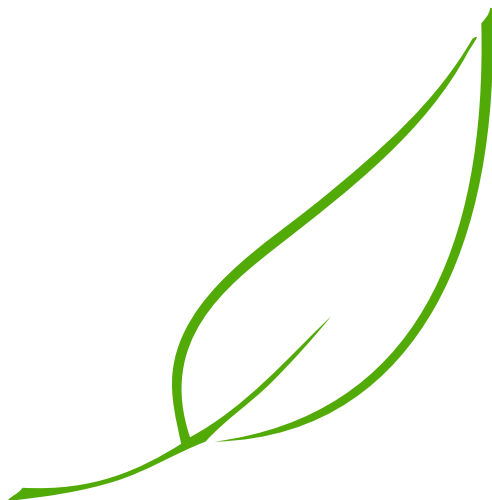


STEPPING UP

by Ken Bradbury
and Robert L. Crowe



GREEN ROOM PRESS

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STEPPING UP

A Play in Two Acts

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by **Ken Bradbury and Robert L. Crowe**

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ACT ONE

ESMERALDA: *(She enters with Rodney. They are talking, then notice the audience.)* Oh, hello, there! What a nice surprise! I know that we advertised the play for tonight but we really didn't think anyone would show up. This is exciting. We've never played to an audience before.

RODNEY: Yeh, wait 'til the actors hear about this. I would say that having a crowd response may throw them off their game but we've been to rehearsals and they have never really been on their game.

ESMERALDA: I wonder if the actors know they are supposed to pause for laughter.

RODNEY: That idea assumes that there will be some laughter during the show. After the performance, I can understand but during the show? I'm not sure the cast will have to worry.

ESMERALDA: While we have the performance mired in the mud, maybe we could try to explain this ... this

RODNEY: ... script.

ESMERALDA: Script is a good word. My name is Esmeralda. And this is Rodney. We're your guides for the evening. Here's what is about to happen to you. Have you ever had the luxury of sitting down for an evening and watching TV? The first program might be a "Crime Scene Investigation," after too many commercials, then comes "Medical Practice."

RODNEY: The following show is "The Big Boom Theory" followed by a re-run of "Nights of Our Lives." and a special on the History Channel.

ESMERALDA: The point we are trying in vain to establish is that an evening's entertainment usually isn't the same story for 3 or 4 hours.

RODNEY: Don't worry. This ... this ... script isn't that long. But it does provide a variety of stories. Just like you spend your life watching a variety of stories on television, we're going to provide a variety of life experiences for you.

ESMERALDA: This first scene is especially recognizable. It's about brothers not always getting along. Did you ever have a brother who was a monster?

(lights down while actors are set, then lights up)

Scene 1: Franken-Bro

Characters: James, Pete, and Frank.

(Frank is asleep, lying on a sofa or in an easy chair. Pete and James enter, whispering.)

PETE: James, this is crazy.

JAMES: I know.

PETE: It'll never work.

JAMES: Maybe not.

PETE: Then why are you doing it?

JAMES: Because I need the grade! If I don't come up with a science project, Mr. Anderson's gonna flunk me.

PETE: It'd help if you'd do your homework.

JAMES: Yeah, I know that now. Look, you gotta help me, Pete.

PETE: But what if something goes wrong?

JAMES: Big deal.

PETE: But it's your own brother!

JAMES: I know. That's why I'm going to try it on him.

PETE: But it could be dangerous!

JAMES: Who cares? He's just my brother. I've got another one downstairs.

PETE: James!

JAMES: Kidding. Look, just help me get this thing hooked up. *(They move to above the sleeping Frank.)* Mr. Anderson's gonna just love this if it works.

PETE: If it works.

JAMES: Okay, we've got to hook these battery terminals up to Frank's head.

PETE: You're kidding.

JAMES: Look Pete, I think I've got this worked out. I've been studying up on it.

PETE: You? Studying?

JAMES: Yeah, I got the idea from a video game. You hook these electrodes to a person's head, you run a cable down to your dad's car battery, then you flip the switch.

PETE: You'll fry his brains!

JAMES: He's my brother. Brothers don't have brains. Here. Hold this cord.

PETE: This could turn out really bad.

JAMES: The worst he'll get is a little shock.

PETE: You could blow his head off!

JAMES: So I'll get him a new one at Wal-Mart.

PETE: James!

JAMES: Kidding! Come on. According to my figures, this will turn my brother Frank into a monster.

PETE: Monster?

JAMES: I mean a monster who will do what I tell him. Look, Frank's always picking on me.

PETE: Frank's a nice guy.

JAMES: Yeah, but he's always making me pick up my room and do my homework and chores. He's a pain.

PETE: Sounds like he's trying to make you better.

JAMES: Just wait 'til you see what I make of him. Okay. Everything's attached. Now I'll pull the switch.

PETE: I don't like this, James. Frank's a really nice guy. I mean, he's class president, and he works at the homeless shelter. He's perfect! I don't think you ought to be messing with him.

JAMES: Hey, when the science project's over, I'll just turn off the switch. Okay ... you ready?

PETE: No!

JAMES: Good! Here goes! *(He throws an imaginary switch and Frank's body begins to shake ... then shakes violently.)*

PETE: Oh, no! Stop it, James! Turn it off!

JAMES: I think I broke the switch. Oh boy ... Mom's gonna be mad. *(Frank's body, still jerking, begins to slowly rise from the "bed." He comes to a sitting position, his eyes open wide. He jerkily comes to a standing position.)*

PETE: Stop it, James!

JAMES: Man, I'm gonna get a great grade! *(to Frank ... shouting)* Can you hear me?

FRANK: *(in a very artificially horrible voice)* Yes ... Master.

JAMES: Master! Did you hear that! It works! It really works!

PETE: I'm leaving.

JAMES: *(grabbing Pete)* No! You can't go. What if he goes crazy? I need help.

PETE: You need therapy.

JAMES: *(to Frank)* Raise your right arm! *(Frank jerkily does so.)* Raise your left arm! *(Frank does so.)*

PETE: Wow!

JAMES: What---is---your---name, Frank?

FRANK: *(a quizzical look at James, then)* Frank.

JAMES: Amazing!

PETE: But you just told him that ...

JAMES: What's an algebraic equation?

FRANK: An algebraic equation is two valid mathematical expressions that are joined with the equal sign.

PETE: Is that right?

JAMES: Don't know. Sounds smart. The capital of Norway!

FRANK: Oslo.

JAMES: When was George Washington born?

FRANK: On his birthday.

PETE: Wow!

JAMES: This is so cool! Clean my room! (*Frank looks at him.*) Go ahead! This place is a mess and you ... I mean my brother ... always says I'm a slob. Clean it up!

FRANK: (*mechanically going around the room and picking up various items*) Dirty socks ... dirty shoes ... pop cans ... someone else's homework ...

JAMES: Hey! Give me that! (*He takes it.*)

FRANK: Spiderman underwear ...

JAMES: And that! (*takes it*)

PETE: Spiderman?

JAMES: Mind your own business.

FRANK: Place is a pig sty... pig sty... pig sty. Must burn ... must burn ...

JAMES: No! Wait a minute!

FRANK: Must destroy. ... Must incinerate with death ray ...

JAMES: Hold it! Hold it, Mr. Monster! That's enough. Uh ... do something else for me. Make my bed!

FRANK: (*turning stiffly to face bed*) Bed is mess ...

JAMES: I know that.

FRANK: Must destroy! Death ray! Death ray!

PETE: He's gonna burn your bed! Your mom's gonna be mad!

JAMES: Stop! Stop! Uh ... gotta find something you can do without destroying it.

PETE: How about you?

JAMES: Huh?

PETE: That dorky haircut. You always said you wish you had cool hair and this guy can do anything. (*to Frank*) Hey buddy! You think you can make James look better?

JAMES: Now wait a minute!

PETE: Come on, James. Let him give it a try. (*to Frank*) Monster! Take a look at James! (*Frank walks around him.*) You see his problem. Give him what he needs.

FRANK: Impossible.

JAMES: What?

FRANK: Okay. I ... will ... try ... (*begins by gentling patting James' head and arranging his locks a bit*)

JAMES: Hey ... this is cool. (*Frank then gets a bit rougher. Begins gently slapping James' cheeks*) ... Wait a minute!

FRANK: Must ... fix ... must ... fix ... (*grabs James and puts a wrestler's hold on him*)

JAMES: Stop it!

FRANK: Must ... fix ... must ... fix ...

JAMES: Stop him, Pete!

PETE: No way! He's strong!

FRANK: (*still wrestling with James and winning*) Must ... destroy!
Must ... destroy!

JAMES: No! Help! Mom! ... Mama! ... Mommy!

FRANK: (*finally letting go and speaking in his normal voice*) You had enough, little brother?

PETE: Frank!

JAMES: Wha ... What're you doing? I turned you into a monster!

FRANK: What a dumb idea.

JAMES: You mean I didn't do it?

FRANK: (*taking off the imaginary cables*) The cables aren't even attached, lame-brain. Just thought I'd teach you a little lesson. James, why can't you just do things honestly? Just do your homework and stop looking for shortcuts?

JAMES: Now I'm gonna flunk science class. My science project is all ruined.

FRANK: You need another topic.

JAMES: Too late. It's due tomorrow. I've flunked.

FRANK: No, you haven't. Your assignment's done.

JAMES: Huh?

FRANK: Sit down and start writing.

JAMES: What?

FRANK: Sit down! (*James sits quickly.*) Now start writing. "My science project: A psychological study on why adolescent boys will believe anything ..."

JAMES: Huh?

FRANK: Write!! "I recently took part in a study to see if my brother will believe anything..."

(*James looks up at his brother. Pete looks at his brother. Lights go down.*)

RODNEY: (*as lights come up*) Oh, brother. Another life's lesson learned. I have a brother and I think someone used a monster machine on him but forgot to change him back to a normal human being. (*as she enters*) Esmeralda, what life lesson do we have coming up?

ESMERALDA: It's a situation that most of us will recognize. It's the concern about losing weight. My Aunt Martha has a big problem. My Aunt Martha IS a big problem. Last year she went to a Halloween party. She used two pine cones as earrings, wore a red dress and went as the country of Canada. The girl in our next segment doesn't have that size-problem but she does have persistence.

Scene 2: The Diet Center

Characters: Karen and Dot

(At open, both actors are on stage. Karen works for the Center and Dot is a potential client.)

KAREN: *(to Dot)* Welcome to the Delightful Diet Center. My name is Karen. I'll be conducting your personal first weight-loss session. First, let me tell you about the Delightful Diet Center ...

DOT: Oh ... not necessary. I've been here four times before. I'm Dot. ... as in dot, dot, dash *(giggles)* It's somebody's code. Maurice, I think. Anyway, in school ... they used to have fun in P.E. when I had to run. They'd yell, "Dash, Dot, Dash!" *(giggles)*

KAREN: *(stares with no expression)* OK. So you are ready for the *fifth* session in our series?

DOT: No, I've never been past the first session. I've started the program four times but your system never works. But, I want to try again. Is the first session still free?

KAREN: Yes, but what do you mean "the system never works"?

DOT: Every time I leave here I just continue eating like I did before. I haven't lost a pound.

KAREN: Look, Miss Dash ...

DOT: You can call me Dot.

KAREN: Dot. How can you lose weight if you continue eating like before?

DOT: I can't.

KAREN: *(pause)* Yes Why don't you step over here and let's weigh-in, shall we? Just step up here on the scale and we'll get the very first reading. *(The scale is one of those like in a doctor's office. She adjusts weight bar and makes a note.)* Thank you. Why don't we sit down and have a chat.

DOT: I wore my sneakers. Aren't we supposed to do jumping jacks and that junk? I've tried to do push-ups but most of my body parts refuse to leave the floor.

KAREN: I think it important to first set a framework. Your frame could use the work but let's chat instead.

DOT: Oh, this is good. Every other time I've been here they wanted to exercise. I'd rather talk. You start.

KAREN: Yes. Since this is my first day on the job, I'm going to read directly from the training manual. *(She reads from the manual and she is not an especially good reader.)* "My guess is that you are like most people and have tried a number of different diets without any exercise. I'm going to make a series of statements and you answer if they are true."

DOT: True!

KAREN: You're supposed to wait until I make the statement.

DOT: True.

KAREN: *(takes deep breath of patience, reads.)* “Your exercise is limited to jumping to conclusions.” *(She looks at Dot and waits for a response. She points at Dot to indicate that it is her line. Dot points back.)* You were supposed to say “true” there.

DOT: Oh. Can we try it again?

KAREN: No. We’ll press on. *(reads)* “Your exercise is limited to beating around the bush.” *(Dot doesn’t move.)* *(Karen motions her to speak and when she doesn’t, Karen says:)* True.

DOT: Was I supposed to say that? I thought we weren’t starting over.

KAREN: I didn’t start over, that was a different statement. Hold on. I think we’ll skip this chapter.

DOT: OK. I thought it was kinda fun.

KAREN: Oops, there’s the telephone. Someone else will get it. *(waits)* *(waits)* Excuse me, no one else seems to be answering. *(picks up the phone)* Weight Loss Hotline. *(slight pause)* Yes, your friends are right, there are indicators that you need weight loss help. What? Your driver’s license says “picture continued”? Yes, we would call that an indicator. *(pause)* The seafood diet? No, I’m not familiar with that one. Oh. When you see food you eat it. Uh, look, we have your number on caller ID. I’ll have someone call you back. I’m in therapy *(looks at Dot)* ... uh ... conversation ... right now. Yes, thank you. *(to Dot)* Now. Where were we?

DOT: Therapy.

KAREN: True. We were talking about diets. Have you tried commercial diets?

DOT: Yes, I did Weight-Watchers, Jenny Craig, Slim Fast and South Beach.

KAREN: And how long were you on each diet?

DOT: Those were all in the same week. I was on one for a few days, called the Atkins Diet. I think it was named after a country music singer, Chet Atkins or Tracy Atkins ... something like that ... but every time I heard a country song I had a hankering for biscuits and gravy.

KAREN: So, nothing has worked for you.

DOT: I tried the 30 Day Diet and it worked. I lost 15 days. Can’t find them anywhere. Can’t remember where I was or what I did. So, I’m not doing that diet anymore. You lose half your life. When you’re 25 you think you’re only 12 ½.

KAREN: True. Would you excuse me just a minute?

DOT: Sure.

(Karen takes her manual stage right and thumbs through the pages looking for help. Dot walks to the doctor’s scale and steps up. She moves the weight bar, then jumps up and down, then moves the weight bar again. She shrugs and returns to her seat. Karen returns.)

KAREN: *(reads)* “Chapter Three. Let’s talk a minute about your support system. Is there anyone in the family who *doesn’t* over-eat? Someone who’s

weight is in proportion to their height? Someone you could use as a role model?"

DOT: There's my Aunt Martha. But I wouldn't call her a model. More like an antique.

KAREN: Is she thin?

DOT: Oh, yeah. Scrawny.

KAREN: Why doesn't *she* over-eat?

DOT: She's a terrible cook. We went over to her house last Thanksgiving; the turkey looked like Jonathon Livingston Pigeon. Because of so many calls, the fire department installed a sprinkler system in her oven. And it's not just indoor cooking. Last summer she bought a charcoal grill. Then, she made some BBQ sauce. It had a dual purpose. You could put it on hamburgers or use it as fuel to start the charcoal. She said she sold a bottle of the sauce on-line to pygmies in South America who wanted some to dip their arrows. I call it The Aunt Martha diet. She won't eat her own stuff.

KAREN: (*looks at Dot for a few moments, then pulls out the instruction manual again and reads aloud*) "Chapter Four. Honest Self Assessment. Read some of the following questions to the client and have them respond." OK. What do you think is your biggest problem?

DOT: It's because I'm a light eater.

KAREN: Wait a minute. You come to a weight loss program and you call yourself a light eater? How can you be a light eater?

DOT: When it gets light, I start eating. And sometimes I don't stop when it gets dark. I guess that would make me a dark eater. Light eater, dark eater. I guess I'm just an eater.

KAREN: (*looks at her, looks to the manual, looks at her again and moves to the next question.*) "Have you ever tried to manage your weight by counting calories?"

DOT: Count calories? I can't even see them. How can you count them? You should know this ... you know what calories are? They are little microbes ... Micro ... soft ... robes, or something like that ... that live in your closet in the dark and they sew your clothes, and the clothes get tighter and tighter.

KAREN: No. No. That's not what calories are.

DOT: Yes. I think I read that.

KAREN: No. (*pause*) Oh, there's the phone again. Sorry, but I need to get this. It's on our hot line. (*on phone and makes pauses in appropriate places in the conversation*) (*During this phone call Dot goes to the scale again, steps on it, then shakes the scale to see if the results change.*) Weight Loss Hotline. What is your emergency? Missy? Of course, I remember you. You were just in here earlier today. What's the matter? Where are you? The check-out lane at Safe-Mart? And you've been there a while? Yes, I can imagine that the people in line behind you are irritated. What's the issue? (*sternly*) Missy, listen to me. Put down the candy bar! Put down the candy bar and nobody gets hurt. No, we can't discuss it. Put the candy bar back in the rack. Check out your

other items and call me back later. You understand what you're supposed to do? Good. Talk to you later. *(to Dot)* Sorry. An emergency. *(looks at procedural manual again)* Now. Just a few more questions. *(Dot returns to her chair.)* "Does your normal diet contain vegetables?"

DOT: Oh, no. That's much too dangerous.

KAREN: How can eating vegetables be dangerous?

DOT: Well, Snow White ate an apple that was poison; Jack had some beans and was chased by a giant and Alice ate a mushroom. Look what happened to them. Nope. I just can't take the chance.

KAREN: *(stares at her and shakes her head in confusion, then reads.)* "Do you understand the value of a balanced diet?"

DOT: Oh, sure. That's why I always carry two chocolate bars, one in each hand. If I only have one it throws off my equi ... liber ... ium. My balance.

KAREN: Today is a free session. I'm not sure you should pay for future sessions. You don't seem ready to maintain the necessary self-discipline. Do you know what we call someone who falls off their diet? A desserter. *(She closes book.)* At the present time, I don't think you're ready for our program. For some reason you seem very relaxed about it all and I am getting stressed.

DOT: Did you know that stressed spelled backwards is "desserts"?

KAREN: No, I didn't ... I mean ... yes, I guess it does. Perhaps if you read some dieting literature it will help prepare you for the task.

DOT: Oh, I did read some stuff ... my favorite saying is by Julia Child. Why they would be quoting a child I don't know, but anyway, she said, "The only time to eat diet food is while you're waiting for the steak to cook."

KAREN: *(pause)* Thank you for coming by today. I'm sure we will see you in the future.

DOT: You can count on it. Goodbye. *(exits)*

KAREN: *(to Dot as she exits)* And remember: *(She reads from the manual.)* "It's simply a matter of mind over platter." *(a slight smile as she closes the book and exits)*

ESMERALDA: How easily those words roll off her skinny little tongue ... "mind over platter." It's not so easy when the platter is a hot-fudge sundae. Let's move quickly to a different subject.

RODNEY: Right-o. Since we have no sponsors we can move quickly from one segment to another. Our next story is told by a person who has our admiration. Have you ever been short of cash? Of course you have. When we get to that status most of us just complain. However, our next presenter decided to do something about it and started his own tour experience. We'll get the tour guide to tell you about it.

Scene 3: The Grand Tour

Characters: Guide

Good morning! And welcome to the museum tour! You are the first group of visitors to my museum so you're sort of my test audience. I know that there's never been an exhibit like this one, but I need some spending money and so I thought, "Hey! Why not charge people to take a peek at one of the oddest exhibits ever displayed before mankind!" So ... welcome to my Family! Now if you'll just step this way ...

Okay, here's our living room and this is my family's oldest piece of furniture ... my Father. From the time he gets home from work until he goes to bed, this is his position. Sorry about the odor. Dad takes his shoes off at the door and the exterminator doesn't come until Monday. Feel free to touch the exhibit. When he's watching the ballgame nothing fazes him. The world could end but as long as the satellite TV is working, Dad will remain in this position. No ... go ahead and try to talk to him. He won't answer. He can't answer. His brain is permanently wired into ESPN, and his right hand is glued to the remote.

Two years ago we had a grease fire in the kitchen and the firefighter had to carry him out on his couch. Most fossils are surrounded by bedrock or shale deposits. Dad is covered in Fritos. Many of these Fritos can be traced back to the early Triassic period of history when dinosaurs roamed the earth and there were only three TV channels available. What? Yes, he's breathing ... He's just not responding. When you ask him a question he'll grunt, "Uh-huh" or when he gets really talkative he'll say, "Go ask your mother."

We'll have to move along quickly. It looks like halftime is coming up and as soon as they go to a commercial Dad will jump up and rush to the bathroom. He stops for nothing. We lost my Aunt Mary that way. She made the mistake of being in the restroom when Dad rushed in during a commercial. The results were not pretty and you'll find it on reruns of "America's Most Tragic Home Videos." Now if you'll come along with me into the kitchen ...

This is called a mother. Perhaps you have one yourself. They're common in most families and we call her "The Rock." No matter what explodes, she's the gal who must put the pieces back together. Take a good look at the lines around her eyes. These are not makeup. These are well-earned battle scars of raising three kids with a loving but slightly distracted husband. These were once the hands of a teenage girl. They're now stained with Frankenberry Breakfast Cereal, sterile antiseptic, and Magic Marker. She has a sense of hearing that's being studied by NASA since she has the ability to detect a toddler waking up three blocks away and can tell by her husband's snoring just where he's been that night. We often find special agents sneaking around the backyard in hopes of discovering her secret of indestructibility. They want to make a spy out of her.

If you'll now follow me down the hallway to my little brother's bedroom ... or as we call it, the Area of Mass Destruction. His name is Bobby

although he's registered with the state as just a number. My mother says that he is my parents' natural born child, but as you will observe, there's nothing natural about him unless you put him in the category of earthquakes and plagues. The furnishings in his room may be original, but it's hard to tell since he's managed to destroy nearly everything not made of titanium. Some of our visitors say that Bobby's room reminds them of a garden, but the things that are growing here were never planted. You don't plant mold.

I have here a sock that dates back seven years ... unwashed. It's not that Mom doesn't clean, she just can't find where he's stashed everything. Here's a fascinating specimen ... a cola can with live algae doing a Hip Hop dance on the top of the can. Here's a banana peel that's fossilized. And here ... here, ladies and gentleman, is the little house wrecker himself: Robert Cory Street. "Idiot," for short. Until he was ten years old he thought his name was, "Bobby stop that!" Dad suggested we call him "Quits" instead of "Robert." Dad said he watched him in the hospital nursery and said, "Let's call it quits."

Since Bobby may awaken any moment and spoil any joy you may have on our tour, let's move on. Yes, he does look peaceful when he's sleeping. So does a hedgehog.

If you'll follow me down the hallway I'll show you the room of The Little Princess, my sister Marcy. Please be quiet. Marcy isn't aware that there are any other people in the universe except her. Yes, you're seeing correctly. Everything in the room is indeed pink. She thinks it's the color of royalty. According to Princess Marcy, the entire human race was put on the planet for just one reason ... to serve her. And yes, that is a pink Barbie doll. She used Mom's fingernail polish.

No one is allowed in Princess Marcy's room without her permission, so you'll notice that she's not here today. She's staying overnight with a friend. I'm paying the friend.

Now if you'll all move with me down the hallway ... Yes, you guessed it. This is my room ... simple, plain, rustic ... just what I need to get by ... just what you'd expect for the forgotten child of the family. Of course all the electronic and sound equipment is a necessity. Sit on the bed if you like. They keep me here as sort of a servant to the Princess and a housekeeper for little Bubba the Hedgehog.

Okay, let's move on to the laundry room and back porch and ... What? Mom, I'm leading a tour. I don't have time to put a load in the laundry! ... Bobby! Put that cat down! Bobby, the cat doesn't like that! ... Princess? What are you doing home so early? Look, I can't help it if I made footprints on your pink carpet ... Mom, I'm busy! Bobby, that cat is choking! Dad? (*shaking him*) Dad, come out of it. This is your child speaking! What do I want? I've had enough! (*sitting*) Move over! Come on, Bears!

RODNEY: We are all participants in the art of stereotyping. People stereotype and we put other people in general categories. For example: boys are brave and girls are afraid of ... things. In our next segment, there are girls who decide to do something about the idea that girls are afraid of ... things, like haunted houses. Not all of them are sure they want to break the stereotype but they will be given the opportunity. On this very stage you will see raw courage demonstrated as it has never been seen before ... on this stage. Meet the Sisters in Spirit.

Scene 4: Sisters in Spirit

Characters - Lydia, Jodi, Nadene, Opal, and Paula.

LYDIA: (*entering with Jodi*) I don't like this.

JODI: It was your idea.

LYDIA: We all agreed.

JODI: You insisted. You dared us, Lydia.

LYDIA: It'll be okay ... really. It's just one night. Where's everybody else?

JODI: They're afraid to come in. They're still standing in the yard.

NADENE: (*running in, breathlessly*) I'm scared!

LYDIA: Then why'd you come in?

NADENE: 'Cause it was spooky standing out there in the dark.

LYDIA: Where's everybody else?

NADENE: Outside. They're afraid to come in.

LYDIA: Look, it's just one night. Jo-Ellen dared us to spend just one night in her grandma's old abandoned house. She said we'd be chicken if we didn't do it. It's not going to kill us.

JODI: If my folks find out, I'm dead anyway. We told them we'd be staying at your house tonight.

LYDIA: They'll never know. We'll just go to sleep, then creep back in my bedroom window in the morning.

OPAL: (*running in with Paula*) I wanna go home!

LYDIA: Go ahead.

OPAL: By myself?

LYDIA: Sure. It's midnight, the streets are dark, the wind's howling and I just heard a vampire on the roof. What could possibly stop you?

PAULA: You're no help.

LYDIA: Look ladies, we can do this! It's just an old abandoned house. Jo-Ellen said her grandmother lived here all her life and now the house is just sitting here.

JODI: Is her grandma still here?

LYDIA: She died. When you die you have to move. It's a law. Come on, let's look around.

OPAL: (*grabbing Lydia*) No! Can't we just stand here?

LYDIA: All night? You want to stand right here in this spot all night?

OPAL: This spot is good. I know this spot. I'm standing here. I don't know what's in the other spots.

NADENE: Opal, one spot's just like another spot. We might as well die in the next room as right here.

OPAL: Something just grabbed me.

PAULA: That was you, Opal. You're grabbing yourself.

OPAL: (*looking to see she's wrapped her arms around herself*) Oh.

JODI: They say that when a person dies, the spirit stays in the house.

LYDIA: Where'd you hear that?

JODI: It was in a movie ... a movie where everybody died at the end.

OPAL: (*covering her ears*) Stop talking! Stop talking!

PAULA: Jo-Ellen's grandma was a weird old lady.

NADENE: Really?

PAULA: She said her grandma used to do things like raise chickens and make her own butter.

NADENE: Gross!

PAULA: And she'd go to bed real early ... like ten o'clock ... and she had clocks that you had to wind up to make them go and she didn't even have a microwave!

JODI: Now that's weird. I wonder if her spirit's still around.

LYDIA: Want to try another room? We can't stand in this one place all night. Our feet will get tired.

OPAL: But at least our feet will be alive. I like live feet. I've had them since I was born.

PAULA: Hold it!

NADENE: What?

PAULA: Did you hear that?

NADENE: What? Did I hear what?

PAULA: Then you didn't hear it.

NADENE: I don't know what I didn't hear if I didn't hear it so tell me what I didn't hear! (*the others slowly turn to look at her, then*) ... You know what I mean.

LYDIA: What did you hear?

NADENE: That moan ... sort of a low groan ... a low moaning groan.

OPAL: (*moans*)

NADENE: Like that.

JODI: That was Opal. Opal the low groaning moaner.

OPAL: (*moans again*)

JODI: Stop moaning, Opal. You're scaring Nadene.

PAULA: Let's go.

LYDIA: Where?

PAULA: Anywhere. Just name a place. I'll go there.

NADENE: Opal, would you stop moaning!

OPAL: That wasn't me that time.

PAULA: It wasn't?

OPAL: I'm not even breathing. How could I moan?

NADENE: There it goes again!

JODI: (*moving to the door*) I'm getting out of here. (*stops*) It's stuck. The door's stuck. We're locked in!

NADENE: It's getting closer! (*the girls form a panicked huddle on the floor, desperately clutching each other*)

OPAL: We're gonna die!

LYDIA: Be quiet, Opal!

OPAL: We're gonna die in a big bloody clump on the floor of a strange house with a dead woman.

PAULA: Would somebody gag her?

JODI: What do you think it was?

NADENE: The wind.

JODI: There isn't any wind.

PAULA: The floorboards.

JODI: We're not walking around.

OPAL: (*shouting*) The Monster in the Spooky House with the Dead Woman!

JODI: (*the girls all turn to her, then*) I'm open to any other ideas.

PAULA: We've gotta find another way out.

LYDIA: Go ahead.

PAULA: Me?

LYDIA: It was your idea.

PAULA: (*standing*) What if I don't come back?

LYDIA: Then I get your locker at school. It's closer to the lunchroom.

PAULA: Funny. (*begins to move to another area*) I don't like this.

JODI: What do you see?

PAULA: Nothing. It's dark. Wait!

OPAL: What?

PAULA: It's a bed!

LYDIA: I'll bet they call it the bedroom.

PAULA: There's somebody in the bed.

NADENE: That's not good.

PAULA: They're breathing. (*Opal faints onto Jodi's lap*)

JODI: Oh, great.

PAULA: It's a man ... the moaning we heard ...

LYDIA: Yeah?

PAULA: He's snoring.

NADENE: Oh, great. Jo-Ellen's grandma's ghost turned into a live old man snoring in her bed. This is not how I'd planned to die.

PAULA: Lydia?

LYDIA: Yeah?

PAULA: Does your grandpa wear his St. Louis Cardinals baseball cap to bed?

LYDIA: He never takes it off.

OPAL: (*suddenly waking*) Lydia's grandpa murdered the old lady to get her baseball cap?!!

(*The girls again slowly turn to look at Opal.*)

PAULA: We're in the wrong house.

NADENE: What?

PAULA: We're in Lydia's grandpa's house.

LYDIA: I thought this rug looked familiar. Look, it was dark. All the houses on this block look alike.

JODI: What if he wakes up with us trapped in the house? How are we gonna explain this?

NADENE: Why don't we just get out of here? Wouldn't that be simpler?

PAULA: (*walking to the door*) We can't ... Jodi said the door was ... (*stops, turns the handle*) ... the door is open.

JODI: How'd you do that?

PAULA: I turned the handle. Works every time, Miss Genius.

OPAL: You mean we're not gonna die?

NADENE: Not unless I strangle you, Opal.

PAULA: Come on, soldiers. Let's sneak back to the fort before he wakes up.

OPAL: (*looking off in the direction of the bedroom*) He looks like a nice old man. You think we should say goodbye?

LYDIA: Opal!

OPAL: Just asking.

PAULA: Follow me.

OPAL: (*as the girls hold onto each other and form an exit line*) Did you hear that moaning again?

NADENE: Would somebody gag her?

PAULA: Forward ... march! (*and they shuffle in a line toward the door with small, frightened steps*)

LYDIA: Hey, while we're on the way back to my house I know this neat old house...

THE OTHER GIRLS: Lydia!

LYDIA: But it's got this back door that's usually open and...

THE OTHER GIRLS: Lydia!

LYDIA: ... and my dad said that late at night you can hear ... (*One of the other girls puts her hands around Lydia's busy mouth and drags her out.*)

ESMERALDA: I'm trying to determine if Rodney's introduction of that scene was sexist. Seems that he was implying that girls are, indeed, fraidy-cats. The next scene shows, what did he say?... "raw courage" ... of some boys. Now, make no mistake about it, I'm not going to try what they are going to try. I'll admit that I'm going to pass on this one. Our scene opens on a platform, high above ... high above... everything. Jerry and Sean are the heroes.

Scene 5: Bun-Gee

Characters: Jerry and Sean.

JERRY: (*standing beside a platform ... actually a table*) I can't believe we're finally here.

SEAN: You said you always wanted to do this.

JERRY: Look, I'm having second thoughts.

SEAN: You can't have second thoughts. We've climbed 200 feet up this tower. There's a line of people behind us.

JERRY: Let's go to the mall instead.

SEAN: Jerry, we can't go to the mall. We're about to bungee jump! You said you wanted to do this for your birthday.

JERRY: I still do.

SEAN: Then what's the problem?

JERRY: I think I'd rather do it for my 60th birthday. (*give your age*) _____ is too soon. I want something to look forward to.

SEAN: He's motioning us up to the platform.

JERRY: No, he was just waving.

SEAN: He was not waving, Jerry! We're next in line! Come on!

JERRY: I can't.

SEAN: Why not?

JERRY: I forgot something when I climbed up here.

SEAN: What?

JERRY: I forgot to stay down on the ground. (*Jerry begins to leave, but is grabbed by Sean.*)

SEAN: Hold it! Hold it!

JERRY: Come on, Sean, I changed my mind! I can do that! It's my birthday!

SEAN: Look at that, Jerry ... look at that line of people on the tower. Can you imagine the humiliation of walking back down through those people saying, "Sorry ... I'm sorry. Make way for the chicken?"

JERRY: But I am chicken!

SEAN: (*grabbing Jerry and moving up to stand on the table*) Come on, birthday boy/girl. You'll never forget this.

JERRY: I won't have time to forget it. I'll be dead in five minutes. (*looking down*) Oh my gosh! Don't let me do that again!

SEAN: Do what?

JERRY: Look down! Next time I look down, stop me. (*looks down and screams, then*) You didn't stop me!

SEAN: Then stop looking down!

JERRY: I can't help it! Down is such ... it's such a long ways away. (*looks down again*) I did it again!

SEAN: Would you stop that!

JERRY: The people, Sean! They all look like ants from up here!

SEAN: (*looking down*) Those are ants, Jerry. They're on your shoe.

JERRY: Then I've got to go home!

SEAN: Why?

JERRY: I can't kill a bunch of innocent ants!

SEAN: Just relax ... here comes the harness.

JERRY: They're going to hang me?

SEAN: That's the strap they put around you.

JERRY: I'm being strapped???

SEAN: The straps hold you up, Jerry. The straps keep you safe!

JERRY: (*to an unseen character*) Hey! Watch where you're putting your hands!

SEAN: He's just trying to help, Jerry. Relax.

JERRY: Relax ... six miles above the surface of the earth, breathing the last few breaths of my life, getting ready to plunge into the atmosphere and burn up like a meteorite while the ground keeps getting closer and closer and

SEAN: Jerry!

JERRY: What?

SEAN: It's time to jump.

JERRY: No it's not. It's never time to jump. It can be time to eat and drink and kiss your puppy, but it's never time to jump. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "Thou shalt jump!" Lincoln never said, "Four score and seven years ago we jumped!" Jumping is not a requirement.

SEAN: Then you'll have to be pushed.

JERRY: Touch me and I'll never speak to you again.

SEAN: Look, just ... (*speaking to the unseen character*) ... What are you doing? No...no, I'm not jumping. I just came here with my friend.

JERRY: You no longer have any friends, Sean. You mean you weren't going to jump?

SEAN: Oh, I bungee jump all the time. This is your day.

JERRY: It's a double harness.

SEAN: No way.

JERRY: Way. He's hooking you up.

SEAN: Hold it! Hold it! You can't do this! I've never done this before!

JERRY: You said you'd jumped!

SEAN: I lied! I lied! He can't do this to me!

JERRY: Oh, yes he can.

SEAN: No ... you see, there's a mistake ... I just came to encourage him. He's a little scared.

JERRY: Me? I'm the only one who's scared? Whatever happened to my big, brave friend?

SEAN: (*again to the person hooking him/her up*) Stop that! I'm not jumping! He's/She's jumping! I'm watching!

JERRY: Looks like you get a good view.

SEAN: I can't do this.

JERRY: Why not?

SEAN: I have an appointment.

JERRY: To do what? To live. I've got an appointment to live and now he wants me to die and that would just completely foul up my plan to live. You can't do this to me!!!

SEAN: Together. We're going to die together, Jerry. Isn't that great?

JERRY: I'm not going to die! I'm not going to jump!

SEAN: He's about to push us if we don't jump.

JERRY: (*to the unseen pusher, and going completely manic now*) I'll bite your hand! I swear I'll bite your hand completely off! I have rabies! I mean it! I haven't had my shots and I'm highly infectious! You touch me and I'll bite and then you'll die a slow, painful death.

SEAN: He doesn't believe you.

JERRY: How do you know?

SEAN: He's laughing.

JERRY: He's just terrified of me, that's all.

SEAN: They're all laughing.

JERRY: Then it's mass hysteria. Sean, I can't jump. I'm serious.

SEAN: Why not?

JERRY: I have a phobia ... I've never told you this, but it's serious.

SEAN: What phobia? You're scared of what?

JERRY: Crashing headfirst into the ground at over a hundred miles an hour. That scares me. I've had it ever since I was little.

SEAN: You're nuts.

JERRY: Yes! Yes, that's it! I'm nuts! You can't push an insane person off a tower! There are laws against that!

SEAN: Jerry!

JERRY: I have an alarm in my pocket! It's set to go off if I'm pushed off anything over two miles in the air.

SEAN: I don't see any alarm.

JERRY: It's a small alarm. It's a very small alarm. A mini-alarm.

SEAN: Stop acting stupid. We're stuck. We have no choice.

JERRY: Of course we have a choice! You always have a choice! Dear Jerry, do you want to die? No Jerry, I do not want to die! See? I made a choice!

SEAN: (*looking behind him*) Here he comes.

JERRY: The hand of death on my shoulder!

SEAN: (*screaming*) I don't wanna do this!!

JERRY: I don't either!!! Sean?

SEAN: What?

JERRY: Since we're about to die, I gotta tell you ...

SEAN: What? What?

JERRY: Remember that Snickers Bar in third grade?

SEAN: What are you talking about?

JERRY: You won a Snickers Bar in the spelling bee and you put it in your desk and then you couldn't find it?

SEAN: Yeah?

JERRY: I ate it.

SEAN: What?!!!

JERRY: Those are my last words to you, Sean! I ate your Snickers Bar!

SEAN: You jerk!

JERRY: I was hungry!

SEAN: Jerry!

JERRY: ... and I was a lousy speller!

SEAN: Jerry!

JERRY: I couldn't help myself! I'm sorry! *(to the guy behind him)* Don't push me! I just made my last confession! I don't deserve to die!

SEAN: *(to the guy behind them)* Wait a minute! Wait a minute! I'm not ready! Jerry?

JERRY: Yeah?

SEAN: If I don't make it out of this alive, I want to tell you something!

JERRY: What?

SEAN: You're an idiot!

JERRY: How many times are you gonna tell me that?

SEAN: Let's see ... One ... Two ...

BOTH: No!

SEAN: I'm not counting! I'm not counting!

BOTH: Three!!!!!!! *(and they jump)* *(lights out)*

ESMERALDA: See there. Nothing to it. All you have to do is jump. I know those bungee cords are safe... but so is the sofa in my living room.

RODNEY: Speaking of the living room, there is a bunch of girls who are on solid ground when they decide to host a party ... in the living room, kitchen, dining room ... wherever they can stuff some of their friends.

ESMERALDA: These girls are planners. They have their checklist of all things needed for a splendid house party. They have thought of everything.

RODNEY: With one exception. Let's watch The Party Girls in action.

Scene 6: The Party Girls

Characters - Marcie, Terri , Rickie.

MARCIE: (*entering*) Hurry up! Hurry up! They're gonna be here any minute!

TERRI: (*entering with her arms full of "stuff"*) Where do I put the chips?

MARCIE: Anywhere! Everywhere! It's a party! Put them all around the room! Where's Rickie?

TERRI: Blowing up the balloons. I think she may have passed out.

MARCIE: I love parties! Dad said we could have the whole basement! This is gonna be so awesome! (*the two girls busy themselves decorating as they speak*)

TERRI: You got the music ready?

MARCIE: The best. It's all loaded into the computer. Non-stop music all night long and the video games are all set. I'm not kidding, Terri. This party is going to put us on top at school. I invited everybody in our class and they've been talking about it all week. (*shouting off*) Rickie! Hurry up with the balloons!

TERRI: She can't talk. She ran out of air.

MARCIE: She worries me. I mean, Rickie's so shy. You know what she's like around boys.

TERRI: She's just quiet, that's all. She'll be okay ... if she can still breathe. (*calling off*) Hurry up, Rickie!

MARCIE: You remember Lori's party last spring?

TERRI: The ponies?

MARCIE: Her dad thought he'd throw the best party ever so he rented those ponies. That was ridiculous! Who rents party ponies?

TERRI: It was a good party.

MARCIE: Lori's just a show off. She actually hired a band.

TERRI: They were good.

MARCIE: The ponies didn't agree.

TERRI: Did they ever catch them?

MARCIE: Last I saw they were headed toward Wal-Mart with Lori's dad racing after them in his SUV.

TERRI: Maybe they had some last minute shopping to do. (*calling off*) Rickie! We need those balloons!

MARCIE: Where is that girl? (*Rickie enters ... dazed ... a bit off balance*) What's the matter with you?

RICKIE: I ran out of air. All my breath is gone. I think I deflated myself.

MARCIE: Where'd you put the balloons?

RICKIE: Laundry room ... couldn't carry them ... too heavy.

TERRI: (*guiding her to a chair*) Sit down, girl. Suck in some oxygen.

RICKIE: Is the room moving?

MARCIE: The balloons were too heavy?

RICKIE: Why is the floor floating?

TERRI: I think she hyper-vaccinated.

RICKIE: Are those my feet?

MARCIE: You take care of Super Woman. I'll get the balloons. *(She exits.)*

TERRI: You gonna be okay?

RICKIE: I think so. Is the party still on?

TERRI: Of course. Look Rickie, I know that crowds make you nervous, but Marcie's our friend and she's making a really big deal out of this. She thinks that throwing the biggest party is going to make her popular, so just play along with it, okay?

RICKIE: Are the boys gonna be here?

TERRI: Girls, boys ... yeah. Both kinds of people.

RICKIE: Will I have to talk to them?

TERRI: Show them how to blow up balloons.

MARCIE: *(barging in with the imaginary balloons in her hands)* Here comes Miss Balloon! Come on, we've got to start hanging them.

RICKIE: *(tries to stand, then catches herself)* Whoa.

TERRI: Just sit down, Rickie. We'll hang the balloons while you make friends with the air. *(Terri and Marcie hang balloons as they speak.)*

MARCIE: Hurry up! Hurry up! We've only got a few minutes and I want this to be the best party our class has ever seen. Did you see this? A real-live chocolate fountain!

RICKIE: *(staring at it)* Then it's supposed to be moving?

MARCIE: Chocolate fountains move, Rickie.

RICKIE: Good. I thought a candy bar was coming at me.

MARCIE: And look at this! An ice cream mountain!

TERRI: You sure you should have put it out so early? What if it melts?

MARCIE: I timed it. I bought one last week and timed it so it'll just start getting soft when the kids arrive. I've thought of everything. Let's just see Lori Henry top this party!

TERRI: Don't worry about beating Lori. Let's just have a good time.

MARCIE: Wait'll I see her face. She'll just die of envy.

RICKIE: Would you not talk about dying? I think my nose just floated away.

TERRI: Your nose is still there, kid. Just take deep breaths.

MARCIE: I guess I should tell you guys about my surprise.

TERRI: What surprise?

MARCIE: The magician. I talked Dad into hiring a real live magician. He's got rabbits and doves and everything.

TERRI: You're kidding?

RICKIE: Do the rabbits bite?

MARCIE: He's setting up in the back room right now. This is gonna be the party of the year! *(as she pops a balloon)* Oh! Sorry! Popped the balloon.

RICKIE: Heart attack! I'm having a heart attack!

TERRI: Breathe, Rickie. Hey, that's awesome, Marcie! I'll bet it cost your dad a ton!

MARCIE: He said it's my Christmas present. Somebody's at the door! They're here! Quick! Get ready! Rickie, stand up and hold onto something! This is gonna blow them away! (*runs out*)

RICKIE: (*standing*) What if a boy says something to me?

TERRI: Answer him. Just talk. It's easy. Open your mouth and let sounds come out.

RICKIE: Ahhhhhh ...

TERRI: Wrong sound, Rickie.

MARCIE: (*running in*) It was the UPS man. The nerve of him showing up right now when I'm having a party!

TERRI: Ask him in. Maybe he likes chocolate.

RICKIE: What if the rabbit bites?

MARCIE: (*rushing around*) Okay ... balloons ... the music ... the chocolate and chips and video and ice cream ...

TERRI: It's starting to melt.

RICKIE: (*sinking into her chair again*) Me, too.

MARCIE: Come on, ladies! Work with me on this! The greatest party this town has ever seen! Monday morning I'm gonna be queen of the school and Lori Henry will be begging to sit with me at lunch!

TERRI: That's what all this is about?

MARCIE: Well, I mean, you know ... it's about you guys, too. (*looks at an imaginary clock on the wall*) It's time ... it's five after time. They should be here.

TERRI: Your chocolate is starting to clog.

MARCIE: What's the deal? Nobody wants to be late for a party this great!

TERRI: Mount Ice Cream is starting to melt ...

MARCIE: This is ridiculous.

TERRI: Maybe it's just erupting.

MARCIE: Where are they?

RICKIE: Killer bunnies. The killer bunnies caused it all.

MARCIE: Would you stop that?

TERRI: The Chocolate River's overflowing into the Ice Cream Mountain.

MARCIE: What's keeping everybody?

TERRI: ... and it's flowing into the chip dip. Should I build a dam out of Fritos?

RICKIE: I had a dream like this once ...

MARCIE: Rickie!

RICKIE: I gave a party and nobody came and then these bunnies got loose all over the ice cream and ...

MARCIE: Rickie! Chill, girl! I'll bet they're all waiting outside so they can come in together. You know how spastic kids can get!

TERRI: (*looks at her a long moment, then*) Yes, we do.

RICKIE: Can we go home now?

MARCIE: What's the deal? (*grabbing something off a table*) It says right here ... "Marcie's Party of the year ... starts at 6 p.m. sharp ... Saturday night at her house." What could be plainer than that?

TERRI: When?

MARCIE: Six p.m.!

TERRI: I mean what night?

MARCIE: "Saturday night at ..." (*she stops, a long pause, then*) Oh, no.

TERRI: What day is this, Marcie?

MARCIE: Oh, no.

TERRI: I'll give you a hint. It follows Thursday.

RICKIE: That would be Friday.

MARCIE: Oh, no.

TERRI: How many times are you gonna say that?

MARCIE: What?

TERRI: "Oh, no."

MARCIE: Oh, no. I'm dead.

TERRI: Marcie...

MARCIE: My life is over. My ice cream mountain is melting, my chocolate fountain is making little tributaries in the chip dip, the Frito dam has busted and I've got a high priced magician waiting in the next room.

RICKIE: ... with killer bunnies.

MARCIE: With killer bunnies. I'll be the laughing stock at school. I can't show my face again.

TERRI: They won't know! Nobody has to know you didn't read your own invitation, Marcie! Look, we'll freeze up the ice cream, we'll sift the chocolate out of the chip dip, we'll dry out the Fritos and we'll make up some story to tell your dad why he paid for a magician that had to take his bunnies home. It's simple.

MARCIE: Simple.

RICKIE: I like it. Let's go home.

MARCIE: Oh just forget it. None of this stuff will last until tomorrow. (*a long pause as she sits*) I just want to be somebody. I just want to be important for once.

TERRI: (*looks at her a moment, goes to behind her, puts her hands on Marcie's shoulders*) I wonder what's going on next door?

MARCIE: Next door?

TERRI: That big building with all the lights on.

MARCIE: Oh that. It's a retirement center. Old people.

RICKIE: I like old people. My grandma's an old people.

TERRI: I wonder what they're doing tonight.

MARCIE: Same thing they always do ... sit around watching T.V. until they fall asleep.

TERRI: I wonder how they'd like a party.

MARCIE: Not many parties over there.

TERRI: Do you ever get too old to eat ice cream?

RICKIE: Huh?

TERRI: Do you ever get too old to dip strawberries into chocolate waterfalls?

MARCIE: I don't get it.

TERRI: You reckon there's a little lady or a little old man next door who's ever eaten a dam made out of Fritos?

RICKIE: Or seen a bunny appear out of a hat?

MARCIE: But my dad ...

TERRI: I know your dad, Marcie. Your dad would be proud of you. And you know what? I'd be proud of you. You want to be somebody important, then let's be the biggest surprise your neighbors have ever had!

MARCIE: But that's crazy. ... They don't even know we're coming ...

RICKIE: Then it's a surprise party! Let's do it!

TERRI: (*beginning to gather things up in her arms*) Get a move on, ladies! We're about to throw the best party that retirement home has ever had!

MARCIE: This is so weird!

TERRI: You're a teenage girl! You're supposed to be weird! It's a part of your job description! Now move it, Marcie!!!

RICKIE: (*shouting*) Hold it! (*the other two stop in their tracks at this outburst*) This is such a good idea ... I mean it's crazy and I have no idea what we're doing and it may be the worst mistake we ever made but ...

TERRI: But what!?

RICKIE: I'll even carry the killer bunnies! Let's go, girls!

ALL: Let's go girls!

ESMERALDA: Ahhh ... doesn't it warm your heart to see teenage girls take their music and potato chips out to help others. Such a nice group of girls. The next entry in our parade of hits has to do with one of the girls you see out in front of the band during a parade ... a baton twirler. No, don't worry about the noise. We're not bringing a marching band on stage, just the majorette. Maybe you have been to the football stadium or seen the display on TV at night when they light the batons on fire and throw them around. Is that dangerous? Only if you are the one with the fire-sticks ... or if you happened to be near the person with the fire-batons. Anyway ... our next story is about a girl who has taken her baton talent off the field and uses it on the traveling circuit. So much for the confusing introduction, let's hear the story from Honey ... and her Mama.

Scene 7: Fire Me Up, Mama

Characters: Honey, Mama

HONEY: (*entering*) I can't find it, Mama.

MAMA: (*offstage*) It's got to be there somewhere, Honey. Look under the fire batons.

HONEY: The fire batons are in the trunk, Mama. I think we left it at home.

MAMA: (*entering*) That's impossible. I never forget your tiara when we're going to a beauty pageant.

HONEY: Mama, do we have to keep doing this? I never win one of these things.

MAMA: Never win a beauty pageant? Have you forgotten 3rd runner-up in Miss Soy Bean of Iowa City?

HONEY: There were only four contestants, Mama.

MAMA: And what about Miss Congeniality at the Porky Days celebration? You won, darlin'! You are a winner if I ever saw one.

HONEY: It's the talent competition that always gets me, Mama. Why don't we skip the fire batons this time?

MAMA: The fire batons are your biggest asset, Honey! No other girl in the competition will be twirling fire batons lit with two gallons of Zippo lighter fluid! What on earth do you have against your fire batons?

HONEY: I keep setting things on fire, Mama.

MAMA: Oh that little incident in Peoria? Honey, those were cheap drapes and it wasn't your fault they weren't fire proofed. It was a real show stopper!

HONEY: It didn't just stop the show, Mama, it cancelled the show. They had to close down the Holiday Inn for three days. It was embarrassing.

MAMA: Honey, everybody's got to be known for something and you, Miss Fire Baton. When you start twirling those flames the judges' eyes just light up! I tell you, they absolutely light up! That lady judge in Kansas City said she'd never seen anything like it in her life.

HONEY: Are you sure that's what she said?

MAMA: It was a little hard to understand her behind all those bandages, but she surely appreciated us visiting her in the hospital.

HONEY: I heard her talking but I don't think that's what she said.

MAMA: What'd she say then?

HONEY: I'm not allowed to use that kind of language.

MAMA: (*searching the room*) Honey, that tiara has got to be here somewhere. I know I packed it.

HONEY: Mama, we've been on the road for almost seven months now. Can we go home if I don't win this one?

MAMA: Honey! Do I detect a bit of doubt comin' out of your mouth? Could it be that my darling daughter thinks she's a loser?

HONEY: No, I just want to go home sometime. I miss my friends.

MAMA: It's got to be here somewhere. (*seeing what she's looking for*) Aha! I found it!

HONEY: (*looking at the tiara*) Mama, do I have to wear that?

MAMA: You always wear a jeweled tiara in these contests. (*putting it on her head*) Gorgeous! Honey, you are just gorgeous!

HONEY: It's too heavy, Mama.

MAMA: You've worn that in every contest.

HONEY: But not since you added the sparklers.

MAMA: Oh, but it'll be worth it, Honey! As soon as you light your fire batons, I'll set fire to those Fourth of July sparklers and you'll look like the Statue of Liberty coming out onstage!

HONEY: The Statue of Liberty doesn't have her head on fire, Mama. Remember what happened at the Indiana State Fair?

MAMA: I no longer use that brand of hair spray on you, dear. Besides, I put the fire out as soon as you went up in flames ... and it fit the music perfectly.

HONEY: I know. As soon as we got to "... bombs bursting in air" my head exploded.

MAMA: You didn't get a scratch!

HONEY: It blew me against the back wall, right on top of Miss Fort Wayne!

MAMA: She was nice about it.

HONEY: I crushed her dancing poodle, Mama. The dog had to perform, "Way Back Home in Indiana" with a limp!

MAMA: That dog was a trouper. I'll give him that.

HONEY: Oh Mama, I'm just getting too old for this. I'm tired of queen contests.

MAMA: You're tired ... you're just a bit worn out, Honey. Just take a little nap and you'll come to your senses.

HONEY: Nap? The contest starts in ten minutes.

MAMA: A short nap, then.

HONEY: One more. Just this one more then we'll call it quits, okay?

MAMA: Honey! I have beauty pageants lined up for you for the next two years!

HONEY: I can't!

MAMA: What?

HONEY: I can't smile that long, Mama! It makes my face hurt!

MAMA: Nonsense! Are you wearing your Vaseline?

HONEY: Mama, you make me put the Vaseline on my teeth so my lips don't stick to my molars, but my jaws hurt! You ever smile for two solid hours?

MAMA: Honey, I do smile for two hours when my little darling is onstage!

HONEY: Then try it while you're twirling fire batons. It's not fun, Mama. It's just no fun any more.

MAMA: (*hugging her*) I remember the day you were born, darlin'. You were the prettiest baby in the hospital nursery.

HONEY: I was the only baby in the hospital nursery.

MAMA: The doctor said, "Oh, what a beautiful baby!"

HONEY: He said that about every baby.

MAMA: Your daddy thought you were adorable!

HONEY: You told him over the phone. He couldn't see me. Mama, just one more, okay? We can cancel all the rest of the pageants. I just want to be a normal girl again.

MAMA: Normal? You want to be normal? Who wants to be normal when you can be ... well ... spectacular! Extraordinary!

HONEY: (*a pause, then*) Me. Let me try normal for just a week or two and if I don't like it then I go back to spectacular, okay?

MAMA: We can talk about this later. They're starting the opening music. Now remember, when they line up the girls make sure you're on the front row.

HONEY: Mama!

MAMA: Front row, child.

HONEY: We line up alphabetically.

MAMA: I know. I changed your last name to Abernathy for this pageant.

HONEY: Abernathy!!

MAMA: Angela Abernathy. I didn't want to take any chances with your first name in case there was a real Abernathy in the contest.

HONEY: Angela Abernathy???? That's ridiculous!

MAMA: And tonight you're from Alabama. I'm not taking any chances.

HONEY: Oh good grief. Where in Alabama?

MAMA: Altoona.

HONEY: Mama!

MAMA: Now hold still while I get your tiara straight. And remember, when they announce your talent competition, run over to the side of the stage and I'll be there with my charcoal lighter to fire up your tiara.

HONEY: Mama, please!

MAMA: And smile, Honey! Last week you frowned like you were in pain.

HONEY: I was in pain! I dropped hot kerosene on my toe!

MAMA: I swear, you complain about the tiniest things.

HONEY: Flaming tap shoes are not tiny, Mama! I stomped for five minutes trying to put them out.

MAMA: And the judges gave you third place in the talent division. They said it was the fastest tapping they'd seen all night. Honey, I'm just doing this to make you happy.

HONEY: Look at this face, Mama. This is not happy. Do you see any happy wrinkles? These are tired wrinkles, Mama. These are fed-up-with-the-whole-thing wrinkles.

MAMA: You're right. You need more makeup.

HONEY: Mama!

MAMA: Honey, ever since you were a little girl, I wanted you to become something great...something better and more spectacular than all the other little girls. I wanted my little princess to become a queen!

HONEY: (*a long pause, then*) Mama, I know you love me. You really do. And I know you just want me to be happy. And I promise to go out there and do my best tonight if you'll just tell me that this will be the last one.

MAMA: But Honey ...

HONEY: Mama!

MAMA: Yes?

HONEY: Promise me?

MAMA: I promise.

HONEY: Are your fingers crossed behind your back?

MAMA: Yes.

HONEY: Mama.

MAMA: Okay ... okay ... just one more. But make this the best, Honey! I want you to go out there and knock those judges off their feet!

HONEY: We did that in Ohio when you put in too much kerosene.

MAMA: I've been a pushy, irritating, bossy Mama, haven't I?

HONEY: (*a pause, then*) Yes.

MAMA: You're supposed to disagree.

HONEY: I can't. You're making good sense.

MAMA: Don't go.

HONEY: What?

MAMA: Don't go. I've been silly. I'm ruining your life, Honey. I've been a selfish, controlling old battle-ax.

HONEY: Well ... you have been silly at times.

MAMA: Take off the gown.

HONEY: Mama.

MAMA: I mean it. All this time you've felt this way but you didn't want to hurt my feelings.

HONEY: I still don't, Mama.

MAMA: Then take it off. The pageant's over. (*a pause then*) Let's go home. Let's go home and just be ... normal. (*Honey says nothing for a long moment, then*) Honey?

HONEY: In spite of being an over-bearing, gung-ho, totally ridiculous mother ... I think I really love you, Mama.

MAMA: (*a pause, then*) I think you just won this contest. Let's go home. (*Honey begins to put on her costume.*) What are you doing?

HONEY: One more ... for you, Mama.

MAMA: But you just said ...

HONEY: You drive me crazy and you're kinda out of your mind, but I love you, Mama. Just one more ... this one's for you.

MAMA: Honey ...

HONEY: Fire me up, Mama!

RODNEY: Now, there is a story that is hard to believe ... a stage mother pushing her daughter to be a star. Glad that never happens in real life!

ESMERALDA: My mother pushed me to be a star ... to be an actress. And I made it! Look here I am, tonight!

RODNEY: Well, she must not have pushed you too hard. Let's push on with the show. Esmeralda, let me ask you a question. Have you understood this play so far? I mean, do you find the episodes believable?

ESMERALDA: Sure. Fear of heights. Girls planning a party. A pushy stage mother. Very believable. Very understandable.

RODNEY: The next two segments are going to test the audience. First, the scene coming-up is about a cast that doesn't understand the plot of the melodrama they are playing ... but they don't understand what a melodrama is, either. Let's watch the filming of A Very Mellow Drama.

Scene 8: A Very Mellow Drama

Characters: Cindy, Leroy, Harry, Mark

MARK: (*entering with the others*) Okay everybody, let's shoot this thing. Are we ready?

CINDY: I still don't understand this script.

MARK: It's melodrama, Cindy ... old time theatre. You know ... a villain, a hero, a poor helpless girl.

CINDY: I'm not helpless.

MARK: It doesn't matter. You're an actress. It's melodrama!

HARRY: I assume I'm the hero?

MARK: Yeah, Harry, you're always the hero. That's in your contract. Harry must always be the hero.

HARRY: I mean ... I'm an obvious choice, right?

CINDY: You're kidding me. I could whip you in a minute.

MARK: Could we all just get along? Leroy, you're the villain ... the bad guy.

LEROY: Will I get hurt? I hate getting hurt. You know I bruise easily.

MARK: You won't get hurt, Leroy. It's all acting. Okay, you've all got your lines. The camera's ready. Let's get at it ... scene one. Places! (*They take their places.*) Poor Little Nell's cabin in the hills. Action!

CINDY: (*overly dramatic*) Oh, woe is me! Woe is me! (*aside*) That's the dumbest line I've ever said.

MARK: Cut! Cindy, that's the way they talked in melodrama. Come on. Just do the lines.

CINDY: This is ridiculous. (*in character*) Woe is me! My dear daddy cannot pay the rent and now the evil banker, Simon Sneerliver, has come to foreclose on our house! Oh whatever shall I do?

LEROY: (*entering, sneering*) Nyah, nyah, nyah! Aha! Poor helpless Nell is left alone! (*to Nell*) You must pay the rent!

CINDY: Oh, I cannot pay the rent!

LEROY: You must pay the rent!

CINDY: I cannot pay the rent! (*aside*) Of course I can pay the rent. I have a debit card.

MARK: Cut! Stick to the script! Action!

CINDY: Oh, woe is me! Whatever shall I do?

LEROY: Little Nell! Do you love your dear old daddy who's in the next room and can't get out of his bed?

CINDY: Oh, yes! I love my daddy!

LEROY: Would you do anything to save his farm?

CINDY: Anything! Anything!

LEROY: Then marry me! Simon Sneerliver! And I shall tear up this mortgage!

CINDY: Marry you? Oh, how horrible!

LEROY: (*aside*) Does she have to say that? I mean, I'm not that bad!

MARK: Cut! Do the lines, Leroy!

LEROY: My mother loves me. She told me so.

MARK: The lines!

LEROY: Then you will break your dear daddy's heart! Nyah, nyah, nyah!

CINDY: Oh, is there no hero who will save me? (*nothing ... a long pause*) I said, "Is there no hero who will save me?"

MARK: That's your cue, Harry.

HARRY: I was checking my hair.

MARK: Get in there!

HARRY: (*jumping into the scene*) I shall save you! I shall save you!

LEROY: Egads! It's Theodore Trueblood! The hero!

HARRY: (*aside*) How's the hair?

LEROY: (*aside*) It looks just fine.

HARRY: (*aside*) Thanks.

MARK: Stick to the script!

CINDY: Oh! My hero! You have come to save me! (*aside*) I can't believe I'm saying this. I can whip both of these guys.

MARK: Just say the lines!

LEROY: I'll come back tomorrow! You'd better have the money! (*He exits.*)

HARRY: Never fear, Little Nell. Theodore Trueblood will save you.

CINDY: How?

HARRY: The script doesn't say.

MARK: Stop that!

HARRY: I shall deliver you from the dastardly paws of Simon Sneerliver! Never fear! I must go!

CINDY: Please do. (*He exits.*) Poor little me! Poor, poor, poor little me! The villain says he will take my farm! I must tell Daddy! (*goes to the door and looks in*) There's nobody here. Someone has stolen Daddy!

MARK: It's the prop room. We couldn't afford a Daddy.

CINDY: Then I shall knit and sew and keep my dainty hands unsoiled, hoping and praying that my hero will save me! (*aside*) I think I'm going to get sick. This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever done.

MARK: Cut! Cut! Look Cindy, it's just a play.

CINDY: It's a dumb, sexist play.

MARK: And you're being paid to do it.

CINDY: Oh.

MARK: The final scene! At the railroad tracks! Action!

LEROY: (*dashing in*) Aha! Little Nell left all alone! Here is my chance! Nyah, nyah, nyah!

CINDY: That is the dumbest laugh I've ever heard in my life. Are you choking on something?

MARK: Cindy!

CINDY: Sorry. Oh whatever shall I do? All is lost! Lost! Lost!

MARK: One more.

CINDY: Lost!

LEROY: I shall tie you to the railroad tracks! Your hero cannot save you now! Agree to marry me or the train shall splatter you all over the county! (*grabs her*)

CINDY: Oh, yuck.

LEROY: Come along, my pretty! (*puts her on the ground and mimes tying her down*) (*singing*) I can hear the train a-comin'! It's comin' 'round the bend!

CINDY: Oh, spare me!

LEROY: Not unless you marry me!

CINDY: I mean the singing!

MARK: Stop that!

LEROY: Hark! The train approaches! This is your last chance, my pretty!

HARRY: (*jumping into the scene*) Oh dastardly villain! Unhand that girl!

LEROY: Nyah, nyah, nyah! I shall have her as my bride or she shall die!

HARRY: Not while Theodore Trueblood is here!

CINDY: Hello? Can somebody hear me? I'm about to die.

LEROY: You can never win, Trueblood!

HARRY: You're a fiend, Sneerliver!

CINDY: And I'm a goner when that train gets here!

HARRY: (*giving him a broad, fake punch*) Take that!

LEROY: (*recovering from the punch*) Ouch! That hurt! Take that! (*He punches Harry.*)

HARRY: (*taking the hit*) Ooof!

CINDY: You mind if I interrupt?

MARK: Cindy!

HARRY: Oh, thou most wicked of villains! My wrath is coming!

LEROY: My evil is coming!

CINDY: The train is coming!

LEROY: Take that! (*brushes his hand against Harry's hair*)

HARRY: My hair! You've mussed my hair!

CINDY: Oh, good grief! (*pulling herself loose from the railroad ties*)
Ooooooph! (*standing while the two other actors continue to square off*)

HARRY: (*as Cindy continues to rise and untie herself*) A comb! Quick!
Does anyone have a comb?

MARK: That's not in the script, Harry!

LEROY: Now look what you've done! You chipped my fingernail!

MARK: Cut! Cut!

CINDY: (*now standing and completely untied, putting Harry and Leroy*
in a double headlock, one head under each arm) The train's coming, boys!
Wanna see it up close?!

LEROY & HARRY: No!

CINDY: (*still holding them helpless*) Here's the deal, partners! Poor,
helpless Little Nell is gonna take out a short-term second mortgage. She's
gonna open up a new strip mall, start her own savings and loan, and then buy
out both of you! Wanna see the train?

LEROY & HARRY: No!!!

CINDY: Then Little Nell's gonna put you both into group therapy and
give you a little dose of reality training on what women are capable of! You
got that?

LEROY & HARRY: Huh?

CINDY: Wanna see the train?

LEROY & HARRY: We got that! We got that!

MARK: Start the cameras! Roll 'em! Roll 'em!

CINDY: (*flips both boys around to where she's grabbing them by the*
front of their collars) And poor Little Nell doesn't care whether you like it or
not because it's a whole new world, Bubba! (*tosses them both to the floor in*
front of her and they look up at her, at her mercy) Because this gal's gettin'
tired of being pushed around by a couple of insensitive wimps who don't know
that all men and women are created equal! You got that?

LEROY & HARRY: We got that! We got that!

CINDY: Now you might want to move a bit because you're layin' right
on the train tracks!

(*With much screaming and shouting, Leroy and Harry leave the area.*)

CINDY: (*to Mark*) Gee, I hope I didn't change the script too much.

MARK: Uh ... well ...

CINDY: (*approaching Mark threateningly*) Because if I did I guess I
could do it all again ...

MARK: (*backing away from her*) No ... no, that'll be fine.

CINDY: You know, I really like this melodrama stuff ... overacting and
everything. Let's do some more ...

MARK: (*running away*) Cut! Cut! Cut it quick! (*and Cindy turns to the*
audience and smiles)

ESMERALDA: I recognize that problems. In rehearsals, I've had the distinct impression that the actors don't understand this show. But, like our melodrama cast we will forge ahead anyway.

RODNEY: That's the spirit! We'll do one more and then take a 15 minute rest. During this time we will poll the actors to see if they want to go on with Act Two.

ESMERALDA: Ever hear of "The Theatre of the Absurd?" Or, perhaps your life is absurd and this will seem normal to you. This story-telling device places a character in situations that don't make any logical sense.

RODNEY: I had a math class like that.

ESMERALDA: Haven't we all. In these situations our hero is befuddled and never gets a clear explanation, or maybe he will ... this time. All aboard for The Next Stop.

Scene 9: Next Stop

Characters - Wilson, Mack, and Ford.

Mack is sitting in one of the seats on a train, reading his paper.

WILSON: *(rushing in and plopping down in the seat beside Mack)*
Whew! Made it!

MACK: Nearly missed the train?

WILSON: Yeah. Got off work late.

MACK: Last train of the night.

WILSON: I know. Glad I made it.

MACK: Going home?

WILSON: Yep. You?

MACK: Done for the day.

FORD: *(the conductor, entering)* Evening everybody. Tickets?

MACK: Sure. *(hands Ford a ticket as does Wilson)*

FORD: Glad you made it. Saw you running through the station.

WILSON: Thanks.

FORD: Gonna be a nice night.

WILSON: Hope so.

FORD: Next stop Pleasant Corners.

WILSON: That's me.

MACK: Servin' coffee tonight, Sean?

FORD: It'll be here in just a minute. Evenin'. *(Ford exits)*

MACK: Nice touch ... serving coffee on the evening trains.

WILSON: Yeah. Great idea. Boy I'm tired. Long day. Can't wait to get home and stretch out.

MACK: My dogs always miss me when I'm away all week. Hope that coffee comes soon. I can hardly stay awake.

WILSON: Go ahead and take a nap. I'll wake you up when it comes around.

MACK: Thanks. I appreciate that. (*and he closes his eyes and stretches out a bit*)

FORD: (*entering*) Next stop ... Biggsville.

WILSON: What?

FORD: Biggsville.

WILSON: We just left Biggsville.

FORD: Sorry, Mister. We just left Hoopstown.

WILSON: But I got on in Biggsville.

FORD: Had a long day?

WILSON: Yes, but ...

FORD: Happens all the time. Where you goin'?

WILSON: Pleasant Corners.

FORD: That'll be the stop after Biggsville. Just keep your seat when the train stops.

MACK: (*waking*) They serving coffee tonight, Sean?

FORD: It'll be here in just a minute. Tickets?

MACK: Sure. (*hands Ford his ticket*)

WILSON: I just gave you my ticket.

FORD: Uh ... sorry. This is the first time I've been through this car.

WILSON: That's crazy.

FORD: Yeah, a crazy life. Ticket? (*Wilson hands him his ticket, Ford looks at it, then*) Gonna be a nice night. Evening.

WILSON: (*as Mack closes his eyes again*) I've been working too hard. This is nuts.

MACK: Nice service.

WILSON: What's that?

MACK: Serving coffee on the night trains.

WILSON: Even your dogs wouldn't believe what just happened.

MACK: What dogs?

WILSON: Your dogs at home.

MACK: I don't own a dog. I'm allergic. Wanna wake me up when we get to Pleasant Corners? (*and he nods off*)

WILSON: Maybe it was something I ate. The fumes from the train. I'll get off at the next stop and get some air and everything will be ...

FORD: (*entering*) Next stop ... Biggsville.

WILSON: What?!

FORD: Biggsville Station. Tickets?

WILSON: You just said that the last stop was Biggsville!

FORD: Last stop was Hoopstown. Biggsville then Pleasant Corners. Got your tickets, folks?

WILSON: (*nudging Mack*) He wants your ticket again.

MACK: (*waking and searching for his ticket*) I put it here somewhere.

WILSON: You put it in your front pocket.

MACK: (*looking in his front pocket*) I don't know how you'd know that. I haven't had it out since I got on the train. (*finds it in his pants pocket and offers it to Ford*) Here you go.

WILSON: How'd you do that?

FORD: (*to Wilson*) Ticket?

WILSON: I just gave it to you.

FORD: (*exchanges a brief and concerned look with Mack*) You okay, Mister?

WILSON: Of course I'm okay! I've given you my ticket twice!

FORD: Well then let's just play a little game. Give it to me a third time. (*winking at Mack*) That's a good fella. Now just sit back and take it easy. We're about to pull into Pleasant Corners. You getting off there?

WILSON: Yes.

FORD: Good.

MACK: They serving coffee tonight, Sean?

FORD: It'll be right here.

WILSON: I'll bet it won't.

FORD: Gonna be a nice night. (*he exits*)

WILSON: That guy is crazy!

MACK: You want me to move to another seat? You seem to be a little ... you know ...

WILSON: Crazy?

MACK: Oh no. You're a nice guy. You're a really nice guy.

WILSON: Don't talk to me like that! You act like I'm losing my mind.

MACK: Hey Mister, I think you're fine. Really. You want me to get you a pillow? Maybe some coffee?

WILSON: You're as crazy as the conductor. No wonder you're allergic to dogs.

MACK: Allergic to dogs? I own a kennel! Over 40 show dogs at my house right now. In fact, I just came from a dog show in Biggsville.

WILSON: Biggsville! Aha! So we just left Biggsville!

MACK: Where'd you think we just left?

FORD: (*entering*) Next stop ... Biggsville.

WILSON: No!!!

MACK: (*indicating Wilson*) He's ... a little tired. Just needs some rest.

FORD: (*to Wilson*) You getting off here, Mister?

WILSON: I just got on here!

MACK: (*he and Ford exchange a very worried glance, then*) Here's my ticket.

WILSON: You got that out of your left pocket. You put your ticket in your right pocket now you just got it out of your left pocket.

MACK: Sure ... sure fella. Wanna give him your ticket?

WILSON: He's got it memorized by now. (*hands Ford his ticket*)

FORD: Should I call for ...

MACK: No ... no, he'll be okay. (*to Wilson*) Where you going?

WILSON: Crazy.

MACK: Huh?

WILSON: Pleasant Corners ... not that it'll do any good.

MACK: *(to Ford)* They serving coffee on the train tonight?

FORD: It'll be around any minute.

WILSON: No it won't.

FORD: Huh?

WILSON: *(collapsing back into his seat)* Never mind.

FORD: Gonna be a nice night. *(as he looks warily at Mack and Mack nods that it'll be okay)* *(Ford exits)*

WILSON: *(wearily)* I just want to get home.

MACK: Where's home?

WILSON: Pleasant Corners.

MACK: Then you won't have long to wait. It's the next stop.

WILSON: No it's not.

MACK: Huh?

WILSON: It's not the next stop or the next stop or the next stop. Pleasant Corners will never happen. I wish I had one of your puppies to hug.

MACK: How'd you know?

WILSON: Know what?

MACK: That I sold Hush Puppies at the beach? Oh, I'll bet you can still smell the grease on me.

WILSON: I mean dogs.

MACK: Never owned a dog. They eat too much. Wish they'd bring that coffee around.

WILSON: They won't.

MACK: How do you know?

WILSON: They will never come with the coffee, believe me. Believe me? What am I saying? How could anybody possible believe me?

FORD: *(entering)* Next stop ...

WILSON: Biggsville.

FORD: *(a long pause as both he and Mack look at Wilson, then at each other, then)* No. Pleasant Corners.

WILSON: That's impossible. We haven't been to Biggsville yet. We just left Hoopstown.

FORD: Last stop was Biggsville. This'll be Pleasant Corners coming up.

WILSON: I don't believe you.

FORD: *(another long pause, then)* Well ... you can do as you like, but this train is about to pull into Pleasant Corners. *(to Mack)* Did you get your coffee?

WILSON: No.

MACK: Yes.

WILSON: What?

MACK: Great service to have coffee on the night trains.

FORD: How are those dogs doing?

WILSON: He doesn't have any dogs.

MACK: They're great.

WILSON: What?

FORD: Been a long day.

MACK: Sure has.

WILSON: (*slapping his own hands*) They're real ...

FORD: What are you doing?

WILSON: (*slaps his legs, feet, and face*) I'm alive. I can feel that. I'm real.

FORD: (*gently putting his hands on Wilson, trying to calm him*) Just hold on, Mister. We'll be stopping in just a minute.

WILSON: (*becoming more violent ... twitching ... wide-eyed ... shaking himself*) This is a seat! I'm sitting on a seat ... on a seat on a train ... on a seat on a train on a track on the ground..

MACK: (*joining Ford in trying to hold onto Wilson as he thrashes about*) Hey! Hey! Easy, fella! Take it easy, there!

WILSON: You have dogs but you don't have dogs because you make wieners on the beach at the dog show but there's no coffee ... there's never going to be any coffee!

FORD: (*shouting offstage*) I need some help in here!

WILSON: What's the next stop?

FORD: Pleasant Corners!

WILSON: No it's not!

FORD: Whatever you say. Just take it easy, Mister.

WILSON: (*standing and shouting*) This train will never get to Pleasant Corners! It goes to Biggsville, then Biggsville and then it stops in Biggsville! It left Hoopstown but we're not going back there anymore! We're going in circles and circles and circles! If you want to go to Pleasant Corners you'll have to jump off! (*moving to the exit*) And don't forget to take your dogs! They like coffee! Don't worry. It'll be around in just a minute! (*he jumps off*)

FORD: (*a long pause as both of them look in the direction of Wilson's exit*) Nice night.

MACK: Yep.

FORD: Want coffee?

MACK: Sure.

FORD: It'll be around in a minute.

MACK: Thanks. (*Ford exits and Mack goes back to reading his paper*) (*Theatre lights come up for intermission.*)

ACT TWO

ESMERALDA: (*enters with Rodney who stands back a couple of steps*) You know what they say: “When the going gets tough, the tough step up.”

RODNEY: Is that what they say? That doesn’t sound right.

ESMERALDA: That’s close enough. Step up here so I can talk to you.

RODNEY: You can talk to me right here. I can hear every word.

ESMERALDA: Hey! Pretend like you’re tough and step up here. Don’t be afraid. If the audience didn’t turn on you in the first act, there’s a good chance we can get through this one, also. You can’t go through your whole life being afraid of out-of-control audiences. (*to audience*) Sit back and relax ... please ... and let’s have a glimpse of Life. Brought to you by Mark and Luke.

RODNEY: Where are Matthew and John?

ESMERALDA: I wish you hadn’t said that. It just makes it harder getting into this scene ...

Scene 1: Life

Characters – Mark, Luke

MARK: This is a play about life!

LUKE: About life!

MARK: Love!

LUKE: Love!

MARK: Living!

LUKE: Living!

MARK: Sorrow, heartbreak, rejection, elevation, anxiety, euphoria, fear, circumnavigation, arthritis and finally ... peace!

LUKE: Peace!

MARK: Scene one!

LUKE: We begin!

MARK: We begin!

LUKE: Life! Is ... what? Think about it! Think about it! The essence

...

MARK: The gist...

LUKE: The kernel, the crux, the lifeblood ...

MARK & LUKE: The quintessence!

LUKE: Oooo ... nice word.

MARK: Quintessence!

LUKE: Yes!

MARK: Quintessence!

LUKE: Enough.

MARK: What? What do we find when we strip away ...

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