

Wild Orchid

A One-Act Play

Bev Brenna gratefully acknowledges the support of the Persephone Theatre/Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre Playwrights' Unit in the development of this work, adapted from Bev's award winning novel *Wild Orchid* (Red Deer Press, 2005; currently on CBC's website *Young Adult Novels That Make You Proud to be Canadian*). A monologue adapted from this text was produced by Sarasvati Theatre's Spring Cabaret of Monologues, March, 2017 (Winnipeg, MN).

Author Bio

Bev Brenna is a Saskatchewan author of over a dozen titles, recently on the Governor General's Award shortlist and winner of an American Printz Honor Book Award. As a Professor in Curriculum Studies at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Bev's research involves children's and young adult literature, literacy, human exceptionalities, and process drama. This monologue is an adaptation of her realistic fiction novel *Wild Orchid* (Red Deer Press/Fitzhenry & Whiteside), part of her award-winning series of the same name. For more information about Bev's work, see: www.beverleybrenna.com and <http://www.usask.ca/education/ecur/profiles/brenna/index.php>.

Synopsis

What do finding a boyfriend, interpreting the plays of Harold Pinter, and looking for wild orchids in Prince Albert National Park have to do with independence? They are all both possible and necessary, according to Taylor Jane, an eighteen year old with a perplexing mother, a difficult past, and a future on the edge of a cliff. This drama explores the perspective of a young woman with autism in her high-stakes quest for adulthood, celebrating the differences among us as well as the universals we share.

Characters

TAYLOR, an eighteen year old girl; slim; very attractive in a quirky way with long dark hair and blue eyes; her high functioning autism presents as sensory oversensitivity and naivety, with very subtle evidence of large-motor clumsiness (without flapping), uncomfortable eye gaze, and obsessions with numbers as well as communication differences in pragmatics and prosody including occasional echolalia. She wears a blue jean dress with long sleeves and running shoes.

PENNY, Taylor's mother, 38 years old, shoulder length blonde hair with vivid striped highlights, sharp-tempered, at times vulnerable. She wears various outfits that contain white (red and white; vivid green and white; no yellow) and high heels.

PAUL, a thirty year old park naturalist that looks like Indiana Jones; he wears khaki pants, a shirt with a name tag "Paul" on one pocket (no yellow), and a brown Tilley hat. There is a package of cigarettes in the pocket. He has longish brown hair that creeps out from under the hat, and a short brown beard. He has a soft pleasant voice, and brown boots.

KODY, a teenage boy wearing jeans and a white T shirt and a gold chain around his neck.

Setting

The play takes place in a car, on a bed, on a swing situated on a sandy beach, in a boreal forest, on a sidewalk, on a bench, on the steps of a Nature Centre and in a cabin. An abstract and minimalist design is recommended. The forest metaphor should predominate in terms of absurdist staging; being lost in a forest is how all of the characters at times experience life. Vertical climbing-wall sequences as well as horizontal trails may be considered in the set design.

Screen Options

**As a mirror of Taylor's perspective, her obsessions, sensitivities, and active visual information may be included as screen images (still and/or video).

WILD ORCHID

**Scene 1: Taylor and Penny's Drive Where Taylor Learns that Being an Adult
Means Having a Boyfriend**

(Penny and Taylor get into a car with Penny driving.)

PENNY

(Brightly.)

Well, here we go! Here we go!

(Taylor does not respond.)

We're going to have a great summer!

TAYLOR

(Pause. Speaking flatly.)

We are not going to have a great summer because I am not going to have a great summer. I wish you had never signed that contract.

PENNY

Contract?

TAYLOR

The contract with Danny. The contract that forces us to go to Waskesiu Lake.

PENNY

Oh. Umm...that contract.

TAYLOR

Sometimes when people go away they never come back.

PENNY

Of course we'll come back! Silly! *(Pause.)* Really, we will. Look, we can have a contract about

that, too, if you like. Okay? How about that, Taylor. At the end of the summer we'll come home!

TAYLOR

At the end of the summer we'll come home. At the end of the summer we'll come home. Legal and binding?

PENNY

Yeah, of course! Legal and binding.

TAYLOR

Write it down and we will both sign it.

PENNY

Oh, well...

(She sighs.)

It'll be an oral contract. Just as good.

TAYLOR

Is it? Is it really?

PENNY

What?

TAYLOR

Just as good? Legal and binding?

PENNY

You bet. Legal and binding. At the end of the summer we'll come back to Saskatoon. Anyways, there are stores there, and a movie theatre...everything we need.

(Taylor doesn't answer or look at her mother.)

Stop sulking. This'll be a chance for Danny and me to get to know each other better.

(In a measured tone.)

Taylor! Anyone in their right mind would like to go to the lake for the summer.

TAYLOR

It is not possible to change our minds from left to right. Minds are not like cars! They are not like trains or planes! Minds do not function according to directionality. In fact, at any given time nobody *(she looks out at the audience)* is in their right mind at all.

PENNY

Just do this one thing, Taylor. Do this one thing for me and you'll see—we'll have fun.

TAYLOR

It is not one thing, Mom! It is many things. Many! New! Things!

PENNY

(Driving and trying to keep her eyes on the road.)

—Stop it, Taylor. You're in the red zone. You know when you were a little girl, you loved riding in the car. It always made you go to sleep.

TAYLOR

I am not going to sleep now. Lake water, water bugs, fish, algae. Snakes. Beach. Danny!

PENNY

Danny isn't a new thing. You've met him lots of times. Remember, Taylor. We've talked about this!

TAYLOR

Danny is a Shittly Bimbo. No matter how many times I have met him he is still going to be a new thing.

(They pass a vehicle.)

PENNY

Just relax. Let's listen to some music.

(Penny puts a Barenaked Ladies CD into the stereo and Taylor cocoons.)

Better! Now isn't that better? Danny gave you this CD, remember?

(Penny checks herself out in the rear view mirror, smiles widely.)

That's so much better! Do I look okay? I hope I look okay. I don't know about this hair. They really did a number on me last week. I think they left it in too long. Definitely stripey. Stripey? Is that a word?

(She pats at her hair.)

TAYLOR

(Without looking.)

Striped.

PENNY

Not stripey? What's wrong with stripey?

TAYLOR

There is no continuum for stripedness. You either do not have stripes or you do have stripes.

(Taylor glances at her mother briefly and then looks away.)

You have them. Striped.

(They pass another car.)

PENNY

(Perky.)

I hope Danny likes it, that's what I hope. Maybe I just need a new color of lipstick.

TAYLOR

(Taylor takes out the CD and puts in Classical Baroque.)

What if he does not?

PENNY

What?

TAYLOR

What if he does not? What if Danny does not like your stripey hair?

PENNY

(Sighing) Oh, Taylor. It wouldn't be the end of the world. It wouldn't be the end of the world if he doesn't like it.

TAYLOR

Not at all?

PENNY

Not at all! Not a whit, not a bit, not an inkling, not a tad. It's just something we say, when we have a boyfriend. I hope he likes...whatever. It means I care about him. I care what he thinks. Someday when you're older you'll understand.

TAYLOR

How much older?

PENNY

Just—just older. Like how you learned to write. At first you couldn't write, and then you could.

TAYLOR

Caring what he thinks is like learning to write.

PENNY

Well, yeah. Sort of. Having a boyfriend is hard work, Taylor.

TAYLOR

It is related to being an adult.

PENNY

You bet, honey. You know when you were a little girl you liked all the same music that I liked.

You would just listen to it and then you would go to sleep.

TAYLOR

Your music gives me bad feelings.

(Pause.)

Are there lots of boys at Waskesiu?

PENNY

Yes, of course. There will be all sorts of people. Can we stop this music? Your music gives me bad feelings!

(She turns off the baroque.)

TAYLOR

And when I am an adult, I can make my own summer plans.

PENNY

Anyways, Danny is counting on me to work with him.

TAYLOR

I don't like him. He always speaks in nines.

PENNY

He does not, don't be ridiculous, Taylor. Let's just drive, okay? Let's just drive in peace.

(She examines her hair in the mirror.)

TAYLOR

Drive in peace. Drive in peace.

(Penny fishes out a tube of lipstick and tries to apply what is left of it.)

When I am an adult, I can make my own summer plans. When I am an adult, I can make my own—and in order to be an adult I need to get a—

PENNY

—Waskesiu’ll be our home away from home. You’ll see.

TAYLOR

That is impossible. We are going to the Shittly Bimbo’s pizza place and that is not our home.

PENNY

Don’t call him that! It isn’t nice to swear, and anyways “bimbo” isn’t a word that refers to a man.

TAYLOR

Why can’t “bimbo” refer to a man? What about a boy? Can it refer to a boy?

PENNY

Never mind.

TAYLOR

(Tapping her feet.)

How much farther?

(Pause.)

How much farther, Mom?

PENNY

Uh, we’ve only just started.

(Under her breath.)

Why do I have the feeling that I'm always just starting. That my life is a series of beginnings that never, ever...

(She bites her lip and darts another glance at herself in the rear view mirror.)

TAYLOR

So would you say that we are five percent of the way there? Or six percent? Six point five?

PENNY

Get the map and figure it out for yourself.

TAYLOR

(Gets out the map and looks at it, with a number of complicated folds to isolate the exact spot.)

We really don't know exactly how much of the way we have come or how much of the way we have left. Just like life. Just like life, Mom. While we are in it, we do not know exactly how much of the way we have—or whether there is a precipice—

(She shivers at the thought.)

PENNY

Stop talking, Taylor. I have to pass this car.

TAYLOR

Stop talking, stop talking. *(Pause.)* I began talking at three months and other than a period of two years where I stopped speaking altogether, I have been talking ever since. And I am not going back to that time period! I see on the map that Waskesiu is still in Saskatchewan. And it is even still in Canada. So we can use the same money.

PENNY

Of course we'll use the same money. Anyways, it's about time you met some new people.

TAYLOR

Babies. Why would I want to meet babies?

PENNY

(Under her breath.)

Here we go again.

(To Taylor.)

You know what I'm talking about.

(Passes another car.)

TAYLOR

What about a boy?

PENNY

A boy? Stop thinking about that word, Taylor. Just stop it!

TAYLOR

(Thinking for a moment.)

Because I know what I need to do.

PENNY

A bimbo is a woman! A woman who is cute but dumb!

TAYLOR

Until there is a word for men and boys who are cute but dumb, I am going to use the word *bimbo*

(she looks out at the audience) for everybody.

Scene 2 : Taylor Melts Down

(Taylor is lying on her bed.)

PENNY

(Coming into the room.)

Are you comfortable, finally? No more yelling?

TAYLOR

When I think about being away from home my IQ starts to drop and it is frightening to be stupid when I am not accustomed to it.

PENNY

This'll all work out. You'll see.

TAYLOR

Danny said, "Just because you don't like yellow doesn't mean moving."

(She sneezes.)

I do not know what he meant by that. And there it is—nine words. Nine words! "Just because you don't like yellow—

(She sneezes again.)

—doesn't mean moving." And what does that even mean?!

PENNY

Danny didn't understand how much you hate yellow. But he made a concession for me. We changed rooms with you and so the problem is solved.

TAYLOR

(Sneezes again.)

He made a concession. He made a concession. Sometimes when people go away, they don't come back.

PENNY

Never mind about that now.

TAYLOR

And what about boys?

PENNY

Taylor, please stop talking about that word. We should go and eat something.

TAYLOR

These are the kinds of pizza I do not like: salami, mushroom, pepperoni, vegetarian, bacon, chicken, pineapple, anchovie—

PENNY

(Interrupting and primping her hair.)

—Oh. Well. We can find something you'll like, Taylor. But first I'll help you unpack.

TAYLOR

I did unpack. What did Danny say about your hair?

PENNY

He said I was his little squirrel. His little squirrel. Isn't that cute?

(She lifts Taylor's suitcase onto the bed.)

TAYLOR

Shittly Bimbo. Will there be boys my age uptown? Little squirrel. Little squirrel.

PENNY

Quite likely there will be people of all ages. Now be nice to Danny. Remember, he's our host here and my boyfriend.

TAYLOR

Little squirrel. Little squirrel. I do not need to be nice to him. But people of all ages—

PENNY

—You do. Just try to get along. Once you look around town you'll feel better. You could even make yourself a map.

TAYLOR

I will not see people of all ages.

PENNY

Absolutely. People of all ages. And I need to get out and do some shopping. I need to buy new lipstick. And I forgot my night cream.

TAYLOR

Mom. That is impossible.

PENNY

I did. I forgot it.

TAYLOR

No, the people of all ages. That is impossible. A person cannot be all ages. I could not be six or ninety-five at the same time that I am eighteen years, five months and 29 days.

PENNY

Never mind, let's just get your things unpacked and then we can eat. No use waiting for Christmas.

TAYLOR

I told you, I did unpack. But I do not like living in a—and what if there's a—

PENNY

(Penny opens the suitcase. It's empty. She looks around more carefully.)

—Where is that nice swimsuit I bought you? And all your things?

TAYLOR

I do not like living in a pizza place. It smells of tomato sauce and pepperoni. These are the kinds of pizza I do not like: salami, mushroom, pepperoni, vegetarian, bacon, chicken, pineapple, anchovie—

PENNY

(Interrupting.)

—Never mind, Taylor. We can figure that out later.

TAYLOR

I also do not like Danny. He smells like smoke. Shittly—

PENNY

—Never mind what you don't like! We've already switched bedrooms with you. And you don't have to like Danny. He's *my* boyfriend, remember? But you do have to be pleasant to him. Now, what's happened to your things?

TAYLOR

This is what I brought: my blue clock; my slippers and cotton nightgown; my white underwear because the blue ones are on me. And that's all.

PENNY

Taylor, you can't wear the same thing all the time! You'll wear out that jean dress. Plus it's too hot. And I bought you all those new clothes!

(She slams the suitcase shut.)

TAYLOR

New clothes. New people.

(Darkly.)

One new thing can change everything.

PENNY

You didn't even bring that cute little swimsuit!

TAYLOR

Grandma wore the same dress when she was a teacher in the Great Depression. She washed out the underarms at night and sponged away the spots. And she washed one pair of panties every morning and hung them up to dry in the fresh prairie breeze.

PENNY

(Muttering to herself.)

Maybe we can find some things on sale in town. I can't believe you would leave all those clothes behind. This is how the budget gets blown.

TAYLOR

Panties in the wind, not budget! Panties in the—

PENNY

—Never mind! And just try to be nice to Danny. He's been very good to us.

TAYLOR

Good to us. Good to us. Danny wears golf shirts. He smokes. And he talks in nines.

PENNY

Don't be silly. He doesn't talk in nines!

TAYLOR

Just count him sometime. And he broadcasts olive oil. I hate him! And up ahead the path could be falling away into—

(She leans over and smells the suitcase.)

My suitcase smells like Hammy.

PENNY

Don't start! Shit! Don't start with that! I just don't have time right now to—

TAYLOR

(Interrupting; speaking quickly, as if she has recited this many times before.)

—Hammy lived to be four years old. That was fairly old for a gerbil. Before Hammy I had Charlotte, and before her I had June, and before her I had Walnut, and he was the first gerbil I ever had.

PENNY

Oh God, Oh God, please don't start this now. Taylor? Please don't start this now! Where's your gum?

TAYLOR

(Reciting even faster.)

Gerbils are rodents. They can also be described as small mammals. They are nocturnal, and although they make good pets, they do make noise in their cages at night. They drum with their feet against the metal floor. This is their best way of communicating.

PENNY

Taylor! Stop! Where's your water bottle?

TAYLOR

Snip snap! Snip snap! Taylor! Quit it. Quit it. Walnut, June, Charlotte, and Hammy. Walnut, June, Charlotte, and Hammy. Hammy was the last one! My suitcase smells like him!

(Taylor crumples to the floor and begins rocking.)

PENNY

O my God. Okay, shit, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Taylor. I should be more patient. I should. I know I should. But sometimes you're just so impossible! Come on.

(She grabs Taylor's shoulders and squeezes, hard.)

We're going to have the best summer ever, honey. A whole summer at the lake! Think of it.

TAYLOR

(Rocking harder, puts her hands over her ears.)

I do not want to think of it. I do not want to think of it.

PENNY

(Kneeling down and taking one of Taylor's hands, rubbing it.)

Okay, yeah. I understand, Taylor! You don't like it here. But that doesn't mean—it doesn't mean the end of the world!

TAYLOR

I—I do not—I do not want to think of it. The precipice could be just up ahead—

PENNY

—I know this is hard for you. I understand that. But this summer will be good for me. And sometimes in a family people just have to... And lots of people would give anything to—think of how it is for me—I'm not sitting at a computer. I can grow my nails! And...and I'm out here in nature! Serving tables, yes, but out in nature! You'll like it here, Taylor. First unpack, then look around.

TAYLOR

(Stops rocking, and her mother is now rubbing both hands.)

First unpack, then look around. And...and when I look around I could look around for a—

PENNY

—That’s right. That’s the spirit. Hard by the yard but a cinch by the inch, Grandma says. You’ll see. It’ll be okay.

TAYLOR

(Heaving a deep sigh but calmer.)

Not a whit, not a bit, not an inkling, not a tad. Not a whit, not a bit—

PENNY

—Taylor, this is my big chance with Danny. He invited us up here and that was a good way of showing...commitment. Commitment is really important in a relationship.

TAYLOR

Commitment...and concessions.

PENNY

Yes. Yes, that’s right.

(Taylor leans over and takes another sniff of the suitcase. Her mother yanks it off the bed and stands it in a corner.)

Now have a drink of water and let’s just chalk this up to experience. I should have packed for you.

TAYLOR

Are you going to buy lipstick?

PENNY

Yes, as a matter of fact, I am.

TAYLOR

A new colour of lipstick?

PENNY

(Falsely cheerful.)

If I have to.

TAYOR

I liked the old lipstick.

(Penny doesn't answer.)

It is the same kind you had on when you first met Danny.

PENNY

(Surprised.)

What? Was it?

TAYLOR

I would like to buy some lipstick .

PENNY

You would? You would like some lipstick? Oh, honey, that will be fun! We can shop together!

TAYLOR

I'd like some just like yours. Just like the kind you had when you met Danny.

PENNY

When I met Danny.

TAYLOR

Once you did not know him. He was a stranger. Then he was your boyfriend.

PENNY

(To herself.)

When I met Danny. When I met Danny I'd been thinking it was all over. So many men but none

of them just right. That night I was sitting at the bar drinking...*(she looks at Taylor and amends what she was going to say)*...one coke after another. And he saw me there and...

(Dreamily.)

he came over to my table, and since then it's just been...

(Brightly.)

I'll just grab my purse and then we can go. That's the spirit! Now you're putting your best foot forward!

(Penny hurries out.)

TAYLOR

(Taylor puts one foot forward, and then the other.)

Identical in terms of quality. Flexible structures of bones, joints, muscles, soft tissues. Comprised of three sections: the forefoot with its phalanges and metatarsals, the midfoot with the pyramid of bones that creates the arch, the hind foot that forms the ankle. Identical components that vary from left to right in minute ways regarding size, texture, shape. But not quality. Quality is clearly the same from right to left. So...no matter which foot I use first, it won't be the wrong one. It is important that both feet go forward, in no particular order. That is the only way to get anywhere.

(Pause.)

It is a relief that I am putting the right foot forward, metaphorically, because even though I know that being dumb is human, I do not want to look dumb.

1. I do not want to look dumb around Mom because she will say, "I told you so."
2. I do not want to look dumb around Mom's boyfriend because he is dumb and that would make two of us.
3. I do not want to look dumb around boys.

Scene 3: Taylor Meets Kody

(Taylor is on a swing on the beach. Wave sounds. She is wearing lipstick.)

TAYLOR

How am I going to get a boyfriend if I cannot even see a boy? A boy my age who does not wear golf shirts and whose hair is not fit for frying. A boy who does not wear polyester pants or dark socks or aftershave. A boy who does not belch loudly, scratch places where you are not supposed to scratch, or smoke. A boy whose voice does not come through his nose in a gust of nines. A boy who is not named Danny.

(Pause. She stops swinging and shakes the sand out of her shoes.)

The boys at my high school met these criteria but they did not sit at my table for lunch unless there were other girls there. Shauna said it was just a matter of time until I got a boyfriend because I am attractive and nice. But I am eighteen years old and so far no boyfriend. And I do not want to stay a child. I could be stuck here forever.

(Pause. Swinging.)

My mother always picks the same type of man to date. I wonder why she doesn't just pick the same man. Then they would already know each other.

(Speaking louder.)

Shittly first dates.

(Pause.)

But even if it is scary, I need to have one.

(Pause.)

Getting a boyfriend is just like learning to write.

(Pause.)

But first I need to get off this swing. Getting of this swing is the first step.

(She rocks back and forth on the swing. Stops. Rocks. Finally shakes the sand out of her shoes and stands up).

KODY

(Whistles at Taylor. She turns and looks towards him. He starts walking towards her, tossing a basketball from hand to hand.)

Hey.

TAYLOR

(Pause.)

Hey.

(She wavers and then starts walking away from him.)

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

Hey.

KODY

Whatcha doing?

TAYLOR

Walking.

(She looks towards Kody and then walks off stage. He looks after her. Then he goes the other way.)

Scene 4: Taylor Meets Paul

TAYLOR

(Taylor approaches the Nature Centre. She looks at Paul for a minute and takes a deep breath.)

Hey.

PAUL

(Beside the steps. Looking towards her from a terrarium where he is putting in some plants.)

You sound like you've had a hard go of it.

TAYLOR

A hard go of it? Is that like hard by the yard? I am glad to be off that beach. Cinch by the inch.

(She takes out two packages of gum.)

Do I want peppermint for calming or cinnamon for alerting?

PAUL

You don't like the beach.

TAYLOR

(Popping peppermint gum into her mouth.)

Once I took a questionnaire on an autism website. It was supposed to help identify personality traits. The first question was, "When you go to the beach, do you want to:

- a. Lay down your towel and stretch out in the sun;
- b. Kick off your sandals and run into the waves;
- c. Get off the beach as soon as possible."

Of course I picked "c." I got a total of 85 points out of 100 for my answers and at the end of the quiz everyone with over 75 points gets a message that says, *Congratulations, you're definitely*

autistic. And I got the message.

PAUL

(Still bending over the terrarium.)

Ah. You got the message.

TAYLOR

Have you taken lessons from the Queen?

PAUL

Beg pardon?

(Pause. Quietly and pleasantly interested.)

The Queen?

TAYLOR

The Queen is known as a good conversationalist. She simply repeats part of what the other person says. This engages people and keeps them talking. Shauna taught me that.

PAUL

(Standing up straight and moving to another terrarium.)

Shauna?

TAYLOR

You are still doing it.

(Pause.)

Shauna was my high school resource teacher until I graduated and she became married and got on a honeymoon in Greece. If she sends me a postcard I will know she is still my friend. So far she has not.

PAUL

(Setting a new plant into the terrarium.)

Maybe she's just too busy. On my honeymoon I didn't write any postcards to anyone.

TAYLOR

(Looking at the terrarium.)

What is growing in there?

PAUL

I've just planted a few things. A pitcher plant. And some sundew. They catch insects.

TAYLOR

Insects?

PAUL

Yup. They're carnivorous. All the plants in this terrarium are bog varieties that grow right here in the park.

TAYLOR

Bog varieties?

PAUL

That's just what the Queen would ask.

(Smiling.)

This is the Pitcher Plant. Insects drown in its leaves and then the plant digests them.

TAYLOR

I do not like the smell of it. Where did you get it?

PAUL

Boundary Bog. Feel free to join us for a trail walk sometime. Or fish seining.

TAYLOR

What?

PAUL

Fish seining. There's a phenomenal number of fish species here in the Park.

TAYLOR

Is that where you can get in touch with dead people? A seining?

PAUL

No, a seine is a kind of dragnet that lets us pull out some fish for a quick study. Catch and release.

TAYLOR

You remind me of someone.

PAUL

Do I?

TAYLOR

Yes. Indiana Jones. That is who you remind me of. Indiana Jones in *The Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Are those cigarettes in your pocket?

PAUL

'Fraid so.

TAYLOR

That's bad.

PAUL

Yup.

(Standing up and heading into the Nature Centre.)

We have trail walks every morning at 10am.

TAYLOR

(Calling after him.)

There aren't any snakes on the trail, are there?

PAUL

Unfortunately not many. Just the occasional garter snake. And lots of mosquitoes.

(Checks his watch.)

And now we have a presentation on orchids starting in...two minutes. It's free—everyone welcome.

(Paul goes inside.)

TAYLOR

Unfortunately not could be 88 % no, but 12 % yes. A 12% chance of encountering a snake isn't high, although I would rather swim, eat crunchy foods, or go back to that yellow bedroom than see a snake. But at least when I am thinking about snakes I am not thinking about boys. Specifically I am not thinking about that boy who whistled at me. But now I am. Now I am thinking about him.

(She follows Paul into the Nature Centre.)

Scene 5: Penny Advises Taylor About Boys

(Penny and Taylor are sitting side by side on Taylor's bed.)

PENNY

And so you've gotta tell me when you're going somewhere. Otherwise I worry.

TAYLOR

I went onto the beach and tried not to look at the water and then I found a swing. Then I went to

the Nature Centre and I met somebody who looks like Indiana Jones. I chewed a lot of gum. I saw some bog varieties. And I saw a presentation about orchids. And I went across the street where there is a theatre and I saw a play. The play was about a man named Stanley. I am not sure I understood all of it. What does it mean when you are the belle of the ball? And Mom, when a boy whistles at a girl, should the girl whistle back?

PENNY

Holy cow, too much information. This play had a boy whistling at a girl?

TAYLOR

No, that was in real life.

PENNY

Well, if somebody's whistling at you, just ignore it. One thing leads to another and pretty soon you're over your head.

TAYLOR

I am not talking about swimming. I am not even going to look at the lake. And if I don't look at it, there is no way that I can swim—

PENNY

—I worry, Taylor. I worry when I don't know where you are!

TAYLOR

I have already told you. The swing. The Nature Centre. The theatre. Stanley never grew up. I do not want to be like that. I do not want to be like that, Mom!

PENNY

You've lots of time, Taylor. There's no hurry. Anyways, you'll always be my little girl.

TAYLOR

That is not true. THAT IS NOT TRUE, MOM!

PENNY

What was this play again?

TAYLOR

It was called “The Birthday Party” and it was written by Harold Pinter and it was about a man named—

PENNY

—And you went to see it all by yourself?

TAYLOR

I was not alone. There were five people there.

PENNY

I’m not surprised. Most people don’t come to Waskesiu to see plays. Now Taylor, just promise me something. Don’t rush into anything with a boy, okay?

TAYLOR

I never rush into things. Except on nature trails when there are mosquitoes.

PENNY

And don’t go off without telling me.

TAYLOR

Okay.

PENNY

Now I’ve gotta get back to work. You should eat something.

TAYLOR

These are the kinds of pizza I do not like: salami, mushroom, pepperoni, vegetarian, bacon,

chicken, pineapple, anchovie—

PENNY

(Interrupting.)

—Find something you do like, then. Pancakes. You like pancakes.

Scene 6: Taylor Gives Kody the Wrong Message

(Taylor is standing outside the Nature Centre. Kody happens along loudly bouncing the basketball.)

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

Hey.

(Pause.)

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

Hey. I could be the belle of the ball. A cinch by the inch.

KODY

Yeah, I like the sound of that. Maybe you could. Like... maybe you could.

TAYLOR

(Clearly distracted by the ongoing basketball sounds.)

Maybe I could.

KODY

What are you doing now? Like...

TAYLOR

What? I have no idea how to answer that. Anyways, it's time.

(She goes up the steps and into the Nature Centre.)

KODY

(Watches her go. Mesmerized.)

Scene 7 Paul Notices Taylor

(Taylor is walking along a nature trail behind Paul.)

TAYLOR

Wild roses. Twin flower. Pink wintergreen. Grass of Parnassus. From the genus Parnassia, also known as bog-star, in the family Celastraceae.

PAUL

Lots of people come up here and don't walk any of the trails. Are you studying biology?

TAYLOR

Studying biology?

PAUL

That's the queen talking again. You know, studying at university?

TAYLOR

University. I have not decided. I have not decided anything.

(Pause.)

My mother wants me to take commercial cooking and my grandmother wants me to play chess.

(Pause.)

But I do not think cooking and chess are good career options because I dislike both of them. Holy cow, that is a lot of Cinquefoil and it is—

(Sneezes.)

—too yellow. I am not going to look at it again.

PAUL

Yellow and sneezing. My wife used to have that.

TAYLOR

Is she dead?

PAUL

What?

TAYLOR

Is your wife dead?

PAUL

(Pause.)

No.

(Pause.)

No. Just...she's sick.

TAYLOR

Will she get better?

PAUL

(The trail gets visibly harder, possibly vertical.)

Sure. Sure, of course she will.

TAYLOR

(Pause.)

There are at least three ways that forests and churches are alike:

1. They have extra air.
2. You feel as though you are in the dark but it does not matter.
3. Life and death are side by side.

PAUL

(In difficult territory.)

Go on ahead, Taylor, and catch up with the others. I'm going to—I'm just going to—

TAYLOR

We really don't know exactly how much of the way we have come or how much of the way we have left. Just like life. Just like life, we do not know exactly—look up ahead! I see the end of the trail! We made it!

PAUL

(Pause.)

Yeah. Yeah, I guess so. The end of the trail.

TAYLOR

I wish I could have seen an orchid.

PAUL

They're pretty rare. A lot of people never see one.

TAYLOR

Especially the Small Round-leaved orchid. That one is the rarest of all. It would be really something to find it.

PAUL

You've—you've seen a lot of other plants. Especially for your first week in the Park.

TAYLOR

I saw seventeen other plants including Pitcher Plants. I especially did not like the Marsh Marigolds. When I saw them I thought of Danny because his last name is Marsh. Shittly Danny! I will try to push him out of my mind or it will be like I am seeing Danny all over the woods.

PAUL

I take it you—you just...you don't like Danny very much.

TAYLOR

Very much is not an appropriate descriptor. Much is a satisfactory amount all by itself. I estimate "much" at about 80%. But it is not relevant to how I like Danny because I don't like him at all, at a rate of 100%.

(Pause.)

Bog Rosemary, Bog bean, Buck bean, Tamarack. Fireweed, Solomon's Seal, Marsh (*she wrinkles her nose*) Marigolds.

(She sneezes.)

Shittly Danny.

(Pause.)

Seeing a Ladyslipper would be difficult but possible. Especially if it were a Small Round-leaved orchid!

(Pause.)

Difficult. But. Possible.

(Pause.)

Have you ever seen any orchids on this trail?

PAUL

Just one.

(Looks at Taylor and smiles.)

Scene 8: Penny Forbids Taylor Dating a Stranger

(Taylor is swinging and Penny is pacing around her.)

TAYLOR

(Yelling.)

It was my fourth trail walk. I saw eighteen interesting plants common to the boreal forest.

PENNY

Never mind about that.

TAYLOR

I was disappointed not to see any orchids. Orchids require a balance of heredity and environment.

PENNY

Stop talking about plants, Taylor! You can't go off without telling me!

TAYLOR

I didn't. Stop talking about plants. Stop talking about plants.

PENNY

You did!

TAYLOR

I didn't!

PENNY

You did! You didn't tell me anything!

TAYLOR

I didn't go off. I didn't go off! I DIDN'T GO OFF!

PENNY

(Trying to speak calmly.)

It worries me, Taylor, when you just disappear off the face of the earth like that!

TAYLOR

(Taking a deep breath. Putting on the brakes.)

I can't fall off the earth because of gravity. But this is not really about gravity, is it?

PENNY

(Frowning)

Taylor, you've got to tell me when you're going places.

TAYLOR

You said to tell you when I went off.

PENNY

What? What are you talking about?

TAYLOR

You said to tell you when I went off the trail. And I did not go off the trail. I stayed on the trail.

PENNY

O my God. Shit.

TAYLOR

It isn't nice to swear.

PENNY

Taylor! I have to know where you are.

TAYLOR

Soon I will be in the future and I will be an adult and I will have a boyfriend—

PENNY

—Taylor, that boy isn't still whistling at you, is he?

TAYLOR

(Swinging again.)

No.

PENNY

Okay, I need to get to work but first I just want to make sure that you do not do anything with this boy that's been whistling at you. You are not to go with any strangers up here, okay?

TAYLOR

I know all about that, Mom. A stranger might come along inside a van and open the door and say, "Do you want to see the puppies?" but he will not be talking about puppies—and maybe that is what Stanley was afraid of when the van came to his house! In the play, he thought there might be a lawnmower—

PENNY

—Taylor, I mean it. You are not to go out with any strangers up here, okay? Promise!

TAYLOR

I promise.

PENNY

(Applying lipstick.)

Good, now does this red look just as good as the pink I used to wear? They don't have any of the right colours uptown.

TAYLOR

Yes. Red and pink are the same. But I am planning for the future even though it makes me a little bit scared. I am not going to be like Stanley in the play. I am not going to get stuck.

PENNY

Red and pink? They are not the same, Taylor. They are simply not the same!

TAYLOR

I think lipstick is like putting your best foot forward. It is. I know it is.

PENNY

That's—that's exactly right, Taylor. It is like that. And sometimes when you just don't feel like getting up in the morning, you look at that lipstick and you say to yourself—

TAYLOR

—It is also kind of like getting off a swing when you do not want to get off.

PENNY

Right... right.

TAYLOR

Or left.

PENNY

What?

TAYLOR

Right or left, it does not matter which one you start with.

PENNY

Oh. Well.

TAYLOR

Red or pink.

PENNY

(Distractedly.)

What?

TAYLOR

Red or pink lipstick.

PENNY

Yes. No! Shit! No, Taylor, those are not the same at all. When I have more time I'll teach you.

TAYLOR

I might not have time because there is a bookstore at the Nature Centre where I will be working.

PENNY

You want to get a job there? In a bookstore?

TAYLOR

I already did it. I got the job.

PENNY

A job? You got a job? Taylor! Your first job! Why didn't you tell me!

TAYLOR

I just did tell you. I just did tell you, Mom. After the blank blank trail, which I am not naming because it refers to plants, we went back to the Nature Centre and someone had just quit in the bookstore. It must have been a change of plans. So they needed someone on short notice to open boxes and stock the shelves. I heard them talking and then I asked if I could have the job.

PENNY

Oh, Taylor! That's good news! Really good news! A job!

TAYLOR

And I signed the contract.

PENNY

Oh! Well. That was...smart. That was smart, Taylor. So if they decide they don't want you in a few days at least you'll get paid for a week.

TAYLOR

Why would they decide they don't want me in a few days?

PENNY

Never mind, just say you are free from now until the end of August.

(Reaching around in her pockets for lipstick.)

TAYLOR

—I will not be free, Mom, because the position is minimum wage. And this will be my very own money that I will be saving in my bank account for the future. And when I get to be an adult I can—

PENNY

—Taylor, I'm so excited for you! It just—are you sure you have a job? It seems so...sudden. You're growing up too fast.

TAYLOR

Eighteen years ago I was born and then I got a year older every year. Eighteen times. That does not fit with the definition of "sudden."

PENNY

Well, it just seems—

TAYLOR

—That is two hundred and sixteen months. And then adding on five months more...that's two hundred and twenty one months, not counting the additional days, that I have been getting older.

And soon I will be an—

PENNY

—Never mind. Never mind, Taylor. I need to hear more about this job!

TAYLOR

I will be working every afternoon from 1pm until 5pm, starting tomorrow, seven days a week, which is 28 hours a week.

PENNY

Well!

TAYLOR

Well! Four hundred sixty two minutes...

PENNY

Fine. That's enough, now.

TAYLOR

One million—

PENNY

—Taylor, I've got to get to work myself, but just promise me one thing. If that whistling boy comes into the bookstore when you are working, you won't go anywhere with him.

TAYLOR

Of course I won't!

PENNY

Okay, good, then. Good.

(Penny exits.)

TAYLOR

Because leaving the bookstore during working hours would be against the rules.

(Anxiously.)

When I get to work tomorrow, I will be expected to follow the rules. Whether I know them or not. And there will be a lot of rules in a bookstore. Rules and rules and rules. And I will have to follow them or else. Or else. Or else. Or else.

Scene 9: Kody Goes After Taylor

(Taylor is swinging.)

KODY

Hey. Hey, there. Like...

TAYLOR

(Stops swinging.)

Hey.

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

I know you, right?

KODY

I think I've known you all my life!

TAYLOR

That is not possible. Because we arrived last Wednesday.

KODY

Kody. I'm Kody. I've been here forever. Every summer. My aunt and uncle have a cabin.

(Taylor gets off the swing.)

TAYLOR

Do you want to be my boyfriend?

KODY

Maybe I do. Maybe. I. Do.

TAYLOR

Well what are you waiting for?

KODY

I just ate a whole lot of onions. Like...

TAYLOR

Onions.

KODY

(Putting gum into his mouth.)

Want a gum?

TAYLOR

Peppermint or cinnamon?

KODY

Mentos ice.

TAYLOR

Oh. Okay. Thank you.

(She takes some.)

KODY

(Chewing.)

So like... do you want to go somewhere? My Aunt and Uncle are in PA right now.

TAYLOR

Where do you want to go? What are we waiting for? Not Christmas.

(They exit.)

Scene 10: Penny Realizes That Taylor is Growing Up

(Taylor is walking by herself. Penny comes to find her.)

PENNY

There you are! I figured that maybe you might like to go shopping with me. For work clothes.

TAYLOR

Work clothes.

PENNY

Yeah, you know. Clothes to wear to work.

TAYLOR

I have clothes. On me. And I am going to wear them to work. Work clothes. Do you have gum?

PENNY

Peppermint or cinnamon?

TAYLOR

Neither. Both. I just want to freshen my breath. I can taste the onions.

PENNY

(Holding out a pack of gum. Taylor stops swinging and takes it.)

Offer me some.

TAYLOR

Offer you some?

PENNY

It's good manners to offer me some. If you're having a piece of gum, it's polite to offer some.

TAYLOR

It was your gum to begin with. You could just help yourself.

PENNY

(In a falsely pleasant teaching tone.)

It'd be nice if you offered me a piece. That's demonstrating good manners.

TAYLOR

Do you want a piece?

PENNY

No thanks. Maybe in a little while.

TAYLOR

Changing the rules. You change the rules and you change the plans!

PENNY

How about we get you a nice dress for work?

TAYLOR

No.

PENNY

Well, how about a cute little pant suit.

TAYLOR

Auntie Margie was wearing a pant suit. I do not want one. Maybe we could buy some Mentos Ice.

PENNY

Oh, for heaven sake! (*Hopefully.*) We could try a few things on just to see?

TAYLOR

It might change everything. One new thing.

PENNY

Stop.

TAYLOR

One new thing, Mom!

PENNY

Don't start about that again. (*Pause.*) When your father...(*pause*)...when your father left I know it was hard for you. A lot of things changed when he left. But we're OK. We've done OK!

TAYLOR

One new thing. Can change all the rest. It can! It can, Mom!

PENNY

(*Resigned.*)

We might as well go home if that's how you're going to be.

TAYLOR

I can't go back to Saskatoon now! And neither can you! The contracts!

PENNY

No, I mean we might as well go to Danny's. Our home away from home, remember? (*Suddenly sharp.*) Auntie Margie? You don't have an Auntie Margie.

TAYLOR

I don't know.

PENNY

What do you mean, you don't know?

TAYLOR

I. Don't. Know. It is complicated, whether I might have one. At some point, I could have one.

PENNY

You don't.

TAYLOR

Auntie Margie is not your business.

PENNY

Sometimes I just don't know what you're... come on... let's have some ice-cream.

TAYLOR

I don't want any ice-cream.

PENNY

But wouldn't it be nice to just walk over there and see what kinds of ice-cream they—

TAYLOR

—No. I don't want any ice-cream.

PENNY

Well it isn't really about the ice-cream, is it.

TAYLOR

It isn't?

PENNY

(Slyly.)

On our way over there, we might happen to see some clothes in the window. Without really meaning to, we might find something on sale and...

TAYLOR

When you met Danny, did you know right away that he was your boyfriend?

PENNY

When I met Danny?

(Dreamily.)

When I met Danny. When I met Danny I felt all sorts of things. Butterflies in my stomach. Shivers down my spine. It was like nothing had really happened, but everything had happened.

TAYLOR

(Nodding, her hand on her stomach.)

Yes.

PENNY

I knew right away that he was the one.

TAYLOR

The one?

PENNY

The one for me.

TAYLOR

He made you feel like the bell of the ball. In that play—

PENNY

—Well, Taylor, I really don't want to hear about that play. Maybe I'll just do a little shopping

by myself. Maybe I'll find something that will fit me. Something on sale.

TAYLOR

Okay.

PENNY

Okay...so...do you want to come along?

TAYLOR

I am not going shopping today.

PENNY

Something's going on here. You seem...different.

TAYLOR

(Smiling.)

I do? Do I?

PENNY

What's going on?

TAYLOR

Nothing. And everything. It has to do with perspective. I have my own perspective on life. And you have yours.

PENNY

I taught you that! Remember when I taught you that, Taylor?

TAYLOR

And if we want the other person to know something, we have to tell them.

PENNY

That's right. That's right, Taylor.

TAYLOR

And if we do not want the other person to know something, we do not have to tell them.

PENNY

Well—that's not exactly—that's not really what we—

TAYLOR

(Serious.)

Because time is passing. And Time is not like money. No one knows when it will end. We do not know exactly how much of the way we have come or how much of the way we have left. We do not know—

PENNY

(Getting control of her temper.)

—Or we could go back and order something. Maybe an omelet? Or pancakes? You've always liked pancakes, Taylor. When you were little—

TAYLOR

—I am not a little kid! I am eighteen years old!

PENNY

You're right. You're right! I'm sorry. You are not a little kid. But—

TAYLOR

And I do not want pancakes. They put something in them the last time.

PENNY

What are you talking about?

TAYLOR

The pancakes. I know they ground up a vegetable in the last ones. That was not in good taste.

PENNY

They did not.

TAYLOR

They did.

PENNY

They did not! A vegetable in pancakes?

TAYLOR

I threw them out the window.

PENNY

You didn't.

TAYLOR

I did. I did! I threw them out the window and then a dog ate them. And then—and then the dog died!

(She laughs.)

That's a joke, Mom. The dog didn't die. I knew it would be funny because of that book we read in English class. The dead dog was funny in the book so I thought it would be funny now.

PENNY

Ha ha, I'm not laughing. And now I need to use a bathroom.

(She rubs her forehead.)

What could be funny about a dead dog...

(She starts to laugh.)

Okay, now I really need to use a bathroom!

TAYLOR

See, it is funny!

(She laughs harder, and they are laughing together..)

PENNY

Anyways. Anyways. Don't hang around here too long. And get a good sleep tonight. Tomorrow will be an exciting day! I'm—I'm proud of you, Taylor. I'm really proud of you.

(Penny exits.)

TAYLOR

(Worried.)

Tomorrow, I will go to my job and...and...and I have no idea what will happen. I. Have. No. Idea. And the more that I think about it, the more ideas I have about the ideas that I do not know. And that give me more ideas. And then I get ideas about those ideas. And ideas about those ideas. And none of the ideas, or the ideas about the ideas, or the ideas about those ideas, are good ones.

**Scene 11: Taylor Realizes that In Order To Be An Adult
She Needs To Get Off The Swing**

TAYLOR:

(Swinging. After a pause. Speaking flatly.)

“Anyone in their right mind would like to go to Waskesiu Lake for the summer. Anyone in their right mind would like to go to Waskesiu Lake for the summer.” That is my mother talking.

(Pause.)

“Anyone in their right mind.” But. It is not possible to change our minds from left to right.

(Pause.)

I wished she had never signed that contract. Wished she had never. Wished she had never.

(Tensely.)

“What in the world are you afraid of, Taylor? (counting the words to nine) What in the world are you afraid of, Taylor?” That is her boyfriend talking. Danny. *Bimbo. Bimbo.*

(Considering.)

What I am afraid of...

(Speaking quickly.)

But I figured it out. I figured it out. First get a boyfriend, then become an adult. First become an adult, then be independent. Be independent. Independent of her. But I am not sure if it is working. I think it is not working! And I do not even know if I actually have a boyfriend. Maybe I do. But maybe I do not.

(Anxiously.)

And now, in addition to being in a new place, with new people that are not babies, and maybe having a boyfriend or maybe not having one, I have a new job. A job that starts tomorrow.

(She rocks, head in hands. Then she gets some control and looks up.)

Well...I am not shopping. That is looking on the shiny side of things. I did not want to go shopping and so I did not go shopping. I could be an adult without knowing it. Maybe I am. Or maybe I am not.

(Pause.)

Just when something seems to make sense, it doesn't.

(Pause.)

Waskesiu is home to many rare varieties of wild orchid. *The Yellow Lady's Slipper. The White Lady's Slipper. The Venus's Slipper.* And *the Small Round-leaved Orchid*, which is the rarest of

all. Seeing a Small Round-leaved Orchid would be difficult but possible. Difficult. But. Possible!

(Pause.)

What am I so afraid of?

(Pause.)

It is the precipice. The precipice lies ahead and I might not know it is there until I am...until the earth just falls away and I am...

(Under her breath.)

I cannot even say it.

(Pause.)

And one new thing—one new thing can change everything!

(Ramping up into a meltdown.)

These are the kinds of pizza I do not like: salami, mushroom, pepperoni, vegetarian, bacon, chicken, pineapple, ham, anchovie, artichoke, bean sprout, caviar, crayfish, eggplant, oyster, scallops, shrimp, zucchini, goat cheese and dandelion greens!

(Anguished. Pulls from her pocket a copy of “The Birthday Party.”)

Stanley would not do well here. Stanley would not do well here! He was even afraid of cornflakes. And he never had a job.

(In a small, choked voice.)

He was stuck. Just like I am stuck here. Stuck on this swing. This swing. This swing.

(Puts the play back into her pocket.)

Walnut, June, Charlotte and Hammy. Walnut, June, Charlotte and Hammy

(Pause.)

“Congratulations, you definitely have autism.”

(Somewhat proudly.)

I got the message.

(Pause.)

If I stay on this swing, I will be just like Stanley.

(Swings.)

If I stay on this swing, I will be just like Stanley! And Stanley never grew up.

(Pause.)

It is about time.

(Pause.)

First I need to get off this swing.

(Stands up. Takes a few clumsy steps away from the swing.)

But ...but there might be...what if there is a precipice dropping away into... And that makes everything... Difficult but possible. Stanley would wonder...Stanley would wonder if orchids were both possible and necessary. And maybe they are.

(Pause.)

Possible and necessary. Even though I am afraid. Even though. Even though.

(Pause.)

If I don't want to be like Stanley. If I don't want to be like Stanley...

(Pause. Touches the play in her pocket.)

I think Stanley has autism but he does not want to deal with it.

(Pause.)

I do not want to be a child forever. Even if there is a prec...I am not going to think about that. Or

falling. Or all that pizza.

(Speaking matter of factly.)

Because I do not have to eat it. I do not. I do not have to eat Salami. Mushrooms. Pepperoni. Vegetarian... bits. *(Pause.)* Bacon. Chicken. Pineapple. Ham. Anchovies. Artichokes. Bean sprouts. Caviar. Crayfish. Eggplants. Oysters. Scallops. Shrimp. Zucchini. Goat cheese. Or Dandelion Greens. Get off this beach. Then the woods. "Put your best foot forward."

(Taylor looks down at her feet, putting one forward, and then the other, walking in a diagonal line towards the edge of the stage.)

But they are identical . One step after another.

She moves closer to the edge of the stage. Becoming stronger all the time.

Speaking defiantly.)

Salami. Mushroom. Pepperoni. Vegetarian. Bacon. Chicken. Pineapple. Ham. Anchovie. Artichoke. Bean sprout. Caviar. Crayfish. Eggplant. Oyster. Scallops. Shrimp. Zucchini. Goat cheese. And Dandelion Greens.

(Pause.)

I do not have to eat any of them. And if I come to the precipice...

(Looking down over the edge of the stage, but not retreating)

If I come to the precipice. I will just—I will just have to—I will just have to keep my balance.

(She puts out her arms to balance herself and keeps walking. Exit.)

Scene 12: Paul and Taylor Connect

PAUL

Hey. You're here early. You don't work until this afternoon, right?

TAYLOR

I am trying to keep my balance.

(Reading it off his name tag.)

Paul Jacobs. Paul Jacobs. That is ten percent like Indiana Jones.

PAUL

(Trying unsuccessfully to unlock the door of the Nature Centre.)

Sometimes June calls me PJ.

TAYLOR

What is June's last name?

PAUL

Jacobs. When we got married she said June Jacobs had a nice ring.

TAYLOR

June Jacobs. I had a gerbil named June. Doesn't she like her name now? June Jacobs?

PAUL

(Pause.)

She doesn't like much of anything now.

(He tries another key in the lock but it doesn't work either.)

TAYLOR

Because she is sick. But she is getting better, right? She is getting better?

PAUL

(Looking at the keys then starting to try them all again.)

Of course. Of course she is.

TAYLOR

Eighty percent that she doesn't like much of anything. That leaves 20% left for liking. I am guessing that she still likes the ring as long as it fits.

PAUL

As long as it fits?

TAYLOR

As long as it fits on her finger.

PAUL

Oh, I see. Maybe.

(Pause.)

Or maybe not.

(He unsuccessfully tries another key.)

TAYLOR

Walnut, June, Charlotte and Hammy. Walnut, June, Charlotte and Hammy.

PAUL

None of these keys work! I just don't know what I'm doing!

TAYLOR

(Escalating.)

I don't want to think about the people swimming in the lake, right near all the fish.

PAUL

(Rattling the keys and the door.)

None them works! And every day,
every day when I come out here,

TAYLOR

And the idea that I could be—that I
might have to be out there swimming—
if that happened, I think I would get

PAUL

No. I've been up all night. I don't know how I'm going to—if she goes—someday, she will—she'll go and I don't know how I'll stand it.

TAYLOR

My dad went away. And now he lives in Cody, Wyoming. He writes me letters sometimes but I do not open them. He left on my birthday.

PAUL

(Trying the keys again.)

Your dad left.

TAYLOR

On my birthday.

PAUL

(Suddenly focusing on what she is saying.)

On your birthday? Your dad left on your birthday?

TAYLOR

I was eight. Now I am eighteen years, six months, and four days.

PAUL

(Pause.)

My dad left on my seventh birthday. *(He fingers the package of cigarettes.)*

TAYLOR

Did he go to Wyoming?

PAUL

Nope. *(Pause.)* He...uh, he died.

TAYLOR

(Pause.)

Being dead is just as bad as being away.

PAUL

Depends on your perspective.

TAYLOR

Oh, I see. Yes. If you're the person whose dead or away you would rather just be away.

PAUL

Or dead.

TAYLOR

No.

(Pause.)

How did he die?

PAUL

Rope around the neck.

TAYLOR

Oh.

(Pause.)

Well that's a shitty thing to do.

PAUL

(Lost in his thoughts for a moment.)

It's inevitable, really. What's the sense of fighting it. Maybe it's just better to give in.

Acknowledge that it's going to happen.

(Turning toward the Nature Centre as if to go in, but realizing he hasn't got the right keys.)

Sorry, Taylor. You've got to make some concessions for me.

TAYLOR

Concessions.

PAUL

I don't even know what day it is.

TAYLOR

It is Thursday, July 7. Why do you carry that package of cigarettes around when you never smoke them?

PAUL

How do you know I don't?

TAYLOR

You smell like you don't.

PAUL

Huh. Well, you're right. I don't smoke them. But I could if I wanted. If I felt like it.

TAYLOR

If you felt like it.

PAUL

That's right. I could. If I wanted.

TAYLOR

If you wanted to smoke them, you could.

PAUL

I could. I could. I just don't.

(Pause.)

He smoked this brand all the time.

TAYLOR

All the time.

PAUL

Yup. They belonged to him. I—I kind of like the smell.

(Pause.)

And I could smoke them if I wanted. If the time was right. Or I could leave them alone. Right now I'm leaving them alone.

TAYLOR

That's like putting your best foot forward.

PAUL

Maybe it is. Maybe. It. Is.

(Pause.)

One time my cat got ahold of the package and ate some of the cigarettes. He was pretty sick.

TAYLOR

You could be sick too if you ate them. Or smoked them.

PAUL

If I get tired of putting my best foot forward I could just smoke one of them.

TAYLOR

Don't do it. Think about something else. Think about your cat.

PAUL

Chicory Tip. That's what we call him.

(Rubbing his eyes.)

Look, I have to run back and get my other keys. Could you stay here and tell anyone who comes along that I will be right back to open up?

TAYLOR

Anyone who comes along?

PAUL

Everyone. And I'll be right back.

(Paul exits.)

Scene 13 Taylor and Paul Start to Love Each Other

TAYLOR

(Calling out to the audience.)

Paul Jacobs will be right back.

(Pause, and then speaking slowly, as if to herself.)

Paul Jacobs looks like Indiana Jones. He is married to a woman named June who is sick and possibly dying, and he has a cat named Chicory Tip. His father committed suicide. He carries around cigarettes but he does not smoke them. He knows a lot about plants and animals.

(Pause.)

And Paul Jacobs knows how to listen.

(Pause.)

And what I know about Kody is that he is my—at least, I thought he was my—

(Anxiously.)

I am not sure if he is. Or is not. I do not even know if we have had a first date. I think it might be

happening on Saturday.

(Pause. Then speaking very quickly.)

Once my mom and dad had a big fight and my dad drove me around and around. We went past the pet store two times. On the third time we went in and I asked for a cat. My dad said no. I asked for other pets. He said no. I asked for a gerbil. He said yes and we bought a gerbil. My first gerbil. His name was Walnut. Walnut was the best thing my Dad ever bought for me.

(Pause.)

Walnut, June, Charlotte and Hammy.

(Calming down.)

Walnut. June. Charlotte. And Hammy.

(Pause. Quietly.)

I miss him. I miss my dad.

PAUL

(Hurrying back with the key and catching the last sentence.)

Your dad never contacts you?

TAYLOR

(Considering.)

No.

(Pause.)

He just sends me letters.

PAUL

(Unlocking the door.)

Letters are something.

TAYLOR

Are they?

PAUL

(From inside.)

Yeah. Letters are better than nothing.

TAYLOR

They are unpredictable.

PAUL

(Coming out with his shovel.)

Like a package of cigarettes.

TAYLOR

No they are not like that! Don't say that! Don't say that!

PAUL

Sorry. I'm sorry, Taylor.

(He's transplanting something into the terrarium.)

I'm in a bad spot. A bad space. The more I try...Every day I put a new one in and in the morning another one is missing.

TAYLOR

At least you know what you have to do. You know what you have to do. And you are doing it.

PAUL

It all feels so futile. And when I think about choosing between dying and living—

PAUL and TAYLOR

(Unison.)

—What I would choose—

TAYLOR

—Is living. I would choose living.

PAUL

(Yearningly.)

I know.

Scene 14: Penny Tries Sabotages Taylor's First Day of Work

So They Can Leave Wasquesiu

(Taylor is sitting on her bed. Penny is pacing.)

PENNY

Anyways, you shouldn't have said that to Danny.

TAYLOR

Well, it was true.

PENNY

(Angrily.)

Just because it's true doesn't mean you should have said it.

TAYLOR

How come he is allowed to say it to you, but I am not allowed to say it to him.

PENNY

Danny says a lot of things that people shouldn't say. It doesn't make him a bad person.

(Under her breath).

Maybe it does make him a bad person. Maybe. It. Does.

(Pause.)

So do *you* think I'm fat?

TAYLOR

I do not know how to answer that. Danny is a shitty bimbo and he should take care of himself.

PENNY

(Looking at her watch.)

Never mind about that now. My break is over and I've got to get back. And it's almost time for you to go to work. One o'clock sharp, right?

(Shifting gears.)

Your first job! I still can't believe it, Taylor.

TAYLOR

Believe it!

PENNY

And Taylor, there's nothing to be anxious about.

TAYLOR

I am not anxious.

PENNY

Well, good, because you don't need to be.

TAYLOR

I am not.

PENNY

There's really nothing to be anxious about.

TAYLOR

(Yelling.)

I am not anxious!

PENNY

Well, I wouldn't blame you if you were. Anxious, I mean. Anyone'd be anxious on their first day.

TAYLOR

Not me.

PENNY

I'm sure—what's the name of the manager?

TAYLOR

I forget. I forget! She—

PENNY

(Interrupting.)

—I'm sure the manager will tell you what you need to know. If she has time.

TAYLOR

Walnut, June, Charlotte, and Hammy. Hammy was the last one. My suitcase smells like him.

PENNY

Don't start with that, Taylor. Everything'll be okay. And...we could go back to Saskatoon a little bit early. You know, if things don't work out so well...

TAYLOR

No. There is not going to be another change of plans.

PENNY

(Under her breath.)

Shit.

(Muttering.)

Well, we'll see. We will just have to see about that.

TAYLOR

Swearing.

PENNY

Never mind.

TAYLOR

That is impossible.

PENNY

Today is a big day for you.

TAYLOR

Today is Thursday July 7. It will last for 24 hours, the same size as any other—

PENNY

—Tomorrow we should have a girls' night. Wouldn't you like that? We could see an early movie. Or... *(she swallows)* a play. I'll make a concession and see that play with you, Taylor.

TAYLOR

A concession? You can make a concession for me?

PENNY

Tomorrow! 7:30. It'll be like a date.

TAYLOR

It is not like a date.

PENNY

I'd better get back. Don't be late.

(Starting to leave, then turning back to ask Taylor.)

Do you really think I don't look fat?

TAYLOR

I do not know how to answer that.

(Penny exits.)

Scene 15 Taylor Is Attracted to Kody

KODY

(Walks onto the beach and sees Taylor pushing the swing.)

Hey. Hey, there you are. Are we still on for Saturday? Like...

TAYLOR

Saturday.

KODY

What about tomorrow. Like... there's a dance tomorrow night.

TAYLOR

No, not that. Not a dance.

KODY

How come? I bet you are a great *(moving behind her)*... dancer. In fact *(he pulls her back onto the swing)* you'd be...the hottest girl there.

(Pause. Twisting the swing.)

And Saturday night is a long time away from now.

TAYLOR

Fifty-four hours.

(He twists harder.)

KODY

What are you doing this afternoon? Like right now?

TAYLOR

(Puts her feet down to try and stop him.)

I don't know. I can't remember!

KODY

Maybe you're free. Maybe you're not doing anything... maybe you'd like to... *(twists more)*

TAYLOR

No! I have somewhere—there's somewhere I have to be. Work. I have to go to work.

(She stumbles off the swing and starts walking.)

KODY

(Following along behind her.)

To work?!

TAYLOR

(Dizzy.)

At the bookstore. The bookstore.

KODY

Oh, the bookstore! You're a...a *reader!*

TAYLOR

(Back in control.)

I read when I want to. When it suits me.

KODY

You'd rather read than...dance?

TAYLOR

No, I like to do a lot of other things.

KODY

You do? You like a lot of other things? Like... *(He begins circling her.)*

TAYLOR

I just said I did, didn't I? I like to do a lot of things.

KODY

(Over her shoulder.)

A lot of other things. Maybe you'd like to do those things... with me. Like maybe today...

TAYLOR

Not today.

KODY

Then tomorrow...

TAYLOR

As long as we're not on the beach. Maybe I would. Maybe. I. Would.

KODY

Not on the beach, though. You wouldn't want to do them on the beach.

TAYLOR

I just said I didn't.

KODY

Well, see you later, then. Like...see you around.

TAYLOR

Sooner rather than later. Sooner rather than later.

Scene 16: Penny Decides They Should Leave Waskesiu

(Taylor and her mother are sitting side by side on the bench.)

PENNY

Taylor, I told you to be nicer to Danny!

TAYLOR

I do not need to be nice to him.

PENNY

You do. Just try. Try to get along.

TAYLOR

Danny is a shitty bimbo. He should not be saying those things to you. He has bad loudness.

PENNY

Honey, it's complicated. People sometimes yell when they're mad, when they're in a relationship and just trying to figure things out...

TAYLOR

It is more complicated than learning to write.

PENNY

Never mind. Give him a break, that's all I'm asking. Anyways...

(Falsely positive.)

Soon you have to go to work. And don't forget about the date.

TAYLOR

What does it mean when someone says, “*See you around*”?

PENNY

What? Who said that?

TAYLOR

This boy.

PENNY

A boy? What boy?

TAYLOR

I don’t know. I hope he likes...I don’t know. I don’t know what he likes. Or doesn’t like.

PENNY

Taylor, we talked about this. I don’t want you hooking up with someone you don’t know.

TAYLOR

I am not hooking up with someone I don’t know.

PENNY

And you need to tell me which boy, or boys, are pestering you! Before I lose my mind!

—It’s just as well we might be out of here. Maybe we should think about doing the splits.

TAYLOR

I am working at the bookstore for the whole summer.

PENNY

Things can change.

TAYLOR

No! Don’t say that! Don’t ever say that!

PENNY

And no more trail walks unless I give you permission. NO MORE ANYTHING!

TAYLOR

No more YELLING. NO MORE YELLING.

PENNY

Never mind about that. Never mind about that now.

(Taylor walks toward the Nature Centre.)

PENNY

Don't forget! Don't be late!

(Taylor exits.)

Because I have had just about enough. I have had just about enough of everything. I'll give him one more day, and then decide. But probably we'll go. Yeah. Shit. I think it's time to go.

Scene 17: Taylor Experiences Life

(Taylor's mother is sitting on the bench waiting for Taylor so they can go to the play. Every now and then she looks at her watch. Taylor is walking towards her but her progress is interrupted by Kody. He is carrying burgers in a bag.)

KODY

I've been waiting for you.

TAYLOR

Are you my boyfriend? Are we hooking up?

KODY

Hooking up? That's more like it.

TAYLOR

Put your best foot forward. No time like the present. Difficult but possible. Difficult but possible.

KODY

Hey, my aunt and uncle have gone to Regina. They won't be back until tomorrow. For sure this time. Like...do you want to come over and hang out?

TAYLOR

(Counting his words: nine. Speaking uncertainly.)

I do not want to wait for Christmas. Okay.

(Kody and Taylor walk along together.)

KODY

How come you never look at me.

TAYLOR

Why would I look when I know where you are?

KODY

(Laughs and holds her hand. They walk to the cabin.)

Do you want to eat now or something else?

TAYLOR

(Looking down at the burgers and wrinkling her nose.)

Something else. Hard by the yard.

(Taylor's mother looks at her watch, stands up, and walks around the bench. She glances right and left, looks at her watch again, and then comes to the front of the stage to look out into the audience for her daughter. Then she turns her back and looks upstage.)

Hang out. What does that mean? Hang it out to dry. Hang it all. Hang it. Hanging. How did it

happen?

KODY

Why don't you come closer?

TAYLOR

Okay. Is your last name—

KODY

(Moving closer. Music plays and he sings along.)

Let's just get this party started...

TAYLOR

Not a beach party. Not a birthday party.

Scene 18 Taylor and Paul Kiss

(Taylor is following Paul on a nature trail. It is early evening and the light is soft.

It is difficult terrain—possibly vertical. They are both breathing heavily.)

TAYLOR

I am worried that I might already be an adult without knowing it. Except that is impossible. I think that is impossible. A person would know. And I don't feel like—I don't feel any diff—

PAUL

—Sometimes she seems a little better but sometimes she's worse. She hasn't left the house all week.

TAYLOR

I know a play about someone like that.

PAUL

Someone who doesn't want to leave the house?

TAYLOR

In *The Birthday Party*. Stanley doesn't even want to leave his room. Someone is coming in a van and Stanley is afraid because he doesn't know what will be in the van.

PAUL

Like those letters from your Dad.

TAYLOR

No! It is not at all like that!

PAUL

Isn't it?

TAYLOR

No. Maybe. I am not going to be like Stanley! He was afraid of everything. I am not going to be like that. I am not going to be like Stanley, that's for sure.

PAUL

It's like she's given up.

TAYLOR

I am not going to be like that.

PAUL

What are you most afraid of? What are you most afraid of, Taylor?

TAYLOR

(Pause.)

Birthday parties. Being on the beach. Foods I hate. Being stuck on that swing. The future.

PAUL

(Pause.)

So am I. I am afraid of the future, too.

TAYLOR

The future is like —

PAUL AND TAYLOR

(Unison.)

A precipice.

TAYLOR

—It is like a precipice and when I—

PAUL AND TAYLOR

(Unison.)

—see what is at the bottom I will either be terrified or—

PAUL

—be okay with it. I might be okay with it.

PAUL and TAYLOR

(Unison.)

Or not.

PAUL

It's unpredictable.

TAYLOR

Yes. And I could be falling—

PAUL AND TAYLOR

(Unison.)

— over it.

PAUL

I think about that, too. About falling. Sometimes when I'm sleeping I wake up—

TAYLOR AND PAUL

(Talking in unison and then continuing, stumbling, and helping each other.)

I wake up and I am falling—

PAUL

I am falling over the precipice—

TAYLOR

—over the precipice—

PAUL AND TAYLOR

(Unison.)

—and into the—

TAYLOR

—into the darkness that I know is the future.

PAUL

—and I am—

TAYLOR

—and I am—

(They are standing face to face now, and grip each other by the elbows, steadying each other.)

PAUL and TAYLOR

(Unison.)

Trying. And I am trying not to be afraid.

(Paul and Taylor lean in to each other and Taylor lightly kisses him on the lips and he lets her.)

Scene 19: Penny Tells Taylor They're Leaving

(Taylor is on the swing. Kody is standing behind her. Penny and Paul enter the stage from different directions.)

PENNY

There you are. I've been looking all over.

TAYLOR

(To Penny.)

I do not have to be nice to him.

(To Kody.)

I do not have to be nice to anyone.

(To Paul.)

Unless I want to.

KODY

Hey.

PENNY

Well, aren't you going to introduce us?

TAYLOR

No.

KODY

Like...

PENNY

Taylor!

TAYLOR

Kody. His name is Kody.

PAUL

Excuse me Taylor, could I have a moment?

(Reaches out his hand to Penny.)

I'm Paul Jacobs. I work with your daughter. Could I have just a minute to speak with her?

TAYLOR

You do not have to ask her permission.

KODY

Like...I'll just see you there, okay? But...hurry up. They won't be back this time, I promise. It was just because they had a flat tire. But it's good now. So...

(He exits.)

PENNY

Hi. So you work with Taylor. I'm glad for her to have the experience even if it's only for a few days.

TAYLOR

It is not only for a few days. It is until the end of the summer.

PENNY

Well...that's what I need to talk to you about.

PAUL

If I could just speak with you for a minute, Taylor?

TAYLOR

I do not know who was first.

PENNY

Sometimes contracts have to be broken. I'm sure you can hire someone else...

PAUL

Well, I didn't actually hire her...the manager...

TAYLOR

Contracts cannot be broken! And when I am an adult, I can make my own summer plans. And I might already be one! More than once!

PENNY

What are you talking about?

TAYLOR

First there was kissing Kody and then there was kissing—

PAUL

—That's what I need to talk to you about.

PENNY

Kody? I think I've seen him before. What's his last name?

TAYLOR

Maybe... *Wyoming*.

PAUL

Taylor, I'll be at the Nature Centre. Please come and talk to me when you have a moment...

(Backs away.)

PENNY

(Angrily.)

That's ridiculous, Taylor! His last name is not *Wyoming*. You either know this boy or you don't!

TAYLOR

Maybe he is my boyfriend and maybe he isn't! I am not really sure. But he might be.

PENNY

I'm trying to be patient, Taylor. I really am! Thank God we are going home tomorrow.

TAYLOR

What? What are you talking about? You are lying. We are not going home tomorrow! We are not! Because I—I don't—*(she becomes incoherent and stands up on the swing.)*

PENNY

Stop it! Get control of yourself, Taylor. We are definitely going home and that's the truth.

TAYLOR

YOU ARE NOT THE BOSS OF ME!

(Jumps off the swing and runs. Penny tries to follow but soon Taylor is on the trail and climbing while Penny cannot follow in her high heels.)

Scene 20: Everyone is Running

(Slow motion. Taylor runs away from Penny, Kody, and Paul as they all give chase.)

PENNY

Taylor, where are you!

PAUL

Taylor! We need to talk!

KODY

Taylor! They're still gone! Where are you?

TAYLOR

Gerbils are rodents. They can also be described as small mammals. They are nocturnal, and although they make good pets, they make noise in their cages at night. They drum with their feet against the metal floor. This is their best way of communicating.

(Taylor runs. Then she walks. Evening comes. Taylor sits down and rocks. She begins to wail and cry until a wolf pack howls and she sits still to listen. Darkness falls.)

Scene 21: Taylor Realizes that She Has the Power to Choose

(As the sun rises, Taylor begins to move her arms and legs. She is disheveled, with branches in her hair, and a streak of mud across one cheek. She has been crying. As she speaks, she begins to re-trace her footsteps out of the woods.)

TAYLOR

The rodent is the most successful of modern mammals. In Asia and Africa there are over eighty species of rat-like rodents divided into two categories: jirds and gerbils. In 1935, twenty pairs were captured near the Anjur river in East Mongolia. Four breeding pairs were imported to America.

(Pause.)

According to known facts about how long other animals have spent on the geological record,

gerbils should live until AD fifty million.

PENNY

(A voice in the distance.)

Taylor. TAYLOR!

TAYLOR

(Turning in the opposite direction.)

I am not talking to you. *(Under her breath.)* Not a whit. Not a bit. Not an inkling. Not a tad. The fat-tailed gerbil of North Africa has a tail that resembles a small sausage.

(Closes her eyes.)

I am not talking to you!

(Other voices call Taylor but she does not answer. She starts walking again. Opens her eyes.)

I have been here before. And I know the way back.

(She eventually approaches Paul outside the Nature Centre. He is sitting on the steps.)

TAYLOR

Am I late? What time is it?

PAUL

Taylor! What happened to you? You look like—oh my God, my God, you've been in the woods all night! They said—we've all been looking!

TAYLOR

I did not run for very long. I mostly walked.

PAUL

But you're all right? You're okay? *(He goes over to her.)* The Ranger came by this morning and asked if anyone had seen you but I didn't think—we didn't know—Taylor, was it about me?

TAYLOR

Am I late for work?

PAUL

(Holding her hand in his.)

It's okay. You don't have to work today because they can— Are you...you're not hurt?

(Penny storms up to them.)

PENNY

You stay right there, young lady.

(To Paul.)

And you get away from her.

TAYLOR

(Turning towards her mother as Paul jumps back.)

You are behaving very badly! I have work to do. And I am going inside to do my shift.

PENNY

You will tell me everything that's gone on, and where you spent the night, and then we're going to tell the same story to the RCMP!

TAYLOR

Why would I talk to them? I have not broken the law.

PENNY

Because— I've been looking for you all—all night!

TAYLOR

I was running away and then I was walking back. And it was my decision. I could run more if I wanted to. If the time was right. Or I could stop running. Right now I am going to stop running.

PAUL

It's time everybody stopped running. And I just want to say—

PENNY

—Look at the bites on your face and hands. And your legs! You slept in the woods?

TAYLOR

It was like being in church only louder and itchier.

PENNY

You must be starving. Come on. I'll get you something. And then we'll just drive home today.

TAYLOR

(Looking at Paul.)

I am not driving home today! It is both possible and necessary that I stay here. This is my first job and I am eighteen years, six months, and eleven days and it is about time that I made my own decisions. I am not a child, Mom!

PAUL

(Softly.)

I'm sorry, Taylor. I was out of line. Before.

TAYLOR

It was okay. I liked kissing with you. And it was different than—

PENNY

—Kissing? With you! Oh my God! You pervert! You child molester! You get away from my daughter! I mean further away!

PAUL

Just wait a minute. Just wait a freakin' minute!

TAYLOR

(Yelling.)

Stop it! Don't say that! DON'T!

PENNY

(To Paul.)

She won't be back! She won't be back here!

TAYLOR

(Firmly, getting control of herself.)

I am working here until the end of August! And you are not the boss of me, Mom!

(Everyone moves into an anguished position and freezes.)

Scene 22: Taylor Makes the Plans

(Taylor is swinging and Penny is pacing.)

PENNY

And Paul hasn't been alone with you anywhere?

TAYLOR

Of course not. Where would he have been alone with me?

PENNY

That's what I want to know. I want to know exactly what this Paul character has done to you.

TAYLOR

It is Stanley that is the character, not Paul. Stanley is the character. Paul is real and he is my—

PENNY

What has he said to you! Just answer me that!

TAYLOR

It would be a very long conversation if I were to repeat everything Paul has said to me. We talk about gerbils, and plants, and people committing suicide, and the Queen, and opening the letters, and his wife June, and studying Biology, and cigarettes, and falling over the precipice, and what is possible and necessary. And difficult and possible.

PENNY

I knew it! I knew he was doing inappropriate things!

TAYLOR

I knew it! I knew it! Paul does not do inappropriate things! I knew it!

PENNY

You are not to see that Paul person again! I'm going to get a restraining order on him!

TAYLOR

I do not have to listen to you! You are a liar. You never really had a contract with Danny, did you? Or a contract with me? Legal and binding. Legal and binding! You are a promise breaker! And you do not know anything about what is possible or necessary and just because you are my mother you think you can be the boss of me. You are not! I am the boss of myself. And I am not going back to Saskatoon and you cannot make me or I will run away again and keep running until I am so far away from you that—that—

(She throws herself off the swing and faces Penny.)

PENNY

Stop, stop, Taylor. Okay. Okay! You're—you're right.

(Hiccupping a little and starting to cry, grabbing the ropes of the swing to steady herself.)

I am not the boss of you. You're right, you are eighteen, and I shouldn't treat you like a child.

But—

(She sinks down into the swing herself.)

TAYLOR

—I will only listen to you if you stop lying to me and if you forget about the restraining order because Paul has not done anything wrong. He just listens when I talk and sometimes talks back. In a good way. In a good way, Mom!

PENNY

I don't know what to think. I just don't know what to think...

TAYLOR

And when I opened the letter, it said that Dad wants me to try another visit. He wants me to visit him again. And I think I might go.

PENNY

Well of course you can go. He's your father. Don't act like I've prevented you from—

TAYLOR

—I just think I might go.

PENNY

Because God knows I've tried to—

TAYLOR

—Mom. I just think I might go. I am deciding about that.

PENNY

And nobody here has hurt you? In any way?

TAYLOR

But life is about that. You sometimes get hurt. But you just have to deal with it.

PENNY

What? I want you to tell me.

(Pause.)

Because if anyone ever does anything to you that you don't want them to, I need you to tell me about it.

TAYLOR

I can take care of myself. Difficult but possible.

PENNY

(Swinging.)

TAYLOR

And what happens is my decision because I am an adult. It doesn't have to do with having a boyfriend! If I want to be an adult I can be an adult. And if I want to visit my dad I can visit my dad. And if I want to stay here in Waskesiu, I can stay here in Waskesiu.

PENNY

You wouldn't.

TAYLOR

If I wanted to, I could. I could, Mom.

PENNY

But you wouldn't!

TAYLOR

I could. Mom. I could.

PENNY

Okay. Okay, I know. I know you could. You're eighteen, you're old enough to make your own decisions, but—

TAYLOR

And you are not the boss of me.

PENNY

Okay, I am not the boss of you. But—

TAYLOR

And that's it.

PENNY

But—

TAYLOR

And that's it, Mom. I am not the boss of you either. And that's all.

PENNY

But—

TAYLOR

—And that's all, Mom.

PENNY

But it's more complicated than that, Taylor. You see, me and Danny are...

TAYLOR

More complicated than learning to write. I get it. Having a boyfriend is hard work. And sometimes you think you have one but he doesn't make you feel—.

PENNY

—And now I have to find...I have to start all over again...Why do I have the feeling that I'm always just starting. That my life is a series of beginnings that never, ever...

TAYLOR

Sometimes what a person wants is not what they can have.

PENNY

Time is running out. Its feels as if time is running out!

TAYLOR

Time is nothing like money. Or cigarettes. And I will decide for myself what I will do.

PENNY

I want to leave on Friday. I just can't stay here any longer. Not with him. Not with him, Taylor.

TAYLOR

I will take that into consideration.

PENNY

I just—I just don't seem capable of choosing someone that—I keep making the same mistake.

Over and over. I just keep making it!

TAYLOR

Catch and release.

PENNY

What?

TAYLOR

Catch and release, that's what it's called. And you can catch others. Other boyfriends. You can catch more of them. Until you find a good one. And then you can be the belle of the ball.

PENNY

Can I?

TAYLOR

I think so. Yes. And so can I.

PENNY

But never mind about that now.

TAYLOR

Never mind. Never mind. Mom. Gerbil males are allowed to stay in the breeding nest.

PENNY

What? What is that supposed to mean? Why would you even say that!

TAYLOR

Gerbil males are allowed. *(Pause.)* Do you think Dad will ever—that he will ever—

PENNY

No. Taylor, I thought we'd been through this enough. It's just not...

TAYLOR

Okay. I understand. I understand, Mom. Sometimes you think you like someone. Then you discover that you do not like him. You only like how he makes you feel. But you do not really like *him*. And that's not a person you want to—to keep. Especially if he talks in nines.

Scene 23: Taylor Decides

(Taylor and Paul are sitting on the steps of the Nature Centre. The terrarium is lying on its side with the earth dumped out.)

TAYLOR

Don't give up.

PAUL

I can't help it.

TAYLOR

Is June dying?

PAUL

(Pause.)

Maybe.

TAYLOR

None of us knows exactly how much of the way we have come or how much of the way we have left.

(Pause.)

Just because your father died and June is dying does not mean you should die.

(Pause.)

I opened a letter.

PAUL

What?

TAYLOR

I opened a letter. From my Dad. You were right. It was unpredictable. But I did it. And I might keep opening them. I think I'm going to keep opening them.

(Pause.)

On my eighth birthday I was hiding under the bed and my dad wanted me to come out and be polite to my friends and my mom said, "Just leave her there, she's not feeling well," but my Dad

grabbed me by the shoes and pulled me out and dragged me out, and I was screaming and crying, and one of the other girls said, “Here comes the Freaker!” That’s what the kids had started calling me at school. *The Freaker.*

(Pause.)

And when we were arguing with my mom, you said, “Just a freakin’ minute.” I thought it was the same thing. It sounded just the same.

(Pause.)

After the kids left my birthday party Mom and Dad had a big fight and they were yelling and yelling and then he left and Mom took a pair of scissors and cut up all of his clothes and threw them out the window and she was still yelling. She *(Taylor gulps)* just cut them up. She cut up all his clothes!

PAUL

(Quietly.)

I’m sorry.

TAYLOR

They looked like birds, flying down, except they had no beaks.

PAUL

I’m sorry, Taylor.

TAYLOR

When I opened the bathroom cabinet, his shelf was empty. His shelf was empty and that...that one thing. That empty shelf. That empty shelf. Changed. Everything.

(She begins to put the earth back into the terrarium. He watches her for a minute and then he helps.)

The only party that might be worse than a birthday party in my opinion would be a beach party.

PAUL

I think you are not going to give up.

TAYLOR

Neither are you.

PAUL

Taylor... about what happened the other day...

TAYLOR

What happened?

PAUL

What I said about that kiss...

TAYLOR

Is it because of me? You think I'm a weirdo. A—a Freaker.

PAUL

No, that's not it. I was out of line. Because...because I'm married.

TAYLOR

Oh. I know that. I know that marriage means concession. And commitment. Concession and commitment.

PAUL

Maybe. Maybe, yes.

TAYLOR

You are my friend. And I think for five seconds you were my boyfriend. Anyways, boyfriend or not, I have crossed over.

PAUL

Crossed over?

TAYLOR

It is like a bridge. For a while you are on a bridge between being a child and being an adult. But once a person is an adult, there is no going back. And I am not. Going. Back.

PAUL

I get it. Yes.

TAYLOR

(Pause.)

I do not know what to say next.

PAUL

What are you going to do?

TAYLOR

I might be going with Mom. Or I might live with my dad. I haven't decided. What are you going to do?

PAUL

I'm just going to keep trying.

TAYLOR

Some things are just out of our control. But some things are not.

PAUL

Yes.

TAYLOR

Even if there's a precipice.

PAUL

Especially if there's a precipice.

TAYLOR

Right foot forward.

PAUL

It's worth a try.

TAYLOR

I never saw that orchid.

PAUL

Not yet.

TAYLOR

But I can keep looking.

PAUL

Yes.

TAYLOR

I know what I have to do.

(Paul goes inside the Nature Centre.)

I know what I have to do. And now I just have to do it.