



**Sample Pages from
The Hope and Heartache Diner**

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THE HOPE AND HEARTACHE DINER

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS BY
Lindsay Price



The Hope and Heartache Diner
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Cast of Characters

7W 6M + 3 Either, Easily Expandable

FELIX BROWN: (17) A teen with a big imagination, a big heart, but also a little self-centred. Can be male or female.

SAM BROWN: (53) Felix' dad. Loves to feed people. He solves problems with food. Plays himself as a teen and an adult. Married to...

NELL BROWN: (45) (Nelka Rolek) Nell is practical, stern but filled with love. Plays herself as a teen and an adult.

LOO BROWN: (19) Lucja (Lubomir if male). Loo is confident and knows what she wants. Can be male or female.

WIKI BROWN: (15) Wikoria. Timid. Loud places scare her. She bakes and is home schooled.

RAT: (19) Rat is rough around the edges, to the point that violence is always just under the surface. But she's working on it. She has plans for the future. Can be male or female.

MISSION: (17) Mission is a southern belle with an unstable past. In the present she is bright and bubbly. But don't cross her.

EARL, BETTY, FELIX SR: Felix's great-grandparents, and grandfather. They are ghosts and purposefully look as they did as teenagers. Earl is a jokester. Betty is a sweetheart with smarts. Felix Sr. was a ladies man as a teen, married once and never again after his wife died young. He and Felix were together every day of Felix' life. He is the source for all of Felix' stories.

The DINERS

These are members of the ensemble. At least 3 guys & 3 girls:

GUYS: BLT, CHOPPER, STEW

GIRLS: JELLY, LADYBUG, SUNNY

But feel free to further divide the DINERS' lines into as many characters as you need. Use the following names for extra Diners.

JOE, GAC, HAIL, LTO, MURPHY, RAFT, JACK BENNY, WAX, WHISKEY, RADIO, MUD, SHIMMY, FLOP, WART, PITTSBURGH, VERMONT, TWIST, MAGOO, BOSSY, STRAWBERRY, SUDS

The DINERS also play

Customers: RAINE, HAMIL, MS. BRONSTEIN, LOST, SHRUG, ASHLEY, AMBER, ERIC, MAUDE, MS GILLMAN, MILO, DONNIE, REBECCA, AVERY, SHANNON, JAENA, DEAN, LIAM, COOPER

Workers: PAULA, BRENDA, CRYSTAL, FALCON

Other: ANNABELL.

Costume Notes

FELIX: A typical teen. Jeans, sneakers, hoodie.

SAM, NELL, WIKI, MISSION, LOO, RAT, PAULA and BRENDA all wear a variation of a diner uniform. For example, khakis, blue button down shirts, and aprons. A t-shirt with the diner name on it. The uniforms are personalized to suit the character.

BETTY, EARL and FELIX SR wear black and gray. They dress in a 50's style. Felix Sr. wears a letter jacket and Converse sneakers. Betty wears pedal pushers and flats. Earl wears a bowling shirt.

Set Notes

The set is an old style diner. It should be representational rather than realistic. Think *Our Town*. Use plates and cups but no liquid or real food. There are tables downstage right and left with a counter across the upstage with stools. Everything is lovingly worn. The chairs are covered with duct tape. The paint is peeling. If you have red vinyl booths all the better.

Lighting Notes

You're going to want two lighting looks: one for the present, and one for flashbacks. One option is a warm wash for the present, cool wash for the past. Another is to use a cyc backdrop to accommodate this change in looks.

Flow Notes

This play moves quickly between present and flashback. There are no costume or set changes, it just happens.

In the original production Felix clapped to signal moving into and out of the flashbacks. The important thing is that there is no pause or blackout between past and present. **The two are fluid like water.** If characters are in a past scene and are onstage during a transition to the present, they simply and quickly walk off.

The Hope and Heartache Diner was first performed on December 3rd, 2015 by the Rose Curtain Players of Owensboro High School (Owensboro, KY) with the following cast:

Stew/Liam/Falcon: Austin Adams
Lost/Avery: Brie Alsip
Donnie: Conner Elliott
Maude: Adrianna Dean
Annabell: Hannah Kate Divine
Ms Bronstein: Kyla Isbell
Chopper/Cooper: Josh Kelly
Jelly/Amber: Nicole Moore
Shrug: Angelia Prather
Sunny/ Ashley: Anna Kate Schertzinger
BLT/Dean: Ben Sexton
Raine: Emma Sims
Shannon: Lizzy Smith
Ms Gillman/Jaena: Bree Sommerville
Rebecca: Autumn Stolle
Hamil: Sam Ward
Ladybug/Paula: Trinity Washington
Milo: Caleb Wiggins
Falcon: Austin Adams
Brenda: Madi Boarman
Rat: Hayden Elliott
Mission: Savanna Hinchcliffe
Crystal: Vanessa Luck
Sam: Forest Clark
Wiki: Lucy Decker
Felix, Sr.: J Tucker Greer
Nell: Cheyenne Harbison
Betty: Kennedy McCollam
Loo: Abby North
Earl: Cory Storm
Felix: Carter Stovall

Production Team

Director: Carolyn Cork Greer
Stage Manager: Alyssa Shelton
Assistant Director: Anna Leigh Thompson
Lighting Design: Joe Lewis
Sound Design: Easton Reynolds
Set Design/Construction: Dave Walker

ACT ONE

Old time upbeat music plays.

Lights come up and the DINERS are in a tableau. Early morning rush at the diner. Busy, drinking coffee, forks in mid air, no one has time to waste. Big gestures, big smiles, energy captured in a moment.

The lights flicker and everyone melts into a new tableau. Avoid going to black - show the change in a stylized manner. Now it's the afternoon shift. Everyone is in the middle of conversation, chatting, lingering, laughing. Everyone connects to someone else.

The lights flicker and everyone melts into a new tableau. Some move to the side as this is the late night shift. There should be less people in the picture. A few sitting alone staring into space. A couple holding hands in a booth. It's quieter.

The lights flicker again and now everything explodes into action. Everyone moves, talking all at once, talking to one another. The action rises to a peak and then everyone freezes. The music cuts out.

FELIX steps forward. The set is only suggested and not fully realized. Think "Our Town."

FELIX: This is Duke's Diner. (gesturing) Booths are there. Counter here. It's small but not cramped. Stack of coffee cups here. Apple pie there. The place needs a coat of paint. A coat of everything - it's pretty much a dive. The booths have more duct tape than vinyl. The counters are worn through. Ma doesn't believe in changing things.

NELL: It's bad luck. The saints wouldn't like it.

FELIX: That would be (as if pointing to pictures on a shelf) Saint Hedwig, Saint Stanisław, Saint Casimir, Saint Mary Faustina, Saint Maximilian. Ma doesn't discriminate. I've been here every day of my life. Whether I like it or not. (she shrugs) Family Business. But this is my last day. (Beat. Realizing.) This is my last day.

The music fades in again and everyone starts to move to the music. Larger than life. The lights change to flashback mode. BETTY and EARL enter to stand face to face.

FELIX: Duke's has been around forever. My great grandparents met here.

BETTY: Pal, you couldn't cook my Christmas dinner.

EARL: Oh yeah? Says who?

BETTY: Once a fry cook, always a fry cook.

EARL: Oh yeah? Well doll, you're just a waitress.

BETTY: *You're all wet.*

EARL: *You couldn't work the fryer for five minutes.*

BETTY: *You couldn't handle the customers for five seconds.*

EARL: I hate talking to customers.

BETTY: Yeah. *(beat, with a smile - finally something in common)* So do I.

They move upstage together.

FELIX: Back then they had class. They had style.

The diner swings into action. Everyone is larger than life in a "50's style."

EARL: *(hitting a bell)* Order up!

BETTY: One toast two sunnyside'n black.

JELLY: *(waving across the diner)* Hey pal.

BLT: *(waving back)* Hey Sal.

BETTY: *(pointing)* Want the regular?

CHOPPER: *(pointing back)* Baby you know it.

BETTY: *(turning with a sniff)* Why I oughta...

STEW: *(standing)* Did you see her gams?

LADYBUG: *(standing)* Did you see the news?

BLT: Unbelievable. *(hands in the air)* I'll eat my hat.

CHOPPER: That'd be better than this meatloaf.

SUNNY: *(hands in the air)* Whatta louse.

LADYBUG *(turning with a sniff)* Some nerve.

EARL: Good one, Johnny.

BETTY: What you busting my chops for?

RAT runs on, brandishing a frying pan ripping a hole right through the atmosphere.

RAT: WHOAREYOUWHYAREHERE!!!!

EVERYONE: AGH!

Everyone hits the ground. The music shuts off. The lights change to present mode. RAT and FELIX are the only ones left standing.

FELIX: What are you doing?

RAT: Felix? What are you doing?

FELIX: Having a heart attack. You scared the crap out of me.

RAT: You? I saw the light on and thought we had been robbed. What are you doing here?

FELIX: *(like an announcement)* I'm doing the full run for my last day.

RAT: If you're gonna be here you better do something. *(she exits)*

FELIX: She's a little cranky before coffee.

All the DINERS nod and agree on that.

FELIX: *(shushing the DINERS)* Shhh!

RAT: *(stepping back in)* Did you start the coffee?

FELIX: I've been busy.

RAT: *(yelling back as she exits)* Those tables better be spotless today.

FELIX: I'm on it! She messed with my flow.

FELIX moves downstage, the DINERS move into position.

FELIX: Ok, this is Duke's, no one knows who Duke is. I'm Felix - Hey, hi! I never said. I'm Felix Brown. Today I'm doing the full run. Doors open at 6 am and shut at 2 am. It's a tradition. It was a tradition. My grandpa did the full run every year at the end of summer.

The lights change to flashback mode. The upbeat old fashioned music plays underneath. GRANDPA steps

forward. GRANDPA is FELIX SR. Here he is 17. He is all Danny Zuko. The girls are in love with him. The boys are shaking their heads at him.

JELLY: (*swooning*) Think you can do it, Felix?

FELIX SR: (*posing*) Sure can.

BLT: You better. I got money riding on you.

BETTY: (*stepping forward*) What's the boy doing now?

EARL: (*stepping forward*) Full run.

STEW: (*standing up to FELIX SR*) Didn't Dennis end up face first in a banana cream pie last year?

BETTY: Waste of a perfectly good pie.

FELIX SR: Dennis is an amateur.

BLT: Whoooo "Amateur."

CHOPPER: Big words for a tough guy.

GIRLS: (*hanging on FELIX SR*) Oh Felix, you're my hero!

The GIRLS giggle and run off. The BOYS storm off in disgust. BETTY and EARL start laughing. The music fades and lights change to present mode.

FELIX: Maybe they didn't exactly act like that. Or talk like that. Nobody talks like that.

BETTY & EARL: (*mocking*) Felix you're my hero.

FELIX SR: Hey! Let the girl alone. If that's how she sees me, who's to argue?

FELIX: (*introducing*) Grandpa, Great Grandpa, Great Grandma. They're dead.

EARL: What? Nobody told me. How come nobody told me?

BETTY: (*swatting him*) Earl.

FELIX: They hang out with me. I know, I know. It's weird.

EARL: No Felix, hanging out with your dead relatives is a perfectly normal thing for a teenager to do.

FELIX: (*to audience*) Just go with it.

BETTY: Felix dear, aren't you picturing us a little young? (*primping*) I'm not complaining mind you...

EARL: Sounds like you're complaining.

FELIX: (*referring to audience*) I want them to see you at your best.

FELIX SR: I'm not complaining. I look good.

BETTY: Sweetie is this really how you want to spend your time? Aren't you supposed to be packing?

FELIX: Later. (*to audience*) I want you to see Duke's how I see it.

FELIX SR: You mean how I see it.

BETTY: You mean how you exaggerate it.

FELIX SR, EARL & FELIX: (*all with the same gesture*) Details.

FELIX: (*to audience*) I want you to see the stories, like they were told to me, sitting at the counter. (*she elbows FELIX SR.*) Not doing homework.

FELIX SR: Shh! Don't let your mother find out.

FELIX: Diners are special.

FELIX SR: You said it.

FELIX: (*she sighs*) I'm all over the map. Ok. The beginning.

BETTY: (*facing EARL*) Fry cook.

EARL: (*facing BETTY*) Waitress.

FELIX: Grandpa worked here and bought the place.

FELIX SR: No one knows who Duke is.

FELIX: My parents met here too. Family. My pop's working the line, on the fryer just like his pop before him and his pop before him.

EARL: Nothing wrong with being a fry cook.

FELIX: We're around the corner from the bus station. We get lost souls coming and going all the time.

The lights change to flashback mode. Everyone watches as MISSION enters and LOST sits at the counter with a duffle bag. A couple of DINERS also enter and sit at a table.

MISSION: What can I get you?

LOST: Cup of, ah, coffee please.

MISSION: You got it. Cream?

LOST: (*defensive*) What?

MISSION: You want cream? For your coffee, honey.

LOST: Cream! Yes. Lots of it. Cream with a dash of coffee. Ha ha.
Ha ha. Sugar too. Lots of cream, lots of sugar and just wave the
coffee pot over the cup.

MISSION: Uh huh. How old are you?

LOST: What? 20? (*she clears her throat and speaks with more confidence*)
20.

MISSION: Uh huh.

LOST: I am 20 years old and I have an high power job and a corner
office with a view overlooking the city. So get me my coffee and
make it snappy.

MISSION: Yes ma'am.

LOST: Oh no, I didn't mean snappy. I'm not a snappy person. Sorry.

MISSION: It's all right honey. I can tell when people mean to be snappy.
This must be a busy high power corner office job you've got.

LOST: Huh?

MISSION: You need a duffel bag to carry all your work.

LOST: Yes. (*she pushes the duffle with her foot under her chair*) Yes...I do.
Briefcases are for suckers.

MISSION: (*sincere*) Wow. I didn't know that. I'm so glad you told me.
What do you do?

LOST: What?

MISSION: What's your "briefcases are for suckers" line of work?

LOST: You ask a lot of questions.

MISSION: Do I? No worries, honey. When we're not busy it's nice to
find out where people are from, who they are, what they do...

LOST: (*Bursting! She starts to pace.*) So what if I'm not an office worker!

MISSION: Ok.

LOST: What if I've escaped from captivity?

MISSION: (*going with it*) Why not?

LOST: (*also going with it.*) What if I've lived in a commune? (*standing*) A hippie commune where coffee is seen as the devil's brew and I've made my escape in the dead of night. I've made my escape with ten bucks and the skin of my teeth. And all I want, all I want in the world is my first taste of civilization. Drink the devil's brew. A simple, no questions asked, cup of coffee.

MISSION: (*putting down a cup*) Cup of coffee. No questions asked.

LOST: (*gives a big sigh*) This was such a mistake.

MISSION: You want tea?

LOST: Huh?

MISSION: I got Earl Grey.

LOST: Oh. Not the coffee. It's not the coffee. (*pause*) I didn't escape from a commune.

MISSION: Oh no?

LOST It's been a long day.

MISSION: Bus rides always took the stuffing out of me.

LOST: It seemed like a good idea at the time. (*looking around*) I don't even know where I am. I mean I bought the ticket but...

MISSION: You were just looking to go. That's a statement, not a question.

LOST: How old are you?

MISSION: You're asking *me* questions now? Don't you know it's not polite to ask a lady her age? (*LOST looks horrified*) Honey, I'm just fooling. I'm 17.

LOST: But you're so...together. You talk so...together.

MISSION: It's the lipstick. Makes me look like a million bucks. Lipstick is to girls what capes are to superheroes. And I haven't always looked so good. Did a lot of living, you know, the kind of living you're not supposed to when you're (*referring to LOST*)...14? (*LOST nods*) 14. Ok. You think you got people missing you?

LOST: I don't know. They never seem to care when I'm around.

MISSION: But you miss them.

LOST: Isn't that stupid? I hate them all. *(she takes a sip of coffee and reacts)* Gah! This is disgusting. How do people drink this? How do you drink this? Why are you drinking this? My mouth is like a sewer, like old socks, like socks in a sewer. It's death in my mouth, burnt death. How do people drink this?

MISSION: It grows on you.

The lights change to present mode. LOST and MISSION exit. BRENDA and PAULA move into position.

FELIX: That's Mission. *(changing tracks)* Ma and Pop! Ok, Pop's working the fryer and Ma walks in fresh off the boat. Fresh off the bus, I guess. Poland. Not a lick of English. 17 years old. That's Brenda working the counter and Paula working the tables.

FELIX SR: She still owes me twenty.

BETTY: Let it go.

FELIX SR: I won that hand fair and square.

The lights change to flashback mode. NELL enters, wide-eyed, tentative.

BRENDA: What can I do you for? *(NELL says nothing)* Hello? Are you deaf or sumtin? Coffee? Toast? Listen you gotta order something, you can't stand in the doorway and take up space. *(NELL steps forward and starts talking in Polish)* Whoa, whoa, whoa! What is that? Is that French? Hey Sammy! You talk French?

SAM: *(Entering. He is a teenager here.)* Sorta.

BRENDA: This kid here don't speak English. I think it's French.

SAM: Bun-joor?

NELL speaks Polish and SAM rears back.

SAM: That's the weirdest French I ever heard.

PAULA: You two left your brains at home or sumtin? It's Ukraine or Russian or Polish, you know?

NELL hears the word Polish and she starts talking a mile a minute.

BRENDA: Whoa, whoa, whoa! I think we have a winner.

PAULA: Get her a cup of coffee. She looks dead on her feet.

BRENDA: Do you have any money? (*loud and slow*) Money. DO. YOU. HAVE-EO A DOLLERO? (*PAULA cuffs her on the shoulder*) What you do that for?

PAULA: She's not deaf.

SAM: (*touching NELL on the shoulder*) Hey. (*he pulls a dollar out of his pocket*) Dollar?

NELL nods, reaches into her purse and pulls out a dollar.

BRENDA: We have a winner. One cup of coffee coming up.

PAULA: Get her some eggs, too. Sammy cook up some eggs.

SAM: Sure. (*NELL takes a note out of her purse and gives it to SAM*) What's this? (*reading*) "My name Nelka. I from Poland." (*looking up*) We got that right. (*reading*) I work hard." (*looking up*) Nell huh? I'm Sam. (*he points to himself*) Sam.

NELL: (*pointing to herself*) Nelka. (*pointing at SAM*) Sam?

SAM: Nelka. So you're looking for a job, huh?

NELL: Yes. Job. I. Work. Hard.

SAM: Hey Paula I got your new waitress right here. She'll be perfect.

The lights change to present mode. SAM grabs a sweater and a hat. He puts them on and he's older.

FELIX: That's how I imagine it anyway.

EARL: You have some imagination, girlie.

BETTY: It'll serve you well at that fancy school.

FELIX: I guess.

BETTY: It's nice.

FELIX SR: Yeah, I forget how "nice" Nell started out.

BETTY: (*swatting him*) Stop.

Older SAM enters.

SAM: Felix! What are you doing here?

FELIX: Hey Pop.

SAM: Why aren't you at home? Your mother'll have a fit if she finds out you're not at home.

FELIX: I'm doing the full run today.

SAM: I better call her. You're supposed to be packing. Did you eat?

FELIX: No...

SAM: Did you leave a note for your mother?

FELIX: I...forgot.

SAM: Uh huh. I better call her. Mornin' Rat.

RAT: Morning Sam. (to FELIX) Stop standing around. (she throws a dishcloth at FELIX)

BETTY, EARL and FELIX SR shake their heads and make disapproving noises.

FELIX: What?

BETTY: You didn't leave a note for your mother?

FELIX SR: She's going to kill you.

FELIX: I forgot.

BETTY: That wasn't nice.

FELIX: I'm trying to have an experience.

FELIX SR: Get ready for impending doom. How's that for an experience?

EARL: Stop scaring the girl.

FELIX SR: She should be scared. Nell scares me.

FELIX: Moving on...Pop does 6 am to one. Ma, noon to 7. My sister Loo does nights. My other sister Wiki does all the baking. Yes those are their names. (like *Count Dracula*) Lucja and Wiktorja, good Polish names from my mother's family.

BETTY: Your mother doesn't like it when you say your sisters' names like that.

FELIX: (like *Count Dracula*) I can't help it. Weird names - weird voice.

FELIX SR: What are you talking about? You got a great name.

RAT: Doors opening.

SAM: Doors opening.

FELIX: Doors opening!

Music plays. The DINERS move into position.

FELIX: The morning ritual. The morning shift. The morning rush.
Everyone starts the day on the same page at the same time.
Doors opening!

The DINERS move into a stylized movement & chant. FELIX conducts them. Each of the five words in their chant has a gesture. When they repeat the word, they repeat the gesture. Start small and build to a climax of everyone in the diner repeating the chant and the gestures all at once.

NOTE: You may change this section if the DINERS want to create their own morning soundscape.

CHOPPER: Coffee. Toast. Short stack. Scrambled, home fries.

CHOPPER & BLT: Coffee. Toast. Short stack. Scrambled, home fries.

CHOPPER, BLT & SUNNY: Coffee. Toast. Short stack. Scrambled,
home fries.

The chant and the gestures grow until all the DINERS are doing it!

DINERS: Coffee. Toast. Short stack. Scrambled, home fries!

The DINERS freeze mid-gesture.

FELIX: The rhythm is always the same. The people are always the same. The door opens. The bell rings. The ritual begins. Other places are ok. You're in, you're out. But it doesn't feel the same or sound the same, or smell the same as a diner. It's a dance and everyone has to know their part.

THE DINERS: (*with gestures*) Coffee. Toast. Short stack. Scrambled,
home fries.

FELIX: You have to feel the rhythm. See breakfast in the air. My dad is one of those types. He loves feeding people. He loves being in the kitchen. It's like he's conducting a huge orchestra.

SAM: (*a bell rings*) Order In! Short stack, side links. (*moves downstage for the next moment*)

FELIX: Pop is strict about breakfast. No substitutions. None. Never.
No how.

The lights change to flashback mode. RAINE and SAM are already in place.

RAINE: I'd like an egg white omelette please.

SAM: No.

RAINE: What?

SAM: Eggs come Sunny up, over easy, scrambled.

RAINE: I don't eat yolks.

SAM: Pick them out.

RAINE: I'll just take a glass of soy milk then.

SAM: No.

RAINE: Well I can't eat here. I can't eat here. This is barbaric. This is life in the stone ages. You are living in the stone ages and you should know better. Soy milk is the future, my friend. Soy milk is with the times. If you don't get with the times, you're going to find yourself lost and alone. Adrift. Adrift in a sea of 2% on a white bread raft. Do you know what happens to bread when it gets wet? The soggy do not survive, friend. The soggy never survive. *(exits)*

The lights change to present mode. DINERS change positions or drift out during the following.

FELIX: We're open!

HAMIL: *(entering)* I know, Felix. I just walked in. Why are you here so early?

FELIX: I'm doing the full run.

HAMIL: Which is?

FELIX: Open to close. *(to audience)* Hamil is a regular.

HAMIL: Why?

FELIX: It's my last day. Gotta do it up right, you know.

HAMIL: Oh yes, off to the fancy writing school. Ooooh.

FELIX: *(embarrassed)* Yeah, yeah.

RAT: (*setting down a coffee*) Is she bugging you?

HAMIL: Nah.

RAT: Tables, Felix. (*MS. BRONSTEIN enters*) Morning, Ms. Bronstein.

MS. BRONSTEIN: Garbage on the street. Garbage on the sidewalk, we're going to hell.

RAT: (*setting down a coffee*) Decaf Ms. Bronstein. (*to FELIX*) You're dead, by the way.

FELIX: Huh?

RAT: Your mom is beyond mad.

EARL & FELIX SR: Uh oh...

FELIX: Pop called her?

RAT: She's coming down.

FELIX: Before her shift?

RAT: You got any last requests, let me know.

BETTY: Should've left a note.

FELIX: It'll be fine. (*to audience*) All families fight. Our family's just like every other family. Except our fights happen in the middle of the diner. That's where my parents are. If you want to fight with them, or they want to fight with you, it happens right here.

The lights change to flashback mode. SAM enters with LOO following. NELL casually enters, wiping her hands on a dishtowel.

SAM: You're going to college (*or University*) and that's final.

LOO: I don't want to go to college.

SAM: You're going to college. I'm your father and I'm telling you, you're going to college.

LOO: But I don't know what I want to be. Why would I waste your money on a useless degree?

SAM: Don't you worry about wasting our money. It's our money. If we want to fling it off the Empire State Building, we'll do it.

NELL: We're not flinging money off the Empire State Building.

SAM: We're not flinging money off the Empire State Building, but we could.

LOO: I'm not going. *(beat)* I want to bring back the night shift.

SAM: What?

LOO: That's what I want to do.

SAM: Let me make you a sandwich. *(he moves to the kitchen)*

LOO: Pop. *(following him)* I know how to do every job. I know how to keep the dishwasher from flooding. I know the right spot to hit the furnace, I know how to order inventory - Pop!

SAM: *(to NELL)* Did she talk this over with you?

NELL: She did.

SAM: And?

NELL: *(with a smile)* She knows a lot.

SAM: Knowing is different than being the boss.

There is the sound of door slam. The lights shift to present mode. The scene is interrupted, we're back to reality. LOO and SAM exit. NELL stares at FELIX.

FELIX SR: I can't watch.

BETTY: Shh!

FELIX SR: Let me know when it's over.

NELL moves forward slowly. It is only NELL and FELIX.

FELIX: Hey Ma. I'm sorry -

NELL holds up a finger to stop FELIX from talking. There is a moment of silence.

FELIX: I just wanted to say I'm sorry I forgot -

NELL holds up a finger to stop FELIX from talking. There is a moment of silence.

FELIX: If you want to yell at me, go ahead. I deserve it.

NELL: Want to yell at you? Want to yell at you? Do you think I enjoy yelling? You think that is something I enjoy? Like I want to go to the movies?

FELIX: Well if you don't want to yell at -

NELL: Oh I want to yell at you. I want to yell at you. (*changing tone completely*) Ms. Bronstein, how are you?

MS. BRONSTEIN: We're all going to hell.

NELL: That's nice. (*she turns and glares at FELIX*)

EARL: She's toast.

NELL: Why did you leave the house without telling me? Hmm? Did you want me to walk into your room and freak out? Is that what you wanted?

FELIX: I was excited. I'm doing the full run, I thought...since it's my last day...you know like Grandpa used to do?

NELL: I have to drag you here kicking and screaming and today you're excited? Today is the day you decide to care? Have you even wiped the tables yet?

BETTY: Should have wrote a note.

EARL & FELIX SR: Shh!

FELIX: Geez ma. That's harsh. (*moment of silence*) Which you're totally entitled to. Go ahead. Be harsh.

NELL: We're going to have a conversation. A family meeting.

FELIX: Now? Here?

NELL: Of course not now, your father's in the middle of morning rush. We have things to say to you. (*she exits*)

FELIX: Ok. That went well. Did that go well? What do you think?

EARL, BETTY and FELIX SR sigh and shake their heads.

FELIX: I do care about the diner. Would I be doing the full run if I didn't care about the diner?

FELIX SR: Is that why you're doing it?

FELIX: Sure. Of course. Where was I?

BETTY: Rat.

EARL: What a doll.

BETTY: Are you in love with her?

EARL: How could I be? I have you.

BETTY: (*with love*) Fry Cook.

EARL: (*with love*) Waitress.

FELIX SR: Ew.

FELIX SR, EARL and BETTY stroll to the side. NOTE: If RAT is played by a guy switch the previous exchange so that BETTY says “What a doll.”

FELIX: (*to audience*) Rat’s real name is locked in a vault, stuffed in a hiking sock and buried underneath an active volcano. I’ve been trying to get it out of her for three years. (*RAT enters*) Hey Rat, you gotta tell me your real name. It’s my last day!

RAT: (*without even looking*) Ask me again and I’ll pull your tongue through your nose.

HAMIL: What’s a four letter word for “a small ornamental case for toiletries?”

MS. BRONSTEIN: Hell, everything is going to hell in a handbasket.

HAMIL: I don’t think that’s it.

RAT: (*without even thinking*) Etui. E-T-U-I.

FELIX: Did you see that? She’s always doing that. Just picks words out of thin air.

RAT: Are you going to help at all Felix?

FELIX: So cranky.

MS. BRONSTEIN: She’s a right dear.

EARL: Exactly. (*BETTY says this if RAT is a boy*)

HAMIL: You said it, Ms. Bronstein.

MS. BRONSTEIN: We’re all going to hell.

HAMIL: At least we’ll have company.

FELIX: This cranky is nothing really. Rat used to be, well...

RAT slams her hand down on the counter. The lights change to flashback mode. This has become instantly the past. MS. GILLMAN is already at the counter.

RAT: You don’t like it then get out, get out!

MS. GILLMAN: I'm not going anywhere.

LOO: (*approaching*) What's the matter?

RAT: She won't call me Rat.

MS. GILLMAN: I'm trying to eat.

RAT: Rat is on my name tag. That's what you call me.

MS. GILLMAN: Who knows what she does to the food?

RAT: I serve it.

MS. GILLMAN: I don't want to think about rats when I'm eating.

RAT: Do I look like a rat?

MS. GILLMAN: You look like death.

RAT: (*picking up a knife*) Oh yeah? Is that what you think?

LOO: Rat. Are you going to knife the customers?

RAT: What? (*she looks at her hand*) Oh. Sorry. Habit.

LOO: (*this is great!*) You said sorry. Rat, that's huge!

MS. GILLMAN: What did she do before? Decapitate people?

LOO: Nicely done.

MS. GILLMAN: Nicely done? She threatened me.

LOO: Only a little. She is going to apologize though.

RAT: I did.

LOO: Not to me. To her.

RAT: Really?

LOO: That's how it's done.

MS. GILLMAN: I want more than an apology. She should be fired. I want her fired.

LOO: I'm not firing her. She's the best waitress I've had in months.

MS. GILLMAN: You? I'm not asking you, you're a child! I want your boss out here right now.

LOO: (*not offended*) I'm the boss.

MS. GILLMAN: Children are not bosses, I want to speak to an adult!

LOO: Maybe you should find another diner. A diner with adults.

MS. GILLMAN: But I like this diner. Where else am I going to get cinnamon toast?

LOO: Best in the city.

MS. GILLMAN: Shoot. Ok, I'll take the apology.

RAT: Really?

LOO: Rat.

RAT: Right. I apologize for my aggressive behaviour because (*this is hard*) the customer is always right.

LOO: Mostly. We'll work on it. (*to MS. GILLMAN*) Call her Rat. It's the name on the tag. Make it Ms. Rat if that'll make you feel better.

MS. GILLMAN: Don't you have some other name? Any other name?

RAT: No.

MS. GILLMAN: Fine. But I expect double cinnamon on my toast from here on in. And free tomato juice.

LOO: You don't like tomato juice.

MS. GILLMAN: It's the principle of the thing.

RAT: What do I get?

LOO: To keep your job.

RAT: Right.

The lights change to present mode. MS. GILMAN exits. RAT takes off her apron and moves to the front door. If there's time, have her throw on a jacket, if not don't worry about it.

FELIX: You know how some people pick up stray pets? Cats and dogs just follow them home? Duke's picks up stray people. (*WIKI enters with a pie plate. She places it on the counter, waves at FELIX and goes back to making sure the pie plate is presented just right.*) My sister does. Wiki. (*like Count Dracula*) Wiktoria. (*WIKI snorts with laughter*)

BETTY: Don't let your mother catch you doing that...

FELIX: Wiki started sending strays into the night shift, I guess, three years ago.

The lights change to flashback mode. This is RAT's first time entering the diner.

LOO: Can I help you?

RAT: (*defensive*) She said I could come.

LOO: Who?

RAT: Uh, kid with the weird name. She said, uh, I can't - Wili, Wiblee...

LOO: Wiki.

RAT: Yeah. That's it. She said I could come.

LOO: She did?

RAT: Forget it, I knew this wouldn't work.

LOO: Hang on. We're not done yet. Where did you talk to her?

RAT: The library.

LOO: Ok...

RAT: What, I don't look smart enough to go to a library?

LOO: You want coffee? On the house.

RAT: (*beat*) Ok.

LOO: My sister doesn't talk. Much.

RAT: Why?

LOO: The world is a loud place. Loud places worry her.

RAT: (*beat*) She talked to me.

During the above WIKI has moved to sit beside RAT. In this moment they are in the library - NO scene changes! They are just instantly there.

WIKI: Wha - wha - What's the best word?

RAT: (*turning to talk to her*) Huh?

She takes a deep breath before she speaks. Speaking is hard for WIKI.

WIKI: I've seen you. You read...the dictionary.

RAT: You spying on me? You're with the library police or something?
(*WIKI shrinks and covers her ears*) Whoa. Sorry. Habit.

WIKI: You like to read.

RAT: This is a good hiding spot.

WIKI: The best.

RAT: Don't you go to school? (*WIKI shakes her head*) Me neither. (*beat*)
There is no such thing as the best word. I love them all. But today
I found the word mendacity. Mendacity is a lie, something untrue.

WIKI: Menda City. City of lies.

RAT: (*seeing that WIKI gets it*) Yeah.

WIKI: Yeah. (*she hands RAT a small piece of paper*)

RAT turns to back to LOO. WIKI exits.

RAT: (*looking at the piece of paper*) She said...She said...she said you
might be, you sometimes look...for people.

LOO: My counter waitress just flaked off, you ever done that before?

RAT: I knew this wouldn't work. I knew this was totally -

LOO: Get out of my throat, would ya! I asked a question.

RAT: And I'm gonna say, "No I don't have any experience" and you're
gonna show me the door.

LOO: Wow you can see the future too? You are talented.

RAT: Don't make fun of me.

LOO: Wiki talked to you. That makes you special. Do you need a place
to stay?

RAT: I got places.

LOO: There's aprons in the back, a shower too if you want it. Then
we'll get started.

RAT: What if I'm a terrible waitress?

LOO: What if you are? You'll learn. What's your name?

RAT: Rat. Got a problem with that?

LOO: I'll have a name tag made up.

The lights change to present mode.

FELIX: They come in like stray cats in the middle of the night. Jittery. Wary. They don't often stay for long, some can't take the routine, others have bigger problems to deal with. No one is turned away so long as you show up and do the job. No questions asked. Mostly. Ma is nosey.

The lights change to flashback mode. During the above NELL and MISSION have entered. MISSION starts wiping the counter. This is her first week, she is a little more subdued. Wiki hovers, watching.

NELL: So. Wiki tells me your name is Mission.

MISSION: Yes ma'am.

NELL: Is that the name your mother gave you? (*MISSION doesn't look at her but shakes her head*) I didn't think so. Something more normal, yes?

FELIX: (*sitting down with them*) Like you gave your kids normal names, Ma?

NELL: You be quiet. Your names have purpose. They have meaning. (*To MISSION*) See, I know your mother gave you a name with purpose.

MISSION: I don't use that name, ma'am.

NELL: Your mother would want you to tell me.

MISSION: I don't think so.

NELL: Ok, I want you to tell me. I just want to know it, in my heart.

MISSION: (*pause*) Emmalyn.

NELL: That's a beautiful name. It's lovely. It matches your face. What's wrong with that?

MISSION: (*tense*) I don't know.

NELL: Then I'm going to call you Emmalyn.

MISSION: Don't. Please.

NELL: How come?

MISSION: I can't...I can't be her. (*she starts to escape for the exit*) I can't be her anymore, I'm sorry I -

WIKI gets agitated. NELL gestures back at her as she goes after MISSION.

NELL: (*stopping MISSION*) Oh. Ok. Ok. Don't worry. I won't pry. (*sitting her down*) So you needed a new name. And you picked Mission?

MISSION: You make me feel stupid when you say it like that.

NELL: Sorry, sorry. That was cruel of me. Do you have one? A mission?

MISSION: It's a place. The Mission District.

NELL: So you do have a mission. A place you want to go? (*MISSION nods*) Yes. Ok. Good.

The lights change to present mode. CRYSTAL, LOO, and FALCON enter.

FELIX: The strays are better than customer kids. Ugh. Teenagers. Every once in awhile some lawyer or some executive asks my dad to let his kid have a go behind the counter. Show them the real word. Like that would do any good.

CRYSTAL: Um, so the guy on table 3 wants a piece of pie.

LOO: So get him one.

CRYSTAL: I have to touch food?

LOO: Ideally, you're not touching food. That's what utensils are for.

CRYSTAL: I didn't know I'd have to touch food.

LOO: You're not touching the food.

CRYSTAL: But I'm really close to it. The smell of food makes me gag.

LOO: You realize this is a diner. We're close to food a lot.

CRYSTAL: Don't you have someone to touch the food?

LOO: Yeah. You. And stop talking about touching.

CRYSTAL: I'm going to gag. I gotta get out of here.

LOO: Where are you going?

CRYSTAL: To work with children!

HAMIL: Rat! Rat!

RAT: Yes Mr. Hamil? What seems to be the problem?

HAMIL: (*pointing at FALCON*) This is my problem.

RAT: What did you do?

FALCON: I didn't do anything.

HAMIL: He called me Bud. "What can I get you, Bud?"

RAT: Did you call this gentleman Bud?

FALCON: I call everybody Bud.

HAMIL: Do I look like a Bud?

FALCON: I didn't know your name.

RAT: Don't call the customers Bud.

FALCON: What am I supposed to say?

RAT: Try, "How can I help you?"

FALCON: I guess.

FELIX: Wiki has a knack for picking her strays. She has a knack for a lot of things even though she's...well. She is amazing in the kitchen. I burn toast. People go a little crazy for Wiki's food.

The lights change to flashback mode.

MILO: (*standing and presenting*) I have to meet her!

RAT: Who?

MILO: The wonder who made this piece of pie. This absolutely amazing life-changing piece of pecan pie. Where is the goddess of the culinary arts who has created this colossal concoction?

MISSION: She doesn't like meeting people.

MILO: I demand to see her. I'm going to marry her.

RAT: Wiki doesn't really care about demands.

MILO: Wiki! Baker of the gods! Wiki! I love you! What kind of a name is Wiki?

NELL: It's her good Polish name. What do you have to say about it?

MILO: It's hard to extemporize a moment of passion over a Wiki.

RAT: No one's asking you to.

MILO: But I must! I love her! She make me want to sing! And dance! (he proceeds to do so - stylized à la Gene Kelly)

SAM: What is this boy doing?

NELL: Making a mess of my floors. Would you get Wiki please?

MILO: (*dancing badly, singing out of tune*) Pie goddess of the diner. There is no one finer in the diner than Wiki! If my name was Mickey it would rhyme with Wiki!

MISSION: We have to take that pie off the menu.

WIKI enters with SAM.

SAM: Hey fella...

MILO falls to his knees in front of WIKI.

MILO: Run away with me forever oh Wiki! Wiki! Oh Wiki!

RAT: Dude! I am not afraid to hit a customer.

WIKI hands a piece of paper to SAM.

SAM: Wiki is asking you to stop. She says: "Thank you for loving my baking so much." She says...I have no idea what she says, your handwriting is terrible.

RAT: Give it here. (*she takes the note*) She can't marry you, she's fifteen. And it's creepy that you ran around like a lunatic after one bite of dessert. (*WIKI swats her*) Ok she didn't say that, exactly.

MILO: I'm not really creepy. And I'm only sixteen. I just...get carried away over dessert.

MISSION: I don't want to see what you do with birthday cake.

MILO: Do you like movies?

RAT: Wiki doesn't like movies.

MILO: Do you like bumper cars?

RAT: Wiki doesn't like bumper cars.

MILO: Do you like flowers?

RAT: Wiki doesn't like - (*WIKI swats her, she looks at WIKI*) since when?

MILO: My Dad owns a nursery and we go to the Flower and Garden Show every year. Would you do me the honour of attending the

Flower and Garden show with me next weekend? (*WIKI nods, she looks at RAT and gives a go ahead gesture*)

RAT: What? Oh! Wiki would love to attend the Flower and Garden show with you next weekend. Don't stand her up or I'll put your head in the waffle iron.

The lights change to present mode. Everyone disperses and FELIX, BETTY, EARL and FELIX SR move downstage.

FELIX: True love. It's so romantic.

EARL: How is a head in the waffle iron romantic?

BETTY: Stop it. You know what she means. (*to FELIX*) I know what you mean, sweetie.

Music plays. The DINERS move into tableaux, showing relationships at the diner.

BETTY: Diners are about relationships.

FELIX: Exactly.

FELIX SR: This is going to get goopy.

EARL: Just because you didn't date for over 40 years...

FELIX SR: I couldn't do that to Mary.

EARL: Mary would have wanted you to date. Mary would have done cartwheels in heaven.

BETTY: Mary on her deathbed said "make him leave the house. He'll sit like a fungus if someone doesn't make him leave the house." And did or did you not sit like a fungus?

FELIX SR: Yeah yeah.

THE DINERS shift into a new picture, with different relationships.

BETTY: (*with a sigh looking at the DINERS*) Love. The couples who barely talk, they just stare at their coffee cups.

FELIX: The couples who can't stop talking.

BETTY: The couples who don't say a word, they just stare at each other.

BETTY and FELIX give a long sigh.

FELIX SR: I'm gonna lose my lunch.

EARL: The lunch you ate in, what? 2012? (*change to the present year minus four*) That's some long lasting pot roast.

FELIX SR: Smartass. (*or smart guy*)

The DINERS shift into a new picture, with different relationships.

FELIX: The first date booth.

BETTY: And the break up booth.

FELIX SR: There's only four booths. That must be the smoldering hatred booth and the I can't stand you but I'll let you buy me lunch booth.

BETTY: Smartass. (*or Smart guy*)

EARL: (*to FELIX*) Your father used to give that first date booth a run for his money when he was your age.

FELIX: He did?

Lights change to flashback mode. SAM is pacing back and forth, looking out the window. He is 17. BRENDA and PAULA enter.

PAULA: What's the matter, Sammy? You look all clammy.

SAM: (*muttering to self*) I can't do this. I can't do this. (*to PAULA*) Ok. Look. Someone is going to come in the diner.

PAULA: I hope so, it's kinda dead.

SAM: No. Someone is walking down the street and they're going to come in the diner.

PAULA: That's usually how it works.

SAM: No! You're not getting it. When that person walks down the street, stops at that door, opens it and enters the diner, I am not here.

PAULA: What?

BRENDA: What are you up to?

SAM: I have a date.

PAULA: Everyone! Sammy has a date!

The place cheers.

SAM: I can't go through with it.

BRENDA Why not? You can't do that.

PAULA: Everyone! Sammy's gonna stand up his date.

The place boos.

SAM: You don't understand.

BRENDA: You're nervous. Don't worry, it'll be fine.

SAM: I'm not nervous. I made a mistake.

PAULA: So tell her that.

SAM: If I tell her I made a mistake, she's going to take my insides and make them my outsides. (*grabbing PAULA*) You could, though. Tell her anything. Tell her I joined the foreign legion.

PAULA: I'm not going to -

SAM: Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! (*he dives behind the counter*)

ANNABELL walks in. All eyes are on the door and immediately whip away. Everyone looks everywhere but at ANNABELL. ANNABELL will swerve between being sweetly chipper and possessed by a demon.

ANNABELL: (*mousy*) Excuse me.

PAULA: What can I do you for? Cup of joe? Slice of pie?

ANNABELL: My name is Annabell and I am expecting to meet a Sam Brown. This is Duke's Diner isn't it?

PAULA: That's the name.

BRENDA: No one knows who Duke is.

ANNABELL: I'm supposed to meet Sam Brown at 4 o'clock. (*she looks around*) Is it 4 o'clock? Is my watch wrong?

BRENDA: That's the time.

ANNABELL: I have the right place and the right time but no Sam Brown. (*with steel*) No. Sam.

PAULA: Yeah about that - (*she tries to pull SAM up and he resists wholeheartedly*)

ANNABELL: (*changing her tone*) Oh I know what that means.

PAULA: Honey, it's ok, he's right -

ANNABELL: It means I'm going to have to get my big brother to break his legs.

Everyone freezes.

BRENDA: Come again?

ANNABELL: Right place, right time, no Sam. No Sam, no Sam, no Sam. WHY GOD is there no Sam? I told him what would happen if I came to the right place and the right time and he wasn't here.

BRENDA: What's gonna happen?

ANNABELL: My brother is a baseball player, an ex baseball player. He got all the way to Triple A before he hurt his knee and now he's bitter. We call him Bitter Bobby.

PAULA: To his face?

ANNABELL: He likes to swing at things. Hard. And in between swings I'll just ask Sam why he wasn't at the right place and the right time. (*right at PAULA*) What's your name?

PAULA: Ah ah Jenny...son. Jennyson.

ANNABELL: That's an odd name.

PAULA: Yeah...

BRENDA: It's a combination of Jennifer and Allison.

PAULA: My parents couldn't decide.

ANNABELL: How fresh. Jennyson, do you know where Sam is?

PAULA: Yeah. About that. I'm going to come clean wit'cha.

SAM is freaking out under the counter. BRENDA hits him with a dishtowel to calm him down. ANNABELL looks at her.

BRENDA: Mice. Feisty mice.

ANNABELL: Please come clean with me Jennyson. My brother doesn't really discriminate. I've asked him to hit girls and he does it without a second thought.

PAULA: Bitter Bobby's got some problems.

ANNABELL: That's what an injury in Triple A will do.

PAULA: So, Annabell. About Sam.

ANNABELL: Yes, Jennyson.

PAULA: You want to know where he is.

ANNABELL: Yes, Jennyson. Without delay.

PAULA: Yes, Annabell, without delay.

ANNABELL: Where is he? Where's Sam? Please tell me!

PAULA: He joined the Foreign Legion.

The lights change to present mode. EARL, BETTY and FELIX SR burst into laughter. FELIX joins in.

EARL: That Paula sure is funny. Cheats at poker but she's funny.

BETTY: *(taking in a big breath)* Oh my. *(exhaling)* But still, that wasn't very romantic.

FELIX: You want romantic? I got a story for you.

The lights change to flashback mode. REBECCA enters the diner. She has her hands jammed in her pocket and her head down low. She slumps into a seat. MISSION crosses to her, taking out a pen and pad. Any remaining DINERS slowly leave one by one.

MISSION: Hey honey, what a nice surprise. Don't usually see you on the weekend.

REBECCA: *(with a big sigh)* Hey.

MISSION: That was a big sigh. Wiki made some cherry pie, want some? *(catching on)* Ohhhhhh. Home fries or coffee?

REBECCA: Coffee.

MISSION: Just coffee? That's too bad.

REBECCA: I thought he was the one.

MISSION: What happened?

REBECCA: Short socks. He wouldn't stop wearing short socks. With pants. You could see his ankle.

MISSION: That's...weird? I guess that's weird.

REBECCA: You think I'm picky.

MISSION: I didn't say anything.

REBECCA: Why should I stare at a man's ankles when I don't want to? Huh? Male ankles are not attractive.

MISSION: You want anything before he comes?

REBECCA: The last three months of my life back.

MISSION: I'll work on it. *(she turns away)*

DONNIE (14) enters with great trepidation. He takes one step in and stops. He turns away, gets up his courage again and turns back. He freezes. MISSION watches all this.

MISSION: Hey Donnie.

DONNIE motions frantically for MISSION to come closer. MISSION looks strangely at him and does so.

DONNIE: Has a short blonde girl with purple glasses and perhaps an air of anticipation been in here?

MISSION: Not to my knowledge.

DONNIE: Maybe you missed her?

MISSION: I don't miss much.

DONNIE: I should ask Nell.

NELL: *(approaching)* Ask Nell what?

DONNIE: Has a short blonde girl with purple glasses and perhaps an air of anticipation been in here?

NELL: I haven't seen anyone like that.

DONNIE: I didn't miss her. I'm ok. I'm ok. *(he takes a deep breath)* I need to make a reservation.

NELL: It's a diner.

DONNIE: I know.

MISSION: We're not big on reservations.

DONNIE: I wondered if you could make an exception. I brought some props.

NELL: For lunch?

DONNIE: (*showing a plastic bag*) I got a tablecloth, a vase, a flower.

MISSION: It's plastic.

DONNIE: Does it look bad?

MISSION: It doesn't look real.

DONNIE: Does it look real from a distance?

MISSION: Are you planning on putting your date at another table?

DONNIE: I don't want to jinx this. (*whispering*) I asked out Alexis Dudley.

MISSION: You did? Congratulations!

NELL: Alexis Dudley?

MISSION: Short blonde girl, purple glasses, air of anticipation. (*to DONNIE*) How long did that take? Three months?

DONNIE: Six.

MISSION: I love asking out stories. (*leaning in*) How did it happen?

DONNIE: I ran her over.

MISSION: (*leaning back*) In a car?

DONNIE: No! (*as if this is obvious*) With my feet!

NELL: Why did you run over Alexis Dudley?

DONNIE: I wasn't trying to. I was running *from* Jeff Kroger, turned the corner and (*he slams his hands together*) Alexis and I made contact.

MISSION: Awwwwww, I mean, ouch.

DONNIE: Books everywhere...papers flying...we're both sprawled out on the floor...Jeff takes one look at me and he's laughing so hard he forgets to turn me into a pretzel. And I'm so...happy, I forget who I am! I turned to Alexis, it wasn't hard her face was right beside mine on the floor, and I said "Will you go out with me?"

MISSION: And what did she say?

DONNIE: "Are there supposed to be two of you?"

MISSION: Oh dear.

DONNIE: But then, then she said “sure.”

MISSION: Sure?

REBECCA: *(she has been listening the whole time)* Oh Oh.

MISSION shoots REBECCA a look.

DONNIE: It was the best moment of my life! I can't believe I waited so long. What was I worried about? What was the big deal? It went fine. It went great! It went...what?

MISSION: Hmm?

DONNIE: What's the matter? You look funny.

MISSION: Nothing. Why would there be anything wrong? I am merely rejoicing in how happy you are. I'm so happy for you. Let's get this date going!

DONNIE: What's wrong? Give it to me straight - come on, Mission.

REBECCA: Yeah Mission.

MISSION: *(to REBECCA)* You shush! *(to DONNIE)* Well, I just...a sure is not exactly the same thing as a yes.

DONNIE: It's not? Sure it is.

MISSION: It can be. Most definitely it can be. It is positive. But...it's a passive positive. It's a maybe. It's a yes for right now. It's a yes unless...

DONNIE: Unless what? *(to REBECCA)* Unless what?

REBECCA: It's a yes unless...*(she winces)* something better comes along.

DONNIE: She's going to stand me up.

REBECCA: I didn't say that.

DONNIE: She's not coming. *(starts to breath rapidly)* I need my inhaler.

MISSION: Donnie don't you dare pass out. What if she walks in and you're flat out on the floor?

DONNIE: Who am I kidding? She is not walking in. She's been “suring” me every step of the way. Do you want to go out? “Sure.” Can I have your number? “Sure.” Can I take you to my favourite place? “Sure.”

NELL: Duke's is your favourite? That's so sweet.

DONNIE: It doesn't matter now, does it? Who cares that I've always wanted to take a first date here. Who cares that I've dreamed about sitting in one of these booths, sitting across from the girl of my dreams, sharing a plate of home fries. It has to be home fries. Home fries are so warm, so homey. Home fries are filled with love.

REBECCA: Exactly! Amen to home fries!

MISSION: Becky, don't excite him.

DONNIE: And maybe our hands touch, reaching for the same fry. She giggles, pulling her hand away. I say, no. No, you take the fry. I hold out the fry for her to bite into and everything stops. All time stops. She takes a bite. She smiles. The world resumes. We are in love. *(he sighs with love and then slams his head on the table)*

REBECCA: *(leaping up!)* I want home fries! I want them all day every day, to hell with coffee. *(she grabs DONNIE by the face)* Don't you lose sight of that fry. You hear me? Hold on to the home fry with everything you've got. Hold on to love. Promise me you'll never let go of the fry!

DONNIE: Can I have my face back?

REBECCA: *(letting go, and turning to the window)* Maybe she "sured" you. Maybe. But maybe she's shy. Maybe she's late because she's thinking about all the great things that might happen on this date and - *(seeing something out the window)* Hold the phone!

MISSION: What?

REBECCA: *(dragging DONNIE to the window)* Short blonde! Short blonde!

DONNIE: Where?

REBECCA: Look! Purple glasses...Air of anticipation...

DONNIE: She's here? She's here?

NELL: She's here!

REBECCA: She looks nervous. But excited. Oh it's so sweet. Home fries all the way.

DONNIE: Excited? I'm not ready. I'm not ready! Where's my inhaler? I don't have a reservation!

MISSION: All hands on deck! Rebecca help Donnie with that table cloth.

REBECCA: Roger!

MISSION: Wiki! A big plate of home fries! And make it snappy.

Everyone cheers and then freezes in place. NELL moves centre to come face-to-face with FELIX. There is a moment of silence.

NELL: It's time for the family meeting. Get ready.

Everyone gasps and stares at FELIX.

Blackout.

ACT TWO

Old time music plays. Lights up and we see the DINERS moving in slow motion. They are all in various states of eating and talking. Typical diner activity. Off to the side, EARL, BETTY and FELIX SR watch. FELIX stands in the centre of the slow motion activity.

FELIX: *(a little distracted)* So. I...uh...I wasn't finished showing you around the place. There's a couple of booths. I said that before. Stools at the counter. Red vinyl of course.

EARL: She's stalling. You're stalling.

BETTY: Hush Earl.

FELIX SR: I'd stall till the end of time.

FELIX ignores them.

FELIX: And I didn't finish telling you about the people. We have so many interesting people at Duke's. I didn't tell you about Mission.

EARL: You can't star forever.

FELIX: *(louder)* I didn't tell you about Mission.

The lights change to flashback mode. The DINERS jolt into normal speed. It's a day at the diner.

MISSION: *(at the counter, to a customer)* Honey, how you doing today? Nice to see you. *(to another customer)* What's going on in your world? You want another coffee? Can I tempt you with a piece of pie?

FELIX: She's so sweet. Always laughing. It's hard to believe she was a stray cat.

LADYBUG: Hey Mission, What are you doing after work?

MISSION: I have a date with a circus performer who's gonna teach me to eat fire. The trick is that the fear of fire burning your face off is way worse than putting the flaming torch in your mouth.

CHOPPER: Hey Mission, how was your weekend?

MISSION: Epic, honey. Epic.

FELIX: Just don't cross her. If you push Mission too hard, she'll push you into next week.

The focus shifts to ASHLEY and AMBER, who are at a table.

ASHLEY: (*hitting the table*) I want to go to Paris! My mom is being such a pig about it. She won't let me go on my own.

AMBER: She's not going with you, is she?

ASHLEY: I'd rather not go. (*calling out to MISSION*) Hey. Hey. I said hey! What does it take to get some service around here?

MISSION: (*approaching*) Oh I'm sorry honey. Were you asking for me?

ASHLEY: You're the waitress, aren't you?

MISSION: I got the name tag.

ASHLEY: Right, so you have to wait on us.

MISSION: Uh huh. What can I get you?

ASHLEY: We want more coffee. And this sugar is empty. Get us another one.

MISSION: Looks full to me.

ASHLEY: No wonder you're just a waitress. You're so stupid you can't see when something is empty.

AMBER: So stupid.

ASHLEY: I swear, you're going to be just a waitress for the rest of your life.

MISSION: Worse things have happened to people.

ASHLEY: I said the sugar is empty. Get a new one.

MISSION: Still looks full.

ASHLEY: Maybe you're right. (*she turns it over*) Whoops. Empty.

MISSION: Honey, I am so sorry. It must be hard for you to get through the day huh, being in such a state of depression.

ASHLEY: What are you talking about?

MISSION: Bless your heart.

ASHLEY: Shut up. I'm a very happy person.

MISSION: I'm going to pray for you.

ASHLEY: Shut up!

MISSION: I'll just go get you those coffees. And it looks like you spilled some sugar. I'll get you a cloth so *you* can clean it up.

ASHLEY: You're going to -

MISSION: Think of it as proof to show how happy you are.

ASHLEY: No.

MISSION: I'll get you a cloth. It was only your immense internal sadness that made you tip it over. Like a tidal wave of sad that welled up from your core. (*patting ASHLEY on the head*) I feel your pain.

ASHLEY: Don't touch me, psycho. You're totally insane.

MISSION: Insane? I don't think so. (*holds out her arm*) See this mark? That's a cigarette burn. Makes a nice circle, right into the skin. My momma did that when she was blind drunk. Doesn't even remember doing it. (*showing the other arm*) And this one here? This burn, see the same shape? This one momma did when she was stone cold sober. *That* is insane. She is one crazy lady. Good thing she's not here. And that we have a no smoking policy. (*the two GIRLS run off*) What, you don't want your coffee? (*she laughs and exits*)

The lights change to present mode.

EARL: You can't stall forever.

FELIX: Why not?

BETTY: You can't stay in your head, Felix.

FELIX: You guys do.

EARL: In case you haven't noticed, we're dead. We don't go anywhere.

BETTY: You romanticize things too much.

FELIX: One more. Ok? One more story and then I'll...So my high school is just down the street. There's a Starbucks the other way, most head over there. But sometimes they end up here. The diner is a place you can just hang. It's a nice place to be.

The lights change to flashback mode. During the above LIAM, COOPER, DEAN sit at one table and SHANNON, AVERY and JAENA sit at the other.

LIAM: Do you see him?

COOPER: Who?

LIAM: That guy.

SHANNON: Who's going to split some fries with me?

LIAM: That is a suit.

COOPER: Eh. You think?

JAENA: I'm not eating fries.

LIAM: Don't you?

COOPER: It's a suit.

DEAN: Loaded fries. Extra loaded.

SHANNON: What does that mean?

JAENA: It means I'm not eating fries.

LIAM: Where do you think he works?

SHANNON: I heard you, but what does it mean?

DEAN: And wings.

JAENA: It means, I'm not...eating...fries.

COOPER: He's an accountant.

LIAM: How do you know?

DEAN: And pie. Gotta have my pie.

COOPER: It's an ordinary blue suit. Accountants love ordinary blue suits.

SHANNON: Why?

LIAM: How do you know this?

DEAN: (*calling out*) Hey, you got any more apple?

LOO: No Más. We're out till tomorrow.

COOPER: My dad's an accountant. He has seven.

JAENA: Why is she doing this?

AVERY: Doing what? I wasn't listening.

DEAN: Dang. I had my heart set on apple. *(he stands up to examine the pie choices)*

SHANNON: It's not that hard a question. Is it for Lent?

AVERY: It's October.

SHANNON: Are you avoiding starch? Oil? Is it against your religion? Your politics? Are you allergic? Are you against junk food? Are you making a statement? Is it too late at night? Do they remind you of a former boyfriend and even looking at a french fry makes you cry with pangs of lost love?

JAENA: Wouldn't you know if I had a former boyfriend?

SHANNON: I'm trying to examine all the angles.

LIAM: Have you ever had to wear a suit?

COOPER: Uh huh. My cousin got married and I had to be in the wedding party.

JAENA: Why is she doing this?

AVERY: What?

LIAM: Why?

COOPER: I don't know. Everyone was in the wedding party.

SHANNON: I want to know.

JAENA: I feel fat. French fries make you fat, I don't want to eat something that makes me feel fat.

SHANNON: Oh.

JAENA: Satisfied?

SHANNON: No.

LIAM: Do you like your cousin?

COOPER: She's a troll. I tried to get out of it. But the entire universe is supposed to help Tabatha because it's Tabatha's special day and Tabatha is only going to get one shot at her special day because there's not a chance in hell she's going to find another man to love her so put on the damn suit Cooper and help us out.

DEAN: Whoa.

COOPER: I know.

DEAN: Cherry pie. Game changer.

JAENA: I'm not going to debate my feelings with you.

AVERY: Debate your feelings? That's a chewy sentence.

LIAM: Do you think you'll ever have a job where you'll have to wear a suit?

COOPER: Uh uh. My dad hates wearing his.

SHANNON: Well now I can't get fries.

AVERY: Why?

JAENA: Have fries, no one's stopping you.

SHANNON: I don't want all the fries in an order, I want some of the fries. Someone is supposed to share my fries and eat their half.

LIAM: (*looking over*) He doesn't look happy.

COOPER: He's an accountant. They're never happy.

DEAN: I have to start with cherry pie. If I like it, I'm going to skip the wings and get a second piece of pie.

SHANNON: Knowing that you feel fat, makes me feel fat for ordering fries.

JAENA: Don't put your feelings on me. Have your own feelings.

AVERY: What's up with you? This chewy word thing.

JAENA: It's nothing.

LIAM: Look at him eat.

COOPER: He's eating very fast.

DEAN: My kind of guy.

COOPER: Just like my dad. My cousin too.

LIAM: Tabatha?

COOPER: Anderson. He works in a bank. Very loud at Christmas.

LIAM: Do bankers wear blue suits like accountants?

COOPER: Gray suits.

AVERY: Are you in therapy?

SHANNON: What?

AVERY: Are you in therapy?

JAENA: What if I was?

LIAM: Does he wear a suit at Christmas?

COOPER: No. He's got this ugly reindeer sweater. He thinks he's being funny and relaxed.

JAENA: I'm not in therapy because of french fries, I'm not eating french fries because I'm trying to be healthy.

SHANNON: So why are you in therapy?

AVERY: She's probably not supposed to talk about it.

COOPER: He's all "look at my reindeers, aren't I fun and relaxed." It's pathetic.

SHANNON: Are you in super secret therapy?

JAENA: It's my parents.

SHANNON: Your parents are forcing you to go to therapy?

COOPER: I'm never going to be pathetic. No suits, no banks and no ugly sweaters.

DEAN: That sweater's no treat.

COOPER: What?

AVERY: Shannon.

SHANNON: What?

AVERY: The divorce?

SHANNON: Ohhhhhhhhh. Is it? (*JAENA nods*) Ohhhhhhhh.

LIAM: When did you start paying attention to this conversation? I thought you were pie focused.

DEAN: Multitasking. Try it.

JAENA: I hate them. I hate that they're being so...ugh.

COOPER: What's wrong with my sweater?

DEAN: One man's trash is another man's treasure.

COOPER: Dude.

DEAN: It's your treasure, man. Embrace it.

SHANNON: It'll get better. It's just new. Everything is "ragh ragh ragh" in a new divorce.

LIAM: Look at that guy eat.

JAENA: I wish my dad would "ragh ragh" in another country. Another planet would be great. Or he could just disappear and solve all my problems.

SHANNON: I'm not sure therapy is helping.

COOPER: He's not chewing properly. My cousin is a dietician. If you don't chew your food twenty times, bad things happen in your stomach. That's why you fart. You eat too fast and air gets trapped. Trapped air is no good man.

LIAM: I thought your cousin worked in a bank.

DEAN: Or was getting married.

LIAM: You did listen.

DEAN: Multitasking.

COOPER: Different cousin. April.

DEAN: I'm tired of your cousins, man. You're like the clown car of cousins.

During the next section LOO comes over and takes the guys' order.

SHANNON: Alright. Avery will you share fries with me?

VERY: Uh uh. I gotta weigh in tomorrow.

SHANNON: Oh. (pause) Wait. Huh?

JAENA: What?

VERY: Gymnastics.

SHANNON: They're forcing you to weigh in?

JAENA: That's barbaric. They can't do that!

SHANNON: Isn't that illegal? And if it's not illegal, it should be illegal because it sounds illegal.

VERY: Not if I want to go to the Olympics. I got a plan.

LOO: Are you sure you don't want the kitchen sink? I could put nacho cheese over it.

DEAN: I *am* a growing boy.

LOO: You're something.

DEAN: Pie first.

LOO: Pie first, coming up. Whip cream?

DEAN: Do I look like a heathen?

SHANNON: You have a plan? I can't even order fries. I got nothing.

LIAM: Do you guys ever think...

COOPER: What?

LIAM: Nothing. Forget it.

SHANNON. I am planless.

JAENA: Why do you need a plan?

SHANNON: You guys are clearly planning. You have a gymnastics plan. You have a mental health plan. When did you guys start planning without me? Why am I out of the planning loop?

AVERY: There is no loop.

SHANNON: I disagree. You have a plan, you have a plan, where's my plan? Hello? Where you are you plan?

JAENA: You're a nut.

LIAM: Do you ever, you know - the future.

COOPER: What about it?

LIAM: Do you ever...you know. Think about it?

DEAN: You mean like whether I'm going to have apple pie or lemon meringue?

COOPER: Lemon Meringue? Who eats Lemon Meringue?

DEAN: I do.

COOPER: Meringue is air, it's wasted space. Why would I eat wasted space when I can have chocolate cake or something. Right?

LIAM: Right.

COOPER: Wasted space in my belly is a fart waiting to happen.

SHANNON: We're graduating this year and you guys are going to go off into the world with your plans and I'm going to be left here. You're already leaving me behind.

JAENA: There's nothing happening! It's all in your head.

AVERY: Maybe *you* need therapy.

COOPER: So what about the future? And not pie future.

LIAM: I'm not talking about the future in the next two seconds. I'm talking like...beyond. Beyond high school. Wearing suits, getting married, life out there.

COOPER: Like the next frontier?

LIAM: No. Actually, yes.

AVERY: You could have a plan if you wanted to.

SHANNON: I don't know what I want.

AVERY: Well, there you go. Your plan is not to have a plan.

SHANNON: Is that a real thing or are you just trying to make me feel better?

LIAM: I mean we're graduating...we have to do something. We can't sit here forever.

DEAN: I could. I love the pie here.

LIAM: Be serious.

DEAN: I am. I'm going to sit here and eat pie. Those are my goals. Sitting and eating.

COOPER: My dad would kill me if I said that.

DEAN: My dad is velcroed to the couch. I could tell him I'm shaving my head and going to help the poor in India and he wouldn't bat an eye.

SHANNON: I mean, last summer we talked about missing the beach. Now, it's different.

AVERY: Things change.

SHANNON: I don't like it. I don't like getting older. I don't like knowing that high school is almost over and we'll never come here for fries again.

AVERY: I got to get home. I got practice at 6 am.

SHANNON: Your plan sucks.

AVERY: It is what it is.

LIAM: I gotta get the car back.

DEAN: But I haven't even eaten my pie.

COOPER: Get it to go.

DEAN: It's not the same.

LIAM: So don't eat it.

DEAN: Don't eat pie? You have changed, Walsh. You are a changed man. Is this what it's going to be like being around you this year? Loo! Will you hold this pie for me?

LOO: Do I look like a heathen?

The lights change to present mode. The DINERS exit. EARL, BETTY, and FELIX SR are off to the side. The family marches centre stage (this includes LOO, WIKI, MISSION and RAT) RAT dumps a chair centre stage.

EARL: This doesn't look good.

BETTY: Stop being a Debbie Downer.

FELIX SR: She's going to Poland.

BETTY: Maybe it won't be as bad as you think.

FELIX SR: Maybe it will be worse.

NELL: Sit.

FELIX sits.

SAM: *(aside to FELIX)* You want a soda?

NELL: So. What was this today?

FELIX: I'm doing the full run.

NELL: What is she talking about? I don't know what she's talking about.

FELIX: Grampa did it.

SAM: My dad used to do it when he was young.

NELL: Oh. Yes.

FELIX SR: She hates me.

BETTY: Hush.

SAM: Every year at the end of summer, open to close.

FELIX: He talked about it all the time.

NELL: He talked about a lot of things.

FELIX SR: She's always hated me.

BETTY: She wasn't charmed by you. There's a difference.

FELIX SR: Whose side are you on?

EARL: Forget Poland. She's sending Felix to Siberia.

NELL: And what have you done during this full run? Are you just hanging around? Are you helping?

FELIX: I...help...

RAT: You can't even say it with a straight face.

FELIX: I help.

NELL: You don't.

FELIX: All right, all right I get it. I'm a horrible human.

NELL: Don't be overdramatic. No one said anything about who you are as a human.

RAT: I'm going to. You're a horrible human.

FELIX: Why is Rat at the family meeting?

RAT: You have one job. Wipe the tables. That's it! You just waltz in whenever, maybe you lift a finger, maybe you don't.

FELIX: Well you won't have to worry about me being around to ruin things much longer. And you know what? I can't wait to get out of here. I'm glad I'm going and I don't have to look at your stupid faces anymore.

NELL: Good.

FELIX: What? I just said I'm glad I'm leaving and that's good?

NELL: Your father and I are selling the diner.

This is big news.

FELIX: What?

FELIX SR: What?

EARL & BETTY: What?

SAM: I thought we were easing into this.

FELIX: The diner? Selling?

EARL: I can't believe it.

SAM: Ever since your Aunt Doreen moved to California, she's asked us to join her. So...

FELIX: You can't do this. You can't...sell.

EARL: Duke's is family.

BETTY: Duke's is tradition.

FELIX: Where is everybody going to go?

SAM: Other places.

FELIX: Ok, Ok, what about Wiki?

NELL: She wants to go to school and be a pastry chef.

FELIX: What? (*WIKI nods*) How?

MISSION: I'm going with her. I will proudly act as Wiki's personal spokesperson and loudness adjutor.

FELIX: Ok, what about Loo? And Rat?

SAM: Rat and Loo want to open their own place.

RAT: One day, one day we do.

SAM: When is one day? Do it now. You're ready.

FELIX: When did this happen? Nobody tells me anything.

RAT: You never listen. There's a difference.

During FELIX' rant, WIKI cowers with her hands over her ears.



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