

OUTSIDE IN (ONE-ACT VERSION)

By Dennis Bush

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CHARACTERS

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

SETTING

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

PRODUCTION NOTES

Outside In can be presented with a very simple set. Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting and staging.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Outside In (One-Act version) had its premiere production in Phoenix, Arizona, in October 2011. The cast included Cera Naccarato, Rosemary Zinke, Chelsea Karnes, Meggy Lykins, Hannah Sanchez, Connery Morano, Alex Reust, and Thomas Hartwell. The production was directed by the author.

A full-length version of *Outside In* premiered in September 2006. The original cast included Nadine Lombardi, Kelsey Torstveit, Emily White, Alex Knerr, Samantha Ortiz, Macy Cobb, Jared Sikes, and Scott McKown. The production was directed by the author.

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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 and SEAN: ... brain off.

DANIELLE: I've got...

ANGEL, SEAN and BROOKE: ... too much...

IAN, KATIE, JEN and TANNER: ... on my mind.

ANGEL: (*Imitating her mother*) You're fat.

JEN and IAN: You're stupid.

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

ANGEL: I worry about...

ALL: ... everything.

IAN: I know...

TANNER and BROOKE: I'm different...

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: *(Imitating her mother)* Have you gained weight? I think you've gained weight. It looks like you've gained weight.

SEAN: *(Imitating his dad)* Your brother was always so good at sports. What happened with you?

KATIE: *(Imitating her mother)* I'm not going to sugar coat it... You're as dumb as a box of rocks.

TANNER: *(Imitating his friend Luke)* You've got weird little habits, dude.

JEN: *(Imitating her mother)* 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.

BROOKE: *(Imitating her mom)* Your sister is so pretty. Maybe she could give you some make-up tips.

DANIELLE: *(Reading a text from her ex-boyfriend)* We can see each other as long as nobody I know sees us seeing each other.

ANGEL: It's midnight...

BROOKE: ... and I can't sleep.

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 of the brush, put it inside the toothbrush holder, rinse off my retainer, put my retainer in and wash my hands, again. The water has to be luke warm. I have to wait a couple minutes till it gets to exactly the right temperature. I wash my face with the luke warm water before slowly turning the water to a cooler temperature. I rinse off my face, then dry my hands with a clean towel. I dry my face with tissues. Towels are too filthy to ever use on my face. 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: They're still fighting. It's midnight and my parents are still fighting. They've been yelling at each other since 7:23. They started earlier than usual, tonight. My dad made a comment about some actress on TV being hot. As soon as 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. 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.

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

ANGEL: *(To IAN)* It's midnight...

IAN: Is it?

ANGEL: Yeah. We're closed.

IAN: I thought you were open till 2:00.

ANGEL: Nope. We close at midnight. Usually at about 11:30 or 11:45. 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 till 1:00 or 2:00. 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 walked here. (*Explaining*) I was hungry. I wanted a sandwich. I had a craving for a tuna sub.

ANGEL: (*Aghast*) 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?

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 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 Italian sub 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 at this hour?

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.

IAN: (*Justifying having a lot on his mind*) I'm fifteen.

ANGEL: Fifteen? And you're out wandering 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. It's just my mom. And she wasn't even home. She went to a party with some guy. I'll be back before she gets home. Even if I stay out till 5:00, I'll still get back before she does.

ANGEL: I'm sorry.

IAN: Nothing for you to be sorry about.

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? 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 Italian sub 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 pull a gun on you?

ANGEL: No, knock on wood. I think I'd die if anybody did that. *(Catching 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: Hmm.

ANGEL: Hmm?

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: *(Chuckling)* Maybe he's not as deep as me. You said he "used to read comic books." Doesn't he like 'em anymore?

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

IAN: Why not?

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

IAN: I'm sorry.

ANGEL: I was 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 gestures for her to go on with the story.)

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 sixteen. 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 of a joke like, "She's so crazy." 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. Like how 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.

(IAN laughs.)

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. I never knew what kind of... situation... I'd be walking into. She was in a constant state of... agitation. 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 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 launch into one of her rants at him. 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 to 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 kind weird, too. I was a... different kind of kid. I wore hiking boots and fairy wings that came off a Tinkerbell Halloween costume. I was different, but 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 was sitting on the floor, surrounded by Barbies covered with ketchup and their arms and legs in all kinds of contorted positions and she said, "Look, honey, there's been

an accident. There's been a big accident and everyone died." And I walked past her and thought it was just another day. But that night, as I was laying in bed, trying to fall asleep and my brain was like a movie theatre showing me images of the Barbies and 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 night, 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? *(With a deep breath, as the emotion washes over her)* 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 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.

(A beat.)

IAN: I don't know what to say.

ANGEL: You don't need to say anything.

IAN: Well... 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. *(Checking her phone to see what time it is)* I should 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 something good on TV. *(Pause)* Hey... 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... Maybe I'll see you again. *(Quick pause)* Did that sound too stalkerish?

ANGEL: *(Laughing)* No, not at all.

IAN: Cool.

(IAN considers giving ANGEL 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. BROOKE and DANIELLE are already seated. JEN enters.)

JEN: *(Spotting BROOKE, hugging her)* 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. Danielle... Jen.

DANIELLE: *(To JEN)* 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. *(Explaining)* 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)* OK, 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 the explanation)* 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 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: ... And 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? 3A24SOS.

BROOKE: As opposed to 11PCBS.

(*DANIELLE looks perplexed.*)

JEN: (*Explaining*) 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’s it’s the AMS – Angry-Mohawk Starbucks.

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

JEN: 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. (*Bringing DANIELLE up to speed*) 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?

BROOKE: (*Softly*) 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. It’s not as complicated as it sounds. We knew each other. We were friends, but we weren’t really in the same... circle. Then, one afternoon, I was sitting on a bench outside my dorm, just reading a book and enjoying the day. And Ethan stopped and asked me if I wanted to help him with a project. So I said, “Sure,” and I did. Help him. And it was fun. I’m good at some things that he’s not. And when I was getting

ready to leave his room, 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. 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... By the time I got back to my room, I had a Facebook message from him. "I'm totally tripping on what happened, today." That's what he said. He was "totally tripping." And, oh my gosh, so was I. Like majorly tripping. He asked for my phone number and wanted to know if it was okay if he texted me. And, of course, I didn't mind. But I didn't let him know how excited I was. I sent him a message with my number and said it was cool if he wanted to text me 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... We started texting and calling and Facebook messaging and emailing 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 complicated?

BROOKE: I guess so.

DANIELLE: 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. 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 felt 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 group. I felt that good about myself and him and us and... everything... Then, tonight, we were both at the party at Scarab. There must have been like three hundred people there. 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 went to the bathroom and sent him a text: "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 text. I saw him check his phone, so I know he got it. 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 question mark so he'd 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 text back from him: “idk.” I D K. You know, like, “I don’t know.” And I was like, okay, I don’t even rate full words, just an abbreviation. Then, another text arrived – a follow up to his “idk.” *(Taking a breath, trying not to cry)* It said, “But we can’t. I can’t.” *(SHE begins to cry)* I sent him another text or two... or five. Okay, eight! But he didn’t reply... He didn’t reply. *(SHE awkwardly wipes away tears)* It doesn’t matter anymore. *(An unexpected wave of tears)* I guess the electricity wasn’t enough... Even matched sets of magnets can be pulled apart... He didn’t answer... but I got the message.

JEN: And here I was complaining about my parents fighting and you’ve had to deal with that tonight?!

BROOKE: *(Raising her cup)* Latte emergency!

JEN: *(To BROOKE)* How are things with you and Adam? Was he with you at the club?

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

DANIELLE: Who’s Adam?

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

BROOKE: *(Unconvincingly)* Yeah.

DANIELLE: *(Joking)* That didn’t sound very enthusiastic.

BROOKE: I’m just tired.

JEN: *(Getting up)* Me, too. I should get back home. Hopefully, my parents will have stopped fighting and I’ll be able to get to sleep.

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

BROOKE: Call me, later, okay?

(THEY hug, then BOTH exit. Transition to a bench outside tennis courts.

KATIE sits on the bench, holding her racquet.)

SEAN: *(Rushing in)* Where is everybody?

KATIE: Not here.

SEAN: I’m only like three minutes late.

KATIE: They canceled the lesson. According to the lady up front, they called everyone in 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: *(Not sure how to respond)* Oh....

KATIE: He’s from somewhere in Alabama. He’s got an accent. Most of the time, 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 20's, 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... Who do you live with? Your mom or your dad?

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

KATIE: (*In 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 till he comes back to get me at the regular time. Do you mind if I wait with you?

SEAN: No, it's okay.

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 a 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 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... Red Vines are my favorite.

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

KATIE: (*Blushing*) 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. And 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 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 – 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 to 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... (*Getting back on track*) 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 and Red Vines are food. They're even fat free.... I looked around to make sure nobody was watching before I put it in my mouth. I leaned against the wall and slid down till 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... His name is actually Hunter, but 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 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." 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. 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. My first kiss. Ever. And it was a Red Vine-alicious kiss. 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’d 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 taste of recycled Red Vine in my mouth.

SEAN: So you and Hunt are going out?

KATIE: His dad got transferred to Cincinnati. He works for Chiquita – the banana company. Their headquarters is in Cincinnati – Ohio! It seems like a strange place to have the headquarters for a company that sells tropical fruit, but that’s where it is. And where Hunt is, now... We talk on Facebook and text and we’ve Skyped a few of times but that was weird. The whole time I was doing it, I worried about how I looked, so we don’t do that much anymore.

SEAN: I think I’d be bitter.

KATIE: About not talking on Skype?

SEAN: 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 that he needed to start looking for a job out of state. People move. It happens.

SEAN: I guess...

KATIE: But I miss having him in the same place. And I miss the way 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 I *was* special.

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

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. If I had a special person who moved away, I’d 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. 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 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 douche-wad 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 into my room and yells and takes a paring knife from the kitchen and makes cuts in my finger tips – which hurts like hell – but he says it’s my fault so I should just shut up and take my punishment like a man. (*SEAN notices his dad’s car approaching.*) Uh-oh. (*Indicating the car*) 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.

(*SEAN exits. Wistfully, KATIE exits a moment later. 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, “uh-VEE-duh” instead of saying it correctly, “uh-VAY-duh.”*)

TANNER: (*Correcting her pronunciation*) 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.

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 the 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 till 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 get started. 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: *(Surprised)* You're funny.

TANNER: Thanks... Sorry if I was a little snotty before. No pun intended.

(THEY laugh, again.)

I just wanna make a good impression on them. I really want to get the job. 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. *(Clarifying quickly)* 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 its 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... 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 privacy. 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. Except for my prescription acne medication. And she stands outside the door for what seems like hours before she finally knows. 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, the firemen could save me without having to bust the door down. So, after standing there for... *forever*, she knocks. 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, "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 touching things and moves things and says, "Hmm," 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. 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 it's the same with my mom. It's like they're trying to burst 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. Outside my room, I can't control what people say about me. I can't help if they think I'm weird or obsessive or whatever. I can't control any of it. But inside my room... *that* I can control.

BROOKE: (*Kissing TANNER 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 and BROOKE notice that Mateo has returned and that the applicants are being waved into the store.*)

TANNER: Let's hope that was a kiss for luck. It looks like they're ready to start the interviews. (*HE leans over and kisses BROOKE's cheek*) There's a kiss for luck for you, too.

(*Transition to the 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: Just wandering around... Thinking about stuff...

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 5:15 this afternoon, that left you like... this?

BROOKE: Adam.

JEN: You said everything was fine, this morning.

BROOKE: It’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, 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.

JEN: You said it was like you two were pieces of a puzzle that fit together exactly right on the first try.

BROOKE: Right... And then last week, we were in his car. 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. 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 dinner – I had jambalaya – It was spicy. Then we went to the movies and, after that, 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...

JEN: Oh my gosh.

BROOKE: *(Continuing, almost oblivious to JEN)* 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 phone rings; SHE looks to see who it is)* It's him.

JEN: Let it go to voicemail.

BROOKE: *(Answering the phone)* Hi... I'm at the Beverly Center with Jen... Uh-huh... 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. *(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 ten or fifteen minutes of my break left.

IAN: *(Embarrassed)* 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'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 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: 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'll never be popular.

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

I don't want 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, as HE begins to understand)* 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: I could come back.

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 came in. SEAN enters, looks around and spots an empty seat next to TANNER.)

SEAN: Is anybody sitting there?

TANNER: No... Not really.

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

TANNER: *(Not amused)* No... Nobody's 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 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... two and a half hours ago, they weren't very busy, but the longer I waited the more crowded it got. I had no idea how many people go out for chili dogs and stuff this late at night.

SEAN: What happened to your friend?

TANNER: No clue.

SEAN: Didn't he call or text?

(TANNER shakes his head "no.")

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

TANNER: Not really. 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. (*A beat.*) We were gonna celebrate my getting a job, today.

SEAN: A job here?

TANNER: No way. At *Aveda*. The one in the Beverly Center.

SEAN: That's great. Congratulations.

TANNER: Thanks. 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." That's why I was psyched when Luke said he wanted to hang out and get some food to celebrate... 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... I had to get out of the house.

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

SEAN: Eeuuww, no. That's the funny thing, though. If I told my dad where I was really going, 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 passionfruit 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. 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-five'd me. Over a chili dog.

A chili dog that I wasn't actually going to get. But whatever...

Sometimes, I feel like if I pretended to be more of a jock, like my brother, my dad would like me better. So I talk myself into believing that if just watch ESPN or read *Sports Illustrated*, I'll be able to have a conversation with him. My dad and brother communicate in this bizarre language of abbreviations and codes. ERAs and RBIs and PPG and PAT and they talk about slugging percentages 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'm in way over my head, here.

SEAN: It makes me mad. It makes me seriously ticked off. There's no logic to any of it. It's like the people who made up 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 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 used the wrong word. 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 – 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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