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Playscripts, Inc.
325 W. 38th Street, Suite 305
New York, NY 10018

Phone: 1-866-NEW-PLAY (639-7529)
Email: info@playscripts.com
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Characters of Characters

BESS, 16, tall, slightly overweight. Average. A desperate desire to be cool. She is still learning how to cuss.

SCOTT, 15. Son of Camp Owners, short. He is a bit of a wigger.

MARK, 19. Camp Counselor. Handsome, even taller.

CLAIRE, 16. Cheerleader. Thin, gorgeous. Mean.

CINDY, 15. Camper, obese. Quiet, delightful, sincere. A tendency towards the wearing of stretchy things. Loves *The Wizard of Oz*. Loves it.

BRIDGER, 17. Camper. Pale, chubby, tall. Mysterious, dangerous. He rarely speaks.

NURSE JOY, old, squat. She cures swimmer's ears and teaches the fine art of non-fat cuisine. This camp is her life.

MS, 14. Timid; feels at all times like she needs permission to speak. A not so secret musical theater enthusiast; not an ingénue, but definitely wants to be.

BIANCA, 14. A tendency to loudly announce awkward things. No social graces, constantly uncouth. She is wide-eyed, observant.

Time / Place

Now, Home, June, a neighborhood swimming pool; then one month later, a Fat Camp, Florida. July.

Setting

Bright and dry. A gazebo in the background. A bright sun, a swimming pool deck.

Acknowledgments

Fat Kids on Fire was first produced by Phare Play Productions at the Wings Theatre in New York City in January of 2008. It was directed by Karen M. Dabney with the following cast:

BESS	Rachel Lin
SCOTT.....	Matt Farabee
MARK.....	Ryan Serhant
CLAIRE.....	Faye Rex
CINDY	Erin McCarson
NURSE JOY.....	Maggie Hamilton
BRIDGER.....	Mark Garkusha
MS.....	Kayla Kuzbel
BIANCA	Noelle Fair

FAT KIDS ON FIRE

by Bekah Brunstetter

ACT I

Prologue.

(Summer, June, Home. Deck of a neighborhood pool. BESS reclines on a lawnchair, listens to music, sunglasses, reading. She wears an insanely colored stripped tankini. Her towel is wrapped around her waist, legs. Across the deck, CLAIRE, beautiful, in a tiny red bikini, is talking to some other kids we cannot see. She flips her hair, a lot. BESS watches her from behind her book, obsessively. CLAIRE pulls some change out from her bikini top and walks towards BESS, really, towards the vending machine. As she walks by BESS, she accidentally drops some change, it rolls under Bess's chair.)

CLAIRE. Hey, could you get that?

(BESS lifts her eyes as if addressed by nobility.)

BESS. What?

CLAIRE. I dropped a quarter.

BESS. Oh, yeah ...Sure!

(She bends to get it, awkwardly, not moving her towel. She then stands there, dripping, waiting to be recognized.)

CLAIRE. Hey, yeah, you're in my biology lab.

BESS. Yeah, I sit in the front!

CLAIRE. Yeah—Mallory?

BESS. Bess. We were in the same class together in third grade, and I went to your sweet sixteen too, yeah, I was totally there.

CLAIRE. Oh, yeah, my mom totally invited the entire school to that.

BESS. And—um—also, we're neighbors, so.

CLAIRE. Really? Cool.

BESS. Yeah, I live in that brick house caddy corner to yours that's always got the stupid flags hanging out front. My mom has a different one for every holiday, she orders them from catalogues, they're so fucking gay. I've got a trampoline.

CLAIRE. You just move there?

BESS. No, yeah, like seven years ago.

But, um, it's cool that you never noticed, It's cause I'm a blender. I blend in. It's an artistic choice.

(CLAIRE stares at Bess's bathing suit, judgmentally.)

So how bout that Homecoming court, right? I'm so glad you got it, you are inordinately prettier than Wendy.

CLAIRE. What?

BESS. Um—more.

CLAIRE. Thanks! It was pretty cool, and stuff, I don't know, it was pretty cool.

BESS. Wow, I like your suit.

CLAIRE. You don't think I look fat? God, I'm *so* fat, I like, *invented* fat.

BESS. Never, not at all.

CLAIRE. Yours is real, stripe-y.

BESS. Yeah, they're supposed to be slimming. I have one like yours, though, it's green.

CLAIRE. Cool.

BESS. Going to the vending machine?

CLAIRE. Yeah, I need something sweet, I have my period *so* bad.

BESS. *Me too!!* I have my period so bad too!! That's so weird, they say that when we hang out all the time—they get synched up. No, not that we hang out or anything, but we could. *(Pause.)* I mean. I do live right behind you. Directly.

So What're you doing this Summer, are you hanging out here, or?

CLAIRE. Pretty much, then I've got Cheerleading camp in July.

BESS. I'm going, I'm *totally* going to camp in July too!

CLAIRE. Cool. What kind?

(Pause.)

BESS. It's a camp for artist kids, gifted artist kids, I don't know, Mr. Spangler recommended me for it.

CLAIRE. Oh yeah—you do art! You sit in the courtyard at lunch, with that weird girl, that one with the big nose and the tapered jeans and the camel toe. The art girl.

BESS. Nah—we don't really, um, so— You going with the other girls from school?

CLAIRE. Yeah, it's a group thing. We got a package, we washed cars.

BESS. I made my Dad go get his car washed, I always do, he's into it, I'm like DAD get your gross ass eyes off my FRIENDS! *(Pause.)* I mean, the cheerleaders, I mean, you guys.

CLAIRE. ...Cool.

BESS. But SUMMER is so weird, you know? How we all—we all go away and don't see each other for a few months and—people come back changed.

They grow into or out of themselves.

You pretty much always look the same though. Steady, constant.

(BESS is starrng at CLAIRE, hard. CLAIRE looks around her, then leans in towards BESS.)

CLAIRE. Hey, um, Bess?

BESS. *(Eagerly:)* Yeah?

CLAIRE. *(Leaning in, whispering sincerely:)* You should probably stop looking at me like that, or people are going to start saying things. I'm just trying to be nice.

(BESS is stunned.)

Well—anyways—bye—good luck at camp.

(CLAIRE saunters off.)

BESS. Bitch. I can see your—I CAN SEE YOUR BUTTCRACK!

(Quiet. She regains herself.)

I'm going to kick your ass next semester. I'm gonna be *hot*.

(Pause. She drops her towel.)

I am a force to be reckoned with. I am.

(Lights fade.)

1.

(The sun burns. NURSE JOY sits in her office with MARK, a new counselor.)

NURSE JOY. Don't let them smell your fear.

MARK. I—uh—I'm not afraid. They're just kids.

NURSE JOY. LARGE kids.

MARK. Yeah, well, they're still just kids, right?

(NURSE JOY stops and stares at him.)

NURSE JOY. It's sweet of you to say that.

MARK. How—um—how large—are they?

NURSE JOY. Moderate to ridiculous. Or also, we take whoever pays.

(Pause.)

MARK. I think they're going to like me. I mean—I want them to like me.

NURSE JOY. *(Suspicious, thunderous:)* Like like you? Because that is not—that is / NOT—

MARK. No, God, no, just uh—like me, I mean. I want to be liked. So— Is there anything else I should—any—like—last minute—before I—

NURSE JOY. *Relate to them, treasure them, as you wish yourself to be treasured. They need constant positive reinforcement. Especially the girls. Fragile times, these, for these young ladies. Toss 'em a bone. Tell them their fortitude is admirable, that the curve of their upper lip is pleasing and good.*

MARK. Okay—cool—

(NURSE JOY turns quickly and grabs MARK's arm.)

NURSE JOY. I must level with you—

MARK. Mark.

NURSE JOY. Mark, right, hi.

MARK. Hi.

NURSE JOY. If I seem a little high strung, it's because I am. They've said—the owners—they've said that the—that the kids haven't been losing enough weight. And if they do, they gain it back. They've said—if this summer, if a certain goal is not reached, then—
Then—it is possible—it is very, very possible that—this could be the last year. *(Pause. She stares at MARK.)* Of camp. I have nowhere else to go.

MARK. Oh— Okay— *(NURSE JOY stares at him.)* Oh. That's bad. Yeah, that's definitely bad.

NURSE JOY. Please keep this information to yourself. No matter who you find liason-ing with, not that you should. With anyone.

(She takes a moment to feel what she has been touching; his large bicep. She drops it, as if it were hot, and stares at it.)

NURSE JOY. Well. Look at you.

MARK. Look at me what?

NURSE JOY. This is going to be interesting. *(Pause.)* Mark?

MARK. Yes?

NURSE JOY. Why'd you take this job?

MARK. For character. I think I need more character.

NURSE JOY. That's it?

(MARK nods.)

You got an agenda, something I should know?

MARK. I wanted to work somewhere where I would not be tempted / to

NURSE JOY. What?

MARK. And—and money. And that, too.

NURSE JOY. Ah.

(She stares at him. She straightens his T-shirt.)

I don't like agendas.

(Lights shift. BESS stands center surrounded by her luggage sounds. She is listening to music, headphones. She is extremely uncomfortable. It's hot. Sounds of kids talking, laughing; a highway somewhere nearby. SCOTT approaches, he watches her. His soccer shorts sag. He makes the conscious decision to mack on her bad, and we watch this.)

SCOTT. Holla.

(BESS looks around her. Who the H is he talking to, even?)

You have nice legs.

BESS. What?

SCOTT. You have great legs.

BESS. Oh, Thanks. *(Pause.)* Really?

SCOTT. Oh come on. I bet niggaz are *always* like *damn*, girl. You've got the best legs here.

How tall are you?

BESS. Five eight or something.

SCOTT. Yeah, I like my women tall.

(He looks up at her. She looks down at him.)

BESS. Um— Do you know where I go? With my stuff?

SCOTT. (*Smiling:*) You wanna shack up with this?

BESS. No, I'm just— Cause I'm kind of just standing here. The airport shuttle dropped me off. I don't know where to go.

SCOTT. Well everyone gets assigned to dorms and stuff, that's later, I think they're just waiting for everyone to get here, so—do you like swimming or what?

Pool's over there by the cafeteria. Do you wanna go swimming?

BESS. Right now?

SCOTT. Yeah, come on. I bet you look dope in your suit.

BESS. Are we allowed to like, just go? Whenever we want?

SCOTT. Yeah, come on. We can do whatever.

BESS. Really?

SCOTT. Hell yeah. Well, pretty much. See My parents own this shit, I hang out for the summer's, I do what I want.

BESS. No rules? Seriously?

SCOTT. Okay, here's all you have to know. But if I tell you, you have to kiss me later.

I bet you're a *real* good kisser.

BESS. (*Forcing, trying:*) ...Yeah—I've kissed—*lots*—I mean, all the time—hell yeah. With frequency, even.

SCOTT. Hell *Yeah*. Okay.

Number one. Don't talk to the really fat ones. It's not good for your rep. One word to them and they be all UP on your junk, they so *crazy*, they be like we's best friends now, and you be all like NO.

Two— Be real nice to Nurse Joy, your life is in her hands. Don't get on that bitch's bad side or you're shit up a creek if you get swimmer's ear and bitch don't even care cause you were rude to her.

The Gazebo's where you go to make out. Stay Hydrated. Don't take the green pills at dinner cause they make you jumpy. Oh. And make out with me.

BESS. What pills?

SCOTT. Do you have a bikini?

BESS. Yeah.

SCOTT. Awesome. You are not even fat at *all*.

BESS. Yeah—well—comparatively—I mean compared to / other—

SCOTT. Nice hey, do you have any boyfriends at home?

BESS. No I mean yeah, like a few. Four, five. Seven. But nothing / serious.

SCOTT. What are you doing at fat camp?

BESS. I'm chubby. Like a toddler.

(Pause. SCOTT nods.)

Yeah, It's cause I'm smart, though, that's all, I think, I have other stuff on my mind.

SCOTT. You're so freaking hot.

(Pause. BESS has no idea what to do, so she begins to ramble with awkward ease.)

BESS. My Mom was an Olympic skier and my Dad did a lot of water polo, they are real into fitness and I never really have been. Even though they completely forced me to play soccer and swim team and t-ball and gymnastics and they used to lock me out of the house until I'd ridden my bike around the neighborhood eight times and it was kind of a big neighborhood, my old house. Once I was walking up that street barefoot and a snake slid across my bare foot. It was really scary.

(SCOTT just looks at her.)

Also, I like to draw.

SCOTT. What's your name again?

BESS. Bess.

SCOTT. Awesome, so do you like me, or what?

BESS. You—you're—you're um—

SCOTT. I'm Scott. *(Extends his hand, takes hers, kisses it with ridiculous bravado.)* I pick you.

BESS. Pick me for what?

SCOTT. My summer girlfriend.

BESS. (*Embarrassed:*) Okay.

SCOTT. You are so hot.

(*BESS has no idea what to do.*)

BESS. It's hot out here. Is it always this hot?

SCOTT. This is *nothing*. Wait a few weeks and they start fainting in the soccer field. Kids dropping like flies. Hey, You'll get a good tan, though.

BESS. People faint?

SCOTT. Yeah well usually just the really fat ones. They fry like eggs. Like fat kid omelettes.

BESS. I'm Bess, by the way. Did I say that? It's short for Bessed. That's also the name of a few hotels in Bulgaria, so.

SCOTT. And I'm your boyfriend.

So go put your bathing suit on, shawty!

You can go into the bathroom in the cafeteria. It's in to the right.

BESS. Okay.

SCOTT. Can I watch?

BESS. What? No.

SCOTT. Come on. I'm your boyfriend.

BESS. Nah, you don't want to see all that.

SCOTT. Hell yeah. Let's go swimming. Meet you at the pool, honey.

(*He saunters off.*)

BESS. B—bye! (*She watches him go.*) B—boyfriend? Okay. Boyfriend. Right. (*She smiles at herself.*) Boyfriend.

(*She kneels and begins to dig through her bag for her suit.*)

(BIANCA approaches, trailed by MS. They have been secretly leering at her from afar, inspecting her suspiciously. BIANCA extends a brave hand.)

BIANCA. Hi, I fucking love your shorts.

BESS. Thanks—um—yeah—they're from Old Navy. They were four dollars.

BIANCA. I LOVE Old Navy, Old Navy is my JAM.

MS. *(Earnestly:)* They have big sizes.

BIANCA. Hi I'm Bianca and that's MS.

MS. Actually, it's um, my name's um, Marabella Samantha Jones, actually.

It's my *stage* name.

BIANCA. *(Stern:)* MS—SHUT UP—don't tell her you do theater. *(To BESS:)* She doesn't really do theater.

BESS. No, Theater's cool, it's, they just did *Hair* at my High School. They all shaved their heads.

MS. Oh my God, that sounds—we do a musical every summer here and they haven't announced which one yet and see I've gotten a lot better than last year, see we just did *Fiddler* and I was a Mama but see we set it on Neptune and the farmers were like these / post-human life ameba and—

(She trails off because no one is listening. All eyes are on BRIDGER. Slowly, methodically, BRIDGER crosses in front of them. He sulks. He stops at stares at BESS. He nods at her. She freezes. He keeps moving.)

BESS. Who's that?

BIANCA. That's Bridger.

MS. He doesn't talk.

BIANCA. His parents keep sending him here cause they don't know what to do with him cause he keeps trying to blow up his high school.

BESS. ...Oh.

BIANCA. This is his third year, too. And also, he worships the devil, or it might just be that he talks to him sometimes, but there is definitely communication.

MS. He's got grenades and machetes underneath his coat.

(BESS looks after BRIDGER. He smiles at her. She doesn't know what to do, so she weakly, shyishly smiles back. BRIDGER continues to Trudge.)

BESS. *(Quietly, after him:)* He's probably not so bad.

BIANCA. *(Regaining floor:)* There aren't any other Bianca's at my school, which is cool, it's Norwegian, my name is, yeah my Dad's Norwegian.

From Norway, Do you shave your legs?

BESS. Yeah.

BIANCA. Awesome Me too. My Dad lives in LA, like Los Angeles, Cali fucking fornia. He got nominated for a Grammy, I'm gonna go with him, to the ceremony. He's getting a dress made for me, it's going to be purple or maybe red.

MS. He does music for kids movies.

BIANCA. They're FILMS.

So that's cool that you were talking to Scott. We dated all last Summer. I don't care or anything.

MS. She taught him how to masturbate, He didn't know how.

BIANCA. Yeah, last summer, I lost like 43 lbs. MS lost 50, but she gained 17 back.

MS. My parents got divorced, and I ate it.

(BESS laughs, MS smiles at her affirmation.)

BIANCA. So there's a gas station down the street, we're not supposed to go, but we go there anyways sometimes, if you want, we could go there some time. You could come with us.

MS. We get cigarettes and skittles. I like the skittles part.

BESS. Um—yeah—okay—

BIANCA. So—what are you?

BESS. What?

MS. Where're you from and stuff?

BESS. Oh, um. Maryland.

MS. You could take a train to New York City from there. That's where Broadway is. Yeah, it would only take like 4 hours or maybe 5.

BIANCA. God, I need a tampon.

BESS. Yeah—tampons are pretty cool—

BIANCA. You are fucking fantastic.

(CINDY's wheezing is heard. BESS looks toward the source of the unseen sound.)

BESS. Who's that?

MS. Who?

BESS. There's a large um, a person—running towards us—sort of—sort of running. Trying to run.

BIANCA. *(Spotting her:)* Oh no—she's back. The Mound.

MS. Her name's Cindy.

BIANCA. She takes the biggest most monster shits and clogs all the toilets.

Don't look too engaged, or directly AT it. Her. She'll talk your ear off.

MS. Yeah, and also, she'll just keep talking.

(CINDY appears. Her eyes land on BESS, reminiscent of how BESS looked at CLAIRE.)

CINDY. *(Bounding towards BESS:)* I SAW HER FIRST ! I SAW HER FIRST!

BIANCA. We gotta go. Bye, girlfriend.

(They go.)

BESS. *(To herself:)* ...Girlfriend.

(CINDY smiles, warm.)

CINDY. Hi. I saw you first. I saw you at the airport!

BESS. What?

CINDY. Hi new camper friend, I'm Cindy!

BESS. Hey.

CINDY. *(Simply, sweetly:)* I'm from Kansas like Dorothy. There's no place like home! Except for this fat camp, of course. I love it here, don't you?

BESS. I'm not sure yet.

CINDY. *(Suddenly serious:)* Just so you know, There aren't really a lot of tornadoes in Kansas, not the part where I live in, that is a misconception.

But we have real storm cellars like the movie but we've only had to use it once, when me and my brother were really little, a tornado came and took half the house and killed my Dad.

(Pause.)

You have really pretty hair.

BESS. Thanks. I like your socks.

(They're just socks.)

CINDY. You should put your hair in pigtails. Or I could do it. That's something I could do for you.

BESS. Yeah, okay—

CINDY. You're new.

BESS. Yeah, first time-r.

CINDY. Well, don't worry, there's nothing to worry about. Stick with me, it's my fifth year.

BESS. This is your fifth time?

CINDY. Yeah.

BESS. Did it, did you—?

CINDY. No, it works, it does, but then I gain it back. My mom says it's because I love carbohydrates more than I love myself, and this is bad. She's bigger than me, though. Sometimes we share clothes. Look at you, you're like a pretty little munchkin person!

(BESS doesn't get it. CINDY dances and sings.)

CINDY. *You represent—the lollipop league—the lollipop league—the lollipop league!*

BESS. Oh—yeah—

(CINDY stops. She stares.)

CINDY. Are you dancer?

BESS. No, I wish, right? If I was, if I could, I'd be doing it right now.

CINDY. I took step aerobics for my cholesterol at this place in town cause my mom made me and if I closed my eyes it was kinda like dancing. Can I ask you a personal question? Would you like to be my roommate?

(Pause.)

BESS. Um—

CINDY. Please?

I have a portable air conditioner because of health reasons and no one else is allowed to have one except me, which means I'm the only one.

I can't get too sweaty or I can't breathe and because I can't breathe I make these weezy sounds, my Mom says someday someone will find this endearing.

(Pause. She gets furtive.)

I would be honored to have you. You could do my hair and I could look at you. How do you do your hair like that, Will you do mine?

(BESS smiles.)

BESS. Yeah—yeah, sure.

(CINDY squeals with delight.)

CINDY. And I know the best room. It has a big pretty cherry tree outside the window. If we hurry, it's ours. *(Pause. CINDY smiles.)* I pick you.

BESS. For what?

CINDY. My vote for this year's camp princess.

BESS. What's that mean?

CINDY. There's a dance at the end of camp every Summer. They pick a Camp Prince and Princess. Last year the Prince was Lars. Everyone thought he was a hubba hubba but I don't see what the big to do was about. And last year's princess was Bianca. She's a witch. It's definitely going to be you this year, I can tell.

BESS. Why?

CINDY. Just because.

BESS. Isn't it kind of weird? That they do that here? Pick a best?

CINDY. ...No. It's crucial. Someone has to rise to the top.

BESS. Yeah, I guess so.

CINDY. You're so nice, how are you so nice? People like you usually aren't nice. Usually, they're witches.

BESS. I know what you mean.

CINDY. Do you need anything? Band-aids? Mouth wash? Vaseline? I can share, I like sharing. Let's Go get you settled in!

BESS. I'm supposed to meet my um—boyfriend—at the pool—

CINDY. Ew.

(CINDY grabs Bess's luggage.)

BESS. You don't have to—

CINDY. No, I don't mind, you go swimming, you go be in love, and when you come back, I'll have the room all set up, like a little story.

This is gonna be so fun!

(CINDY struggles to grab all of Bess's things. This is hard. CINDY manages to grab it all, then turns and waves at BESS. BESS heads towards the pool.)

(NURSE JOY walks as quickly as she can towards the Gazebo. She is like a squirrel on natural diet pills. MARK trails behind her.)

(She steps up into the Gazebo, ringing a bell. She is full of joy. She is chunky. Lights shift. Sounds of campers. Her shirt boldly proclaims, JOY. MARK, the hot counselor, joins her. He is sort of shy.)

NURSE JOY. Campers! Hell— Hello! Welcome, campers! *(Campers trail in to listen.)*

(To MARK:) Mark—introduce yourself.

MARK. Um—hi—I'm Mark.

(The ladies eat MARK with their eyes.)

BIANCA. Oh. My. God. Mine.

BESS. *(Dreamy:)* ...Wow.

(SCOTT puts her arm around her possessively. She allows this to happen. Slowly, awkwardly, she puts her arm around him, and suddenly, they are a Couple.)

NURSE JOY. You have no idea how much joy it brings me to welcome you to New Image Camp Vanguard. So much Joy, it's sad. Welcome, old! Welcome, new, to a journey, to say the least. A journey towards self-improvement and self-discovery.

(Pause.) But in terms of self-discovery, campers, please keep this discovery to your selves. You will find that self-discovery-ing your fellow campers in the gazebo will distract you from the task at hand.

Our goal here over the next six weeks is to re-invent the way to think about food, exercise, and your physical person. While engaging in fun and rewarding group activities, unbeknownst to you entirely, you will also be shedding pounds!

There is nothing more important than being physically fit—socially, emotionally. But even more so—we will help you find your beauty WITHIN. I've found mine—can you find yours?

My name is Joy— I'm the nurse and the dietician— This is my eleventh year. I am also a veteran and proud graduate.

I spend the off season an hour North outside of Orlando. I have two cats, Rogers and Hammerstein. I am not lonely at all. I enjoy reduced fat sour cream and the wedding channel. *(Pause. No one is paying attention.)*

This first week is crucial. No slip-ups. Counselors—like Mark—

MARK. Hi—I'm—Mark—

NURSE JOY. Will be checking your bags and person regularly for forbidden paraphernalia. Cool Ranch Doritos, Little Debbie Nutty Bars, Fritos, Rolos, butterscotch chips, marmalade, three layer dips, microwavable breakfast burritos, bunny bread, potted meat, any and all Chef Boyardee products. What is hunger? Is it boredom?

MARK. *(Nodding furiously:)* Yes. Definitely.

NURSE JOY. NO CHEATING.

Weigh in happens every Sunday. You will take your meals, three a day, in the cafeteria. Your days will be strategically and lovingly arranged by yours truly, with aerobics in the morning, soccer and swimming in the afternoon, cooking and entertainment in the evening. If you're theatrically inclined, auditions for *A CHORUS LINE*—

(MS squeals, LOUD, and starts clapping. Every one looks at her. She stops.)

Uh—a chorus line—will be held this evening in the Rec Hall. Counselor Stevens will direct.

Step lightly, children. Mind your counselors—be proud of who you are. Stay hydrated. *(Suddenly serious.)*

And No monkey business. I don't want to see a single—not like last year. No pranks, no jokes, no pregnancies, no smoking in the shower. Broken ankles, acceptable. Keep it in your pants.

(Suddenly British, perhaps.)

This is a *civilized* establishment.

*(Satisfied with this, NURSE JOY leaves. MARK follows her.
Light shift. Time Passes.
They Move together. Perhaps step aerobics.
NURSE JOY leads them in this movement.
MS secretly rehearses dance moves.
They sweat until they give up, which does Not Take Long.
Lights shift.
Time Passes. NURSE JOY commands her space.)*

NURSE JOY. Time for your letters home, campers. The act of letter writing is not dead.

BESS. Dear Mom and Dad, Here is my letter home. It's only been a few days, but I'm losing weight and having fun. Thanks for letting me come.

I met a boy. Yeah. He's a foot shorter than me and he makes me really uncomfortable. I have a friend, Cindy. She's the fattest person I've ever met. I'm having trouble talking to the other campers. They are all always staring at me. It makes me nervous. I've cried seven times.

(She stops, re-reads. Erases, throws away, starts over.)

Dear Mom and Dad,
I'm losing weight and having fun.

CINDY. Dear my Dead Dad, Happy death day. How are you? 8 years ago, on one windy Wednesday, you died. Goodbye, Dad. Hello, memory.

How's heaven? Guess what? I'm at fat camp. Again. Mom sent me here for the Summer. Again. It's not so bad. I feel safe here. And the lasagna this year is really good. They told us how to make it and I wrote it down.

I hope we go to Disney World. I want a Butterfinger.

Remember those things about being alive?

I hope you also remember lifting me into the tree house like I was little, which I was then, wasn't I?

Oh and I have a new friend, too. Her name's Bess. I think we're going to be friends and then maybe pen pals. I'm feeling very positive and not even sneaking anything either because I've decided to be a figure skater one day, perhaps a famous one on cereal boxes. Thoughts?

MS. (*Barely able to contain herself.*) Dear Ms. Moriarty, it is with utmost pride that I write you this letter of great importance, an announcement. And I have to say, before I announce anything, that none of this would have been possible without the dedication and sheer brilliance you have shown teaching Freshman Acting. You are a true leader and inspiration.

The announcement is: I just received word that I have been cast in Camp Vanguard's production of A CHORUS LINE. I will be playing the part of Greg. (*Pause.*) I know what you're thinking.

The—female—roles—were taken. The director decided to go with other performers with less experience and talent. And due to the lack of young men at the camp interested in a life in the theater, I agreed to play the part of Greg. I feel like this is my chance, Ms. Moriarty. I'm really going to show my stuff. I feel armed and ready. It's Like you always said that Tom Stoppard always says, *Actors are the Opposite of People*. I agree. Also, work is work.

Please find enclosed my personal rehearsal report from the first read-through. I hope this letter finds you well. Feel free to write me back. A lot.

Sincerely,

Marabella Samantha Jones.

(*BIANCA sneaks into Nurse Joy's office and gets on the phone.*)

BIANCA. Sup Daddy, sorry I would've just texted you this but we can't have cell's here. Soooo lame. Speaking of lame, everyone here is soooo lame. I only came again so I can look good with you at the Grammy's. How are plans coming? It's only seven months away and I just want everything to be just right. I'll be a size 4 then so just order it in that. I woke up today thinking it should be fuschia with a delicately plunging neck and a slit up the back but black is also good, and so is white. Silver is also good, or maybe blue. Will you tell Mom to send me my magazines and some of those sugar free mint chocolate things and also I want a Nano, a little one in a case. I'm bored. Sincerely, Bianca.

BESS. (*Beginning letter again with more enthusiasm.*) I'm having the time of my life! This is the most fun ever had, ever! I even have a boyfriend. His name's Mark. He's extremely tall and handsome. Athletic, you'd like him. I've made so many friends. People I can

really relate to. I'm so, so happy here. I love the sunshine. I'm getting a good tan.

I'm feeling confident in my bathing suit.

I'm drinking lots of water, and then after that, I'm drinking more. I pee a lot.

SCOTT. Dear Mom and Dad, here is the letter you told me to write you. So I'm writing it.

Hope Europe is cool. I bet it's lame.

Nah, I didn't want to go. I don't care. I like it here.

So here is the letter I'm writing you.

Peace, Bitches.

(He stops. He scratches this out.)

Cordially, Scott.

CINDY. Sometimes I hear you in the wind, I think. I'm pretty sure that it's you. Also, if you fast forward Wizard of Oz to 43:07:08 and a half, and press pause and close one eye, I can see you waving. So thank you.

BESS. You won't believe the change in me. Write to you again soon. Love, me.

(BRIDGER cannot manage a thing. He eats the piece of paper. Lights.)

(The sun burns on CINDY, bad. Sounds of the Soccer Game grow distant and echo. CINDY sweats.)

(Lights out on her.)

2.

(The Gazebo, later that night. Dusk. SCOTT violates BESS, faux-tenderly. He touches her, lots. She sits awkwardly, not knowing how to respond. He mack daddies, she sits. The groping is funny: she is big; he is small.)

SCOTT. Damn, this has been the best week of my LIFE.

(BESS nods nervously.)

SCOTT. Mmmm.

BESS. What?

SCOTT. Mmm. I said Mmmmm, it's a good sound of appreciation, cause you're soft.

BESS. Thank you.

SCOTT. You still my girl?

BESS. ...Yeah.

SCOTT. Do I make you nervous or some shit?

BESS. Kind of. —You kind of do—make me—

SCOTT. Well, hey. Don't be nervous. It's just like this, okay?

(He kisses her. It's kind of bad, but not unbearable.)

See?

BESS. Yeah.

SCOTT. Hell yeah.

BESS. *(With nerves:)* So, um, read any good, No. How are you?

SCOTT. ...How am I?

BESS. I mean, how are you?

(He touches her.)

Is this what we do? I mean, do we do anything else? Am I supposed / to—

SCOTT. You're supposed to just RELAX. I mean, when I tap a bitch—

BESS. *(Alarmed:)* ...What?

SCOTT. Whoa—dang, girl—have you never?

BESS. N—no.

SCOTT. Cause you *totally* seem like you have, I mean, when I first saw you, I was like SHIT naw, *trouble*, *this* girl looks like she knows how to use her parts all *bad*.

BESS. Is that why? Why you—cause you thought / I would—cause I'm not—

SCOTT. Damn, I love you.

BESS. Already?

SCOTT. Yeah, sort of. Do you love me?

BESS. I don't know, um—it's hard to know after a week, am—am I supposed to know? How do *you* know?

SCOTT. Cause of how I feel. How do you feel?

BESS. I don't know, how do you feel?

SCOTT. Like I love you and stuff AND shit.

BESS. So—Where're your parents?

SCOTT. What?

BESS. You said—they own this place, so—

SCOTT. They travellin, yo.

BESS. What?

SCOTT. They uh, they go on trips. In the summers. They like to go on trips. Europe and stuff.

BESS. Don't you like to go on trips?

(SCOTT is Quiet.)

SCOTT. Shit, nah, I don't care. I like it here. Fuck, nah.

BESS. I don't know, I'd like to go on a trip. To like—Venice, or—yeah. They say it's sinking. In fifty years, it will be was. We better get there.

SCOTT. Get there and do what?

BESS. *(Smiling:)* I don't know, um, rent a boat, chase down a rainbow. I used to, no I—sometimes I—fantasize, I guess, that I um—that I live in another country 80 hundred years ago, I don't know, and that I have really long hair and I put flowers in it and um, I don't know, it's like my job to go to parties held at the homes of

artists and I wear gowns and drink things out of little glasses, um. You know? When things were more—less—yeah.

SCOTT. Yeah, the stuff you say is pretty cool, hey, when I kiss you, you should use your tongue more.

(He kisses her again. It's bad. BIANCA approaches, trailed by MS. BIANCA has her iPod on, in one ear. MS is dressed for dance class. BIANCA clears her throat. The kissey pair separates, SCOTT reluctantly.)

BESS. Oh—hey, guys—we were just um—

BIANCA. *(Like she cannot hear:)* What?

BESS. We were um—

SCOTT. BUSY. Yo.

(BIANCA removes the headphone from her ear.)

BIANCA. Oh, I'm sorry, I couldn't hear your. I was listening to some of my Dad's music on a CD that you can order off Amazon.com and everything, this guy who worked with Avril fucking Lavigne recorded it.

MS. Hi Bess.

BESS. Hi. Hi, Um, Marabella Samantha Jones.

(MS smiles.)

BIANCA. *(To SCOTT, coolly:)* Scott.

SCOTT. Sup?

BIANCA. Nothing, just saying your name. I can do that. You used to like it when I said your name.

SCOTT. That was *last* Summer, honey.

BIANCA. And this Summer, *I've* got a new boyfriend.

MS. Bianca and Mark are in love.

BIANCA. Shut UP.

BESS. Really?

BIANCA. Yeah, well, there's like, stuff in the air. Significant stuff. He's been looking at me.

MS. Nurse Joy wanted us to come get you cause Cindy fainted and she's your roommate and all.

BESS. (*Alarmed, standing:*) What? Is she okay?

BIANCA. Yeah, she's just fucking fat.

(*BIANCA puts her headphone back in her ear.*)

Bess—I'm just trying to be nice here, also. You really shouldn't hang out with her so much. She's not good for your rep.

BESS. We're not—I mean, she just comes in handy is all.

BIANCA. You are such a *bitch*. I love you. See you at dinner, save you a seat, Bitch!

(*She goes. MS lingers a few beats. Awkward.*)

MS. I have to go, too. Because I'm going to rehearsal. For the musical. Yeah, I got cast in it. I have a whole song that's just mine.

(*Pause. She sings slightly, weakly.*)

I'm watchin Sis Go pitter pat. Said I can do that. I can do that.

(*She trails off.*)

Kay, bye.

(*She runs off.*)

BESS. That's weird.

SCOTT. Sup?

(*He goes for her neck with the wide wet kisses of a little boy.*)

BESS. Mark and Bianca. I mean Mark's so, and *she's* so—

SCOTT. Yeah sometime, we should take a shower together, like in movies—

(*He kisses her again.*)

Yeah, you're pretty cool.

(SCOTT *spits into the dust.*)

BESS. I better go check on Cindy.

(*She stands up to go. He stands up next to her. He is conscious of his height.*)

(*She starts to go. He stops her.*)

SCOTT. Aw, come on, honey, we were just getting started!

BESS. No, I really / gotta

SCOTT. I'll show you mine if you show me yours.

BESS. Um—no thanks—maybe some other time.

SCOTT. You still my girl, right?

(*Bashfully, stuck, she nods. Quickly, she goes.*)

... Yeeah.

(*SCOTT is extremely self-conscious. Did anyone see that small patch of rejection? He looks around him. He sniffs. He sags his shorts. He saunters off.*)

3.

(*CINDY and BESS in their room. NURSE JOY hovers over CINDY, who is passed out on the bed like a beached whale. BESS is fanning her.*)

NURSE JOY. She'll be okay, It happens. Kids dropping like flies, every year.

BESS. And that's—okay?

NURSE JOY. It's Florida.

BESS. So?

NURSE JOY. Humidity.

(*NURSE JOY turns and looks at BESS. Really looks at her.*)

You probably don't understand this, though. *Actual* large people are more susceptible to heat. I bet you wear sweaters in June.

BESS. N—No.

NURSE JOY. Bess— It's Bess, right?

(BESS nods.)

NURSE JOY. And How was your first week?

BESS. Good, no, great, yeah. I really feel like I've—I've learned a lot.

NURSE JOY. Really? What have you learned?

BESS. You know, like, um, it's been nice to just be—reminded of—all the food groups.

NURSE JOY. *(Hot:)* Are you patronizing me?

BESS. What? No—

(NURSE JOY gets up to leave.)

I'm nervous about tomorrow, though. I really want to have lost a lot. Cindy said last year, the first week, she lost 13 pounds.

NURSE JOY. Don't get your hopes up. You're comparatively smaller / than

BESS. I'm not small.

NURSE JOY. Comparatively. Not everyone is as lucky as you.

BESS. I'm not lucky.

NURSE JOY. If she wakes up, try and keep her in bed.

(NURSE JOY goes.)

(BESS sits by CINDY. CINDY stirs.)

BESS. Cindy? Cindy, it's Bess. You okay?

CINDY. What?

BESS. You fainted on the soccer field. It's Bess.

(CINDY stirs. She smiles and curls into her pillow.)

CINDY. It was—it was wonderful—

BESS. What was?

CINDY. There was a city made of green and candy canes—houses built from Barbecue potato chips— Oatmeal pies—cream cheese. And you were there—and you—

(She opens her eyes.)

BESS. Are you okay?

CINDY. I'm fine. I faint every year, it's the heat, plus cause I'm so big. It's part of me being alive.

BESS. You're / not

CINDY. No, I'm big, it's okay. I have peace, my Mom says have peace.

BESS. Peace.

CINDY. Not like a piece of pie, even though those are good and should happen all the time. Like peace of mind.

BESS. Then why are you here, if you have peace with—it?

CINDY. So I don't die one day, so I don't choke on myself or my heart doesn't stop because it's angry at the weight of me.

BESS. I guess hearts do that, get pissed.

(CINDY starts to sit up. She's dizzy. She lays back down.)

CINDY. Whoa— Wow—hello, dizzy—

BESS. Nurse Joy says you should stay in bed 'til you feel better.

(CINDY lays back down.)

Bianca came and got me when it happened, I was kinda scared for you for a minute.

CINDY. YOU WERE? THAT'S SO SWEET! ARE WE FRIENDS?

BESS. Yeah.

CINDY. Yay. *(Pause.)*

Can I tell you a secret that's not really a secret at all, more like something that everyone knows that I'm going to tell you?

BESS. Okay.

CINDY. Bianca is not very nice. To me. She's not very nice to me. I understand, though, sometimes people have to not be nice because they feel like they have to.

BESS. She's just messing.

CINDY. No, I know. It's okay, I don't mind. *(Pause.)* How'd I get here, how'd I get to the room?

BESS. Mark helped, I think.

(CINDY's eyes grow wide.)

CINDY. *(Quietly stunned:)* ...He touched me?

BESS. Well, yeah—

(CINDY falls silent.)

What?

CINDY. I haven't been touched by a boy before ever.

BESS. *(Teasing:)* You look like you liked it.

CINDY. Boys are weird and mean.

BESS. No they're not.

CINDY. Mainly mean. Except for my Dad, he was pretty nice.

BESS. Your dad wasn't a boy.

(BESS smiles at her and picks grass out of her hair. CINDY likes this.)

CINDY. I used to faint all the time and my Dad would catch me, he was big like a lovely tree person, like a person who at one time was a tree.

It's fun, you should try it. You get pats on your head and everyone frets over you like a kitten stuck in a well, like you're Dorothy in the hog pit. That's how you get carried and taken care of, like some sort of cute pet.

(CINDY looks at BESS.)

Hey, have you gotten prettier? I think your nose moved.

(BESS smiles, blushes.)

BESS. Shut up.

(CINDY sits herself up. BESS hands her a glass of water.)

CINDY. Where you all morning?

BESS. With Scott.

CINDY. Oh. *(Pause.)* Are you and Scott in love?

BESS. I—I don't know.

CINDY. Do you let him touch you?

BESS. Sort of.

(Pause.)

CINDY. Whoever he picks for his girlfriend is ALWAYS princess.

BESS. I don't see what the big deal is, it sounds kinda lame.

CINDY. It's SACRED.

BESS. Okay, fine, how does it all go down?

CINDY. You stand up on the stage and there's only light on you. And they play some pretty music, like the kind that makes you want to find the nearest tall shoulder and plant your head on it, like the kind your Dad plays for your Mom.

And everyone looks at you and claps. And then you get to pick anybody to dance with, anybody you want, who would you pick?

BESS. I don't know, maybe—Mark.

CINDY. He's scary, I bet. I bet he's not nice like you.

BESS. He kinda looks like this guy back at my high school. His name's Chip. He drives this red truck and when it goes by your heart stops cause he's shaking the pavement and you get shaken.

CINDY. Have you made love with him?

(Pause.)

BESS. No.

CINDY. That's okay. Boyfriends are an enigma.

BESS. What?

CINDY. How you can expect anyone to like you that much all the time.

(BESS smiles. They sit there in silence.)

BESS. Do the counselors ever—I mean—with the campers? I mean, have they ever? Like—would Mark—

CINDY. No, but I say there's a first time for everything. People are people, and they all like to kiss each other, I guess. And they should.

BESS. Have you ever—have you ever liked / any—

CINDY. EW.

BESS. What?

CINDY. Ew.

BESS. No, Not ew. Totally normal.

CINDY. Sometimes they make me / feel—sometimes I feel—

BESS. Like Dorothy could totally make out with the scarecrow.

CINDY. She would NOT, Dorothy would NEVER kiss the scarecrow except for a friendly peck on the cheek!

BESS. But she could, if she wanted to.

CINDY. He's made of *straw*.

BESS. Or how about the Tinman, he's kinda hot. Hard.

CINDY. What?

BESS. Nevermind.

CINDY. No, I see what you're saying, I guess. Be open to the idea, my Dad used to say that, be open to the idea, like reduced fat mayonnaise or Presbyterian church.

BESS. Yeah.

(From outside, a breeze. CINDY closes her eyes and listens.)

What?

CINDY. Just listening.

BESS. What for?

CINDY. My Dad. *(Pause.)* My Mom used to get so mad at me cause whenever there was a storm I go and try to stand inside of it. She said it served me right I didn't have any friends, standing in the middle of storms.

BESS. You don't have any friends?

CINDY. I don't know, I think I'm bad at it.

BESS. You're not bad at it.

(CINDY rolls over and rummages under her bed. This takes a minute.)

CINDY. I want to give you something.

(She pulls out a King Size Snickers bar. She lays it on the bed, reverently. They both stare at it like it might move.)

BESS. Where'd you get it?

CINDY. My uncle in Kansas works at Walgreens and he likes me just the way I am.

(CINDY hands the Snickers bar to BESS.)

CINDY. I want you to have it.

BESS. No, I couldn't. It's yours!

CINDY. No, I want you to have it. Tomorrow's the first weigh in, I can't, I need you to do it.

BESS. Um—

CINDY. I want you to eat it right now. I want to watch you eat it. And then it will be like I ate it, too.

BESS. Are you sure?

(CINDY nods emphatically. BESS unwraps the bar. Slowly, she takes a huge bite. She closes her eyes.)

CINDY. Good? Is it Good?

(BESS nods and smiles. She takes another bite. CINDY salivates.)

Later Tonight will you do my hair like yours maybe like you said?

(BESS nods. CINDY melts with a candy-like joy.)

4.

(The next day. A scale. The campers, one by one, step onto it. MARK makes notes, smiling too big. The girls swoon. BIANCA waves bye, seductively.)

(Finally, it is BESS's turn. They are alone.)

(BESS stands on. Looking adoringly at MARK. She is extremely nervous. He writes stuff down on a chart.)

MARK. Okay— *(Looking at chart)* —Bess—you can step off now.

(She is sweating. He looks at her.)

MARK. You okay?

BESS. Yeah—just kind of— *(Pause)* —hot.

MARK. Yeah, it's hot. *In Here.*

BESS. How'd I do?

MARK. Three pounds.

BESS. Is that good for the first week?

MARK. It's excellent. Any progress is excellent, actually. Now let's get your measurements.

(He pulls a soft tape measure from his pocket.)

BESS. My—

MARK. Your measurements.

BESS. Oh. Um— No, thanks.

MARK. Uh. It's required. We have to get your measurements cause sometimes you loose inches and not pounds. Waist, hips, bust. It's science.

BESS. Oh.

MARK. It's just for our records.

BESS. Can I just do them myself?

MARK. They wouldn't be right, people can't measure themselves. Plus they have to be accurate this year, or the camp might get closed, and we'd all be shit up a creek. *(Pause.)* I wasn't supposed to say that. I didn't say that.

BESS. The camp might close?

MARK. Listen, could you not—repeat, uh—

BESS. No, I won't.

MARK. We've got a secret now.

BESS. Yeah, I guess we do.

(MARK holds out the measuring tape.)

MARK. It'll be over before you know it. All you have to do is stand still.

BESS. *(With nerves:)* Okay. I can do that.

(She stands there, breathes heavy. He puts his arm around her waist, measures it. It sort of takes him a while. Gradually, he measures her hips, arms, thighs, etc, breaking to write down numbers. BESS is paralyzed with fear as he touches her.)

MARK. See, it's not so bad.

BESS. Yeah.

MARK. You okay?

BESS. Yeah.

(He is touching her, and it's awkward.)

So—um—you come here often?

MARK. What?

BESS. You like being a counselor so far?

MARK. Yeah, it's okay. I mean, no, it's *great*. Real—fun. Character building, stuff like that, builds character. And I think I wanna do sports medicine or something. So I feel like all this nutrition stuff kind of fits it. And I get paid really good. It's something to do. *(Pause.)* I like your lip.

BESS. What?

MARK. You have a nice, um, upper lip.

BESS. Thank you. *(He continues to measure.)* How old are you?

MARK. 20.

BESS. *(Quick:)* Really? I'm 18.

MARK. *(At chart:)* Says here you're 16.

BESS. Yeah, well, you know. I have an 18 year-old *soul* that's what I meant.

Are you almost done?

MARK. Almost. This usually takes longer. You've got, uh, less, girth, than. Almost done. Yeah.

BESS. Are you enjoying yourself?

MARK. What?

BESS. At, at camp. Are you having a time? As they say in France? They probably say that. In France.

MARK. Probably.

BESS. Meeting people you like? *(Pause.)* Bianca?

MARK. Who?

(Pause. BESS smiles.)

MARK. I saw you the other day.

BESS. What?

MARK. No, um, I mean—I wanted to tell you that I—I saw you during free time over by the pool, under the tree, you were drawing.

BESS. Oh—yeah. Yeah, I do that. Sometimes. Plus there's um, there's good light there? And the freeway behind the fence, I was trying to—I don't know like—capture it between the cracks, the sounds passing.

MARK. You were drawing sound?

BESS. Sort of, I guess, yeah, I do that sometimes.

MARK. I didn't want to bother you.

BESS. No, yeah, I mean, I like to be bothered—sometimes—

MARK. I tried to do art once.

BESS. Really, you did?

MARK. I used to draw cars.

BESS. Oh.

MARK. Yeah and airplanes.

I spent hours doing it. But I was never really good, I always wished that I was, so I could be like—*hey—look—I do this*. But nah, I wasn't good.

BESS. (*Looking at him, dreamy:*) I bet you played sports. Lots and lots of—sports.

MARK. Yeah, almost every one. Every sport there is, I played it. Play it. It's an art, though, sports, I swear. Artsy people always wanna say that sports are for idiots, but not true. You gotta put your whole spirit in to it. And when you score, it's like a creation I guess cause you're making something good happen, right?

BESS. Yeah, I totally agree.

MARK. *You do?*

BESS. Yeah, I mean, you're doing something, you're not just some—you're not just to—look at.

MARK. (*Smiling:*) Yeah.

BESS. Yeah.

(He is close to her.)

MARK. You smell good, what is that?

BESS. I washed my hair?

MARK. Pineapple?

BESS. I don't know. It's from the grocery store. It's / what my Mom—

MARK. It's tropical, or something, it's—

(He is smelling her hair, really close. BESS loses all color.)

It's like an island or something, some place I never been. *(He smiles.)*
You got an island in your hair.

BESS. I have what?

MARK. Smells nice.

BESS. Thanks.

(They stare at each other. He feels the heat from her and steps back, putting his attention back to the clipboard. She lingers.)

MARK. You okay?

BESS. I don't know. I.

MARK. Whoa. Do you need to sit down?

BESS. Maybe. I. You. Could I—

(She faints. He catches her. He lays her to the ground. He stands up, scratches his head, looks around, looks at her.)

MARK. ...Fuck.

5.

(Bess and Cindy's room, later. BESS is laying down, fanning herself. CINDY frets over her. Her hair is done like Bess's. BIANCA looks pissed and intrigued and MS hovers near. MS is apathetic and stretching.)

CINDY. Fainting is very fun, isn't it? It's like getting sucked through life backwards, I bet it's like going to France.

BESS. It was kinda nice. To just go away.

BIANCA. So wait, what, did he catch you or what?

BESS. I—I don't know, I was out.

CINDY. Did he touch you?

BESS. Well, yeah. He was touching me. He had his arms around me.

BIANCA. HE HAD HIS ARMS AROUND YOU?????

BESS. Measuring me. Getting my measurements, And then I felt all weird. Like I wasn't wearing anything, I could feel air all over me. And he was breathing on me. Smelling my hair. He said it smelled like an island.

(CINDY looks confused. She smells Bess's hair.)

CINDY. No it doesn't.

(MS makes herself present.)

MS. *(Too loud:)* I have to go Now. I'd like to stay, I'm sorry I can't, but I have rehearsal to go to now. I'm in the play. I have to rehearse. So that's where I'm going.

(Pause.)

BIANCA. Okay.

(She goes.)

BIANCA. So What else, I mean, anything else? I mean, did / he—

BESS. He looked at me. I think he listened, too. Like words were coming out my mouth and—he was hearing them.

CINDY. *(Excited, in pain:)* Yay Boys! I love Boys, Boys are neat!

BIANCA. He loves you. He's in love with you.

BESS. *(Smiling:)* Nah. He's not. Seriously, Bianca, he's not.

BIANCA. *(Coolly:)* Well, Congratulations.

BESS. What?

(BIANCA extends her hand for a shake.)

BIANCA. No, I mean, well done.

CINDY. You're gonna be camp princess and he's gonna be your prince.

BIANCA. Yeah, last year, / I—

CINDY. Tell us something else like I was there, like a story, and we're the main person. We'll be you.

BESS. His hand brushed my hand, yours. He brushed your hand.

BIANCA. *(Closing her eyes:)* What did it feel like?

BESS. Butterscotch.

CINDY. Mmmm... Gooney...

BESS. And he held it. Just for a second. Then he let it go, like the car was pulling away and you have to leave each other. Like you're going, and he's staying. Desperate.

CINDY. What else?

BESS. He said, he said, *your eyes are like green strawberries. New with rain.*

CINDY. I'm dying. I'm dead.

(She fakes dies on the bed, next to BESS, close to BIANCA. BIANCA scrunches her nose.)

BIANCA. Ew.

BESS. What?

BIANCA. Something smells like ass.

CINDY. I don't smell anything.

(BIANCA looks at her.)

What?

BIANCA. No, nothing.

(BIANCA starts to snicker. BESS smirks. She can't help it. When someone stinks, it is too awkward not to laugh. Color rushes to CINDY's face.)

CINDY. I'm just going to um—I'm just going to go take a shower. A lot.

(She runs off.)

BIANCA. God, can you imagine being SO lame and SO fat that you can't even remember to shower? God, she probably doesn't want to take her clothes off cause she doesn't want to see herself.

(BESS is quiet.)

BESS. Yeah.

BIANCA. I talked to my Dad, oh my God, guess how we're getting to the Grammy's?

BESS. Um—a limo?

BIANCA. ...Yeah.

(Pause.)

So, Mark.

BESS. I don't know. Maybe.

BIANCA. Wait— What about Scott?

BESS. *(Coy:)* What about him?

(She fixes her hair in a mirror.)

He's a little—small—comparatively.

(BESS smiles at her reflection.)

6.

(BESS, poolside. Listening to music. There is a towel arranged over her gut, but her legs are bare. MS approaches her. SCOTT approaches her.)

MS. Um, hi.

(BESS lowers her shades.)

BESS. Hey.

MS. Hey, hi. I was just uh—I'm sorry to bother you, I just—wondering if—

BESS. Yeah?

MS. I was um, I was wondering if you would come see the show, cause I'm in it, and all, and um, I just thought it would be cool if you came.

(Pause.)

BESS. You mean the one that's at the end of camp, like, 3 weeks from now?

MS. Yeah, but um, seating's limited, so. And um, if you wanted to, I could um, I could make a reserved sign and put it on a seat for you.
(Pause.) In the front.

BESS. Yeah, cool.

MS. Really?

BESS. Totally, I'll be there.

(SCOTT saunters up.)

SCOTT. *(Smiling, big:)* Hey.

BESS. *(Hesitant:)* Hi.

SCOTT. Whoa, you disappearing on me? Someone get this bitch like twelve sandwiches with like extra mayo!

BESS. Ha.

MS. So um, Bess, remember, you just said that you would be there, so you'll be there, right?

BESS. Yeah.

MS. Yeah, okay, no big deal, we'll talk closer to, I mean, house left or house right, I'll start to get a jist of—which—sight line is better, so...

(She trails off. SCOTT is glaring at her.)

Kay, bye.

(She goes. SCOTT sits next to her.)

SCOTT. You still my girl?

BESS. Yeah, Sure.

SCOTT. Everybody's at the Rec Hall, They're about to show *Scream* and maybe you could get scared and I could hold you and you could grab on my nuts.

(BESS gives a weird look.)

You should come and talk to people, you're always out here by yourself.

BESS. Um, I talk to people, People know me.

SCOTT. Yeah, you need to if you're gonna be camp princess, and I ALWAYS be tappin on the camp princess all bads, and everybody's sayin it's probably gonna be you, bitch.

(Pause.)

Bess. I mean Bess.
Come on, Come inside.

BESS. In a minute.

(MARK approaches. He removes his shirt for a swim. Nice. He turns and smiles at her. BESS scoots away from SCOTT. SCOTT watches BESS watch MARK.)

MARK. Hey!

BESS. ...Hi...

(Glistening, he jumps into the water. SCOTT watches BESS watching MARK.)

SCOTT. ...Um—holler at you later, I guess—

(He kisses her on the cheek, goes. BESS sits, pensive.)

FROM somewhere, the sound of sneakers. A far off game. CLAIRE appears, back-flipping with grace. She is stunning in her uniform; her tricks are daunting. BESS watches, amazed, stunned.

CLAIRE settles herself in the chair next to BESS, and suns herself.

BESS stares.

CLAIRE re-applies her lip gloss. This takes a fat moment.)

CLAIRE. Okay, so wait.

THAT was your boyfriend?

BESS. Shut up. He's nice. Also, He plays JV soccer!

CLAIRE. *(Pause. She laughs harder.)* I'm sorry—it's just so—*sad*. So—art camp? Where's the um—where's the art?

BESS. I made a bracelet earlier! *(She holds up her wrist.)* It broke.

(Pause. BESS really looks at CLAIRE, blinks into the sun.)

CLAIRE. Hmm—it looks to me, looking at all the big groups of fat kids standing around everywhere, being fat, that you, Bess, are at a fat camp.

BESS. It's a New Image Camp. It's for New *Images*. Not just weight loss. We re-define ourselves and gain a greater sense of—yesterday, we learned how to make low-fat microwave popcorn invigorating.

(CLAIRE starts to laugh again.)

CLAIRE. It's like a Disney movie, but everyone is way fatter and sadder!

BESS. I don't care what you think, I'm having a nice time. *(Pause.)* I like Florida, I like it here.

CLAIRE. If you don't care, then why am I here?

(BESS is silent. CLAIRE settles into her chair.)

CLAIRE. That counselor, Mark.

BESS. What about him?

CLAIRE. Him, you should tap. I'd totally tap him.

BESS. I don't know.

CLAIRE. What, are you scared?

BESS. *(With balls:)* No. I'd. I'd fuck him.

CLAIRE. And also— What're you sitting here all by yourself for?

BESS. I have friends. I'm friends with everybody. There's even a rumor going around that I'm gonna be the camp princess! It's like homecoming queen. It's like what you—

CLAIRE. You think you're gonna be homecoming queen with a hamster for a boyfriend and that retarded fat girl as your best friend?

Yeah, okay.

(BESS rubs her eyes and blinks into the sun. CLAIRE is still there.)

(MARK approaches, wet.)

MARK. Got something in your eyes?

BESS. Yeah—no. Um—

(He wanders to towel off.)

Nothing—just you.

CLAIRE. Smooth.

(BESS looks at CLAIRE.)

BESS. Okay—so— Help.

(CLAIRE smiles. She reclines on the chair next to BESS, flaunting her body as the sun burns it.)

CLAIRE. Like this. It's easy.

(BESS imitates her, letting the towel drop.)

(Lights.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Prologue.

(Whispers in the dark. We can't see a thing. Bess and Cindy's room. Middle of the night. The sound of CINDY's wheezy sleeping, heavy breathing. CLAIRE doesn't sleep. She stretches beautifully and perhaps does backbends. BESS might try to do one as well, and fail miserably.)

BESS. Claire.

Are you still here?

CLAIRE. *(Totally annoyed, totally:)* Uh, yeah.

(Pause. Crickets, Breath.)

BESS. What are you doing?

CLAIRE. Tightening my inside muscles real tight.

BESS. Oh. *(Pause.)* Claire?

CLAIRE. What?

BESS. Do you, um, do you remember when we used to be friends?

CLAIRE. No way, When?

BESS. When we were little. Like um, best friends. I used to cut your bangs with lefty scissors and your Mom would get mad and yell at me, I'd go home crying, it was awkward. Remember?

CLAIRE. I remember my bangs. They were *way* stupid.

BESS. No, *me*, do you remember *me*?

(Pause.)

CLAIRE. Did you have a dog?

BESS. I did, I did have a dog!

CLAIRE. And like—a bed?

BESS. I had a bed, too!

(Pause.)

CLAIRE. Yeah, I kinda remember.

BESS. Awesome.

(Pause. The sounds of CINDY.)

Claire? Are you really going to help me get Mark?

CLAIRE. Sure.

(Crickets. Far off traffic. Breath.)

BESS. The other night I dreamt that you were getting married on the beach but it was the apocalypse but you wanted to go ahead with it anyways.

(CINDY rolls over.)

CINDY. Hi, Daddy. Hi. I'm over here, and I have all of the crayons. Meet me in the basement, I made us pudding pie. Hi, Daddy. Hi.

1. Weigh-in, Pt. 2.

(BESS, weigh-in, later. BESS is dressed 30% skimpier. CLAIRE sits in the corner, watching. MARK stares at BESS, curiously.)

CLAIRE. He's definitely starring at you.

MARK. You look tired.

BESS. I didn't sleep, um, last night.

MARK. Sleep is important.

BESS. I know.

MARK. Sleep deprivation can slow your metabolism, actually, it um, it messes with your hormone. Secretion. And stuff.

CLAIRE. Ew.

BESS. It's hard to sleep. Sometimes. So far away from home.

MARK. Yeah.

BESS. But Um—sometimes—also—about sleeping—I just want to hold on to someone while I sleep, so I can't. Sleep. Because I don't—because there's no one to— *(Pause.)* Don't you?

MARK. Yeah.

CLAIRE. Now say something funny and like laugh, say something gross.

BESS. And And then Cindy keeps me up, too.

MARK. What?

BESS. That freaking sound she makes.

(BESS imitates. CLAIRE laughs.)

MARK. Come on, that's not very cool.

BESS. I'm just saying.

(MARK backs off.)

MARK. Um— You can hop on the scale.

BESS. *(Eagerly:)* I really want to have lost a lot this week.

MARK. I'm sure you have, hop on up there.

(Pause.)

CLAIRE. Say something NOT melancholy, say something like *cheerful*.

BESS. Um, how are you today?

MARK. ...How am I today?

CLAIRE. *Nice.* Totally intriguing and freaking dull. No, say something EXOTIC and simple like *do you like Green Tea, because I think it tastes so good.*

BESS. I mean, how's it going?

MARK. Good. *(He looks at scale.)* Alright! You lost TWO! Good job, Bess!

(He gives her a very uncomfortable high five.)

You can hop off now. We just need to get your measurements and then we're all done.

CLAIRE. Freaking talk to him. ENGAGE him.

BESS. What's your favorite breakfast food?

MARK. *(Starting to take her measurements, starting with waist:)* Uh. Waffles?

BESS. I love waffles.

MARK. No, omelettes.

CLAIRE. Take your shirt off.

BESS. What?

MARK. What?

CLAIRE. Tell him the measurements would be more accurate if you took you shirt off and then take your shirt off. Damn.

BESS. *(Blurting it out, terrified:)* Maybe I should take off my shirt?

MARK. I don't know if / that's necessary—

BESS. No, see, then it'd be easier for you, right? To measure me. And the numbers would be smaller.

MARK. Well, technically, yeah, but they wouldn't be CONSISTENT, and there's a real scientific way that we do things around here. It's science.

CLAIRE. Just take it *off*.

(BESS does so. She stands there. Nearly mortified, but trying hard not to be. Silence.)

Ask him if he likes what he sees.

BESS. Do you, um, like what you see?

MARK. *(Quietly, nervously:)* Put your shirt back on.

BESS. Is it gross?

CLAIRE. Okay, that's pathetic.

MARK. Please put your shirt back on.

BESS. Cause it's gross?

MARK. Because it's not cool, Bess, it's not appropriate.

BESS. But you like what you see.

MARK. I didn't say that.

BESS. You didn't not say it.

MARK. You have.

BESS. What? I have what?

MARK. You have a good—you have a nice figure. You do. Look Bess, it's not / cool to—

BESS. You're just saying that.

MARK. No, I mean it, seriously, now please put your shirt back on.

BESS. Don't you want to look some more?

MARK. *Bess.*

BESS. Okay.

(She puts her shirt back on, steps on the scale. MARK continues measuring her, obviously shaken.)

BESS. How'd I do?

CLAIRE. Not bad.

MARK. Good. You did good.

BESS. Good.

(BESS smiles. MARK measures.)

(Campers file on for Crunch Session, led by NURSE JOY.)

2.

(Later that day, BESS, sunning, poolside, just in suit. CLAIRE, sunning beside her.

BIANCA approaches, trailed by MS.

BIANCA has her iPod in one ear.

She looks wounded.)

BESS. Do you think he wants me?

CLAIRE. Totally maybe. Or at least he wants to do you now.

BESS. Really?

CLAIRE. Totally.

BESS. I'm going to write him a poem.

CLAIRE. Are you retarded? Guys like that don't like poems.

BESS. No?

CLAIRE. Uh—*No*.

BESS. What do they like?

CLAIRE. They're just little boys. I don't know, they like it when you touch their car and like lean on it. They liked to be looked at and they like it when you touch their trophies and bake them stuff. Look him in the eye and feel, like, the weight of your mascara, and use it to make your eyes empty.

BESS. I don't wear mascara.

CLAIRE. But you will.

(SCOTT approaches. He's got a camera and starts taking pictures of her.)

SCOTT. Hey sista.

BESS. *(Grossed out:)* Hey.

CLAIRE. Gross. Get rid of him. He smells like masturbation.

SCOTT. Aren't you supposed to be playing volleyball?

BESS. I snuck off. Wanted to work on my tan.

SCOTT. Well, um. Everybody's wondering where you are.

CLAIRE. Why is everyone so *obsessed* with you?

BESS. Why is everyone so obsessed with me?

SCOTT. What?

BESS. Do you like my suit? It's vintage.

SCOTT. Yeah, it's sexy. Let me in on that.

(He sits behind her. He sticks his hand in her top, he's feeling her up. He doesn't really ask. BESS just sits there, frozen. He kisses her face.)

CLAIRE. Oh, gross. What is he doing? He's not even *doing* it right.

SCOTT. Do you like that?

CLAIRE. Get rid of him. Trust me.

(BIANCA enters furiously, trailed by MS.)

BIANCA. *(Firm:)* Scott.

SCOTT. Sup.

BIANCA. *(Firm, to BESS:)* Hey, bitch.

BESS. Hey.

BIANCA. Oh, and this time, I mean *bitch*.

MS. BRIDGER IS GOING TO BLOW UP THE CAMP.

BIANCA. MS, I told you not to *tell* her.

(Pause.)

MS. Um— Don't tell anyone or anything.

BESS. What?

MS. It's a secret. We're only telling the people we like, that's what Bianca decided.

BIANCA. So I heard you and Mark made out in Nurse Joy's office and that next summer, you're going to vacation with his family in Nantucket.

CLAIRE. Awesome.

SCOTT. Uh—what?

BIANCA. I thought maybe you were making it up, but I guess it is definitely no longer speculation but actual truth. I don't care or anything, I mean, I don't care. I'm going to the Grammy's.

SCOTT. Wait, what's this / about—

BESS. So wait, he's going to blow up the camp?

CLAIRE. That's hot.

MS. *(With nervous fear:)* All of Nurse Joy's kitty litter is missing and so is half of the orange juice. Larry his roommate says he's keeping it under his bed until he finds the most ironic and loaded time and then BAM! Like when we're all smiling, like a farce.

(BRIDGER walks by. He stops and stares at them. They all freeze in fear. His eyes land on BESS. He smiles. He stops smiling. He continues walking.)

CLAIRE. Ew, terrorist.

BIANCA. So um, don't bother coming to our room tonight. I don't think we'll be going to the gas station later, or we might be, but I think we're just gonna go by ourselves.

BESS. Oh, I'm really sad now cause Gas Stations are so awesome. You better go so I can fucking *cry*.

(CLAIRE snickers.)

CLAIRE. There's more.

BESS. And Bianca, I don't think it would kill you to NOT eat fucking Cheetos everyday, I mean, I'm just trying to be nice.

(BIANCA stomps off. MS lingers.)

MS. But You're still coming, right? It's tonight. I've put some serious thought into it, and I think you should sit stage left.

BESS. What?

MS. The show?

BESS. Oh—right—

MS. I'm really good. I'm serious. I am very, very good.

(MS goes. SCOTT stands there expectantly.)

SCOTT. So uh, bitches be like crazy, I could have sworn Bianca just said that you / and—

CLAIRE. Ew, he's going to cry, ew.

SCOTT. Cause that would be, um—cause I gotta say, I'd be pretty—um—if you—

CLAIRE. Tell him it's over.

(Pause.)

BESS. Yeah, so, about us.

SCOTT. *(Frantically:)* Yeah, us. You're something else, you know that? You really are. I mean, wow. Hell yeah. I'm going to take like 8,000 pictures of you so when I go home I can be like SHIT niggaz to all my— You're the hottest girl I've ever dated.

(Suddenly serious:) Nah—I mean—you're cool. You're not like anybody else. You're just like, *hi, I'm me*, all the time.

BESS. Scott.

SCOTT. No, I mean it. These past few weeks have been like the best of my life.

I just feel really comfortable around you, like I could ask you anything, whatever, like,

Hey, have you ever given a blow job?

CLAIRE. Have you ever *gotten* one?

BESS. Um.

SCOTT. Um, what?

BESS. I was thinking we should, um, take a break, is that okay?

CLAIRE. Geez, don't ask him if it's okay, just freaking tell him! GOD I'm *bored*. This is worse than Spanish TV.

SCOTT. That depends on what you mean by a break. Yo.

BESS. I mean, like not see each other—any more—

SCOTT. Are you serious?

BESS. Yeah, I mean, I'm sorry, but I just don't want to be tied down this Summer with any one person, you know?

(Pause.)

SCOTT. You're messing up a really good thing.

BESS. But still.

SCOTT. Yeah?

BESS. ...yeah.

SCOTT. Okay.

BESS. Okay?

SCOTT. Well. Fuck. See you later. Niggaz be like—uh—no—they don't be like anything—

BESS. *(Sincere:)* Hey, listen—I'm sorry.

SCOTT. *(Quietly:)* I'm gonna miss you. I really am.

(He leaves. BESS looks after him, sad.)

CLAIRE. Damn, what were you guys, like married? That's pathetic.

BESS. I think I really hurt his feelings.

CLAIRE. So?

BESS. No, I think I really did.

CLAIRE. You can't think of it that way. You did what was right for you. Now you're all freed up for Mark. HOT.

(She lays back down, tans. CINDY approaches. She pauses. She undresses for swimming. This takes a moment. CLAIRE spots her.)

CLAIRE. Could she put some freaking clothes on or something?

BESS. Not everyone is as perfect as you.

CLAIRE. It's not an issue of being perfect, it's an issue of self-control. Hasn't she ever heard of a salad? It's not *that* hard to not CONSTANTLY eat fried cheese.

(CINDY sits next to her.)

CLAIRE. Loose her.

CINDY. Volleyball's over. I scored a point.

BESS. Cool.

CINDY. I like your suit. It's pretty naked, it's pretty.

CLAIRE. Eww, oh my God, she wants to make out with you.

BESS. Thanks. Yours is real, purple.

CINDY. *(Bursting with excitement:)* So Guess what today is?

BESS. *(Bored:)* ...Wednesday.

CINDY. My Dad's birthday too. He / woulda been—

(MARK approaches, bathing suit, tan, hot, goes to chair on opposite side of pool.)

CLAIRE. There he is. There he is! Stretch your legs out!

CINDY. Every year I write him a birthday card cause my Mom says that he gets them in heaven telepathically if I burn the letter and pray hard.

CLAIRE. Say something to him!

BESS. MARK! Hey, MARK! What's up?

MARK. Hey, Bess.

BESS. There's a chair over here.

MARK. Sun's better over here.

CLAIRE. Tell him he's got a good tan!

BESS. You've already got a *perfect* tan.

MARK. Yeah, well, sun's better over here.

CINDY. She says if I think and pray hard enough and burn the words they go up to heaven.

BESS. Your loss!

CINDY. He was sucked up in the air and I saw it, it was like I was dreaming, like I had hit my head. He was flying through the air like a little piece of dust getting smaller and smaller, like a house.

(She imitates. She looks up. She stares up.)

Do you think he'll ever write back?

CLAIRE. Does she ever shut up?

CINDY. (*Desperate:*) Do you think I'll ever get good news? Some little—do you think people change forms after they die and do weird things like turn toasters on and float over Bridges? Because sometimes like this morning I was in the shower, can you keep a secret? You can. Cause this morning I was in the shower and the water was too cold and then all the sudden it was warm. Dad? Was it my Dad?

BESS. Cindy! Shut the fuck up for two seconds!

CINDY. But my Dad—I was just saying—I was just telling you / that—

BESS. I know, I know, your dead Dad eaten by the sky, blah blah blah, I know, Jesus. Look, why don't you go—

CINDY. Aren't you and Mark dating? Why doesn't he come over here?

BESS. Shhh, shut up, it's a secret.

CINDY. (*Ashamed:*) Sorry, gosh, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. That was stupid of me.

BESS. I think I'm gonna just zone out now, okay?

(Puts on her headphones. Tunes CINDY out, watches MARK. CINDY watches her.)

CINDY. Do you maybe want to, later, do / you want to—

BESS. I wanna be alone right now.

CINDY. Okay. (*Pause.*) I know your voice, I know that voice. It means you're not my friend, it means that if you saw me in the mall with my Mom you would walk the other way.

I thought you were my friend. (*Pause.*) I heard Mark on the phone yesterday. He's got a girlfriend. She's at swimming camp, she's a swimmer. He calls her cuteface. I thought that was funny cause you say, you say that he likes *you*. That's what you said.

BESS. What are you, my stalker? God, you fucking dyke. Leave me alone.

(CLAIRE laughs.)

CINDY. What?

CLAIRE. Oh my God, you are SUCH a bitch.

BESS. I'm sorry your fat Kansas ass can't understand a simple term, it means lesbian.

CINDY. I thought we were friends. I told you everything.

BESS. Well, I wasn't listening.

CINDY. You're a bad person.

CLAIRE. Ooooooh.

CINDY. I'm not voting for you for Camp Princess anymore. I don't like you anymore!!

(CINDY runs off in tears.)

CLAIRE. Like she has any sway.

(BESS sits, stunned by what just happened. She looks like she might go after CINDY, but doesn't. She settles back into her chair. Her and CLAIRE look nearly the same.)

CLAIRE. Even if he does have a "cuteface" bitch or whatever somewhere else—he might still be looking for a little fun.

BESS. Yeah? You think?

CLAIRE. Get him to meet you in the Gazebo. Ask him to meet you tonight. Do it.

(CLAIRE looks in Mark's direction.)

He's looking at you. He just fucking looked at you.

BESS. He totally did. Ohmigod, he really did.

(BESS stands and breathes, then moves towards MARK, confidently.)

Mark— Hey Mark!

3. Nurse Joy's office.

(BRIDGER *sits in a chair across the desk from her. He is picking pieces of wood off of the chair with his long, threatening thumbnail. MARK stands patiently behind NURSE JOY.*)

NURSE JOY. I'm just curious. If I wanted to build a bomb, how would I do it? Just curious. Bored, I guess.

(BRIDGER *is silent.*)

The girl campers of Dorm West said they saw you leering outside their window at 2 a.m. They feel like they are in danger. We have this problem with you every year, and I know your parents find it appropriate to keep dumping you here because they can't think of anything better to do with you, but I do *not* deal with behavioral problems. I have enough on my plate and I am trying to run a tight ship. DO NOT FUTZ WITH MY BOAT!

(BRIDGER *doesn't respond.*)

I think you're faking it. I think you're bored. I think that you think you're Sylvia Plath. I think you need a tan. Like Mark. (*Pause.*) Mark thinks so too.

(MARK *nods.*)

All I'm saying is that it wouldn't kill you to strive towards some sort—of social life. Use words. Find a lady friend. Mark thinks so too.

(MARK *nods.*)

Anything?

(BRIDGER *is silent.*)

You and I are both getting too old for this. Just tell me I don't need to worry. Tell me I don't need to call your Dad.

(BRIDGER *is silent.*)

Well, I'm glad we had this chat. Go on now and bite the heads off pigeons or leer or whatever it is that you—do.

(BRIDGER goes, as he passes MARK, MARK gives him a thumbs up, and a pat on the back. BRIDGER stares at him, and goes. NURSE JOY releases an exasperated sigh. BRIDGER passes BESS as she enters. He stops and stares at her. BESS is trailed by CLAIRE.)

(BRIDGER moves and lets her pass, still starring at her.)

BESS. You wanted to see me?

CLAIRE. What does this fat bitch want?

NURSE JOY. *(Stern:)* Sit.

Mark, will you give us a moment?

BESS. *(Coyly:)* Hi, Mark. I like your shirt.

MARK. Thanks. I bought it.

NURSE JOY. MARK.

(MARK starts to go.)

BESS. See you tonight?

MARK. Yeah—at dinner—I will definitely see you tonight at dinner.

(He quickly goes. NURSE JOY stares BESS down.)

NURSE JOY. We found Cindy.

BESS. *(Cocky:)* Yeah?

NURSE JOY. She was running down the highway towards Disney World.

BESS. I find that hard to believe.

NURSE JOY. What?

BESS. That she ran.

NURSE JOY. *(Commanding:)* I don't tolerate cruelty.

(CLAIRE disappears.)

BESS. It wasn't just me, it was Cl—

(She looks around. CLAIRE is nowhere in sight.)

It—um—

NURSE JOY. You've only got a few weeks left and I suggest you behave yourself. I don't care how popular you are around here, how many people like you cause your back folds less than theirs.

BESS. People like me, man.

NURSE JOY. Cruelty is an ugly bitch.

(NURSE JOY pops a Diet Mountain Dew, slurps it good.)

Do you know what cruelty is?

BESS. Y—yeah—Duh—

NURSE JOY. No, do you know what it REALLY is?

Technically, it is meanness, mean spiritedness, but what does that mean? Actually, it is taking your own *pathetic* insecurities and placing them into the hands of another who you feel is larger or smaller or better or worse than yourself. It's giving in. They win. Have you ever felt small? Have you ever been pushed in the mud?

BESS. *(Quietly:)* I've always felt—sort of—outside of—

NURSE JOY. Have you ever been punched? Have you ever cried for five days? Have you ever been made to feel SO worthless that you wish you could die and make everyone watch? For me, This was third grade. Have you ever made yourself throw up?

BESS. No. There was um, I mean, my friend thought so once, so I let her believe it, so.

NURSE JOY. Because people who make themselves throw up are more complicated?

BESS. Yeah, I don't know.

NURSE JOY. You most certainly don't.

(NURSE JOY compulsively chugs her Diet Mountain Dew. It's nasty.)

Ugh.

(The phone rings. NURSE JOY picks it up skeptically.)

NURSE JOY. Hello? *(Her eyes grow wide with fear.)* Yes, hello.

(She looks at BESS. To BESS:)

We're done.

(BESS goes. NURSE JOY returns to the phone.)

Yes, I'm here. Everything is wonderful.

(Her eyes widen.)

I see. I see.

(She hangs up, devastated.)

4.

(Night. The gazebo. BESS waits for MARK. She is wearing some sort of special outfit.

She sits in a way that she hopes the moonlight will hit her and make her glow when he arrives.)

BESS. Cl—Claire? I could really—I could kind of use some—I kind of need you right now—

When he comes, am I supposed to— What am I supposed to do? I don't know how to—I don't really—Claire?

(She hears a stir. She sits, ready.)

(BRIDGER, 17, appears. BESS is startled.

He is tall, thick. Acne. Frightening. Wears all black.)

(He stares at her.)

BESS. Uh, hi. *(Pause.)* Hi.

(Pause. Lightning Bugs.)

BRIDGER. Lightning Bugs flash because they're falling in love. What they're doing, actually, is releasing electricity, towards each other, to show that they're ready. Physically and emotionally available. It's their bug-way of making love to each other.

BESS. Bugs don't make love.

BRIDGER. Do you?

BESS. What?

BRIDGER. Do you make love?

(Pause.)

BESS. I'm kind of waiting for someone, so.

BRIDGER. I can stay if I want.

BESS. I was here first.

BRIDGER. Do you have a date?

BESS. An arrangement.

BRIDGER. Romance.

BESS. Maybe.

BRIDGER. It's overrated.

BESS. Yeah, How do you know?

BRIDGER. How my mom looks at my Dad, or doesn't anymore, at all.

(Pause.)

Do your parents still do it?

BESS. Uh—

BRIDGER. Mine don't. *(Pause.)* I wonder if—if it's just that—when you are young, if you're lucky, you look good, and you find someone that looks good with you, like the right color and size. And then when you get older, you get—bored.

BESS. They still do it.

My parents. They're very beautiful people still. They work out. They kiss on the lips. *(Pause.)* I weigh 17 more pounds than my mom.

BRIDGER. Is she a moth?

BESS. What?

BRIDGER. Some sort of cotton person?

BESS. *(Smiling:)* Oh. Sort of.

(She looks at her watch.)

Okay, fine, you can stay, But when he comes / you've got to—

BRIDGER. No, I will.

(Pause. They sit. Lightning bugs.)

BESS. So did you / really—

BRIDGER. What do you think?

BESS. I don't know.

BRIDGER. Do I look like I would've, or uh, or could've?

BESS. I don't know, I never met anyone who tried to blow up their high school. *(Pause.)* Was it fun?

BRIDGER. Is this seriously what people are saying, I mean what / everyone's—

BESS. Yeah, you built a bomb out of carrots and gasoline.

BRIDGER. I thought it was Radishes.

BESS. Some sort of earth based uh, leafy vegetable.

BRIDGER. I guess people talk.

BESS. Yeah, I guess they do.

(Pause.)

BRIDGER. But what if—what if not? What if no one said anything about anyone ever again?

BESS. There'd be nothing to say.

(Pause. BESS looks at her watch.)

BRIDGER. Is it late?

BESS. What?

BRIDGER. Romance?

BESS. Only like 15 years. So.

(Pause.)

BRIDGER. I knew a girl like you once.

BESS. Um.

BRIDGER. Yeah, back at my school. *(Pause.)* What?

BESS. No, nothing, that's just kind of—offensive—a *girl like you*—

BRIDGER. In a universe with infinite possibilities, anything and everything, including you, has already happened, and is happening right now.

BESS. Oh, okay.

BRIDGER. You disagree?

(Pause.)

BESS. Why was she like me?

BRIDGER. She was pretty in this like rabbit-way. And she would be a bitch \ but didn't know how to do it, like she was trying it on, like a shoe or a mask.

The words came out of her mouth, she'd say them wrong, like a question, like *Fuck You?* Like she wasn't sure.

BESS. I'm not like that.

(Pause. BRIDGER stares at her.)

(Bitchy:) Hey, Aren't you hot? I'm sure the eight layers of vampire garb aren't helping you out there, pal. It's fucking Florida, you know. You don't have to wear / all that—like every DAY—

BRIDGER. I know.

(Pause.)

I *know*, okay? I just—I prefer to remain—covered. In some way.

BESS. Yeah, well it's fucking Florida.

BRIDGER. You cuss for the first time yesterday?

BESS. No, It's—it's just how I fucking, it's how I *talk*.

(Lightning bugs.)

(Pause. He removes his dark coat, QUICK. BESS jumps, fear. She looks. There is nothing of danger under his coat. Just a pleasing plump man gut. He adjusts his neck. He sits, self consciously.)

BRIDGER. I have three sisters. They're all very pretty.

(Pause.)

BESS. Oh— Okay...

BRIDGER. I don't think I mean pretty, I think I mean hot. Like very—conventionally—cheerleaders and track runners and what not. They paint their nails to match their outfits. Sarah the littlest, she was sweet for five minutes but then she grew boobs and now she's a cunt.

And when I, when I was like—12? When I started—becoming—you know, I, Kathy, she—the oldest, I, I would be walking from my room to the bathroom in a towel—all covered up mind you, just to take a shower, and she would say, *ew, put some clothes on, I don't want to see that shit.*

BESS. That wasn't very nice.

BRIDGER. No, it goddamn wasn't.

(Pause. Quietly, BRIDGER removes his shirt. Hair, chub, pale. He sits there, bare-chested. BESS tries not to look.)

I don't have a problem with it, but everyone else seems to.

BESS. Oh.

BRIDGER. I mean, what is that? Why does it feel like that?

BESS. Like what?

BRIDGER. Most attractive people are terrorists and cunts.

BESS. Not true.

BRIDGER. You're not even looking at me. You haven't looked at me. What if you looked at me right now?

BESS. What if I did?

BRIDGER. Do you like talking to me?

BESS. Worse things have happened.

BRIDGER. What if I touched you?

BESS. Why? Why would you?

BRIDGER. Because we're the same.

BESS. What if I screamed or said you make me sick? What if I ran?

BRIDGER. What if I chased you?

BESS. What if I wanted you to?

BRIDGER. Do you?

(Pause.)

BESS. No.

(BRIDGER scoots closer. BESS scoots further away.)

I HAVE A VERY CLEAR IMAGE OF THE MAN THAT I DECIDE TO FALL IN LOVE WITH. When I decide. Or that one that will love me. When he decides.

BRIDGER. Oh. Romance.

BESS. Standards, I think. *(Pause.)* You ever been drunk? I bet it's like being in love. Permanent happy.

BRIDGER. You're lovely on the inside, too.

BESS. I'm lovely on the OUTSIDE, / I'm—

BRIDGER. And I'm going to kiss you now.

BESS. I don't want to be kissed.

BRIDGER. I'm going to do it anyways.

(Fast, he kisses her. It's lovely. Romance. Mature. He runs his hands through her hair. BESS settles into it. BRIDGER kisses her nose.)

BESS. That was—very—

(She smiles.)

BRIDGER. Grown up? I practiced.

BESS. Very—

(She kisses him again.)

(MARK approaches. He stops. He watches. Perplexed. BESS pulls away from the kiss. She smiles. She sees MARK. She wipes off her face.)

Ugh—get OFF me—Mark—get him off me—gross—

(BRIDGER stands silently. Hurt, but hiding this, and silently, he goes. BESS sits there, eyes wide, and looks at MARK.)

You—you came.

MARK. I did.

BESS. It was so weird, um, I was sitting here waiting for you and the next thing you know, that weird ass shows up and is all, *I'm gonna kiss you*. I feel so gross now, I mean I don't want you to / think that like—

MARK. Bess. BESS.

BESS. What?

MARK. I'm not here to—I mean, I'm here to—

BESS. What?

(Mark's cell phone goes off. He looks at it. He pockets it.)

Who was that?

(Pause.)

MARK. My girlfriend.

(Pause. The devastation is palpable.)

BESS. Oh—awesome—girlfriends are awesome—

MARK. We're um, we've been together for a while, so, she wanted us to spend a Summer apart, cause we're young and all, and cause, she wanted to see if we could do it, miss each other. I don't know, I might want to marry her maybe, or something.

BESS. No, yeah, that makes sense.

MARK. But I um, I couldn't stand the thought of you just sitting here waiting all night. And being all tired tomorrow from the waiting—I'm responsible for you, you know.

BESS. So—um—you feel sorry for me?

MARK. You're not like anyone else, You don't havta pretend.

BESS. I'm not pretending.

MARK. Come on. I'll walk you home

(BESS blushes. They walk.)

Your Hair still smells good.

5. Bess in her room, late at night.

(BESS holds fake flowers, and wears an awkward dress. She stands front. She waves. She practices, maniacally. Music plays. MS knocks softly on her door. She enters, in a droopy costume of post-show depression. BESS hides the crown and flowers.)

MS. Hi. I brought you this.

(She holds out a sign marked RESERVED.)

BESS. Oh—Oh—shit—

MS. You know the thing about the tree falling, and whether or not anyone hears it, and whether or not it makes sound, you know?

BESS. I just got really busy all of the sudden—I was—I had a date—

MS. I was really good. I was really, really good, actually. No one came, except Nurse Joy and Cindy, Bianca didn't even come, so did it happen?

(MS sadly begins to re-enact her song. She really is good. BESS watches, but her attention turns back to the mirror. It's just too sad for her to watch.)

BESS. Yeah—I got a lot to do, so—sorry I missed uh, sorry. I still haven't figured out what I'm wearing to the dance tomorrow night yet, so.

(She is quiet. MS gets the hint. She leaves the Reserved sign on Bess's bed.)

MS. I think it definitely happened.

(She goes. BESS regains herself, resumes practicing.)

(CLAIRE appears.)

CLAIRE. No, cup your hand more. And you're totally slouching. Stand up straighter.

BESS. Oh my God—thank God you're back—I thought you—

CLAIRE. And your smile is crooked, and not in a cute way.

BESS. *(Adjusting:)* Like this?

CLAIRE. Better. And don't look so freaked out. Everyone's gonna be looking at you, you have to not look so freaked out.

BESS. *(Adjusting:)* Kay.

CLAIRE. Now you look dead.

(BESS corrects.)

BESS. He walked me home.

CLAIRE. Who?

BESS. Mark.

CLAIRE. Did he kiss you?

BESS. *(Desperate:)* No, but he wanted to. I mean, I thought he wanted—me, I—didn't we decide that he does?

CLAIRE. No, he definitely does. Definitely.

(CLAIRE looks around the room.)

BESS. How do you know?

CLAIRE. Cause you're the best one here.

BESS. I'm not the best one everywhere.

CLAIRE. Where's that other fat girl?

BESS. Which one?

CLAIRE. Your roomie.

BESS. She—um—she requested another—she moved. (*BESS focuses on the mirror.*)

How'd you do it, I mean, what do you do with people looking at you all the time?

CLAIRE. I don't know, I guess I'm used to it.

BESS. I'm not. It makes me tingle. I can feel the eyes.

CLAIRE. It's good, though, right? Okay, now walk. Practice walking. Use your ass.

BESS. (*Doing so:*) Claire?

CLAIRE. What?

BESS. What's it like to be you?

CLAIRE. What's it like to be anybody?

BESS. No, seriously, what's it like? Do you fall asleep differently?

CLAIRE. I don't know, how do you fall asleep?

BESS. With my eyes open, thinking sometimes, a lot. What's it like to walk around the locker room in your underwear?

CLAIRE. What is it like to not?

(Pause.)

BESS. Claire?

CLAIRE. What?

BESS. Are we friends?

CLAIRE. Sure. Why not.

BESS. Awesome.

(BESS fixes herself in the mirror.)

6. The Dance, The Cafeteria.

(The Fat Kids are Dancing, as best they can. MS and BIANCA together, with SCOTT. Ha. CLAIRE stands at one end, bored, on her phone. She looks good. MARK in a nice shirt, plays DJ, and badly. There are crappy decorations, pretzels, diet coke. BESS wears some awkward dress and heels. She stands fairly alone. CINDY and BRIDGER dance, together, ignoring BESS. NURSE JOY commands the stage wearing a loud floral dress. She looks a nanosecond away from tears.)

NURSE JOY. Campers, You all look amazing, I hope you know that. I could eat you, I really could. But I won't, because I've already had my 1200 calories, I'll have this strawberry instead!

(She indulges.)

Okay, campers. I can't believe the last night of camp is finally here. And by the last night, I mean ever. Unfortunately, not that I blame this on any of you specifically, not at all, perhaps only on myself, but the—owners—have decided—to longer continue New Image Camp Vanguard.

(Shrieks of rage. NURSE JOY cries.)

Don't worry about me, campers. There is always the chance of some sort of love or some sort of new beginning. Or maybe not, at all.

Remember to have a nice time, but also remember to keep distance. You're all barely old enough to drive, careful. No falling in love. One snack per person. We'll be announcing the camp princess after this song. And by the camp Princess, I mean the last one ever.

(Music resumes as she leaves the stage, keeping a watchful eye on the campers.)

BESS. Mark looks so amazing.

CLAIRE. He looks pretty good.

BESS. Wait 'til he sees me up there. He's not gonna be able to breathe. He's gonna shit him self. It's gonna be cathartic. He's gonna kiss me.

CLAIRE. He totally is. *(Yawning.)*

BESS. Did I tell you, did I tell he walked me home?

CLAIRE. Yeah—you did.

BESS. He walked really close.

CLAIRE. I bet.

BESS. *(Shaking:)* And the way he talked about his girlfriend, I mean, she sounds like a total cunt, total.

(CINDY shyly approaches. She wears a dress and red shoes that probably sparkle.)

CINDY. Hi.

BESS. Hey.

CINDY. *(Proud, brave:)* I just wanted to tell you cause tomorrow's the last day, and I don't know if I'll ever see you again so I wanted to tell you that look really pretty.

BESS. *(Quickly:)* Thanks.

CINDY. Is there anything you want to tell me?

(Pause. CLAIRE hides a smile.)

BESS. Um—I guess that it was nice to meet you. And stuff.

CINDY. Oh. *(Pause.)* You, too.

(BESS moves her eyes to MARK. Dejected, CINDY goes.)

BESS. It's almost time, It's almost time!!! Oh shit. How do I look? Oh God. The song's almost over. Oh my God. How's my hair?

CLAIRE. What?

BESS. How do I look?!

CLAIRE. You look alright. Geez, calm down.

BESS. But it's almost time for them to announce the winner!!!!

CLAIRE. Oh yeah.

You should go ask Mark to do you.

BESS. What? No. No, I can't.

CLAIRE. I bet all he needs is an invitation.

BESS. Are you serious, should I really?

CLAIRE. Yeah, totally.

BESS. I could do that.

CLAIRE. In those bushes outside.

BESS. In the bushes?

CLAIRE. Definitely.

(Like the room has spit her out, BESS moves to MARK.)

BESS. Having fun?

MARK. It's alright.

BESS. Let's go outside?

MARK. Outside?

BESS. Let's go outside.

MARK. Why outside?

BESS. *(Awkward:)* I'm going to fuck you in the bushes.

MARK. Whoa.

BESS. Cause you're nice and you're sweet and I was thinking you could take my virginity.

MARK. Bess.

BESS. So I don't have to lie about it when I get home.

MARK. You're a nice girl.

BESS. So I don't have to lie about it.

MARK. Calm down.

BESS. I'm not scared.

MARK. Yes you are, you're shaking.

BESS. I'm not. Please come outside with me.

(MARK's eyes are drifting.)

What are you looking at? Are you looking at Claire?

MARK. Who?

BESS. That girl over there, the cheerleader, are you looking at her? Look at me!

MARK. I'm not looking at anyone but you.

BESS. *(Pulling him:)* Let's go outside.

MARK. No.

BESS. *Please.*

MARK. I said no.

BESS. PLEASE!

(She grabs him, he pushes her off. She falls.)

MARK. NO!

(The music stops. Everyone stares. CLAIRE laughs. SCOTT and CINDY can't help but laugh a little, too. BESS gathers herself, stands.)

BESS. *(To MARK:)* You're so funny. You're so funny, Mark. Quit playing around.

(To other campers:) He's so funny. It's a scene. It's a scene we're doing. For the talent show tomorrow night. It was going to be a surprise.

Mark, you're funny.

I'm fine. Everyone stop looking. Stop looking. I'm fine. Everyone stop looking.

STOP IT.

(The song ends, everyone claps, looks towards the stage, where MARK jumps onto the stage, stands with flowers, a mike, a sash, trying to pretend like nothing happened.)

MARK. Alright, campers. Um, I Hope everyone's having a good time!!!

(Semi lack-luster cheers.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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