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To Robert Gattie, a Constant Help Through the Years

Cast of Characters

1	M 6
2	M 7
3	M 8
4	M 9
5	MORT
6	GORDON
7	NORM
8	DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG
9	ACTOR 1
10	ACTOR 2
11	ACTOR 3
12	KIM
13	JOANNE
14	SAUNDRA
15	NICK
TABITHA	UNCLE NED
TABITHA'S MOM	AUNT BLANCHE
TABITHA'S BROTHER	COUSIN SKIPPY
TABITHA'S NEIGHBOR	AUNT CAROLE
SAMMY	UNCLE STEWART
SAMMY'S DAD	GREAT AUNT GLADYS
SAMMY'S MOM	PAM
SAMMY'S SISTER 1	PAM'S MOTHER
SAMMY'S SISTER 2	MR. GRAY
MIA	NATE
JULIE	JOHN
JULIE'S DIRECTOR	TOM
DOUG	JESS
SUSIE	JESS'S DAD
DOUG'S PARENTS	DAL
MEG	LISA
ALANA	GREG
ALANA'S 3 BIG FRIENDS	ZACH
M 1	JOE
M 2	CLAIRA
M 3	PYRO
M 4	FLAME
M 5	NITRO

Cast of Characters *(continued:)*

MR. MORTON

CORABELLE

DANA

WHOOPEE 1

WHOOPEE 2

WHOOPEE 3

WHOOPEE 4

BOB

ISTANOCHINOTURKISTANASTANIAN 1

ISTANOCHINOTURKISTANASTANIAN 2

ISTANOCHINOTURKISTANASTANIAN 3

18 MORE REASONS NOT TO BE IN A PLAY

by Alan Haehnel

(Open to a group of students standing stock still, perhaps in a quasi-military formation. Sternly, they look straight out at the audience.)

ALL. We are in grave danger.

1. In the fall of 2005, a crucial document was published.
2. This document warned the world of a burgeoning sickness.
3. An insidious cancer.
4. An ever-spreading plague called...

ALL. Drama.

5. The name of this publication:

ALL. *15 Reason Not to be in a Play.*

6. The information in this important document has been widely propagated.
7. From Maine to Kansas to California...
8. Audiences across the country have heard the warning.
9. None can claim ignorance.

ALL. The word is out!

10. And yet.

11. Despite the identification and publication and dissemination of this crucial information...

ALL. It's still happening.

12. Yes! Unbelievable and horrifying as it may seem, at this very moment some unsuspecting child may be bursting through the door of her abode and happily shouting...

TABITHA. Hey, Mom, guess what? I'm going to be in a play!

13. And instead of the appropriate response that child should get at such an ominous pronouncement...

TABITHA. Mom? Where are you?

TABITHA'S MOM. Tabitha, I'm here. What did you just say?

TABITHA'S BROTHER. Tab, did you just swear?

TABITHA. No, I just said...

TABITHA'S NEIGHBOR. I was just across the street giving CPR to my favorite cat when I thought I heard my favorite little neighbor girl say something terribly disturbing.

TABITHA'S MOM. Say it again, Tabitha—slowly.

TABITHA. *(Slowly:)* I got a part in the school play!

TABITHA'S MOM. No! Good Lord, no!

TABITHA'S BROTHER. What were you thinking? What's the matter with you?

TABITHA'S NEIGHBOR. I knew I should have moved after they found that cyanide in the water supply. Now this!

TABITHA'S MOM. Where did I go wrong? I tried to be a good mother!

TABITHA. But I...

TABITHA'S BROTHER. Mom, it's not your fault. *(To TABITHA:)* See what you've done!

TABITHA'S NEIGHBOR. I'm calling 9-1-1. I'm calling the moving truck!

TABITHA'S MOM. I'm a failure!

TABITHA'S NEIGHBOR. I'm calling an exorcist!

14. Instead of that completely natural and appropriate response, somewhere in this great but confused country of ours, this is happening:

SAMMY. Hey, Mom, Dad, Jenny, Sarah...hey, everybody!

SAMMY'S DAD. What's up, Sammy?

SAMMY'S SISTER 1. Who's doing all the yelling?

SAMMY'S MOM. Honey, what's the matter?

SAMMY'S SISTER 2. This better be good, Squirt.

SAMMY. Everybody, I have something very, very, very important to say. It's big. It's serious.

SAMMY'S SISTERS. Well?

SAMMY'S DAD. Out with it, Sam; I've got crab grass to murder.

SAMMY. I...got a part in the play! I'm going to be in the play!

(The family freezes, shocked, then erupts into shouts of congratulations, hugging SAMMY. The others witnessing this scene look disgusted.)

ALL OTHERS. Sick!

15. Impossible as it may seem, children of all ages are continuing to contract this scourge called drama.

1. And are actually being congratulated for it!

ALL BUT SAMMY AND FAMILY: Really sick!

2. Clearly, the initial warning–15 Reasons Not to be in a Play–was not enough.

3. The enemy remains at large–lurking, snatching, devouring our families, our friends, our neighbors.

4. We are a nation under siege.

5. The question is...

ALL. What are we going to do about it?

6. Are we going to ignore the problem?

7. Are we going to give up the fight?

8. Are we going to roll over and play dead while the theatrical threat still looms so large?

ALL. Heck, no!

9. That's not our way.

10. If 15 Reasons didn't convince the nation yet, then perhaps we need to be a bit more persuasive.

11. Perhaps we need to kick it up a notch.

12. Perhaps we need to go to overwhelming force.

13. 15 Reasons didn't do the trick? So be it. What we've got right here and right now is...

ALL. 18 More Reasons Not to be in a Play! *(Pause.)* Reason One!

MIA. Abraham Lincoln!

(Everyone looks at her. She looks back, nodding her head knowingly.)

MIA. Oh, yeah.

(After another pause, everyone turns back to the audience.)

ALL. Reason Two!

JULIE. Because you're a fast talker. You come from a family of fast talkers and if there's such a thing as a gene for fast talking you have definitely inherited it and if you were in a play you'd memorize your lines and all that but you'd say them too fast and you know the director would say...

JULIE'S DIRECTOR. Take it slower.

JULIE. And you'd know you're supposed to take it slower and you would say to yourself over and over, "Talk slower, talk slower," but when you worried about it you'd get tense and when you got tense you'd talk even faster so the director would start to get mad and he'd say...

JULIE'S DIRECTOR. You have to talk slower!

JULIE. And you'd practically be screaming at yourself inside yourself and beating yourself up because you'd know you were still talking too fast but you'd be getting so nervous about it you'd be getting faster and faster so the director would lose his patience finally and yell...

JULIE'S DIRECTOR. Slower!

JULIE. And that would make you go so fast that you never even took a breath and you'd go and go and go and go and go and go so fast that you ran completely out of air but still you'd be telling yourself to slow down so the director wouldn't yell at you because you hated that but you couldn't stop racing and racing until finally you just...

(JULIE passes out.)

5. It's all right. She does this. She'll be back.

JULIE. Hello. Did I talk and talk and talk so fast and so nervous that I actually passed out?

5. Yup.

JULIE. Again?

5. Yup.

JULIE. Good thing I wasn't in a play.

ALL. Reason 3!

DOUG. Because you remember Susie Jenson. When you were six, you lived in a neighborhood that had a lot of old people, trees, dogs, fences and just one other kid your age: Susie.

SUSIE. Hey!

DOUG. Since you were the only other kid Susie's age, she decided you must be her best friend.

SUSIE. Hey, best friend, let's go play!

DOUG. Since—amongst the trees, fences, dogs and old people—there was only one other kid your age, your parents assumed you wanted to be with Susie.

DOUG'S PARENTS. There's Susie. Go play!

DOUG. But, in truth, Susie Jenson—whom you could not escape—bugged the living heck out of you. Why? Because every day, every single day, she wanted to do the same thing.

SUSIE. Let's put on a play!

DOUG. And every play, every single play, she wanted to be the same thing.

SUSIE. I'll be a fairy.

DOUG. And then Susie, the fairy, would proceed to tell you every possible way you could enact her supporting role.

SUSIE. Yeah, I'll be a fairy, and pretend that I got caught on a thorn bush on a thorn and I was bleeding and you could be the ambulance guy that comes to save me, okay?

DOUG. Hour after hour with Susie.

SUSIE. I'll be a fairy, and you could be my wings. Stand behind me and flap, okay?

DOUG. Day after day with Susie.

SUSIE. So, listen, I'll be a fairy and you can be this mean dragon that eats dirt and spits it at me. Go ahead. Eat some dirt.

DOUG. The weeks, the months, the eternities with Susie and her fairy variations.

SUSIE. I'm going to be a fairy and let's pretend that I broke my wing so I couldn't fly but then I ran into Aladdin and he said I could borrow his flying carpet. You can be the carpet. Just lie down and I'll get on your back. And then I can be flying through the air and you can just bounce up and down on your belly like we're hitting some rough spots in the clouds and then—oh, yeah!—then you be like a fairy-hating demon that pulls the carpet out from under me. You would just have to roll over for that part. But then I could fight you and I could win by hitting you on the head over and over with my wand. Let's do that, okay?

DOUG. Susie. Susie Jenson. The torturing fairy of your childhood. So now, whenever anyone mentions being in a play, you think of...

SUSIE. Hi. It's Susie. You want to come over and play? I'll be a fairy and you could be a little bug I accidentally squish to death.

DOUG. And you curl up in the fetal position and refuse to eat or speak for a month.

ALL. Reason 4!

MEG. Because your older sister was in a play and she said she loved it so you have to hate it. It's a law.

ALL. Reason 5!

(This section—"The Legend of Mort"—should be delivered with the flavor of a ghost story told around the campfire. These first repeated words, for instance, should sound like an overdone, spooky echo effect.)

ALANA. Because...

M 1. Because...

M 2. Because...

M 3. Because...

ALANA. Of the legend.

M 4. The legend!

M 5. The legend!

M 6. The legend!

ALANA. Of ...

M 7. Of...

M 8. Of...

M 9. Of...

ALANA. Mortimer Blackburn!

ALL. Mort!

ALANA. Mort, or so the legend goes, was once a normal child.

MORT. Hello. I'm Mort. I'm normal. Pretty much. I like Oreos and video games and females, not necessarily in that order.

ALANA. One creepy evening, with a full moon lurking in the air, Mort was approached by a shady character with a tempting proposition.

GORDON. Hey, Mort, come here.

MORT. Oo, you look shady.

GORDON. It's just the moonlight. It plays with my complexion.

(We hear the sound of a wolf in the distance.)

MORT. What was that?

GORDON. Nothing. Just an ominous wolf signaling impending danger.

MORT. An ominous wolf, huh? They're endangered, aren't they?

GORDON. Listen,

ALANA. Said the Shady character,

GORDON. You've got a good look.

MORT. I do?

GORDON. You've got a good voice.

MORT. I do?

GORDON. You've got a good walk.

MORT. I...really?

GORDON. Mort, I want you to be in a play.

MORT. Why would I do that? I'm normal. Pretty much.

ALANA. But the shady character seemed to know just how to get to Mort. It was almost as if he could get inside his mind!

NORM. Noooooo! A mind getter-insider-er! He was one of those guys who gets inside your mind and then he knows what's inside your mind almost as if he was inside your mind!

ALANA. Yes. One of those.

NORM. Noooo!

GORDON. Why would you want to be in a play? Because in the green room we play video games and eat Oreo cookies.

MORT. Oh?

GORDON. And you'd be an actor. Females dig that.

MORT. I'm in.

NORM. He got inside Mort's miiiind!

ALANA. *(To NORM:)* Do you mind?

NORM. *(Fading off to the side:)* Nooooo!

ALANA. So Mort met the director.

GORDON. Director Frankenburg, this is Mortimer. He wants to be in the play.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Ah, you have brought me another one. Well done, Gordon.

GORDON. I live to serve, Director Frankenburg.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Mortimer, is it?

MORT. Mort. It saves on syllables. I suspect we may be wasting too many syllables in this country.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Yes, yes. Mort, it is time for your audition.

MORT. My aud...say, that shady guy mentioned something about Oreos.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Growl, Mort.

MORT. Huh?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Growl.

MORT. You mean, like—grrr?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Yes! Yes, I sense potential! Again!

MORT. Grrrr.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. You are a natural!

MORT. Do I get the part?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Yes. You are Bowser!

M 1. Bowser!

M 2. Bowser!

M 3. Bowser!

MORT. Boy, this place echoes.

ALANA. Bowser. Little did Mort realize at that moment the enormous impact that name would have on the rest of his life.

NORM. How could he have known? He didn't know! His life was full of non-knowing!

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Who are you, Mortimer?

MORT. Well, since you called me by my name, I pretty much figure you already know the...

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. You are Bowser!

M 4. Bowser!

M 5. Bowser!

M 6. Bowser!

MORT. Right. Now, about those crème-filled chocolate cookies I mentioned earlier...

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. We must rehearse! Gordon!

GORDON. Yes, Director Frankenburg?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Bring out...the other actors!

GORDON. Yes, Director Frankenburg.

MORT. Hey, Shady Guy—Gordon, right? Where is this green room you were talking about with all the cookies and the video...

(But GORDON has already exited.)

ALANA. Little did Mort know that he had entered into the realm of the notorious Director Frankenburg who required from his actors nothing less than complete and abject devotion. Poor Mort.

NORM. Poor Mort. Poor, poor, poor Mort. Mort the poor. Poor as a Mort could be. Oh, Mort, how poor you are!

ALANA. *(To NORM:)* Do you make a habit of being annoyingly repetitious?

NORM. I pity Mort for his poor poverty.

(GORDON enters with three ACTORS in tow, all staring straight ahead and walking like zombies.)

GORDON. Actors, come! Director Frankenburg desires your presence!

MORT. Gordon, there you are. I was looking for the directions to the green room and the video games. *(Noticing one of the ACTORS:)* Hey, she's a female. Is she going to dig me?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Silencio! Act 1, scene 2, my actors.

(The ACTORS immediately jump to their places, staring off into the distance with looks of deep concern on their faces.)

ALANA. Suddenly, Mort, once a jovial...

NORM. Jovial Mort!

ALANA. And free...

NORM. Mort the free! Free Morty!

ALANA. *(To NORM:)* Do you think you're helping me tell this legend?

NORM. I believe I am adding dramatic emphasis in key moments, yes.

ALANA. You're not.

NORM. Who says?

ALANA. I do along with three of my largest and most aggressive friends who happen to be standing right behind you.

(NORM turns to see that three large and aggressive people are behind him, looking threatening.)

NORM. *(Slinking away:)* And he fades quietly into the shadows, the shadow-fading shadow guy, good-bye.

(Alana's three big friends exit as ALANA turns back to the audience.)

ALANA. Suddenly Mort, once a jovial and free teenaged individual, found himself in the midst of a play peopled by actors devoted to and virtually hypnotized by their ostensibly helpful but actually tyrannical director!

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. *(Regarding his actors, posed to perform:)* Excellent, my pets. Now, bring me Bowser. Bowser!

MORT. *(To GORDON:)* Jeez, he gets kind of loud, doesn't...

(GORDON grabs MORT by the ear and drags him to DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG.)

MORT. Hey, ow! Wait a minute! Yeouch! Let go of my ear, you shady character, you!

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Ah, my beautiful Bowser. You shall be in this scene.

MORT. You know what? I'm kind of thinking that maybe I'll skip the Oreos and the...

ALANA. But it was too late! He had been caught and cast by Director Frankenburg!

NORM. *(Hidden:)* Caught and cast! A cast and caught character! Oh, no! Say it isn't so! Mort the...

(One of Alana's aggressive friends strides on and drags NORM out of his hiding place.)

NORM. Hello. I am Norm who never just said any of that and never just will ever again.

(The friend pushes NORM offstage as the action continues.)

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. *(Bringing MORT to a spot next to the actors:)* This is your place, Bowser. This is your destined spot in this scene. Get down on all fours.

MORT. Hey, you know what? I think I hear my mother getting ready to call me.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Down, Bowser, like the very dog you are!

MORT. *(Obeying:)* Okay, well, sure, for a second.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Now, my actors—begin the scene!

(All of the acting is extremely overdone. MORT looks lost in the scene, wondering what he is supposed to be doing.)

ACTOR 1. My gosh, look at that!

ACTOR 2. Yes, yes, it is incredibly alarming!

ACTOR 3. Won't someone do something?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Stop! Stop the scene!

(The actors stop speaking but continue looking out with great intensity.)

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Bowser, what are you doing?

MORT. I'm...I'm down on all fours in my destined space beside these actors...

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Bowser, you are a dog.

MORT. Well, sure, I mean, that's the part I'm...

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. You are the loyal companion to these people as they journey through a dark and treacherous forest.

MORT. Dark and treacherous. Cool. Do we get a cookie break soon?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. You sense danger. How do you sense it, Bowser?

MORT. Uh...I get an e-mail?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. No.

MORT. Text message?

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Bowser, listen to me.

ALANA. Thus did Mort begin to become ensnared in a net of evil magic. Unwittingly, innocently, lured in by his boyish desires, Mort was now in the clutches of a master of psychological manipulation, a magician of theatrical hypnosis—Director Frankenburg!

NORM. *(Running onto the stage:)* Run, Mort! Run from the magician of masterful manipulation! Don't get ensnared in the snares of the snaring... *(Runs off pursued by Alana's friends:)* See ya!

MORT. You know, this has been fun and all, but...

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. You sense the danger through your nose, Bowser—your nose! Do you hear me?

MORT. My nose. Check. Gotcha.

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. This is not about acting. I am not asking you to act.

MORT. You're not? That's great, because I'm getting kind of...

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. I am asking you to be. Be Bowser. Be the dog. Get in touch with your noble connection to the long canine lineage, to the apex of your doggie genealogy. Bowser, you must find and celebrate your inner wolf! When you sense danger on the wind, your nose is connected to the noses of the roaming packs of wolves that inhabited this land long before man ever saw it. You are Bowser—Bowser the wolf-hearted, Bowser the brave, Bowser the fearless! What do you sense, Bowser?

MORT. I sense...I smell...

ALANA. At that moment, Mort stood on the precipice, the chasm at the edge of sanity—and he plummeted in!

NORM *(Off:)* Don't plummet, Morty! Stay away from the edge! Don't step off the... *(Sudden cut off with a choking sound.)*

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Be Bowser!

MORT. I smell danger!

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. And what do you do when you smell danger?

(MORT growls, then barks.)

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG Good. Wonderful! I knew you had it in you! Actors, begin the scene again!

(The ACTORS snap back into the scene. This time, MORT is focused.)

ACTOR 1. My gosh, look at that!

ACTOR 2. Yes, yes, it is incredibly alarming!

ACTOR 3. Won't someone do something?

(MORT growls as he looks out in the same direction as the ACTORS, then barks.)

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Good, but I sense we could build greater intensity into the moment. Bowser, can you give more?

(MORT growls and yips in the affirmative.)

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. Excellent. Again!

(The ACTORS and MORT begin the scene again, taking their focus to an absurd level.)

ACTOR 1. My gosh, look at that!

ACTOR 2. Yes, yes, it is incredibly alarming!

ACTOR 3. Won't someone do something?

(MORT growls and then begins barking wildly and fiercely.)

DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG. He's alive! Bowser is alive!

(The ACTORS and DIRECTOR FRANKENBURG exit as MORT sniffs around the stage, completely absorbed in his canine role.)

ALANA. You can guess the rest. Not only did Mort become Bowser for Director Frankenburg's play, but...he became Bowser, period. He no longer craved Oreos, but rawhide chews; not video games, but running cats; not females of the human variety, but bi...you get the idea.

(MORT-as-Bowser runs offstage, apparently in amorous pursuit.)

ALANA. Ultimately, Mortimer took Dr. Frankenburg's call of the wild so seriously that he became just that: Wild. Uncontrollable. Ferocious.

NORM. *(Off:)* Mort? Mort! Down, Mort, down! Back away! Mort, no! Don't...

(Amidst the sound of MORT's attack, we hear NORM's scream.)

ALANA. Perhaps it's only a legend. Perhaps none of it ever happened. But on a quiet night, near a certain theater, people swear they can hear the faraway call of a wolf...

(MORT howls from offstage.)

ALANA. And, oddly, they remember a fairly normal boy they used to know. A boy who mysteriously disappeared. A boy by the name...

M 1. The name.

M 2. The name.

M 3. The name.

M 4. The name.

ALANA. Of...

M 5. Of.

M 6. Of.

M 7. Of.

M 8. Of.

ALANA. Mortimer Blackburn!

ALL. Mort! *(Pause.)* Reason 6!

MIA. Overgrown zucchini.

(Everyone looks at MIA quizzically. MIA just stares out, nodding her head at her own wisdom. After a moment, all turn out to the audience again.)

ALL. Reason 7!

KIM. Because if you're in a play, when the play is over, they'll want to have a cast party, which is okay, except that it will be at this boy named Peter's house who you find fairly attractive which is okay except that sometimes when you look at the shape of his face and the depth of his dimples you start to wonder about the names and genders of the offspring you might produce together which is okay except that he has no idea you have a crush on him which is okay except that at the cast party at his house, Peter's mother is going to make this pink, fluffy salad sort of stuff with Cool Whip and strawberry Jell-o and canned fruit cocktail in it which is okay except that when you were four years old you sort of loved the stuff so much that you sneaked a huge bowl of it off the buffet table one New Year's Eve and sat under the table with the bowl and a soup spoon and by the time your parents finally found you, you had pretty much O.D.-ed on the stuff which is okay except now every time you even look at the pink fluffy stuff you get that pukey feeling which is okay except at the cast party somebody will put a big mound of the stuff with little bits of fruit poking out of it like body parts in a zombie movie and they'll hold it right up to your face, right under your nose, and they'll say, "Don't you just loooove this pink fluffy stuff?" which is okay except not only will you get that pukey feeling but you'll actually know you're about to worship the porcelain god which is okay but before you can sprint to the bathroom who will end up right in your path but your future husband for all time and eternity, Peter, who will be about to smile and show you his dimples when you'll suddenly make that horrible "raalph!" noise and you'll vomit all over the brand-new jet black Converse All Stars he bought just for the party. And *that* will definitely *not* be okay!

ALL. Reason 8!

JOANNE. Because I said so, young lady, that's why! (*All pause. She looks around.*) It works for my mother.

ALL. Reason 9!

SAUNDRA. Your Great Aunt Gladys.

NICK. Great Aunt Gladys, now 97, is an amazing woman, according to the local family lore. At reunions, everyone over the age of 35 has an Aunt Gladys story.

UNCLE NED. She used to be a trapeze artist with The Ringling Brothers Circus. I once saw her do a triple flip and land on the back of a stampeding elephant, never losing a single pedal off the rose clenched in her teeth. What a woman!

AUNT BLANCHE. Aunt Gladys. Why, she ran for President once—did you know that? Richard Nixon refused to debate her because she was just too darned tricky for him. What an inspiration!

COUSIN SKIPPY. Aunt Gladys could do 350 push-ups at the age of 65. A wonder!

AUNT CAROLE. One Thanksgiving, she ate the entire turkey herself, plus all the fixings! A marvel!

UNCLE STEWART. That Gladys. Why, she could simultaneously write Russian with one hand, Swahili with the other all the while singing an Italian Aria! A delight, she was!

SAUNDRA. But what is Great Aunt Gladys to you?

NICK. This inspirational, wonderful, marvelous, delightful...

SAUNDRA. ...push-upping, elephant-landing, super-debating...

NICK. ZACH. ...ambidextrous, linguistically-gifted, turkey-gobbling whiz-bang of a woman?

SAUNDRA. What is she to you?

NICK. To the family, she is...

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. Super-duper!

SAUNDRA. To you, she is...

(GREAT AUNT GLADYS enters, looking highly disgusted with life. She walks like a very old woman, but her back is extremely straight.)

NICK. A surly old lady with the face of a dried crab apple.

SAUNDRA. Every part of her looks exactly 97 years old.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Had my birthday yesterday. It stunk.

NICK. Every part of her looks antique except...her back.

SAUNDRA. Her back is so straight you'd swear she had a two by four surgically implanted.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. *(To audience:)* Look at you, you slobs. Sit up!

NICK. To them:

COUSIN SKIPPY. *(To the other ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS:)* Do you know she once juggled three running chainsaws and a live bear cub?

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. That little furry little mammal nipped me, too.

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. She's splendiferous!

SAUNDRA. To you, Great Aunt Gladys is...

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. But you better believe I kept my back straight through the whole routine!

NICK / SAUNDRA. The Posture Nazi.

SAUNDRA. Apparently, Great Aunt Gladys, at age 97, is no longer able to juggle chainsaws or eat whole turkeys...

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. But I've still got all my teeth. Look at these chompers.

(She claps her teeth together.)

SAUNDRA. Apparently, she has no life now and so she spends her waking hours attending every possible family event including but not limited to...

NICK. Christmas, concerts, parent-teacher conferences, routine dental exams...

SAUNDRA. And, of course—your school play.

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. Great Aunt Gladys: Wow.

NICK / SAUNDRA. Great Aunt Gladys: Ow.

(PAM comes out, trying to cross the stage unnoticed by GREAT AUNT GLADYS.)

NICK. So. You just finished your school play where you had three roles—a shrub, a frog and a Martian. And now that the play is over, you must face her. If you hope to remain a member of the Kindersloggin clan...

SAUNDRA. Yes. You and Great Aunt Gladys, who never married, do share the same surname: Kindersloggin.

PAM'S MOTHER. Pam, where are you going? You must go talk to her.

PAM. She scares me.

PAM'S MOTHER. Ask her what she thought of your show.

PAM. I'll have nightmares.

PAM'S MOTHER. You should be ashamed. Did you know that she once swam the entire English Channel underwater?

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. *(To the tune of the final portion of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus:)* Aunt Gladys, she's amazing, she's astounding, forever!

PAM. She is one day going to look at me and I will turn to stone.

PAM'S MOTHER. Oh, now!

(GREAT AUNT GLADYS stomps her foot.)

PAM'S MOTHER. She's stomping. She wants you.

PAM. She's going to eat me like a turkey!

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Where is my great, great niece Pamela Kindersloggin?

PAM'S MOTHER. I'll be in the other room.

(She exits.)

PAM. But...

(GREAT AUNT GLADYS STOMPS again.)

NICK. The stomp of Great Aunt Gladys is like a notice from the IRS. You don't ignore it.

PAM. (*Approaching GREAT AUNT GLADYS slowly.*) He...hello, Great Aunt Gladys.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Hello, yourself. Stand up straight! Are you a Kindersloggin or aren't you?

PAM. Yes, I am, sir, ma'am, yes! How...how did you like the play...I was in?

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Hated it! You slouched through the whole first part.

PAM. Yes, but I was a shrub. A curved shrub. The director told me to do that.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. You slouched again in the second part, when you had that one line.

PAM. You mean when I said, "Glorp"?

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. That one. You were bent over like...like some kind of bent over thing. What were you, ashamed of the Kindersloggin name?

PAM. No! That was my frog line. I was a frog then. Frogs, you know, slouch. They have a sort of curved, uh, amphibian backbone, or...

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. And what in the Sam Hill were you supposed to be near the end, anyway, when you had those pipe cleaners shoved into your head?

PAM. That...that was my Martian role. Those were my antennae. Except one sort of started to fall off because...

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. You slouched in that part, too.

PAM. Well, the director told me...

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Director? Director? Who in the heck is this director character? Show me this director individual. I want to talk to this director nut-job.

PAM. Well, I...he...I mean...

SAUNDRA. The last thing you want to do is have your Great Aunt Gladys meet your director, who happens to be a fairly nice guy with only mild delusions of grandeur.

MR. GRAY. (*The director.*) For this play, you must understand, I am God. Consider yourselves my planets, all revolving around me, the sun, the center of your solar system. I control your orbits. I allow your days to be days, your nights to be nights, your everythings to be everything. In short, do exactly as I say. Oh, yes—Pam?

PAM. Yes, Mr. Gray?

MR. GRAY. When you play the Martian near the end, slouch a bit more.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. I want to meet this so-called director of yours who wants you to betray your sense of self-worth and the highly-esteemed name of Kindersloggin by giving you bad posture.

MR. GRAY. The frog character should be very slouchy, Pamela.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. You want to play a frog, play a frog—but do it with dignity! Stand up straight!

PAM. But...but...

NATE. You will be caught between the dictates of your director, Mr. Gray...

MR. GRAY. And the shrub. The shrub should be bent. Hunched. Crouched. Very slouched.

SAUNDRA. And the commands of the most holy member of the Kindersloggin family.

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. (*Still with the Hallelujah Chorus theme:*) Aunt Gladys, Aunt Gladys, forever, forever.

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Tell him you won't play a bush! Tell him you'll play a tree—a straight, proud, foliage-covered tree! That's what I say!

NATE. You'll be caught!

SAUNDRA. Conflicted!

NATE. In danger of violating sacred family ties!

MR. GRAY. Pamela, are you listening?

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. So what are you going to tell that moron of a director? Let me hear it.

PAM. I...well...I...you see...I...

GREAT AUNT GLADYS. Stand straight! Speak up!

PAM. Great Aunt Gladys, you're an amazing woman and you've climbed the Alps thirteen times blindfolded but I have to slouch when the director tells me to slouch!

(As the ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS sing the concluding Hallelujahs of the chorus, GREAT AUNT GLADYS clutches her heart.)

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. Hallelujah, Hallelujah...Hall-le-lu...

(AUNT GLADYS keels over. The ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS look at her, then at PAM. In unison, they accuse her:)

ADMIRING FAMILY MEMBERS. You killed Aunt Gladys!

SAUNDRA. And that, in terms of your relationship with your fellow Kindersloggins, would be a bad.

NATE. Very.

ALL. Reason 10!

JOHN. Because when you're doing stuff in the play, you might hurt your left-hand pinky finger. Yeah. And you know, you never know, but the way science is going, you have a pretty good idea that someday they're going to come out and say that the whole key to your entire health system isn't your lungs or your heart or your spine or your brain...it's your left-hand pinky finger. And you'll be really old and feeling really crummy and you'll hear the science people say that and you'll look at your ruined left-hand pinky finger and you'll say, "Rats! That darned play. Rats, rats, rats!"

ALL. Reason 11!

MIA. Conjunctivitis.

(After another puzzled pause, NATE speaks.)

NATE. Uh, Mia?

MIA. *(Harsh:)* What?

NATE. Never mind. Conjunctioniviatitis or whatever.

MIA. Conjunctivitis.

NATE. Right.

ALL. Reason 12!

TOM. Because your father has a mental disease.

JESS. Dad, what are you doing?

JESS'S DAD. Don't mind me.

TOM. He has an unnatural affection for an inanimate object.

JESS. Dad, I'm studying.

JESS'S DAD. Study away.

TOM. He is in love with his...

JESS'S DAD. I'm just adding to the family archive with my...

TOM / JESS'S DAD. Ultra-zoom, hyper-pixelated, extremely expensive digital camera.

(As JESS'S DAD circles around taking photos.)

TOM. Not only is he compelled to take hundreds of pictures of you and your fellow family members, he has to show you every shot.

JESS'S DAD. I like this one here. You look—I don't know—pensive.

JESS. Dad, please.

JESS'S DAD. I know, I know, I'll leave you alone. Your mother is clipping the dog's nails; I'm going to get that.

TOM. You being in a play—a golden photo opportunity even for a normal parent—would be disastrous in your household.

JESS'S DAD. You're in a play?

JESS. Dad, don't overreact. You don't need to...

JESS'S DAD. I have to get this! I need at least 50 shots of you at the moment I first found out!

TOM. It would move him from neurotic to psychotic.

JESS'S DAD. And then 50 more of me at the moment I first found out.

TOM. From annoying to insufferable.

JESS'S DAD. Honey, that was a great first rehearsal.

JESS. Dad, all we did was read through the script.

JESS'S DAD. I got 427 shots before I had to switch batteries. Come look at these!

TOM. He will no longer be your dad. He will become a live-in digital photo stalker.

JESS'S DAD. Here is one of you trying on your costume! And here's one of your trying on your costume a half-second later! And here's one of you...

JESS. Dad! I need to get some sleep!

JESS'S DAD. In a minute! Here's a great shot of your director trying to hit me with his clipboard. And here he's about to call me a...

JESS. It's three o'clock in the morning, Dad.

JESS'S DAD. You know what? I think I'm going to buy another camera for opening night! I'll be able to capture every moment.

TOM. As the weeks go on, your patience will erode.

JESS. Dad, I'm warning you. Do not come to rehearsal.

JESS'S DAD. Look at the pictures I'm getting with this new lens! Wow, talk about definition. That vein on the director's forehead stands out like a swollen river!

TOM. As your father sinks deeper into his madness, your exasperation will rise into desperation.

JESS. Dad, no more! If I look at another picture, I swear I will not be accountable for my...

JESS'S DAD. Look at this great shot of you pulling your hair so hard the roots are bleeding!

TOM. You will snap.

(Throughout the final segment of this sketch, JESS stands to the side with a malicious grin spreading wider and wider on her face until the end when, as her father is going crazy, JESS'S grin looks positively demonic.)

JESS'S DAD. Hey. Hey! Where is my camera?

TOM. You will commit a heinous crime.

JESS'S DAD. I can't find my camera! I only took it off my neck for a second and now I can't...

TOM. You will enjoy his pain.

JESS'S DAD. Oh my...what is that glinting out on the lawn? It looks like shards of metal and glass! It looks like the destroyed remains of...

TOM. You will discover a sadistic side you never knew existed.

JESS'S DAD. My camera!

TOM. Your father—and you—will never be the same again.

JESS'S DAD. I once had a camera. A pretty little camera. A cuddly camera. I sang to it. I took pictures with it. Until it got... I once had a camera. A pretty little camera.

ALL. Reason 13!

MIA. Half inch plywood.

NATE. Um, Mia?

MIA. Hello, Nate. How odd and entirely unnecessary of you to address me at this particular moment.

NATE. Well, uh...

MIA. When we should, for the sake of pace, be moving on with maximum expediency to the announcement of our next reason, *n'est pas?*

NATE. Sure, but...

MIA. Unless you have made it a top priority to question the veracity of the reasons I have proposed so far.

NATE. I was just hoping...

MIA. Because such questioning would indicate a lack of trust in me, which trust is the very cement that holds any organization together.

NATE. Mia.

MIA. Do you not trust me, Nate?

NATE. No! I mean, not “no” that I don’t trust you, but “no” that I don’t not trust you, or, I mean...

DAL. What I think Nate is trying to say, Mia, is not that he doesn’t trust you, but that he, and many of us, and perhaps many of these people (*Indicating the audience:*) are curious about the reasons you have presented. They are fascinating, but just a bit cryptic. Would you care to tell us more?

MIA. Is that what you meant, Nathaniel, or did you simply not know how to broach your distrust of me until Dal swept in and exonerated you with her euphemistic phraseology?

NATE. Uh...well, I mean, what?

MIA. Are you hoping that Dal just rescued your sorry hide, Nate?

NATE. Kind of, yeah, but what I...

MIA. As I thought. So be it. At the risk of insulting various intelligences up here and out there (*Audience*), I will elucidate how my reasons for not being in a play are not only valid, but absolutely correct.

My first reason—Abraham Lincoln. Long recognized as one of our greatest presidents, Mr. Lincoln was killed in the theatre, by an actor, after watching a play. Does that make sense now, Nate?

NATE. Mia, I never said I didn't tru...

MIA. My second reason—overgrown zucchini. At various points in history, audience displeasure at a poor theatrical performance has been expressed by the throwing of over-ripe vegetables. Given the cyclical nature of fashion, such a tradition could well return. And if, while performing in a play, one were clobbered by a vegetable as substantial as an overgrown zucchini, one might be rendered unconscious, perhaps even comatose. Any questions, Nate?

NATE. No, that's great, but...

MIA. Mia's reason the third—conjunctivitis. Also colloquially known as pink-eye, this highly contagious and irritating malady can be easily spread amongst cast members of a play because they foolishly, wantonly share mascara in preparation for stage appearance. Satisfactory, dear Nathaniel?

NATE. Mia!

MIA. And my final reason—half inch plywood. One common error in theatrical construction, when amateurs rather than professionals are often engaged, is the utilization of too-thin plywood for the construction of standing surfaces, otherwise known as platforms. Specifically, these novices will construct platforms of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch rather than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood, thinking that a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch will not much matter. But when these insufficiently-supported platforms are elevated several feet above the stage floor and are overloaded by too many uninformed actors, that $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of insufficiency may well cause them to plummet to the stage, injured not only by the fall but by the lethal shards of wood and metal that might impale them on the way down! Nathaniel, are you now satisfied that my assertions are, in fact, valid reasons not to be in a play?

NATE. Mia.

MIA. What?

NATE. It's not that I doubted your reasons. They were just too short. I wanted you to say more because I really love your voice.

MIA. You...you like my...

NATE. I love it.

MIA. Well. Then. Indeed. This, uh, might well lead us naturally into another reason entirely.

ALL. Reason 14!

MIA. Because, during the course of your involvement in a play, you might suddenly be caught off guard by an unexpected...connection with another actor.

NATE. Keep talking. Please keep talking.

MIA. And your previously impervious intellect might suddenly be perforated by an unusual sensation.

NATE. "Perforated." Beautiful word. Beautifully said.

MIA. You, once priding yourself on your logical detachment, might find yourself unexpectedly...breathless.

NATE. And?

MIA. Faint.

NATE. Oh, yeah?

MIA. And flooded with...with...oh, Nate!

NATE. Oh, Mia!

ALL. *(Getting between the two of them:)* Oh, no you don't! *(Pause.)*
Reason 15!

LISA. Because, generally, you are very even-tempered. However, there is a spot, buried deep down within you like lava inside the earth, where your anger li...

GREG. And a certain thing that can happen when you are in a play is like a drill reaching that dangerous place inside you.

LISA. Yes. Exactly. This trigger, this drill, if you will, is something called stepping on li...

GREG. You have your lines in the play, of course, and other actors have their lines. They are supposed to happen in a set order. When one person is done with her line, the next person should come in.

LISA. But when an actor gets anxious—or perhaps selfish—she will come in too quickly, thus cutting off the very last word you are supposed to s...

GREG. It'll drive you crazy, this stepping on lines. You, once a sane and calm person, will feel yourself starting to boil.

LISA. Yes. And when you boil, when this lava inside has been tapped, your voice starts to get higher and higher and louder and loud...

GREG. The tension will build like a pressure cooker until—to your utter embarrassment and the audience's utter shock—you'll just have to scream...

LISA. STOP STEPPING ON MY LINES!!

ALL. Reason 16!

ZACH. Because at your school, this year, four key elements are poised to combine to spell out the destruction of the entire civilized world.

JOE. The entire...?

ZACH. Civilized world.

JOE. That sounds like pretty much the biggest reason I've ever heard.

CLAIRA. That's, like, a three-pointer!

ZACH. Agreed. We need to start again.

ALL. Reason 16, 17 and 18!

(Note: For this section, the name of the school where the play is being performed should be substituted for the name Blankville High.)

ZACH. Because at your school, this year...

JOE. They've heard it.

ZACH. (*Very quickly until the word “world”:*) Four key elements are poised to combine to spell out the destruction of the entire civilized world.

CLAIRA. Whoa.

ZACH. Yes. Like highly reactive chemicals in a laboratory resting shelves apart, four dangerous events occurred, all centering on Blankville High in Blankville, North Wherever. First dangerous event: Three devious and ingenious techies are seniors at Blankville High School—known within their elite circle as Pyro, Flame and Nitro.

PYRO. Dude, we’re seniors.

FLAME. Dude, we own the auditorium.

NITRO. Dude, we know the technology.

PYRO / FLAME / NITRO. Dude, this is our year to rule!

ZACH. Second dangerous event: The director of the Nowhereville drama department, Mr. Morton, wants a spectacular ending to the musical.

MR. MORTON. I want people to be astounded. I want them to be practically blasted out of their seats. I want the final seconds of this show to be one of the high points of the audience members’ lives! I want to be a legend!

ZACH. Third dangerous event: Corabelle Ammel—97 years old, born and raised in Blankville, North Wherever—has released the secret ingredient...

CORABELLE. Just a pinch of vinegar—that’s the key!

ZACH. ...to her famous whoopee pies to her daughter, Marilyn Grayson, who baked a large batch of the confections for her granddaughter, Dana Nickleson, who brought them to the bake sale for the high school drama department.

DANA. Try my great-grandmother’s recipe for whoopee pies. They’re great.

WHOOPEE 1. Aw, a whoopee pie is a whoopee pie is a... *(Tasting:)*
Holy Toledo, these are amazing!

(Others come crowding around, clamoring.)

WHOOPEE 2. Give me one!

WHOOPEE 3. I want a dozen!

WHOOPEE 4. I'm addicted! I have to have another!

DANA. Everybody wants the whoopee pies! What do we do?

BOB. Supply and demand, Dana—charge 'em five bucks a pie!

WHOOPEE 1. I'll give you ten!

WHOOPEE 4. Twenty! Give me that whoopee pie!

ZACH. Fourth dangerous event: The tiny, previously unknown island nation of Istanochinoturkistanastan has decided to form a government and assert itself on the world stage as a force to be reckoned with.

(Three ISTANOCHINOTURKISTANASTANIANS speak passionate gibberish to one another.)

ZACH. Though Istanochinoturkistanastan has virtually no exports and not the slightest inkling of a viable economy, it does happen to have nuclear long-range weapon capability.

(The ISTANOCHINOTURKISTANASTANIANS, still speaking gibberish, take out a manual, flip through it until they find the page they want, then say, all together: Boom!)

ZACH. The Istanochinoturkistanastanians have decided that the quickest way to make their mark would be to declare war. Having no grudges whatsoever against any other nation on earth, they are currently engaged in searching for an enemy.

(The ISTANOCHINOTURKISTANASTANIANS spin a globe of the world. They stop it several times, discuss the chosen spot in gibberish, ask "Boom?" then shakes their heads and spin again.)

ZACH. How, you might well ask, are these four elements related? Furthermore, how could they possible combine to spell out the...

ZACH / JOE. *(Together:)* The destruction of the entire civilized world?

JOE. We got that point.

ZACH. It's is a very big point.

JOE. Granted. Please continue.

ZACH. Observe the chain of events that has brought these elements together. First, Mr. Morton approached Pyro, Flame and Nitro with his vision.

MR. MORTON. I'm looking for the finale of all finales, gentlemen.

PYRO. Are we talking major light-age, Mr. Morton?

MR. MORTON. Lights galore, Pyro.

FLAME. Are we talking special effects, Mr. Mort.?

MR. MORTON. The bigger the better, Flame.

NITRO. Are we talking pyrotechnics, M.M.?

MR. MORTON. Pull out all the stops, Nitro.

PYRO / FLAME / NITRO. Awesome!

PYRO. Wait, Captain Eminator, what kind of budget are we looking at?

MR. MORTON. The usual.

PYRO / FLAME / NITRO. Bummer!

ZACH. At this moment, however, Dana Nickleson made the second crucial connection.

DANA. Mr. Morton, Mr. Morton!

MR. MORTON. Dana, what is it?

DANA. Mr. Morton, you won't believe what just happened at the drama club bake sale. My great-grandmother's whoopee pies were, like, a phenomenon! We auctioned the last one off for \$75.00! We've set up a website and the on-line orders are just pouring in!

MR. MORTON. So you mean our drama budget this year is...

DANA. We're going to have all the money we could possibly need, Mr. Morton! I've got to get back to the table—we're being mobbed!

MR. MORTON. *(Turning to PYRO, FLAME and NITRO:)* Guys...

PYRO / FLAME / NITRO. *(Reverently:)* Dude.

ZACH. Are you beginning to get the picture? With virtually limitless funds, these three techies have been working on creating the most phenomenal final moments of a play ever seen! For weeks they have been toiling away in the darkness of the auditorium, re-wiring, reconfiguring, redesigning the space to accommodate a pyrotechnic and lighting event unparalleled in theatrical history.

PYRO. Dude, we could wire a cannon just over the proscenium—it could blast a ton of confetti right out over the audience.

FLAME. Yeah, yeah, and then we could rig up the speakers to deliver this mega blast of super decibels that'll lift 'em out of their seats!

NITRO. And then we can torch the flashpots.

PYRO / FLAME / NITRO. The flashpots. Gnarly.

ZACH. Just days ago, they ran a test.

PYRO. Okay, Dudes, on three—Flame, you hit the plunger.

FLAME. Got it.

NITRO. And I'll pull the switch.

PYRO. I've got the control panel. Ready?

NITRO / FLAME. Ready.

PYRO. Mr. Morton, are you watching? This is about half of what we're gonna do, so you'll have to use your imagination, right?

MR. MORTON. Fire away, my techie wunderkinds.

PRYO. One, two, three!

(When PYRO, NITRO and FLAME pantomime their appropriate moves, all cower back in fear and wonder, as if witnessing a tremendous spectacle.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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