

OUTSIDE IN

By Dennis Bush

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CHARACTERS

PRIMARY CHARACTERS

| | |
|----------|---|
| ANGEL | F, 19; on her own; a “bright-color girl” |
| IAN | M, 15; into comic books; a loner |
| KATIE | F, 16; sweet, cute; looks for the good in everyone |
| TANNER | M, 17; obsessive-compulsive; sensitive but with a wit |
| JEN | F, 17; makes connections, caring, loyal |
| BROOKE | F, 19; in a relationship with complications |
| DANIELLE | F, 18; quirky, funny, emotional |
| SEAN | M, 17; hates sports; insists on logic; nice guy |

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| ANGEL’S MOTHER | a disturbed woman |
| SEAN’S DAD | sports-obsessed; favors Sean’s older brother |
| CARLA | Katie’s mother; blunt; harsh |
| LUKE | Tanner’s friend; a surfer type who’s never been in the ocean |
| SHEILA | Jen’s mother; bitter; angry; usually drunk |
| ELAINE | Brooke’s mom; means well but critical |
| DANIELLE’S MOTHER | perky with an edge |

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| | |
|--------------|---|
| ETHAN | Danielle's ex-boyfriend; popular, egotistical |
| TANNER'S MOM | defeated, sad, full of regrets |
| TANNER'S DAD | simple man; echoes his wife |
| JEN'S DAD | speaks before he thinks |

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Outside In was first performed in September, 2006. The original cast was:

Nadine Lombardi
Kelsey Torstveit,
Emily White
Scott McKown
Alex Knerr
Macy Cobb
Samantha Ortiz
Jared Sikes

PROPS

Drink cups
Clip boards with applications
Coffee cups
Cell phones
Two tennis racquets
Bag with take-out coffee
Bag with comic books

TIME

The play is set in present-day Los Angeles and takes place during a 24-hour period, from Friday night to Saturday night.

SET

Outside In can be presented with a very simple set. There are no special costume requirements. Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting, role assignments and staging.

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AT RISE: The actors are scattered around the set. The audience should have a sense that they are able to see into the homes of the characters and witness their private insecurities and emotional struggles. The actors should deliver their lines as if they are independent thoughts, yet there should be a clear connectedness and flow to all the lines, as a whole.

ANGEL: It's midnight. . .

IAN: I can't sleep. . .

KATIE: I can't seem to. . .

TANNER: . . .wind down.

JEN: I can't turn my. . .

BROOKE: . . .brain off.

DANIELLE: I've got too much. . .

SEAN: . . .on my mind.

KATIE: I've got. . .

ANGEL and SEAN: . . .too much. . .

TANNER and JEN: . . .too much. . .

BROOKE and DANIELLE: . . .too much. . .

SEAN: . . .on my mind. . .

KATIE and ANGEL: You're fat.

JEN and IAN: You're stupid.

BROOKE, DANIELLE, TANNER and SEAN: You're really nothing special.

ANGEL I worry about. . .

ALL: Everything.

IAN: I know. . .

TANNER and BROOKE: I'm different. . .

KATIE and JEN: I'm strange. . .

DANIELLE and SEAN: I'm not like. . .

ALL: . . .everyone else.

TANNER: When I. . .

KATIE: . . .walk into a room. . .

SEAN: . . .walk down the hall. . .

IAN: . . .go anywhere.

ANGEL: I never feel like I. . .

JEN: . . .fit in. . .

KATIE: . . .belong. . .

BROOKE: . . .have anything in common with. . .

ALL: Anyone else.

ANGEL: And now it's midnight. . .

IAN: The end of one day. . .

KATIE: . . .the beginning of another day. . .

IAN: . . .and I can't get to sleep because. . .

TANNER: I can't stop thinking about. . .

DANIELLE and BROOKE: . . .what he said. . .

JEN and SEAN: . . .what she said. . .

IAN and KATIE: . . .what they said.

ANGEL'S MOTHER: Have you gained weight? I think you've gained weight. It looks like you've gained weight. . .

SEAN'S DAD: Your brother was always so good at sports. What happened with you?

CARLA: I'm not going to sugar coat it. . . You're as dumb as a box of rocks.

LUKE: You've got weird little habits, dude. You've always had weird little habits and they're only getting more. . . weird.

SHEILA: You'd be more of a disappointment if I didn't expect you to be a disappointment. I suppose that's the only expectation of mine that you've ever lived up to.

ELAINE: Your sister is so pretty. Maybe she could give you some make-up tips.

DANIELLE'S MOTHER: The music you listen to is disturbing. All those dreadful lyrics have got to be putting ideas in your head. Don't you have any CDs with happy songs on them?

ETHAN: We can see each other as long as nobody I know sees us seeing each other. I can't risk that.

ANGEL'S MOTHER: You're fat.

SEAN'S DAD: You're not even athletic enough to wear an athletic supporter. You're a loser.

CARLA: You're dumb as a box of rocks.

LUKE: You're weird.

SHEILA: You're a disappointment.

ELAINE: You're ugly.

DANIELLE'S MOTHER: You're disturbed.

ETHAN: You're not good enough.

(Shouted, in rapid succession.)

ANGEL: Fat

SEAN: Loser.

KATIE: Stupid.

TANNER: Weird.

BROOKE: Ugly.

DANIELLE: Disturbed

JEN: A disappointment.

IAN: Not good enough.

ANGEL: It's midnight. . .

BROOKE: And I can't sleep.

KATIE: I've got too much on my mind.

TANNER: I can't just go to bed. I have a getting-ready-for-bed routine. . . I have to wash my hands, then, brush my teeth, rinse off the brush, put it inside the toothbrush holder, rinse off my retainers, put my retainers in and wash my hands, again. The water has to be lukewarm. I have to wait a couple minutes 'til it gets to exactly the right temperature.

TANNER'S MOM: What are you doing in there?

TANNER'S DAD: You spend more time in the bathroom than your sister. And she's a girl.

TANNER: (**continuing, as if uninterrupted**) I wash my face with the lukewarm water before slowly turning the water to a cooler temperature. I rinse off my face, then, dry my hands with a clean towel and dry my face with tissues (**quick pause**) Towels are too filthy to ever use on my face.

TANNER'S MOM: What are you doing in there?

TANNER: (**continuing, as if uninterrupted**) I put astringent on a cotton ball and gently apply it to my entire face – my entire face. I let it dry for a couple minutes before adding spot-blemish treatment medication and, then, I wash my hands, again. After that, I can go to bed. . . Unless I forget a step. Sometimes, I can't remember if I forgot a step. And I can't go to bed unless I'm sure – absolutely sure – so I have to start all over again.

JEN: It's midnight and my parents are still fighting. . . They've been fighting since 7:23. They started earlier than usual, tonight. My dad made a comment about some actress on TV being hot. As soon I heard the words coming out of his mouth, I knew it was going to be trouble. I wanted to dive across the room and stuff the words back in. Like a do-over intervention. But it was too late and it's not like I can TiVo real life and fix things.

JEN'S DAD: She's an actress. Of course, she's hotter than you.

JEN: My dad never says the right thing. Sometimes, I feel like writing down better things for him to say and slipping him the paper when my mom isn't looking. It's not like I'd be taking sides. I'm just trying to help out.

TANNER'S MOM: What takes you so long in there?

TANNER'S DAD: Did you hear your mother? She asked you a question.

JEN'S DAD: Of course, she's hotter than you.

JEN: I knew it was going to be trouble.

TANNER: I can't just go to sleep.

KATIE: I've got too much on my mind.

BROOKE: And I can't go to sleep.

(TRANSITION, without a break in the flow, to the bench outside the Sub Shop where ANGEL works.)

ANGEL: **(noticing IAN approaching)** It's midnight.

IAN: Is it?

ANGEL: Yeah. We're closed.

IAN: I thought you were open 'til 2.

ANGEL: Nope. We close at midnight. Usually at about 11:30 or 11:45.

(quick pause) There's a Wendy's and a Jack in the Box on La Cienega and an In-N-Out on Sunset. They're all open 'til 1 or 2. There's a 24-hour Starbucks on Sunset, too.

IAN: **(an acknowledgment)** No car.

ANGEL: No car? In LA? How do you get around? Do you take the bus everywhere?

IAN: I walk here. **(explaining)** I was hungry. I wanted a sandwich. I had a craving for a tuna sub.

ANGEL: You wouldn't want the tuna this late at night anyway. Seriously. Not unless you wanna get sick. If I were you, I wouldn't get tuna any later than about four in the afternoon.

IAN: Really? Why?

ANGEL: It's been sitting around. It's supposed to be in the refrigerated part of the sandwich-making area but the refrigerated section isn't all that far from the heated tray with the meatballs in it. And most of the time, the tuna container just sits out on the counter because people – not me, but other people – forget to put it back where it belongs. Any later than 4:00 and it's gets a kind of sweaty look to it. And enough of a smell to let you know to steer clear of it.

IAN: I think I lost my appetite.

ANGEL: It's too late to be eating anyway. Especially if you're going to bed, soon. The food just lays in your stomach and turns to fat. There's a guy who comes in every night at 10:00 and gets a foot-long Cold Cut Combo with double meat and cheese. Every night! I would bet money that he eats it and falls asleep on the sofa. That's what he looks like – a late-night eater-and-fall-asleeper.

IAN: Maybe he eats it and goes to the gym. There's a 24-Hour Fitness near my house. People go and work out in the middle of the night.

ANGEL: What are you doing up in the middle of the night?

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IAN: I have trouble sleeping.

ANGEL: I do, too, sometimes. . . when I have a lot on my mind.

IAN: Yep.

ANGEL: (**teasing**) You're too young to have a lot on your mind. How old are you?

IAN: (**a little sheepishly**) Fifteen.

ANGEL: Fifteen? And you're out wondering around by yourself at midnight?!

IAN: It's Friday night. There's no school tomorrow.

ANGEL: Did you sneak out of the house?

IAN: Nope.

ANGEL: Do your parents know you're out walking around?

IAN: Parent. Singular, not plural. It's just my mom. And she wasn't home. She went to a party with some guy. I'll be back before she gets home. Even if I stay out 'til 5, I'll still get back before she does.

ANGEL: I'm sorry.

IAN: Nothing for you to be sorry about. You didn't do anything.

ANGEL: I know, but it's sad.

IAN: Kinda, but I'm used to it, so it doesn't really seem so bad to me. And when she's out, she can't yell at me, so that's a good thing, right?

ANGEL: Do you have friends? (**quick pause**) Oh, sorry, that was rude. I shouldn't be asking you personal questions like that.

IAN: (**with a little laugh**) A minute ago, you were asking if I snuck out of the house, so I think you pretty much already crossed the personal questions line.

ANGEL: I just worry about people.

IAN: Particular people or people in general.

ANGEL: Both, actually. I worry about my family and friends. But I also worry about people who come in here – like the guy who gets the Cold Cut Combo every night and the woman who screamed at me and accused me of spitting in her meatball sandwich. And, when I watch the news, I worry about those people, too. Like, last night, when they showed the video of that apartment building on La Brea that was on fire. I worried about the people who wouldn't have a place to sleep and I worried about all their family pictures getting burned up. And the people who worked in that Office Max where the guy came in and shot the place up. . . I worried about them.

IAN: Did anybody ever come in to the Sub Shop and pull a gun on you?

ANGEL: No. Knock on wood. I think I'd die if anybody did that. (**catches herself**) Oh, I don't mean actually die – though if he shot me I guess that'd be a possibility – I meant die as in be totally freaked out.

IAN: Hmmm.

ANGEL: Hmmm?

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IAN: You said, "If *he* shot me." It's interesting that people always think of murderers as guys.

ANGEL: You're deep.

IAN: I read a lot. Comic books, mostly, but they have a lot of complex plots about social issues.

ANGEL: Complex plots about social issues? Comic books? You're funny.

IAN: I'm serious.

ANGEL: My little brother used to read comic books and he never mentioned any complex plots about social issues.

IAN: Maybe he's not as deep as me. (*quick pause*) That was a joke. I didn't mean to slam him. (*pause*) You said he "used to read comic books." Doesn't he like 'em any more?

ANGEL: I don't know. . . I haven't seen him in a while.

IAN: Why not?

ANGEL: (*laughs*) Oh, now, *you're* the one asking the personal questions.

IAN: I'm sorry.

ANGEL: I was just teasing. I wasn't offended or anything. It's just a long story.

IAN: I'm not in a hurry to get back home.

ANGEL: Things happen. Things happened. Past tense.

IAN: What happened?

ANGEL: I've been on my own for a while. A few years. . . Three years to be exact. . . But that's a few. . . Three's a few.

I left home when I was 16. I didn't have a choice. . . Not one that I could see, anyway. Things got too hard to deal with. . . too hard to be around all that anger and never knowing what would set her off. My mom, I mean. She was crazy. . . crazy for real, not an exaggeration or a joke like, "she's so crazy."

She'd go off on these rants about things that didn't have anything to do with her but, somehow, she took 'em personally and they set her off. Like Jay Leno's chin. She'd yell at the TV about how big and ugly it was and how it disgusted her. She could've changed the channel or looked away or anything but, no, she screamed at the TV about Jay Leno's chin. It sounds funny, I know. But in person – when she was doing it and I was there in the same room, it was scary. . . scary as hell.

It was like she was disconnected from reality. She used to say our neighbor's belly button talked to her. He was a really big guy and he wore t-shirts that were too short so his hairy belly showed. Him and

my mom would be out getting the mail at the same time on Saturday mornings and she'd come back in and say that his bellybutton had told her all kinda stuff. Freaky stuff. Stuff like (quick pause; recalling the stories) our neighbor had a Chinese woman tied up in his garage. Or that he kept dead rats in Tupperware containers in the refrigerator. And she believed the bellybutton. (**incredulous**) She believed his bellybutton! She called the police. Of course they thought she was a nut case after she told 'em she got her information from the guy's bellybutton. But that's the kind of craziness that went on in my house every day.

Now that I have some distance from it, I can laugh... at least a little more than I could when it was happening. I didn't have many friends. It's not like I could bring anybody home. I never knew what kind of... situation... I'd be walking into.

She was in a constant state of... agitation. (**quick pause**) It's like she needed that kind of chaos to live. And she was always angry... Angry about *something*... angry at *someone* – usually me. I was fat or I was lazy or I was so much like my father that it made her want to kill me. Try going to sleep at night, after your mother tells you that.

My little brother figured out how to survive. He stayed in his room and pretended to be asleep most of the time when my mom would go in and launch one of her rants at him. She'd go off on some crazy tangent and he'd just lay there and not say a word. I could never do that. I got upset. I said things. I cried.

My dad was smart. He got out. Just left. No warning. No note. Just one day when I was in 6th grade, I came home from school and he was gone. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe he could leave my brother and I behind – with her – just leave us to deal with everything that he ran away from.

I know he left because of my mom. She used to scream at him and try and scratch his eyes out. Seriously, like digging her fingernails into his face. He had to get away from her. He knew she was crazy. But I know he thought I was kinda weird, too.

I was a... different kind of kid. I wore hiking boots and fairy wings that came off a Tinkerbell Halloween costume. of jeans with tie-dye patches sewn on all over and I wore a hot pink dress with bright green Converse sneakers. I was different. I wasn't crazy. But every day I stayed in that house, I could feel myself slipping

away. Like I started to think that some of her crazy behavior was normal. When you can walk into a room and see your mother covering a pile of Barbie dolls with ketchup and not even give it a second look, something is wrong. Your concept of reality has shifted. I mean, she's sitting on the floor, surrounded by Barbies covered with ketchup and their arms and legs in all kinds of contorted positions and she says, "Look, honey, there's been an accident. . . There's been a big accident and everyone died." And I walked past her and thought that it was just another day.

That night, I was laying in bed, trying to fall asleep and my brain was like a movie theater showing me images of the Barbie's and the neighbor's bellybutton and every other crazy thing I'd seen and heard living in that house. I looked at the clock and it was midnight. Not 11:59 or 12:01 but midnight. On the dot. And I said, it's time. It's the end of one day and the start of another one. So, I got out of bed, put some clothes in one of those carry-on luggage things with wheels and I walked out of the house and didn't look back. No warning. No note.

Some nights I slept outside, up on Hollywood Boulevard, near the tattoo place, and some nights I went to shelters. I got my high school diploma and I met some really good friends who helped me out when I needed it. I got a job here. I got an apartment.

And every day, when I'm brushing my teeth in the morning and, again, at night, I look in the mirror and I wonder how I could have left my brother in that house with my mom. How could I have left him behind to deal with everything I ran away from.

I went back to the house about six months after I left. I just wanted to see it. Like confronting a nightmare. The neighbor guy told me – *he* told me, not his bellybutton – that my mom and brother moved but he didn't know where to.

I hope my brother's safe. . . I hope he's ok. . . I know I am.

IAN: (**after a pause**) I don't know what to say.

ANGEL: You don't need to say anything. (**quick pause**) You listened. . . Thanks for that.

IAN: (**not sure how to accept the compliment**) No problem. (**quick pause**) Thanks for the tip about the tuna.

ANGEL: (**with a smile and a little laugh**) I do what I can. I'm all about customer service. (**pause**) I need to head home. I don't usually hang

around after I close up. People driving by probably think I'm a homeless person getting ready to go to sleep on this bench.

IAN: I guess I should go home, too. Maybe there's a *Real World* marathon on MTV. **(pause)** Hey. . .

ANGEL: Hey?

IAN: What hours do you work?

ANGEL: Four to midnight – well, usually, closer to 11:30 or 11:45, like I said. I take my dinner break around 8:00.

IAN: Cool. . . So. . .

ANGEL: So?

IAN: So maybe I'll see you again.

ANGEL: That'd be nice.

IAN: Yeah. . . That'd be cool.

ANGEL: Anyway. . . I. . . I really need to get going.

IAN: Right. . . yeah. . . me, too. **(considers giving her a hug but opts for a handshake that is equal parts awkward and eager.)** See ya.

(TRANSITION to the 24-Hour Starbucks on Sunset Blvd.)

JEN: **(entering; sees BROOKE and hugs her)** I'm so glad to see you. You're here, so you got my text, right?

BROOKE: Yeah, I was at Scarab – the new club across from the Viper Room. I left as soon as I got your message.

JEN: You were closer than I was. No wonder you got here first.

BROOKE: **(introducing DANIELLE)** This is Danielle. We met outside the club. Jen. . . Danielle. **(quick pause, reversing the introductions)** Danielle. . . Jen.

DANIELLE: **(to Jen)** Hi. Nice to meet you. I hope you don't mind me tagging along. Brooke said it wouldn't be a problem.

BROOKE: We were both at the 18-21 party at Scarab, tonight. Turns out, Danielle goes to UCLA, too.

DANIELLE: I'm a freshman. **(quick pause)** We didn't go to the party together. We met there. *Outside*, actually. Not *in* the club. I was having a bad night.

BROOKE: We were *both* having a bad night. And then I got your text and I figured *everybody* must be having a bad night.

DANIELLE: **(trying to get up to speed)** How do you two know each other?

BROOKE: **(to JEN)** Do you wanna explain that or should I?

JEN: You can.

BROOKE: **(to DANIELLE)** Okay, so my mom and I lived with Jen's dad and her for three months while Jen's mom was in rehab. . .

JEN: **(interjecting, continuing the explanation)** And my dad was pretty much acting like he wasn't married to my mom anymore, even

though they still were. . .

BROOKE: (**continuing**) So, for three months we were like sisters – even though we're not related at all.

JEN: I'm closer to Brooke than I am to any of my real stepsisters and brothers.

BROOKE: Same for me with her.

JEN: We created like a secret language.

BROOKE: Mostly acronyms and codes that we could text message each other.

JEN: We started doing it so we could have conversations late at night without getting in trouble.

BROOKE: And when my mom and I moved out.

JEN: (**interjecting**) My mom got out of rehab and moved back in.

BROOKE: . . .we kept using the coded messages to communicate with each other.

DANIELLE: What kind of codes?

BROOKE: Like L911 was short for "Life Emergency."

JEN: But that morphed into L911 also meaning "Latte Emergency," depending on the context.

DANIELLE: And that's how you knew to meet here?

BROOKE: Tonight's message was 3A24SOS.

JEN: (**decoding for DANIELLE**) Meet at 3 a.m. at the 24-hour Starbucks on Sunset. Get it? 3A24SOS.

BROOKE: As opposed to 11PCBS.

DANIELLE: 11PCBS?

JEN: Meet at 11 p.m. at the cute-boy Starbucks. It's the one on Santa Monica with all the unbelievably cute boys.

BROOKE: So, it's the CBS. Cute Boy Starbucks. There's also the AMS.

JEN: The Starbucks on Hollywood Boulevard, near the Highland Complex, where the manager is a really angry woman with a mohawk. So, it's the AMS. Angry Mohawk Starbucks.

BROOKE: So, what's going on? Why the emergency, late-night latte?

JEN: It's nothing special. My mom and dad have just been fighting all night and I thought my head was going to explode.

DANIELLE: Do they fight a lot?

JEN: All the time. When I left, my dad was standing outside the bathroom, screaming and pounding on the door.

BROOKE: Your mom was in the bathroom with the door locked, again?

JEN: Yep. (**explaining to DANIELLE**) That's her favorite place to go after they've been fighting for a few hours. It's like a comedy routine sometimes. My dad'll say something really offensive or make up this big lie that's total bull and my mom will flush the toilet like that's her answer to what he said.

BROOKE: That definitely qualifies as a Latte Emergency.

JEN: (*raising her cup, then, taking a sip*) And a latte always makes everything better. . . at least for a few minutes.

DANIELLE: I should have two or three lattes, then.

JEN: (*to DANIELLE*) Didn't you have a good time at Scarab?

BROOKE: She was standing outside crying. That's why I went over and started talking to her.

JEN: Crying? (*to DANIELLE*) What happened?

BROOKE: (*to JEN, almost whispered*) Boyfriend trouble.

DANIELLE: It's a little more complicated than that.

JEN: How long were you two together?

DANIELLE: We weren't really *together*. Not how most people think of together. We weren't in the same. . . circle. (*quick pause*) We were in the same *world*, essentially, but not really in the same *parts* of that world. Sometimes, our parts of the world overlapped. . . intertwined. . . collided. It's not as complicated as it sounds. Well, it *is* complicated but not really as ominous as "colliding worlds" would lead you to think. Ethan and I were a couple but nobody else knew it. *He* knew and *I* knew but nobody else did.

Before we. . . connected – and I mean that in an emotional way, not in an MTV kind of slutty physical way. Anyway. . . before we connected. . . we knew each other. We were friends. . . kind of. We talked. We instant messaged, sometimes, and forwarded jokes to each other. That kinda stuff.

Then, one afternoon, he asked me to help him with a presentation he had to give. (*quick pause*) In person – he asked me in person. We weren't talking online. The presentation he had to give was in person, too. And I did. (*quick pause*) Help him. It was fun. I'm good at some things that he's not, so I could really be helpful.

And after it was over, he gave me a hug and it was like electricity. . . like we were a matched set of magnets being drawn together. It was. . . intense. . . and wonderful. (*quick pause*) And he whispered, "Wow," in my ear. I was thinking the same thing. Just that one word. "Wow." And he looked at me and I looked at him and we looked at each other – which is different than him looking at me and me looking at him. And I could tell he wanted to kiss me. I knew it. I was sure of it.

When I checked my e-mail, that night, there was a message from him. "I'm totally tripping on what happened, today." (*quick pause*) That's what he said in the e-mail. He was "totally tripping on what happened, today." And, oh my gosh, so was I. Like majorly tripping.

He asked for my cellphone number and wanted to know if I would mind if he text messaged me. Oh my gosh, of course, I didn't mind. But I didn't let him know how excited I was. I e-mailed him my number and said it was cool if he wanted to text me and that I'd talk to him, "sometime. . . whenever."

And, then, I sat and stared at my phone. Just waiting for it to vibrate. My whole body was vibrating waiting for the phone to vibrate. And when it did, I almost died. My heart was beating so fast.

So, we started texting and calling and e-mailing and, when nobody else was around, he'd hug me. It was always the same. . . Electric. . . Like there was this energy rushing through our bodies. I started to tell one of my friends about Ethan and she thought I was joking. She said, "You're kidding, right?" She couldn't believe that Ethan and I could ever be together. So, I told her, yeah, I was joking. I wasn't but I didn't tell her that. I haven't said anything to anybody else.

JEN: So nobody else knew what was going on?

DANIELLE: Nope. Nobody. See what I mean about being in different parts of the same world?

On campus, we'd say hi or wave a little but that was it. Most days, our afternoon classes were over by 3:00, so we'd meet up and go for a ride in his car and make out. (**quick pause**) Not while the car was moving. We'd park before we started making out. (**back to the story**) I've kissed before but this was like. . . electricity. I hate to keep describing our. . . vibe. . . like that but that's really what it was like. I never wanted to pull away. It was primal. Seriously, primal.

It went on like that for three weeks. Three weeks where I swear my feet didn't touch the ground. I felt that good about myself and him and us and. . . everything.

Then, tonight, we were both at the 18-21 party at Scarab. There must have been three hundred people there. All kinds of people from different. . . circles. I was with my friends and he was with his. I got there first and, when I saw him come in the door, it was like everything slowed down and a bright light – like a spotlight from the sky – was shining on him. I remember thinking that just seeing him made me happy. And I know he saw me. I looked good tonight, too. I knew he'd love this top.

I went to the bathroom and sent him a text message. "I wish we

could be together.”

I found my friends, again. They were dancing. I leaned against the wall and waited for Ethan to reply to my message. I saw him check his phone, so I know he got the text. He kinda smiled. It might've been a smirk. I don't know. I wasn't close enough to tell.

So, I sent him another one. “Why can't we be together?” I even used the actual question mark. I clicked into the symbols and added the question mark so he would be sure to understand that I was asking him a question.

And, then, I saw him turn away from his friends, and a couple seconds later I got a message from him.

“idk”

I D K. You know, like “I don't know.” And I was like ok, I don't even rate full words, just an abbreviation.

Then, another text arrived – a follow up to his “idk.”

It said, “But we can't. . . I can't.” (***SHE begins to cry***)

I sent him another message or two. . . or five. (***quick pause***) Okay, eight! But he didn't reply. . . he didn't reply.

I don't know why. . . I don't know why. (***quick pause, with a clear attempt at humorous sarcasm***) “idkw,” I suppose, to use his shorthand.

It doesn't matter anymore. (***SHE is crying***) I guess the electricity wasn't enough. Even matched sets of magnets can be pulled apart.

He didn't reply. . . but I got the message.

JEN: Oh, my gosh, that's so sad. And here I was complaining about my parents fighting and you've had to deal with that, tonight?!

BROOKE: Latte emergency! (***they sip their lattes***)

JEN: How are things with you and Adam? Was he with you at the club?

BROOKE: (***covering something up, but not broadly***) No. . . No, he had some other stuff to do. I went with Hanna and Kim.

DANIELLE: Who's Adam?

JEN: He's Brooke's boyfriend. He's really nice.

BROOKE: (***unconvincingly***) Yeah.

DANIELLE: (*joking*) That didn't sound very enthusiastic.

BROOKE: I'm just tired.

JEN: Me, too. I should get back home. Hopefully, my parents will have stopped fighting and I'll be able to get to sleep.

DANIELLE: It was really nice to meet you. (*SHE hugs JEN, then, BROOKE*) You guys are great. (*SHE exits.*)

BROOKE: Call me, later, ok? (*hugs JEN; they both exit*)

(TRANSITION to SEAN's house; SEAN is downstage; his father yells from offstage or farther upstage)

SEAN'S DAD: (*yelling*) Sean! (*no response; louder*) Sean!

SEAN: (*waking up*) What?

SEAN'S DAD: Get your butt outta bed.

SEAN: Why?

SEAN'S DAD: It's 7:00.

SEAN: It's Saturday.

SEAN'S DAD: And you have your tennis lesson in exactly 30 minutes. So, get your butt out of bed. You have to get a shower and get something to eat first. You can't expect to play tennis on an empty stomach.

SEAN: How 'bout if I have breakfast and skip the tennis lesson. I hate tennis.

SEAN'S DAD: (*during SEAN'S DAD's rant, SEAN exits his space*)

And you hated basketball camp and soccer club and Little League and everything else we've tried. You aren't making an *effort*. You've *never* made an effort. I am not going to have a son of mine end up a loser – or any more of a loser than you already are! You are a reflection of me, young man. Your brother was a *three-sport athlete* and *you* complain about going to a co-ed group tennis lesson. How do you think that makes me feel? You need to suck it up and try to act like a man for a change. So, hate it or not, you are going to your lesson and you're going to be on time and that's all there is to it. Period. End of discussion.

(TRANSITION to a bench outside the tennis courts. KATIE sits on the bench, holding her racquet.)

SEAN: (*rushing in; he's a few minutes late*) Where is everybody?

KATIE: Not here.

SEAN: I'm only like three minutes late.

KATIE: They canceled the lesson.

SEAN: When?

KATIE: According to the lady up front, they called everyone in the class,

last night, and posted a sign, this morning.

SEAN: I didn't get a call.

KATIE: Me neither. I did see the sign, though, after my dad dropped me off. I have to call him to come get me.

SEAN: I'm not calling anybody. I'd rather just sit here and pretend like the lesson wasn't canceled. That way, I don't have to go home right away.

KATIE: I'm at my dad's from Friday nights to Saturday afternoons but, most of the time, he just drops me off at stuff and comes back and gets me. Then, he says, "How'd it go?" And I say, "OK," and that's pretty much it. It's better than my stepdad, though.

SEAN: What's he like?

KATIE: He's from somewhere in Alabama. He's got an accent. And he wears Lynard Skynard T-shirts and walks around the house screaming, "Freebird" – whatever that means. Most of the time, though, he just lays on the couch yelling at everybody.

SEAN: That sucks.

KATIE: Sure does. And my mom is picking up his expressions and even getting a little bit of a Southern accent. My mom grew up in Delaware and moved to Orange County when she was in her 20s, so the only thing southern she knew about was Southern California. But that hasn't stopped her. The other day, my aunt was over at our house, and my mom told her "You're as exciting as a bag of hair."

SEAN: What's that supposed to mean?

KATIE: I don't know. She tells me I'm "dumb as a box of rocks."

SEAN: Why don't you live with your dad, instead?

KATIE: He's remarried. His wife doesn't really want me over there. He takes me places and pays for stuff but I don't know if he'd do that if he didn't have to 'cause of the custody agreement. **(pause)** Who do you live with? Your mom or your dad?

SEAN: Both of 'em. They're still married.

KATIE: **(a bit of disbelief)** And they get along?

SEAN: Kinda. My dad is definitely in charge and my mom just kinda goes along with whatever he says.

KATIE: Maybe I won't call my dad, either. I can wait 'til he comes back to get me at the regular time. Do you mind if I wait with you?

SEAN: No, it's ok.

KATIE: You don't usually talk much during the lessons. And you always look so mad.

SEAN: I don't wanna be here. I hate sports.

KATIE: Then, why are you taking the lessons?

SEAN: My dad didn't give me a choice. He signed me up and told me I was gonna take tennis lessons. It's the latest in a long series of sports disasters. Nothing I do is ever good enough for my dad.

Nothing I do is as good as my brother did it.

KATIE: You just have one brother?

SEAN: Yep. Three years older. He goes to USC. Football scholarship.

KATIE: I always wanted an older brother. I've got one stepsister who's five. And another one who's two. My dad and his new wife don't have any kids. My stepmom doesn't want any. She says "kids are inconvenient."

SEAN: I'm hungry. I only had a Pop Tart for breakfast. I should've brought the other one with me. I hate when I only eat one, 'cause by the time I go back for the second one in the package, it's all stale and gross. They should make the packets resealable.

KATIE: Resealable packages are good. Except for Peeps.

SEAN: Peeps?

KATIE: The marshmallow chicks at Easter. I prefer them stale. I don't know why. I just do.

SEAN: I've never had a Peep.

KATIE: (**truly aghast**) You've never had a Peep?!

SEAN: Nope, we're not allowed to have candy. Dried fruit is as close as we get.

KATIE: I love candy.

SEAN: Like Three Musketeers? I've seen that commercial where the candy bars are floating. They look good.

KATIE: Pretty much any kind of candy.

SEAN: What's your favorite?

KATIE: (**blushes**) Red Vines.

SEAN: Red Vines? Like they have at the movies? I thought you'd pick something chocolate. Girls are supposed to love chocolate.

KATIE: Well. . . Red Vines have a special. . . association. . . for me.

SEAN: How?

KATIE: It happened near the end of last year. I was hanging around in the hallway. School had been over for almost an hour. I was just hanging around. I wasn't in a hurry to get home. I never am.

I was hungry. I hadn't eaten anything all day. I didn't have any money for lunch and there wasn't any food in the apartment for breakfast or to make a sandwich or anything. My stomach was growling so loud that I could hear it over the song playing on my iPod.

I was killing time – rearranging the books in my locker and taking out the ones I needed to do my homework that night when I noticed something. . . something red.

I reached my hand in and dug it out. . . It was a Red Vine (**quick**

pause) A really stale, dried out, almost crunchy Red Vine that I couldn't remember putting in there in the first place.

I must have had some left after a movie and brought 'em into school and eaten 'em all except that one. I always get Red Vines at the movies. My mom says they don't have Red Vines back east. They have Twizzlers. So, even though the package at the movies, here, says Red Vines, she still calls 'em Twizzlers.

Anyway, what I had in my locker was definitely a Red Vine. And even though it was stale, it was still a Red Vine and I was hungry. Red Vines are food. They're even fat free.

I looked around to make sure nobody was watching before I put the Red Vine in my mouth. I leaned against the wall and slid down 'til I was sitting on the floor. I closed my eyes and chewed on that first bite of the stale – but still surprisingly yummylicious – Red Vine. I heard footsteps coming my way. I opened one eye – my left one, since the footsteps were coming from that direction. I must have looked like a . . . crazy person. . . sitting on the floor, one eye open, one eye closed and a stale Red Vine hanging out of my mouth.

It was Hunt, so I didn't need to worry about whether I looked like a crazy person. He already knows I'm crazy. **(quick pause)** That was a joke. **(quick pause)** We've been friends for a while. We're both kinda crazy. . . in a good way.

His name is actually Hunter – though he's not one – a hunter, I mean. He goes by Hunt. He sat behind me in English, two years ago. The first day, he leaned up and said, "Hunt," in my ear. It kind of creeped me out. I thought it was an instruction. . . a command, like, "You! Hunt! Now!" I couldn't imagine what it was I was supposed to hunt for. I mean, it wasn't like it was Easter and there were eggs hidden around the room. I guess he could tell I was a little confused, because he leaned up, again, and said, "I'm Hunt. . . That's my name."

We ate lunch together that day. **(quick pause)** And every day since. He's essentially my best friend. **(pause)** Why did I say that – essentially? He is my best friend. I guess I feel like girls are supposed to have girls for best friends and guys are supposed to have guys for best friends and no messing with that formula.

Pretty much after that first lunch, we hung out all the time. Mostly at

his house. It was nice. It was normal. His parents were nice and normal, too. It was like visiting another planet. When he came to my apartment, he tried not to notice how messy it was. He did ask about the hole in the wall where my stepdad got made and put his first through it. He pretty much ignored all the stuff my stepdad and mom scream at each other. . . and my stepsisters and me. **(SHE feels the urge to sigh, but inhales, instead, moving on.)**

So, anyway, Hunt was coming down the hall and he waved and smiled and I waved back and smiled and tried not to look too weird with the Red Vine still sticking out of my mouth.

And he sat down next to me. He gave me a kind of halfway hug. We couldn't really hug the whole way because our backs were against the wall. And he leaned in and started chewing on the other end of the Red Vine. **(quick pause)** I told him – I kinda mumbled it 'cause my mouth was full – that it was a stale Red Vine that I found in my locker. But he kept eating more from his end and I kept eating more from my end – like it was a race – and our lips met in the middle and we kissed. It was my first kiss. Ever. And it was a Red Vine-alicious kiss.

Anyone who would eat a stale, dried out, almost crunchy Red Vine that I found under a book in my locker just to kiss you is pretty incredibly special. He's been to my apartment. He knows my stepdad punches walls and curses at my mom and says I'm more trouble than I'm worth. He knows all of that and he still kissed me.

He said, "I want us to be more than friends. I wanna keep the friend but put "girl" in front of it. I want you to be my girlfriend."

I wanted to die right then and there. I didn't think I would ever be as happy, again, as I was in that moment. Then, I threw up a little of the Red Vine in my mouth which kinda ruined the mood. But I was still happy – just happy with the tasted of recycled Red Vine in my mouth.

And I knew that no matter what happened with Hunt and me, I will always have that moment when we kissed at the middle of a Red Vine and life was never the same.

SEAN: So, you and Hunt are going out?

KATIE: Well, yes and no. His dad got transferred to Cincinnati. He works for Chiquita – the banana company. Their headquarters is in

Cincinnati. (**quick pause**) Ohio! (**quick pause**) It seems like a strange place to have the headquarters for a company that sells tropical fruit.

Anyway, Hunt lives in Cincinnati, now, with his family, so we can e-mail and stuff. We don't talk on the phone much, anymore. We both went way over our minutes the first month after he moved.

SEAN: I think I'd be bitter.

KATIE: About going over our minutes?

SEAN: No, about having him move away.

KATIE: (**with a bit of a laugh**) He didn't do it on purpose. It's not like he kissed me and, then, told his dad he needed to start looking for a job out of state. (**SHE laughs**) People move. It happens. Do I wish him and his family still lived here in LA? Of course. But they don't, so I have to make the best of it.

We e-mail and stuff, like I said, so it's not like we can't communicate. But I miss having him in the same place. . . I miss the way he looked at me.

SEAN: What d'ya mean?

KATIE: He looked at me like I was special. . . and having him look at me that way made me *feel* special and for as long as he was looking at me, I believed that I *was* special.

SEAN: You seem pretty special to me. How old are you?

KATIE: How old am I?

SEAN: Yeah, how old?

KATIE: Sixteen. Why?

SEAN: You're a year younger than me and you're way more mature than I am.

KATIE: I don't feel very mature.

SEAN: You have perspective. You see the big picture my dad is always talking about. (**gives an example**) If I had a special person who moved away, I would have locked myself in my bedroom and played my guitar really loud.

KATIE: How loud can you play a guitar?

SEAN: It's an *electric* guitar. And I crank the amp way up. (**quick pause**) Until my dad has a fit and makes me turn it down.

KATIE: So, you're a musician?

SEAN: I play guitar. I sing a little, too. Only when my dad's not home. He doesn't like singing in the house.

KATIE: That's a stupid rule

SEAN: Tell me about it. And when my parents have friends over for dinner or to play cards or whatever, sometimes, their friends will ask me to play a song on my guitar and sing for 'em. And I look at my

dad and I know he doesn't want me to sing but I know he won't tell me not to in front of his friends 'cause they'd all think he was a music-hating Nazi freak. So, he says, "Go ahead and play something, Sean." And I do. And, then, later – after their friends leave and my mom goes to bed – he comes in my room and yells at me and tells me I'm in big trouble. (**notices his dad's car approaching**) Uh oh.

KATIE: What?

SEAN: (**indicating**) That's his car. He probably came back to watch me so he could yell about how crappy I played. He's gonna be mad I didn't call him and tell him the class was canceled.

KATIE: Maybe he won't be mad.

SEAN: Yeah, and maybe winged monkeys will fly outta my butt.

KATIE: See you next week.

SEAN: That makes the tennis lesson almost worth looking forward to. (**with a bit of an awkward wave**) Bye.

(HE exits. KATIE exits a moment later, with a wistful sigh. For a second, SHE felt special, again.)

(TRANSITION to the Beverly Center mall. TANNER sits on the bench with a clipboard. BROOKE enters carrying an identical clipboard.)

BROOKE: Are you filling out an application to work at Aveda, too? (**SHE mispronounces the name, calling it Aveeda.**)

TANNER: It's Aveda and, yes.

BROOKE: Are you sure?

TANNER: Yes, I'm sure it's Aveda and, yes, I'm sure I'm filling out an application.

BROOKE: You know they sell make up, right? It's like a beauty salon that sells make up.

TANNER: They sell a full line of skin-and-hair-care products made from organic source materials gathered from all over the world. Their products are exclusive, environmentally-friendly and designed for the discriminating customer who cares about *his* or her appearance and who understands the value of quality products. (**HE snaps**)

BROOKE: But mostly women shop there, so mostly women work there. My friends and I shop at Wet Seal, right over there, and the Bath & Body Works and Aldo on this floor all the time. I've never seen a guy go in the Aveda store.

TANNER: My uncle shops there. He buys me Aveda products all the time. My mom and dad would never spend that kind of money on shampoo or conditioner but my uncle knows that I appreciate the good stuff. Skin-and-hair-care products are very important to me.

BROOKE: You don't know about make up, though.

TANNER: I can learn enough to sell it.

BROOKE: You're pretty. . . confident.

TANNER: I know the products, I've done research on the company and I knew how to pronounce the name of the store. I want this job.

BROOKE: So do I. I used to work at Ravenal – a boutique on Melrose but I got laid off, last week. I applied at a few other places here in the Beverly Center. It's kind of like trick-or-treating, when you apply for a job at a mall. You just go from one good place to the next, skipping the stores you don't like in between.

TANNER: This would be my first real job.

BROOKE: How long did they tell you it would be 'til they call us back in for the interviews?

TANNER: They weren't sure. The lady who gave me the application said that as soon as the manager, Mateo – a guy – gets back from lunch, they'll be starting the interviews. Those two girls over on that bench are waiting, too.

BROOKE: One of them just picked her nose.

TANNER: **(making a joke)** Maybe she's just searching for organic source materials.

(They both laugh. The tension between them fades.)

BROOKE: **(with surprise)** You're funny.

TANNER: Thank you. **(pause)** Sorry, if I was a little snotty before. No pun intended. ***(They laugh, again.)***

BROOKE: No problem.

TANNER: I just wanna make a good impression on them. I really want to get the job. **(pause)** I would love to work here. I love how clean and organized the store is. Cleanliness and organization are very important to me.

BROOKE: I've never been big on organization. My dorm room is a mess. **(quickly clarifies)** It's clean. It's just not organized.

TANNER: I couldn't sleep if my room was a mess. I couldn't. Everything has to be in it's place.

BROOKE: Sounds a little obsessive to me.

TANNER: I prefer order to. . . chaos. If everything is all neat and clean and organized, then, everything is good. Everything is fine. I can control what happens in my room. I can keep the chaos out by making sure I have everything under control.

BROOKE: You make it sound like there's some kind of chaos monster clawing at your door, trying to get in and tear your room apart.

TANNER: There's chaos outside the door but it's not a monster. ***(pause, deciding whether or not HE's going to share any more personal***

information; HE decides that SHE has earned his trust, so HE continues) My parents are loud. They both come from big families and my mom's Italian and, apparently, those people yell a lot even when they're not mad at each other. And they have no respect for my privacy. **(quick pause)** Especially my mother.

I can feel her standing outside my bedroom door. Like she's a specter – a ghoul. . . the phantom of no privacy. And she listens at the door. I don't know what she's listening for. It's not like I'm on the phone making drug deals. I don't do drugs. Well, except for my prescription acne medication. And she stands there for what seems like hours before she finally knocks. She can't just walk in. I have a lock on my door. I put it on myself. She was seriously pissed off about that – my dad was, too – so we had a big long discussion about it and I said I wouldn't keep it locked at night so if there was a fire, my mom and dad could get it to wake me and the firemen could save me without having to bust the door down.

So, she knocks. **(quick pause)** Like a machine gun. Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. Always the same. Five knocks. Loud and fast. I let her in and she walks around the room like she's browsing at a store. So I ask her, "What are you looking for?" And she says, "Nothing. Just looking. I'm allowed in so infrequently, it always feels like I'm coming to a new place, so I want to have a look around. I never know when I'm going to be allowed in, again." – which is a total exaggeration, since she comes in almost every day. And every time she comes in and walks around and looks at my stuff and *touches* things and *moves things* and says "hmmm." It's like she's judging me.

I don't let my friends in my room anymore for the same reason. They look around and make stupid comments and tease me because I keep everything. . . organized. **(quick pause)** My friend, Luke, used to rearrange my collection of action figures. And not just rearrange them. . . He'd stage little battles. He played with them. I have them for their collectible value. They aren't toys. They're collectible action figures.

I was like, "Luke, you can't just come over to hang out and play with my action figures and make a huge mess and, *then*, make fun of me for having them. And he'd get all defensive and tease me about other stuff and turn it around and make it be about how weird I am. It's like I couldn't stop him. And when my mom does her "hmmm," it's like she's bursting my bubble of self confidence in my safe place – my

only safe place. And I have no control over that. And I hate that. I hate it.

I can't control what happens outside my room. (*clarifying*) Outside my room, I can't control what people say about me. I can't help it if they think I'm weird or obsessive or whatever. I can't control any of it. But inside my room. . . inside my room. . . *that* I can control.

BROOKE: (*giving him a kiss on the cheek*) You're not weird. No more than anybody else is. No more than I am, that's for sure. You're quirky. And there's nothing wrong with that.

TANNER: (*noticing that Mateo has returned and the applicants are being waved into the store*) Let's hope that was a kiss for luck. It looks like the manager's back and they're ready to start the interviews. (*HE leans over and kisses her cheek*) There's a kiss for luck for you, too. (*They exit.*)

(TRANSITION to food court at the Beverly Center. JEN rushes in; SHE spots BROOKE)

JEN: There you are!

BROOKE: (*clearly depressed*) Yeah. . . Here I am.

JEN: I got your voicemail. But it was confusing. You "didn't get the job."

What job? I thought you were working at that place on Melrose.

BROOKE: Miko, Jackie and I all got laid off.

JEN: You could have told me. I feel totally double-O T L.

BROOKE: You're not out of the loop. You just had other stuff going on and the job thing really wasn't that big a deal. I didn't like working at the boutique, anyway, so getting laid off was kind of a kick in the butt to find a job I like better.

JEN: But you didn't get the job today and, now, you're upset?

BROOKE: Kinda. . . I've been walking around the mall for hours.

JEN: Shopping?

BROOKE: No, just wandering around. . . Thinking about stuff. . .

JEN: Talk to me.

BROOKE: I don't know what to say.

JEN: I saw you like (*counting in her head*) 15 hours ago. You were fine, then. What the heck happened between 3 a.m. at the Starbucks and (*checks watch*) 5:15, this afternoon, that left you like. . . this?

BROOKE: Adam.

JEN: What d'you mean, "Adam?" You said everything was fine, this morning.

BROOKE: Everything's not so fine. We broke up. . . I broke up. . .

JEN: You broke up? One person can't break up. You can't just stop loving somebody. It's not like a light switch you can turn on or off.

BROOKE: It is. I turned it off. I flipped the switch. One minute, I was in love with him and, flip, no more love. It was that simple and that quick. No agonizing over the decision. **(quick pause)** Nope. **(quick pause)** Just a flip.

Falling in love with him. . . I mean, when I first fell in love with him, that was pretty much like flipping a switch, too, except I didn't consciously do the flipping. The universe -- the big switch flipper in the sky -- whatever you wanna call it. . . flipped the switch and I was just the victim. . . so to speak.

It felt like fate. You remember how Adam and I met. We were at the movies. **(quick pause)** Outside the movie theater. We were both waiting for other people – I was meeting my friend, Katrina, and he was waiting for some girl who stood him up. We struck up a conversation. **(clarifying)** He spoke to me first. I wasn't even sure he was talking to me. I mean, he's gorgeous. . . way cuter than the guys that usually catch my eye. **(quick pause)** And guys that cute don't ever give me a second look. **(quick pause)** Or a first look. . . any look. But he flirted with me like I was the prettiest girl in the world. He smiled. He has those bright green eyes and a dimple – just one, right here **(SHE indicates the left cheek)**. He asked me about myself. Real questions. Not just like, "What's up?" or "Hey, how you doin' today?" And he listened to my answers and, then, asked other questions that built on what I'd said. It was like we were putting together a puzzle and every piece we tried fit perfectly into place on the first try.

He told me that he didn't like to hold hands because his palms always got really sweaty and it made him self conscious.

What guy admits that? Who shares that kind of information and allows themselves to be that vulnerable? We talked for like two hours. Non-stop. Both of us talking. I kept trying to call Katrina. She's not usually late. I kept getting her voicemail. Finally she called me and apologized and I was gonna go home and Adam said, "Why don't we go see the movie anyway. . . together."

And we did! I let him pick the seats. Guys like to do that. When we sat down, he lifted the arm rest between us and pushed it back between the seats. You know what I mean. . . They do that – the armrests. It's not like he broke it off with brute force or anything. He double checked with me to make sure it was all right. He was like, "Do you mind? Are you okay without the armrest between us? I won't

bite or anything.” And he smiled and kinda winked. Not in a sleazy or smarmy way – just a cute, playful wink.

We watched the movie. He didn’t talk, during it, which was a good thing. I hate movie talkers. And about halfway through, he reached over and held my hand. Even after telling me that he didn’t like to hold hands because his palms got sweaty. So, I was like, “Wow, this is a big deal. A huge deal.” I didn’t say that out loud. I just thought it. But it was. . . **(clarifying)** A huge deal.

We went to more movies in the next three months than I’d been to the whole rest of the year. Maybe more than I’d been to in the whole rest of my life.

It was amazing. It was like we were living one of those sweet and funny romantic comedies. We held hands. We kissed. . . in public places. I’ve never been one for. . . public displays of affection, but we couldn’t stop kissing. We kissed during movies and while we were in line at the concession stand. I’m sure we grossed out a lotta people. You know what it’s like to be sitting behind a couple while they’re kissing like there’s nobody else around. Except there are people everywhere. *We* were that couple.

And, then, last week, we were in his car. **(explaining)** He was driving me home and I said something about Jennifer Anniston and he gave me a smack. More than a slap but it wasn’t on the face. **(indicates)** It was here. On my left shoulder. And it hurt. He played it off like it was nothing. Like he just kinda tapped me. But it was definitely a smack.

(JEN is taken aback.)

He got me flowers and a really nice pair of earrings, the next day. He was so sweet. He didn’t apologize or anything but he acted like a puppy who was sorry he went to the bathroom on the kitchen floor. And we went out to the dinner – I had jambalaya. It was spicy. Then, we went to the movies. After the movies we went back to his apartment to hang out for a while. I spilled some ginger ale on the carpet. It was an accident – his fault, really. He put his arm around me and kissed my shoulder and I kinda flinched and the ginger ale spilled. It was only a little. And the carpet is the same kind of amber color as the ginger ale so you couldn’t even really see the spill.

But he hit me. Hard. With his fist.

And that did it. That flipped the switch. I can't be in love with a guy who would do that to me. . . to anyone.

JEN: Oh, my gosh.

BROOKE: (**continuing, almost oblivious to JEN**) He called, again, this morning. (**clarifying**) He's been calling three or four times a day ever since the ginger ale incident. He says he's sorry. Really sorry. And he misses me.

I miss him, too. . . I'm afraid the switch is going to get flipped on, again. . . And, then, where will I be?

JEN: You can't go back to him, after he did that to you.

BROOKE: He says he loves me. He's the first guy who ever said that to me.

JEN: And he won't be the last.

BROOKE: Look around? There isn't a line of guys waiting to take his place. Nobody gives me a second look. Adam was the exception.

JEN: The exception who hit you.

BROOKE: I know. . . I know. . . (**her cellphone rings**) It's him.

JEN: Let it go to voicemail.

BROOKE: (**answers the phone**) Hi. . . I'm at the Beverly Center with Jen. . . Uhuh. . . Yeah. . . Yeah, okay. . . I'll be there as soon as I can. (**SHE hangs up**) I've gotta go.

JEN: Don't.

BROOKE: I need to go. (**SHE hugs JEN and exits**)

(TRANSITION to the bench outside the Sub Shop. IAN is there, as ANGEL moves into the scene, carrying a Sub Shop beverage cup.)

ANGEL: (**friendly but curious**) Hey! What are you doing back here?

IAN: I wasn't doing anything and I remembered that you got your dinner break at 8:00, so I thought I'd come by and keep you company.

ANGEL: That's so sweet, but. . . I don't really have much time to hang out. I've only got like 10 or 15 minutes of my break left.

IAN: (**embarrassed**) I can leave. (**chastising himself**) I shouldn't have come. I told myself I shouldn't have come but I had such a good time talking to you, last night. I guess I wanted to keep that going.

ANGEL: You really don't have very many friends, do you? I asked you that, last night, and you didn't answer. We started talking about something else, instead.

IAN: I've never been good at making friends. It's usually hard for me to talk to people.

ANGEL: You didn't have any trouble talking to me, last night.

IAN: That was different.

ANGEL: Different how?

IAN: It just happened. It was like a . . . happy accident. . . I didn't feel like I had to. . . I don't know. . . wow you, I guess is the best way to describe it. I always feel like when I meet people, I have to say or do something that's like, "wow," so I stand out. I usually kinda fade into the background.

ANGEL: What's so good about the background?

IAN: That's where I feel comfortable. **(pause)** It's safer. . . People don't expect much. **(quick pause)** One of the cool things about last night was that I wasn't faded into the background – how could I with only two of us there, right? – and I still didn't feel like you expected anything from me other than to just be me.

ANGEL: Who you are is all you need to be. And you don't need to fade into the background or anywhere else.

IAN: But I'm not one of the "wow" people. I'm not popular. . . I'll never be popular.

ANGEL: Popularity is like microwave popcorn. There's a lot of hot air and not a lot of substance. And the so-called popular people are all trying to look the same and act the same.

I was at the mall, last week, and all the clothes in all the stores looked the same. Faded blue and beige. Like a uniform for teenagers trying to look cool. There was *some* stuff with red and green and pink in it but those colors were even more faded than the blue and beige. It's like everything was put in the wash like a hundred times. And that's what the people who are supposedly cool are wearing.

There's no individuality that way. No personality. Nothing distinctive. It's like whatever individuality they did have had to be washed out – diluted – before they could fit in with everybody else. Even the stores themselves are all the same. The clothes look the same, the salespeople act the same – like they're better than everybody else. Every mall in LA has the same stores. And it's like that everywhere. It's like our whole country has been mall-ized. Like that's the ideal. . . the goal.

I don't wanna look like everybody else. I don't want my clothes – or my individuality – to be washed out and faded just so I can be accepted. I'm a bright-color girl. I'm a little weird but, to me, a little weird is wonderful.

IAN: I like orange.

ANGEL: Orange is good.

IAN: It's a bright color. I have an orange shirt. I got it for my birthday but I haven't worn it, yet. It's hard to fade into the background in an orange shirt.

ANGEL: You should wear it. But don't just *wear* an orange shirt. *Be* an orange shirt.

IAN: (**questioning**) Be an orange shirt? (**pause, understanding**) Be an orange shirt!

ANGEL: (**with a laugh**) I'd like to stay out here and be an orange shirt with you but my break's over, so I've got to be the assistant manager-slash-sandwich artist and get back to work, instead.

IAN: You close up around midnight, right?

ANGEL: Probably closer to 11:30 or 11:45 like last night.

IAN: You close early even on a Saturday night?

ANGEL: Nobody comes in after like 10:30 so it's pretty much clean up after that anyway.

IAN: I could come back at 11:30.

ANGEL: I'll see you, then. (**SHE exits**)

IAN: (**to himself, with a sense of wonder**) I have a friend! (**HE exits**)

(TRANSITION to a hotdog stand/restaurant near the intersection of Melrose and LaBrea. TANNER has finished his hot dog and is playing with the paper it was wrapped in. SEAN enters, looks around and spots an empty seat next to Tanner.)

SEAN: (**to TANNER**) Is anybody sitting there?

TANNER: No. . . not really.

SEAN: Not really? Is your imaginary friend sitting there?

TANNER: (**not amused**) No. Nobody is sitting there. Nobody real and nobody imaginary.

SEAN: I was joking. I didn't mean to tick you off.

TANNER: You didn't. Not really.

SEAN: Again with the "not really."

TANNER: My friend Luke was supposed to meet me here. Actually, he was supposed to meet me inside. I ordered my chili dog and got a table and waited and waited and he didn't show up. When I got here (**checks watch**) *two and a half hours ago*, they weren't very busy but the longer I sat there waiting, the more crowded it got. I had no idea how many people go out for chili dogs and stuff this late at night. While I was waiting for Luke, this guy with one thick eyebrow came over and asked if I could move since it was a table for four and there was only one of me. So I said, "I'm waiting for my friend," and he was like, "Sure." The three people that were with the guy just stood there and looked down at me – they were standing and I was sitting so they were literally looking down at me – and I felt like such a loser. So, I got up and came out here.

SEAN: What happened to him? (**quick pause**) Your friend, I mean.

TANNER: I don't know.

SEAN: Didn't he call?

TANNER: Nope.

SEAN: And he's two and a half hours late? Aren't you worried something might have happened?

TANNER: Not really. **(pause)** I guess that sounds harsh but it's not like this is the first time we've made plans and he hasn't shown up. Something else probably came up. It usually does.

SEAN: Maybe he figured it wasn't a big deal.

TANNER: We were gonna celebrate my getting a job, today.

SEAN: A job here?

TANNER: No. **(quick pause)** God, no. **(quick pause)** At Aveda. **(clarifying)** The one in the Beverly Center.

SEAN: That's great. Congratulations.

TANNER: Thanks. My mom and dad weren't impressed. My mom was like, "Oh. . . that's nice. I hope you don't expect me to buy anything just because you got a job there." I was hoping they'd be a little more enthusiastic. That's why I was psyched when Luke said he wanted to hang out and get some food to celebrate. **(pause)** So much for that plan.

SEAN: **(trying to add levity, at his own expense)** At least you had plans to start with.

TANNER: Whaddaya mean?

SEAN: I've spent most of today getting a lecture from my dad about why I'm such a failure at sports and, according to him, a failure at sports is a failure at life.

TANNER: He said that?

SEAN: Repeatedly. Toss in about a million references to how great my brother is at sports and how much he reminds my dad of himself when he was younger and you have an idea what my day's been like. **(pause)** I had to get out of the house.

TANNER: Had a craving for a chili dog? At 10:30?

SEAN: Eeeuuuwww, no. That's the funny thing, though. If I told my dad where I was really going to go, he'd have screamed and yelled and said I couldn't go.

TANNER: Where's that?

SEAN: Smoothie Shack. They make the best mango, banana and passion fruit smoothies. At home, I eat what my mom makes but when I'm out, I try to be as vegetarian as possible.

TANNER: So, what are you doing here? A hotdog stand is about as far from vegetarian as you can get.

SEAN: I just bought a bottle of water. Smoothie Shack is like thirteen more blocks down Melrose and I was thirsty. And, besides, this way I'm not really lying. When I told him I was walking here, my dad said, "Good! A chili dog'll put hair on your chest." And he high-fived me.

Over a chili dog. A chili dog that I wasn't actually going to get. But whatever scores points and keeps him from yelling at me is all good.

Sometimes, I feel like if I pretended to be more of a jock, like my brother, my dad will like me better. So, I talk myself into believing that if I just watch ESPN or read *Sports Illustrated*, I'll be able to have a conversation with him. I stand in the bathroom, looking into the mirror and giving myself a pep talk. There's always a stack of *Sports Illustrated* magazines in the bathroom, so it seems like a good place for the pep talk, plus, there's the mirror and, that way, I can make tough-guy faces and practice looking like I know what the heck the difference is between a small forward and a power forward and why they call the small forwards small when all of 'em are so tall.

But even after the pep talk and all the tough-guy faces, as soon as I sit down in front of the TV to watch ESPN it's like my head weighs a hundred pounds and it takes all my concentration just to keep it from falling off my shoulders. My dad watches *Sports Center* at four or five different times during the day and night. He says it's new scores and updates and different highlight footage but it seems to me like it's the same stuff repeated over and over.

And my dad and brother communicate in this bizarre language of abbreviations and codes. ERAs and RBIs and PPG and PAT and they talk about who has a better slugging percentage and who doesn't have their legs under 'em for a three-point shot. Where are their legs if they aren't under them?

TANNER: I don't know.

SEAN: Why is it that getting the ball between the post things in football is called a field goal but getting the ball in the net thing in soccer is just a plain goal – not a *field* goal. And why do they call it a field goal in basketball when the ball goes in the basket, even though they play on a court, not a field? It's just not logical.

When a football player from one team catches a ball thrown by the throwing guy from the other team, it's called an interception. When a basketball player from one team catches a ball thrown by somebody from the other team, it's called a steal? Why isn't it an interception? Or why isn't it a steal in football?

TANNER: I'm in way over my head, here.

SEAN: It makes me mad. It makes me seriously ticked off. There is no logic to any of it. It's like the people who made up the sports tried to make them as confusing as possible. But none of it confuses my dad or my brother or any of their friends. We've had like twenty guys at

my house to watch college football on Saturdays. They all show up in USC shirts and drink beer and yell at the TV like the players and referees can actually hear them. And they have all these hand things. Not just regular high fives. They do double high fives and I guess you'd call 'em low fives, when they slap each other's hands down low instead of up high. But the one that's the strangest is when they kind of bang their knuckles against another guy's knuckles.

One time, my dad made me stay and watch the whole game and then, he practically killed me 'cause I called halftime intermission. His friends booed me. Grown up, adult men booing me because I didn't use the correct term for the time when they all line up to use the bathroom and demonstrate what really bad aim they have after drinking so much beer. Intermission – halftime, halftime – intermission. What's the big freaking difference?

TANNER: I don't know.

SEAN: But the thing that ticks me off most of all is that I care – not about whether it's halftime or intermission or whether it's an interception or a steal. I care that it's like a secret world that I can't find my way into and it's a world that's so important to my dad and my brother.

I shouldn't care. . . I shouldn't have to care. . . But I do.

TANNER: So, you do things like say you're going out for a chili dog when you're really going to get a smoothie.

SEAN: Exactly. How weird is that?

TANNER: Weird is relative.

SEAN: I guess so.

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