

DEAR CHUCK

A full-length dramedy by
Jonathan Dorf

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Dear Chuck has a flexible cast, with a minimum of 8 performers and a maximum of 50 or more. Unless a gender is specified, roles are flexible; adjust pronouns as necessary.

LIST OF SCENES

Overture: The Search for Chuck

My Civil Rights

Clubbed

Chuck Interlude #1

The Dance

Three Rows

It's My Room

Chuck Interlude #2: Dear Chuck

Supposed To

Registered Voter

Baking

Chuck Interlude #3

The Menu

I'm Thinking

The Teen Shopping Experience and Chuck Interlude #4

It's My Party...

Bran and Bananas

The Social Network

Chuck Interlude #5

Helicopter

Subtraction
Promise Not to Tell
Chuck Interlude #6
Decisions, Decisions
Zero Tolerance
Adventures in Babysitting
Chuck Interlude #7
Roots
Tested
Fireflies
Chuck Interlude #8
Babel, or A Cyber Symphony
Chuck Interlude #9: Dear Chuck Reprise
Finale: The Coming of Chuck

NOTES

It is possible to condense the number of actors in "Overture: The Search for Chuck" and "Finale: The Coming of Chuck." The cast in the script is based on the size of the Choate cast, which was 31, and it is left to the director to reassign the lines as necessary and appropriate. The actors should use their own names, rather than the names in the script. It's possible that the Girl 22 monologue in "Overture: The Search for Chuck" could be divided among several cast members after Girl 22 does the opening paragraph. The same is true of the letter in "Chuck Interlude #9." It is possible to break up "Chuck Interlude #2," but my advice would be to give that to a single performer.

Occasionally, alternate text will appear in [brackets].

Should it be necessary to reduce running time or to conform to local community standards, producers have permission to cut scenes (in their entirety only – no partial cuts). The Overture, Finale and the Chuck Interludes may not be cut.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following statement should be included in any program: "*Dear Chuck* was originally commissioned and developed by the Choate Rosemary Hall Summer Arts Conservatory."

Thank you to Jonathan Muñoz-Proulx and Daniel Rashid for their assistance in the subsequent developmental readings of the play.

Chuck Interlude #2: *Dear Chuck* is adapted by permission from a journal entry by Daniel Sobol.

OVERTURE: THE SEARCH FOR CHUCK

(A dark stage. Enter GIRL 1.)

GIRL 1: Mom? *(Pause.)* Dad? *(Pause.)* Demon spawn? *(Pause.)* Chuck? *(Pause.)* If you come out, I won't tell Mom and Dad you put paint chips in the salad! Chuck?!

(Enter GIRL 2.)

GIRL 2: Who's Chuck?

GIRL 1: Who are you?

(Enter GIRL 3.)

GIRL 3: I asked you first.

GIRL 1 & GIRL 2: No you didn't.

(Enter BOY 1.)

BOY 1: Will you chicks stop screaming?

GIRLS: Chicks?

BOY 1: Girls. Sorry.

(Enter GIRL 4.)

GIRL 1: I'm not a girl.

(Enter GIRL 5.)

GIRL 4: I'm a woman.

(Enter GIRL 6 carrying a sign that says "Feed the Hungry.")

GIRL 5: A young woman.

GIRL 6: Woman. Young woman. Girl. Chick. We ought to be out saving the rain forest.

(She sees that her sign is wrong and flips it. Enter BOY 2.)

Saving the rain forest.

(Girl 6's sign now reads, "Save the Whales.")

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And the whales.

(Enter GIRL 7.)

BOY 2: Do you know how many trees you're killing?

(Enter BOY 3 and GIRL 8.)

GIRL 7: Does anybody know how to get out of here?

BOY 3: Where's here?

GIRL 8: Has anybody seen Chuck?

(Enter GIRL 9.)

GIRL 1: You know Chuck?

GIRL 8: He's my demon spawn little brother.

GIRL 1 & GIRL 9: No, he's *my* demon spawn little brother.

GIRL 10: Maybe he got out.

BOY 4: There's no doors.

BOY 5: *(Pointing at different groups of kids:)* You three look over there. And you – sign girl – you go look –

GIRL 11: Who said you were the boss?

BOY 5: I'm a man.

GIRL 12: You're short.

BOY 5: I'm sixteen. I've got my driver's license.

GIRL 13: Do you have a car?

GIRL 14: *(Beat.)* You're a boy.

(Pause. Actors should enter until the entire cast is onstage.)

GIRL 14: I like boys.

(She kisses him on the lips.)

But you're not in charge. *(Pause.)* You three look over there. Sign girl – you go look over there. Boys, come with me.

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(All on stage begin looking for exits to no avail.)

BOY 6: We should sound off.

GIRL 15: Sound off?

BOY 6: Say your name and if you found something.

GIRL 15: Chuck!

GIRL 16: Your name's not Chuck.

GIRL 17: Everyone should say *their* name.

GIRL 18: What are we looking for again?

GIRL 19: A door!

BOY 7: Or a window. We could climb out a window.

GIRL 20: I'm not climbing out a window.

GIRL 21: I thought we were saying our names. I'll start. My name is...

(Each member of the cast should sound off by saying his or her name. This should go as quickly as possible.)

BOY 8: Has anyone seen Chuck?

BOY 9: *(Points one way:)* I bet he's over there. *(Points in the opposite direction, like the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz:)* Or over there. Or—

GIRL 22: Nobody's seen Chuck. Not in a while. Most of you don't even remember what he looks like. Some of you think you do, but you don't. Chuck is a metaphor. He's that elusive moment of knowing who you are, and when you're a teenager, most of the time you're pretty Chuck-free. When you're a little kid, you've got your Chuck squared away. Your job is to make nice in the sandbox, to eat what they give you and try to get most of it in the toilet, to scream for your way every now and again, do your coloring homework and to hold your mom or dad's hand when crossing the street and at other

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strategic moments. When you get much older, you'll have had time to try out different Chucks and figure out which one is for you. Maybe it's the family Chuck or the career Chuck or a pet Lab named Chuck or all or none of the above. *(Beat.)* But in between kid Chuck and grown-up Chuck, there's a whole lot of out-of-focus Chuck and absent Chuck, followed by drive-by Chuckings and frantic Chuck chases and arriving at a Chuck stop only to find out he just left. And people will tell you that you didn't really see Chuck for that second you thought you did, and you'll start to ask yourself that and is this new Chuck worth the trouble and wouldn't it just be easier to sit back down in the sandbox? *(Beat.)* Like it or not, after a while we get too big for the sandbox, and like it or not, Chuck doesn't come out to play anymore. So we have to find him. Like it or not, it's just something we do. *(To the cast:)* I hear that Chuck is just on the other side of the door – if we can find one.

BOY 1: *(Finds the stage exit:)* Door!

(A mass exit begins. Girl 1 rushes past Boy 1.)

GIRL 1: Chuck?!

GIRL 8: Chuck's there?

BOY 8: Chuck!

MY CIVIL RIGHTS

(A swim club. A BOY holds a rubber ducky, a towel and whatever else would say "I'm dressed to go swimming." The Boy points at a lifeguard.)

BOY: I should totally get a lawyer and sue that guy. Sue him for every penny he's got, and sue the swim club, and I might just sue you too. Somebody's gonna' pay for my civil rights gettin' violated.

(Beat.)

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Don't give me that look like you don't know what I'm talkin' about. Playin' dumb isn't gonna' keep me out of the kiddie pool. The sign doesn't even say "kiddie pool." It says "wading pool." I want to wade. I'm real big on wading. I wade at the beach. I wade in the pond near my house, I even waded in the Dead Sea once, which is really hard 'cause all the salt makes you float. Who am I bothering if I wade here? I mean hey – I'm probably the only guy in there that wouldn't change the color of the water.

(Beat.)

The lifeguard says maybe if there's nobody else in the pool he'd let me swim. So I'm waiting. The kids from the summer camp are at the snack bar having their afternoon cookies and bug juice, so they're all getting out. But just as the camp kids are finally gone, there's this one little twerp—looks like he's two, maybe three—got those elbow flotation things, and he's crying his head off and his mom or nanny or housekeeper or whatever is draggin' him in. He obviously doesn't want to go—he's trying to bite her hand—so why doesn't this crazy lady just give the kid some time to get over it and stop scarring him for life. Because I don't want to see him turn into a psychopathic killer, and I don't own a bathtub, so this way, everybody gets what they want.

(Pause.)

What's her hurry? He's just hittin' the prime kiddie pool years. But I'm running out of time. I don't want to be goin' in there when I'm thirty – not that I shouldn't be allowed.

(Beat.)

I'm thinkin' about a petition. Or a boycott. Or maybe a march where everybody sings "We Shall Overcome." In a round. Because this is age discrimination, and it really sucks.

CLUBBED

(A GIRL rushes into a classroom. A SECOND GIRL is already there.)

FIRST GIRL: Oh no—I missed it. I had to stay after because we're doing this family trip to— I totally forget where we're going.

SECOND GIRL: You didn't miss it.

(The First Girl looks at her watch.)

FIRST GIRL: Did the time change? I mean, it's good that I didn't miss it, but—

SECOND GIRL: Nobody showed up.

FIRST GIRL: Oh.

SECOND GIRL: Like six of my friends said they were definitely probably going to come.

FIRST GIRL: Maybe they're late. I just got here—right?

SECOND GIRL: They're not coming.

FIRST GIRL: Maybe they are.

SECOND GIRL: They're at the mall. Except Evie and Grace—they're...

FIRST GIRL: Gettysburg.

SECOND GIRL: Uh...no.

FIRST GIRL: No. That's where we're going this weekend. My mom thinks I would understand history better if I saw it. This summer we're going on a tour of Europe where you go to a different massacre every day.

SECOND GIRL: Evie said she had to watch her little brother, and Grace is...I don't know where Grace is. Actually, I do. She's not supposed to meet up with Hector because her

parents don't want her dating, so she goes to the public library and they hide out in the study carrels.

FIRST GIRL: Hector with the pigeon tattoo?

SECOND GIRL: He says it's an eagle. It is kinda small and pigeon-looking though.

FIRST GIRL: So I guess it's just us.

SECOND GIRL: I guess.

FIRST GIRL: Did you still want to have the meeting?

SECOND GIRL: Well, do you have any ideas for the club?

FIRST GIRL: We need to get more people.

SECOND GIRL: Other than that, obviously.

FIRST GIRL: *(Beat.)* This is really embarrassing.

SECOND GIRL: I know.

FIRST GIRL: No, I mean I don't know what club this is. I was going to go to CARE down the hall, but by the time I got there the meeting was totally packed, and there's no way I'm going to get a leadership position if it's standing room only. What club is this?

(There's a long silence.)

SECOND GIRL: Maybe that's why no one showed up.

FIRST GIRL: Well, *we're* here. We showed up.

SECOND GIRL: So we could put it on our college apps.

FIRST GIRL: You too?

SECOND GIRL: I'm a horrible person.

FIRST GIRL: We are horrible people.

SECOND GIRL: So shallow...

FIRST GIRL: Like a teaspoon. *(Beat.)* Nobody has to know.

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SECOND GIRL: What?

FIRST GIRL: Like we could come up with something really amazing and turn this around.

SECOND GIRL: (*Thinking:*) We could feed the homeless.

FIRST GIRL: There's already two clubs for that. (*Beat.*) Save the whales?

SECOND GIRL: Some annoying girl with a sign is already doing that. What about dolphins?

FIRST GIRL: Instead of whales?

SECOND GIRL: Or in addition to.

FIRST GIRL: There's a whole list of fish that get eaten too much.

SECOND GIRL: And that plastic floating thing in the Pacific.

FIRST GIRL: We could do clean water.

SECOND GIRL: Or solar.

FIRST GIRL: The whole carbon footprint thing.

SECOND GIRL: This is blowing my mind.

FIRST GIRL: Yeah. It's like there are too many ways the world needs saving. I'm kinda overwhelmed.

SECOND GIRL: (*Beat.*) Did you see all that trash by the gym?

FIRST GIRL: You mean like right outside the door?

SECOND GIRL: Yeah.

FIRST GIRL: Ick squared.

SECOND GIRL: What if we picked it up?

FIRST GIRL: Isn't that kind of small?

SECOND GIRL: Maybe. But it's better than nothing.

FIRST GIRL: That's kinda catchy.

SECOND GIRL: What?

FIRST GIRL: Better Than Nothing.

SECOND GIRL: Yeah. Better Than Nothing. I like that.

FIRST GIRL: And every little better than nothing you do adds up.

SECOND GIRL: Yeah. But it would help, right?

FIRST GIRL: Every little bit helps. That's what my mom says.

FIRST GIRL: Yeah. We could pick up trash or babysit kids for free so their moms could work or help build houses...

SECOND GIRL: The Better Than Nothing Club. Is the "every little better than nothing" thing our slogan?

FIRST GIRL: Maybe we don't need one. Or a club. Maybe it's just us doing stuff. (*Beat.*) Unsung heroes.

SECOND GIRL: That would make an awesome essay title. Just sayin'.

(As the lights dim on them, a GIRL runs across the stage. This is CHUCK INTERLUDE #1.)

GIRL: Chuck! Chuck! Stop!

(She stops.)

Did anybody see a guy, kinda' short, kinda' tall? Did anybody see which way he went? (*Pause.*) Chuck, come back!

(She exits on the run.)

THE DANCE

(The "back to school" dance, with signage to say so. A BOY and a GIRL slow dance to whatever is the song of the moment. Around them, other BOYS and GIRLS may do likewise.)

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BOY: Your hair smells really great.

(The rest of the scene plays like a typical scene at a school dance, with the couple getting closer and closer. They are not, however, truly saying these things out loud until the Girl's final line.)

GIRL: I have an eight-page paper due Monday on *Wuthering Heights* and I can't find the movie anywhere.

BOY: Frank Smith is away visiting his dad this weekend, so I told him I'd take his shifts at Burger King. Hate that job.

GIRL: Shelley has a flask of Tequila. She wants me to go to the bathroom with her. I don't really want to, but I don't want her to think I'm a loser.

BOY: The rep from UCLA [feel free to substitute an appropriate school] is gonna' be at school on Tuesday. I always wanted to go there, but I don't even know anything about it.

GIRL: I'm so sick of playing soccer. I swear my mom cares more about it than I do.

BOY: My grandfather's in the hospital again. He's gonna' be fine, but I gotta' go over and pick up his mail.

GIRL: Was the cast list for the play posted yet?

BOY: I probably should talk to my parents more.

GIRL: My little brother actually likes soccer. I feel bad that I haven't gone to any of his games this year.

BOY: When are my feet gonna' stop growing?

GIRL: He keeps asking when am I gonna' come see him play, and I always make up some stupid excuse. Next time he asks...

BOY: I never read for fun anymore. I used to do it all the time.

GIRL: Are all my friends really hooking up?

BOY: I like you a lot, but I don't know how far I'm ready to go yet.

GIRL: (*Beat.*) Thanks. Your hair smells nice too.

(*The music crescendos as they dance offstage.*)

THREE ROWS

(*A TEEN after a funeral.*)

TEEN: They didn't have the funeral 'til a week after, so you'd think it wouldn't be that bad, 'cause people have time to get over it a little, and the casket was closed, so it's not like you see him lying there. He probably wouldn't look horrible—I don't know, maybe his neck would be a little funky-looking from the rope, but it's not like he stuck a gun in his mouth. Not like his face is missing.

(*Pause.*)

And almost our entire grade is there, and some of the kids that knew him from other grades, and all the teachers and some of the parents are there. My mom says she's not sure when to pick me up, so she's just gonna' stay and sit in the back of the church until it's over. I look back, and she's three rows behind me. And she sees me looking, and she kinda' gives me this little smile. It only lasts a second, but—you ever just sit in front of the window in the morning when the sun is coming in, like in a really comfortable chair? It's like that.

(*Pause.*)

The school select choir starts singing "Amazing Grace," and one of the kids can't make it through. And the director stops conducting and sits her down, but the choir keeps going. They start to rush the song, and I look back at my mom again, only this time she's watching the girl from the choir and not looking at me.

(Pause.)

And when "Amazing Grace" finishes and the captain of the soccer team gets up to recite Daniel's stats and ask why somebody that just set the league scoring record could hang himself in a garage, I look back again. And she's watching the captain of the soccer team cry and not watching me. And in that second I miss her again I want to— (*Beat.*) When I was little I used to ride the bus. And I talked to everybody. The person next to me—that was always my best friend, Ellen—the kids in the seat across from us, and in the row behind us and the row in front of us, and in the row behind them and the row ahead of them. No seat on the bus is too far to talk to. Three rows is nothing. But when you need your mom to be a nice warm seat in the morning sun, three rows in a church is infinity.

IT'S MY ROOM

(*MOTHER, reminiscent of the Queen of Hearts, stands inside her daughter's room flanked by a quartet of DECORATORS. Two additional DECORATORS stand guard outside. Enter the GIRL, perhaps coming home from school for the day.*)

MOTHER: Mauve.

DECORATOR 1: It's delightful.

DECORATOR 2: It's delectable.

DECORATOR 3: Reliable.

DECORATOR 4: Reliably delectable.

GIRL: Mom!

MOTHER: The walls will be mauve, the floor will be rose.

DECORATOR 1: Rose is superlative.

DECORATOR 2: A color among colors.

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DECORATOR 3: And flowers.

GIRL: Mom, are you in my room?

DECORATOR 4: You'll be in awe of rose and mauve.
Together, they're unstoppable.

(The Girl approaches the assemblage. Decorators 5 and 6 block her way.)

DECORATOR 5: You cannot enter.

DECORATOR 6: Your mother forbids it.

GIRL: But it's my room.

MOTHER: Rose carpet or rosewood, that is the question...

DECORATOR 1: The decision is critical.

DECORATOR 2: Life or death.

DECORATOR 3: The house hangs in the balance.

GIRL: Mom, who's in my room?

(The Decorators gather round, and Mother mimes talking while they react extravagantly.)

DECORATOR 5: She's in with the designers.

DECORATOR 6: The decorators.

DECORATOR 5: Those carefully selected individuals...

DECORATOR 6: Individuals selected to improve your living space.

GIRL: Mom, let me in!

MOTHER: As for the bed...

DECORATOR 5: It's best that you stay out.

DECORATOR 6: Out of it entirely.

GIRL: It's my room.

(The Girl tries to get past Decorators 5 and 6, but they again block her path.)

DECORATOR 5: Let your mother do the rest. After all, she's the one who's going to invest.

GIRL: But I have to live there.

(She tries to break through, but they drag her back.)

Can't I just tell her —

(Decorator 6 covers the Girl's mouth with a hand to cut her off. Decorators 5 and 6 drag the Girl off the stage.)

MOTHER: *(Majestically:)* Then we are agreed.

(Mother begins to exit, trailed by the Decorators. It has the feel of a royal train.)

DECORATOR 1: Indeed we are.

DECORATOR 2: All parties concerned are agreed.

CHUCK INTERLUDE #2: DEAR CHUCK

(Enter a TEEN holding pen and paper. The Teen sits and writes.)

TEEN: *(Reading the letter:)* Dear Chuck,

Nothing's been the same since you left. I know you probably won't ever see this letter, and even if you do, I know it probably won't make you come home. But I wanted to tell you some thoughts I've been thinking, just in case.

(Pause.)

I've been thinking about hair. I've been thinking how there's a moment when hair is neither wet nor dry. I get out of the shower and dry my hair with a towel, and it clings. It clings to my head and it lingers in this unconfident place where it wants to fill out and expand, but instead it remains

indescribably moist, vulnerable. I think I am my hair right now.

(Pause.)

I am so ready to grow and take on this new part of my life, this next exploration – but something's holding me back. I want to move on, but what do I want to move on to? My mind is asking new, startling questions of me, and I don't know how to respond.

(Pause.)

I talk constantly of how well I know myself and what I believe, but then I wonder if I only say it so much because I'm trying to convince myself it's true. All the old words I used to describe me and what I'm thinking don't seem to have the same meanings anymore, and I want to use new ones...and I keep coming back to hair.

(Pause.)

Chuck, I need you to come back. I know you'd have the answers to all these questions in my head. Please come home.

Love,

(The Teen should say his or her name, then seal the letter in an envelope and exit with it.)

SUPPOSED TO

(Two GIRLS in a school corridor.)

GIRL 1: He is so in love with you.

GIRL 2: He doesn't even talk to me.

GIRL 1: He wants to. Look.

(BOY 1 walks by.)

GIRL 2: I don't see it.

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GIRL 1: Look again.

(The Boy "rewinds" across the stage to the point of his entrance. He then repeats his walk past the girls in slow motion.)

There.

(The Boy freezes. Girl 1 approaches the Boy so that she can point directly at his slightly open mouth:)

See how his mouth is open a little right here.

GIRL 2: Isn't that just from breathing?

GIRL 1: No—that's talking. Definitely trying to talk. He just needs a little help.

GIRL 2: What kind of help?

(Enter GIRLS 3, 4, 5.)

GIRL 1: You should ask him out.

GIRL 3: He is totally your Mr. Right.

GIRL 4: Do you want to be the only girl in our grade that doesn't have a boyfriend?

GIRL 5: The only girl.

GIRL 4: We all have boyfriends.

GIRL 3: You're supposed to.

GIRL 5: It's a rule.

GIRL 3: You're 16—not 3.

(Girls 3, 4 and 5 take up positions to watch the rest of the scene as the Boy begins to walk toward the edge of the stage.)

GIRL 1: See that?

(The Boy freezes again.)

GIRL 2: What?

GIRL 1: That look. He's dying to ask you out.

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GIRL 2: So why doesn't he?

GIRL 1: Maybe his lips are stuck. His lips are stuck, and they're keeping the rest of his mouth from moving.

GIRL 2: I don't know how to ask him out.

GIRLS 3, 4, 5: You what?

GIRL 1: You'd better think of something. He's not going to wait forever.

GIRL 2: I don't know what to say. What should I say?

GIRL 1: I don't know. Say what *he* said.

(Girl 2 approaches the Boy. Both sculpt their mouths into the exact same silent, half-open pose and freeze in it while Girls 1, 3, 4 and 5 watch their efforts.)

REGISTERED VOTER

(The sign-carrying Girl 6 from the Overture, perhaps holding the sign from the opening, or a different one.)

GIRL: There's this old guy with a beard on the sidewalk in front of the post office, always has a table set up, protesting sweat shops or the lack of universal health care or cruelty to animals, like when they cut up a mouse to see if it'll save me from the flu. Today I'm at the post office, and old beard guy is there, and he's got a petition about greenhouse gas emissions. And so I go up to him and ask to see some of his literature, and after he gives me some and I look it over for a minute, I say, "I'll sign your petition." He looks at me for a long time—it's probably only five seconds, but his eyes get all beady and bulgy—and he says, *(Croaking voice:)* "Are you a registered voter?" *(In her own voice:)* When I tell him no, I'm only fifteen, he tells me I can't sign—this petition is only for registered voters. But I can have this neat refrigerator magnet that says "Save our Children's Earth." He actually uses the word "neat."

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I say no thanks, and "Why do you have to save me? Why can't I save me?"

BAKING

(Two teenage BOYS. Somewhere at school.)

FIRST BOY: They said I was too young to know.

SECOND BOY: Maybe they're right.

FIRST BOY: *I know.*

SECOND BOY: At least they didn't throw you out.

FIRST BOY: My dad went back to reading the newspaper. "You're too young to know" and bang—up goes the paper, only he's turnin' the pages way too fast to be readin' em.

SECOND BOY: Dude, are you checkin' out my butt?

FIRST BOY: Ha ha. *(Beat.)* Check this—I roll out of bed this morning, and my mom's like Super Mom. She's baking chocolate chip cookies and banana bread and cereal—

SECOND BOY: She's baking cereal?

FIRST BOY: No—there's a bowl of cereal at my place.

SECOND BOY: Is it the kind you like?

FIRST BOY: Who cares.

SECOND BOY: Sometimes when my mom's mad at me, she makes me eat calves liver or tofu or tuna fish or—

FIRST BOY: It was Cap'n Crunch.

SECOND BOY: That's all you ever eat.

FIRST BOY: No it's not.

SECOND BOY: For breakfast it is. So if it's Cap'n Crunch, what's the problem?

FIRST BOY: Nothing, only she makes me try everything. The Cap'n Crunch and all the stuff she's baking. My mom never bakes.

SECOND BOY: She let you eat cookies for breakfast?

FIRST BOY: Not let me. Made me. Four of 'em. *(Pause.)* I said, "Mom, even if you make me fat, I'm still not gonna' be straight." And she says I'm too young to know and sticks a loaf of whole wheat bread in the oven.

SECOND BOY: *(Beat.)* Maybe she's right.

FIRST BOY: About what?

SECOND BOY: Maybe you'll grow out of it.

FIRST BOY: I won't.

SECOND BOY: But you don't know that for sure.

FIRST BOY: I'm pretty sure.

SECOND BOY: Are you two plus two equals four sure? *(Pause.)* Maybe if you tried really hard—

FIRST BOY: You wanna' come over for dinner? I think she's bakin' a chocolate cake and pizza and—

SECOND BOY: I can't.

FIRST BOY: *(Pause.)* She'll probably still be bakin' tomorrow. You want to come over tomorrow?

SECOND BOY: I don't think I can tomorrow either.

FIRST BOY: *(Beat.)* How come?

SECOND BOY: I want to, but...

FIRST BOY: But...?

SECOND BOY: *(Beat.)* If people think your mom bakes, they might think my mom bakes too.

CHUCK INTERLUDE #3

(A TEEN.)

TEEN: I'm having lunch at school, and there's this new kid. I guess he transferred, 'cause I've never seen him before, it's halfway through the year, and there he is, standing in the middle of the cafeteria with a tray. He looks around—and it's weird, 'cause he's not moving. He's just checkin' it all out with his eyes, and then he starts walkin' toward my table. It's just me, 'cause the rest of my friends are still in the line, and he says, "Can I sit here?" And I'm like whatever, 'cause it's gotta' be tough to be somewhere new and not know where to go.

(Pause.)

He says, "thanks—my name's Chuck." And he sits. No—not sits. He settles. You know like how there's all that stuff at the bottom of your drink if you don't shake it? It's like that. Only in a good way. Like a blanket. Comfortable. Like he's been there all along. I'm thinking maybe he's gonna' be my new best friend.

(Pause.)

I see the rest of my friends coming, and I turn and tell them to hurry up—"you gotta' meet Chuck." Only when I turn back, he's gone. No Chuck, no tray, even the little spill from the canned peaches is dry. And that feeling, that bottom of the drink feel good feeling, it's gone. Every once in a while if I try really hard, I can make myself remember what it was like to sit next to Chuck, but it's not the same. (*Beat.*) Chuck, if you're out there, if you can hear me, I'm saving you a seat at lunch.

THE MENU

(*Four teens, one BOY and three GIRLS, sit at a restaurant. A teen WAITRESS takes their order.*)

GIRL 1: And I'll have the grilled cheese.

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WAITRESS: Grilled cheese?

GIRL 1: (*Shows her on the menu.*) Yeah. Here.

BOY: I want the grilled cheese too.

WAITRESS: Oh – that's the kids' menu.

GIRL 1: Yeah.

WAITRESS: You need to look at the first three pages.

GIRL 1: But those are all ribs and giant platters.

WAITRESS: We specialize in ribs. They're really good here. The baby backs are my favorite, but pretty much all of them are awesome.

GIRL 1: I don't like ribs.

GIRL 2: I don't eat meat.

WAITRESS: Would you like our snow pea and mushroom salad?

GIRL 2: Why can't we order off the kids' menu?

WAITRESS: It's for kids under twelve.

GIRL 1: It's a small portion – right?

WAITRESS: That's why it's for kids under twelve.

GIRL 1: So if I want a small portion, why can't I get the grilled cheese?

BOY: Yeah. Why can't we get the grilled cheese?

WAITRESS: Let me ask the kitchen. I'm sure they can make you a grilled cheese.

GIRL 1: The kid-size one.

WAITRESS: I don't think we can do that – but I'm sure they can make you a regular one.

GIRL 1: I don't want a regular one.

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GIRL 3: Why don't we just split a regular one?

GIRL 1: No – I want the one off the kids' menu.

WAITRESS: I need to ask the manager.

BOY: Can't you just pretend we're under twelve?

WAITRESS: You're not under twelve.

BOY: I know – but can't you just pretend?

GIRL 3: Maybe just this once? Like a Christmas gift?

GIRL 1: We should be able to get it anytime.

WAITRESS: Let me get the manager.

GIRL 1: Whose side are you on?

WAITRESS: I should get –

BOY: (*To Girl 1:*) Yeah, tell her.

GIRL 1: How old are you?

WAITRESS: Can I get you something to drink first?

GIRL 1: You go to our school – right?

WAITRESS: And I have to pay my car insurance, so can I get you something to drink?

GIRL 1: Do you have a kids' drink menu?

WAITRESS: I'm getting the manager.

(Girl 1 climbs onto the table.)

GIRL 3: (*Trying not to attract attention:*) Katie, get down!

GIRL 1: I declare the Rib Eye officially occupied.

GIRL 3: Oh my God – my parents are going to kill me.

(The Boy jumps up with Girl 1.)

BOY: Yeah, this place is so occupied.

(The Waitress gives up and exits.)

GIRL 1: My friends—we will take back the Rib Eye just like our brothers and sisters took back the kiddie pool at the swim club.

(Girl 3 moves to hide under the table.)

Join us.

BOY: Yeah! Stand on your tables!

GIRL 2: I'm afraid of heights.

GIRL 1: And we will eat no ribs until we have a choice to eat off the kids' menu.

(Girl 2 conquers her fear and slowly joins them on the table.)

BOY: Yeah! Pro-choice!

GIRL 1: Does anybody know "We Shall Overcome"?

I'M THINKING

(Enter a GIRL wearing generic clothing.)

GIRL: Last month my parents bought me a convertible and said if I wreck it—of course, they hope I don't because they don't want me to get hurt—but if I wreck the car, they'll buy me another one.

(Pause.)

Last week it was a diamond ring, just because Dad was on a business trip to South Africa and saw one that he liked. I can't remember if he bought one for my mom or just for me.

(Pause.)

Yesterday, it was some dress that wasn't on sale at Bloomingdale's. *(Beat.)* But I'm thinking of giving up the convertible, because I need some money to go to the movies

with my friends or so I can get a phone that's not three generations behind everyone else's.

(Pause.)

I'm thinking of giving up the ring, because I'm tired of skipping lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I let two of my friends think I'm anorexic, because anorexia is a fashionable problem, and that way I can still get invited to all the parties.

(Pause.)

I'm thinking of giving up the dress, because my mom works two jobs just so I can pretend I'm like my friends at my private school, and if she doesn't ever get to enjoy a nice dress, maybe I shouldn't either.

(Pause.)

Sometimes I think about giving up. *(Beat.)* I will not give up.

(She exits.)

THE TEEN SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

(Enter the EMCEE.)

EMCEE: The teen shopping experience: a three-act play in miniature. Act One. 3:30 PM. A sporting goods store.

(A BOY enters a store that sells hats and other team merchandise. Trailing him at a cautious distance are a squadron of SALESPEOPLE, behaving more like a SWAT team with a hint of the Star Wars rebel alliance. They have one hand in their ears as if they're speaking with tiny mics and ear pieces. The Boy browses the merchandise. SALES 1 and 2 are the closest. SALES 3, the leader, directs traffic.)

SALES 1: We have a bogey.

SALES 2: We have visual contact with the bogey. He appears to be heading for the hats.

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SALES 3: Copy that. Keep your distance One and Two.

SALES 1: I've been spotted. I'm pulling out. (*Sales 1 approaches the Boy. To the Boy:*) Hi. Nice weather we're having. See ya'.

SALES 4: I've got you, One.

(Sales 1 exits as SALES 4 moves in to replace Sales 1. The Boy feels the brim of a hat.)

SALES 2: Bogey is touching a hat.

SALES 3: Copy that. Five and Six, create a perimeter.

(SALES 5 and 6 move to block the exits.)

Seven, begin sales maneuver.

(The Boy picks up the hat. SALES 7, looking a little more like a typical salesperson, approaches the Boy.)

SALES 2: He has it in his hand.

SALES 7: Can I help you with something?

BOY: No – I'm just looking.

SALES 7: I'll be right over there if you need me.

BOY: OK. Thanks.

(Sales 7 retreats somewhat.)

SALES 2: Sales maneuver repelled. I repeat: the sales maneuver has been repelled.

SALES 3: Seven, maintain surveillance. Five and Six, be ready to close the perimeter.

SALES 5: Copy that, Red Leader.

SALES 3: Huh? (*Pause.*) Two and Four, the second he makes his move, take him.

SALES 2: Ready here.

SALES 4: Ready.

SALES 7: Standing by to assist.

(The Boy takes the hat to the sales counter, pulling out his wallet and some cash as he does so. Sales 7 races to receive him.)

BOY: Can you cut the tag off so I can wear it out?

SALES 7: Executing sales maneuver.

BOY: What?

SALES 7: I said let me find some scissors. *(To the others:)* Stand down.

BOY: What?

SALES 7: Just looking for scissors down here.

(Sales 7 finds scissors and cuts the tags off.)

I repeat: stand down. Sales maneuver completed. *(Giving the Boy the hat:)* Thank you for your business.

(The Boy puts it on and starts to exit.)

BOY: Anybody want to see my receipt?

(The sales force tries to look really, really busy as the Boy exits.)

EMCEE: Act Two. 4:00 PM. A fairy tale accompanied by a pantomime.

(The Emcee produces a large picture book and sits, becoming a storyteller while cast members become little children and gather at the Emcee's feet.)

Once upon a time there was a little girl – not so little really – a not-so-little 15-year-old girl who lived in a suburb.

(Enter the GIRL.)

One day that not-so-little girl and a friend...

(Enter the GIRL'S FRIEND as the Emcee turns the page.)

...went to the mall. Inside the mall was a store...

(Enter about a half-dozen SALESPEOPLE, who busy themselves about the store. One of them holds a pocketbook as if they were a display. Other actors might enter as CUSTOMERS.)

...and inside the store was a pocketbook. The not-so-little girl saw the pocketbook, and it was love at first sight.

(The Girl makes a grand gesture of seeing the pocketbook, taking it from the "display" and showing it to her friend. She then brings it to the counter.)

So she took it in her arms and brought it to the counter, where the salesperson welcomed her. *(Turning the page:)* While the not-so-little girl's not-so-little friend watched, the not-so-little girl held out her credit card in her dainty hand.

(The Girl passes the credit card to the Salesperson at the counter.)

The salesperson took the card, and she looked. She looked and looked, and then she peered and eyed.

(Gradually, the entire sales staff assembles to look at the card.)

She called over other salespeople and other salespersons, to look and look and peer and eye this wondrous card with a not-so-little girl's name and signature.

(The Emcee turns the page. As the Emcee continues with the story, the actors in the story continue to perform according to the narrative.)

"But of course," said the salesperson holding the card. "Everyone knows that behind every not-so-little girl is a mommy or a daddy's account." And in the retail business, all's well that ends well as long as you can account for the account.

(The Emcee turns the page. A Salesperson swipes the card and punches in the card's expiration date.)

And there was a swiping and a punching, and the salespeople held their breath and waited to shout "approved!" And they waited. And waited some more. But something was wrong. There was no "approved" but only a "denied." For the mommy and daddy behind the account had given their not-so-little girl a far more little credit limit.

GIRL: Wait – that's a mistake.

FIRST SALESPERSON: Do you feel a breeze?

GIRL: Try it again!

SECOND SALESPERSON: Hot air, perhaps?

(Several Salespeople take away the pocketbook and hold a funeral for the credit card, placing it in a shoebox. Some act as pallbearers and carry it off, another consoles the pocketbook and the remaining Salespeople and Customers cry and carry on in pantomime as they process offstage. Simultaneous to the funeral, enter a clean-cut ADULT COUPLE.)

Can I help you find something?

FIRST SALESPERSON: Can we help you?

GIRL: I'm still here!

*(The First and Second Salespeople waltz off with the Adult Customers. The Girl and her Friend are left alone as the Emcee steps in front of them and theatrically closes the book. The Girl and her Friend may exit or become characters in the next scene, as do the other actors while a recorded VOICEMAIL GREETING plays: **CHUCK INTERLUDE #4.**)*

VOICEMAIL GREETING: You have reached Chuck's voicemail. Chuck isn't here right now. He's out there. This isn't his voice. That would be too easy. At the beep, you know what to do. Or maybe you're calling because you don't.

(The sound of a beep, or the actor who voices the greeting could simply say "beep." The Emcee, trying not to appear unsettled, continues.)

EMCEE: Act Three. Seven o'clock. A department store.

(Enter a MOTHER and FATHER with their teenage children, a BOY and a GIRL, on leashes. The Boy and the Girl try to break free unsuccessfully as a SALESPERSON comes over.)

FATHER: Careful—he's a biter.

SALESPERSON: Anything in particular for the young lady and gentleman?

MOTHER: *(To the Girl:)* I think you'd look just wonderful in one of those pink sundresses like Grandma used to wear.

(The Girl grabs a nearby dress and covers her head with it.)

(To the Salesperson:) Do you have any of those pink sundresses, the kind my mother used to wear?

GIRL: Might as well just kill myself.

SALESPERSON: I'll call the local museum.

MOTHER: What was that, honey bunny yum yum?

BOY: Want to spend...own money...

GIRL: I said I might as well step in front of a bus.

FATHER: Something sporty, but not too flashy. Don't want my son looking like a hoodlum.

SALESPERSON: I understand perfectly.

MOTHER: You'll have gentleman callers lined up straight around the block with a dress like Grandma's. Why ever would you want to step in front of a bus?

BOY: Must break free. Must get Hilfiger [or the designer of the moment]...

MOTHER: Your grandma was a beautiful woman.

GIRL: *(To the Salesperson:)* Do you have a bus schedule?

FATHER: Solid. That's the word I'm searching for. Solid colors, a good solid button-down shirt, the kind my great-grandfather used to wear.

SALESPERSON: My brother's an undertaker. I'll get right on it.

MOTHER: I'm half-tempted to dig her up and get that dress for you. Maybe your brother could help.

BOY: Own...money...

MOTHER: She'd be so tickled to look down and see you wearing it.

BOY: Baggy...shorts...please.

(The Boy collapses, exhausted from fighting his father.)

MOTHER: Even if Grandma's dress isn't the right fit, at least the nice salesperson here could see the kind of outfit I'm talking about.

GIRL: Yeah. I think I'll just kill myself.

EMCEE: The teen shopping experience. A three-act play in miniature. The end.

IT'S MY PARTY...

(A teen party at somebody's house. A HOST KID, NOT SO SOBER KID and a RANDOM KID.)

NOT SO SOBER KID: Best...party...ever.

RANDOM KID: She says that every time.

NOT SO SOBER KID: Yeah, but this time I mean it.

RANDOM KID: Girl [Dude], you won't even remember it tomorrow.

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NOT SO SOBER KID: I will too. I am totally...one hundred percent...

(The Not So Sober Kid falls asleep.)

RANDOM KID: I told them be careful not to trash your place.

HOST KID: Rule of Twelve.

RANDOM KID: What's that?

HOST KID: If there's more than twelve people, the place is gonna get trashed.

RANDOM KID: There's like fifty people in the living room.

HOST KID: There's more upstairs.

RANDOM KID: My parents never even leave the house for more than like an hour.

HOST KID: They're not back until Tuesday. Or maybe it's Wednesday. It's on the fridge.

RANDOM KID: Least you got a couple days to clean up.

HOST KID: I left their bedroom door open and closed all the other ones.

RANDOM KID: I don't really know you, but are you insane?

HOST KID: I barely know anybody here. They just like my house.

RANDOM KID: Wish my house was this nice. You're in my algebra class.

HOST KID: English, I think. It's all good. Not insane.

RANDOM KID: I would be so dead. Like I'd be dead, and then they'd bring me back to life so they could kill me again.

HOST KID: They can only kill you once.

RANDOM KID: My mom's a Buddhist. They believe in reincarnation.

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HOST KID: I don't know what that means.

RANDOM KID: Like let's say they put a pillow over my face when I'm sleeping. So then I come back as a grasshopper, and they step on me. Then I come back as a flower and they chop me off with a pair of garden shears and then maybe I'm a deer and bang, they blow me away with a shotgun and –

HOST KID: Could you have them do all that in my parents' bed?

RANDOM KID: *(Pause.)* What?

HOST KID: If they murdered all your reincarnated bodies and stacked them in my parents' bed, maybe they'd notice somebody else lives here.

RANDOM KID: That's dark.

HOST KID: You know, I see those homeless families downtown [in the city, if your school is not in an urban area], and like these little kids are out on the street and their clothes are all ratty and they need more layers or thicker cause it's cold, and their parents are all trying to keep them warm and giving the kids their jackets, so the parents are even colder and it's horrible, but then I start thinking, at least they're trying. At least they know their kids' names. I know it's insane, but I'm looking at this family that's freezing their asses [butts] off and probably doesn't know where their next meal is coming from, and I'm feeling sorry for *me*. How messed up is that?

RANDOM KID: *(Beat.)* I could piss [go number one] in their bed.

HOST KID: Really?

RANDOM KID: If you want.

HOST KID: But you don't even know me.

RANDOM KID: My parents are all into practicing random acts of kindness.

HOST KID: You are so kind, Random Person from English.

RANDOM KID: Algebra.

HOST KID: I mean it. (*Examining the passed out Not So Sober Kid:*) Is she OK?

RANDOM KID: Are any of us?

BRAN AND BANANAS

(*A TEEN holds a bowl of bran and bananas.*)

TEEN: When I was like six, my dad had an awesome job. I don't actually know what he did, but he was home having breakfast when I was having breakfast for school. He'd have bran cereal every day. He said it kept him regular. I thought that meant if he didn't have it his head would spin around and he'd puke green slime or something, so I was glad for the bran. I didn't want that to happen to me either — and I figure my dad knows what he's doing so I have it too. Only can we add some honey to mine, 'cause not turning into a monster doesn't taste as good as I was hoping. And I wake up fifteen minutes early, 'cause my dad's reading the newspaper, and he reads the sports with me. We do this every morning until I'm in middle school.

(*Beat.*)

Yeah, I know your parents aren't cool, but it's not like people can see us.

(*Pause.*)

In seventh grade, my dad switches to Greek yogurt and fruit, because it's protein and low carb, and he drinks coffee but not fruit juice. I stick to bran, but if Dad's doing fruit, I'm doing fruit. Mostly bananas. Mom cuts them up and leaves them in a

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bowl covered with wax paper. She spends breakfast taking showers—she says this is father-son time—but as long as the fruit's in the bowl and I can just dump it on the bran, life is good. And when we finish, Dad goes into his study and Mom comes out of the shower and I go to school.

(*Beat.*)

It gets harder when he moves to the other side of town. So breakfast turns into brunch, which is something that happens on Saturdays and Sundays.

(*Beat.*)

And then Dad gets a job three states away. This time, I know he designs buildings, and brunch becomes summer. But this year, there's music and tennis and tutoring for my SATs because my mom is freaking out that they're going to be too low. I don't think she's doing it on purpose, but I think I can only see him for a week this year.

(*Beat.*)

I'm glad the screaming matches and the silences that made me want to get up and run away are over, but a week of breakfasts...? I know I shouldn't—I know it's better for everybody—but part of me would trade a few more broken coffee mugs and an earful of words that made the stuff kids say at school seem like hugs and kisses for a few more breakfasts of bran and bananas.

THE SOCIAL NETWORK

(*A CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN sits across from another TEEN clutching an application.*)

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: So tell me about your experience.

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APPLICANT TEEN: Well, I worked at Cream 'n Stuff for like a year.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: That's...

APPLICANT TEEN: Ice cream. And stuff.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Stuff like...?

APPLICANT TEEN: We "stuff" your ice cream with anything you want. Chocolate chips, marshmallows, nuts...more ice cream...

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Ah. I get it. *(Beat.)* But you left.

APPLICANT TEEN: My parents—and me—I—we believe that school comes first. After the summer, I left *(As if trying to remember something that's been memorized:)* to focus on my academics. But now that we're past New Year's and I've got school under control, I feel like I'm ready for a job. Baby needs a new pair of shoes, right?

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Baby what?

APPLICANT TEEN: Sorry. Just makin' a joke.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Don't make jokes.

APPLICANT TEEN: Sorry.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: *(Beat.)* So why Cup 'a Joe?

APPLICANT TEEN: 'Cause after you eat some ice cream, what's better than coffee?

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Didn't I just say no jokes? Otherwise I'm just gonna leave.

APPLICANT TEEN: No—sorry. *(Beat.)* I feel like I can take the same skills I learned at Cream 'n Stuff and use them for this job. Customer service skills, I mean. Not the ice cream scooping.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: (*Making notes on the clipboard.*) Great.

APPLICANT TEEN: Are you really writing notes? (*Beat.*) Sorry.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: So tell me about Facebook [or the social media network of the moment].

APPLICANT TEEN: What?

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: The Facebook photo. Or was it Instagram? (*Checking something on the clipboard.*) I think it was both.

APPLICANT TEEN: What are you talking about?

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Anytime somebody applies for a job, we check all their profiles.

APPLICANT TEEN: (*Beat.*) I got hacked.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: It's your photo.

APPLICANT TEEN: Yeah, but nobody was supposed to post it. (*Breaking "character".*) What are you doing?

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: That's not the kind of conduct we expect from an employee of Cup 'o Joe.

APPLICANT TEEN: Stop for a second.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: We can't hire someone who—

APPLICANT TEEN: Stop!

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: (*Beat.*) They're gonna check.

APPLICANT TEEN: I took it down.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: It might still be archived.

APPLICANT TEEN: You're supposed to be helping me, not...this.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: I *am* helping.

APPLICANT TEEN: (*Beat.*) What am I supposed to do?

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Hope nobody finds it. And don't let anybody take any more pictures of you doin' dumb stuff.

APPLICANT TEEN: Or not do the dumb stuff in the first place.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Now you're thinkin'!

APPLICANT TEEN: Now I'm boring. Pretty soon I'll be my parents.

CLIPBOARD-CARRYING TEEN: Least they have jobs.

APPLICANT TEEN: Truth.

*(Transition to **CHUCK INTERLUDE #5**: as the actors exit, enter a TEEN whose attire perhaps suggests a chauffeur's uniform, holding a sign that says "Chuck." The Teen should be dressed in heavy winter clothes, perhaps a hat, scarf, gloves and a heavy coat. Beat. The Teen removes the gloves and the heavy coat. Beat. The Teen should remove one more layer and the scarf, revealing a windbreaker or other light jacket, and perhaps a baseball cap instead of the heavy hat. The attire should now reflect spring. Beat. The Teen, who with each costume change has redoubled the effort to hold up the sign, gives up and exits.)*

HELICOPTER

(A college tour. A STUDENT TOUR GUIDE leads a group of STUDENTS and PARENTS, including GIRL 1 and MOTHER 1 and GIRL 2 and MOTHER 2.)

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TOUR GUIDE: The university of your choice has more than two hundred clubs and athletic teams at the varsity through intramural levels.

GIRL 1: Can you tell us about the—

MOTHER 1: Yes, my daughter has a question.

GIRL 1: (*Dying:*) Mom...

MOTHER 1: Pretend I'm not even here. But I know my daughter is wondering how your admissions office weighs extracurricular activities.

GIRL 1: That is not my—

MOTHER 1: I'm just a fly on the wall.

GUIDE: Well, I just give the tours, but—

MOTHER 1: Not to put you on the spot, but where on a scale of one to ten would you place student council president?

MOTHER 2: Where indeed. My daughter was wondering the exact same thing.

GIRL 2: (*Dying:*) Mom...

MOTHER 2: She was also wondering, on a scale of one to ten, where you would rate president of the mathematics tutoring club.

MOTHER 1: What an incredible coincidence. My daughter was wondering where you'd rate—on a scale of one to ten—president of the combined mathematics and foreign language tutoring club.

MOTHER 2: Did I say the mathematics tutoring club? Of course I meant to say the mathematics tutoring club, but I left out vice-president of the conservation club—

MOTHER 1: And I left out senior vice-president treasurer of the young entrepreneurs club.

MOTHER 2: President of bakers against poverty.

(As the mother vs. mother battle continues in pantomime, the two Girls and the rest of the tour sneak away.)

GIRL 1: *(To the Guide:)* Is it true that they serve ice cream every day?

TOUR GUIDE: Yep. One of our alums gave a hundred mill on the condition that we have ice cream available for lunch and dinner.

GIRL 2: That's so awesome. I hope they have cookies 'n cream.

GIRL 1: I love cookies 'n cream.

GIRL 2: Isn't it just the best?

TOUR GUIDE: Every Wednesday. But do not overlook the banana fudge swirl. Just sayin'.

(They exit. The sound comes back up on the Mothers, who still duel.)

MOTHER 1: President for two years running of the high school fire and rescue auxiliary.

MOTHER 2: Invented the tapered blanket for toddlers.

MOTHER 1: Discovered a new word for the color blue.

MOTHER 2: State basket-weaving champion, junior division!

MOTHER 1: National 18 and under full contact origami champion!

(The Mothers realize they are alone.)

Hmm...

MOTHER 2: *(Pulling out a cell phone:)* Not a problem. I track her phone.

MOTHER 1: *(Waving her off:)* She'll be back. They think they're all independent, but they always come crawling back,

crawling back for their social security number or someone to proofread their essays or pay for another application, and of course for my signature, my all-important signature, because nothing happens in my daughter's life without my signature. She doesn't bat an eyelash. She doesn't make a move. She doesn't even breathe without my say-so. So we'll just sit right here and wait.

MOTHER 2: You said it, sister mother. We'll just sit right here, for as long as it takes.

(Beat. Lights dim on them, waiting.)

SUBTRACTION

(Enter a GIRL.)

GIRL: My grandma had numbers on her arm. She was really little—she had a hat that she wore every Saturday that was so big she disappeared in it—which made the numbers seem like they took up half her arm. They didn't—that was in my head—and she never said much about them. Only once, and that was just for five minutes one day when it was raining and I was staring.

(Beat.)

The boy in my math class has a swastika on his arm, but he loves numbers and what he can do with them, especially subtraction. He used to have wavy blonde hair, almost down to his shoulders, but then he subtracted it. He used to wear all these crazy colors like he was Bob Marley or something, but then he subtracted them. He used to walk me home, and my mom would make him stay and eat sandwiches, 'cause his parents were never home, but six months ago he subtracted me and the rest of his old friends and then he subtracted his name and became the boy in my math class.

(Beat.)

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He doesn't just subtract. The boy in my math class adds too. He adds new friends that keep their swastikas covered under long undershirts, and he adds lots of words he learns on the internet, words like White Power and racial purity and the Big Lie and the Zionist Conspiracy. He says the sandwiches my mom used to make him were filled with dog food, and she was trying to poison him.

(Beat.)

We all have to teach a math lesson this year. Yesterday was his. He gets up, and he takes the chalk, and he goes to the board. He writes six million, and then he subtracts six million from it. And he's smiling and says zero is the answer. The teacher asks what the question is, and he says "six million is the number of Jews they say died in Europe between 1939 and 1945. Six million is the number the Jews made up. Zero is the number that really died. Not countin' natural causes or whatever." And the boy in my math class keeps smiling, like it's a joke, but he's not joking.

(Beat.)

And at that moment I want to subtract him. Not just subtract him from my class or from my school, but from the world. He's sixteen years old, and he's got that smile I want to rip off his face. If he died I wouldn't care. Just let a car subtract him one night crossing the street or a bullet or cancer or just let somebody subtract his air until he can't breathe anymore.

(Beat.)

But then I remember my grandma and how she lived with the numbers she wanted to subtract. And I remember those five minutes in the rain when I asked about them, and if they still hurt. She said – real quiet, so my father wouldn't hear – "I wish they weren't there, but some things we just have to live with. Or live through."

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PROMISE NOT TO TELL

(GIRL 1 is alone on stage. Enter GIRL 2.)

GIRL 2: Every night after dinner I lock myself in the bathroom and make myself throw up. Promise not to tell anyone.

GIRL 1: But—

GIRL 2: You're my friend, right?

(BOY 1 enters, moving a little slowly, from the other side of the stage.)

GIRL 1: I promise.

(Girl 2 moves to a corner of the stage as the Boy approaches.)

BOY 1: I ran into the door.

GIRL 1: The door?

BOY 1: If I piss off my dad when he's drunk, sometimes he takes the back of his hand and...

(He imitates his father hitting him in the face.)

It's my fault. Promise not to tell anyone.

GIRL 1: I don't know.

(Enter GIRL 3 and BOY 2.)

BOY 1: He swore he wouldn't do it again. He feels real bad about it. *(Moving away to his corner of the stage:)* Don't tell—you promised.

GIRL 1: I did?

GIRL 3: I think I'm pregnant. But you can't tell anybody.

GIRL 1: I—

(Girl 3 moves to her corner, while Boy 2 moves toward Girl 1 as if he wants to tell her something.)

Don't say it. Don't tell me anything, 'cause I know it's gonna' be something horrible, and I can only keep three horrible secrets at once.

BOY 2: Promise not to tell.

GIRL 1: Tell what?

(Enter GIRL 4, who approaches Girl 1.)

BOY 2: You promised.

GIRL 1: Don't tell what?

BOY 2: *(Moving toward his corner:)* Don't tell anything.

GIRL 1: *(to Girl 4)* There's no corner left for you.

GIRL 4: But I need to tell somebody.

GIRL 1: Tell one of them.

GIRL 4: I don't trust them.

GIRL 1: Then tell one of the teachers or your parents or your grandparents or a member of your extended family or a step or half-family member or your minister or your rabbi or Ann Landers or Alateen or Gamblers Anonymous or the Runaway Hotline or the Child Abuse Hotline or your doctor or the police or the 911 operator or the nice old man in the cardigan that feeds pigeons in the park—

GIRL 4: I don't live near a park.

GIRL 1: Then find a nice old man in a cardigan somewhere else. *(Pause.)* Unless you want to tell me you won the lottery, only you don't want anyone to know. Or you've got two Marc Jacobs [or the designer of the moment] originals and you need my help deciding which one to wear to the school dance. Or every boy in our grade asked you out, and you can't decide which one to go with. Or you need to tell someone you got an

A on the English test or a part in the next Spielberg [or the film director of the moment] movie.

GIRL 4: It's not one of those.

GIRL 1: But it's like one of those—right?

GIRL 4: No.

GIRL 1: Did you ever think that maybe I'm just not up for making an impossible decision today?

GIRL 4: Promise not to tell?

GIRL 1: (*Beat.*) Promise.

(Exit the actors as it becomes a news broadcast, CHUCK INTERLUDE #6. Enter the ANCHOR.)

ANCHOR: Our top story once again is the search for Chuck. Still no sign, and authorities are rushing to get his face on a milk carton. Anyone with information on Chuck's whereabouts, you can dial this toll free hotline: 1-888-GO-CHUCK. (*Pause.*) Moms and dads, do you know where your Chuck is?

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

(A BOY, preferably the actor who said "I have a driver's license" in the opening, holds a set of car keys.)

BOY: When I was eight, I had to pick: peewee soccer vs. peewee football. Even before that, it was play in the sandbox vs. play on the slide. Or the jungle gym. If you go sandbox, you've gotta' do a serious shakeout or Mom's gonna' scream at you for trackin' up the carpet. The slide's safe and fun, but you're pretty much limited to climbing the ladder and sliding down. There's always a couple kids that try to climb up the slide, but then what? All you can do is slide back down again. Limited. Jungle gym has more possibilities, but you gotta' balance it with the danger factor. Header off the jungle gym

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has taken out a lot of second graders over the years. Luckily, my mom or my dad or one of my teachers was always there, so they pretty much made the decisions for me.

(Beat.)

This time, it's my decision. My dad says, "They're here if you want 'em." Not "happy birthday, son" or "use it well." "Here if you want 'em."

(Beat.)

Of course I want a car. I'm not an idiot. I like girls, girls like cars, therefore girls like me if I have a car. It's the transitive property. So what's the problem? The problem is I have to pay for the car—not for the car exactly, 'cause my parents already own it, but for the insurance, the gas, the repairs. How am I supposed to pick up girls in my car if I'm too busy working to pay for it?

(Beat.)

And what kind of job can I get? Hey baby—check out my wheels and do you want onions on that burger?

(Beat.)

My nightmare? Hottest girl in the school throws a party and goes out of her way—I mean like she walks right up to me in the hall and then she calls me later to make sure I didn't think I was hallucinating—and says I have to be there. Saturday night, no parents, she loves my car, she wants to get to know me and my car...it doesn't get any better...and then bam—I'm stuck on the graveyard shift, scooping yogurt for a bunch of twelve-year-olds.

(Beat.)

I need this car, but it just might kill me.

ZERO TOLERANCE

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(A GIRL sits in a chair. The PRINCIPAL and a TEACHER and a POLICE OFFICER stand over her.)

GIRL: I didn't mean I was gonna' kill him.

POLICE OFFICER 1: Search her locker for guns, knives, bombs—

GIRL: It's an expression. I probably say it five times a day.

POLICE OFFICER 1: —Molotov cocktails, Chinese throwing stars, grenades—

GIRL: I say it to my hamster when he doesn't want to get on the wheel.

PRINCIPAL: Young lady, saying "I'm gonna' kill you" is something we take very seriously at this school.

GIRL: It was a joke. (*To the Teacher:*) Couldn't you see I was kidding?

POLICE OFFICER 1: —blackjacks, needles, vials filled with biological weapons—

TEACHER: I heard the words "I'm gonna' kill you." I have to report that.

GIRL: Ask Todd—he knows I was kidding.

POLICE OFFICER 1: There is no Todd here. Todd is a thing of the past. (*Continuing the list from before:*) Vials filled with chemical weapons, napalm, rocket launchers, tactical nuclear weapons—

GIRL: But if I said it to Todd and he knows I'm kidding—

POLICE OFFICER 1: No Todd! No Todd!

PRINCIPAL: If a teacher hears the words "I'm gonna' kill you," "I'm going to kill you," "You're dead" or "You dead," the teacher must inform the principal. I in turn must inform the police.

POLICE OFFICER 1: *(Continuing the list:)* ICBMs, F-16s, C-4—

PRINCIPAL: We have a zero-tolerance policy for violence.

GIRL: I wasn't gonna' be violent.

POLICE OFFICER 1: —trenchcoats, dead animals, albums that play backward and conjure the devil—

GIRL: I didn't know. If I knew it was so bad, I wouldn't have said it.

(Enter POLICE OFFICER 2.)

POLICE OFFICER 2: We'll take her.

GIRL: But—

POLICE OFFICER 2: Come on, you homicidal missy.

PRINCIPAL: It's out of our hands.

(The Police Officers grab the Girl, who resists, and start dragging her off the stage.)

POLICE OFFICER 1: —dead letters, letter bombs, movies that bombed, bad haircuts—

POLICE OFFICER 2: You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say—

GIRL: I didn't know!

POLICE OFFICER 1: —bad hair days, big hair, hair loss treatments, hair extensions—

POLICE OFFICER 2: —can be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney—

GIRL: I want my parents!

POLICE OFFICER 2: Miranda Miranda Miranda!

POLICE OFFICER 1: —static hair, electric hair—

PRINCIPAL: You're not in elementary school anymore.

POLICE OFFICER 1: — shock treatments, shock therapy —

PRINCIPAL: Your parents can't save you anymore —

GIRL: I shouldn't even be here. I don't go here.

POLICE OFFICER 1: — the electric chair!

GIRL: I'm in elementary school.

TEACHER: I hope you learn something from this experience.

GIRL: I'm six years old.

POLICE OFFICER 1: A firing squad.

GIRL: No — not six. Four. No — two.

(She begins to cry in an exaggerated baby "wah." The Police Officers and the Girl reach the exit.)

GIRL: I'm just a baby! I wanna' be a baby! Waaahhh!

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