

GOLDEN LADDER

A full-length dramedy by
Donna Spector

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

CATHERINE BRONSON, plays both a young girl 7-15, and a woman, 30.

BERNARD BRONSON, young, 21, and older, 40s, Catherine's father.

LAURA BRONSON, young, 18, and older, 40s, Catherine's mother.

AARON FELDMAN, 15-16, and at the end, 31. Catherine's first boyfriend.

MARY SCACCIA, 13-16, Catherine's girlfriend.

CAROLE HAVENS, 15-16, Catherine's girlfriend.

HOTEL CLERK, may be played by same actress who plays Carole Havens.

PLACE

Pasadena, California, and in the memory scenes between Bernard and Laura, Evansville, Indiana. The setting, however, is a bare stage.

TIME

Moves back and forth to various times between 1943 and 1980. Catherine's adolescent scenes take place in the early '60s.

NOTES

Catherine, Bernard, Laura and Aaron's older scenes may be played by older actors.

On pp. 32 and 52, productions may substitute "damn" for "shit" or simply cut the word altogether as necessary.

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ACT I

(Lights up on CATHERINE, standing with AARON. Both in their 30s, Catherine wears a coat and a shawl over her head, holds a baby in her arms. Aaron wears a yarmulke.)

CATHERINE AND AARON: Ye-hei she-la-ma ra-ba min she-ma-ya ve-cha-yim a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil, ve-I-me-ru: a-mein. O-she sha-lom bi-me-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil, ve-I-me-ru: a-mein.

CATHERINE: *(She looks down at baby:)* That was the Kaddish, Leah. The Jewish prayer for the dead. And look where your grandfather lies — in a Christian graveyard.

(Aaron exits with baby, coat and shawl. CAROLE, 15, enters dressed in a pink cashmere sweater and silk skirt, pearl necklace.)

CAROLE: Catherine, we need to know. Just tell us.

CATHERINE: *(Now 15, she turns to Carole:)* I don't even know why you're asking me this.

CAROLE: Because I'm your friend, and that's why the girls have sent me.

CATHERINE: Oh, Carole, please. If you were my friend...

CAROLE: You're making this very unpleasant for me, Catherine. For all of us. If you'd just tell us clearly yes or no...

CATHERINE: Why does it matter?

CAROLE: Don't be ridiculous! This is a Christian club.

CATHERINE: I know that.

CAROLE: Yes, you know that. So. Are you Jewish?

CATHERINE: No. *(To audience, as Carole leaves:)* There are times in your life when you do something so against your conscience you don't want to look at it. You begin to change

the story, to justify your actions. You could almost convince yourself, except for your dreams.

(BERNARD enters, in his 40s.)

BERNARD: Oh, Catherine.

(He crosses DL and sits.)

CATHERINE: My father. When I was little, I thought he was wiser than God. In my earliest memories he sits by my bed and tells me stories.

BERNARD: Once upon a time there was a golden ladder that reached from earth all the way to heaven. The ladder wasn't always visible to people on the earth, but sometimes, when they were walking along the road or standing in a field listening to the ducks and geese, or lying in bed half-asleep, the golden ladder would appear...

CATHERINE: *(Age 7. Crosses to him, sits:)* Like a rainbow?

BERNARD: Almost like a rainbow, but not red, green, blue and violet that stain the sky after rain. Just the color of gold people believe waits where the rainbow touches down.

CATHERINE: Did anyone ever find the gold?

BERNARD: Probably not, because the rainbow always ends just a bit farther from where you are.

CATHERINE: Daddy, can people climb the golden ladder?

BERNARD: It could happen. Once, there was a man who began to understand life on earth, which is a place so wonderful and terrible it is truly absurd, and this man began to laugh. And as he laughed, he grew lighter, as though the force of gravity couldn't hold him anymore. Then, just as his feet began to leave the ground, he saw the golden ladder

shimmering on its way into the clouds. And, people say, he climbed the ladder, laughing until he disappeared.

CATHERINE: I've heard him laughing, Daddy. Did you ever climb the golden ladder?

BERNARD: No, I'm not wise enough.

CATHERINE: I think you are. I know it.

BERNARD: That's because you're seven years old. Maybe when you're older... But now it's time for you to sleep.

(He withdraws into shadows.)

CATHERINE: *(She stands. To audience:)* He thinks he can leave, but I've got him now, the way you can never have anyone in real life.

LAURA (V.O.): Kathleen!

CATHERINE: Ah, yes. My names: To my mother I was Kathleen. A nice Irish girl. I was Catherine to my father, who believed the name was Russian. Who performed the Cossack dance at parties when he'd had a couple of drinks, so everyone would think he was Russian. Perhaps an émigré from the Tsarist régime. But he wasn't Russian, not in that sense, and the name Catherine comes from the Greek word katharos, which means pure, clean as a cloudless sky. So I am, you might say, a misconception. Or to put it more kindly, a romantic notion.

BERNARD: *(Enters, as his younger self:)* Where is she? That girl with the incredible eyes.

LAURA: *(Enters from opposite side, as her younger self. She runs past Bernard, calling out to a friend:)* Maude! Wait for me!

CATHERINE: My father meets my mother at a college in Indiana. A romantic notion which may be true. It is, at least, a story both my parents told. A mutual mythology.

(She withdraws, but watches.)

BERNARD: *(Chasing after Laura:)* Excuse me!

LAURA: *(Stops and turns to him:)* What?

BERNARD: I need to ask you something.

LAURA: Who are you?

BERNARD: I'm the editor of *The Sentinel*.

LAURA: The who?

BERNARD: *The Sentinel*. Our college newspaper?

LAURA: Oh.

BERNARD: You haven't been reading it?

LAURA: No, I haven't. But I will, once I get settled in. And you're the...?

BERNARD: Editor. Yes. I'm looking for some freshman reporters, and I thought...

LAURA: You thought of me? Why?

CATHERINE: He wanted to say, Because you are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. But he said...

BERNARD: You seem so intelligent.

LAURA: I do? Well. Thank you.

BERNARD: So alert, and...sensitive.

LAURA: Really? That's so...nice of you. I mean, you don't know me.

BERNARD: But I'd like to.

LAURA: Oh. Well, I have to go right now, but maybe tomorrow...

(She turns to leave.)

BERNARD: Wait, Laura.

LAURA: You know my name?

BERNARD: I've asked about you.

LAURA: *(Suddenly shy.)* What's your name?

BERNARD: Bernard.

(They look into each other's eyes, transfixed.)

LAURA: What would I have to do, Bernard?

BERNARD: I would give you assignments. You would go to theater events, club meetings...

LAURA: That might be interesting.

BERNARD: And athletic events.

LAURA: Sports? Oh, I don't think I could...

BERNARD: Let's say no sports. But clubs would be all right with you? You could take notes, write a small report...

LAURA: I could do that.

BERNARD: Sure. You just begin with a strong lead...

LAURA: A strong lead.

BERNARD: You know. The five W's.

LAURA: Oh. The five W's.

BERNARD: You'd get your own byline...

LAURA: My own byline?

BERNARD: Sure. You'll become famous. On campus, at least. Everyone'll know who you are.

LAURA: Oh, no, I don't think so.

BERNARD: What do you mean?

LAURA: I want...to be like everyone else. Here, at college.

BERNARD: Hunh. (*Beat.*) Okay. You can write anonymously. (*Beat.*) Say, what're you studying?

LAURA: Literature.

BERNARD: You are? (*Beat.*) Do you know Wordsworth's poetry?

LAURA: No, but he's on our reading list.

BERNARD: She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament...
A dancing Shape, an Image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and way-lay.

LAURA: That's so beautiful!

BERNARD: (*Shyly:*) So are you. (*Then, embarrassed at his boldness:*) So, tomorrow? You could come to my office? Just over there, by the bulletin board.

LAURA: I'll come after lunch.

BERNARD: You know, if you came at lunch time, I could buy you a sandwich. And a soda? Then we'd have more time for me to tell you...

LAURA: I'd love to.

CATHERINE: The only way my father could buy my mother lunch was if he went without dinner. But he clutched his

heart, knowing this love was a sickness from which he would never recover.

BERNARD: (*Clutching his heart:*) I need an aspirin. (*Stepping into the edge of the light:*) I worshipped her like an icon, Catherine.

CATHERINE: I know that, Daddy.

BERNARD: Remember the way you played with your mother's jewelry? I tried to build a house for her of colored glass and jewels, a place so lovely she would always be happy.

CATHERINE: But she wasn't always happy.

BERNARD: Whatever she wanted. I would do anything.

(Fading into the shadows.)

CATHERINE: You would give up anything. (*Sighs. Then, to audience:*) Until I was nine I thought my mother was perfect. She was much prettier than other mothers. She had a closet full of silky dresses and fancy shoes. I would try them on, spraying myself with her My Sin perfume. Then I would sit at her dressing table and play with her shiny rings and necklaces. I smeared her red lipstick and rouge on my face, trying to look just like her.

(Laura enters.)

LAURA: Look at your hair, Kathleen!

CATHERINE: (*To audience:*) Then everything changed. (*To Laura:*) What's wrong with it?

LAURA: You look like an Italian immigrant. Take this clip and pull that hair out of your eyes.

CATHERINE: No.

LAURA: I won't take you to church looking like you just stepped off the boat.

CATHERINE: Fine.

LAURA: (*Fixing Catherine's hair:*) That's a good girl. Now go get dressed. I put your pink skirt and blouse on your bed.

CATHERINE: I don't like pink.

LAURA: Don't be silly, Kathleen. You and I chose that outfit last month, you remember? We'd just had lunch in Bullock's Tea Room, and we went down to the Junior Dresses...

CATHERINE: I wanted that black dress, but you wouldn't pay for it.

LAURA: Why are you always contradicting me? No nine-year-old girl wears black. I buy what looks good on you.

CATHERINE: You buy what you like. I'm just your little doll to dress in cute clothes.

LAURA: If we're late for church, Kathleen, I'm going to have a hemorrhage. Then you'll be sorry.

CATHERINE: I'll wear that pink stuff if Daddy comes to church with us.

LAURA: Your father is too busy to come to church. You know that.

CATHERINE: But he never comes.

LAURA: That's because he's writing his novel, Darling. He always writes on weekends.

CATHERINE: (*To audience:*) Ultimately, I gave in, just as my father did.

BERNARD: (*From the shadows:*) Make nice, Catherine, that's a good girl. Don't upset your mother.

CATHERINE: All right, Daddy.

LAURA: You look so much prettier in pink, darling, that's a good girl. And don't forget, when we visit Gram, leave the picture of Jesus in the car.

CATHERINE: Why, Mommy?

LAURA: Because Gram doesn't like Jesus.

CATHERINE: Daddy? Do you know why she doesn't like Jesus?

BERNARD: She's old, Sweetheart. Old people get ideas in their heads.

LAURA: But you just remember: you're Presbyterian. No matter what anyone says.

CATHERINE: What would they say? Would they talk about Jesus?

BERNARD: Not at Gram's.

LAURA: Kathleen, you're baptized now. And confirmed. So no one can say anything.

CATHERINE: When we went to Gram's house in Altadena we ate strange food, called latkes and gefilte fish. We drank sweet wine. Gram lit candles and said prayers in another language. It was a strange and secret world I didn't understand. Because no one named that world. No one told its stories. But I loved Gram. She had a soft voice and long white hair she brushed with a silver brush.

BERNARD: You were good, honey. Gram loves you.

CATHERINE: Because I didn't talk about Jesus?

BERNARD: No, she loves you because you're you.

CATHERINE: She doesn't love Mommy, does she?

BERNARD: Oh, they have their difficulties.

CATHERINE: Why? Mommy didn't talk about Jesus.

BERNARD: You know how women are.

CATHERINE: I do? *(To audience:)* Finally I figured it out: Gram had met Jesus somewhere and didn't like him. Maybe he said something like, You've got to leave your family and follow me. He said those things. I learned it in Sunday School. *(To Bernard:)* Daddy, is Gram going to Hell?

BERNARD: Of course not, Sweetheart. Why would you say that? Gram is a good woman.

CATHERINE: Because in Sunday school they told us if you don't love Jesus, you'll go to Hell.

BERNARD: If they say that, it's not true.

CATHERINE: What was I to believe? I kept seeing Gram burning in flames, and I was very worried. That night I heard Mother and Daddy fighting in their bedroom.

BERNARD: I don't want Catherine to go to Sunday school any more.

LAURA: Bernard! You promised me!

BERNARD: I've changed my mind.

LAURA: You can't do that.

BERNARD: They're telling Catherine my mother will go to Hell.

LAURA: Not your mother, Bernard. They don't say that.

BERNARD: Catherine told me...

LAURA: Kathleen is just a child. She doesn't understand.

BERNARD: She understands enough to say my mother...

LAURA: You agreed I could raise her Presbyterian.

BERNARD: For god's sake, Laura, even you weren't raised Presbyterian!

LAURA: I was raised Southern Baptist, and there's nothing worse than that!

BERNARD: Not even Jewish?

CATHERINE: Jewish? What was that?

LAURA: You're not Jewish. Not any more.

BERNARD: All right. I'm not Jewish any more. But my mother is, and I won't have any Christian preacher telling Catherine my mother is going to Hell.

LAURA: Darling, let's not talk about this now. Let's just...go to bed.

(Laura smiles and exits.)

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* I couldn't wait to talk to my father. The next morning I found him alone, working on ads for his newspaper. *(To Bernard:)* Daddy, what's Jewish?

BERNARD: Jewish? Why do you want to know that?

CATHERINE: I heard some people talking about it, and I just wondered.

BERNARD: Well, Judaism is a religion.

CATHERINE: What kind of religion?

BERNARD: One of the world's major religions. There are Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and...

CATHERINE: Presbyterians.

BERNARD: Presbyterians are Christians. There are many forms of Christianity. But Christians believe Jesus was the son of God, and Jews do not believe God would ever assume the form of man. Any representation of God by an image is forbidden.

CATHERINE: Are you Jewish?

BERNARD: I was. Not any more.

CATHERINE: Oh. But why were you Jewish and Mother and I are Presbyterian?

BERNARD: Because I was born that way.

CATHERINE: And I was born Presbyterian?

BERNARD: No. Your mother decided you both would be Presbyterian.

CATHERINE: Why?

BERNARD: Because it's more socially acceptable. In certain parts of the world. Like our neighborhood.

CATHERINE: Why?

BERNARD: Some people don't like Jews.

CATHERINE: And that's why you're not Jewish any more?

BERNARD: No, I wouldn't say that.

LAURA: (*Enters, smiling:*) What are you two talking about?

CATHERINE: Why Daddy isn't Jewish any more.

LAURA: Oh, for heaven's sake! Your father isn't Jewish because Jewish is a religion that your father doesn't believe in.

CATHERINE: But Daddy was born that way. He said.

LAURA: Kathleen. Can we end this discussion now?

CATHERINE: Why?

LAURA: Nice people don't talk about religion, sex or politics.

(She exits.)

CATHERINE: So what are you, Daddy?

BERNARD: I'm an atheist.

(He exits.)

CATHERINE: Oh, no. I knew from Sunday school that atheists were as bad as Catholics. Now I had two people to worry about: Daddy and Gram, blazing in the flames of Hell.

MARY: *(Enters, chewing gum:)* Hey, Cathy. Wanna go over to the park and watch the boys?

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* My best friend Mary Scaccia, when I was thirteen. We did everything together. *(To Mary:)* Sure.

(She links arms with Mary.)

MARY: *(As they walk along:)* I'm getting braces next week.

CATHERINE: What for?

MARY: My teeth are crooked. See?

(She flashes her teeth.)

CATHERINE: They don't look so bad.

MARY: Everyone's gonna call me metal mouth.

(They sit together, facing audience.)

I brought some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Y'know, it's one of the last times I'm gonna eat peanut butter for the next few years.

(She pulls them out of her bag, gives one to Catherine. They eat and talk.)

CATHERINE: I shouldn't eat peanut butter. I've got fat legs.

MARY: They're not fat.

CATHERINE: They're not thin like your legs.

MARY: Mine are skinny. Nobody likes skinny legs.

CATHERINE: I do.

MARY: I'm skinny all over. I don't even have to like wear a bra. Not like you, y'know.

CATHERINE: I hate my bra. It feels like I can't breathe when I wear it. Remember how Joe Arnold used to come up behind me in the cafeteria and snap my strap?

MARY: He's a jerk.

CATHERINE: He's popular.

MARY: Most popular guys are jerks. Would you kiss a guy like Joe Arnold?

CATHERINE: Oh, gross!

MARY: Y'know, I heard he French kissed Francine Shacklin.

CATHERINE: Francine? She wouldn't.

MARY: I don't know. She's Jewish.

CATHERINE: What do you mean?

MARY: You know what they say about Jewish girls.

CATHERINE: What?

MARY: They're all fast. By the time they're fourteen they usually go all the way.

CATHERINE: No, they don't! That's terrible to say.

MARY: They can't help it. They've got like extra hormones or something.

CATHERINE: This sandwich tastes terrible.

MARY: What's the matter with it?

CATHERINE: There's too much jelly. It's making me sick.

MARY: I'll finish it. Hey, look at those Ramsey boys. Would you believe they're twins?

CATHERINE: No.

MARY: They're so cute! They're looking at you. I wish I had, y'know... (*Looking at Catherine's breasts:*) ...what you have. It's gonna take years for boys to look at me.

CATHERINE: Do Jewish girls really have extra hormones?

MARY: Yeah. I read it in *Seventeen*, I think.

CATHERINE: What if you're sort of Jewish, but not really Jewish?

MARY: You can't be sort of Jewish.

CATHERINE: Well, I knew this girl once who had one parent who was born Jewish but he quit because he became an atheist.

MARY: Boy, is that screwed up! Do I know this girl?

CATHERINE: No, I met her when we went to Lake Tahoe for vacation. But now, y'know, it makes me think. Did she have extra hormones?

MARY: Sure. Maybe not as many. I mean, maybe she wouldn't go all the way till she was fifteen. But you never know.

CATHERINE: What about Jewish boys?

MARY: Oh, they're the worst. They go all the way by the time they're ten. Like Aaron Feldman?

CATHERINE: Who's he?

MARY: That tall, thin kid in tenth grade who wears glasses and has really green eyes? He made a speech last year in assembly about some Jewish holiday.

CATHERINE: Yeah, I remember him.

MARY: Lisa Clark told me he slept with ten girls already.

CATHERINE: Ten? That's more than, uh, two a year. If he started when he was ten.

MARY: Yeah. And he looks so boring. I heard he's so smart he takes math at Cal Tech. So you never know. *(Beat.)* Hey, maybe we should go swimming in the high school pool? There might be more boys over there.

CATHERINE: I don't feel like it. Boys bore me.

MARY: Hunh. Well, okay. I'm gonna go anyway. See you later.

CATHERINE: *(To audience, as Mary walks off:)* That night I dreamed about hormones. They were naked women with huge breasts and bright red lips, and they were dancing all around me in high heels. *(Beat.)* When I woke up, I took a piece of cloth and bound my breasts so tight I looked like a boy. And I went on my own special diet: no more than ten bites of food at each meal. I was thirteen, so I had just one year to make myself so skinny I wouldn't be sexy.

LAURA: Kathleen, you're not eating.

CATHERINE: Can't you just call me Cathy? Both of you? It's very confusing to have two names.

LAURA: I made lamb chops, mashed potatoes and peas, your favorite meal, and you refuse to eat more than a few bites of anything.

CATHERINE: I'd rather have latkes, the way we do at Gram's.

BERNARD: Your mother hasn't learned yet, Honey. She's trying, but she doesn't have it down.

LAURA: I am not trying, Bernard. I just pretended to try to please your mother.

BERNARD: It would please me too.

CATHERINE: At school, y'know, everyone calls me Cathy.

BERNARD: Catherine's right, Laura. We should just call her Cathy. It's ridiculous the way we...

LAURA: Fine. She can be Cathy. *(To Catherine:)* You can be Cathy. Now will you please eat?

CATHERINE: I eat.

LAURA: Not enough. You eat like a straw.

BERNARD: How can a person eat like a straw, Laura? You mean she looks like a straw?

LAURA: I mean what I say. Whenever I say it.

CATHERINE: My stomach shrank when I started taking ballet. It's because you make me practice all the time.

LAURA: One hour out of twenty-four isn't all the time. Are you on a diet? Because if you are, I won't have it. You're thin enough. *(Angry stare at Bernard:)* Like a straw.

CATHERINE: I'm not on a diet. I'm just not very hungry.

LAURA: Why not? Are you sick?

BERNARD: You know, Laura, sometimes that happens during puberty. Young girls' bodies change.

LAURA: You're always taking her side, Bernard. I can't even have an opinion around here.

CATHERINE: (*Sudden terror:*) How do they change, Daddy?

BERNARD: Oh, they... Well, sometimes they... (*Beat.*) Did I ever tell you about the chubby little girl who grew up in a witch's house? She knew the witch was going to cook her one day, so she got thinner and thinner...

CATHERINE: Daddy. Do Jewish girls have more hormones?

BERNARD: What? More hormones than who?

CATHERINE: Than girls who aren't Jewish.

BERNARD: I think everyone has the same hormones. No, that's not right. Hormones change when you... But Jewish girls are no different...

LAURA: Why are we talking about Jewish girls?

CATHERINE: I just wondered.

LAURA: Do you know any Jewish girls?

CATHERINE: Well, sure. There are some in my class. There's Francine Shacklin...

LAURA: That girl is not your type, Kathleen.

CATHERINE: Cathy. You said Cathy was okay.

LAURA: Cathy. I met the Shacklins at Back to School Night, and they're definitely not the sort of people we associate with.

BERNARD: Laura.

CATHERINE: Why not?

LAURA: Well, they're Jewish, and we're not. They go to a different church...

BERNARD: Synagogue.

LAURA: And they eat different food...

CATHERINE: Like Gram. And Daddy must've eaten Jewish food when he was little. Didn't you, Daddy?

BERNARD: Of course. What else was there?

LAURA: Just stop it, you two! I won't be ganged up on!

CATHERINE: But Mother, if Daddy's mother is Jewish, and he was born Jewish, then I must be...

LAURA: No. You are not. We're Presbyterians! We go to church every Sunday.

CATHERINE: Daddy doesn't.

LAURA: Look around you. Do you see any Jewish families in our neighborhood? In my women's club? Not that there's anything wrong with being Jewish, but...

CATHERINE: So what do you mean?

LAURA: It means we're not talking about this any more! Now go to your room and do your homework.

CATHERINE: (*Getting up, in tears:*) All right, don't tell me if I have any extra hormones. See if I care!

(She walks away.)

LAURA: See what you've done, Bernard?

BERNARD: I did it? Laura, if you'd let go of this prejudice of yours...

LAURA: Prejudice? That's so unfair! This is the way the world is. I'm trying to protect her.

BERNARD: No, you're not.

LAURA: You hate me!

BERNARD: I could never hate you.

LAURA: I gave up my family to be with you, and now...

BERNARD: Come here. *(He takes her in his arms:)* Imagine a beautiful princess who lives in a land where everyone tries to look the same, denying any differences because they're all afraid...

LAURA: Bernard, this is not the time to tell me stories.

BERNARD: Sometimes stories explain better than...

LAURA: Not now! I'm telling you...

BERNARD: All right. Tell me.

LAURA: I'm trying to do what's best for us.

BERNARD: So am I. But please. Don't talk about Jews the way you do.

LAURA: Me? Remember what your mother said to me when she found out...

BERNARD: Shhhh. She didn't mean it.

LAURA: She did. Sometimes she won't even speak to me. I could be invisible, and then she criticizes everything I do. Why don't you tell her to be nice to me?

BERNARD: I've tried. Believe me. And she's changing, I'm sure she'll...

LAURA: She is not! She's terrible! No matter what I do...

BERNARD: Please. She's my mother! And now she invites us over...

LAURA: Because of Kathleen. I'm still an outsider. So don't ask me to make Jewish food again to please your mother! She wouldn't come here to eat it anyway.

BERNARD: I won't.

LAURA: I'm not going to your mother's anymore. You and Kathleen can go by yourselves.

BERNARD: Oh, Laura. If you could only...

LAURA: And don't talk to Kathleen about being Jewish again! You know what can happen to her.

(They exit.)

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* When I heard that, I understood: I was doomed. That's why we couldn't talk about it. And on my fourteenth birthday...

MARY: *(Comes running in, breathless:)* Cathy! Aaron Feldman wants to meet you.

CATHERINE: Oh, no! Why?

MARY: He's been asking about you. And when I told him today was your fourteenth birthday, he just begged me, I don't know.

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* He knew. He saw it in me: my hormones must have kicked in. So I resigned myself. If I had to do it, at least it would be with one of the smartest and cutest boys in the tenth grade. *(To Mary:)* Okay. Introduce me.

MARY: He's waiting over there by the live oak trees. Just a sec.

(She runs off.)

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* My heart was doing gymnastics in my chest. I couldn't breathe, and my breasts hurt so much I

turned around, reached under my tee shirt and ripped away the cloth that bound them.

MARY: (*Entering with Aaron:*) Hi, Cathy, this is Aaron, Aaron, this is Cathy, it's her birthday, oh, I told you that, God, I don't know where my brains are. (*Beat.*) So. Here he is.

AARON: Hi.

CATHERINE: Oh. Hi.

MARY: Well, I'll be running along. See you.

(She exits.)

AARON: I hear it's your birthday.

CATHERINE: Y'know, maybe you've got the wrong idea.

AARON: It's not your birthday?

CATHERINE: Well, it is, but...

AARON: Your fourteenth?

CATHERINE: I don't know what you've heard about me, y'know, but...

AARON: Well, I heard you're very smart. Y'know. Best grades in your class. And, uh, well... You write poems. No, I didn't hear that, really. I read them. They're good.

CATHERINE: How do you know?

AARON: I guess it's just my opinion. I'm not a poet.

CATHERINE: You're a math person.

AARON: Yeah. Well. Uh, that's not all I am.

CATHERINE: Oh, I know.

AARON: there is no canopy
for hiding, my love

I have prepared
a horse for riding
time is open now
let your body glisten
in the sun

CATHERINE: That's my poem!

AARON: Yes.

CATHERINE: How did you remember it?

AARON: (*He continues to quote:*) who sings his song
in our heart
let him sing
to the sun
for we have chased
the horses of the moon away
and we hold the light
in our hands

CATHERINE: I can't believe you know it. (*Beat.*) So, uh...
How old are you?

AARON: Fifteen.

CATHERINE: That means at least two more. Maybe two and
a half.

AARON: What?

CATHERINE: So, where do we, y'know, go?

AARON: What do you mean? (*Stares at her breasts:*) You look
different. From when I saw you yesterday.

CATHERINE: (*Crossing her arms over her chest:*) You think so?

AARON: Yes. (*Beat.*) You want to go somewhere?

CATHERINE: Well, sure. I mean. We can't just stay here.

AARON: We can't?

CATHERINE: Well, I mean. *(Beat.)* Maybe it's not really true, what they say.

AARON: What do they say?

CATHERINE: You know.

AARON: I don't. *(Beat.)* You're really pretty up close.

CATHERINE: I'm not pretty.

AARON: Yes, you are. You're very pretty. *(Beat.)* Want to go swimming?

CATHERINE: In the pool?

AARON: You know anywhere else we could go swimming?

CATHERINE: No, I meant...I don't know very much, even though I'm fourteen. But the pool? *(Beat.)* How'd you find out about me?

AARON: Well, I... Y'know, I... Oh, maybe... *(Deep breath:)* I just saw you, and I knew.

CATHERINE: I figured.

AARON: Y'know, I... Well...I'd been watching you a long time.

CATHERINE: Waiting.

AARON: Well, sort of. I mean, it's hard, y'know.

CATHERINE: Is it? Okay. I guess I have to know. You just can't escape your destiny.

AARON: Are you my destiny? Is that what you think? I mean...

CATHERINE: It looks like it.

AARON: Can I...? What do you think? Could I...kiss you then?

CATHERINE: I suppose.

(They kiss tentatively.)

AARON: You're Jewish, aren't you?

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* Then I knew. It showed. *(To Aaron:)* Not really.

AARON: What do you mean?

CATHERINE: Well, my mother's not Jewish, and my father was born Jewish, but...

AARON: Oh, I see what you mean. It's like a maternal lineage.

CATHERINE: What?

AARON: You know. Jews say you have to have a Jewish mother to be really Jewish.

CATHERINE: Really? Then I'm not Jewish?

AARON: Why? You don't want to be Jewish?

CATHERINE: No, it's not that. *(Beat.)* I just worry about the Jewish hormones.

AARON: Jewish hormones?

CATHERINE: Hormones are in the blood, aren't they?

AARON: Are they?

CATHERINE: So if my father was born Jewish, then he has Jewish blood, and I have some too, so I must have Jewish hormones.

AARON: This is the weirdest conversation.

CATHERINE: In which case, I'll probably end up doing it.

AARON: What?

CATHERINE: Going all the way.

AARON: I beg your pardon?

CATHERINE: But if my father quit being Jewish to be an atheist and my mother says being Jewish is a religion, not, y'know, something cultural...

AARON: It's both.

CATHERINE: Oh. Hell. Then I guess I'll have to do it. With you.

AARON: Oh. *(Beat.)* You... I mean... You're not the person I thought you were.

CATHERINE: What did you think?

AARON: Uh, y'know... You're really fast.

CATHERINE: I guess I am. I tried not to be, but...

AARON: I mean, most girls don't start talking about going all the way with a boy they just met.

CATHERINE: I've had no experience talking to boys. I didn't know.

AARON: You mean you just do it and don't talk?

CATHERINE: I never did, but...

AARON: Wow. Maybe we should go over to my house. There's nobody home.

CATHERINE: Okay.

AARON: *(Takes her hand as they start walking off:)* Total silence. Hunh.

CATHERINE: (*Stops and speaks to audience:*) We went to his house and we tried to do it. We fumbled around a while, very embarrassed but not speaking. (*To Aaron:*) You don't know anything.

AARON: Gee, thanks. You don't know anything either.

CATHERINE: Well, I don't have to. I just turned fourteen.

AARON: So what was all this about going all the way?

CATHERINE: You ought to know. Didn't you start when you were ten?

AARON: Sex? When I was ten?

CATHERINE: I thought you'd done it with like twelve or so girls by now.

AARON: Shit! You did?

CATHERINE: Sure. What about your hormones?

AARON: What is this crap about hormones?

CATHERINE: Mary told me if you're Jewish, you've got more hormones, and you've got to go all the way with girls by the time you're fourteen.

AARON: I can't believe she said that.

CATHERINE: And she said you'd gone all the way with ten girls by last year.

AARON: Cathy. Don't you ever question things your friends say?

CATHERINE: She said she read it in Seventeen.

AARON: Seventeen. The ultimate medical and scientific authority. (*He starts laughing:*) That is so funny! Y'know, you ought to write a story about this.

CATHERINE: I don't think it's very funny.

AARON: Well, it is. Extra hormones.

(Aaron laughs even harder.)

CATHERINE: I'm going home.

AARON: Wait. I'm sorry. I'm not really laughing at you. Well, I am, sort of, but not in a mean way.

CATHERINE: I'm grateful to you for enlightening me. But I'd like to leave now.

AARON: Oh, Cathy. Couldn't we be friends?

CATHERINE: I don't think so. You make me feel stupid.

AARON: You're not stupid. Maybe, y'know, a little naïve, but that's okay.

CATHERINE: It's not okay.

AARON: It's okay with me. Could I kiss you?

CATHERINE: No.

AARON: Just a friendly kiss. *(Beat.)* I'll tell you the truth. You're the first girl I've ever kissed.

CATHERINE: Not even a kiss?

AARON: Not even one. Till you.

CATHERINE: You're the first boy I ever kissed.

AARON: I know.

CATHERINE: Okay, then.

(She raises her face. He bends down to meet her. They kiss, carefully, then more prolonged.)

Oh. I think that's probably enough.

AARON: Why?

(She backs away from him. Both are breathless.)

CATHERINE: Because I feel you down there, and it makes me nervous.

AARON: Okay. Okay. I don't want to make you nervous.

CATHERINE: I'll be your friend, Aaron. Even if we don't have extra hormones.

(They both start laughing uncontrollably.)

MARY: *(Comes in, pulls Catherine aside:)* So, what? Are you his girlfriend now?

CATHERINE: No.

MARY: He didn't try to get you to go all the way? Because you'd be like his thirteenth.

CATHERINE: No, he didn't. *(She looks over at Aaron:)* He has enough experience. We decided to wait till I was older.

(Laura enters as Aaron and Mary leave.)

LAURA: Aaron Feldman? What sort of name is that?

CATHERINE: Why do you want to know?

LAURA: Well, it sounds rather... I don't mean to say that he... But your father and I think...

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* I should have seen this coming. *(To Laura:)* Daddy and you?

LAURA: Yes. Your father and I have discussed this sort of thing and...

CATHERINE: What sort of thing?

LAURA: The people you choose as friends. You're young, so we feel we should guide you in your friendships.

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CATHERINE: Daddy doesn't care who my friends are.

LAURA: He certainly does.

CATHERINE: He cares whether my friends are Christians?

LAURA: Well, now that you put it that way, yes, he really does.

CATHERINE: Oh, come on, Mother. Daddy's a Jewish atheist.

LAURA: (*Slaps Catherine's face:*) Don't you ever say that again!

CATHERINE: You hit me.

LAURA: I won't have you talking about your father that way.

CATHERINE: (*Backing away:*) What way? Telling the truth? You won't have me telling the truth?

LAURA: Come back here, young lady. We're not through discussing this.

CATHERINE: Yes, we are. I'm going to tell Daddy you hit me.

LAURA: I'm sorry, Kathleen. I didn't mean...

CATHERINE: CATHY! And you're not sorry. You did mean it! DADDY!

(Bernard enters as Laura exits.)

BERNARD: What's the matter, honey?

CATHERINE: Mother hit me!

BERNARD: She did? (*Beat.*) What did you do?

CATHERINE: Nothing.

BERNARD: You must have done or said something that upset her.

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CATHERINE: I called you a Jewish atheist.

BERNARD: Oh.

CATHERINE: Isn't that what you are, Daddy?

BERNARD: Yes. I think that's a pretty accurate label. Although I would say Jewish-atheist-writer-father-husband is even more accurate.

CATHERINE: Well, okay, but...

BERNARD: And what we have here is what I'd call the father-husband problem.

CATHERINE: She still shouldn't have hit me. Because I told the truth.

BERNARD: No. As a father I can tell you it was not a good thing to hit you for telling what we understand is the truth.

CATHERINE: I hate her.

BERNARD: Don't hate, Cathy. Hate corrodes the soul. As a husband I understand that for your mother the truth is different.

CATHERINE: She tells lies.

BERNARD: No, for her the truth is I'm a Christian.

CATHERINE: But you're not.

BERNARD: We all have ways of creating the world in our own image.

CATHERINE: God did that.

BERNARD: Did he? Well, tell him for me sometime that human beings have learned a lot from him.

CATHERINE: Okay.

(They both smile.)

I have a Jewish boyfriend.

BERNARD: Do you? That's nice.

CATHERINE: Mother says you both don't want me to have Jewish friends.

BERNARD: Oh. *(Beat.)* Cathy, sometimes living in your mother's world is difficult, I know, but try not to upset her. Where she grew up, in Kentucky, there were only Protestants.

CATHERINE: Really?

BERNARD: Yes, and when we began dating each other...

(Catherine moves UL.)

LAURA: *(Enters. She is 18:)* Where do you want to go tonight, Bernard?

BERNARD: *(Now 21 years old:)* Laura, before we go out, could we talk?

LAURA: We always talk.

BERNARD: I think I ought to tell you something.

LAURA: Okay.

BERNARD: I'm a Jew.

LAURA: A what?

BERNARD: A Jew.

LAURA: What's that?

BERNARD: A person who's Jewish.

LAURA: What does that mean?

BERNARD: You're kidding me, right?

LAURA: No. Am I smiling or something?

BERNARD: You really don't know what I'm talking about?

LAURA: I'm getting irritated, Bernard. What is this Jewish thing?

BERNARD: A Jew is a person who believes in Judaism, which is a religion. Like Christianity.

LAURA: Oh, that's nice.

BERNARD: But there's an important difference. You see, Jews believe...

LAURA: Can we go to the movies? I don't really care about religion. I just care about you.

BERNARD: *(To Catherine, as Laura exits:)* So I believed if I married her, everything would be fine.

CATHERINE: Well, I still don't see why she...

BERNARD: It was later, after we were married, that she began to have a hard time.

CATHERINE: What do you mean?

BERNARD: Certain things happened that made her close down.

CATHERINE: What things?

BERNARD: I'll tell you about it, but I need to talk to your mother right now. *(Beat.)* Sometimes people hold on tighter to their illusions than to the truth.

CATHERINE: Why?

BERNARD: Fear, I think. But it's hard work to create a dream world and believe in it.

CATHERINE: I'm confused.

BERNARD: That's the human condition.

CATHERINE: It is?

BERNARD: So, please, honey, let her believe what she wants. I need her to be happy.

CATHERINE: Okay, Daddy. I'll try. *(To audience:)* And from then on, what I really tried to do was protect my father.

(Aaron enters as Bernard exits.)

AARON: Hey, Cathy.

CATHERINE: Oh, hi.

AARON: You said you want to talk to me.

CATHERINE: Oh. Yeah. *(Beat.)* Uh, how's your math class going?

AARON: You mean at Cal Tech? It's great, y'know, even though I'm the youngest kid in the... *(Beat.)* Is that why you called me?

CATHERINE: Well, sure, I mean... Yes! I want to know how you like it, y'know, math, I mean.

AARON: Oh. Well, I like math a lot.

CATHERINE: Great! That's terrific.

AARON: Yeah.

CATHERINE: Yeah.

AARON: So. I'm glad we had this talk about how much I like math. Uh, how's your poetry...coming?

CATHERINE: Good! I just wrote this poem, y'know, about the ocean.

AARON: Oh. *(Beat.)* Great!

CATHERINE: Well, it's not exactly just the ocean, y'know, it's more about the way the light, in the late afternoon, y'know, when you're sitting on the beach, and it looks like a path of gold sometimes on the waves, and you could just follow it...y'know?

AARON: Hunh. *(Beat.)* That's great. Can I read it?

CATHERINE: Sure. Uh, listen, Aaron, I need to talk to you about something.

AARON: Didn't we just talk?

CATHERINE: Well, yes, but... There's this other thing. See, I... Well... *(Beat. Then in a fast mumble:)* My mother doesn't want me to be friends with you.

AARON: What?

CATHERINE: Didn't you hear me?

AARON: No.

CATHERINE: I can't say it again.

AARON: Come on.

CATHERINE: Uh. Well. *(Beat.)* My mother doesn't want me to be friends with you.

AARON: Why not? She doesn't want you to like anybody as smart as you?

CATHERINE: I'm not kidding, Aaron.

AARON: Oh. So what do you mean?

CATHERINE: Well, y'know, I mean... *(Beat. She closes her eyes and grits her teeth:)* It's because you're Jewish.

AARON: What?

CATHERINE: She doesn't like Jewish people.

AARON: Didn't she marry one?

CATHERINE: Well, yes, but she says...

AARON: I know: your dad isn't Jewish anymore because he's an atheist and...

CATHERINE: She says my father's a Christian.

AARON: Oh, man, that's seriously crazy.

CATHERINE: Stop it, Aaron. This isn't funny.

AARON: I wasn't being funny.

CATHERINE: So I'm not saying we should stop being friends, y'know, but...

AARON: Cathy. You're getting weird. Cut it out.

CATHERINE: Well, y'know, uh... *(Beat.)* Maybe we should be a little more careful about letting people see us together.

AARON: You're ashamed of being seen with a Jew, aren't you?

CATHERINE: No!

AARON: You're getting just like your mother, y'know. You don't want people to know your father is Jewish.

CATHERINE: It's not that. It's... Well, it's just that my father doesn't want me to upset my mother.

AARON: Did he tell you not to be friends with me?

CATHERINE: Not exactly, but being friends with you would upset my mother, and I'd like to upset her really, because I hate her sometimes, like now, but I don't hate my father, I...really love him, Aaron, and he said he needs my mother to be happy.

AARON: He's a grown up, Cathy. You don't have to...I mean, I thought you liked me.

CATHY: I do, Aaron, really, but...

AARON: *(On the verge of tears:)* You're the first girl I ever... I thought I could...I mean, we... Well, you and I were...y'know, so I...

CATHERINE: I'm sorry, Aaron, but... Listen, I mean, what if... Well, like, what if...we didn't walk around together all the time, and maybe, y'know, met each other sometimes in a private place, like your house? Just for a while.

AARON: No.

CATHERINE: It might be fun, you know, like our own secret?

AARON: It's not fun, Cathy. It's sick.

CATHERINE: Aaron, please.

AARON: Forget it. I don't even want to know you.

(Mary enters as Aaron exits, holding his head.)

MARY: How come I never see you with Aaron anymore?

CATHERINE: I don't know. He won't talk to me.

MARY: How come?

CATHERINE: He's just being weird.

MARY: Did he want you to go all the way and you said no?

CATHERINE: Something like that.

MARY: I told you Jewish boys have more hormones, y'know, but you wouldn't listen to me.

CATHERINE: I guess you're right.

MARY: So, wanna go over to the high school and watch football practice?

CATHERINE: No, I guess not.

MARY: The guys look really good in their shorts.

CATHERINE: I'll go some other time.

MARY: All those tan muscles.

CATHERINE: They look dumb running around in their shorts, shoving each other and kicking balls.

MARY: Hunh. *(Beat.)* Are you missing Aaron?

CATHERINE: No. *(Beat.)* Yes.

MARY: Well, look, Cathy, maybe you should just go all the way with him.

CATHERINE: I can't.

MARY: Why not? Then you can tell me what it's like. I hear you move.

CATHERINE: What do you mean?

MARY: The boy puts his thing inside the girl and they move around.

CATHERINE: I don't care.

MARY: I think it's weird. I mean, like do they move up and down or around the room?

CATHERINE: Don't talk about it.

MARY: So if you'd just do it with Aaron, we'd know for sure.

CATHERINE: I can't do it with Aaron, stupid! Not if he won't talk to me, and he looks the other way when I pass him in the hall, and yesterday he ate lunch with Francine Shacklin, and they were laughing, and... *(She starts to cry.)* I hate him!

MARY: I'm sorry, Cathy. I wish you wouldn't call me stupid though.

CATHERINE: I didn't mean to, but don't talk about Aaron ever again, okay? When I see him in the hall, I'm going to look the other way too, because I don't even want to know he exists, okay? And if he goes all the way with Francine Shacklin, I hope he dies!

MARY: Yeah, because she's got all those hormones.

CATHERINE: Oh, shut up!

MARY: What did I say? I didn't mention you-know-who's name.

CATHERINE: Jewish hormones. You're really something, Mary.

MARY: I read it in Seventeen.

CATHERINE: Seventeen. The ultimate scientific and medical authority.

MARY: I'm going over to the high school now.

CATHERINE: Oh, do. Go watch the dumb boys do pushups in the mud.

MARY: I don't like you any more.

CATHERINE: Who cares? *(To audience, as Mary exits:)* I didn't like myself either. As Aaron walked through the halls holding hands with Francine Shacklin, waited for her after classes, took her to dances, I'd roll my eyes and make anti-Semitic remarks like, "Oh, those Jews." I became the perfect WASP. *(She addresses an unseen church group:)* As president of the Presbyterian youth group, I want to talk to you about predestination and the damnation of unbelievers. As you know, we are all in the hands of God, who decides who is

going to be saved and who, y'know, will be sent to Hell. Now, even though God has already made His decision and there isn't much we can do about it, I mean, actually, not anything we can do about it, we still try to be good and follow Jesus' teachings, because we know –I mean, it's only logical –that God isn't going to save anyone who isn't a Christian, y'know, preferably a Presbyterian. And although I do feel sorry for the unbelievers who are going to burn in the flames of Hell, it is their decision, isn't it? I mean.

(Laura enters.)

LAURA: Cathy, don't you think that speech you made in church today was too negative?

CATHERINE: No.

LAURA: You made everyone very uncomfortable.

CATHERINE: Why? It's Presbyterian doctrine. I learned it in Sunday School.

LAURA: Yes, but most Presbyterians are more modern in California. They try to look on the bright side of things.

CATHERINE: Then they ought to quit teaching the darker side in Sunday School. I mean, either they believe it or they don't.

LAURA: What about your father? Having his very own daughter saying such things in public.

CATHERINE: Mother! How many millions of times have you told me Daddy's not, y'know, Jewish any more?

LAURA: Yes, but suppose someone realized Bronson might be a Jewish name? It isn't any more, but what if someone thought... And there you are, talking about damnation.

CATHERINE: Listen. You're saved or you're not. Right?

LAURA: I suppose. And your father is a Christian.

CATHERINE: Right. Daddy's a Christian, so, y'know, he's okay. *(Beat.)* Actually, maybe it really doesn't matter what he is, does it?

LAURA: It certainly does!

CATHERINE: No, I mean, if predestination is true, then I could be wrong about the unbelievers, y'know. I mean, God is God.

LAURA: But you have to be a Christian.

CATHERINE: Of course, you certainly do. *(Beat.)* So it's a good thing, y'know, Daddy's a Christian. *(Beat.)* What makes you think he's a Christian if he says he's an atheist?

LAURA: He never tells me that. He promised me he'd be buried next to me in a Christian graveyard.

CATHERINE: Right. And anyway, y'know, we don't care what other people think.

LAURA: Yes, we do. It's important if you want to succeed in life. Look at me. I came from...a very poor area, as you know. And what did I do? I went to college and married a writer! And look what we have now: One of the nicest houses in our neighborhood. We have money. We're respectable! No one can ever call us white trash.

CATHERINE: White trash?

LAURA: Never mind.

CATHERINE: Did people say that about your family?

LAURA: We're not talking about this.

CATHERINE: Why not? Why don't we ever see your family? My grandmother and grandfather? I must have aunts and

uncles and cousins... Every time I ask anything, you brush me off. Is it some dark, dirty secret?

LAURA: All right. I'll tell you. But you must never repeat this to anyone.

CATHERINE: Even Daddy?

LAURA: He knows. (*Beat.*) About six months after we were married, we decided to move to California to start a new life. We left Evansville and, with the few things we owned piled into our Packard, we drove across the country and stopped in Kentucky to see my family. Your grandmother and grandfather were sitting in their new farmhouse kitchen reading the Bible. I said, "Momma? Daddy? I brought my new husband for you to meet." Well, they were surprised, because...I hadn't been able to get in touch with them about the wedding.

CATHERINE: Why not?

LAURA: Oh, they were...away.

BERNARD: (*From the shadows:*) No. They had no telephone.

LAURA: And their feelings were hurt, I think, and that made my father less polite than he could have been...

BERNARD: For a long time they didn't say a word, just stared at me.

LAURA: Naturally, they wanted to know about my new husband, so they asked a few questions...

CATHERINE: About what?

LAURA: About...religion. They were very serious about that, especially my father.

BERNARD: He said, "Are you a believer, young man?" And I said, "Yes, sir."

LAURA: My father was...abrupt.

BERNARD: He said, "You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior?" And I said, "No, sir. I'm Jewish, not Christian."

LAURA: Your father's answers didn't please him.

BERNARD: Your grandfather said, "I heard about Jewish people. They don't believe." And I said, "I believe in your daughter. I believe in our love."

LAURA: And I think they were disappointed in me.

BERNARD: Her father said, "Laura, you made your choice. You denied your family. Now, don't ever come back."

LAURA: So we've never spoken to each other since then.

CATHERINE: Oh, Mother. I'm so sorry.

LAURA: Don't be sorry for me. I have a good husband and a daughter I am going to be proud of all my life, because she will be a perfect young lady.

CATHERINE: No! I don't want to be a perfect young lady.

LAURA: But you will be, darling.

CATHERINE: Did you tell Daddy about my speech?

LAURA: Don't you think I care about his feelings? I wouldn't dream of it.

CATHERINE: Well, don't, okay? Just in case, y'know, he still thinks he's an atheist. *(To audience:)* It was a schizophrenic period.

(Bernard enters.)

BERNARD: Cathy, I just received a very disturbing visit while you and your mother were at church.

CATHERINE: You did? Who was it?

BERNARD: Aaron Feldman.

CATHERINE: Aaron came over? To see you? *(Beat.)* Why? What did he say?

(Catherine moves to the side and watches as Aaron appears DL.)

AARON: Hello, Mr. Bronson?

BERNARD: Yes?

AARON: Uh, hi. I'm Aaron Feldman, y'know, Cathy's friend?

BERNARD: Oh. Come in, Aaron.

AARON: *(As he follows Bernard into house:)* Actually, I'm Cathy's former friend.

BERNARD: Her former friend? Why is that, Aaron?

AARON: Well... She didn't tell you we weren't friends any more?

BERNARD: No. She...doesn't talk to me much lately.

AARON: Listen, Mr. Bronson, uh, y'know... Uh, I think you ought to sit down.

BERNARD: That bad, is it? I'm all right standing up.

AARON: Well, uh... *(Beat.)* Your daughter's an anti-Semite.

BERNARD: Impossible.

AARON: No, really, I mean, it's true.

BERNARD: You have proof?

AARON: Uh, here's the thing of it... She's been calling me a Jew behind my back.

BERNARD: Well, you are Jewish, aren't you?

AARON: But, y'know? She says it in a really negative way, like, "Oh, those Jews."

BERNARD: You've heard this?

AARON: Her friend Mary told me. And, y'know, uh...I heard some kids say she made a speech in her church about how everybody who's not a Christian is going to be damned.

BERNARD: She didn't!

AARON: I'm telling you. Y'know, it kills me, Mr. Bronson. I mean, it seemed like...well, I thought we...

BERNARD: This is difficult to believe.

AARON: She's been telling people you're a Christian.

BERNARD: She told you that?

AARON: No, I heard it from some friends.

BERNARD: But Cathy understands this is something her mother needs to believe.

AARON: How do you know, I mean, she really understands?

BERNARD: We've discussed it. Privately.

AARON: Recently?

BERNARD: No.

AARON: Well. Y'know, if you'd just talk to her, now that you know what's going on?

BERNARD: I will. And thank you, Aaron.

AARON: (*Broken-hearted:*) Thank you, Mr. Bronson.

BERNARD: I'm sorry, Aaron. (*Beat.*) You were very brave to come here.

AARON: You think so? I always feel, y'know, my basic mode is cowardice.

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* When your whole view of the world is based on unworkable oxymorons, if someone challenges you, you have to get angry. There's no other choice.

BERNARD: *(As Aaron exits L:)* Cathy. Have you become an anti-Semite?

CATHERINE: That's a stupid thing to say. Y'know, who the hell does he think he is, saying stuff like that?

BERNARD: I think he's someone who's very concerned about you.

CATHERINE: Right. He's so concerned he won't speak to me or even look at me.

BERNARD: When he says you've been making negative comments about Jews...

CATHERINE: I didn't!

BERNARD: And that speech of yours in church about the damnation of unbelievers...

CATHERINE: Oh, come on, Daddy, it's just church doctrine.

BERNARD: But you believe it?

CATHERINE: I learned it in Sunday School.

BERNARD: That's no answer.

CATHERINE: Y'know, I hate being questioned like this!

BERNARD: So you think I'm damned? I'm heading for some kind of Christian Hell? Or is it true you tell people I'm a Christian?

CATHERINE: No, I'm not saying... Look, Daddy, I was elected president of our youth group, and I have certain responsibilities... I have to seem...I mean, I have to be...

BERNARD: A bigot? You have to be a bigot to be accepted by these friends?

CATHERINE: You're calling me...your own daughter... Didn't you and Mother want me to be a Presbyterian? First she gets on my case, and now you. What the hell do you both want from me?

BERNARD: I want you to be an honest, decent, loving human being. Someone who accepts people as they are.

CATHERINE: Then you should have given me a different mother. Our family is so screwed up... I'm sick of this! Just don't talk to me about it any more, okay? *(As Bernard exits, to audience:)* Having hurt the person in the world I adored most, I had to go for the next person I cared about.

(Aaron enters.)

AARON: You want to talk to me?

CATHERINE: You had no right to visit my father. Y'know? Now he's very upset.

AARON: Well...I didn't know what else to do.

CATHERINE: What about me? You could have come to talk to me, but oh, no, you couldn't bring yourself to speak to me in person, just like you can't even look at me for months, y'know, while you prance around with Francine Shacklin...

AARON: Y'know, it's really hard to be Jewish and talk to an anti-Semite.

CATHERINE: Anti-Semite! Shit! Is that what you really think?

AARON: Yeah, and y'know, I think you're really defensive about it, because you never used to swear, and I know what you said in your church about the damnation of unbelievers and what you said about Jews, and, y'know, it all adds up.

CATHERINE: I see.

AARON: Yeah, I bet you do. *(Beat.)* Look, uh...I'm sorry about the way I've been acting toward you, y'know, I mean, ignoring you and sort of flaunting my thing with Francine...

CATHERINE: I don't care about you and Francine!

AARON: I'd be jealous too, y'know, if it was you and some guy.

CATHERINE: Jealous? Of you and Francine? You're crazy! I never even liked you, if you want to know the truth.

AARON: You didn't?

CATHERINE: How could I like some scrawny Jewish nerd who takes math at Cal Tech? I was embarrassed to be around a jerk like you.

AARON: Oh. A scrawny Jewish nerd. *(Beat.)* Well, screw you, Cathy. Have a nice life with all your uptight little WASP friends.

(He exits.)

CATHERINE: The end of the school year passed in a haze of unhappiness. Aaron was right: I was so defensive I'd squeezed my heart into a rock that hurt my chest whenever I breathed. I was tired of swearing and talking tough. I didn't want to be a Presbyterian any more. But I didn't want to be an atheist, because if there was a Hell I'd probably go there. And I didn't know how to be Jewish. I kept dreaming about the golden ladder Daddy talked about when I was little. I knew that was the name of the novel he'd been writing for years,

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and I wanted to read it. I thought maybe there were secret instructions for becoming wise, so I could climb that golden ladder right up to Heaven. But he wouldn't let me read it till it was finished. So I had no hope of figuring things out. Then one morning in the middle of summer I woke up and I knew what I had to do. The answer was so clear I started laughing, so I knew I was on the first step up that golden ladder. I had to become a Catholic!

(End of Act One.)

ACT II

(Catherine appears alone on stage. She is dressed in summer clothes.)

CATHERINE: The idea to become a Catholic was so revolutionary I didn't want to tell anyone but Mary, who was a Catholic and could tell me how to do it. Unfortunately, there was one small problem: Mary hated me.

MARY: *(Enters, in shorts, very sullen:)* What do you want?

CATHERINE: Mary, listen, I'm sorry I was so mean to you last year, but now we're fifteen and...

MARY: Don't bother apologizing. I don't like you, Cathy.

CATHERINE: I don't blame you. Really.

MARY: You're a snot.

CATHERINE: A snot? Oh. I'm sorry. Here, I brought you a present.

(Hands her a wrapped present.)

MARY: What is it?

CATHERINE: Open it.

MARY: *(Unwrapping it:)* It's a book. *(Looks inside:)* The pages are all blank.

CATHERINE: It's for you to write in. Like your thoughts.

MARY: I don't write. *(Beat.)* But it's okay, I don't read much either. *(Beat.)* Thanks.

CATHERINE: It wasn't just you, you know. I was so flipped out over Aaron I was mean to everybody.

MARY: You weren't mean to those kids at the Presbyterian church.

CATHERINE: Well, I don't want to be a Presbyterian any more.

MARY: You're pretty screwed up.

CATHERINE: Oh, I probably am. But guess what? I want to become a Catholic.

MARY: What?

CATHERINE: Promise you won't tell anybody? It's a secret.

MARY: Why?

CATHERINE: Well, I'm not sure how my parents would feel. (*Beat.*) Actually, I know how my parents would feel, but I thought if I talked to a minister...

MARY: A priest. Catholics don't have ministers.

CATHERINE: Oh? Well, right. If I talked to a priest...

MARY: Boy, you think you're so smart, but you don't know anything.

CATHERINE: I know. That's why I have to talk to a priest.

MARY: So what do you want to be a Catholic for?

CATHERINE: Well, I believe in God, at least, I think I do, so I...

MARY: You have to believe in God to be a Catholic.

CATHERINE: Right. But, y' know, there were things Presbyterians believe that were a problem. And I like things about the Catholics, like you have these saints, don't you?

MARY: Of course. We have lots of saints.

CATHERINE: Well, I think that's pretty terrific, like all those saints you can pray to for different things. I mean, in the Presbyterian church you just have God.

MARY: Yeah, I heard that about non-Catholics.

CATHERINE: Well, they do have Jesus. And the Holy Ghost, but he's not really a person, I guess.

MARY: He's a flame.

CATHERINE: A flame?

MARY: Yeah, y'know, over the heads of the disciples? In paintings. People saw those flames.

CATHERINE: Oh. (*Beat.*) And you've got the mother of God too, Mary.

MARY: I'm named after her. Mary, the Holy Mother. I'm not a mother yet, but someday...

CATHERINE: Wow, what a great idea. I'm really impressed that you're named after Jesus' mother. Do you pray to her?

MARY: Sure.

CATHERINE: Does she answer your prayers?

MARY: I guess so. Yeah. Usually. If I don't ask for a new bicycle.

CATHERINE: I really need a mother I can pray to and get answers. I mean, someone who's not always telling me I can't wear black and I shouldn't be negative and I shouldn't tell people certain things, but who just listens and smiles. She does sort of smile, doesn't she?

MARY: Yeah, it's a small smile.

CATHERINE: A small smile is okay. (*Beat.*) And you've got confession, right?

MARY: Of course we do.

CATHERINE: Where you go in this little dark room and tell the priest all your sins, and he says it's okay...

MARY: You have to do penance before it's totally okay.

CATHERINE: Like what?

MARY: You say some Hail Marys. On your rosary. *(She pulls a rosary out of her bra.)* See? I keep mine near my heart. They're blessed.

CATHERINE: Oh, that's so pretty! I know I'm going to like being a Catholic.

MARY: Here, you can have my rosary.

CATHERINE: That's so nice of you, Mary, but I couldn't.

MARY: I can get another one. You'll need to practice with it so you don't sound too stupid when you talk to a priest.

CATHERINE: I will. And could you take me to your church so I can meet the priest?

MARY: Okay.

CATHERINE: I'm so happy we're friends again.

MARY: Me too.

LAURA: *(Off:)* A Catholic?

(Laura enters, upstage, with Bernard.)

MARY: See you later.

(She exits.)

LAURA: This is the limit, Kathleen, the absolute limit! You're a disgrace to our family.

CATHERINE: Cathy. And I'm not a disgrace.

BERNARD: Why do you want to be a Catholic?

CATHERINE: Well, I don't know, I was thinking maybe some of the things Presbyterians believe aren't really true, and anyway, they teach you one thing and then when you talk about it, people get upset.

LAURA: It's your Italian friend, Mary, isn't it? Why do you let her influence you?

CATHERINE: Why do you have to mention that she's Italian?

BERNARD: Is she Italian? Oh, of course. Scaccia. That sounds Italian.

LAURA: You're ganging up on me again.

BERNARD: No, I'm just pointing out a simple fact.

CATHERINE: And anyway, the priest I talked to is Irish, like your family, Mother.

LAURA: You've already talked to a priest?

CATHERINE: I have. He was a nice man.

BERNARD: And what did he say when you told him you want to be a Catholic?

LAURA: I hope you realize Catholics are idol-worshippers.

CATHERINE: You mean the saints, Mother? You think the saints are idols?

LAURA: Certainly they are. What do you think happened when the Catholic Church converted pagan cultures? Their gods became saints. Which Catholics still pray to in the form of statues.

CATHERINE: Well, I don't know much about the history yet...

LAURA: And all the incense they use to cover up their body odor.

CATHERINE: Body odor? The saints?

LAURA: It's a well-known fact that Catholics seldom take baths.

CATHERINE: That's not true! Mary takes baths all the time. Or showers. Every time I go over there, I have to sit around and wait till she gets out of the shower.

BERNARD: Where did you get that idea, Laura?

LAURA: My grandmother told me stories about Catholics in Ireland, and even my mother remembered the way the Catholics were so dirty they...

BERNARD: Many Catholics were poor where your family came from in Ireland.

LAURA: I'm telling you both, those Catholics...

BERNARD: Please. Don't generalize. You shouldn't say "those people"...

LAURA: You mean I can't refer to a group of people as "those"? Those teachers who went on strike? Those lawyers who lost their case?

BERNARD: Of course, in those instances...

LAURA: So I'm not prejudiced. I just see things clearly. People come from different backgrounds, and sometimes it's difficult to relate to someone who is...

CATHERINE: A Catholic or a Jew? That's what you were going to say, isn't it?

BERNARD: Shhhh. Be quiet, Cathy.

CATHERINE: But all she really cares about is what other people think.

LAURA: No, I just think it's helpful to be with people who have similar tastes, interests and, yes, religion. Not that we shouldn't associate with them...

CATHERINE: But we shouldn't be intimate with them, right? Like marry them?

BERNARD: Laura, Cathy. Surely we can have a reasonable discussion.

CATHERINE: Never! This happens every time.

LAURA: You think you know everything, miss. But if you think you can become a Catholic and reek of fish every Friday, you've got another think coming!

(She exits in a fury.)

CATHERINE: *(To Bernard:)* Reek of fish?

BERNARD: Catholics eat fish on Fridays. *(Beat.)* Every religion has its rules and rituals.

CATHERINE: Even the Jewish religion?

BERNARD: Oh, yes. There are many laws and rituals.

CATHERINE: What did you think was most important?

BERNARD: I think what Rabbi Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others."

CATHERINE: Daddy, are you sure you're an atheist? I mean, sometimes when you talk about being Jewish, I think...

BERNARD: I'm not Jewish any more, Cathy. I made a choice when I married your mother.

CATHERINE: You didn't have to do that.

BERNARD: *(An agonized outburst:)* Do you think it's been easy? Denying my family? How do you suppose my mother

feels?

CATHERINE: Oh. I...I didn't realize. Gram seems so...well, around you she...

BERNARD: (*Pulling himself together:*) She knows why I made my choice. Now what I really am is an agnostic.

CATHERINE: What's an agnostic?

BERNARD: One who admits he doesn't know. But saying I'm an atheist feels more whole-hearted. (*Beat.*) Now, what did the priest say?

CATHERINE: He said becoming a Catholic is a very serious decision.

BERNARD: Are you sure it's what you want to do?

CATHERINE: Yes.

BERNARD: Well, then I suppose you'll have to do it.

CATHERINE: Even if Mother hates me?

BERNARD: She could never hate you. I'll talk to her about it. Don't worry. And if you try being a Catholic and you find it's not what you want...

CATHERINE: Oh, it is. I know it.

BERNARD: I wish I could be so sure about anything. Even for five minutes.

CATHERINE: You're sure you love me, aren't you? And Gram and mother?

BERNARD: Oh, yes. That is one thing I'm sure about.

CATHERINE: Daddy, do people always become like their families?

BERNARD: What do you mean?

CATHERINE: Oh, y'know, Mother's family was prejudiced, so she...

BERNARD: Many things influence us, Cathy. The first time your mother realized what it meant to marry a Jew was on our wedding night.

CATHERINE: Your wedding night?

BERNARD: We got married in the morning, at a justice of the peace, with two of our friends as witnesses...

CATHERINE: What about your families?

BERNARD: I didn't want to tell my family because I was afraid they'd be upset if I married a shiksa.

CATHERINE: A what?

BERNARD: Never mind.

CATHERINE: Shiksa.

BERNARD: And your mother's family was poor, with so many children, and her father working in the mines... They were still living in that railroad car the company had abandoned...

CATHERINE: What railroad car? Mother never told me that.

BERNARD: She doesn't like to remember those things. We sent them a letter, but they never responded. (*Beat.*) Anyway, I wanted to take her to a fancy hotel in Chicago for our honeymoon, so we took a train to Chicago and went to the Whitehall Hotel...

CATHERINE: Was that fancy?

BERNARD: Very elegant. And I was so naïve I didn't realize I should have tried to make a reservation. We just showed up at the desk and...

(HOTEL CLERK enters with a reservation book, followed by Laura as her younger self.)

HOTEL CLERK: Good afternoon.

BERNARD: We'd like to reserve a room for two nights. Your bridal suite, if it's available.

(He smiles at Laura proudly.)

HOTEL CLERK: For which two nights?

BERNARD: Tonight and tomorrow.

HOTEL CLERK: *(Checking her book:)* Yes, it's available. You're newlyweds?

(She smiles warmly.)

LAURA: We just got married this morning. In Indiana. And we took a train here.

HOTEL CLERK: How nice. Is this your first time in Chicago?

LAURA: Yes. I can't wait to see the city. It looks so beautiful.

HOTEL CLERK: You'll find many wonderful places to see here. It's a good choice for a honeymoon.

BERNARD: *(To Laura:)* You see, honey? What did I tell you?

HOTEL CLERK: So. Your names, please?

BERNARD: Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Bronson.

(He and Laura smile radiantly at each other.)

HOTEL CLERK: Bernard Bronson?

BERNARD: Yes.

HOTEL CLERK: *(Looking at her book:)* How careless of me! I'm sorry, but the bridal suite is taken.

LAURA: Oh, that's too bad.

BERNARD: We'll take another room. Do you have any with a nice view of the city?

HOTEL CLERK: I must have been looking at the wrong dates. We are entirely booked for this weekend.

LAURA: No rooms at all?

HOTEL CLERK: None. I'm sorry.

BERNARD: I bet you are.

HOTEL CLERK: I beg your pardon?

BERNARD: Never mind. We'll take our Jewish name somewhere else. Come on, honey.

(He takes Laura's hand and they walk a few steps downstage as the Hotel Clerk exits.)

LAURA: What happened, Bernard? What did you mean about our Jewish name?

BERNARD: Never mind, honey. We'll find a nice room somewhere.

LAURA: Okay, but tell me, Bernard. Jewish name?

BERNARD: Okay. *(Beat.)* Some people think Jews are different.

LAURA: You're not different.

BERNARD: Some people think I am. Because I'm Jewish and they're not.

LAURA: I'm not Jewish.

BERNARD: But you married one. You've got my last name.

LAURA: Oh.

BERNARD: *(To Catherine, as Laura exits slowly:)* That night we

went to one fancy hotel after another and no one would take us.

CATHERINE: That's awful. What did you do?

BERNARD: We finally found a small hotel on the outskirts of town. Your mother cried the whole night.

CATHERINE: Oh, Daddy.

BERNARD: And then my family would have nothing to do with us for years. Until you were born. And even then, my mother treated your mother very badly.

CATHERINE: That's why Mother won't go with us to Gram's anymore, isn't it?

BERNARD: I'm afraid so. And the way your mother's parents feel about me...

CATHERINE: I think I understand. *(Beat.)* Daddy, should I be a Catholic?

BERNARD: It's not my decision, sweetheart.

CATHERINE: You don't care. *(Beat.)* I think I'll do it then.

(Mary enters as Bernard exits.)

MARY: I'm so glad you're becoming a Catholic.

CATHERINE: Me, too. Listen. *(She pulls rosary out of her bra:)* Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. *(Beat.)* Don't you just love saying thee and thou and art?

MARY: Hunh?

CATHERINE: Those old words people don't say anymore.

MARY: We say them.

CATHERINE: In church. But, like, what if I said, Hey, Mary, how art thou?

MARY: Why would you say something like that?

CATHERINE: I wouldn't.

MARY: So why'd you ask me?

CATHERINE: Because...I mean, I was talking about language.

MARY: Why?

CATHERINE: Well, because... Oh, never mind. Hey, do you want to hear a poem I'm writing about Mary?

MARY: You wrote a poem about me?

CATHERINE: Not you. Mary the mother of God.

MARY: Oh. Why don't you write a poem about me?

CATHERINE: I will sometime. I promise. But listen:
She waits for me in a blue-white silence,
opens her arms to receive my sins
like children she'll never have,
and suddenly candles everywhere are glowing...

MARY: I don't get it.

CATHERINE: It's about telling the Virgin Mother all my sins.

MARY: Why don't you tell the priest? In confession?

CATHERINE: I like the idea of telling this really understanding mother the bad things I do.

MARY: That's what you tell the priest. You pray to the Holy Mother.

CATHERINE: Well, I have these questions, like, about what prayer really is.

MARY: Boy, I used to think you were smart! You just ask for things, like not a bicycle but maybe lasagna for dinner or could I be happy.

CATHERINE: Father Flanagan says prayer is more complicated than that.

MARY: He does? He never told me.

CATHERINE: And he knows I have trouble with confession because I don't really know what a sin is.

MARY: Boy! Everybody knows what a sin is.

CATHERINE: But is it like you hit a kid or you swear or you hate your mother...

MARY: Nobody hates their mother.

CATHERINE: Some kids do. Even when they know they shouldn't.

MARY: All that stuff is a sin.

CATHERINE: That's what Father Flanagan says. But what if you're mean to someone and then you feel sorry right after? It's not a sin anymore, right? Or you think about kicking someone like Francine Shacklin in the ankle, but you don't do it because it would be a crummy thing to do, or maybe because you don't want some person you used to know to think you cared... Is that a sin?

MARY: You're giving me a pain in my eyeballs.

CATHERINE: But you can see how I have all these questions, and Father Flanagan says...

MARY: You're sure you want to be Catholic?

CATHERINE: Oh, yes. I just have a lot of problems. You know, with life. *(To audience:)* I kept thinking: if I just did it,

just became a total Catholic in spite of all my unanswered questions, my family would become like a Catholic version of a Norman Rockwell painting.

(Bernard and Laura enter, smiling and holding hands. They kneel, DC, and Catherine joins them. All face front.)

BERNARD/LAURA/CATHERINE: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(They rise, smiling.)

LAURA: Isn't it wonderful that we're all the same religion at last?

BERNARD: It certainly is. My, I feel so cleansed and whole after a good mass!

CATHERINE: Mommy and Daddy, isn't life simple, when you come down to it?

LAURA: Oh, yes! And look, Catherine darling, there's your sweet friend Mary.

MARY: Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Bronson. I'm so glad you like me now.

LAURA: Oh, but we always did, dear. It just took becoming Catholics for us to realize it.

BERNARD: I always liked you, Mary.

LAURA: How true! My husband was much more accepting than I was. But now my mind has been opened.

MARY: That's really cool.

LAURA: *(She sniffs the air around Mary:)* And now I can smell

how wrong I was. You do take baths.

MARY: Showers. I take showers.

LAURA: Showers are good too. I'm so glad you're a friend of our sweet Catherine. *(She takes out her wallet:)* Here. Take my Bullocks card, Catherine. Buy yourselves a couple of black dresses.

CATHERINE: *(To audience:)* My fantasies could get so far-fetched even I couldn't believe them.

(Aaron enters as Mary, Laura and Bernard exit.)

AARON: I hear you're becoming a Catholic.

CATHERINE: Who told you?

AARON: Word gets around.

CATHERINE: So why do you care?

AARON: It's not a big deal. I'm just curious.

CATHERINE: If it's not a big deal, why should I tell you? I mean, you don't talk to me for centuries and suddenly you want me to tell you something personal. Not that you really care.

AARON: Okay, I do care. About you and... What do your parents think?

CATHERINE: They think it's just terrific. They love having me be a Catholic.

AARON: C'mon, Cathy. This is your old friend Aaron talking to you.

CATHERINE: You're not my old friend, Aaron. You just show up sometimes to interfere in my life. Why don't you visit my father again if you want to know how he feels?

AARON: So maybe I shouldn't have visited your father. I don't know. He's such a nice guy that I thought...

CATHERINE: Don't think about me, okay? Or my father.

AARON: Listen, I try not to. I really do.

CATHERINE: Catholicism is a wonderful religion. Very satisfying for the soul.

AARON: The soul. Hunh. What do you think the soul is?

CATHERINE: It's a flame, for heaven's sake! *(Beat.)* No, that's the Holy Ghost. Well, the soul is...what's inside the body that goes on after the body dies.

AARON: Ah. It goes on. *(Beat.)* Do you have to not have sex till you get married?

CATHERINE: Who says that?

AARON: Well, you can't use birth control, right? So I guess you could have sex, but if you got pregnant, you'd have to have the baby. So if I was a Catholic girl, I just wouldn't have sex. Unless I wanted a baby.

CATHERINE: We didn't get that far in catechism class. But if I want to go all the way, I'll do it.

AARON: Really.

CATHERINE: Yes, really, Mr. Know-It-All. Because that's why Catholics have confession. So they can do whatever they want and go to confession and do penance and their sins get wiped away. So there!

AARON: What a cool system. You could rob a bank or kill someone, then you just...

CATHERINE: Are you crazy? You can't do stuff like that.

AARON: But you just said...

CATHERINE: Some sins just don't get wiped away. Not that easily. I mean, there are big sins and little ones, I don't know their names yet—they have these classifications I haven't learned. And anyway, you'd go to jail.

AARON: Right. And sex is a little sin.

CATHERINE: It might be. I'll ask Father Flanagan.

AARON: Hey, if it turns out to be a small sin, do you want to go all the way with me?

CATHERINE: Take a long walk off a short pier, Aaron.

AARON: I wasn't being flippant, Cathy.

CATHERINE: Oh, right. How about your girlfriend Francine?

AARON: We broke up. *(Beat.)* I told her I was still in love with you.

CATHERINE: You're what?

AARON: You heard me. *(Beat.)* Listen, we're a year older now. Could we try kissing again?

CATHERINE: I don't think so.

(But she's mesmerized by him.)

AARON: *(Moving closer:)* I'll tell you what. Let's do a game. I'll kiss you and you try to resist. I mean, don't kiss me back. It's very good for Catholic girls to try this kind of thing.

CATHERINE: *(Unable to move:)* Why?

AARON: *(Putting his arms around her:)* It's practice. For resisting temptation.

(He kisses her. She just stands there but can't resist more than a few moments. Suddenly they're kissing passionately.)

Come to my house. There's nobody home.

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CATHERINE: You want to sleep with me?

AARON: Not exactly. Come on. I can't wait.

(He pulls her by the hand.)

CATHERINE: *(Holding back, although she's breathless:)* No, I've got to talk to Father Flanagan. What if this is a big sin?

AARON: It feels too good to be a big sin.

CATHERINE: I don't want to have a baby.

AARON: *(Kisses her again:)* You won't get pregnant.

CATHERINE: How do you know?

AARON: I've got protection.

(He pulls condoms out of his pocket.)

CATHERINE: *(Stops cold:)* Why do you have...those things?

AARON: Well, I'm sixteen and...

CATHERINE: Did you have sex with Francine?

AARON: *(Reluctantly honest:)* Yes. *(Sees her horrified look:)* Cathy, I needed life experience! I needed to be ready for you!

CATHY: *(Pushes him away:)* That is so disgusting! I hate you, Aaron! Go away and don't ever come near me again. *(As he backs away, she turns to audience:)* I needed to talk to someone. So I turned to the one person whose understanding seemed to be limitless.

(Bernard enters.)

Daddy, do you have a few minutes?

BERNARD: I hope I have more than that.

CATHERINE: Well, I want to talk to you about being a Catholic and, uh, getting physical with, uh, boys.

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BERNARD: This is a requirement for being a Catholic?

CATHERINE: I'm serious, Daddy. (*Beat.*) I like being a Catholic. I think. I mean, I like being in the church all by myself with the candles and saints and it's sort of gloomy except when sun lights up the stained glass windows, you know? And it smells like stones and incense, and you can feel all these prayers hanging around.

Want to read the entire script? Order a perusal copy today!