

# **Sweeten the Punch**

By Jeff James

## CHARACTERS:

MARCY DAVENPORT

## FAMILY CHORUS:

DIANE "DEE-DEE" DAVENPORT / MOTHER

PAUL DAVENPORT / FATHER

JASON DAVENPORT / BIG BROTHER

CHAD DAVENPORT / LITTLE BROTHER

## OTHER CAST:

MARK (MALE STUDENT #2)

TOUR GUIDE / FEMALE STUDENT / MAYOR'S DATE

MALE STUDENT #1 / DOCTOR / MAYOR

*(The set should be a stylistic collage, almost as though the set designer took previous set designs, cut them apart, and glued them together to create a new one. It should be all funny angles and half-finished suggestions of rooms. We should get an idea of parts of rooms assembled haphazardly to make a semi-cohesive whole. Different elements of each scene and setting in the play should be combined, because the set must be dynamic enough accommodate the wide range of settings in the play.)*

*As far as the chorus members go, the family chorus should be onstage at all times after coming out for the first time. Other cast members should always exit the stage after finishing scenes.*

*As the pre-show music runs out, the audience is allowed to sit in silence watching the stage for a long few seconds, as though someone had missed an entrance. Just as they are about to become restless, MARCY DAVENPORT very noisily bursts in the from behind the audience. She is a 20ish looking woman but could actually be older or younger, depending on which way you look at her. She dresses herself with the intention to make an impression, a little funky and showy but not overly so. She starts her line from the back and says it walking.)*

MARCY

*(Breathless)*

Sorry! Sorry I'm late! *(Pause)* I was driving on the freeway and some idiot in an SUV as big as a mack truck tried to sideswipe me when I was changing lanes... and then he tailgated me for the next three miles, and kept on flipping me off and yelling out his window at me! I was so upset I missed my exit and didn't even realize it for five minutes, but he was so close to my back bumper at this point I felt like I was sitting in his lap waiting for him to head-butt me, I swear. I finally managed to maneuver out of his way and get off the freeway - I had to fake him out by doing a little dip to the left and then swerving to the right as hard as I could - and you know what I noticed when he drove past me? *(Still screaming a blue streak and waving his arms like a television preacher, I might add.)* A "What Would Jesus Do?" bumper sticker. *(Pause)* So, apparently, Jesus thinks I should go fuck myself. *(Laughs, then)* I hope all

of you had a much more pleasant drive, to say the least.

(Pause) Welcome to Sweeten the Punch. I'd like to thank you all for coming tonight. This is the first time I've ever done this, and this show is very personal for me - I can remember when it just used to kick me at night and give me back pains. Now it's all ready to fall flat on its face here in front of a live audience. (Pause) Lovely. Anyway, I've had a great time putting it together. I'm sure all of you will have a great time, too. If you ever rode Mr. Toad's wild ride at Disney World, well... this'll be better than that. At least by a margin of two to one, I'd say.

(Pause) But where should I start? I guess I'll give you the quick version first, to get us acquainted. (Pause) Pleased to meet you, by the way. I was born in the town of Wichita, Kansas, which is the biggest city in Kansas, but the skyscrapers stop at 20 stories and on a clear day you can see all the way across town from your back porch. I had friends who **really** enjoyed cow-tipping and making crop circles, in that order. Laugh nervously if you've ever done anything like that. (Pause) I moved here after college, and I live in a place downtown half as nice as it costs. I won't tell you how old I am, although I will say that my birthday was last month, and I had a pretty good time, although I would like to know whose friend the midget was. (Pause) I own my own business, a little store downtown called Share 'n' Spare. The idea behind it is like one of those white elephant parties where you bring in strange old artifacts and trade them for newer, stranger artifacts. You'd be surprised at how many people really enjoy the prospect of getting salt and pepper shakers shaped like realistic looking human feet, or action figures based on past presidential candidates. They come and trade in the

clay sculpture they're too embarrassed to tell their kids they find hideous and are secretly relieved to know someone else will be perplexed by its existence. Oh, and we also accept credit cards. (Pause) There's a little coffee shop scrunched into the dark recesses in the back that's run by my friend Xerxes (his real name, I kid you not) so that you can get extra hyped up about all the weird crap you're going to surprise your spouse with when you get home.

(Pause) The best story I have about the store is the day when, out of the blue, Kirstie Alley jogged in, completely by chance. She was actually looking for a bathroom, but the first thing she saw when she walked in was this three-foot tall statue of a giraffe that had come in the day before. This thing was entirely covered with foil that made it look kind of gold-ish, and the spots were made out of something deceptively diamond-like. Now, she is notoriously icy in person (I've been told) but you could practically see her heart grow two sizes bigger when she saw the silly thing, and I could hear her credit card rattling in her wallet from across the room. She came up to me and told me that she was so excited to find my store that she would send me a signed photo endorsing the place. It's hanging above the cash register along with a signed picture of Corey Haim that I got one time at a mall visit he did when he was still the next hot young thing. They make a cute couple, despite the age difference. (Pause) She ended up buying the giraffe and a set of wind chimes made out of old car parts, and promised to return later with what she claimed was a particularly strange painting given to her by William Shatner when she worked with him on Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan. Lucky for me, Scientology isn't against the occasional spending spree. (Pause) But I guess you can

already tell that what I really enjoy is talking. My friends have told me that if not for the need to stop occasionally for sleeping and eating, I would talk until my lips turned purple and my teeth were ground down to points. Talking is, of course, why I'm here tonight. Well, specifically, storytelling. (Pause) This whole show was actually inspired to some degree by a little group that meets weekly on the second story of the same building my store lives in. They actually call themselves "The Second Stories," so I guess that's appropriate. The idea behind the group is that new members have to come in with a story to tell, and then after that they rotate through the group every week until every member has told a story. Then they start again. The storytelling requirement is designed to keep the membership small and devoted. (Pause) Anyway, I went to a couple of their meetings and really liked the idea of story-sharing, so I based this show around that. (Pause) I had a dream once where everyone I ran into told me a story and as they spoke, the words they spoke spun out from their mouths into a piece of candy that I reached up and ate as I listened. (Pause) It's also kind of like that. So many different kinds of stories exist, and I love them all. There are the ones people have told me happened to them, the ones I read on some mystic Internet site (most likely already long faded into the abyss of the never-updated), and the ones I've read in books and magazines or seen on the television. And, of course, the ones from my own life experience. I'm going to tell you a variety of these tonight, some of them perhaps more interesting than others, some more believable than others, but all of them very close to my heart. (Pause) I'm hoping that in turn some of you will come to me later and tell me a story of

your own. *(Pause)* The main story I'd like to talk about is one I like to call "The Worst Summer of My Life". It probably won't surprise you to find out that it takes place back when I was in high school. I'm twenty... something years old and I'm still stuck on the summer before my sophomore year in high school. *(Pause. Laughs.)* Funny how things work, isn't it? Of course, I think it's safe to say that it really was the worst summer of my life... so far. At the time, it seemed like God - because I still sort of believed in God back then - had made me his personal punching bag. *(Pause)* I guess that might sound egotistical, I mean... why should God have cared enough to focus so much smiting on little ol' me? Well... let's just say that everyone is egotistical at the age of 16, whether or not they like themselves. *(Pause.)* You know, you might be wondering why you should give a rat's ass about the story of my life. Well, all I can say is for you to sit back and find out. And if you don't enjoy it, you can just pretend like you're going to the bathroom and sneak out the back. *(Pause.)* I suppose I can give you a clue of what I'm going to talk about. I'm going to tell you about how my family was, and probably still is; I'm going to tell you about this amazing guy I met; I'm going to tell you about a really weird dinner party, and I'm going to tell you about what happened to my dad. *(Pause.)* Anyway, I suppose I should get started, which means I have to introduce you to my family. *(Pause)* You understand if I could use a smoke, right?

*(Marcy reaches into her purse and pulls out a packet of cigarettes, then lights one. While she does this, the chorus goes into the back and*

*changes clothes, walking forward as Marcy introduces each character.)*

MARCY

First, there's my older brother Jason.

*(Big brother walks forward, all confidence, wearing a letter jacket and carrying a football.)*

MARCY

Don't let that letter jacket fool you for a second. He got it for winning tournaments with the debate team. He likes carrying the football around because, he says, there's always the chance he might get to play a little game of catch. He never got into team sports because he was too wrapped up in his research for the next debate and his longtime girlfriend. Before they started dating, she was notorious around school for (allegedly) having once given three blow-jobs to two different guys in one 48-hour period! Apparently it was worth refilling her plate at the buffet for bachelor number two. *(Pause)* Of course, Jason claimed that-

JASON

--Those days were long behind her by the time we met. She told me it was a learning experience. She came to the realization that she had hit rock bottom, and pretty soon after that she decided to put her life back on track. *(Pause)* She says I've been her knight in shining armor. And she's become so strong - I wish I had half her strength and power. She's better because of it.



MARCY

Well I think we all know what she's better at. *(Pause)*  
Jason, of course, might as well have been a football  
player. He was as cocky as one, and the girls who usually  
had a fetish for jerseys seemed to find ways trip on him  
every chance they got.

JASON

It's just because I'm confident. *(Pause)* I hope you  
understand, Marcy, that you'll never get very far in life  
if you aren't willing to step up to the plate. You'll never  
have the chance to go to someplace like Harvard if you  
don't apply yourself more now!

MARCY

...Here it comes...

JASON

I didn't get a-

MARCY and JASON

--FULL RIDE TO HARVARD--

JASON

--By sitting around on my ass chatting with my friends and  
smoking myself to death.

MARCY

Gee thanks, Jason. I've taken your advice to heart! By the  
way, folks, I think it's been statistically proven that  
people that went to Harvard will find a way nine times out

of ten to bring it up in the first five minutes of conversation. It's true. And he's not even going yet.

JASON

And could you turn down that shit you're listening to? I'm trying to study over here!

*(Jason turns and walks to one side of the stage then freezes. Little brother walks forward, wearing a soccer jersey.)*

MARCY

Then there's my little brother Chad. Ten years old. Look at him. Isn't he cute? *(Pause)* About as cute as a bag full of scorpions. You see, it's deceptive... he's all little and innocent looking, so you might not expect him to turn out to actually be the son of the prince of darkness!

CHAD

Marcy, mom said it's my turn! It's my turn! I wanna watch the TV! I wanna! My favorite show is on! You're making me miss my favorite show! You've had the TV all afternoon! MOM!

MARCY

He's a regular full-time fun factory.

CHAD

I don't wanna watch this show! I hate this! Why do you watch this, it's stupid! I wanna change the channel!

MARCY

No!

*(Suddenly, Chad runs over and grabs Marcy's purse. He runs around with it on his head while Marcy runs after it.)*

CHAD

*(Sing-song)*

I've-got-your-pur-rse! I've-got-your-pur-rse!

MARCY

GIVE IT BACK!

*(After a few more seconds of this, Marcy finally grabs hold of the purse and wrenches it out of Chad's grasp. He looks shocked for a minute and then bursts into tears.)*

CHAD

MOM! MOM!! MARCY HURT MY ARM!!!

MARCY

Which, of course, brings us to my mother. Dee-Dee Davenport, short for Diane Dixon. It's become obvious to me over the years that she married my father for alliterative purposes.

*(Mother moves forward at a swift pace and begins to comfort Chad, giving reproving looks to Marcy.)*

DEE-DEE

Now, Marcy, was it necessary to hurt your little brother like that? He was just trying to play with you. You should lighten up, dear. *(To Chad)* Oh, my poor little baby! Did your big, mean, sister hurt you?

CHAD

*(Eating it up)*

Uh-huh!

DEE-DEE

Let me give you a mommy-hug! *(She squeezes him tight and then shakes him back and forth a little. He giggles. Then, to Marcy.)* You smell like smoke. Have you been smoking again?

*(If the cigarette isn't already gone at this point, Marcy drops it and steps on it.)*

MARCY

*(Flatly)*

Of course not, mother. It was one of my friends.

DEE-DEE

Well you just keep wearing the patch. Your father and I didn't spend all that money just so you could fritter your life away. Besides, a cigarette looks unwomanly in your mouth. You have no cheekbones and your color is much too pale. *(To Chad)* All right pumpkin, it's time to go to soccer practice. Are you ready to show those other boys who's boss?

CHAD

Yeah!

DEE-DEE

Do you have your cleats?

CHAD

No...

DEE-DEE

All right, well I'm going to go start the car, you go get them and be out in a minute.

CHAD

Okay.

*(Dee-Dee walks over to where Jason stands and freezes next to him in a neutral position. Chad stays behind for a second looking at Marcy and then out of nowhere he pipes up and says:)*

CHAD

BITCH!

*(Then he scurries over to stand next to his mother and freezes in neutral position.)*

MARCY

You get a picture of what a day with my family was like. And yes, they behaved like this all the time. But I'm forgetting something...

*(From offstage, we hear a car door slam, and Dee-Dee unfreezes just to say her line the re-freezes.)*

DEE-DEE

Your father's home!

MARCY

Of course... my father. *(Pause)* Paul. He was a physicist. All I knew about his work was that he had a job at some anonymous-sounding company that didn't get talked about in scientific journals. At least, not when I read them. When people did talk about it, it was commonly at other companies and in whispers around the water cooler, as if the dull brown building my father worked in might uproot from its foundation and follow them home to crush their children.

*(Marcy's father PAUL walks onto the scene, loosening his tie as he walks. He is carrying some papers.)*

PAUL

I looked at your math homework, and you've got the equations turned around in the fourth and seventh problems. And you should use the quadratic equation for number eleven.

*(He hands her the sheets, then continues walking to his place with the others. When he reaches them, he freezes.)*

MARCY

Thanks, Dad. *(Pause)* He would always help me with my homework, except that he tended to not give it back to me until well after I had already failed the test. He meant well, but he was always scatterbrained. From what I could tell he was one of the top men at his company, but I'm only guessing from how much he got paid and consequently how high our standard of living was. It's not that I disliked having a huge nice house and a pool. I'm just saying that I was always curious to know what he was up to that kept him at work until ten o'clock at night. But it wasn't really that big a deal. I mean, I got used to it after so many years. *(Pause)* So, after all the members of our little clan were in place, it was time for dinner. My mother was always a fan of making menus in advance. I guess it made her feel like she was in control of something in her life.

*(Dee-Dee unfreezes and walks forward to talk to the audience.)*

DEE-DEE

It's important to plan ahead for things like what you're going to eat. You can't budget if you just buy everything on a whim! Personally, I like to sit down with a few of my favorite cookbooks and pick out meals I'd like to try. Of course, you don't want to get too crazy, so I always try to stick to a couple really good recipes that my family enjoys and then toss in a new one once in a while for variety. Generally, chicken is usually a good choice. It goes well with everything, and is cheap and easy to prepare. And besides, everything already tastes like chicken, so you

might as well stick with a proven winner. Chad and Jason like my chicken casserole, and Marcy really enjoys my chicken Marsala.

MARCY

Well, I would have enjoyed it if she had ever put the Marsala wine in it like you're supposed to.

DEE-DEE

I think it tastes just fine without. (*Pause.*) Tonight we're having Chinese Chicken Casserole Surprise! I found it in this great little site online devoted to recipes made with chicken!

MARCY

The surprise? Cheddar cheese. Knocked me out of my seat.

DEE-DEE

It's a surprise, dear, because the Chinese didn't believe in cheese before they were introduced to the European and American cultures. After all, who wants to eat spoiled milk?

MARCY

Where my mother got these facts, I'll never know. I suppose she had nothing else to occupy her time with while dad toiled away discovering a way to turn household appliances into weapons of war, or whatever it was he did.

DEE-DEE

Marcy! Hurry up and come downstairs for dinner! And don't tell me that you're dieting! You have your figure for a



reason! You just need to accept that you'll never look like those girls in the magazines!

MARCY

From a more sensitive, caring woman, words like that would have come out as supportive, compassionate, maybe even forward-looking and progressive. From her mouth it just sounded like I wasn't good enough for her and never would be. *(Pause)* Let me tell you... this would set the table for a simply fantastic dinner. *(Pause)* You know, I've been told a particular story, and I think that if I relate it, you might understand my family even better because you can make a comparison. This is a story about a family that is very different from my family, but sometimes I wish that this wasn't so. The story's called "The American Vacation." My cousin Michelle from Vermont tells me it's a true story about her great-aunt and uncle, but I find that kind of hard to believe. I'm sure you won't find it very realistic in nature, but I do believe that there's a lot about it that resonates with my family.

*(Marcy steps to one side of the stage. In a line, the chorus of family members walks onto the stage: FATHER, MOTHER, BIG BROTHER, and LITTLE BROTHER. They are dressed as a stereotypical 1950s family, i.e. pearls on the mother's neck, the father wearing a suit and hat, the kids clean-cut. They stand neutrally. Images of 1950s suburbia are projected behind them as Marcy speaks.)*

MARCY

Okay, imagine that it's 1950's America. It's summertime, which means bike rides and scraped knees, mosquitoes and mom's apple pie, fireworks on the fourth of July, block parties and trips to the beach. You can fill in the blanks with your well-trained imaginations, I'm sure. It's evening, and the dusk is tart with the last crisp edges of sun just trailing over the horizon. Dad just got home from work, the shoes came off, the tie was loosened, and now it's time to relax...

*(As she says this, the lights change and the chorus gets into position, with Mother in the "Kitchen" preparing dinner, Father in the "Living Room" reclining in a chair with the newspaper open in front of him and the Brothers in their "Bedroom" playing quietly. We watch this scene for a few seconds as the chorus goes through their respective motions. Father stops flipping through the paper and folds the top down to look over it then speaks.)*

FATHER

Honey?

MOTHER

Yes, dear?

FATHER

What's for dinner tonight?

MOTHER

Meatloaf!

FATHER

Oh.

*(Father returns to his paper, flipping the pages rhythmically. After another second, Big Brother comes into the living room and speaks.)*

BIG BROTHER

Hey, Mom?

MOTHER

Yes, sweetie?

BIG BROTHER

What are we having for dinner tonight?

MOTHER

Meatloaf! It's almost ready.

BIG BROTHER

Awesome!

*(Big Brother runs offstage, apparently to wash his hands for dinner. After a pause of another few seconds, Little Brother comes down into the living room.)*

LITTLE BROTHER

Mommy?

MOTHER

Yes, pumpkin?

LITTLE BROTHER

What are we having to eat?

MOTHER

Meatloaf! And it's ready!

LITTLE BROTHER

Ewww! Gross!

MOTHER

Go wash your hands!

*(Little Brother lets out a defeated sigh and stomps off towards the bathroom.)*

MARCY

Suddenly, Father realized something that he thought was of great importance. It kind of surprised him, too, but only because he had never realized it before - despite how obvious it was.

FATHER

Every Thursday night, we have meatloaf, and every Thursday night I ask her what we're having for dinner. *(A revelation)* On Wednesdays, we have chicken. *(Pause)* I get the leftovers in my lunch disguised as a sandwich, and I'm surprised every time, but always a little disappointed. And I always hope it'll be something else.

MOTHER

Come help me set the table, would you sweetie?

BIG BROTHER

Be there in a minute, mom!

FATHER

*(Puts down paper)*

I've been working in the same job for 12 years. The same hours. The secretaries are different, but the memos are always typewritten, the phone is always answered, and my coffee is always black. Black as night.

*(The brothers run into the kitchen and seat themselves at the dinner table, which is mimed. Mother turns towards the living room and speaks to her husband.)*

MOTHER

Come to dinner, dear! I'd like you to say grace tonight!

FATHER

*(Mildly irritated)*

In a minute, honey! *(Pause, then to himself)* I don't need a planner because all of my weeks are the same, exact schedule. Pre-ordained by God, or... who knows.

MOTHER

Hurry up, dear, we're ready to say grace!

*(Father looks down at his feet for a few long seconds and then stands up suddenly. He strides into the kitchen purposefully. He stops, and prepares himself to speechify.)*

MOTHER

What's wrong, dear?

FATHER

We need a change. *(Pause)* We've gotten too used to the same-old, same-old, the daily grind, whatever you want to call it. Tonight is meatloaf night, because every Thursday night is meatloaf night. But I don't want meatloaf anymore. *(Pause)* I haven't taken any vacation time in years. It must have added up by now. We're going to go on a trip. A long one. It'll be the best family vacation we've ever had.

LITTLE BROTHER

Better than Coney Island?

FATHER

Much better, son. We won't let ourselves stay in one place. No, no... we'll keep it moving, all the time. We'll drive all over the country. We're going to see the sights. We'll go to the Statue of Liberty and the Great Lakes, the Grand Canyon and Yosemite, Mount Rushmore and the Whitehouse. We'll see the wheat fields in Kansas, the mountains in Montana, and the redwoods in California. We'll take pictures next to the world's largest rocking

chair and the world's smallest skyscraper, and we'll visit the shoe tree and the haunted pretzel. This vacation has been a long time coming. We'll leave tomorrow morning.

MOTHER

But what about the block party this weekend? I'm making a casserole!

FATHER

We'll just have to miss it!

*(The lights change and the chorus freezes. Marcy looks them over once quickly and then speaks.)*

MARCY

Father stayed up all night packing for his family, and in the morning they all crammed themselves into their modest late-model family sedan, after leaving notes for the neighbors to take care of the pets and pick up the mail. The first stop Father made was at a gas station, where he picked up a map that showed the locations of particularly interesting tourist attractions. He tipped the boy who worked behind the counter for knowing such a map existed in the first place. He intended to mark off every sight they saw, until they had seen all they needed to see.

*(Pause. As Marcy speaks, the chorus changes out of their 1950s clothes and back into the clothes for her family.)*

MARCY

Well, that's the first chapter in that story. It might not make sense at first, but I think that if you think about the comparisons between this family and mine, it makes that much more sense why I don't really go home any more. But, then again, I haven't even really begun to tell you about my own family. *(Pause)* Of course, now it's time for dinner!

*(The chorus is ready and sitting at the dinner table.)*

MARCY

As a family, we always had very typical, predictable dinners. My father always dropped the occasional "How was your day?" if our silent smacking lasted for a few minutes too long. Personally I always dreaded coming downstairs for dinner, and would generally try and get out of it somehow... It never worked, though. This particular dinner happened during the very last week of school before summer started.

*(Marcy steps out of her place as narrator and steps into the scene in character as herself in high school. The rest of the family sits, engrossed in dinner as she comes into the room.)*

MARCY

*(Breathless)*

I heard on the news that a cougar has escape from the zoo and Shelby says she swears she saw it prowling through her neighborhood, so I've got to go over there because she doesn't want to be alone in the house and cause I've got a way with animals and I'd probably be able to talk it out of killing anyone if feeding it ground beef isn't enough.



DEE-DEE

It probably won't maul your friend in the time it'll take for you to sit down and have a nice civilized dinner and conversation with us, now will it?

MARCY

Mom!

PAUL

Marcy, sit down!

*(Defeated, Marcy sits down at the dinner table. Everyone sits eating quietly for a few seconds until Dee-Dee feels the need to fill the empty air.)*

DEE-DEE

So, Chad... tell us about your soccer game.

CHAD

We won! We beat 'em six to two! Coach says that if we do that again two more times he'll take us all to Dairy Queen!

DEE-DEE

That's wonderful, honey!

CHAD

Yeah! He said he'd have the money then!

DEE-DEE

What money, pumpkin?

CHAD

...He said his friend Gary would owe him big if we won two more games, and then he'd take us out to eat! (*Exasperated but joking*) Mom! You knew what I meant!

DEE-DEE

Oh, of course, pumpkin!

PAUL

So, did you have any really good plays, sport?

CHAD

Well I blocked a bunch of goals, especially from this one kid Ricky Harris. He goes to Kenwright and he and his friends are always skipping school and bothering us kids during recess. One day they came and stole Sam's airplane and they were saying they were never gonna give it back, so when we played 'em today we were really mad. Ricky kept on trying to make goals and I kept on blocking him just before he could make a shot. They always pass the ball to him cause I guess they all think he's really good. He kept on yelling at me and calling me names, and I didn't like that very much. So one time when he went to make a goal and he stuck his leg out I jumped up in the air as high as I could and landed on his leg. It made a really loud noise and he started crying like a baby and they had to call a doctor to come to the field. They made me sit out the rest of the game and couch came and had a talk with me. He said that what I had done was very bad and that Ricky was hurt very bad and that I should never do it again, but he didn't really look very mad at me. When the coach from the other

team walked by he gave us a really nasty look but he just kept walking, and coach just sorta smiled. *(Pause)* So coach said that the other coach might try to get me kicked off the team or at least in trouble but not to worry about it because he knew what to do. *(Pause)* Can I have some more casserole?

DEE-DEE

Sure, pumpkin. How about you, Jason? How was your day at school?

JASON

Um, well... it was okay. I mean, I had a test in my second period class and I had studied for it a lot but there were some questions on there that I hadn't expected. But a lot of people in class said that they thought the teacher hadn't even talked about those questions before, and that they were going to complain. I told them I would just wait and see how my grade turned out.

DEE-DEE

I'm sure you did fine, sweetie. Did anything else interesting happen to you today?

JASON

Um, well... I've been thinking about it for a long time and... well... this is a decision that's really important to me, and I hope you understand, but...

*(Jason stands up and backs away from the table, and everyone freezes except Marcy.)*

## MARCY

Before Jason makes his little announcement, I think it's important that you understand what he was like to me all the time. I mean, you've seen a little bit of his behavior, but I don't think you understand the depth of his ego.

*(Jason unfreezes and walks forwards. He begins speaking to the audience.)*

## JASON

I knew from a very young age that I was smarter than pretty much everyone I knew. I was reading at a much higher level than all of the other kids were, and I was doing it just for the fun of it. My teachers never really knew what to do with me. There was a gifted program at one of the several schools I went to, but as time passed and I got older, the support for this type of program waned and schools no longer catered to my advanced abilities. While I've been in high school I've been concurrently taking college courses, simply because my math abilities are far advanced beyond what the high school can offer me. I know that I am going to succeed in life because of my abilities. *(Pause)* Marcy, on the other hand, just doesn't get it. I don't understand how two such different children could have come from the same parents. My guess is that she's actually adopted but our parents have been too kind to tell her the truth so far. Honestly, my sister's behavior is unexplainable. The way she dresses... and all that black make-up she wears... I guess she thinks that she should pigeonhole herself as early on in life as possible. Oh well. There's a black sheep in every family.

*(Jason returns to his place at the table and freezes again.)*

MARCY

You can see what I have to deal with everyday. *(Pause)* The funny thing, though, is that he is about to say something at the dinner table that is completely out of character for him...

*(Everyone unfreezes.)*

DEE-DEE

Well, what is it, Jason?

*(Pause.)*

JASON

I've decided that... I'm going to join the marines!

*(Everyone freezes again and Marcy turns and speaks, quickly.)*

MARCY

I'd just like to interject again really quickly right here and note that my father's instant reaction was relief at the fact that his son hadn't decided to come out of the closet or anything, because that was what the whole thing sounded like at first. Then he quickly began building a picture of the ideal war hero in his head. The first thing that came out of my mother's mouth was:

*(Everyone unfreezes.)*

DEE-DEE

But what about Harvard? They're giving you a FULL RIDE!

JASON

Yeah, well... I don't want to do that anymore... I think joining the marines is the right thing for me to do. Learn what it's like to be a part of a squadron, learn about the companionship and brotherhood, get a sense of family. I want to put my life on the line for my fellow human being. I want to feel alive again.

DEE-DEE

But you could come back dead! And what do you mean, get a sense of family? We're your family, right here! Why can't you go to Harvard like you're supposed to and become a neurosurgeon so you can save lives! Or a lawyer and protect human rights! You don't have to put your life on the line for anyone! What on earth could possibly have made you want to make a decision like this?

JASON

It just feels right! It's something I want to do! I feel lost. Nothing seems right anymore. I need a sense of direction, purpose in my life. I need to feel like I'm really doing something, like I'm achieving something. How can I judge my life right now? I have no means of comparison! All I know is that I'm unhappy!

DEE-DEE

You're eighteen years old! You're supposed to be unhappy!  
(Pause) Paul, why aren't you speaking up! Tell him that what he's doing is wrong!

PAUL

Honey, you know I can't do that. If not for my torn ligaments I would have done the same thing when I was his age. I know exactly what he's going through. If he feels like he should, I know it's the right thing for him to do.

DEE-DEE

I don't understand any of this. I need a breath of fresh air.

*(Dee-Dee gets up and walks out of the scene.)*

MARCY

*(To audience)*

At this point, my mother probably had a nice breath full of Valium or Prozac. Once properly medicated to face reality, she returned to the table.

*(Dee-Dee returns into the scene, stiffly, slowly, and sits down at the table.)*

DEE-DEE

I hope you realize, Jason, that the decision you are making will affect you for the rest of your life.

JASON

Yes, Mom, I know. Like I said... it's what I want to do. I've researched as much about it as I can.

PAUL

Well, I will tell you this, son. Researching it will never compare to actually being there and doing it. But I know you can handle it. I know how I raised you to be.

JASON

Thanks, dad.

DEE-DEE

I would like some more casserole. Could you pass it to me?

PAUL

Chad, pass your mother the casserole.

CHAD

Here you go.

DEE-DEE

Thank you, dear.

MARCY

The rest of the meal passed in relative silence, although my mother did complement herself on her own cooking so that we would all know we should do the same. And then it was time for the dishes.

*(The chorus all gets up and mimes clearing the table and then they strike the chairs. Everyone in the family moves into the back except for Jason and Marcy. Marcy stares at Jason but he does not leave.)*



JASON

Marcy? *(Pause)* I don't want to do this, Marcy.

MARCY

I'm sure.

JASON

Marcy, please! *(Pause)* It's not right...

MARCY

You decided to do it. *(Pause)* Why are you talking to me about it?

JASON

*(Rushed)*

Marcy, don't make me do this! I don't want to do th-

MARCY

*(Very pointed)*

I'm SURE you made the RIGHT DECISION.

*(There is a long pause as Marcy and Jason stare at each other. Finally, Jason is defeated and walks into the back with the other chorus members)*

MARCY

The jitters, I guess. Anyway... *(Pause)* Jason's announcement? Pretty simple. His girlfriend dumped him for another guy. Shocking, huh? They had been dating for three years. I think my brother secretly believed that he was going to marry her. I'm sure it seemed like a reachable goal at the

time. *(Pause)* She did get her comeuppance, though. I heard this story while he was still in basic training and wrote him a letter about it the next day - we actually communicated more after he left than when he was at home. *(Pause)* Apparently one night his ex was riding in her new boyfriend's car with the top down - hers and the car's - and her new beau decided to try and act out something he had read in Penthouse Letters. She was more than willing to give it a go, because giving a blow-job to a guy while riding in a convertible was actually on her to-do list for life, right behind seducing a clergyman. Well, it's already hard enough to drive when you've been drinking cheap beer for four hours, and receiving sexual gratification isn't particularly conducive to focusing on the road. *(Pause)* That tree came out of nowhere. *(Pause)* After a good bit of expensive plastic surgery, doctors say he may be functional again someday, maybe even well enough to have children. Her friends tell her that the limp isn't that noticeable, and neither are the scars from the facial reconstruction. *(Pause)* My brother told me that when he read my letter he laughed, and felt kind of guilty, but laughed again some more.

*(Jason, wearing the uniform of a candidate in basic training, walks forward into the scene.)*

JASON

Marcy, I just want to apologize for the way I treated you all those years. I think you deserve a lot better. I was so lost - I just didn't know what to do with myself, and you were an easy target, I guess. I let myself get too caught up in what other people wanted for me, and not what I

wanted, and I took my frustration out on you. I guess it kind of doesn't make sense, then, that I decided to join the military - I mean, if anything, I'm controlled by other people even more while I'm here. But the difference is that here I can see the results of my actions - I know that everything I'm doing has consequences. Lives are in the balance. And I'm learning so much about my capabilities - what I can do if I really push myself. All Harvard ever meant was that a Davenport was finally going to an Ivy League college. I'd get a piece of paper and my mother's vindication. Here I know that what I do could mean someone's life, and my own vindication. I know you understand.

*(Jason walks back out of the scene.)*

MARCY

People always told me that relationships with your siblings improve as you get older, but I never really believed them. *(Pause)* But now I think it's time to tell another chapter in "The American Vacation." I really do think it's a striking comparison to look at the differences between my family and this family.

*(As Marcy speaks the next part of this monologue, the chorus changes into their 1950s clothes.*

*During this, pictures of tourist traps flash on the screen.)*

MARCY

At this point, it seemed like the inside of the car was the only house they had ever known. They had already marveled

at the world's largest ball of twine, and had seen the orange groves in Florida; they saw a miniature replica of the Eiffel Tower in one town. The world's smallest skyscraper was as amusing as one might think, considering the whole thing was a dupe pulled by a shady contractor who played with decimal points - four point oh stories versus forty stories. All these, however, were just pit stops on the way to one of the big ones - Yellowstone Park. (*We see pictures of Old Faithful and other Yellowstone sights*) Father drove like a maniac because he hoped to fit as many things into his visit as possible. Upon arrival, the family was tired and a little shaken from too many close encounters on the road.

*(The projections stop, and the family walks onto the scene, obviously exhausted except for Father, who seems to have a strange manic energy about him.)*

LITTLE BROTHER

I'm tired! I wanna take a nap!

FATHER

Didn't you sleep in the car?

LITTLE BROTHER

There wasn't enough room. (*Points at Big Brother*) He was hogging all the space.

BIG BROTHER

There was nothing I could do about it!

LITTLE BROTHER

You could have given me a little more room!

MOTHER

He can't help it! His legs are too long! *(Pause)* Now, I don't want you boys fighting. I know you're tired but don't forget that we're family and we love each other!

BIG and LITTLE BROTHER

Yes, ma'am.

FATHER

All right, we'll get ourselves a place to stay and you guys can rest a little before we go out and see the sights. And I can get some brochures and plan what we'll do.

LITTLE BROTHER

Yay!

*(The brothers walk out of the scene but Mother and Father stay behind.)*

FATHER

Are you having a good time?

MOTHER

Of course, dear!

FATHER

Good. I'm glad.

*(Mother and Father walk out of the scene and the lights darken.)*

MARCY

During that day, they saw more of the Yellowstone Park than most every other person to ever visit it before did. This was possible because under Father's leadership they all became strangely driven. *(Pause)* I'm sure it was pretty funny seeing a conservative middle class family speeding from geyser to geyser like a bunch of over-wound children's toys. *(Pause)* In the evening, the family split up so everyone could check out whatever they found most interesting. Father watched Old Faithful perform no less than three times. Mother and Little Brother walked down winding nature paths and came back first. Big Brother was last to return to the cabin.

*(The lights come up to indicate a new scene. Mother is sitting and writing a letter. Little Brother is curled up asleep. Father comes in the door.)*

FATHER

The beauty of nature astonishes me.

MOTHER

*(Shushing him)*

He's sleeping.

FATHER

Oh. *(Pause)* What are you writing?

MOTHER

I thought I'd write a letter.

FATHER

Who to?

MOTHER

I'm not sure, really... I guess... to myself.

FATHER

Really?

MOTHER

Yes. (*Pause*) Well, there's no one else, really. Besides, I thought it would be nice if I wrote myself letters talking about things on my mind and then sent them to the house. I guess my thought was that when we get home I'll have all kinds of mail and I can be surprised again and again by what I did on this vacation. Makes it last twice as long

FATHER

Sounds like a lovely idea.

MOTHER

I thought so.

FATHER

So where's our other son?

MOTHER

Enjoying nature, like you were. I'm sure he'll be back soon.

MARCY

As though he had heard her say it, Big Brother chose that moment to burst in the door, but he was not alone. Along for the ride was...

*(Big Brother walks in the room holding hands with a female TOUR GUIDE.)*

TOUR GUIDE

*(Extending handshake to Father.)*

...Janet. Pleased to meet you.

MOTHER

And how did you two meet?

BIG BROTHER

Well, she's a tour guide and...

TOUR GUIDE

...He showed up for my last tour of the night...

BIG BROTHER

...But I was the only one who signed up for it, so we got to talking, and...

TOUR GUIDE

...Here we are. Your son's really an amazing gentleman. You should be proud.

FATHER

*(Hugs Mother)*



We are!

BIG BROTHER

But the big announcement is that... well...

*(They look each other in the eye for a second and then simultaneously speak.)*

BIG BROTHER and TOUR GUIDE

We're getting married!

FATHER

What?!

MOTHER

So soon?

BIG BROTHER

It just seemed right.

*(Mother and Father look at each other in the eye for a second, then they break away. Father gives Big Brother a manly handshake and hug, and mother runs over to the Tour Guide and bursts into tears while hugging her.)*

MOTHER

*(Sniffling)*

I'm so happy! *(Pause)* When's the wedding?

TOUR GUIDE

We were thinking April.

FATHER

How are you two going to support yourselves?

BIG BROTHER

Well, I'm going to get a job as a tour guide... and maybe someday I can work my way up to park ranger.

*(Big Brother and the Tour Guide squeeze each other's hands at the prospects of their future.)*

FATHER

I think you kids will be all right.

*(The lights change and the family moves out of the scene.)*

MARCY

And so Big Brother found the love of his dreams. But Father hadn't satisfied his desire for America and knew that the road trip must continue. Big Brother and his fiancé were left behind to begin their new lives as members of the park service. *(Pause)* Talking about people falling in love makes me think of a story that I can tell about what happened to me the same week as that fateful dinner where my brother declared his love of the marines. *(Pause)* His name is Mark, and I had had a crush on him for at least a year, if not longer. I had never actually had a real conversation with him, although I had classes with him every day and sometimes interacted with him on the "hey what's up" level. This day was different, however.

*(The lights change. We are in the hallway of a school. There are two MALE STUDENTS and a FEMALE STUDENT standing in the hall chatting. Marcy has changed clothes to something with more black, and she stands off to one side looking through her locker. Every once in a while she peeks sideways at the three students as they are talking. The students speak in low, conspiratorial tones, obviously referring to Marcy.)*

MALE STUDENT #1

She's such a weirdo. I don't understand why she acts like that. And what's with the clothes? It's way too warm for her to be wearing all that black!

FEMALE STUDENT

She's so negative. And bitter. And she can be such a heinous bitch.

MALE STUDENT #2

Well, she can be weird, yeah... but there's got to be something going on in there. *(Pause)* I mean, I bet she's a pretty interesting person if you get to know her.

FEMALE STUDENT

Interesting if you're into charity cases. She's so pathetic!

*(We hear the sound of a school bell ringing, and Marcy begins to walk to class, which happens to be past the students. Right as she is passing them, the Female Student sticks out her foot and*

*Marcy trips on it, spilling her books on the ground. The students laugh, except for MALE STUDENT #2, who looks concerned and helps Marcy to her feet.)*

MALE STUDENT #2

Are you all right?

MARCY

Yeah.

FEMALE STUDENT

Pathetic!

MALE STUDENT #1

Bitch!

*(The Female Student and Male Student #1 leave the scene.)*

MALE STUDENT #2

I'm sorry about that.

MARCY

Why do you care?

MALE STUDENT #2

Well, it's not right. They don't even know you. They just think it's fun to cut you down.

MARCY

Well then... thanks. *(Pause)* I have to go to class.

MALE STUDENT #2

Wait! (*Pause*) Uh... I was wondering if I could talk to you sometime.

MARCY

About what?

MALE STUDENT #2

Well, lots of things. Music, movies, books... whatever you want to talk about.

MARCY

Uhh... (*Pause*) Okay. When?

MALE STUDENT #2

Is after school okay? (*Marcy nods*) Okay, I'll meet you in the parking lot. (*Pause*) Oh... and uh... my name's Mark.

MARCY

Marcy. Nice to meet you.

MARK

Yeah. (*Pause*) See you later!

MARCY

Okay! (*Mark leaves the scene and Marcy turns to the audience and speaks.*) So as soon as my last class was over I rushed outside and waited in the parking lot and tried to look less flustered than I felt.

*(The lights change a little to indicate a new scene as Mark walks up behind her.)*

MARK

Surprise!

MARCY

Oh!

MARK

Sorry, I couldn't help myself. Hope I didn't scare you too much.

MARCY

No.

*(Pause.)*

MARK

So how do you get home?

MARCY

I walk.

MARK

Well, I'd offer to give you a ride, but my car is in the shop. Do you mind if I walk with you?

MARCY

Sure. It's not that far.

MARK

Okay.

*(Throughout this next part we should get the feeling of constant motion on the part of Mark and Marcy, even though they probably wouldn't be able to walk in a straight line. The actors should try and be as playful as possible with the setting in order to distract the audience from the fact that they are not actually walking a long distance down a street.)*

MARK

So I've seen you around school and I've always thought you looked like an... interesting person.

MARCY

What's that supposed to mean?

MARK

Don't be defensive. I just meant that you looked like someone I would want to get to know.

MARCY

Oh. *(Pause)* Well... here I am.

MARK

Right. *(Pause)* So what do you like to do? In school, I mean. What are your hobbies?

MARCY

Well... I've been taking a lot of art classes. And Biology II, which is really hard. *(Pause)* And I do a little theatre, but I haven't had time to be very involved. *(Pause)* Mostly I just spend my time writing.

MARK

Do you write very much?

MARCY

Yeah, actually. I try to spend about an hour a day just writing.

MARK

Well, what do you write?

MARCY

I used to write a whole lot of poetry, but the poems kept on getting longer and longer so I started writing short stories. And then my short stories kept on getting longer and longer.

MARK

So what did you do then?

MARCY

I started writing a novel. I've been working on it since September. It's already almost half done. I've got about a hundred and fifty pages, and I think it'll probably turn out to be about three hundred.

MARK

Wow! That's amazing!



MARCY

Thanks! (*Pause*) I actually have a publisher already interested in it. My agent sent them a few pages and a synopsis a month ago and he told me that they were "ravenous" to have my book. It's pretty exciting.

MARK

You have an agent? Wow! That's incredible! You must be living a lifelong dream.

MARCY

Yeah, it's really great.

MARK

Have you been published before? I mean, I heard it's pretty hard to get an agent interested in representing new authors unless they've got something already finished they can sell.

MARCY

Yeah I've had a couple of my short stories in magazines. None you would have ever heard of. (*Pause*) I used the money to buy some art supplies and a ribbon for my typewriter, cause they're hard to find.

MARK

You still use a typewriter?

MARCY

Yeah. I just think it's more organic. (*Pause. Indicates house*) This is me.

MARK

Oh. Um... Listen...

MARCY

Yeah?

MARK

I was wondering... Can I see you again sometime?

MARCY

Um yeah, sure... (*Pause*) Actually, this weekend my parents are throwing a dinner party and they're inviting the Mayor. They told me I could invite a friend if I wanted to...

MARK

You have dinner parties with the Mayor, too? That's amazing!

MARCY

Well my dad's business is involved in some pretty high tech stuff and he's trying to interest the mayor in investing and maybe even legislating a little. My dad's pretty high up in the company. (*Pause*) All kinds of secret dealings go on in our house late at night.

MARK

All shady-like, huh? (*Pause*) You know I think you're probably the most exciting person I've met in a long time.

MARCY

Wow. I don't know what to say... *(Pause)* Uh... thanks.

MARK

You're welcome. *(Pause)* So I guess I'll see you later.

MARCY

Uh, yeah. Goodbye!

MARK

It was nice walking with you.

MARCY

You too.

*(Marcy practically holds her breath until he disappears from the stage. Once he is gone she can barely contain her joy.)*

MARCY

Isn't he amazing? *(Pause)* I hope I didn't talk too much. I think he likes me! Well, he wants to see me again, which is definitely a good sign. I'm so excited! *(Marcy suddenly stops then looks at the audience and takes deep breath before speaking again.)* Sorry. I guess I got a little carried away there. But you see what I mean. The guy is amazing. I had never had anyone treat me like that, and I really loved the feeling. So I was pretty hyped up the rest of that week until the party came. *(Pause)* The party was definitely an interesting experience, which I'll tell you about in a minute. *(Pause)* First, though, I need to tell

you what happened to me after I got home from hanging out with Mark.

*(Marcy walks around to enter into the living room of her house.)*

MARCY

*(Entering)*

I walked in the front door to discover..

*(In walks Paul Davenport.)*

MARCY

That my father was home.

PAUL

Hi Marcy! How was your day at school?

*(Pause.)*

MARCY

Um, fine. *(Pause)* What are you doing home from work, dad?

PAUL

I decided to take some time off, come home early. You don't mind, do you?

MARCY

Uh... no. Of course not. Is something wrong?

PAUL

No, honey. Everything's right. *(Pause)* Here, why don't you sit down next to me.

MARCY

Okay.

*(She does this. Pause.)*

MARCY

Is there something you want?

PAUL

Well, honey... I wanted to have a little talk with you. A talk we've been needing to have for a while, but it's been too hard for me.

MARCY

Dad! Not the birds and bees speech! I've had enough sex education in school, I swear!

PAUL

No, it's not that.

MARCY

Then what is it? *(Pause, then very quickly.)* I don't do drugs, I swear. I've never tried them.

PAUL

Of course, honey. I believe you.

*(Pause.)*

MARCY

So why don't you get to it?

PAUL

Well... alright. (*Pause*) I think I owe you an apology for... for never being around. It seems like being a father these days means being this distant male figure who spends all of his time making money and never actually talks to his children. I think you deserve better than that. No, I know you deserve better than that. I've been spending way too much time working, and as soon as I finish up this next project, I'm going to be staying home a whole lot more.

MARCY

Dad, are you getting fired?

PAUL

No, honey, that's not it.

MARCY

Then you're quitting?

PAUL

No, I'm just changing positions so I can spend more time at home.

MARCY

You're not going to be working at home, are you? Because I've heard that in a lot of ways that's actually worse than working at an office all day... you never get to rest, because technically you're always at work.

PAUL

I promise you, Marcy, that's not it. I've been working too much, so I've changed positions in the company to spend more time with you and your brother.

MARCY

Oh.

*(Pause)*

PAUL

You should know that I don't think this will make up for all of the time that I wasn't here. I just want to do what I can from now on. *(Pause)* Marcy, are you happy?

*(There is a long pause, and then in a sudden burst, Marcy hugs her father.)*

MARCY

Of course I am, dad!

*(They hug for a few seconds more, and then Paul carefully disengages Marcy's arms and puts his hands on her shoulders to look in her eyes.)*

PAUL

There's just one more thing, though... Because I am getting a new position, we're going to have to move.

MARCY

*(Standing up)*

WHAT?!

PAUL

Your mother and I have decided that it's the best decision for all of us. I hope you can understand.

MARCY

You were just buttering me up, weren't you?

PAUL

No honey, that's not it. We really are moving so I can spend more time with—

MARCY

I don't care! I hate you! I don't want to have anything to do with you!

*(Marcy stomps out of the scene.)*

PAUL

Marcy!

*(Paul gets up and moves to his place with the rest of the family chorus.)*

MARCY

Just remembering that moment makes me angry again. We had been living in the same town for almost 10 years... I would have to uproot and leave behind all of my best friends. At the time, that seemed like a fate worse than death. You know, to get my mind off of all that, why don't we add another chapter to my story about the family traveling around America.



*(Mother, Father and Little Brother change into their 1950s clothes and use chairs to indicate sitting in a car. Father is driving. Behind them on the screen are projected pictures of street signs from highways all over the country.)*

MARCY

It was two weeks after they had left Big Brother and his fiancé in Yellowstone Park, and it seemed as though they had driven across half of America. Father kept driving and driving, and never slept very much, but he was a very good driver. They stayed in hotels when Father reached the point after which he felt he could drive no more. Every time they stopped, Mother mailed two letters - one to Big Brother and one to herself. Little Brother, who had been having fun before, was starting to get tired and sullen. One day, something odd happened..

LITTLE BROTHER

*(Moaning)*

Ohhhh...

MOTHER

Are you all right back there, pumpkin?

LITTLE BROTHER

I don't feel well.

FATHER

Do you need us to stop?

LITTLE BROTHER

Yeah, I—

*(Suddenly Little Brother has a coughing fit. He hacks up something into his hand, and then looks down at it in horror.)*

MOTHER

Pumpkin? Are you alright? *(To Father.)* Pull over the car!

LITTLE BROTHER

Mom! I... I coughed up something... I... don't know what it is!

*(Mother looks down at what is in Little Brother's hand and shudders in horror. She immediately turns to Father.)*

MOTHER

WE HAVE TO GO TO A HOSPITAL RIGHT NOW!

*(The scene changes to indicate a hospital examination room. Little Brother is lying on an examination bed and Mother and Father sit waiting for a diagnosis. A doctor enters carrying a clipboard.)*

DOCTOR

Honestly, folks I've... never seen anything like this. We had the contents of your son's stomach pumped and there seemed to be some kind of insect in there.

*(Everyone freezes and Marcy runs forward suddenly.)*

MARCY

No, that's not what happened! That's not what happened at all! There's no way the little boy had insects in his stomach! That's not possible.

*(The doctor unfreezes and speaks to Marcy)*

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, dear, but that's the prognosis. Besides, you aren't telling this story. We are.

MARCY

But this is my show!

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, Marcy, but this story has to be told the way it has to be told. I'm sure you understand if we'd like to get back to it.

MARCY

Fine! See if I care!

*(Everyone unfreezes and returns to the action.)*

DOCTOR

We're not exactly sure what they are, but I'm guessing it was probably something he ate.

FATHER

We've eaten the same things he has...

DOCTOR

Well I would say that if you haven't felt any symptoms similar to what your son was showing, you have nothing to worry about. You might want to call the health board and let them know what happened and give them a list of all of the restaurants you've been to lately. *(Pause)* Other than that, we'd just like to keep your son under observation for a while, so that we can perform a few more tests and make sure the condition doesn't return.

MOTHER

How long would you need him to stay here?

DOCTOR

Just a few days. Not much longer than that.

*(Mother and Father pause and look at each other for a second, and then Father speaks.)*

FATHER

You know what we have to do.

MOTHER

Yes. *(Pause)* You'll take good care of him, right?

DOCTOR

The best your health insurance can buy.

MOTHER

Wonderful. *(Pause)* We'll be back in a few days. Don't worry, pumpkin, everything will be fine.

DOCTOR

Oh, ma'am he can't hear you. We've got him on this drug to knock him out so that we can perform a procedure in a little while.

MOTHER

Oh. Well-

DOCTOR

I'll let him know what you said as soon as he wakes up.

FATHER

Thank you. We'll keep in touch.

*(Everyone leaves the scene.)*

MARCY

You'll have to excuse my actors. Sometimes they like to play pranks on me. The real version of the story is that the little boy had the flu and had to stay in the hospital for a while. When it was time, Mother and Father returned to the road and continued on their journey. Now both of them were filled with a fire to succeed, so that their boys could be proud. They knew what they had to do. And every time they stopped - without fail - Mother send out a letter to Big Brother, to Little Brother, and one to herself.

*(Pause)* I'm sure all that makes you really want to hear a story about another dinner. *(Pause)* So anyways, the dinner party came up sooner than I thought it would, and my mother

was frantic with the preparations. We also found out that Jason was going to be home for the weekend after the party, so that was just one more thing to add into the mix. It would be the first time any of us had seen him since he enlisted. Personally, I was looking forward to meeting this newly changed brother of mine. *(Pause)* When the night of the dinner party came, I was pretty nervous, but it helped that he was the one that had shown an interest in me. We spent most of the week inbetween meeting and the night of the party talking on the phone and really getting to know each other. The conversations we had were amazing. I was totally looking forward to really getting to know him well. It was really upsetting to know in the back of my mind that I would be moving soon, so I decided to wait to tell him until I absolutely had to. *(Pause.)* On the night of the party, Mark came over a little early and helped me with some of the setting up. It was interesting to see all of the different guests showing up. Now, I suppose that some of you out there might have a hard time believing what is about to happen. First of all, how does my mother know the mayor? Well, she's his personal secretary, so that's that. She's worked for him for as long as we have lived here. Of course, while that is believable, you probably will have a hard time believing his behavior on the night of the party. We all had a hard time believing it. He and his date were the last to show up, and they were three sheets to the wind upon arrival.

*(THE MAYOR and his DATE stumble into the room, clinging onto each other.)*

MAYOR

We've already been cele... celebra... celebrating, can't you tell?

MAYOR'S DATE

Hey! Where's my purse? What did I do with my purse? Stanley, where's my purse?

MAYOR

I don't know where it... It's under your arm, silly!

MAYOR'S DATE

Oh! (*Giggles*) I'm fuggin' wasted!

MAYOR

Allow me to introduce my beautiful wife Claire...

MAYOR'S DATE

I'm not your wife!

MAYOR

That's right! We left my wife at home! (*Pause*) Allow me to introduce my beautiful Claire, date. No, that's not right.

MAYOR'S DATE

Date, Claire!

MAYOR

Don't mind if I do! (*Pause*) Oh, wait... I get it.

MARCY

Oh, well I'm Marcy Davenport, and this is my date Mark.

MAYOR

He's a fine young gentleman. Stout!

MARK

Thank you.

MARCY

He climbs mountains.

*(Mark shoots Marcy a confused look, but she barrels on with what she is saying.)*

MARCY

His dream is to one day scale Mount Everest, completely alone except for a sherpa or two. Isn't that right, Mark?

MARK

Uh, yeah!

MARCY

And in his free time he takes guitar lessons!

MAYOR

I used to play the guitar. Before I got drunk. I mean... I don't know what I mean.

MARCY

He's actually going to get the chance to take some guitar lessons from Bruce Springsteen next month, because his dad



works for Springsteen's record label and called in a favor.  
Right, Mark?

MARK

Of course.

MAYOR

I love Bruce Springsteen. I think. *(Pause. To his date.)* Do you remember who Bruce Springsteen is?

MAYOR'S DATE

String cheese who?

MAYOR

String cheese? *(He bursts out laughing)*

MARCY

*(Points offstage)*

Um... If you folks head over that way, there's a bit of a buffet...

MAYOR

Ooh I'm hungry! Are you hungry?

MAYOR'S DATE

Is there any... cheese?

*(The Mayor and his Date crack up laughing at this and the two of them stumble off towards the other room. After they leave Mark turns to Marcy with a questioning look on his face.)*

MARK

What was that all about?

MARCY

Well, they were obviously plastered.

MARK

No, I mean about me being a mountain climber and my dad knowing Springsteen.

MARCY

Oh, that. (*Pause*) They were drunk. I was just teasing them a little bit.

MARK

Oh. Well, it was kind of odd. It kind of came out of nowhere.

MARCY

Oh I'm sorry. I'm sort of a spontaneous person like that sometimes. I hope you don't mind.

MARK

Well it'd just be nice to know in advance next time.

MARCY

And how would that be spontaneous?

MARK

Good point. *(Pause)* Still... it kind of weirded me out a little.

MARCY

All right. I'll try and give you a heads up the next time I do something impulsive like that.

MARK

Okay, fair enough. *(Pause)* Um, I'll be right back. I'm going to go to the bathroom. It's upstairs, right?

MARCY

Second door on the left.

MARK

Thanks. *(He exits.)*

MARCY

The Mayor's arrival had a number of interesting facets. First, they were drunk as skunks, which is remarkable strange for what I thought was a business meeting. Second, where was the Mayor's wife? Last I knew they were still together. And third was my mother's reaction to the whole thing. She had already been popping pills the whole day because of how nervous she was, and the arrival of a plastered guest of honor didn't particularly help her stay calm. By the first hour of the party, she was more medicated than I had personally ever seen her, and yet she was still carrying on conversations like nobody's business. Of course, the party only went downhill from there, considering the prank my little brother decided to pull.

*(Chad steps forward, still wearing the soccer jersey.)*

CHAD

So I was talking to my friends about how we were having this party tonight and the mayor was coming. Everybody was really impressed, even though some kids didn't think I was telling the truth. I was kinda upset, though, because Mom and Dad say that it's a grown up party and I would have to go somewhere else. I kinda wanted to get back at my parents for it, cause I really wanted to go to the party. One kid, Petey Campbell, told me 'bout a great prank I could play. He said that he had been in his brother's and had found this bag of pills underneath his brother's socks. He said that his brother always behaved really funny whenever he took the pills and that it would be really funny if I put the pills in something that the grownups would eat. So when my mom wasn't looking I put some of the pills in the fruit punch she made for everybody. I didn't get to see what happened but I'm sure it was really funny.

MARCY

Somehow, Mark and I managed to not drink the punch before people started acting strangely, and my father wasn't a fan of the stuff in the first place, so the three of us figured out pretty quickly that something must have happened and that it probably had something to do with the punch. Everybody else at the party wasn't quite so lucky, though. Let me just give you a little snapshot of what happened.

*(The scene is set with the stage utterly covered with random crap. The Mayor is squatting center stage, pushing his hands into his head and then forward and out. Every time he does this, he yells either "cockroaches" or "glockenspiel" depending on his mood. His Date is running back and forth across the stage in nothing but her underwear, singing tunelessly at the top of her lungs. Dee-Dee just sits in one place swaying back and forth and moaning. When Marcy speaks again, they all freeze.)*

MARCY

The Mayor and his date were eventually all right, although he did puke on every single piece of furniture in our living room. Mark was very impressed, let me tell you. I was lucky he ever talked to me again after that night. *(Pause)* As for my mother, she didn't fare quite so well. Something was never quite right with her again - sometime in the night her brain chemistry convinced her that she was twenty years old again, and she never let go of that. She no longer knew anything in her life that happened to her after the age of twenty, except for two things: that I was not to be trusted, and that I was to blame for everything. *(Pause)* I was almost flattered by the attention. Dad, of course, figured out that Chad had spiked the punch, and let me tell you - I have never heard my father yell like that ever in my life, and I hope I never hear it again. I think my brother may still be grounded. *(Pause)* In the morning, when we were cleaning up the mess, Jason came home. He and I talked for hours about everything that was going on in each of our lives. Basic training went pretty well for him

until they gave him a gun to hold. Suddenly Jason realized that with a gun in his hand, he could kill anyone he wanted to, and I think that really frightened him. None of us realized how upset until late that night. *(Pause)* He was sleeping on the couch that night because mom had turned his bedroom into a storage room.

*(We see Jason curled up under a blanket, trying to sleep on the couch. He is apparently restless and unable to sleep. After a few seconds of rolling around, he gets up and goes over to the liquor cabinet on the far wall, pulling out a bottle of whiskey. He pours himself a drink and then downs it very quickly. After a few seconds, he pours another.)*

MARCY

He continued on like this until he forgot how to pour. At this point, he started stumbling around the room trying to find things to do, because instead of putting him to sleep like he wanted, the whiskey just made his restlessness illogical and unchecked. This is apparently how he got the idea to fool around with the gun.

*(We watch as Jason goes and picks up the gun, checks the different parts of it, then loads it. He starts building a fort from the couch cushions and various other things. He then begins to pretend to shoot at various intruders.)*

MARCY

Somewhere along the line, Jason forgot that he was playing, and he really began to search for intruders. Soon after this is when my father came home. *(Pause)* Where he was, I wouldn't be able to tell you.

*(Suddenly Paul bursts in the door. He is drunk as well, and he fumbles with removing his coat. He is mumbling to himself.)*

PAUL

No, no I jus' wanna touch it. Jus for a little while. Oh come on. Come on. I promise not to hurt you. I promise.

*(Jason stands up and levels the gun at Paul and yells "Halt, intruder!" Before he can fire, however, Marcy stands up and yells:)*

MARCY

STOP! That's not how it was at all! Go back and do it the right way!

*(Paul walks backwards through the door and Jason returns to where he was crouching in his fort. The action starts again. Paul comes in the door, but this time he is stone cold sober.)*

PAUL

...That's it! That's the answer to the problem! Alexei will be so excited to hear that I've finally solved the Durenberg proof!

*(Paul absentmindedly tosses his coat onto the coat rack and it misses. Suddenly, Jason stands up and levels the gun at Paul, yelling "Halt, intruder!" Right as he is about to pull the trigger, both men freeze. Marcy walks forward and addresses the audience.)*

MARCY

I was the only one to hear the commotion and come downstairs. Chad was too frightened and mom was living deep in la-la land.

*(Marcy runs into the scene, and the two men unfreeze. Paul crumples to the ground and Jason slowly lowers the gun.)*

MARCY

What have you done?

JASON

Kilt a intruder. Kilt 'im.

MARCY

Oh my God, Jason! You shot dad! Do you hear me? You shot dad!

JASON

Fugger deserved it. He fuggin deserved it.

MARCY



No, Jason! Our father was a good man!

JASON

Charlotte, you don't know what you're talking about!

*(Marcy stares at Jason very intensely when he says this. Her speaking tone should be as intense.)*

MARCY

My name is Marcy!

JASON

No, your name is Charlotte. I 'member. I 'member when you were born. Just a little 'un. So little. They called you Charlotte Rose.

MARCY

NO! MY NAME IS MARCY!

*(Jason stares at her for a very long few seconds, and then seems to make a decision.)*

JASON

All right, I spose you're right. Marcy.

MARCY

...Jason, we have to call the police! We have to!

JASON

Our mama's a fuggin vegetable and you wanna call the police? The po-lice?

MARCY

Jason, you just killed our father! We have to call the police!

JASON

Imma go sleep. I'm tired. Tired as a dog. Dog tired.

*(Jason slowly sets the gun down then curls into a fetal position on the floor, instantly falling asleep. Marcy reaches into her pocket and shakily pulls out a cigarette from the packet. She lights it, inhales deeply, then begins to speak.)*

MARCY

I called the police as soon as my hands stopped shaking. They court marshaled him, and he was sent to military prison. He'll be there for a good long time. *(Pause)* I suppose now I should finish the story about my travelers. Give a final little wrap up to that whole story, and maybe it'll help make sense of this all. Maybe not.

*(The lights change and the scene reveals Father apparently sleeping on the ground, much like Paul fell in the previous scene. We know he is alive because he moves around and wakes up. The screen behind him is blank this time.)*

MARCY

When he woke up one morning, instead of his wife next to him he found a neatly written note, written on the same stationary that she wrote all of her notes on. It read:

FATHER

*(Reading)*

"I can't take anymore traveling around America. I don't know what you're running from, and I don't know why you brought me along. I don't want anything from the house. I will take care of the boys. I do not think we should see each other again. I will be filing for divorce. Good luck with whatever it is you're trying to find. P.S. Please forward all of my letters to my new address as soon as you get the chance. Signed, Adele."

MARCY

Father just sat there staring off into space for the longest time. He didn't know what to do with himself. Honestly, he realized that he no longer even knew why he had started this trip or even why he had forced his family to travel with him. It all seemed so vague and pointless now. *(Pause)* He never went back home. Instead, he went to the closest village and rented the smallest, dankest apartment he could buy. Whatever money he had left he spent on slowly drinking himself to de-

*(Suddenly Mark runs in, apparently distraught. He interrupts what Marcy was saying.)*

MARK

I'm sorry! I came as soon as I heard... I can't believe that happened... it's so terrible for a son to shoot his own father by accident... I don't even know...

*(Mark realizes that Father is sitting onstage,  
and this is apparently a shock.)*

MARK

But I thought... I heard... I heard your father was dead!

MARCY

...That's not my father.

MARK

Then who is it?

MARCY

Just someone who looks like my father. *(Pause)* Mark, you just... won't understand this.

MARK

You're right I won't, because unless your father had a twin brother I didn't know about, that has to be your father!

MARCY

You're right. It is his twin. His long-lost twin. We were actually having a very private conversation just then.  
*(Pause)* I'd really like you to leave me alone, if you don't mind. I'll talk to you later.

FATHER

I don't have a twin.

MARCY

What?

MARK

He said he doesn't have a twin. I knew something weird was going on here.

MARCY

Listen, Mark... I have something I have to tell you. I'm moving. Very soon.

MARK

What? Why are you moving?

MARCY

Because my father...

MARK

Because your father what?

MARCY

Because of my father's death. We're moving somewhere else to get away from it all.

FATHER

That's not the reason at all. We were going to move because I needed a break. Same reason for the vacation, you see... a man needs to rest every once in a while.

MARK

What's going on here?

MARCY

I... I...

FATHER

My daughter is quite the fanciful one. Always telling stories. *(Pause)* Of course, I call her my daughter, but that's not really the story. I mean, I represent her father... I feel like her father sometimes, but I'm just a character she's created. You haven't really met her family. We're all just two-dimensional constructs of what she'd like us to be. I guess she just thought her real family was too boring.

MARCY

He's lying. He's a crazy old man, you know. *(Pause)* The rumors were actually wrong. He wasn't dead. The bullet only grazed his skull... he was brain damaged.

MARK

Marcy, I don't understand you. You seem like a nice enough girl, but...

MARCY

But what? I am a nice person, I swear... everyone's got their problems.

FATHER

I dunno boy, I wouldn't get myself mixed up with this one. You'll never know what's heads or tails when she's around. Think back a little...

MARK

Yes... Yes... I'm remembering something. *(Pause)* Do you remember the day we met?

MARCY

Of course!

MARK

Well, I just remembered something about it, but it seems kind of strange. I just remembered the circumstances...

*(The lights change to indicate a scene change. We are back at the hallway in the high school, and the Male Students are talking with the Female Student. Marcy moves to where she was before.)*

FEMALE STUDENT

...She's so negative. And bitter. And she can be such a heinous bitch.

MARK

Well, she can be weird, yeah... but there's got to be something going on in there. *(Pause)* Of course, maybe not. Maybe she'll just grow up to be a serial killer some day.

FEMALE STUDENT

She's so pathetic!

*(We hear the sound of a school bell ringing, and Marcy begins to walk to class, which happens to be past the students. Right as she is passing them, Mark sticks out his foot and Marcy trips on it, spilling her books on the ground. All of the students laugh uproariously at her, then walk off towards class. Mark walks forward.)*

MARK

It seems strange that I would treat you like that and then have a sudden change of heart to become interested in you. Doesn't seem at all believable, in fact. What have you got to say about that!

MARCY

I don't know what you're talking about.

FATHER

Charlotte always was a feisty one.

MARCY

My name is MARCY! MARCY! Get it right!

MARK

Everything about this relationship is a fabrication. All of this is in your head. In fact, I'm not here right now, which means—

*(The lights change, and Mark disappears. They brighten again.)*

FATHER

You know, your mother and I miss you a lot. We never understood why you left home so suddenly. Don't ever forget, honey, that whenever you want to you're free to come home to—

MARCY

NO! GO AWAY! I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU ANYMORE!



*(Father disappears, and the lights change to only focus on Marcy.)*

MARCY

Charlotte, Marcy ... what's the difference? I just like the way that Marcy sounds. *(Pause)* I told you that that last part was the last chapter about the traveler, but that wasn't the truth. This is the last part of that story. *(Pause)* After all of the family split apart and went their separate ways, the house should have gone into ruins, but it didn't, because there was still someone living there. Her name was Charlotte. Sometimes Patricia, Sometimes other things. She had the bad luck of still being in the bathroom when her family left on their trip. They never even thought to look for her. Her mother had known something, although she didn't quite know what, and that was why she apparently wrote letters to herself. *(Pause)* Of course, none of that's actually true either, but it's kind of poetic. *(Pause)* Why don't I read you some of the letters?

*(She pulls out the letters from her pocket, unfolds one, and begins reading.)*

MARCY

"Charlotte is a bright young girl, but she oftentimes daydreams and tends to miss the deadlines on work. It is my recommendation that the Special Education program be looked into for her." *(Pause. Next letter.)* "We would like to apologize for any hurt that our actions as a school have caused to your family. Under the circumstances, we as

administrators felt it necessary to investigate the allegations made by your daughter. We would like to send you our deepest apologies. We also believe that some form of therapy is necessary for Charlotte's well-being."

*(Pause. Next letter.)* "I think Charlotte actually believes everything she says. I've caught her in so many little lies, and it has happened one too many times that another mother from school has called me and asked about some story she has told. I don't know where this behavior comes from. I thought we raised her better. I suppose her dissatisfaction with the world is so great that she cannot live with being herself." They go on like this. *(Pause. She pulls out a cigarette and lights it.)* So, you may be thinking that I'm nothing but a liar, that everything you've seen tonight was just fabricated, off the cuff, that I've just been putting you on. I ask you, though... What does that matter? What is truth, anyway? Everything I have told you is just as true for me as what someone else could have told you about my life. My life is what it is. Believe what you want. All of my stories are true. *(Pause)* And all of them are lies.

*(She blows out a large puff of smoke, and then the lights cut off to blackout.)*

THE END