), Los Angeles, California, 1981

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet (The Tragedy of),* 1599-1602

Superman, *DC Comics*, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, 1933

*Survivor* (2000), American version of the Swedish TV series *Expedition Robinson,* created in 1997 by Charlie Parsons

*This Old House,* American, home-improvement TV show, PBS, WGBH Productions, created by Russell Morash, 1979

*Yes*, British progressive rock band, founded in 1968 by Chris Squire and Jon Anderson

If I have omitted any acknowledgements, it was not on purpose.

All facts were extracted from *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia,* Wikipedia Foundation, 2001. Web. 4. August, 2013

**Last, but not least,** **I want to thank my dear friend and colleague Janette Birkett for being a secondary sentience via her set of eyes. Janette, you made me aware of a few things that I would have never questioned. Clearly, I would not have succeeded in publishing this work without your vast proofreading expertise and astute suggestions. You are the best!**

 **Ten thematic, didactic, one-act plays, in which diverse characters confront contemporary conflicts**

 *From Footlights to Flashlights* is Gwyn English Nielsen’s first collection of character-building plays for teenagers. Previously, she has found success as an author of the children’s books, *Serendipity and the Dream Catcher* and *Torey the Turkey Goes Skiing,* as well as the chapbook of autobiographical poetry, *Teaching Love Life.*

In the anthology, there are ten chapters, each including a play focusing on a specific theme related to a challenge that adolescents often experience in today’s society. Contents include “Allegorical Chairs,” a contemporary morality play; “Chain Link,” a uniquely staged one act, exploring identity in crisis; ‘To Be or Not to Be,” a piece concentrating on the hazards of peer pressure; “Cup of Random Joes,” the playwright’s tribute to Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* that centers on the haphazard nature of love; “Two Guys and a Guillotine,” a play based on a true story, involving inequity in a middle school; “Trilogy of Rude Behavior,” three brief plays about socialization; “Hold the Phone,” a series of connected monologues that tell the ironic tale of what happens when teens do not communicate well; “Baseball: America’s Pastime,” an exploration of sexism in school sports; “Within and Without Magic,” a play that portrays a family struggling with grief and its effects, and “Rainbow Blue,” the only two-act play, depicting a guidance counselor’s creative lesson on tolerance or “anti-bullying.” All of the plays entertain as well as teach.

 ***From Footlights to Flashlights* contains readable,**

 **performable, and producible plays, particularly**

 **well suited for school assemblies.**