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Chemical Bonding

(or Better Living through Chemistry)

A comedic drama in two acts

By Don Zolidis

©2009

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Chemical Bonding by Don Zolidis
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Full-Length Dramatic Comedy
15F, 9M flexible

After graduating from high school, class salutatorian Dani is slated to study photography at NYU in the fall and has a summer job working the third shift at a small-town chemical factory. And while her friends are readying for college with road trips and Facebook updates, Dani struggles with her new job, a new relationship, and a serious illness in her family. When Dani starts wondering if she should put off school to figure out what she wants to do with her life, only her eccentric support group of friends and family can persuade her to pursue her dreams.

Cast of Characters

The girl:
DANI, 18, salutatorian of her small high school class. A photographer.

The family:

KAY, 53, her mother, diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.
JACK, 56, her father, a Vietnam veteran.
GRANDPA OTIS, Kay's father, 75 years old, rides a hoverround, Korean War veteran.
AUNT STACY, 48, lives in Minneapolis
CHELSEA, 20, her cousin
NAOMI, 16, her other cousin

Her friends:
TAYLOR, 18, a girl, videocamera in hand for everything.
NULA, 17, wild and somewhat stupid
CHIEF, 17, her boyfriend. Madly in love with Nula.
BRITT, 14, Taylor's little sister. Always hanging around.

The guy:
KANE, 21.

The workers at the plant:
EDNA, 60s, been there forever. Retiring.
PEARL, 60s, been there forever. Not retiring. Really, really funny.
MARY, 40s, a Mother of seven.
PETE, 40s.
SALLY, 30s
MR. BOB AMUNDSON, the foreman.
COMPANY LAWYER, Jessica, young and attractive
RORY, 18, a high school dropout, the new guy.

Other random people:
OFFICER AARONSON, 30s
OFFICER CARY, 20s
NURSE ANGELA, 22
JISELLE, 20 her future R.A. at NYU

Setting: Mabel, Minnesota. A small town. Present day.

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Act One

(DANI stands behind a small podium. She is dressed in a blue graduation gown, with miter and cords. She reads from notecards and looks up haltingly. She's not the best speaker in the world.)

DANI

Congratulations class of 2010! We have officially made it! Thirteen years, and for some of us, more, I'm talking to you Jacob, have culminated in this moment. I never thought I would be standing here today. When one thinks about education, one is often struck by how… I believe it was Plato who said "the unexamined life is not worth living."

(she looks out to the audience.)

That was Socrates? Socrates. Okay. To be fair, I didn't say it *was* Plato, I said I *believed* it was Plato, there's a difference. Well I am not a good comment on the American educational system apparently. Back to my speech.

(she looks down at her notecards again.)

I believe it was *Socrates* who said "the unexamined life is not worth living" and we have been examined a lot. From standardized tests in fourth grade, to standardized tests in fifth grade, to that mile time trial we all had to do in sixth grade, to standardized tests in seventh grade… we have been examined. And what have we learned? Well…

(she looks down at her cards again.)

Actually I'm not going to read this. This speech is terrible. They made me write this in my communications class and it's awful. I just wanna talk to you, okay?

(pause. She tries to think of something to say.)

You ever do that? You ever think you've got something deep to say and then it turns out there's absolutely nothing in your brain? I just had that moment and I am beginning to freak out. Um… but… getting on with it. Graduation. Crap. Is anybody else out there like totally terrified? I know I shouldn't because I'm like salutatorian and all; I would have been valedictorian except for Mr. Jackson's long-term sub, but I'm not going to get into that. But it's like: part of me just wants to stay in homeroom forever, you know? And then part of me is like, no, you should burn everything to the ground and then spit on the ashes, you know? I'm not going to do that, Officer Weeks. I'm totally over that.

But um… we're done with high school. And we're moving on. Yeah.

(she stands there.)

So okay that wasn't better than what I had on the cards. Do I have time to do that over?

(lights down on her.)

(lights up on DANI, still in her robe. She has her hat in her hands. KAY, dressed up, approaches, followed by JACK, in an ill-fitting suit.)

KAY

There you are!

DANI

Hey.

(KAY gives her a big hug.)

KAY

Don't worry about it, honey. I thought it was great.

DANI

You're required to say that.

KAY

Only a little bit.

(JACK extends his hand.)

JACK

Good try.

DANI

Thanks Dad.

JACK

We weren't hoping for much.

KAY

You be good.

JACK

It was honest.

KAY

It was very honest. I thought it was a lot better than that Asian girl's.

DANI

I wish you wouldn't call her `that Asian girl'. I've known her since I was six.

JACK

I liked the part where you threatened to burn down the school. It's nice to add crime to your graduation speech.

KAY

She did not threaten to burn down the school. She only said she thought about it. Who hasn't thought about it?

JACK

Sane people. It was beautiful window into your soul, Dani. I'm glad we've raised a monster. Makes me feel good.

(DANI steps away from them.)

DANI *(to the audience)*

Let me step out of this for a second. This is Mabel, Minnesota, cheese curd capitol of central Minnesota. Cheese curds, if you don't know, only vaguely resemble cheese and squeak when you eat them. We also have a ten-foot statue of a guy named Dutch Jake, who is like Paul Bunyan, except he's Dutch and his name is Jake. And everyone who comes to our town is like, "hey look it's Paul Bunyan" and we're like legally required to say, no that's Dutch Jake, he's like Paul Bunyan except he didn't sell out. I don't know. The whole town is weird.

(TAYLOR, 18, enters with videocamera, wearing a graduation robe.)

TAYLOR

Oh my God, that was the most awesome speech ever.

DANI

It really wasn't.

TAYLOR

I have the whole thing right here.

DANI

Great.

TAYLOR

It's already up on Youtube.

DANI

That makes my life perfect.

TAYLOR

When you threw down those notecards I thought you were really going to let everybody have it, you know? I was so waiting for that. Like, if I was giving the speech I'd just be calling everybody out, you know? Hey! Miguel totally cheated on me he's a complete snake! I just want a pulpit, you know?

DANI

Wow.

TAYLOR

You ever just wake up and are filled with hate?

JACK

All the time. Are you talking to me?

DANI

My Dad has problems. Don't worry about him.

JACK

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

(NULA and CHIEF bolt on holding hands, also dressed in graduation robes.)

NULA

What's up!

TAYLOR

Say something for the camera.

NULA

Do I look okay?

(She fixes herself.)

CHIEF

You're gorgeous.

NULA

Really?

CHIEF

Absolutely.

NULA

I love you.

CHIEF

I love you.

JACK

I need to get out of here.

KAY

Honey. You go out and have fun tonight.

JACK

Don't tell her that.

KAY

Safe fun.

TAYLOR

Oh we have really safe fun.

JACK

Taylor. You're in charge of her.

DANI

Oh come on.

JACK

Taylor is responsible. Dani is lucky to have a friend as pretty and responsible as you.

TAYLOR

Thanks!

JACK

You should teach Dani how to get your hair to do that. I tell ya, every morning she's in the bathroom for an hour trying to iron her hair or whatever, and it never looks half that good.

KAY

All right, let's go, Jack.

JACK

Be home by ten. You've got a big day tomorrow.

DANI

I'm not coming home by ten.

JACK

All right, ten fifteen.

KAY

Let's go, Jack.

JACK

All right, all right, I'm going.
(They leave.)

TAYLOR

Your Dad is so awesome.

DANI

Yeah he's a treat.

NULA

Okay I want to send a video message.

TAYLOR

No.

NULA

No I want to send a video message!

TAYLOR

I heard you the first time and I said no.

NULA

I'll just do it on my phone then.

TAYLOR

Fine. Okay.

NULA

Chief I need you to go over there for a little while.

CHIEF

Why?

NULA

Just do it.

CHIEF

I don't want to leave you.

NULA

That's so sweet.

TAYLOR

And cut. Brilliant.

NULA

That's not my message!

TAYLOR

Yes it is. It's over now. I wanted to capture you in your natural environment. Like filming monkeys or something.

NULA

Shut up I'm not a monkey.

TAYLOR

I said you were like a monkey, not an actual monkey.

NULA

Oh. Wait. What?

DANI

Don’t worry about it Nula.

CHIEF

Aw no I gotta go take pictures with my family.

NULA

Can I come?

CHIEF

They’ve already said they don’t want you in the pictures.

NULA

Why?

DANI

Clearly jealousy.

NULA

I’ll miss you.

CHIEF

I’ll miss you too.

DANI

I already miss you.

NULA

Stop hitting on my boyfriend.

DANI

I wasn’t hitting on him, I was mocking you.

CHIEF

Why would you do that?

DANI

Because the fact that I’m single leaves a gaping void in my heart.

CHIEF

I gotta go.

NULA

Go if you have to.

(CHIEF starts to leave.)

Skipping Forward

NULA

How do you work the pedals?

TAYLOR

Nula. Just stop opening your mouth okay?

NULA

What did I say? I was just wondering how he moved the pedals.

GRANDPA OTIS

I gotta little dwarf in there. I just tell him how fast I want to go. And then I got another dwarf for the breaks.

DANI

Grandpa.

GRANDPA OTIS

I feed `em fish.

DANI

There's a lever in there he can use.

NULA

See that's what I wanted to know.

GRANDPA OTIS

You look beautiful, by the way.

DANI

Thanks, Grandpa.

GRANDPA OTIS

Much prettier than that Chinese girl.

DANI

Korean.

GRANDPA OTIS

Whatever. She looked like a marshmallow with legs. They shoulda never let her on stage.

DANI

She was valedictorian.

GRANDPA OTIS

I don't care if she was some kind of female Korean Einstein, you don't put someone on stage looking like that.

TAYLOR

I thought she looked very pretty.

GRANDPA OTIS

Good for you.

DANI

I should really be going Grandpa.

GRANDPA OTIS

Getting rid of me, huh? Everybody's trying to get rid of me.

(GRANDPA OTIS takes out a brochure for Shady Acres.)

Look at where your mother wants to lock me up: Shady Acres Retirement Village. You ever heard of a place more terrifying and evil in your life?

NULA

Hey my Grandma lives there.

GRANDPA OTIS

Your Grandma, huh? What's she look like?

NULA

She looks like an old lady.

GRANDPA OTIS

Is she uh… you know, big, or - ?

DANI

Grandpa!

GRANDPA OTIS

I'm not dead yet. And I don't need to live in some kind of godforsaken retirement village with bocce ball and friendly elderly people getting injections of happy juice every day. I'm perfectly fine.

NULA

Well you are in a wheelchair.

GRANDPA OTIS

You are a piece of work.

(He wheels off.)

DANI

Bye Grandpa.

TAYLOR

So are you coming out tonight?

DANI

Yeah, but I can't stay out late.

TAYLOR

Why not?

DANI

I got a job interview tomorrow.

NULA

Oh. Bummer.

(Lights change. DANI steps out.)

DANI *(to the audience)*

Nula was the kind of girl who still had Disney princesses painted on her walls. Her favorite was Ariel because she was part fish. I'm not sure whether or not Nula thought that this made her handicapped, but it was open for debate. Nula and Taylor were both going to go to University of Minnesota in the fall –

TAYLOR

This is going to be the best summer of our lives.

NULA

Yes!

DANI *(to the audience)*

They already had the wall hangings picked out.

NULA

I'm totally seeing, like, peach.

TAYLOR

Oh my God I was thinking peach.

NULA

You were?

TAYLOR

Yeah and then I thought that was stupid. Who puts peach on their walls? What is wrong with you?

DANI *(to the audience)*
I gave them about six weeks before one of them dropped out or killed the other one.

TAYLOR
This is going to be the best summer of our lives!

NULA
It so is!

TAYLOR
You know what we should do? Road trip.

NULA
Yes! Can we bring Chief?

TAYLOR
No we're not bringing Chief.

NULA
That is so wrong! You are a horrible person!

TAYLOR
Okay, first off, Chief smells.

NULA
What?!

TAYLOR
He smells.

NULA
That is axe body spray for men.

TAYLOR
It's disgusting. It smells like he rolled around in roadkill.

NULA
Either Chief comes or I don't come.

TAYLOR
Well I'm bringing Dani then.

DANI *(to the audience)*
Unfortunately, I couldn't go because it was not going to be the best summer ever for me. I was going to NYU in the fall for photography –

NULA

Where is that?

DANI

New York University. It's in New York. Hence the name. New York University.

NULA

Oh.

DANI *(to the audience)*

And it was expensive.

(Lights up JISELLE, 20, on a webcam. She talks very quickly.)

JISELLE

This is Jiselle I'm going to be your R.A. for the year. First off I want to say that New York is really safe. No one gets mugged or murdered at all any more. But this is an amazing city and you are going to love it. A few ground rules: First, never look anyone in the eye on the street. Two, don't stare at the crazy people. Three, if someone is trying to talk to you on the street, keep walking and do not acknowledge them. I'm sure all of this stuff is the same in Minnesota.

DANI

To tell you the truth, college terrified me.

(Lights up JACK with the newspaper.)

JACK

You know what I did the summer after I graduated? I worked road construction for the county. The asphalt was so hot the skin on my arms bubbled off. But you know what I learned?

DANI

That when you pour asphalt it makes the skin on your arms bubble off?

JACK

I learned character. And I also made a boatload of money.

DANI

Did you buy new skin?

JACK

Skin grows back, Dani. Character doesn't. Take a look at this.

(he hands the newspaper over to DANI.)

I'm going to float this idea out there for you for a summer job.

(he points to a want ad.)

DANI

Paralegal?

JACK

Below that.

DANI

Light industrial?

JACK

Yeah.

DANI

Dad this is in a chemical factory.

JACK

I know.

DANI

Third shift.

JACK

It's thirteen bucks an hour. And think about all the valuable life lessons you're going to learn.

DANI

It's a chemical factory.

JACK

It's light industrial. That's not that hard. They hire old ladies to do that. Come on. You're a go-getter, you can do anything.

DANI

You see that's why I would want to work some place *other* than a chemical factory. What if I mutate? I could turn into the Incredible Hulk or something.

JACK

Look. If you mutate, you can sue them. Hey, you're supposed to be an artist, right? You need to suffer.

(Lights change. DANI steps out.)

DANI *(to the audience)*

Mullgrew Chemicals was in a forgotten part of Mabel by the river. It looked like a series of mushrooms had bloomed in the night and sprouted light towers. I thought it looked pretty cool actually.

(DANI takes pictures as BOB sets up his office to the side of the stage. There's a desk piled high with garbage, a small battered chair drowning in papers, books, and empty potato chip bags.)

BOB

Okay. Have a seat.

(DANI looks at the chair.)

Here.

(BOB sweeps everything off of it onto the floor, picks up the chair and shakes crumbs off it.)

There ya go. You want a water?

DANI

I'm good.

(She sits gingerly. BOB rifles through the stuff on his desk.)

BOB

Are you kidding me? Are you *kidding* me?

(he shouts)

HEY! WHO TOOK MY DOUGHNUTS!

(to DANI)

I'm sorry about this, we got a couple of jokers here who think it's funny to TAKE MY DOUGNUTS! Nothing to worry about. Um… So. Let's talk. Are you a journalist? I saw you out there with your camera.

DANI

No I'm not a journalist.

BOB

Whew. I thought we were in trouble. Ha! Okay tell me about yourself.

DANI

Um… my name's Dani. And I'm a go-getter.

BOB

You're a go-getter?

DANI

That's what I've been told.

BOB

What are you gonna go get?

DANI

Anything you want me to go get.

BOB

Whoah! Don't say that while the cameras are rolling. I like you right off the bat. Tell me something else.

DANI

I was salutatorian at my high school.

BOB

What's that?

DANI

I was second in my class.

BOB

Who got first? I'm gonna hire her!
(He laughs at his own joke.)
I'm kidding ya. So… Sal-u-ta-

DANI

-torian.

BOB

Torian. Wow. So you got the book smarts.

DANI

Or I cheated really well.
(BOB's mood darkens.)
I'm kidding ya.

BOB

Oh that was a joke.

DANI

That was a joke.

BOB

Let me tell you something, Dani, I love jokes, but only when I tell `em.
(he laughs)
Seriously though we don't like cheaters.

DANI

I'm not a cheater.

BOB

Good. You sure?

DANI

Yes.

BOB

Okay, so I'm getting a picture of Dani – can I tell you something? I like to think of this job as a family, okay? A family that meets after the sun goes down and cleans plastics with chemical solvents. So our family… there are moving parts to a family, right? You got your Mom, your Dad, your perverted uncle, at least in my family, I'm kidding ya he's doing a lot better. So what part of the family unit are you?

DANI

I guess I'm the daughter.

BOB

The daughter. And what does the daughter do?

DANI

She uh…

BOB

She looks good in a dress, that's what she does! Ha ha ha. Better than the uncle anyway. Seriously he doesn't do that any more. Tell me more. What's going on inside?

DANI

I'm going to college in the fall.

BOB

Terrific.

DANI

In New York.

BOB

Hoo! In New York?! That is… wow. Wow. That is a long way from Mabel Minnesota.

DANI

And I'm a photographer.

BOB

That has no application to this job whatsoever.

DANI

But I just need a job for –

BOB

For the summertime, ya? It's like I'm reading your thoughts now. Now you're thinking `who is this guy and why is he so dang handsome!' I'm happily married though, so don't get your hopes up. Ha ha ha. I can tell right now you have a great sense of humor.

DANI

I've been told that.

BOB

That's just terrific. I like to joke with my employees, anybody who doesn't have a sense of humor, whoop! Out the door. Okay. So you're a girl, we have established that… Wonderful. Before I hire you though, I want to put you to the test, you up for it?

DANI

Okay.

BOB

Here are my doughnuts! They were here the whole time! Oh for crying out loud – SORRY ABOUT YELLING ABOUT THE DOUGHNUTS! Okay. Let's act out a crisis situation and see how you handle it. You want a doughnut first?

DANI

No I'm okay.

BOB

You're watching your weight, that's good. That's a good thing in a girl. You don't want to blimp up like the Goodyear man, ya know? You should see my wife she's got thighs like a lumberjack. Alrighty, let's say you're working the vertical cleanser and we have a level two spill due to operator error, someone down the line has a made a mistake, the factory floor is flooded with benzene sulfate. It's bubbling, it's smoking, the roaches are fleeing for higher ground, some of them mutate, what is your role? And to make things more realistic, you have ten seconds.

(He takes out a stopwatch.)

Go.

DANI

I uh… run?

BOB

Ha ha ha! Yes. Good answer. Seriously though you can't outrun a level two spill, it's like a charging hippo, it'd kill ya.

DANI

Well what would I do in that situation?

BOB

Skipping Forward

At Station C the cords will enter through here, you inspect them for any defects, then place them on the cart here in the appropriate crate. Got it? When the crates are full, and only when the crates are full, you wheel the cart to Station E.

DANI

Are you sure it's not Station D? I've heard that actually comes after C.

EDNA

It's Station E.

DANI

Okay then. What else do I do?

EDNA

That's what you do.

DANI

All right. Look for defects. Fill the crates. Wheel the cart. What happens if there are defects?

EDNA

They go in the trash chute.

DANI

Trash chute. Got it. Sweet. Can I like shoot them into the chute?

EDNA

Let me go through your protective gear.

(EDNA hands each item to DANI as she explains it.)

Goggles must be worn at all times the machines are operational.

DANI *(putting them on)*

I feel like a fish.

EDNA

The goggles provide minimal protection against sprays of hazardous chemicals. Don't wear the goggles, and acid will most likely land on your cornea, permanently blinding you.

DANI

Good to know.

(EDNA takes out a shower cap.)

EDNA

This goes over your hair. If you want to keep your hair, you'll wear it.

(DANI puts it on.)

This is your work suit. This protects your clothing and skin. Wear it at all times if you want to keep your clothing and skin.

(DANI puts it on.)

DANI

This really compliments my figure. I've got a lot of room to expand in here.

EDNA

Listen hon; Bob likes to joke around. I don't joke around with safety. You wanna make jokes, go be a comedian. You wanna clean mouse cords? Stay here.

DANI

That's really a tough choice.

EDNA

Don't come crying to me when you're dead. All right, you're trained.

DANI

It was nice meeting you.

(EDNA doesn't respond as she saunters off. DANI steps to the side to talk to the audience.)

DANI *(to the audience)*

There's one more thing you gotta know. And that's about my Mom. And I don't want to make this too heavy or anything, because she wouldn't want that, but about two months ago she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. There's really not much treatment for it, it doesn't respond to chemo, drugs don't really work… basically it's a death sentence. So that is like um… I guess another reason why this won't be the most fun summer ever.

(lights up on KAY, folding the laundry.)

KAY

First off: I don't want to be afraid of this thing.

DANI

Okay.

KAY

And we're going to be upbeat.

DANI

Right.

KAY

I mean like really upbeat. Fantastically upbeat. People are going to look at me and say, "What's gotten into Kay?" and you're going to say –

DANI

Cancer.

KAY

Well… Let's not call it cancer, let's call it –

DANI

Sunshine?

KAY

Somewhere between sunshine and cancer is the right answer, I think.

DANI

I think that's a pretty broad range Mom.

KAY

Yeah.

DANI

You know I've heard that it's all about positive mental attitude.

KAY

Exactly.

DANI

Like if you think you're going to get better, I mean really believe it, then you will.

KAY

I can believe that.

DANI

So you're going to get better. But you can't ever doubt it.

KAY

Well it's a good thing I don't doubt it then.

(Lights down on her. Lights up on the "Machine." It rumbles and squeaks. DANI takes a photograph of it and talks to herself.)

DANI

It's like a dishwasher. Filled with acid. Just a giant vat of floating acid. What's the worst that could possibly happen here?

(KANE approaches from behind. He wears the same outfit as her.)

KANE

You know it works better if instead of taking pictures of it, you press the green button.

DANI
I'm getting a feel for it. I'm connecting, you know?

KANE
First day?

DANI
How'd you guess?

KANE
Are you scared?

DANI
I watched like all four Terminator movies before I came to work. The machines are going to kill us all.

KANE
It's not that hard. Press the green button.

DANI
That's what they want me to do. That's when it begins.

KANE
That's actually when you begin to get work done. There's nothing scary here. I've only seen like two or three people die.

DANI
That helps. That helps a lot.

KANE
I'm glad.

DANI
Okay Dani you can do this.

KANE
Who's Dani?

DANI
I'm Dani.

KANE
You're talking to yourself with me standing right here?

DANI
Do you mind? I'm trying to get some work done.

KANE

I'm Kane by the way.

DANI

Great.

KANE

I'm on Station E.

DANI

Wonderful.

KANE

So I actually can't do anything until you start bringing things over from Station C.

DANI

Can I ask you something?

KANE

Shoot.

DANI

Why is there no Station D?

KANE *(darkly)*

We're not allowed to talk about that.

DANI

What?

KANE

I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I have no idea. I think this is a world where the alphabet holds no power.

DANI

Oh.

BOB'S VOICE

Attention employees. Attention employees. Critical meeting in Break Room 1. I repeat: Critical meeting in Break Room 1. Please shut down your machines and meet in Break Room 1.

DANI

Oh darn it. I was just getting started.

KANE

Saved by our noble leader.

(Lights shift to Break Room 1. SALLY stands in the corner. EDNA sits at a table, cigarette in hand. PEARL and MARY sit near her, also smoking. PETE lingers. BOB stands in front as DANI and KANE enter.)

BOB

Okay then. We're all here.

MARY

Can we get on with this?

BOB

Don't rush me, Mary. I wanna be on my A game for this. First off, I'd like to introduce the newest member of our family: Dani. Dani can you say a few words?

DANI

What?

BOB

Good enough.

MARY

I thought this was an emergency.

BOB

It is. It is a very special emergency. Can you please put your cigarettes out ladies?

PEARL

Why?

BOB

Ha ha ha you are funny. Seriously, can you please put the cigarettes out?

PEARL

This is our breakroom. If you want to come in here, you play by our rules.

BOB

Fair enough. Alrighty.

MARY

Why Are We Here?

BOB

Don't push me, Mary. I may seem friendly on the outside, but on the inside I'm a gorilla. Okay? So… today is a very sad day at Mullgrew Chemicals.

PETE

Are you firing me?

BOB

No I'm not firing you Pete.

PEARL

That would be a happy day.

PETE

Shut up, Pearl.

PEARL

Come here and make me pipsqueak.

BOB

Hey hey hey no. No. You two stop it.

PEARL

Pete I will eat you for lunch.

BOB

Eyes up here please. What do you think of when you think of Mullgrew?
(KANE raises his hand.)
Kane?

KANE

Zombies.

BOB

Ha ha ha. Seriously someone?

KANE

I seriously think of zombies. Who knows what's in these chemicals? What if we're in the middle of creating a virus that's going to wipe out mankind, you know?

BOB

I don't think that's likely to happen –

PETE

It could happen.

KANE

I know, right? I think about this a lot on my shift. Who would be the first to go?

PETE

Pearl. She's sedentary.

PEARL

I'll sedentary you.

BOB

Well you know what I think of when I think of Mullgrew? Edna. Edna Gustafson. She is the heart and the soul of this company.

KANE

I wouldn't have guessed that.

BOB

Well she is. She is. And the reason why today is sad is… Edna is retiring.

MARY

You're leaving us here?

EDNA

Yep.

BOB

Would anyone like to say a few words about Edna?
(Silence.)
Anybody? Um… Edna would you like to talk?

EDNA

About what?

BOB

About um… your career and your connection with this place and um… your feelings on leaving and everything?

EDNA

No.

BOB

Okay then. Uh… so anybody else want to say anything? Well I'm just gonna pick somebody then. Sally.

SALLY

What?

BOB

Name two great things about Edna.

SALLY

She's punctual.

BOB

That's one.

SALLY

I can't think of anything else.

BOB

Come on Sally, use that brain of yours.

SALLY

I really… I don't know um…

BOB

She has beautiful eyes. There's a free one for you.

SALLY

I don't feel comfortable saying that.

BOB

Well I said it for you. Anybody else? Pete?

PETE

I bet she used to be hot.

BOB

Good one, Pete. I bet Edna looked just like Dani when she started. What are you a size 2?

PETE

I think she's a 2.

EDNA

That's what I was when I started. And now look at me.

BOB

Behold your future. Ha ha ha. I'm kidding ya. Take care of yourself and it won't happen to you.

EDNA

Are you gonna shut up any time soon?

BOB

Okay. Okay. Shutting up. Dani?

DANI

What do you want me to say?

BOB

Something inspirational. Dani is very inspirational everyone.

DANI

I'm not really a good public speaker.

BOB

We have a saying here at Mullgrew: If you don't know how to do something, just try it and see what happens.

DANI

Good thing that doesn't apply to working on the deadly machines!

BOB

Oh it does.

DANI

Okay, um –

KANE

Can I jump in?

DANI

Please do.

(KANE approaches EDNA with the microphone.)

KANE

Edna. Oh Edna.

(He takes her hand.)

EDNA

Don't touch me.

(He drops her hand.)

KANE

Okay. Edna. You… are the wind beneath my wings. Can I hug you?

EDNA

No.

KANE

How about an air hug?

EDNA

No.

KANE

I'll give you a mental hug then.

EDNA

Are you done?

KANE

Almost.

(KANE closes his eyes.)

Ahhhhh.

EDNA

Great. Okay. My turn.

(EDNA slowly stands up.)

I remember when Pearl and I started in `67.

PEARL

Woo.

EDNA

So that means I have spent over forty years here –

KANE

Good math Edna.

BOB

Wow. Forty years. How do you do it?

EDNA

Mostly I try to make my mind go blank. You know… just try to think of happy thoughts and ignore where I am. So… as of two minutes ago I am officially clocked out for good.

(BOB applauds.)

And now I can say this. Bob… you are a worthless excuse for a human being and I hate your guts. I'm going to Florida where I'm going to sit on a beach sipping Mai Tais and I'm going to laugh thinking about how miserable you pathetic people are. And I'm taking my cake with me.

(EDNA picks up her cake and leaves. Pause.)

BOB

Alrighty. Well let's get this party started!

(DANI steps out.)

DANI

On Tuesdays, I visit my Grandpa Otis at Shady Acres. I kind of had this idea that it was going to be like Tuesdays with Morrie and he would dispense all this great wisdom and advice to me. I'd learn so much about life and I'd learn about him and -

(GRANDPA OTIS wheels out.)

GRANDPA OTIS

If they give me strained squash again I'll spit it right back in their faces.

DANI

Hi Grandpa?

GRANDPA OTIS

Am I an infant? Am I a terrorist? Why am I being subjected to torture?

DANI

Well I'm sure that for some people, the squash is –

GRANDPA OTIS

It's liquid squash. Liquid. It's like goo.

DANI

Well you don't have to eat it.

GRANDPA OTIS

Did you bring me the good stuff?

DANI

Yeah I got it.

(DANI takes out a package of cookies as NURSE ANGELA enters. She is very young and sweet.)

NURSE ANGELA

Otis! There you are!

GRANDPA OTIS

I can eat these if I want.

NURSE ANGELA

Eat what?

GRANDPA OTIS

Never mind woman.

NURSE ANGELA

We were wondering why you left the dinner table.

Skipping Forward

(NURSE ANGELA leaves.)

DANI

Grandpa maybe you should be nicer to people.

GRANDPA OTIS

And the point of that would be what?

DANI

Karma.

GRANDPA OTIS

Karma?

DANI

You know if you put positive energy out there, positive energy returns to you.

GRANDPA OTIS

Uh huh.

DANI

And if you put negative energy out there, negative energy returns to you.

GRANDPA OTIS

I see. So you're saying that instead of trying to shoot the people who were trying to kill me in Korea, if I woulda given them flowers or some crap, they woulda been nice to me? I would not have been shot seventeen times in the right hip?

DANI

You never know.

GRANDPA OTIS

All right. You have come to me for wisdom, here it is.

DANI

I just enjoy the company –

GRANDPA OTIS

I know why you're here: wisdom. You're trying to suck it out of me like a leech before I die. So here it is: This is the philosophy I've lived my whole life by: you ready for it? You gotta little notebook you're gonna write it down in?

DANI

Okay.

GRANDPA OTIS

Here it is: Get Yours.
(he looks at her importantly.)
You're not writing it down.

DANI

Get yours what?

GRANPDA OTIS

There ain't no Get Yours what, it's get yours. That's it.

DANI

What does that mean?

GRANDPA OTIS

It ain't a fortune cookie, it means get yours. How hard is that?

DANI

That's a pretty narcissistic way of looking at the world.

GRANDPA OTIS

It's a what now?

DANI

Narcissistic. It means you're in love with yourself.

GRANDPA OTIS

I know what narsa-siss-whatever means. Of course I'm in love with myself, who else am I gonna be in love with?

DANI

Humanity.

GRANDPA OTIS

What is wrong with you?! Humanity?! Are you growing up in some kinda hippy commune? All right: wisdom time's over. Now it's time for the plan.

DANI

What plan?

GRANDPA OTIS

Listen carefully cause I'm only gonna say this once: Bingo.

DANI

Bingo?

GRANDPA OTIS

Bingo. Think about it. All right I don't wanna say too much. Go home and act normal.

(He wheels off, eating cookies, leaving DANI bewildered. He wheels back on a second later.)

Don't draw attention to yourself.

(he leaves again. The lights change as DANI addresses the audience.)

DANI

I wasn't really sure what Grandpa was planning, but the words "act normal" were a giveaway that it was probably dangerous and a little bit insane. But I couldn't really worry about that because –

(Lights on JISELLE, on a webcam.)

JISELLE

Jiselle again. Hey! Okay, here is your list of non-negotiables for the fall. Laptop, printer, scanner, microwave, mini-fridge, if you want a couch you can bring a couch but you don't have to, TV, DVD player, stereo, we have one formal dance in the fall and one in the winter so you can shop here if you want I got this great Vera Wang that was a total steal –

DANI

If I got a Vera Wang, I would have to steal it. Anyway, about a month passed and I forgot about Grandpa's plan until -

(The doorbell rings.)

(KAY enters slowly. Two POLICE OFFICERS, OFFICER AARONSON and OFFICER CARY enter. They are very positive people.)

KAY

Hello.

OFFICER AARONSON

Hey there. I'm Officer Aaronson and that over there is Officer Cary.

OFFICER CARY

Hiya.

KAY

Is there a problem?

OFFICER AARONSON

Do you happen to be Kay Williams?

KAY

That's me.

OFFICER AARONSON

And is your father an Otis Schwarzen?

KAY

Is he okay?

OFFICE AARONSON

I'll take that as a yes. Okay then.

KAY

What happened?

OFFICER AARONSON

Nothing at all.

OFFICER CARY

Can I use your bathroom? I wish we had a toilet in the car.

OFFICER AARONSON

Can you wait one minute please? I may need you for backup.

OFFICER CARY

I'm not gonna be much good for backup if I have to pee the whole time.

OFFICER AARONSON

This is what happens when you get that Big Gulp from Stop-N-Go. Nobody needs eighty ounces, least of all you with your finicky bladder.

KAY

The bathroom is just down the hall.

OFFICER CARY

Great. You are a peach.

(He darts down the hall and runs into DANI.)

Hi. I'm just using the bathroom, you're not under arrest or anything.

DANI

Okay. What's going on?

KAY

I don't know.

OFFICER AARONSON

He's new. You mind if I ask you a few questions?

KAY

Is there something going on with my Dad?

DANI

What happened to Grandpa?

OFFICER AARONSON

We have a situation.

(Pause.)

How do I put this? Um… would you characterize your father as a… how would you characterize him?

KAY

Um…

OFFICER AARONSON

Would the word crazy come to mind?

KAY

Frequently. What happened?

OFFICER AARONSON

Well… okay, so, ah… the Shady Acres Retirement Village…

KAY

Yeah?

OFFICER AARONSON

He's not there any more.

KAY

Did something happen to him?

OFFICER AARONSON

Oh no. Nothing happened *to* him. He happened to other people. He escaped.

KAY

He escaped?

(OFFICER CARY returns)

OFFICER CARY

I feel better. Oh let me tell ya.

OFFICER AARONSON

Can we at least *try* to be professional?

OFFICER CARY

I'm sorry. I'm not a robot. Jeez.

OFFICER AARONSON

It's not about being a robot, Jim, it's about a minimal level of professionalism, okay?

OFFICER CARY

You sound like my mother.

KAY

Can we get back to my Dad?

OFFICER CARY

Oh yeah, your Dad. What a loon. Total nutjob.

OFFICER AARONSON

Do you mind? Well, anyway, he has broken out.

KAY

And why are the police involved?

OFFICER AARONSON

The manner in which he made his escape was –

OFFICER CARY

He assaulted two employees on the way out. It was during the bingo game - apparently he ran over one with his motorized wheelchair, and struck another one with a flying object. A um…

(checks his notes)

Metal picture frame of his grandkids.

DANI

Wow.

OFFICER AARONSON

Oh yeah you're the girl from the picture!

OFFICER CARY

You're very pretty.

KAY

I gave him that as Christmas present.

OFFICER CARY

Well he got a lot of use out of it.

OFFICER AARONS

Do you happen to know where he is?

DANI

Probably in Canada.

OFFICER CARY

You think he's heading for the border?

KAY

Knowing him he could be anywhere.

OFFICER AARONSON

We just want to ask him a few questions.

OFFICER CARY

Here's one: "What's your deal?" What a loon. I love old people.

OFFICER AARONSON

Nice to know, Jim. If you do hear from him – let us know. Here's my card.

OFFICER CARY

I'd give ya my card too but they don't give me one.

OFFICER AARONSON

Not an accident. All right then. See ya.

OFFICER CARY *(to DANI)*

Nice meeting ya. Hey um… quick question – are you seeing anybody?

(OFFICER AARONSON grabs OFFICER CARY and forces him out.)

KAY

I guess it's good that he's getting around better.

(Lights down on them.)

(Lights up on the chemical factory. An Alarm is going off.)

BOB'S VOICE

Is this thing on? Okay. We have had a slight leak. Do not panic. We have the situation mostly under control. Please stay in your area. I repeat. Please stay in your area. I will be on with further instructions when I figure out what to do. Okay. Whoo.

(DANI, in her gear, stands by her machine. She holds her goggles and hairnet.)

DANI *(calling out)*

Hello? Um… is that supposed to happen?

(no response)

BOB'S VOICE

What do you mean, you don't know what to do? Oh for crying out loud, get over there and call HQ and see what we're supposed to do! I don't know, I'm freaking out!

(DANI puts on her goggles and hairnet.)

DANI *(calling out)*

Should I be in like a protective crouch or something? Hello?

(DANI tentatively gets in a protective crouch.)

BOB'S VOICE *(continuing)*

Aw jeez. Aw jeez.

DANI

Bob?

BOB'S VOICE

What do you mean it's still on? Oh. Oh. Um… never mind that stuff guys. Everything's under control.

(PEARL saunters in, dressed in her gear. DANI is still crouching.)

DANI

Hey!

PEARL

What are you doing?

DANI

I'm freaking out!

PEARL

Don't worry about it, sweetheart. This happens all the time. So there's a little spill? What's the worst that could happen?

DANI

Where are you going?

PEARL

Break room.

DANI

But I mean aren't there like chemicals that could kill you pouring through the building?

PEARL

I'm a smoker. I have chemicals pouring through my lungs every day and they haven't killed me yet. You have a nice time.

(PEARL starts to leave.)

BOB'S VOICE

Okay. Here's the deal: We're instituting a level two quarantine. Stay where you are. Do not move. I repeat: do not move.

(PEARL shrugs and leaves anyway.)

If you something glowing or oozing or… you know, that kind of thing, don't touch it. Okay. Have a nice day. Is it off? Well how do I turn it off? Okay. Did that do it? Oh fer crying out loud how does this thing work? Oh. Here we go.

(The lights dim to half.)

DANI

Whoah.

(KANE enters, carrying a guitar.)

KANE

Hey Dani is that you?

DANI

Yeah.

KANE

You all right?

DANI

I have to say I'm a little nervous over here, I hear things like dangerous chemical spill and quarantine and I start getting concerned.

KANE

Don't worry about it. Happens all the time.

DANI

The fact that dangerous spills are always happening doesn't make me feel better.

KANE

They're little. Think of them like… tiny little leaks of poisonous solvents. They could be like dripping on you and you wouldn't even notice it. I'm kidding. Come on. Stand up. It's okay.

(DANI gets up.)

DANI

Why do you have a guitar?

KANE

This isn't a guitar.

DANI

What is it then?

KANE

This is a musical creation device.

DANI

You're weird.

KANE

I know. No I just came from band practice and I figured I'd play a little bit during break.

DANI

You're in a band?

KANE

Well it's me and another guy. We like to call ourselves a band. We're not really… I guess the word here would be good. You want to hear something?

DANI

Well not now.

KANE

I mean we're okay. Here, I'll make something up. This'll make you feel better.
(He starts a very sweet chord progression on the guitar.)

DANI

That's nice.

KANE *(singing)*

Oh I'm living in a quarantine
If you know what I mean
I'm in a quarantine
But it's okay
Yeah it's okay
Cause I don't have to work today
I'm in a quarantine
I just saw a guy looking kind of green
I'm in a quarantine
His eyes are popping out, he's looking ugly, he's dying and it's not fun
No
He's turning into a zombie
Zombies zombies zombies
They're coming to kill us all
They're coming to kill us all
Zombies!

(he stops.)

DANI

That was beautiful.

KANE

Promise me something. If I start to change into a zombie… kill me.

DANI

All right.

KANE

And I'll do the same for you.

DANI

No no no if I turn into a zombie I'm going to eat your brain.

KANE

That doesn't seem very fair.

DANI

Eh, what can you do?

KANE

Take your goggles off.

DANI

I don't know. I just met you. Okay.
(She takes them off.)

KANE

Makes the world clearer, doesn't it?
(she laughs.)

DANI

Should I take off my hair net too?

KANE

Don't go crazy.

DANI

So um… how long have you been working here?

KANE

Ten spills. Three years.

DANI

Wow.

KANE

I'm like seventy percent tumors.

DANI

So you don't go to college or anything?

KANE

Well I was enrolled in college, but I didn't actually go.

DANI

Why not?

KANE

Well I had to do this thing called `get up in the morning' and that was really pretty hard for me. I don't know. I guess I just felt like I was going to college because that's what I supposed to do, but I didn't really see any point in it.

DANI

The point is probably so you don't have to work in a chemical factory for the rest of your life.

KANE

Well there is that. I'm not gonna work here my whole life I'm gonna –

DANI

Be a rock star?

KANE

I don't know.

DANI

Why not?

KANE

I think you have to have talent to be a rock star.

DANI

No you don't. You just have to have a good look. You could be like the jumpsuit, goggles and hair net guy.

KANE

All the kids would go for that. No I'm… I don't know… I figure I'll find something else to do, I just don't know what. What about you? Are you going to school?

DANI

I'm going to NYU in the fall.

KANE

Wow.

DANI

It's in New York.

KANE

I figured that.

DANI

Some people have a hard time with the connection.

KANE

So are you gonna be like an actress or something?

DANI

Photographer.

KANE

Oh. Very cool.

DANI

My Dad thinks it's a little fruity.

KANE

Well it is. But the world needs fruit, right?

DANI

He's not a big proponent of the arts. He's much more a proponent of working in the chemical factory, actually.

KANE

Yeah cause this is so much fun.

DANI

I'm learning character.

KANE

You have amazing character.

DANI

I know.

KANE

That's cool, though. You're like… chasing the dream, you know?

DANI

I guess.

KANE

No you gotta own that. That's your thing.

BOB'S VOICE

Okay people. This is an update. We are working hard to contain the spill and figure out just what in the Sam Heck's going on here. In the meantime, um… if you start to feel sick… stay where you are and do not move. Okay? Okay. Have a nice day.

DANI

He doesn't really inspire a lot of confidence.

KANE

Not so much, no. I think we are gonna turn into zombies. At first I was joking, but now –

DANI

Do you think I should call someone?

BOB'S VOICE

Please turn off all cell phones. There's no need to call 911, I know we've had a couple calls now. The police know. The paramedics know. So stop please and um… again, this isn't our fault.

DANI

Okay we're all gonna die.

KANE

Do you want me to play another song?

DANI

No. God. No.

KANE

I'll make it a happy one.

DANI

No thanks. Oh man.

(DANI puts her goggles back on.)

KANE

Hey hey no no
(KANE tries to prevent her from putting them back on.)

DANI

No I like my eyes.

KANE

I like your eyes too.
(He struggles with her with the goggles.)

DANI

Stop it.

KANE

There's nothing to worry about it—

DANI

I am in a death factory run by a complete moron!

KANE

He only seems like a moron, he's really very bright!
(KANE gets the goggles away from her.)

DANI

Hey! Give those back!

KANE

Wait! Don't move!
(DANI completely freezes.)
Oh it was nothing.
(he runs.)

DANI

If I go blind it's your fault!
(She chases him – he runs backwards, away from her.)

KANE

You only live once right, maybe this is the moment –
(DANI catches him and grabs her goggles.)
Hey! You're hurting me!

DANI

Good.
(DANI wrests the goggles from him and steals his hairnet.)
Ha!

KANE

Whoah! Hey. Not cool. I need that for my look, remember?

(He snatches it back. They stop playing for a moment.)

You know um… if we're gonna die or turn into zombies or whatever… I wanna try something first.

DANI

What?

(he tries to kiss her, but they bump goggles instead.)

KANE

Ah dang it.

DANI

Wait.

(She tries to adjust her goggles to kiss him back. It's really awkward.)

BOB'S VOICE

All right then. We've got it handled. Um… nobody got hurt, we're just fine. Okay then. Everybody go home. We'll see you tomorrow.

(They stand there for a moment. PEARL returns.)

PEARL

We can hear you two you know.

(She exits. Lights fade on the scene as DANI comes forward.)

DANI

So I didn't really say anything to my friends about it, cause I wasn't sure they would approve, but I did go and change my facebook status. Where I put a relationship I put in a question mark.

(Lights up on TAYLOR, on the computer. Apart.)

TAYLOR

What do you mean question mark?

DANI

Question mark.

(Lights up on NULA, apart from everyone else, also with a laptop.)

NULA

Nula likes this.

TAYLOR

There's nothing to like. You don't know anything.

DANI

There are things happening.

(Lights up on CHIEF, apart from everyone else, also with a laptop.)

CHIEF

Chief is in love.

NULA

Nula likes this.

TAYLOR

What does he look like?

DANI

I'm not saying.

CHIEF

Chief wonders if pizza is the best food in the whole world.

NULA

Nula is in love.

CHIEF

Chief likes this.

(Lights up on BRITT, with a laptop.)

BRITT

Britt would like to be your friend.

TAYLOR

Ignore.

BRITT

Britt would like to be your friend.

TAYLOR

Ignore.

NULA

Nula is now friends with Britt.

BRITT

Hi!

(TAYLOR calls out.)

TAYLOR

Britt get off the computer!

© Don Zolidis

BRITT *(calling back)*

I can be on the computer if I want!

TAYLOR

Mom said you can't have a facebook profile!

BRITT

Yes she did!

TAYLOR

You can't friend my friends! Stop it you're so annoying!

BRITT *(typing)*

Taylor shaves her arms.

TAYLOR

Oh my God what are you talking about?!

BRITT *(calling back)*

I've seen you do it!

NULA

Nula likes this.

(TAYLOR shuts her laptop and the lights go down on her spot.)

DANI

Dani is worried about college. Dani's grandpa is on the run.

(TAYLOR appears in BRITT's light.)

BRITT

Hey!

TAYLOR

Get of the computer!

BRITT

It's my computer I can do what I want.

TAYLOR *(calling out)*

Mom! Britt's on facebook!

BRITT *(calling out)*

Taylor has a fake ID!

TAYLOR

Shut up!

(TAYLOR slams BRITT's laptop shut. Lights out on them.)

DANI

Dani is logging off.

(Lights down on everyone. Lights up on the living room of her house. KAY is on the phone.)

KAY

Dad will you listen to me for one second? Where are you? No the police are not here. Why would they still be here? Oh come on. We're not going to trace the phone call, it's not like you're Minnesota's most wanted man or anything. They just want you to apologize. They're really very nice.

(JACK enters with the newspaper.)

JACK

Is that your Dad?

KAY

How did you get away anyway? You hitched a ride?! What is wrong with you?

JACK

Who would pick him up?

KAY

That was Jack. No I'm not going to tell him that. Cause it's mean, that's why. Just because you're old that doesn't give you license to mean to everyone.

JACK

What did he say?

KAY

That was Jack again.

JACK

What did he say?

KAY *(into the phone)*

He said what did you say? Oh come on.

JACK

What?

KAY

Are you serious, Dad?

Skipping Forward

DANI

No.

JACK

What do you mean, no?

DANI

He doesn't want to go back there.

JACK

So?

KAY

Jack. It's not prison. He's not a criminal.

JACK

That place is nice, I would live there.

DANI

He doesn't want to be there, Dad.

JACK

They have a swimming pool and a sauna, for Pete's sake. All year long he can be in the pool.

KAY

His legs don't work, he's not going in the pool.

JACK

He can float, put him in one of those little inner tube things, he'd have a great time.

DANI

Dad he doesn't like it there.

JACK

He doesn't like it anywhere Dani.

(KAY feels a sharp pain in her stomach)

KAY

Well he can stay here for a little while –

JACK

No no no no no.

KAY

Just for a little while. We can get some little ramps for him.

JACK

I'm putting stairs in.

KAY

Jack. Stop it.

JACK

Why does he have to be here?

KAY

I want him here!
(short pause)
Okay? I want him here. Can you just let me be with my family?

JACK

…of course.

KAY

I don't know how many more times I get to see him –
(she sits down, in pain.)

DANI

Are you okay?

JACK

Where does it hurt?
(KAY motions to center of her back. JACK tries to touch it. KAY gets up, hunched over.)

KAY *(through gritted teeth)*

No don't, just –
(she crumples to the ground.)

JACK

It's gonna be okay. Try and breathe. Just try and breathe, okay?

KAY

…crap.
(the pain passes. She's wheezing on the ground.)
Oh God.

JACK

Was it like a sharp pain?

KAY

It was like pain pain. Oh man.

JACK
You made it through childbirth, how hard can this be?

KAY
You're lucky I'm hurt right now or I'd kill you.

DANI
Can I get you some water?

JACK
You want to go to the doctor?

KAY
No… I'm better.
(she woozily gets her feet. JACK grabs her.)

JACK
It's gonna be all right.

KAY
Just sometimes it hurts.

JACK
I know.

DANI
Positive mental attitude, Mom.

KAY
Yeah I'll try that next time.

JACK
Your Dad can stay as long as he wants.

DANI
Which probably won't be very long.
(they look at her)
I mean cause he doesn't like being places, not cause… I'm sorry that didn't come out right. He can stay a long time. I'm just stupid don't listen to me.

KAY
That's okay.

DANI

I have foot in mouth disease.

JACK

How was work today?

DANI

Um…

JACK

Why are you home so early, anyway?

DANI

Well we had a level two chemical spill and were quarantined for a while and then the plant was shut down. I figured I was gonna die or mutate for a while so I ended up kissing one of my co-workers, but… it all worked out. No biggie.

JACK

Oh.

DANI

And I also think I might not be going to college any more.

(The doorbell rings.)

(Without waiting for a response, AUNT STACY, 40ish, dressed inappropriately with dyed blonde hair, bursts in.)

AUNT STACY

All right I'm here! Let's start the party!

(Lights down.)

(End of Act one.)

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Act Two

(Light up on the interior of the house. DANI is on-stage.)

DANI

Let's start with some family photos. Here's one of my Aunt Stacy.

(Lights up on AUNT STACY in a pose.)

A good photograph is surprising. It catches you off guard with truth. That's why you don't want anything posed; a pose is calculated, it's the face you want to present to the world, but a good picture presents what really is. So here's my Mom upon Aunt Stacy's entrance.

(Lights up on KAY, frozen.)

There's a look that says… crap. And here's my Dad.

(lights up on JACK, frozen.)

I think this is genuine confusion with a little spice of fear. Like… what's gonna happen next? Anyway, you know how you have that one relative everyone is slightly ashamed of? I'm not talking about my Grandpa who everyone is really ashamed of, I'm talking *slightly* ashamed. Well, that's Aunt Stacy.

(Everyone unfreezes and the scene resumes.)

AUNT STACY

Let me look at you, let me look at you.

DANI

Hi Aunt Stacy.

AUNT STACY

Give me a hug.

(DANI gives her a tentative hug.)

That's not a hug! Give me a big ol' bearhug!

(AUNT STACY hugs her aggressively.)

Oh yeah there's the stuff! All right.

(AUNT STACY holds her at arms length.)

You are just a beautiful young woman, you know that? Just lovely. Oh. You break my heart standing there. Never change. Never ever change. Don't eat transfats, take care of your skin, I used to go out tanning all the time when I was your age and now I look like a suitcase. Don't be like me! Don't be like me!

DANI

I'll try not to.

AUNT STACY

Jack how are you?

JACK

I'm good.

AUNT STACY

You are always so good. You are a positive person, I love that about you.

KAY

Hi Stacy.

AUNT STACY

Kay.

KAY

I'm glad you could make it.

AUNT STACY

Well, when my only sister calls me and tells me she's having a party – you know me! I'm there! Ha ha ha ha. Woo!

KAY

The party's next week.

AUNT STACY

I know! I'm early! I needed to spend some time with you Kay, I really did, life in Minneapolis – what to say about it? Big cities drive me bonkers. So much traffic and noise and foreigners speaking all kinds of languages from all over the planet – I love it! But I hate it too! My whole life I was trying to get out of here and now I'm trying to get back!

KAY

You're moving back?

AUNT STACY

God no! Someone chop off my head if I ever move back to this swamp, no I'm saying… internally I am… I just crave things, you know? Like Real Human Contact. Oh gosh it's good to be here!

(She turns to DANI.)

You know when I came in I thought who is that fox? And then I realized it was my little niece. I remember when your Mom left you with me for three days when you were two – I was pregnant with Naomi at the time and puking my guts up every five minutes – you used to take off your diaper and sprint through the house, and that's when I had that ficus, you remember that ficus?

KAY

No I don't remember that ficus.

AUNT STACY

Well this one got it in her mind that the ficus was a potty, cause she watched me watering it you know? So any time I wasn't looking, off went the diaper, little Dani runs down to the plant and just sprays it! Oh my God you killed that plant.

DANI

I'm sorry?

AUNT STACY

And now look at you! A knockout. Gosh I wish I looked like that. But you know what you need? Your hair looks flat to me. You need highlights darling. I have a hairdresser who would work magic on you. I mean you would be heavenly – look at this right now it's very flat, you know, it just sits there, and that's a shame because you have just the prettiest face it's like the bottom of the sea. With freckles. Gosh. I just want to be you. So where am I staying?

JACK

You're staying here?

AUNT STACY

I'm not staying at Motel Six!

JACK

I don't know that we have room for you right now.

AUNT STACY

Are you calling me fat?

JACK

I'm not calling you fat –

KAY

We can fit you in. You can stay in Dani's room.

AUNT STACY

No I wouldn't dream of that!

KAY

She works nights.

DANI

Yeah it's no problem.

AUNT STACY

Well I promise not to go through your diary!

KAY

It's a journal.

AUNT STACY

Even better! Oh… it is so GOOD to be here. Naomi and Chelsea are going to LOVE visiting their adorable cousin in the country!

KAY

When are they coming?

AUNT STACY

Ugh. Who knows? They never tell me anything any more. All it is is Mom where's your purse! Cause they steal, you know? They're little stealers! So I say don't look at my purse go find your father's.

JACK

Seymour has a purse?

AUNT STACY

It's a man bag. He calls it a man bag. Between you and me it's a purse.

JACK

How is Seymour?

AUNT STACY

I don't know I don't talk to him any more. I just felt like I do not want to be around negative people, I'm not going to surround myself with that energy, you know? So I am HAPPY and he has his interests and I have mine and mine do not involve being lame. So there.

KAY

Oh. So he's not coming to visit?

AUNT STACY

I told him you don't want him here. But we are here to have FUN right!? Am I right Dani? I bet Dani has lots of fun! What are you doing with your bad self?

DANI

Well tonight… um… I work third shift at a chemical factory and they sent us home early after there was a dangerous spill… and then we were quarantined for a while.

AUNT STACY

What an adventure! See she's having adventures!

DANI

I don't know that I would characterize it as an adventure so much as a um… scary, life-threatening situation.

AUNT STACY

But you are alive and you are healthy and you came out of it a stronger woman, I am proud of you.

DANI

Thanks. I think.

AUNT STACY

And are you going to school next year?

DANI

Well…

KAY

Yes. She is.

DANI

It's complicated.

AUNT STACY

Why is it complicated?

KAY

Yes Dani please tell us why it's complicated.

JACK

This is the first we've heard of this.

AUNT STACY

Is it about a boy? Mmm. When I was your age I was so boy-crazy. Remember that, Kay?

KAY

I do.

AUNT STACY

She was always studying and being boring or whatever, but I was… uh… I was climbing the walls. Literally. I did in fact sneak into Petey Lewis' house one night – second story. I was like the spider-woman of love. I would just sneak in anywhere. You couldn't stop me!

JACK

We made a deposit Dani.

DANI

I don't want to talk about it right now.

JACK

That's money we won't get back.

DANI

I can defer for a year without the losing the money –

KAY

What's the guarantee that you would want to go in a year?

DANI

I don't think there is one. I don't know.

AUNT STACY

Don't worry about it, Dani. Chelsea didn't go to college either –

DANI

It's not that I'm not going to college –

AUNT STACY

And now she has a job as a bartender –

JACK

Really?

AUNT STACY

So there you go!

KAY

She's twenty-one?

AUNT STACY

Twenty. Apparently you don't have to be twenty-one to be a bartender. Go figure! I guess the only underage girls they want in the place are the ones working there. That's healthy for everyone. I'm sorry am I getting sarcastic? Dani… I went to college and I hated it. You have to take all these classes… ugh… don't get me started. Here is my advice to you: if you look good enough, it doesn't matter what you know, the men will love you anyway. And you darling, you are like a little gem ready to be picked up by a rich older man. Just remember what I said about the hair.

JACK

Go to college.

AUNT STACY

Case closed. Right? Right. Don't worry about it. Kay… how are you?

KAY

I'm uh… I'm hanging in.

AUNT STACY

You are looking good.

KAY

Thanks.

AUNT STACY

I mean it. See she never tanned, that's the difference between her and me. You see this Dani? Alligator. Porcelain. You also got the better skin. I broke out like a diaper rash the day I turned twelve.

KAY

Hard living.

AUNT STACY

Exactly! Oh it's so good to see you. We are going to be troopers. You are a trooper.

KAY

Thanks.

(AUNT STACY wraps her arm around Dani's shoulder.)

AUNT STACY

Hey roomie! You excited!?

DANI

How long are you staying for?

AUNT STACY

Who knows?!

(Lights change.)

(DANI steps out.)

DANI *(to the audience)*

Grandpa Otis was holed up at the Motel Six about four blocks from our house.

(lights up on Grandpa in a small room.)

GRANDPA OTIS

You tell anybody where I was?

DANI

No Grandpa, nobody knows.

GRANDPA OTIS

Good.

DANI

I stole some cheez-its from the house.

GRANDPA OTIS

Excellent. You were always my favorite. Now… here's the plan: we're going to Canada. I met a guy on the interweb who has a cabin.

DANI

No we're not and there's no such thing as the interweb.

GRANDPA OTIS

Don't tell me there ain't no interweb. You think I can't handle technology just cause I'm old? I tell you what I learned how to use that VCR we got.

DANI

Grandpa that's like technology from the stone age.

GRANDPA OTIS

Regardless, I am savvy. And I found a guy - his name is Samuel L. Jackson, he owns a cabin up there – he's a retired lumberman.

DANI

All right. Rule number one of the interweb. Don't trust anyone. No one is who say they are. Your Samuel L. Jackson is probably some creepy little thirteen year old girl.

GRANDPA OTIS

I saw his picture he's a handsome fella. Spry.

DANI

Okay. It doesn't matter. You're coming home with me.

GRANDPA OTIS

I am not.

DANI

Mom said you could stay with us for a little while.

GRANDPA OTIS

Now why would I want to do that?

DANI

Otherwise you're going to make it to Canada and find out there's no shack and then what are you gonna do?

GRANDPA OTIS

You think I'm scared of being on my own? You put me in a forest anywhere in the world, I will hunt and trap and kill a wild animal with my bare hands.

DANI

How are you going to do that?

GRANDPA OTIS

Cunning. Pure cunning. Not only will I kill, cook, and skin that animal, I will make a diorama out of its bones and put on a show for local children. Don't doubt it.

DANI

I'm sure that would be a lot of fun for the local populace, but let me float this idea by you. Come live with us for a little while.

(Lights change to the Break Room of the factory. Sitting, not dressed in full gear, are SALLY, MARY, PETE, PEARL, and RORY, 18, the new guy. DANI hurries in.)

BOB

Okay everybody everybody have a seat have a seat. Okay then. Well, yesterday, was an adventure. That's one of way of putting it.

MARY

I got another way of putting it.

BOB

I don't want to hear it Mary. Oh before I begin –

MARY

You already began.

SALLY

Can we just get back to work?

BOB

I like that spirit but no. Before I go any further, I'd like to introduce the newest member of our family: Rory. Rory can you stand up?

(RORY stands up.)

RORY

Hey.

BOB

Let's give him a round of applause.

PEARL

He just stood up, why are we applauding him?

BOB

We are a family, and families applaud each other.

MARY

Not in my family we don't.

BOB

I'm going to applaud then, and whoever wants to can join me.

(BOB claps by himself.)

Rory this is Sally, Pearl, Mary, Pete, Kane, and… Dani.

RORY

Hey I went to high school with you!

DANI

Really?

RORY

Yeah you're like that super-smart chick that was studying and stuff! Whoah! We got the same job!

DANI

Yeah it's funny. I'm sorry I don't really remember you.

RORY

Yeah I dropped out after the tenth grade. I was like, `what am I doing here? I don't know!'

(he laughs)

Like I told my parents I was going to school and stuff and instead I'd just get lost in the parking lot, you know?

(he laughs again)

Wow! We have the same job! Ah I always figured you'd be like rich or something, but check it out it doesn't even matter what you did in school! We're in the same spot!

DANI

Both of us making our thirteen dollars an hour.

RORY

I'm making fourteen!

DANI

What?

RORY

Yeah, cause I can lift like fifty kilos I get extra bonus money. I don't even know how much fifty kilos is! I didn't even finish school and I'm in the same job as Dani! This is totally blowing my mind! This is like karma man.

DANI

I don't really think it's like karma at all.

BOB

Okay Rory thank you. I just loving saying his name, you know? Rory. Rooaarrry. He's like a friendly lion.

RORY

That's what I tell chicks!

BOB

I love it!

MARY

What are we doing here?

(KANE enters.)

BOB

Now that we're all here there's some things we have to talk about in relation to yesterday's…

PETE

Fiasco?

BOB

I don't like that word. I prefer `opportunity.'

KANE

Why don't we just call it puppies?

BOB

We're not calling it puppies.

KANE

I think it's a good compromise. Every time there's a poisonous spill you could say `uh oh the puppies are loose.'

BOB

No.

KANE

Here come the puppies! The puppies are eating through the floor! The puppies have gotten under my skin and are dissolving my muscle tissue!

BOB

Anyway, our corporate headquarters has sent a lawyer to talk to us today. And she is a hoot. Wait till you get a load of her. When they told me they were sending the lawyer, I had this picture of Matlock, does anybody watch Matlock?

SALLY

I watch Matlock.

BOB

Did you know that Matlock was Andy Griffith? Blew my mind. Anyway, so in comes Jessica and she is, I mean on a scale of one to ten, she's like a twelve – I don't even know what she's saying she's so dang pretty.

(The COMPANY LAWYER enters.)

COMPANY LAWYER

Hello everyone. My name is Jessica Summers and I'm here to talk to you about –

BOB *(cutting her off)*

Everybody? Good Morning Jessica.

(everyone half-heartedly says Good Morning.)

Oh for crying out loud we can do better than that!

(they do a slightly better job.)

I don't know what got into them today.

KANE

Deadly chemicals.

RORY

Dude are we dealing with deadly chemicals!?

COMPANY LAWYER

Okay, can I just… can we start over?

BOB

Good morning –

COMPANY LAWYER

No just let me talk. I'm not here today to assign blame for yesterday's occurrence. What we are trying to do is move forward as a company. We care about your safety.

RORY

Awesome!

COMPANY LAWYER

Yes it's quite awesome. We want to make sure that what happened yesterday never happens again. Okay?

BOB

You know who you remind me of? Cindy Crawford. Remember Cindy Crawford before she died?

PEARL

She didn't die.

BOB

I'm pretty sure she's dead.

COMPANY LAWYER

Can we get back to the subject at hand? I have here a release form that I'd like you to sign. This is really a series of action statements and best practices that will help us move forward. Now you don't have to read through all of this legalese, just go ahead and flip to the back and sign. And then I'll collect those.

BOB

I hate reading these things.

MARY

Me too.

COMPANY LAWYER

I'm going to go over it in my presentation in just a moment.

BOB

Great. I can't wait you're doing a super job so far.

DANI

You know this actually says that we waive our right to sue.

COMPANY LAWYER

That's just standard stuff. Don't worry about it.

BOB

Why would anyone want to sue? Don't be ridiculous! Sometimes she goes crazy.

DANI

Well I don't know, what if I like developed cancer from yesterday?
(BOB laughs.)

BOB

Nobody's talking about cancer!

DANI

I know that.

COMPANY LAWYER

That's a very unlikely possibility. All the medical experts agree.

DANI

I'm not signing this.

COMPANY LAWYER

Signing the form is a requirement.

DANI

You can't do that.

MARY

Just sign the form I'm dying for a smoke.

COMPANY LAWYER

There's no smoking in the break room.

BOB

That's what I was saying!

DANI

You can't fire me for refusing to sign this. I know my rights.

COMPANY LAWYER

Are you a lawyer?

DANI

No.

COMPANY LAWYER

I don't think you really understand what can and can't be required of you. Point one: you are an at-will employee. That means you can be fired at any time for any reason. I could fire you because I don't like your shirt and you couldn't do a thing about it. Okay? Point two: No one is even talking about firing. What we're talking about here is laying the groundwork for moving forward.

DANI

I don't trust you and I'm not signing it. Fire me if you want to.

BOB

Skipping Forward

I don't know. Well I figured you didn't want to be in like a… thing.

DANI

What do you mean?

KANE

You know like boyfriend-girlfriend.

DANI

Is that what we're in?

KANE

I don't know. I'm asking you.

DANI

I mean… let's just let it be what it is.

KANE

What is it?

DANI

I don't know.

KANE

I don't know either.

DANI

Are we both emotionally retarded? Can we figure this out?

KANE

I just figured you were leaving for New York in a month, so –

DANI

About that. Um… I don't know if I'm going.

KANE

Why not?

DANI

At the beginning of the summer I was totally set and then… the more I think about it, the more it's like, I'm jumping off a cliff, you know? I don't know what's in New York. I've never been there. I mean, I like trees, you know?

KANE

I'm sure they have trees in New York too. They're probably like mugger trees, but –

DANI

You know what I'm saying? I don't know if I'm that person. I feel like I've been on this road, you know, and I've never questioned it. Everything's all laid out and I'm just going forward and I've never really stopped and wondered why I was going there.

KANE

I thought you wanted to be a photographer.

DANI

I do. But I don't have to go to New York to do that, do I?

KANE

But there's people who can help you there. I mean you got a dream, right? Chase it down. Don't wait for it to come to you.

(Lights up on the house again. TAYLOR, NULA, and BRITT enter.)

TAYLOR

Dani it's time for the Road Trip!

NULA

Road Trip!

BRITT

Road trip!

TAYLOR

All right look, if you are going to come with us, you're going to be cool, okay?

BRITT

Road trip!

TAYLOR

That's it. You're done. I'm taking you home.

BRITT

What did I say?

TAYLOR

You're just not cool, okay? I cannot deal with you.

NULA

Dani! Dani where are you?! We are here to steal you!

BRITT

Mom said I could go.

TAYLOR

Mom is not right here right now. Okay? And unless you want to be left at the closest Kindercare, you're going to be cool and not repeat everything I say.

BRITT

Not repeat everything you say. Got it.

TAYLOR

Are you four years old?

BRITT

I'm fourteen.

TAYLOR

I know how old you are and just cause Mom wants the house to herself and got rid of you –

BRITT

She didn't get rid of me.

NULA

Yeah she did. She totally got rid of you so she could party while you guys are gone.

BRITT

What!

TAYLOR

You should probably go home and stop it.

(DANI enters.)

DANI

Hey guys.

NULA

All right get your stuff together! We're leaving!

TAYLOR

Road trip!

DANI

Maybe you could like call me first?

TAYLOR

Surprise road trip!

DANI

Where are you guys going?

TAYLOR

We are going to Chicago!

BRITT

Chicago!

TAYLOR

We're dropping you off at Grandma's in LaCrosse.

BRITT

I'm not staying there.

TAYLOR

Yes you are. We're going to tie you up and toss you out of the car from the highway.

BRITT

You are so mean, Taylor. You know that? You're like the devil.

TAYLOR

You're like the devil's annoying little sidekick devil.

BRITT

Hey do you guys want to hear a secret about Taylor?

TAYLOR

Shut up, Britt.

NULA

Yes I want to hear it.

BRITT

Taylor was totally in love with this waiter at Chili's and then one time he made a joke and she laughed so hard she puked right in front of him. It came out of her nose.

TAYLOR

You are so gross!

BRITT

I'm not the one who puked.

DANI

You know, being trapped in a car with you guys for nine hours sounds like a lot of fun and all, but I'm gonna have to pass. Besides my "friend" is supposed to come over for dinner tonight.

(GRANDPA OTIS wheels in.)

GRANDPA OTIS
What's all this screeching in here? Sounds like a bunch of bats got into the house.

NULA
Hi Otis do you remember me?

GRANDPA OTIS
What's your name again?

NULA
Nula.

GRANDPA OTIS
Oh that's right.

BRITT
We're going on a road trip.

GRANDPA OTIS
Congratulations. Try not to kill anybody. I went on a road trip in Korea.

NULA
Was it fun?

GRANDPA OTIS
I got shot seventeen times in my right hip.

DANI
Okay, anyway guys –

GRANDPA OTIS
You ever take a red hot poker and stab it into your skin? It felt like that. Except seventeen times.

DANI
Grandpa um –

BRITT
What was war like?

GRANDPA OTIS
You wanna know?

BRITT

I'm thinking about going into the marines.

TAYLOR

You're not going into the marines, shut up.

BRITT

I am so going into the marines!

GRANDPA OTIS

She can go into the marines if she wants! There's a whole unit of petite assassins. They go out there and they swarm. Anyway: war. What a glorious nightmare it is. The stench of battle, the air ripe with fear and the hornet sounds of bullets zipping past you. I was a snot-nosed nineteen year-old kid in 1951 with a duffel bag and a goofy smile. My future wife, Mary, was a combat nurse and in those days she had a figure like Rita Hayworth. I took one look at her and I faked every sickness known to man. Course she was moved to another unit and we got a new nurse named Beulah who had hands like sandpaper and a bosom like two torpedoes strapped together with tape.

BRITT

How did you track down your wife?

GRANDPA OTIS

Got lucky. Took nine months but I met her again. And that next time I made my intentions clear. I've always said that if you find you desperately want, then you need to do whatever it takes to get it. Whatever it takes. Even if that means faking a serious hip injury so you can end up in the right ward.

DANI

So you faked it?

GRANDPA OTIS

I was going to fake it, but I was lucky enough to get shot seventeen times in the right hip. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to see a man about a mule.

(He wheels off.)

NULA

I love love. That's just like me and Chief.

TAYLOR

So pack up your stuff.

DANI

Sorry.

NULA

You know what? That leaves an extra spot in the car.
(NULA gets out her phone.)

TAYLOR
We're not getting Chief. Don't text him.

NULA
Why not?

BRITT
Can you just live for yourself for one second and forget about Chief!?

NULA
I guess I could try that.
(she puts away the phone.)
I feel sick now.
(she takes out her phone again.)
Okay I feel better.

TAYLOR
You are one sad, pathetic human being, you know that?

NULA
If being sad and pathetic is what being in love means then yes.

BRITT
That doesn't even make any sense.

NULA
Go home and play on facebook or something.
(BRITT takes out a blackberry.)

BRITT
I can play on facebook right here.

NULA
Where did you get that?

BRITT
I'm spoiled. I'm okay with it.

TAYLOR
All right we should go.
(They start to leave.)

NULA

Road trip!

BRITT

Check it out, I've got one profile where I pretend to be Samuel L. Jackson.

NULA

Who's that?

BRITT

You don't know anything, do you?

(Lights down on them as DANI steps forward.)

DANI *(to the audience)*

When my Mom heard there was a guy in my life –

KAY

When is he coming over? When do I get to meet him?

DANI

I don't know that we're at the meeting the parents stage.

KAY

Nonsense. Bring him over for dinner.

DANI

I don't think that's a good idea.

KAY

I don't have long left I want to meet him.

(KAY leaves.)

DANI *(calling after her)*

How am I supposed to argue with that?!

(Lights change. AUNT STACY and JACK bring out a dining table. KAY begins setting up chairs. DANI has her camera and sits aside.)

DANI

Images from a family dinner.

(She takes a snapshot. They freeze.)

(Another shot. They freeze.)

(Another they shot. They freeze.)

AUNT STACY

Will ya quit taking pictures and get over here and tell me about this guy?! Sheesh. I need a pair of pliers so I can pull it out of you.

DANI

There's not really much to tell.

KAY

What's his name?

DANI

Kane.

AUNT STACY

His name is Kane? Like the biblical murderer?

JACK

He sounds great.

DANI

It's not spelled the same way.

KAY

Jack can you pour some water please?

(JACK heads off as KAY gets silverware.)

AUNT STACY

You know what I read? Kids don't date any more. They hook up. They're just hooking up all over the place, that's what they call it. Like, hey how are you let's all make out! If they like hooking up, that's when they start dating. How backwards is that? Dani, defend your generation.

DANI

Well it's not like everybody's hooking up all the time.

(KAY returns to set up the table.)

KAY

Stacy you hooked up all the time when you were her age. You were notorious.

AUNT STACY

I was not.

KAY

You dated your English teacher.

AUNT STACY

I didn't hook up though, I dated first.

KAY

He was like twenty-eight.

AUNT STACY

Kay enjoys telling lies about my character. But this is not about me, this is about you and KANE. It's a strong name, isn't it? What do you like about him? Tell me tell me tell me! Is he hot?

KAY

Stacy!

DANI

He plays guitar.

(AUNT STACY acts like she's going to faint.)

AUNT STACY

Ohhhhhh…. Guitar! I always fell for the musicians. It didn't matter if they played the triangle in the band, I was all over them. Oh. Guitar. That was the best one.

(GRANDPA OTIS wheels in.)

GRANDPA OTIS

When's dinner?

KAY

Soon.

GRANDPA OTIS

How soon is soon?

KAY

Soon soon.

GRANDPA OTIS

That doesn't help me.

AUNT STACY

Dad, Dani is having her boyfriend over for dinner tonight.

GRANDPA OTIS

I'll go eat in my room then.

DANI

No Grandpa you can stay.

AUNT STACY

You gotta be on your best behavior though. He's a musician.

GRANDPA OTIS

Is he a hippie?

DANI

The hippies went extinct a long time ago Grandpa.

GRANDPA OTIS

Good. Serves `em right. Hippies.

(JACK finishes putting the water out.)

JACK

All right here we go.

GRANDPA OTIS

We're drinking water?

JACK

I know it's strange, but try to wrap your mind around it.

GRANDPA OTIS

Don't start with me Jack.

JACK

You want something else?

GRANDPA OTIS

Get me a bloody Mary.

JACK

Am I bartender?

GRANDPA OTIS

How hard is it to make a bloody Mary?

AUNT STACY

Dad, wait for Chelsea, she's a professional.

GRANDPA OTIS

It's tomato juice and vodka. Stacy used to make them for me when she was six years old. Are you saying Stacy at six is more of a man than you?

JACK

I don't think we're having cocktails with dinner.

GRANDPA OTIS

Why not?

KAY

Dad, this is for Dani –

GRANDPA OTIS

I'm more pleasant with a bloody Mary.

KAY

I know for a fact that is not true. And Stacy shouldn't have been mixing drinks for you in kindergarten.

GRANDPA OTIS

Why not? She was learning a trade.

(The doorbell rings.)

AUNT STACY

He's here! Everybody act natural!

(DANI kind of freaks out a little bit.)

DANI

Can I just say something here first? First off, he doesn't really… I'm not sure what he wants from this relationship, so I… no pressure or anything, okay?

KAY

No pressure.

AUNT STACY

I'm so excited!

DANI

See that's pressure.

AUNT STACY

Oh sorry. I'm not excited.

(a whisper)

But I really am!

(DANI gets the door. KANE enters. He carries some flowers.)

KANE

Hey.

DANI

Come on in.

AUNT STACY
He brought flowers! Seymor never brought flowers.

DANI
Everyone? This is Kane. Kane, this is my Grandpa Otis, my Aunt Stacy, my Mom, and my Dad.
(ad lib greetings.)

KANE
Wow. Everybody's here. This is like a firing squad or something.

GRANDPA OTIS
You ever face a firing squad, boy?

KAY
Nobody's faced a firing squad.

GRANDPA OTIS
Speak for yourself.

AUNT STACY
All right come over here and sit down. I want you sitting next to me!
(AUNT STACY grabs KANE and takes him to the table.)

KAY
The salad's ready to come out.

JACK
Don't worry about it I'll get it.

KAY
Thanks Jack.

JACK
Everybody else having salad?

GRANDPA OTIS
I'm seventy-nine years old and I'm not going to waste my time eating salad.

DANI
I'll have some.

AUNT STACY
I'm only eating salad. I'm trying to lose weight!

JACK

All right then.
(He leaves.)

AUNT STACY

So Kane…
(she stares at him expectantly)

KANE

Yeah?

AUNT STACY

What do you think about Dani?

KANE

Um… she's cool.

AUNT STACY

That's it? She's just cool?

KANE

Well I mean… she's a nice girl.

AUNT STACY

She's a very nice girl.

DANI

All right Aunt Stacy, let's not grill him.

AUNT STACY

I'm not grilling him. Am I grilling you?

KANE

No no.

KAY

What do you do Kane?

KANE

I'm working at the chemical factory right now.

DANI

He's a musician really. A musician with character.

GRANDPA OTIS

How are you planning on taking care of Dani?

DANI
Hey hey hey nobody's taking care of anybody.

KANE
I figure Dani's pretty good at taking care of herself.

GRANDPA OTIS
Don't you forget it.
(JACK returns with salads.)

JACK
Here we go.
(ad libbing thank yous.)

AUNT STACY
This looks amazing. I'm ravenous.

GRANDPA OTIS
What do you think about this salad, Kane?

KANE
It looks great.

DANI
Grandpa. Please.

GRANDPA OTIS
What am I doing? You work in the chemical factory, is that what you said?

KANE
Yeah.

GRANDPA OTIS
Do you go to college?

KANE
I don't. Actually.

AUNT STACY
That's okay. Some people aren't meant for college.

GRANDPA OTIS
Figure you don't need to learn anything more?

KANE

I think that there are some things that are learned through experience. I think everybody learns, you know? I mean, I think if you stop learning, then you stop growing as a person. And if you're going to be any kind of artist, you have to be… available to the world around you. So I'm still learning.

(short pause.)

AUNT STACY

I like him!

KANE

Sometimes though I wish I had courage like Dani. To quit her job like that… I mean that's like –

JACK

What do you mean she quit her job?

(KANE shuts up.)

DANI

Uh….

JACK

You quit your job?

DANI

A little bit yeah.

KAY

Why didn't you tell us?

DANI

It just happened.

JACK

How are you gonna pay for college?

DANI

Well, you know, I –

AUNT STACY

So she quit! Big deal! She should be having fun anyway! Who wants to work at a chemical factory and get cancer?

JACK

You shoulda talked to me first.

DANI

There was a principle at stake.

JACK

What principle?

KANE

Well, you see –

DANI

They were trying to make us sign this thing that –

JACK

What thing?

DANI

Like an agreement.

JACK

You couldn't sign an agreement?

KAY

What was in the agreement?

KANE

You had promise not to sue.

JACK

You're gonna sue them?

DANI

Well I mean I don't know.

GRANDPA OTIS

That's the problem with this country. Everybody's suing everybody else all the time. When I was young, you solved your problems like men.

DANI

What do you want me to do, go out and fight them if I get a tumor?

GRANDPA OTIS

That's one way to solve things.

JACK

Nobody's fighting anybody.

GRANDPA OTIS

That's cause you're a wuss.

KAY

Dad.

AUNT STACY

I like it when men fight. There's just something so animalistic in it, you know?

DANI

Okay, look. I have principles and I don't like them trampled on. So I quit.

KANE

I think it was the right thing to do.

GRANDPA OTIS

Says the musician.
(The doorbell rings.)

AUNT STACY

Who's that?

DANI

I don't know.
(DANI gets up.)

KANE

This salad is really good by the way.
(BOB enters.)

BOB

Hi there. Oh boy we're having a family dinner.

DANI

Hey everybody this is my boss, Bob.

BOB

How are ya? Oh this is just great. Employees sitting down and having dinner together. Chemistry, you know? Bringing people together.

DANI

What are you doing here?

BOB

Well uh… I won't take up too much of your time, but uh… is this your mother?

KAY

Yeah.

BOB

The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, does it? You are one pretty lady.

KAY

Thank you.

BOB

Well, the reason I'm here… we just miss ya. We do. It's not the same.

DANI

It's not the same?

BOB

Ya know I look and I say where's Dani? And you're not there. And I think what happened? When I think about Dani I think about spirit. And we miss your spirit.

DANI

I'm sorry but I can't sign that form.

BOB

Tell ya what, you don't have to sign the form.

DANI

Really?

BOB

Come back to us Dani.

DANI

I don't know.

(BOB gets down on one knee.)

BOB

I'm begging ya. Come home to your family.

DANI

Um…

BOB

I'll give you a raise.

GRANDPA OTIS

What is wrong with this guy?

BOB

I'll do better'n that. I'll give you a promotion. You can be shift manager.

DANI

I don't know anything about that.

BOB

No one does. Just wing it. Whattya say?

DANI

Okay.

BOB

Fantastic! Fantastic! Oh you've made me happy today. See ya tomorrow. Nice meeting you everyone.

(ad libs from everyone)

I'm floating now.

(he leaves. Pause for a moment.)

GRANDPA OTIS

What a fruitcake.

(Lights change.)

DANI

So Kane survived his introduction to my family because they got distracted.

AUNT STACY

I like him! He's a keeper. He's like a really nice fish, you know, you just take him home and rip off his scales and have a meal. Course he'll probably start ignoring you and then you'll become desperate and whiny like me. Don't be like me!

JISELLE *(into the computer)*

Haven't heard from you in a while. Hope everything's cool. Look if you want to talk or anything, just drop me a line and –

DANI

It was about two weeks before I was supposed to leave for New York. And that's when –

AUNT STACY

All right it is time for the birthday party of the century!

DANI

My cousins came up from Minneapolis – there was

(she takes out her camera)

Chelsea. About the IQ of a turkey sandwich.

(lights up on CHELSEA, frozen.)

And Naomi. With the IQ of a slightly smaller, slightly less attractive turkey sandwich.

(lights up on NAOMI, frozen.)

My Mom wanted to keep it really small –

AUNT STACY

This is a celebration of life.

DANI

Just the immediate family.

AUNT STACY

We should invite everyone who's life she's touched. That would be a lot of people. A lot more than me, at any rate.

DANI

Luckily we didn't listen to her much.

AUNT STACY

I'm the DJ!

(AUNT STACY begins playing music not entirely appropriate to the situation.

(Lights up on DANI, NAOMI, and CHELSEA.)

CHELSEA

We made it!

NAOMI

I thought we were gonna die. Seriously, there was like this deer that charged our car. He was coming outta nowhere I screamed like crazy.

CHELSEA

Naomi broke my eardrums on the way here.

NAOMI

Well he was gonna kill us!

CHELSEA

He wasn't gonna kill us.

NAOMI

You know how some animals get possessed by evil spirits? This was one of them. You could see it. It was like evil.

STACY

Hey girls.

CHELSEA

What's up, Stacy?

STACY

How `bout a little Black Eyed Peas? Woo!
(or another inappropriate song such as "My Humps")
Naomi what did you do your hair?

NAOMI

I didn't do anything to it! Why does everyone keep asking me that?

CHELSEA

Leave her alone, okay? God.

NAOMI

Why are you always interrogating me? Can't I just live my life without you trying to tell me what to do?
(JACK enters.)

JACK

Do I hear my favorite nieces?! Yes I do!
(JACK charges and gets them in a simultaneous bear hug.)

NAOMI

Ah! Uncle Jack! Let go!

CHELSEA

Ah!

JACK

Uncle Jack never lets go until he gets his hugs!
(KAY enters from the kitchen. She is not feeling well.)

KAY

Hello.

CHELSEA

Hi Aunt Kay.

KAY

How are you doing?

CHELSEA

I'm good.

NAOMI

Hey!

KAY

Let's see, you're a junior this year?

NAOMI

Sophomore.

CHELSEA

You know what the word sophomore means? Stupid.

NAOMI

It does not!

JACK

Naomi is not stupid, she's just confused.

AUNT STACY

Enough chit-chat! Let's rock this thing!

(AUNT STACY turns on a black light with strobe. The effect is muted by the fact that the rest of the lights are mostly on.)

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.concordtheatricals.com