

THE ONLY THING BETWEEN ME AND TOTAL AWESOMENESS

By Alan Haehnel

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THE ONLY THING BETWEEN ME AND TOTAL AWESOMENESS

A Full Length Ensemble Comedy

By Alan Haehnel

SYNOPSIS: The characters in this high-energy comedy run out at the play's opening to proclaim that they are so talented, so committed, so totally awesome that they are going to take the world by storm! Except for a few small problems. Like needing to get a license, or having a fear of germs, or being stuck in a dead-end relationship. So each of the 16 characters – with the help of many memorable friends, relatives and even a ketchup packet – reveals what stands in his or her way. No matter the problem, everyone ends with the boundless hope that, when they have overcome the obstacle, awesomeness will prevail!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(10-27 females, 6-12 males, 0-35 either; gender flexible, doubling possible)

CENTRAL ENSEMBLE:

MEG (f).....	Working to do 50 pushups in a row. <i>(21 lines)</i>
PEARL (f).....	Needing decent sleep. <i>(40 lines)</i>
BEN (m).....	Struggling against procrastination. <i>(48 lines)</i>
JAKE (m).....	Trying to get over his germophobia. <i>(27 lines)</i>
ALLISON (f).....	Pursuing the perfect strawberry-rhubarb pie. <i>(39 lines)</i>
RUBY (f).....	Trying to discover what stands between herself and total awesomeness. <i>(60 lines)</i>
JACK (m).....	Needing anger management. <i>(55 lines)</i>
GRACE (f).....	Wanting her driver's license. <i>(48 lines)</i>

CATHERINE (f).....	Needing the ultimate prank to play on Maggie Plimpton. (27 lines)
ABBY (f)	Wanting to understand math. (26 lines)
ANN (f).....	Searching for her diary. (36 lines)
NOAH (m)	Needing a job. (24 lines)
SAM (m)	Aching to tell Janice how much he loves her. (18 lines)
SOPHIE (f).....	Looking for a way to break up with her boyfriend. (36 lines)
ELLA (f)	Needing the perfect dress. (17 lines)
JON (m)	Having to clean his room. (36 lines)
SECONDARY ENSEMBLE:	
EXAMINER (m/f)	Driver's test administrator. (35 lines)
JANICE (f).....	Sam's only desire in the world. (2 lines)
ROBBIE (m)	Sophie's boyfriend. (4 lines)
MAGGIE PLIMPTON (f).....	Catherine's rival in pranking. (8 lines)
PEARL'S MOTHER (f).....	Mother to Pearl. (6 lines)
MR. HANSON (m).....	Very proper 8th-grade English teacher. (16 lines)
SYSTEMS (m/f)	Hoping to help Ben actually overcome his procrastination and launch a project. (23 lines)
TOWER (m/f).....	Hoping to help Ben actually overcome his procrastination and launch a project. (23 lines)
CONTROL (m/f)	Hoping to help Ben actually overcome his procrastination and launch a project. (28 lines)

BEN'S MOTHER (f)	Who will ground Ben if he keeps procrastinating. (11 lines)
STEWART (m).....	Sophie's grandfather. (2 lines)
EDITH (f).....	Sophie's grandmother. (3 lines)
JACK'S COUNSELOR (m/f)	Working to help Jack manage his anger. (10 lines)
JACK'S SISTER (f).....	(5 lines)
MS. HOPKINS (f)	Abby's very patient math teacher. (13 lines)

ALLISON'S FAMILY:

ALLISON'S MOTHER (f)	(6 lines)
ALLISON'S GRANDMOTHER (f)	(6 lines)
ALLISON'S 1ST AUNT (f)	(4 lines)
ALLISON'S 2ND AUNT (f)	(5 lines)
ALLISON'S 3RD AUNT (f)	(6 lines)
ALLISON'S 4TH AUNT (f).....	(4 lines)

NOAH'S FAMILY:

NOAH'S FATHER (m)	(6 lines)
NOAH'S MOTHER (f).....	(1 line)
NOAH'S LITTLE SISTER (f).....	(1 line)
NOAH'S MATERNAL GRANDPA (m)	(1 line)
NOAH'S MATERNAL GRANDMA (f).....	(1 line)
NOAH'S PATERNAL GRANDPA (m).....	(1 line)
NOAH'S PATERNAL GRANDMA (f).....	(1 line)

GERMS: Creeping and predatory germs.

GERM 1 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 2 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 3 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 4 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 5 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 6 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 7 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 8 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 9 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 10 (m/f).....	(1 line)
GERM 11 (m/f).....	(1 line)

SLEEP: A group of people with helpful suggestions for Pearl.

SLEEP 1 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SLEEP 2 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SLEEP 3 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SLEEP 4 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SLEEP 5 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SLEEP 6 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SLEEP 7 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SLEEP 8 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SLEEP 9 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SLEEP 10 (m/f).....	(1 line)

BREAKUP: People who find Sophie and Robbie to be a cute couple.

BREAKUP 1 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
BREAKUP 2 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
BREAKUP 3 (m/f).....	(2 lines)
BREAKUP 4 (m/f).....	(1 line)
BREAKUP 5 (m/f).....	(2 lines)

DIARY: People involved in Ann's diary-finding endeavor.

DIARY 1 (m/f).....	(8 lines)
DIARY 2 (m/f).....	(13 lines)
DIARY 3 (m/f).....	(11 lines)
DIARY 4 (m/f).....	(2 lines)

DURATION: 90 minutes.

SET: Bare Stage with 17 Chairs.

PROPS

- Clipboard
- Diary
- Pencils
- Ketchup Packets

AUTHORS NOTE

I have designed this play to be--first and foremost and utmost--versatile. The set can be, as I have indicated, just a few chairs that various actors move around to suit the various scenes, or it can be an elaborate configuration of platforms. Or the chairs can even be dispensed with to make this a highly-transportable show.

The biggest challenge will be in deciding how to cast the play, in deciding how many actors you require. I see two major possibilities in this regard, though I'm sure more exist. First, cast your central group of 16 actors who stay on stage throughout the show, then have a secondary ensemble who goes on and off stage to don and doff various costume pieces appropriate for the roles they are playing. Second, have your central group of 16 play all of the characters. This might necessitate having a box of costume pieces onstage or even doing something as obvious as having actors hang signs around their necks when switching characters--whatever will help the audience keep track of who is whom and when.

ACT ONE

AT RISE: CENTRAL ENSEMBLE CAST come running out onto the stage enthusiastic. The stage is bare except for a few scattered chairs that the players use to help enact their scenes.

MEG: Let me tell you...

PEARL: I just have to tell you...

BEN: Do you have any idea?

JAKE: I don't think you have any idea.

ALLISON: You have no idea.

RUBY: No one has any idea!

JACK: The things I could do!

GRACE: The inventions in my brain!

CATHERINE: The places I'll go!

ABBY: The people I will influence!

ANN: The heights!

NOAH: The money!

SAM: The ideas!

SOPHIE: The awards!

ELLA: The accomplishments!

NOAH: The money!

JON: You have absolutely no clue.

MEG: I mean, it's going to be...

JAKE: I am going to be...

SOPHIE: Huge!

RUBY: Dazzling!

CATHERINE: Amazing!

SAM: Cuter than cuteness beyond computing!

ELLA: A+++!

JACK: Mindblowing!

GRACE: It's going to be...

ABBY: I am going to be...

PEARL: On top of the world!

BEN: Famous!

ALLISON: Renowned!

ANN: On everybody's lips!

JON: Supercalifragilisticexpi...

NOAH: Rich! Rich, rich, rich!

ELLA: Completely....

PEARL: Absolutely...

ABBY: Indubitably...

SAM: Indescribably...

RUBY: Totally...

BEN: Totally...

MEG: Tot-a-lly...

ALL: *(Strike a pose of triumph while shouting this great declaration of assured success.)* Awesome!!

ALL freeze for a long moment. ELLA breaks from the freeze and comes downstage. ALL other CENTRAL ENSEMBLE sit and listen attentively.

ELLA: As soon as I find my dress for the spring formal. I know, I know, you're already making assumptions about me, how vain and materialistic I am. You want to ask me, "Is your last name Kardashian" [or current celebrity]? I get it. But look, clothes speak. They're symbols with meaning. They tell the world who we are and what we're about, and they remind us, the wearers, of those things, too. It just so happens that I'm going to the spring formal by myself, and not because no one has asked me. Three guys have, and the answers, in order of asking, were no, heck no and never in a thousand years, you freak. I'm going alone because I want to go alone, and my dress has to say a lot of things. It has to say I'm independent but not arrogant, that I'm happy with who I am even though I'm not always 100% certain who that is, that I am aware of fashion but not a slave to it, that I am aware of sexuality but not a slave to it, that what others believe about me is less important than what I believe about me, that I have a soft side that balances out my hard side, that my hard side can be soft on Monday but hard again on Tuesday and then soft again on Thursday and on Wednesday you just have to take your best guess, that my need for belonging does not trump my need for expressing, and that, most of all, I have a heart of gold buried in a mile of dirt. So that's a lot

for a dress to say, wouldn't you say? Plus it can't be itchy, and it has to cost less than 48 dollars and 55 cents. I have not yet found my dress. Last week, I came very close with a teal number at the Salvation Army store. When I put it on and looked in the mirror, it was telling me and the world everything I wanted it to. Accept it was saying it in what I can only describe as a South Texas accent. So, back on the rack it went along with the approximately 200 others dresses I have tried on. I am not giving up. My dress is out there. That combination of cloth, form and cut, once slipped upon this body, will converse with the world in a way never yet heard. And when I find it, and when I appear in it at the spring formal, when I sashay through that door to that dance, I will be stupendously, tremendously...

ALL: Awesome!

GRACE comes forward and ELLA sits. This is the convention throughout the play.

GRACE: As soon as I get my license.

EXAMINER enters, carrying a clipboard.

GRACE: Hi! Again.

EXAMINER: Oh, no.

GRACE: Third time's the charm!

EXAMINER: No, it wasn't.

GRACE: Hm?

EXAMINER: This is your fourth time.

GRACE: I was never good at math.

EXAMINER: Get in the car, please.

GRACE and EXAMINER pantomime getting into a car. They're actually sitting on two chairs.

GRACE: At least I don't feel nervous. I'm very comfortable with you now. Like we're old friends, right?

EXAMINER: I prefer friends who use their blinkers and don't almost run over old women on crosswalks.

GRACE: She was practically wearing camouflage. She blended right into the road, you have to admit.

EXAMINER: You have to drive.

GRACE: Click with the seatbelt. Adjust with the mirror. No to the radio. Unless you...

EXAMINER: No to the radio.

GRACE: No distractions.

EXAMINER: Correct.

GRACE: Away we go.

EXAMINER: Let's get that license this time.

GRACE: I'm glad you're in my corner. (*Pantomimes turning the wheel.*)

EXAMINER: Watch the...watch the curb!

GRACE and EXAMINER pantomime bumping over the curb.

GRACE: Oopsie.

EXAMINER: If you want me to stay in your corner, you have to take those corners wider. Take the next left up here.

GRACE: Oh, I know. We followed the same route the last two...

EXAMINER: Three.

GRACE: Three times. I've got it practically memorized.

EXAMINER: I hope you didn't memorize your mistakes.

GRACE: Of course not.

EXAMINER: Like not putting on your turn signal before turning.

GRACE: Did I just not do that?

EXAMINER: You just not did that.

GRACE: Dang!

EXAMINER: Don't get excited. Do not get excited. Please. Excitement leads to inatten...stop!

GRACE pantomimes slamming on the brakes. GRACE and EXAMINER both lurch forward, then back.

GRACE: I saw it. I saw the ball. I saw the child. I saw the child following the ball. (*Pantomimes leaning out the window.*) Nice ball, kid! Don't run after it next time. You could die!

EXAMINER: And how soon were you going to react to the ball and the child?

GRACE: At the exact same time you screamed "stop!" Should I go now?

EXAMINER: I did not scream. Yes, go.

GRACE: Sounded like a scream. Did you plan that, by the way? I mean, that was such a classic thing--the little kid and the ball. It was almost like a cliché, you know?

EXAMINER: Yes, I pay little children to risk their lives in front of novice drivers. Take this right.

GRACE: That blinker thing was so annoying. When are they going to come up with cars that just read your mind, huh? Or driverless cars--I mean, they're getting close. Are computers going to have to get driver's licenses? Are you going to be testing computers?

EXAMINER: Pull over.

GRACE: What?

EXAMINER: Pull over.

GRACE: Are we doing the parallel parking thingy?

EXAMINER: No. Put the car in park.

GRACE: Okay.

EXAMINER: That's neutral. Put it in park.

GRACE: Got it. Maybe I was trying to park neutrally, right?

EXAMINER: Look at me.

GRACE: Hello.

EXAMINER: I asked you to pull over so I could look you in the eye and tell you we are done.

GRACE: I passed?

EXAMINER: No. You failed. For the 4th time. You just rolled through a stop sign.

GRACE: I did? (*Looks over her shoulder.*) When did that get put up?

EXAMINER: About three decades ago. I am going to write down my schedule. These are the days I work. These are the days I administer driving tests.

GRACE: Oh, that's nice! I'll be sure to...

EXAMINER: When you call to schedule your next appointment, make sure it is on a day when I am not working.

GRACE: But we're like buddies now.

EXAMINER: I think you're too comfortable with me.

GRACE: Hey, I'm job security.

EXAMINER: No, actually, you're not. That's why I'm giving you my schedule because if I have to drive with you again, there is a very high likelihood that I will quit. My family will be destitute. We will eat Ramen noodles and dust if I have to do this with you again.

GRACE: You're funny.

EXAMINER: I'm serious.

GRACE: Okay.

EXAMINER: Carefully, very carefully, take us back.

GRACE: I'll do a three-point turn out of here. You'll like it.

EXAMINER: I don't care.

GRACE: You know, someday I'm going to get my license.

EXAMINER: I'm hoping the driverless car will arrive first.

GRACE: And when I do, you know what I'm going to be?

EXAMINER: 48 years old.

GRACE: No! I'm going to be...

ALL: (*Except EXAMINER stand and power pose.*) Awesome!

SAM: As soon as I confess my undying love for Janice Whately. This has to be done. Has to be. Until it is, the universe will not be complete. Until I have found the right way and the right moment and the right opportunity to let Janice Whately know that my heart has but one purpose, and that is to beat for her, to pound out one eternal cadence of complete and unwavering devotion to her and her alone—(*Like a heartbeat.*) Jan-ice, Jan-ice, Jan-ice, Jan-ice--until what I hold as a sacred secret is shared with her, the universe remains a broken place. Yea, verily, the sun and its sister stars may shine; the orbits may proceed along their prescribed paths; comets may streak; asteroids scatter; vast expanses of nothingness roar with the silence of their emptiness; but harken onto this, ye mere mortals! Some enormous black hole expands out there, its ominous pull increasing by the moment, its inexorable, dark gravity swallowing rock and flame and every promise of light. It grows! It grows! This black hole grows and will swallow us all until I can come

face to face with this celestial being named Janice Whately and tell her...

JANICE: Hey, I heard you wanted to talk to me.

SAM: Uh, yeah, uh...cool shoes. They're the same color as my dog.

JANICE: Ok.

SAM: Ok.

JANICE exits.

SAM: One day she shall know! And when the sun sets on that momentous day, when that black hole has been vanquished and has ceased to suck, I will be, at last...

ALL: Awesome!

JAKE: As soon as I get over my fear of germs.

ALL hunch down like predators, watching JAKE.

JAKE: I mean, most of the time I'm okay. I don't obsess over the fact that...

GERM 1: Ew!

GERM 2: Ick!

JAKE: That I'm...

GERM 3: Ach!

GERM 4: Blaaah!

GERM 5: Yuck, yuck!

JAKE: That I'm totally surrounded by invisible creatures just waiting to pounce on my vulnerable immune system!

ALL jump towards JAKE, with a loud "germy" shout. JAKE screams. ALL freeze. JAKE looks around at them, frightened for a second. He then breaks the tension with a nervous laugh. ALL unfreeze, laughing with him and relaxing, no longer germs.

JAKE: Yeah. I'm generally fine. But at certain times of the year, you know, I'll be sitting in a class, taking a test.

ALL except JAKE line up in rows, as if in a classroom.

JAKE: I'll be trying to concentrate on, you know, sonnets or the causes of the American Revolution or the elements of the periodic table, but all around me, the sounds will start.

JAKE sits, as if trying to work on a test. Someone coughs. JAKE jumps. He goes back to trying to concentrate, when someone else coughs, twice this time. JAKE reacts again, looking around suspiciously.

JAKE: People talk about being sick. They cough.

Three more coughs, from different people.

JAKE: They sniff.

Sniffs from several sources.

JAKE: They say something's going around.

There is a chorus of coughing, sniffing and throat-clearing for several seconds.

JAKE: "Something's going around." They say it casually, easily, as if it's no big deal that something's going around. I know what's going around all right.

As JAKE begins his description of what's going around, the fellow students eye him, then lean in, then rise, becoming more and more menacing.

JAKE: Bugs are going around. Germs are lurking everywhere. Microbes are hiding in wait! Assassins! Air-borne killers that want to invade my body and tear down my very cells!

The group looks like it's going to attack, then freeze at JAKE'S next word.

JAKE: Wait! Do you know what happens when someone sneezes?

Someone lets loose a particularly loud and violent sneeze. ALL start to spin around in slow motion, looking vaguely like a tornado as JAKE narrates.

JAKE: The force of the wind coming from the person's mouth can be over 100 miles an hour! The spray from the sneeze can spread out over a territory as far as 30 feet! 30 feet at 100 miles per hour, launching a deluge of germ-ridden mucus carrying any number of noxious and dangerous viruses including...

GERM 6: Rhinopharyngitis!

GERM 7: Parainfluenza!

GERM 8: Metapneumovirus!

JAKE: That could lead to...

GERM 9: Bronchitis!

GERM 10: Pneumonia!

GERM 11: Flu!

JAKE: And death!

GERMS stop twirling and spinning and fall to the floor.

JAKE: So please sneeze into your elbows.

GERMS quickly rise and spasmodically sneeze into their elbows, then falls back to the floor.

JAKE: Thank-you. But even then, with everyone practicing proper hygiene, with frequent use of anti-microbial soap in spray bottles which I have stationed in my backpack, my locker, my bedroom and in at least two locations of every classroom, the germs still find a way.

GERMS begin to creep toward JAKE slowly.

JAKE: They crawl. They creep. They seep. They lurk slither, fly, descend, surround and infiltrate, no matter what I do!

GERMS converge on JAKE with sickly sounds, and he disappears beneath them for several seconds. The scene looks like a zombie take-over. We hear JAKE yell from beneath the throng.

JAKE: But one day!

GERMS part and JAKE pops up confidently.

JAKE: One day--through diet, exercise and a Nobel-prize-winning medical discovery--I know I will vanquish every bug, virus, germ and beastie, thus making me indisputably and oh-so-healthily...

ALL: Awesome!

ABBY: You know what's going to happen some day to celebrate just how cool we are? Some day, one of those old-fashioned airplanes is going to fly over the town and sky-write the letters A-W-E-S-U-M in honor of us! Yay!

SOPHIE: And then another plane is going to have to come by and somehow suck the "U" out of the sky and replace it with an "O" and then buzz over to add an "E" at the end just so we won't be known as the bunch who *is* the word but can't *spell* the word. Yay!

ABBY: I've never been good at spelling.

SOPHIE: Maybe you shouldn't take up sky-writing.

ABBY: But do you think they got the idea?

SOPHIE: I'm sure they got the idea.

ABBY: Written across the sky...

SOPHIE: Emblazoned upon the great blue expanse...

ABBY: We are...

ALL: Awesome!

PEARL: I just need to get a good night's sleep. Some people are afraid of sleep. They worry about nightmares or about not getting enough accomplished. "I'll sleep when I'm dead," said Warren Zevon, as if sleep is something to be avoided; as if it gets in the way of life. Yeah, some people apparently don't like sleep, so I suppose, for them, insomnia wouldn't be a big deal because it would be keeping them away from something they want to be kept away from. I am not in that class of some people. I like sleep. I actually adore it. If sleep were a dessert, it would be an extremely gooey hot fudge sundae with marshmallow, caramel and peanut butter sauce which I would eat in one sitting even if it meant jogging a marathon to burn it off. I want sleep in my life, please! I don't know what I've done to offend it, why it insists on staying away from me. We used to be such good friends, sleep and I. We'd hang out together all the time. We didn't need an excuse. We didn't need perfect conditions. My mother has a picture of me asleep on the back of a goat. A goat! A goat has a bony spine and coarse hair and can often smell disgusting, but sleep and I just curled up together and had a wonderful time. Oh, people have suggestions. When they hear I haven't been sleeping, they come out with all sorts of ideas, and I try them all.

SLEEP 1: I like a glass of warm milk before bedtime.

PEARL: Yeah. It got too hot and burned my tongue which kept me awake.

SLEEP 2: Turn off your computer!

PEARL: Uh-huh. Only trouble is, I read about eliminating screens while I was on my computer, so the irony made my head spin until 3:00 in the morning.

SLEEP 3: Try the scent of lavender.

PEARL: Turns out I'm allergic to the scent of lavender. I sneezed from 11:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., virtually without a break.

SLEEP 4: Try the scent of vanilla.

PEARL: While laying in bed sniffing vanilla, a memory came to me about a girl who left a vanilla candle burning unattended. It caught the curtains on fire and eventually burned down her house. Everyone got out, but a cat died in the flames and I love cats, so I cried and cried but did not snooze.

SLEEP 5: Try the scent of jasmine.

PEARL: I didn't even light the jasmine-scented candle before I thought of Jasmine from the Disney movie Aladdin, and then I stayed up all night writing furious letters about how the media stereotypes women.

SLEEP 6: Try the scent of...

PEARL: No more scents. Scents make no sense. I am done with them.

SLEEP 7: I know this may sound silly, but find one of your favorite stuffed animals from when you were a young child. Reunite with this stuffy, and you will reunite with your sleep.

PEARL: Actually, nothing sounded silly after the lavender debacle, so I went ahead and asked my mother where all of my old stuffed animals went. And she said...

PEARL'S MOTHER: Uh, well.

PEARL: Because, Mom, you know I've been having a hard time sleeping. Someone told me if I reunited with my favorite stuffy, I could reunite with sleep. I'd like to try it.

PEARL'S MOTHER: Yeah, about that...

PEARL: Remember that penguin I had? I loved that penguin. What did you do with my penguin?

PEARL'S MOTHER: Your penguin is with all of your other stuffed animals.

PEARL: Cool. And where is that?

PEARL'S MOTHER: In the landfill.

PEARL: What? You brought my stuffies to the dump? I thought they were something you'd cherish for ever and ever because they reminded you so much of me when I was your darling little angel child.

PEARL'S MOTHER: Pretty much, kind of...no. I wanted more room in your closet.

PEARL: How could you?

PEARL'S MOTHER: With a trash bag and my bare hands.

PEARL: Wow. So then I couldn't sleep because I was contemplating the fact that the woman who gave birth to me was the cruelest specimen of motherhood nature ever produced.

SLEEP 8: Try a new mattress!

PEARL: Try giving me 800 bucks.

SLEEP 9: Try a new pillow!

PEARL: I'm on pillow #14: Superpedic, goose-down infused, spine-conforming and satiny soft. My head slips off it all night.

SLEEP 10: Try the soothing sounds of the ocean!

PEARL: That makes me get up to pee every half hour.

SLEEP 1: Try making your room colder!

PEARL: Shivered myself awake.

SLEEP 2: Try making your room hotter!

PEARL: Sweated myself awake.

SLEEP 3: Try...

PEARL: I have.

SLEEP 4: Try...

PEARL: Did that.

SLEEP 5: Try...

PEARL: Still sleepless in Seattle and in every other major city. I will not give up, though. I am completely confident that one night, when the moon is in the right phase, when I have put together just the right recipe of blanket weight, bed height, meditation and even medication, I will drift off into 8 or more hours of uninterrupted, blissful, chocolate-covered sleep. And when I awake, I shall be alert, refreshed, and 100%...

ALL: Awesome!

ANN: I just need to find my diary. I know, cute, right? Diaries are like, this throwback to the past, women in hoop skirts and lace, sitting under a tree. I mean, who even keeps a diary nowadays? I do. It is my repository for my fondest dreams and my deepest secrets. And I have to find it. Before I lost it yesterday, I was completely...

ALL: Awesome!

ANN: (*Searching.*) But now I'm not. Now I am anxious. Stressed. Terrified! What if somebody found it? The thing is, I've looked everywhere, but while I've been looking, I have had to pretend that I'm not looking.

DIARY 1: (*Enters.*) What are you doing?

ANN: Uh, nothing.

DIARY 1: You look like you're looking for something.

ANN: I'm not.

DIARY 1: Then why are you picking things up and bobbing your head around and looking so worried?

ANN: Because I am...practicing for a time when I do lose something. You have to be ready for these things.

DIARY 1: Right. What did you lose?

ANN: Nothing. Actually, that's not true. I lied to you, and therefore I lost my...soul.

DIARY 1: Your soul?

ANN: Yes. My soul. My everlasting soul. I misplaced it somewhere. Have you seen it?

DIARY 1: You're not funny. What did you lose?

ANN: My sense of humor. That's why I'm not funny.

DIARY 1: Very funny.

ANN: Oops, guess I found it again. Ha, ha.

DIARY 1: You're being too weird. If you want help looking for what you lost, let me know. *(Exits.)*

ANN: You see why I can't ask for help? Because if I admit that I lost my diary, two bad things will happen. One, people will say things like...

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3 enter.

DIARY 2: You have a diary?

DIARY 3: I didn't know you kept a diary.

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3: Am I in it?

ANN: And then I'll have to admit that I do have a diary, which I don't really want to do, and also I'll be faced with the moral dilemma of whether to lie, because, depending on who asks...

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3: Am I in it?

ANN: ...the actual answer and the inevitable follow-up...

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3: What did you write about me?

ANN: ...could be highly uncomfortable. And that's just problem one. Problem two, once I have admitted that I have a diary and I am looking for it, people will volunteer to help.

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3: We'll help you find it! *(DIARY 2 and DIARY 3 exit.)*

ANN: Which I also do not want. Because, again depending upon who has asked and who is now looking and what I have written, or not, about them, if they do happen to find my diary and I am not in the immediate vicinity when they have found it, they will be faced with a moral dilemma.

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3 enter. DIARY 3 is holding a diary.

DIARY 2: What's that?

DIARY 3: Ann's diary. I found it for her.

DIARY 2: That's great! Where was it?

DIARY 3: Buried under an avalanche.

DIARY 2: So...you're going to bring it back to her, huh?

DIARY 3: Yup.

DIARY 2: So...do you suppose you're in it?

DIARY 3: Maybe.

DIARY 2: Do you suppose I'm in it?

DIARY 3: Also maybe.

DIARY 2: Do you suppose, before you brought it back, we might...

ANN: Please bear in mind that these finders of my diary might be such people as my mother, my father, my brother, my ex-boyfriend, my current boyfriend, girlfriends from various eras, both ex- and current, all of whom would find the contents of my diary, depending on the individual, embarrassing, infuriating, shameful, lustful, hurtful and, in many cases, fodder for extreme blackmail.

DIARY 2: Do you suppose, before you brought it back, we might...

ANN: And, to be frank, given what I know about human nature and curiosity, the likelihood that anyone who knows me would be able to return my diary to me without at least casually leafing through it to look for information about themselves or at least a few juicy tidbits--of which there is no shortage thereof--is virtually nil.

DIARY 2: Do you suppose, before you brought it back, we might...read it?

Pause.

DIARY 3: Yeah!

DIARY 2 and DIARY 3 exit.

ANN: So you see, I am on my own, looking for my diary, hoping desperately to find my diary...

DIARY 4: *(Enters.)* What are you looking for?

ANN: Nothing. Except love in all the wrong places.

DIARY 4: So weird. *(Exits.)*

ANN: All the time trying not to appear to be desperately looking for it. I have faith, though. I will find my beloved diary, and when I do, the entry I write about losing it and the diarist herself, me, will be...

ALL: Awesome!

JON: Except all I have to do is...

MEG: Yes?

JON: Let me try that again. The only thing I have to do to achieve complete awesomeness is...

PEARL: What's the matter?

JON: To be totally honest, I am too embarrassed to continue. I don't think I can do this.

SAM: Hey, come on, we're with you.

GRACE: Absolutely. Whatever you have to admit, we will not look down on you for it.

JON: What if I admitted that I needed to stop stealing housecats and selling them for their pelts?

RUBY: You steal housecats?

JON: No! But some of you would definitely look down on me if I did, right?

RUBY: I would. Stay away from my kitties!

NOAH: Dude, I know you. I know you're not even close to being a housecat stealer and pelt seller, so go ahead and own up. What are you afraid of?

JON: I'm afraid of being so cliché that you'll all roll your eyes and wonder why I even bothered.

CATHERINE: Look, we promise we won't look down on you; we promise we will keep our eyes straight ahead. They will not roll. You can trust us.

JON: Okay, here goes.

CATHERINE: Third time's a charm. Let 'er rip!

JON: The only thing between me and total awesomeness is...that I have to clean my room!

ALL consciously stare straight ahead for a long moment.

CATHERINE: There, you see? You got it out, and no eyes rolled.

BEN: (*Whispering to JAKE.*) I have to admit, mine really wanted to. Clean his room?

JON: I heard that! You see, what did I tell you?

CATHERINE: Ben! We were trying to make a safe space for him!

BEN: I'm sorry! I wasn't looking down on him. I was looking a little sideways at him. And man, did my eyes want to roll!

CATHERINE: Ben!

JAKE: He's right! How much more cliché can you get?

RUBY: At least he's not stealing cats!

BEN: At least that would be a little bit exciting!

JON: At least I'm still standing right here, you know? I haven't yet disappeared through the floor, even though I want to.

MEG: Look, look, why don't you go ahead and tell us all a bit more about your issue, and maybe we can tease out some parts of your story that are interesting?

JON: In other words, in its present state, my reason for not being awesome is really boring.

MEG: In its present state...yeah. But let's see what we can do.

JON: So. My room is a mess. I mean, my tolerance level for disorder is certainly higher than, say, my mother's or my sister's, but even I have to admit it: My room is wreck.

MEG: And why is it a wreck? Did you, maybe, have an interesting accident, for instance, that kept you from cleaning it?

JON: No. I was just lazy. I mean, if something was supposed to go in a drawer, I just put it on the floor. Hanging stuff up is a real drag. Do you know how long it takes to hang a shirt, especially if you're going to button the top button so the thing actually stays hung? I mean, I just didn't have time for that. And I don't really see the point of making my bed when I'm just going to get in it again at night. Never mind dusting and vacuuming. I mean, please. I have watched people do those things, and it looks a lot like some sort of work.

MEG: Now, let me get this straight--your room is a mess because you're just too lazy to pick it up.

JON: Yes.

BEN: Oy.

JON: See? Not only did he roll his eyes; he said "oy"!

ELLA: Is there anything special about the mess in your room?

JON: Special?

ELLA: Yeah, like, do you collect starfish? Maybe you've let your starfish collection get way out of hand and your whole room looks like a beach at low tide? That would be interesting.

JON: I do not collect starfish.

ELLA: Do you collect anything?

JON: Comments from my father about how I need to clean my room, but they don't make the place look like a beach at low tide.

ELLA: Well, maybe...

JON: Okay, forget it! I knew what I had to say was lame, but you encouraged me to say it anyway, so I did, and guess what? It was lame! Totally uninteresting! So be it. At least nobody else will have to worry about saying something that will have people walking out of here commenting about how, for the most part, this was an interesting presentation, but what about that one thing, huh? Wasn't that just plain boring and cliché and unimaginative? I get that prize, hands down, right?

RUBY: Are you sure you don't have any homicidal feelings about cats?

JON: I have three cats. I love them as individuals, and I love felines as a general category. Your cats are safe.

RUBY: Good. I don't mind boring, but I will never forgive a cat-hater.

JON: Fabulous. So once I clean my room, I will be...

ALL: Awesome!

JON: And I will make sure that whatever gets in my way in the future will be interesting.

ALL: Awesome!

CATHERINE: Just as soon as I pull the ultimate prank on Maggie Plimpton.

MAGGIE: (*Enters.*) Dream on, Girlfriend.

CATHERINE: We have been pranking each other for about five years now.

MAGGIE: Six, actually. I pulled off the first prank on April Fool's Day, 4th grade. I tied her shoelaces together, and she fell right into Jonathan Pruitt's lap.

CATHERINE: And I came back on the very same day by gluing together the pages of her poetry project. Both fairly lame as pranks go, but a beginning, the start to a friendly...

MAGGIE: For the most part.

CATHERINE: Six-year war between us.

MAGGIE: Which I am currently winning.

CATHERINE: I admit it. She is currently one prank up on me, but that is only a temporary victory. Maggie should enjoy it while she can.

MAGGIE: Oh, I'm enjoying it all right. I am definitely enjoying the memory of you opening your locker and having two dozen water balloons come falling out. Every one of them broke. You got a little soggy, I think.

CATHERINE: That was a cute moment, I have to admit. But nothing compared to the time I used those fake text messages to get you to go out to the lake and kayak a mile to the island in the middle of the night so you could go to a party that didn't exist.

MAGGIE: Or when I got up to read your notes for the final oral project in American History, only instead of your notes you had a piece of paper saying, "Ain't it fun, getting punked?"

CATHERINE: Or when I had the guys pick up your car and put it in the middle of the football field?

MAGGIE: Or when the police came to your house to ask about the eight stolen lawn flamingos that somehow landed on your roof?

CATHERINE: Good times, good memories. But one of these days, I am going to punk Maggie so bad that she is going to know, absolutely, that she is outclassed and simply does not stand a chance. She will surrender.

MAGGIE: Like I said before, Dream on! (*Exits.*)

CATHERINE: My next prank is highly classified, so I won't give you the specifics in case you're ever interrogated. Let's just say it involves two major celebrities, a famous haunted house in town, and three gallons of Grade A maple syrup. The result will be epic. When I'm done with this prank, Maggie will be so sticky, so scared, and so completely embarrassed, and I, on the other hand, will be so...

ALL: Awesome!

ANN: You know how you're listening to the radio and this weird sound comes on, this really ugly warning noise, followed by an announcement?

JACK: (*Makes the "waning noise" sound.*) This is a test of the Emergency Alert System.

ANN: Yeah, that's the one. Well, through this whole thing we've been doing up here, every time we say the word "awesome" or "awesomeness," I get this warning in the back of my head.

GRACE: You, too?

SAM: I know just what you mean.

GRACE: Did you have him?

SAM: Yup--8th grade English.

JAKE: I think we all did.

ANN: So you know what I'm talking about, right?

Members of the group nod their heads and ad lib agreement.

ALL: Mr. Hanson!

MR. HANSON: (*Enters.*) Aaaaa-hemmmm!

ALL: Uh-oh.

MR. HANSON: Did I just hear the word "awesome" uttered in my classroom? I believe you, Ms. Jones, were the perpetrator of the utterance, were you not?

PEARL: I might have been.

MR. HANSON: You were, indeed. And how, specifically, did you use the word, Ms. Jones?

PEARL: Ummm...correctly?

MR. HANSON: I will be the judge of that. You needed a pencil.

PEARL: Yeah. Tommy Sporkman bit mine in half last period.

MR. HANSON: Tommy Sporkman's aberrant dietary habits are irrelevant at the moment. You required a pencil; you received one from Mr. Greer.

JON: I'm happy to give in time of need.

MR. HANSON: When Mr. Greer handed you the pencil, Ms. Jones, you thanked him by saying...?

PEARL: Thanks?

MR. HANSON: Incorrect.

PEARL: Thanks very much; you're a pal?

MR. HANSON: Strike two.

PEARL: I said... (*Mumbled.*) "Awesome, thanks."

MR. HANSON: With proper elocution and volume, please re-enact your language crime accurately.

PEARL: I said, "Awesome, thanks."

MR. HANSON: Ah. May I see the pencil in question, Ms. Jones?

PEARL: Here.

MR. HANSON: Would you say this mere piece of wood and graphite rivals, say, the grandeur of the Sistine Chapel? The soaring notes of Handel's Messiah? The jagged peaks of the Alps? Does it inspire one to contemplate the heavens, to wonder at the nature of God, to ponder the immensity of the universe?

PEARL: It is a nice pencil.

MR. HANSON: I will take that vapid response as a resounding no. This pencil does none of those things and therefore does not deserve the use of a word you should, by now, realize I find grossly, irreverently and most annoyingly overused! Save "awesome" for that which is truly awe-inspiring, Ms. Jones! Words have meaning. Words have power. Choose them wisely!

PEARL: Yes, Mr. Hanson.

NOAH: Wow. How many times did he lecture us like that?

JACK: Too many to count.

NOAH: I mean, I learned a lot from him in many ways. He was an awesome teacher...

MR. HANSON: Aaaa-hemmm!

ALL: Oh, no!

ALLISON: But you know what? Somebody should have stood up to him when he went off on us like that. He was wrong!

MR. HANSON: I yield the floor to you, Ms. Dwyer. Instruct me. How was I wrong?

ALLISON: Because...because, yes, words have meaning and power, and we should choose them carefully. I agree. But words change, too! They change all the time, and nobody can control them changing. They are--we just had this vocabulary word last week; what is it?--malleable! They are highly malleable, Mr. Hanson. You know that! You taught us about how the English language has gone through the Old and the Middle and the Modern periods, borrowing and morphing and shifting according to cultural changes and wars and fashion. Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Hanson, but your "awesome" is not our "awesome," and when we say "awesome" we sometimes mean what you mean but a lot of times we're choosing to use it to say just plain "good" or "cool" or "nice" or even "thanks for the pencil." But mainly we're saying "awesome" in a way that tells everybody that we're together with them, that we know how to talk so others will understand us and like us and even believe us. And that, Mr. Hanson, is how language works, and I think it is awesome.

ALL applaud.

JON: You know what he would have said?

MR. HANSON: Pure and unadulterated hogwash.

GRACE: Probably. But this is our gig and we're just pretending Mr. Hanson's here, so let's have him say...

MR. HANSON: I congratulate you for your courage, Ms. Dwyer, and capitulate to your rhetoric. "Awesome," in its current usage by the adolescent sub-species, will henceforth be tolerated in this classroom, and I believe you are all quite...

ALL: Awesome!

BEN: As soon as I overcome my tendency to, well, procrastinate. Especially my homework. Especially on school nights. And on weekends. And on vacations when I'm supposed to make up for all the homework I've procrastinated on the school nights and weekends. The thing is, though, I have a lot of determination. When I sit down to do my homework, I take a deep breath. I feel a lot of commitment, like...like I'm trying to launch a really big, really important thing.

CONTROL, TOWER and SYSTEMS enter and take up positions on various areas of the stage.

CONTROL: Stand by for the launch of the Really Big, Really Important Thing.

TOWER: Roger that, Control. RiBRIT is ready to launch.

SYSTEMS: All systems go. Final checklist ready to check.

BEN: Check off the checklist, Chekhov.

CONTROL: Pencils?

BEN: Check.

TOWER: Scratch paper?

BEN: Check again.

SYSTEMS: Math textbook?

BEN: Checkeroo.

CONTROL: Science?

BEN: Checkdoodle.

TOWER: English?

BEN: Checkeronski.

SYSTEMS: Fully charged laptop?

BEN: As they say in the game of checkers, King me!

TOWER: We're looking good, Control. All requisite items present.

CONTROL: Ben seated, strapped in, ready for lift off?

BEN: Ready to ride, RiBRIT!

CONTROL: Check fuel levels.

SYSTEMS: Fuel levels at maximum.

BEN: Maximum is right. Two helpings of mac and cheese, a green salad with jalapeno-ranch dressing and one large bowl of rocky road ice cream. I am good to go.

CONTROL: Auxiliary fuel tanks in place?

TOWER: In place and full.

BEN: Two cans of Pringles, one in each desk drawer. Barbecue, sour cream and onion. They will sustain me on my journey.

SYSTEMS: All systems seem to be go.

TOWER: We have been here before, Control.

CONTROL: Many times, Tower.

BEN: But today, ground control to Major Tom, Major Tom to...whoever...we're going to do this thing!

TOWER: We have a go for count-down.

CONTROL: Roger that. Count-down to the Really, Big, Really Important Thing beginning. We will have lift-off in...

CONTROL, TOWER and SYSTEMS: Ten, nine, eight, seven...

BEN: (*Stands, leaving his chair.*) Oops, hang on!

SYSTEMS: What happened?

CONTROL: It appears that Ben has left his position. Confirm, Systems?

SYSTEMS: Roger that. Ben has left his position.

BEN: No worries. I'm good. Just have to sharpen my pencil. It's a little dull. Dull pencils are bad pencils.

BEN pantomimes sharpening his pencil with a fellow cast member, who makes a sharpening sound.

BEN: There we go. All sharpened. Ready to roll again. (*Returns to his seat.*) I am back. Count away.

CONTROL: Reset countdown. Everyone ready? Tower?

TOWER: Tower ready.

CONTROL: Systems?

SYSTEMS: Systems ready.

CONTROL: Roger that again. Count-down to the Really, Big, Really Important Thing beginning. We will have lift-off in...

CONTROL, TOWER and SYSTEMS: Ten, nine...

BEN: (*Standing.*) Wait a sec!

SYSTEMS: Now what?

TOWER: Stand by to re-set the record for consecutive number of false starts.

BEN: No, no, not a false start. Just a slight hesitation. A miniature pause while I clip this hangnail. Very annoying, this little hangnail of mine. Not to mention dangerous. Now where are those fingernail clippers? Unattended hangnails can be fatal, you know. I think one of our presidents died from that. Either that or a heart attack.

SYSTEMS: Anyone up for a game of Monopoly?

TOWER: Control, can't you control him?

BEN: Just a little...

Another Cast Member: Clip, clip!

BEN: Thank-you very much. *(Returns to his seat.)* Threat averted, ready to roll. Ready to rev, roll, roar and conquer! Count it down!

SYSTEMS: Should we bother?

TOWER: We're imaginary figures with nothing else to do. I suppose so.

CONTROL: Reset countdown. Everyone ready? Tower?

TOWER: Tower ready and full of doubt.

BEN: Come on. Hope is a thing with...fins? No, hope is a thing with...a diesel engine.

CONTROL: Systems?

SYSTEMS: Systems ready...to get let down again.

BEN: Hope is a thing with feathers! Feathers! Let's take off with our feathers!

CONTROL: Roger that. Count-down to the Really, Big, Really Important, Really Feathery Thing. We will have lift-off in...

CONTROL, TOWER and SYSTEMS: Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three...

BEN: *(During the countdown.)* It's going to happen this time. Feeling good. Feeling clear. Feeling... *(Interrupting the countdown.)* Like I have to go to the bathroom.

CONTROL, SYSTEMS and TOWER all groan.

CONTROL: Again?

SYSTEMS: You were supposed to be go before we launched.

BEN: I did! I have to go again!

TOWER: You don't have to go again. You're just scared.

BEN: Well, maybe I am scared. And guess what happens when I get scared? I have to go to the bathroom!

SYSTEMS: Set up the Monopoly board! We're not going anywhere.

BEN: I'll be right back. What's the problem?

BEN'S MOTHER: (*Offstage.*) Ben!?

CONTROL: Oh, no.

TOWER: Oh, boy.

SYSTEMS: Oh, crap.

BEN'S MOTHER enters.

BEN: Hi, Mom.

BEN'S MOTHER: Ben, you've been up here for two hours. How much homework have you got done?

BEN: Uh...

CONTROL: Tower, prepare for it.

TOWER: Tower prepared.

BEN'S MOTHER: How much?

BEN: Well...

CONTROL: Systems...

SYSTEMS: Systems fully aware of what's coming.

BEN'S MOTHER: I am not fooling around. What have you accomplished?

BEN: I am very close to just about getting ready to start.

CONTROL: That's it.

BEN'S MOTHER: That's it!

TOWER: We are...

BEN'S MOTHER: You are...

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