

Wild Orchid: A Two-Act Play

Bev Brenna, 2020

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Author Bio

Bev Brenna is an award winning Saskatchewan author and 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 play is an adaptation of her realistic fiction novel *Wild Orchid* (Red Deer Press/Fitzhenry & Whiteside)—the first book in a trilogy about Taylor Jane Simon, a young woman with autism.

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 growing up? 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 independence, celebrating the differences among us as well as the universals we share.

Characters

TAYLOR, an eighteen year old girl; slim; 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. In one pocket of her dress she carries a copy of Harold Pinter’s play “The Birthday Party.” In the other pocket she carries a bunch of unopened letters.

PENNY, Taylor’s mother, 38 years old, pretty (shoulder length blonde hair with vivid striped highlights, brown eyes), sharp-tempered, at times vulnerable. She wears flashy outfits (no yellow) and high heels.

PAUL, a thirty year old park naturalist that looks like Indiana Jones; he wears khaki pants, a khaki shirt with a name tag “Paul” on one pocket, 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.

GARTH, Taylor’s father; he ages from 35—45 years old during his scenes in the play; he looks like Cat Stevens, wears jeans and a T shirt.

Setting

The play takes place in a car, on a bed, on a swing, in a forest, on a sidewalk, on a bench, and on the steps. Taylor’s father appears in cameo from Wyoming, writing letters at his old desk. 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: ACT I

Act I, Scene 1: Taylor and Penny's Drive Where Taylor Learns that Being an Adult

Means Having a Boyfriend

(Penny and Taylor are in a car; Penny is driving.)

PENNY

(Brightly.)

Well, here we go! Here we go!

(Taylor does not respond.)

We're going to have a great summer!

(Taylor does not respond.)

We're going to have a great summer, Taylor. Right? Right?!

TAYLOR

(Pause. Speaking flatly.)

That is incorrect. That is completely incorrect, Mom. *We* are not going to have a great summer because *I* am not going to have a great summer. I know this because there are two perspectives here and only 50% of us think what you think. 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,

when you're an adult, you can make your own summer plans. Until then, I get to do it for both of us. And Waskesiu isn't so bad! There are stores there, and a movie theatre...everything we need.

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

No sulking, now. No sulking, Taylor. This is a good chance. A good chance for me and Danny.

Don't you want that? A chance for me? Me and Danny? Don't you want me to be happy?

(Pause.)

Anyways, 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. We'll have fun! Do this one thing for me and you'll see.

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

You're in the red zone. RED! ZONE!

TAYLOR

(Pulling a book from her pocket.)

Stanley would not be happy moving to the lake. Stanley didn't even want to leave his bedroom.

PENNY

Stanley isn't real, Taylor. Stanley is a character in a play. It's Danny we're talking about! Danny and me!

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

Stop saying that. Stop it, Taylor.

(She puts a Barenaked Ladies' CD into the car stereo and music fills the car.

Taylor cocoons unhappily.)

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 have stripes or you do not 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? Would it be the end of the world?

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

What does it matter, then?

PENNY

I just care what he thinks. It's just part of having a boyfriend. 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

Having a boyfriend 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.

TAYLOR

Are there lots of boys at Waskesiu?

PENNY

Yes, of course. There will be all sorts of people.

(She turns off the baroque.)

TAYLOR

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

(Pause.)

When I am an adult, I can make my own summer plans. When I am an adult, I can make my own—and having a boyfriend is related to being—

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

Stop swearing! And don't call him that! Anyways "bimbo" isn't used for a man.

TAYLOR

Why not? What about a boy? Is it used for a boy?

PENNY

Never mind. Never mind, Taylor. (She looks briefly at her watch.) I can't believe we've only just started.

(Pause.)

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

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

Get the map and figure it out for yourself.

TAYLOR

(Taylor looks at the map and makes a number of complicated folds to isolate the exact spot.)

At any given moment it is difficult to know exactly how much of the way we have come or how much of the way we have left. Because we are moving. We are moving objects in space. 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 it, Taylor. I have to pass this car.

TAYLOR

Stop it, stop it. *(Pause.)* Stop talking. 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. New things. New things. Stanley wouldn't like all these new things. But 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? Shittly bimbo, shittly bimbo...

PENNY

Stop thinking about that, Taylor. Just stop it! Eventually we'll be there and once we're settled, everything'll be okay.

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.

Act I, Scene 2: First Letter to Taylor from Dad

GARTH

(Sitting at an old desk, writing a letter and reading as he writes.)

Dear Taylor. I miss you. But this is for the best...I know it will be your 6th birthday soon. I'm sorry I had to leave before your birthday party.

(He crumples up the letter, takes another sheet, and starts again.)

Dear Taylor. When you receive this I will have started my new job and hopefully be sending some money soon to you and your mom. See you soon, I promise. I wish you could come and live here. I'm sorry—I'm sorry I had to leave you and your mom but it was...

(He crumples up the letter, takes another sheet, and starts again.)

Dear Taylor. When you receive this I will have started my new job. Hopefully I'll be sending some money soon to you and your mom. See you soon, I promise. Please don't forget to write me and tell me what you are doing. Give Walnut an extra sunflower seed from me. Have a happy birthday, honey. Love, Dad.

Act I, Scene 3 : Taylor Melts Down

(Taylor is lying on her bed holding her copy of “The Birthday Party.”)

PENNY

(Coming into the room.)

See, that didn't take so long! We're here just in time for lunch!

TAYLOR

We drove for 3 hours and 11 minutes.

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

Danny talks in nines. He is a Shittly--

PENNY

--Stop saying that! Anyways, Danny's made a lot of concessions for me to come here.

TAYLOR

(Counting on her fingers to nine for each sentence.)

“If you had half a brain you'd remember that!”

“Jesus Christ did you ever see anything like it?”

“Oh My Sweet God does she ever stop yelling?”

PENNY

Never mind. Never mind, he has a lot on his mind right now. He's trying to run a business, you know.

DANNY

Danny is a Shittly—

PENNY

STOP SAYING THAT!

TAYLOR

And what about boys?

PENNY

Taylor, please stop talking like this. Just stop it!

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

—Never mind about that now. Let's unpack. No use waiting for Christmas.

TAYLOR

I did unpack.

PENNY

I'll help you unpack and then we can walk down to the beach.

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

TAYLOR

Will there be boys on the beach?

PENNY

Absolutely. There'll be people of all ages.

TAYLOR

That's impossible.

PENNY

—We'll unpack and look around. Two things. First unpack then look around.

TAYLOR

I will not see people of all ages. That's impossible. That's impossible, Mom! When I was six, I was six. When I was seven, I was seven. A person can't be a bunch of ages at the same time—

PENNY

Where is that nice swimsuit I bought you? And all the other things?

TAYLOR

Once I had a dad, and then I didn't.

PENNY

You still have a dad! You just don't want to remember him. Or read his letters.

TAYLOR

Letters are like a precipice. You never know what's there.

PENNY

Stop thinking about that precipice! Just think about how great it is here. At the beach! For our summer holiday!

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.)

—Where are all your clothes!

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

—TAYLOR!

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 that new stuff!

(She slams the suitcase shut.)

TAYLOR

New stuff. New everything.

(Darkly.)

One new thing can change it all.

PENNY

(Muttering to herself.)

Maybe we can find some things on sale in town. And I need some new lipstick. Lucky I don't have to work until 4. Danny was nice about that.

TAYLOR

“OK Jesus take a couple hours to your self.”

“But if you're late I swear to God Jesus.”

(She leans over and smells the suitcase.)

My suitcase smells like Hammy.

PENNY

Don't start! Shit! Don't start with that!

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? We could do calming or organizing. You choose. Calming or organizing?

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

(She fishes a package of gum out of her purse.)

Peppermint or Cinnamon?

TAYLOR

Snip snap! Snip snap! Taylor! Stop it. Stop! 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

Okay, shit, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Taylor. I should be more patient. I should. I know I should. But you've got to work with me on this. You've got to work with me, Taylor.

(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 am thinking of it!

PENNY

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

I know you don't like it here. But that doesn't mean—it doesn't mean the end of the world!

TAYLOR

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. With Danny. It's about commitment...And lots of people would give anything to—think of how it is for me—Come on! Chew some gum and it'll be okay.

TAYLOR

(Takes one stick of each kind. Chews.)

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.)

Let's just chalk this up to experience, okay? I should have packed for you.

TAYLOR

You are 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.)

I liked the old lipstick, Mom!

(Pause.)

Mom...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!

I'll make sure you get just the right colour. Now you're talking! This'll be great!

TAYLOR

I'd like some lipstick just like yours. Just like yours when you met Danny.

PENNY

(To herself.)

When I met Danny. When I met Danny I'd been thinking it was all over. That night I was sitting at the bar drinking...*(she looks at Taylor and says quickly)*...uh, I was drinking one coke after another. And he saw me there and...

(Dreamily.)

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

(Brightly.)

So...Let's go. If you just your best foot forward everything'll be okay.

(She exits.)

TAYLOR

(Looking at her feet.)

But they are identical. They are both 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. But not quality. But not quality, Mom!

(Pause.)

It is hard to do the right thing. But I want to do it. 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.

Act I, Scene 4: Second Letter to Taylor from Dad

GARTH

(Sitting at an old desk, writing a letter and reading as he writes.)

Dear Taylor. I guess you've been pretty busy up there but I hope you are having fun. It's been a few years since I've seen you but your mom sends me your school pictures. Soon you'll be ten. I can hardly believe it! Your mom tells me that you were very brave at the doctor's, answering all those questions.

(Crumples up paper and throws it away)

Dear Taylor. I guess you've been pretty busy up there but I hope you are having fun. Things are pretty good here. My landlady has a cat. I am glad Walnut isn't here but if he was, he could probably beat up the cat and take over the place. Please write to me or at least draw me one of your great pictures. Do you still draw those pictures? Happy Birthday, Honey. Love, Dad.

Act I, Scene 5: Taylor Meets Kody

(Taylor is on a swing on the beach. 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 or talk in nines. 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 who is not a man named Danny.

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

Or else. Or else I could be stuck here forever.

(Pause. Swinging.)

Just like Stanley. He didn't want to leave his bedroom. But even though I don't like cornflakes, I wouldn't let them scare me. And I would eat them if I had to. Because I know that life is complicated. I know that. I know that it is.

(Pause.)

My mother always dates men that look the same. 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 I'm not going to let them scare me. First dates are like eating cornflakes.

(Pause.)

Or learning to write.

(Pause.)

It's going to be hard work. 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.

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

Hey.

KODY

Want some gum?

TAYLOR

Okay.

(She takes the package of Juicy Fruit, puts it in her pocket, and walks off stage.)

Act I, Scene 6: Taylor Meets Paul

(Taylor approaches Paul who is transplanting plants into a glass terrarium.)

TAYLOR

(Heaves a deep sigh.)

PAUL

Having a tough day?

TAYLOR

I am glad to be off that beach.

(She takes out two packages of gum and deliberates.)

PAUL

You're glad to be off the beach.

TAYLOR

(Popping peppermint gum into her mouth.)

Once I took a questionnaire online. 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." Then I answered all the other questions. I got a total of 85 points out of 100 and then I got the message.

PAUL

(Still bending over the terrarium.)

Ah. You got the message.

TAYLOR

The message that says, “Congratulations! You’re definitely autistic.” 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 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 with me in high school until I graduated and she became married and got onto 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 postcards to anyone.

TAYLOR

(Looking at the terrarium.)

What is growing in there?

PAUL

Bog varieties. A pitcher plant. And some sundew. They both catch insects.

TAYLOR

Insects?

PAUL

Yup. They're carnivorous. All these plants grow right here in the park.

TAYLOR

Right here?

PAUL

That's just what the Queen would ask.

(Smiling.)

This one is the Pitcher Plant. The leaves are hollow, and hold water. Insects drown and then the plant digests them.

TAYLOR

I do not like the smell of it. But that is probably because I am not an insect.

PAUL

Feel free to join us for a trail walk sometime. We also have a fish seining coming up.

TAYLOR

What?

PAUL

A fish seining.

TAYLOR

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

PAUL

We net fish to study them and then let them go. 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.)

Our schedule's right here on the door. We have trail walks every morning at ten.

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. 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.)

Act I, Scene 7: 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 then I found a swing. I met that boy. I met somebody who looks like Indiana Jones. I saw some bog varieties. Then I went into the Nature Centre and I chewed a lot of gum. And I saw a presentation about orchids. And I sat on a bench and reread "The Birthday Party." I am not sure I understand the whole thing yet but I think I understand a small percentage more. Like, I think I know what "the belle of the ball" means. And Mom, when a boy whistles at a girl, should the girl whistle back?

PENNY

A boy whistles at a girl in that play?

TAYLOR

No, the whistling 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. There's all sorts of fish here

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

I have already told you. The beach and the swing. The Nature Centre. The bench. In the play, Stanley never grew up. I do not want to be like that. I do not want to be like that, Mom!

PENNY

I don't know why you're so obsessed with that play. Anyways, you've lots of time, Taylor. There's no hurry to grow up. But whatever happens, you'll always be my little girl.

TAYLOR

Shut up! Shut up! I'm not listening to you! I am not listening!

PENNY

Taylor, just promise me one thing. Tell me before you go somewhere.

TAYLOR

I might go onto a nature trail sometime. It might be necessary. Possible and necessary.

PENNY

But don't go off without telling me.

TAYLOR

Okay!

PENNY

I mean it, Taylor! Don't go off without telling me!

TAYLOR

Okay! I said OKAY!

PENNY

Now I've gotta get back to work.

TAYLOR

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

chicken, pineapple, anchovie—

PENNY

(Interrupting.)

—How about some gum.

(She holds out a package of cinnamon gum.)

TAYLOR

(Takes the gum and pulls out her other two packages.)

Now which one would I like? Cinnamon for organizing, or juicy fruit for...for...

PENNY

(Interrupting.)

You should 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 to the other person.

TAYLOR

You had gum to begin with. You could have offered it to 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. I've really gotta get to work, now.

(She exits.)

TAYLOR

Peppermint for calming, cinnamon for organizing, and juicy fruit for...for....

(She takes a piece of juicy fruit.)

Oh!

(She smiles.)

Act I, Scene 8: Taylor Gives Kody the Wrong Message

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

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

Hey.

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

Hey.

KODY

Whatcha doing?

(Pause.)

Whatcha doing now? Like...

TAYLOR

Chewing gum.

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

KODY

(Watches her go. Mesmerized.)

What the heck?

Act I, Scene 9 Paul Notices Taylor

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

TAYLOR

Wild roses. Twin flower. Pink wintergreen. Grass of Parnassus. But what I really want to see is a wild orchid. That is the rarest of all.

PAUL

Are you studying biology?

TAYLOR

Studying biology?

PAUL

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

TAYLOR

University. Unfortunately I have not decided. I have not decided anything. Since I graduated from high school the future is—it's like a—

(Pause.)

My mother wants me to take a commercial cooking class and my grandmother thinks I should play chess.

(Pause.)

But cooking and chess are not good career options because I dislike both of them. Holy cow, those Marsh Marigolds are—

(Sneezes.)

—too yellow. I am not going to look at them 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.)

Because sometimes people get better and sometimes they don't.

PAUL

She's getting better!

TAYLOR

Okay. If you're sure.

PAUL

I just told you, she's getting better!

TAYLOR

I have a feeling that there could be a precipice just up ahead. But I'm going to keep going. I hope I see a wild orchid. I really hope I see an orchid today.

PAUL

(In difficult territory.)

I'm really not sure. I'm not sure I—

TAYLOR

You have to keep going. That's what I know.

PAUL

(Pause.)

Maybe. Maybe not.

TAYLOR

I do not like the Marsh Marigolds. And when I saw them I thought of Danny because his last name is Marsh. Shitty 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...you don't like Danny very much.

TAYLOR

Very much is not an appropriate descriptor. Much is a satisfactory amount all by itself.

(Pause.)

Bog Rosemary, Bog bean, Buck bean, Tamarack. Fireweed, Solomon's Seal, but no orchids (*she looks around*) yet. Just more Marsh Marigolds.

(She sneezes.)

Shittly Danny.

(Pause.)

Seeing an orchid would be difficult but possible.

(Pause.)

Difficult. But. Possible.

(Pause.)

Have you ever seen any orchids on this trail?

PAUL

(Looks at Taylor and smiles.)

Just one.

Act I, Scene 10: Third Letter to Taylor from Dad

GARTH

(Sitting at an old desk, writing a letter and reading as he writes.)

Dear Taylor. I miss you. I hope you are having a good year there in Saskatoon. I got a different job and so things are looking up. I will be sending you something soon for Christmas. I was sorry to hear about June, but I am glad that you got Charlotte. From what your mom has told me, she sounds like a good jumper. Maybe would you draw me a picture of her? Or maybe you're too old for that, now. But if you want to, you could. I'm always here, honey. Whenever you decide that it would be okay to connect. You could always write a letter sometime to tell me how you are doing. It's okay that you don't like to talk on the phone. I know that you never liked talking on the phone. But I hope you will write me someday. And forgive me. Forgive me for leaving, Taylor. I love you. I will never stop loving you. Happy 13th birthday, honey. A teenager! It's hard to believe! Dad.

Act I, Scene 11: Penny Forbids Taylor Dating a Stranger

(Taylor is swinging and flipping through the bunch of sealed envelopes she's taken out of her pocket. Penny is pacing around her.)

TAYLOR

(Yelling.)

It was my fourth trail walk. I was very smart on it and saw eighteen interesting plants common to the boreal forest.

PENNY

Never mind about that.

TAYLOR

I was disappointed not to see any orchids. Orchids can be shaped like buckets, slippers, helmets, and even flying ducks. To thrive, 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 go off.

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. And I just don't have time to—

TAYLOR

(Taking a deep breath.)

—There was no precipice after all. At least, not there. And anyways I can't fall off the earth because of gravity. But this conversation is not really about gravity, is it?

PENNY

What?

TAYLOR

This conversation is not really about gravity, is it, Mom?

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

You said to tell you when I went off the trail.

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 the whole way. You said not to go off the trail! And I didn't!

PENNY

O my God. Shit.

TAYLOR

Swearing.

PENNY

Taylor! I have to know where you are and that means you've got to let me know when you go places!

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

(Listens for a moment.)

No.

PENNY

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 too, when the van came to his house! In the play, he thought there might be a lawnmower in the van but he wasn't sure and so he was afraid—

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

I promise.

PENNY

(Applying lipstick.)

Good. 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 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. You can see by looking that red is much bolder, it offers much more of a statement.

TAYLOR

Is lipstick like putting your best foot forward? Is it, Mom?

PENNY

That's—that's maybe the smartest thing I've ever heard you say. 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 new 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 foot you start with. Either one is good.

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 we'll have a real makeover.

TAYLOR

I might not have a lot of time available because there is a bookstore inside the Nature Centre and

I am going to work there.

PENNY

A job? You want to apply for... a job in a bookstore?

TAYLOR

I already did it. I got the job.

PENNY

A job? You got a job? Taylor! Your first job! 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.

TAYLOR

—I will not be free, Mom, because the position pays 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 make my own choices—

PENNY

—Taylor, I'm so excited for you! It's just—you're growing up so fast.

TAYLOR

Good!

PENNY

It seems so...sudden.

TAYLOR

Eighteen years ago I was born and then I got a year older every year. Eighteen times. That is not what I would call 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—

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

Four hundred sixty two minutes...

PENNY

Fine. That's enough, now.

TAYLOR

One million—

PENNY

—Taylor, just promise me one thing. If that whistling boy comes into the bookstore when you are working, don'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. That is obvious.

(Anxiously.)

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

Act I, Scene 12: Kody Goes After Taylor

(Taylor is swinging.)

KODY

Hey. Hey, there. Like...

TAYLOR

(Stops swinging.)

Hey.

KODY

Hey.

TAYLOR

I think I know you. Have I seen you before?

KODY

You bet you have. I'm no stranger, right? I'm Kody. And you're Beautiful Girl. Right?

TAYLOR

If you say so.

KODY

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

TAYLOR

Do you want some gum? It might be better than cornflakes.

(She offers him the packages.)

KODY

Is that a hint? It's prob'ly the onions.

(He takes a piece of Juicy Fruit and grins.)

What are we waiting for?

TAYLOR

Not Christmas. I'm not waiting for Christmas.

(They exit together.)

Act I, Scene 13: 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. You're going to need 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.

(She takes out the Juicy Fruit and eats a piece.)

Do you want some?

PENNY

Where's the other gum I gave you?

TAYLOR

I just want to freshen my breath. I can taste the onions.

PENNY

What? What are you talking about? You never eat onions.

TAYLOR

No.

PENNY

We could get you a cute little pant suit.

TAYLOR

Auntie Margie was wearing a pant suit. I do not want one. Maybe we could buy some more Juicy Fruit.

PENNY

Oh, for heaven sake! (*Hopefully.*) Maybe...we could try a few things on? Just one new outfit, please, Taylor!

TAYLOR

One new thing! Could change! Everything!

PENNY

Stop.

TAYLOR

One new thing, Mom!

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

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

“Jesus Christ did you ever see anything like it?”

“Don’t try to boss me in my own house!”

“If you had half a brain you’d remember that!”

PENNY

Well, maybe it is time to go home. Just pull the plug. Maybe he does speak in nines. So you were right. You were right, Taylor! Are you happy now!

TAYLOR

No! No, I’m—I’m not happy! But I can’t go back to Saskatoon!

PENNY

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

I don’t know what you’re talking about!

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. Everything was different.

(Broken hearted.)

And now. Everything isn't that different.

TAYLOR

You're supposed to feel like the bell of the ball.

PENNY

I know.

(Pause.)

Something's going on here.

(Suspiciously.)

What's going on, Taylor?

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

We learned that a long time ago.

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

—And I am not a little kid, Mom. I am not.

PENNY

We could go back and have some pancakes. You've always liked pancakes, Taylor.

TAYLOR

I do not want pancakes from there. 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.

(She rubs her forehead.)

What could be funny about a dead dog...

(She starts to laugh.)

TAYLOR

See, it is funny!

(She laughs harder, and they have a helpless moment where they are laughing together..)

PENNY

Taylor. What am I going to do?

(Her phone rings. She answers it.)

Shit. Okay, I'll be right back. How did I know? Okay, okay, I'm coming. Right now.

TAYLOR

I could hear him. Swearing.

PENNY

I have to get back. It's time for my shift.

TAYLOR

I know.

PENNY

But we're not done this conversation.

TAYLOR

Will we ever be done?

(Penny exits.)

...Tomorrow, I will go to my job and...and...and I have no idea what comes next. I. Have. No. Idea. And the more I think about it, the more there's fear. Fear is rising up like a big fat cliff. It's right ahead of me. A precipice. I knew it. I knew it would be there. I knew the precipice would be there! And it's waiting for me! It's. Waiting. For. Me.

**Act I, Scene 14: 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 and counting the words to nine.)

“Jesus Christ did you ever hear anyone like her?”

Danny. *Bimbo. Shittly 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. And

there's going to be so many rules—just like the wheelbarrow in the van. Like the cornflakes.

(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.

(Brightens a little.)

I could be an adult without knowing it.

(Brightens a lot.)

Maybe I am. *(Deflates.)* Or maybe I am not.

(Pause.)

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

(Pause.)

Waskesiu is home to many wild orchids. *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, of course. I have been afraid of it my whole life. 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 stayed stuck. Stuck in Meg’s boarding house, stuck in his bedroom, stuck in *afraid*. 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. I think Stanley had autism and he didn’t want to deal with it.

(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.)

Even if there is a precipice dropping away into... making everything... it's going to be 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 can think about the orchids. And boys. Even if there is a prec... I am not going to think about that. Or falling. Or all that pizza. I can just think about—boys!

(Speaking matter of factly.)

Because I do not have to eat that pizza. 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. "Put your best foot forward."

(Taylor looks down at her feet, putting one forward, and then the other.)

But they are identical. That's the problem. That's really the problem.

(She grabs back at the swing.)

I don't know if I can do it. I think—I think maybe I can't.

END OF ACT I

WILD ORCHID: ACT II

Act II, Scene 1: Dad's Fourth Letter to Taylor

GARTH

(Sitting at an old desk, writing a letter and reading as he writes.)

Dear Taylor. I was sorry to hear about Hammy. I know how much fun you had with him. Your mom tells me that you do not want to get another gerbil, but I think that someday you will. That's how it is with life. Some things finish and other things begin. I will keep writing to you, Taylor, because I'm not giving up. I hope that someday you will write me back, or even talk on the phone even though you do not like talking on phones. Your mom says that you are getting good at email and if you let her give me your email address I could send you some photos. You always used to like looking at photos. I am learning to skate. It is something I always wanted to do, and now I'm doing it. Maybe if you come and visit me sometime we can go skating. Or do something else fun.

(He stops and wipes his eyes.)

Your mom sent me your high school graduation picture and I just want you to know that I am proud of you. And your marks! You've done so well, especially in math and science! I am so very proud of you. Remember that there is a very good university just a few blocks from where I am living, and you are always welcome to come here. You could come and stay for a while, or you could come and stay for longer. It's your decision. Maybe you could write me a letter sometime and tell me what you are thinking. Love, Dad.

Act II, Scene 2: Paul and Taylor Connect

PAUL

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

TAYLOR

I am trying to put my best foot forward.

(Reading it off his name tag.)

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

PAUL

What?

TAYLOR

PJ. IJ.

PAUL

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

When I was a kid some bullies started calling me first PJ and then pajama boy. I didn't like it.

TAYLOR

When I was a kid someone called me TJ. I hit him in the eye.

PAUL

A person should be called what they want to be called. When we got married she could have kept her last name but my wife 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 anymore.

(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

Because people either get better or they don't.

PAUL

I already said she was! I said she was, didn't I?

TAYLOR

June Jacobs has a nice ring. 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, right. Maybe.

(Pause.)

Or maybe not.

(He unsuccessfully tries another key.)

TAYLOR

Walnut, June, Charlotte and Hammy. I like to think about them when...when I don't want to think about other things. Like pizza. Or my new job that starts this afternoon. Or the lake. I do not want to think about the lake. And how there could be fish swimming around in it at the same time as people are swimming around in it...

PAUL

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

TAYLOR

(Escalating.)

People swimming in the lake, right in the same water where the fish are.

PAUL

(Rattling the keys and the door.)

None them works! And every day,
every day when I come out here,
the ones I transplanted yesterday
are gone. It makes me terrified that...

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
so—It makes me terrified that...

TAYLOR and PAUL

(Unison, looking at each other.)

...Are you okay?

(Surprised.)

What?

TAYLOR

Would you like some gum? It is Juicy Fruit.

PAUL

(He takes a step away from her. Looks at the keys.)

I don't think any of these are—

TAYLOR

(Offers him the gum. He shakes his head.)

PAUL

I don't know what I'm going to do.

TAYLOR

What you're going to do.

PAUL

She's a lot worse today. She can't walk. She can't even swallow. Or else she doesn't want to.

TAYLOR

June Jacobs is not getting better.

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

PAUL

(Pause.)

My dad left on my birthday too. I was seven. *(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. Yes. If you're the person you might rather just be away.

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. It happens to everyone. Life is shit.

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

TAYLOR

No! Don't say that! Life is good. It's people that are...people are the ones who...I think it's complicated...

PAUL

Sorry, Taylor. Please make some concessions for me.

TAYLOR

Concessions.

PAUL

I don't even know what day it is.

TAYLOR

It is today, of course!

PAUL

(smiles, starts to say something, but doesn't)

TAYLOR

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.

(Pause.)

He smoked this brand all the time. My dad.

TAYLOR

All the time.

PAUL

Yup. They belonged to him. I—I kind of like the smell. It's kind of all I have to remember him...

(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.

(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

Wild Orchid Feb 20, 2020

Everyone. And I'll be right back.

(Paul exits.)

Act II, Scene 3 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. People used to call him PJ but he didn't like it. He is married to a woman named June who is sick and possibly dying, and he has a cat named Chicory Tip. His father is dead and all he has to remember him is a package of cigarettes. He carries the cigarettes in his pocket but he does not smoke them. He knows a lot about plants and animals.

(Pause.)

And Paul Jacobs knows how to listen. He listens to me.

(Pause.)

And what I know about that other boy 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. Or not. 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 did not go past, we went in, and I asked for a cat. My dad said no. I asked for a dog. He said no. He said, "What about a snake." I said no. I asked for a gerbil. He said yes, and we bought a gerbil and took it home. That was 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 them. 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. Take it from me.

TAYLOR

They are unpredictable...I'm never going to open them.

PAUL

(Returning with a shovel.)

PAUL

Life is shit.

TAYLOR

No! Don't say that! Don't say that!

PAUL

Not opening those letters is...is like me deciding to smoke the cigarettes.

(He begins transplanting something into the terrarium.)

TAYLOR

It is nothing like that!

PAUL

And I feel like smoking them today, believe me. Look at this *(gestures to the terrarium)*. 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.

Act II, Scene 4: Penny Tries Sabotages Taylor's First Day of Work

So They Can Leave Waskesiu

(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. Well, maybe it does.

(Under her breath).

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

TAYLOR

Danny is a shitty bimbo and somebody should hit him in the eye.

PENNY

(Looking at her watch.)

Never mind about that now. My break is over and I've got to get back. Make sure you have

lunch. And you don't want to be late for your first day of 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

No?

TAYLOR

Not at all.

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. Things are going to work out. And 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

No swearing.

PENNY

Never mind. Today is a big day for you. You should be thinking about that!

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 skip dinner and see an early movie. Just have popcorn from the concession.

TAYLOR

The concession?

PENNY

Tomorrow! Right after work. I'll meet you here. It'll be like a date.

TAYLOR

It wouldn't be like a date.

PENNY

Just watch the time, okay?

(Penny exits.)

Act II, Scene 5 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. Friday night comes a lot sooner.

TAYLOR

Fifty-four hours. Thirty 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.*)

What the heck? 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.

Act II, Scene 6: Penny Decides They Should Leave Waskesiu

(Taylor is walking to work and Penny comes along and walks with her.)

PENNY

I took a coffee break so I could walk you to work.

TAYLOR

You didn't need to do that.

PENNY

You're going in the wrong direction.

(Tries to steer her another way but Taylor resists.)

TAYLOR

No. No, I'm fine on my own.

PENNY

Danny said to wish you good luck.

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

What? Wishing you good luck?

TAYLOR

Those other things.

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.)

You have to get 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!

TAYLOR

Peppermint for calming or cinnamon for alerting. Peppermint for calming or cinnamon for—.

PENNY

Maybe it's time to pull the plug.

TAYLOR

What? What, Mom?

PENNY

Pull the plug. Get out of here. It could be for the best.

TAYLOR

Get out of here? But I am working at the bookstore for the whole summer.

PENNY

Things can change.

(She tries to take Taylor's hand and switch direction but Taylor shakes her off.)

TAYLOR

No! Don't say that! Don't ever say that!

PENNY

I am saying it! And no more trail walks unless I give you permission! No more anything!

TAYLOR

I need to go. TO MY JOB!

PENNY

Don't forget, Taylor. Don't forget about the date.

(Taylor exits.)

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.

Act II, Scene 7: Taylor Experiences Life

(Penny 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

You're quite a girl, aren't you.

TAYLOR

Maybe yes, maybe no.

KODY

Hey, my aunt and uncle have gone to Regina. They're not gonna be back until tomorrow. For sure, this time. Do you want to come over and hang out?

TAYLOR

(Counting his words: nine. Speaking uncertainly.)

I do not want to wait for Christmas.

(Kody and Taylor walk along together.)

KODY

Hey, how come you never look at me...shy?

TAYLOR

Why would I look at you when I know where you are?

(Penny 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.)

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

KODY

What the heck? Hey, just come on over here. That's it. Closer.

(He pulls her down beside him.)

TAYLOR

Your name is Kody, right? But I do not know your last name—

KODY

(Moving closer.)

Let's just get this party started...

TAYLOR

Not a beach party. Not a birthday party.

KODY

How about this...

TAYLOR

No, no, not that.

KODY

And this...

TAYLOR

No, I said *NO!*

KODY

Well...what the heck...

TAYLOR

AND NOT THAT EITHER!

Act II, Scene 8: 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. Wouldn't they? Wouldn't a person know?

PAUL

Sometimes she seems a little better but sometimes she's worse. She won't leave the house. She won't agree to any help.

TAYLOR

Just like in the play.

PAUL

That play? No! It is not at all like that!

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

That's 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. Pizza. Being stuck on that swing. And most of all... the future. I am afraid of what might be in it, and what might not be in it. Walking along and falling into—and having no control...

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 freezes.)*

Act II, Scene 9: Penny Tells Taylor They're Leaving

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

PAUL

Taylor, I need to talk with you!

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

(To Penny.)

You couldn't have looked all over.

PENNY

Well, aren't you going to introduce us?

TAYLOR

No.

PAUL

I'm Paul.

(Reaches out his hand to Penny.)

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.

PENNY

Is this the one who's been whistling? That whistling person?

TAYLOR

No. You mean Kody. He's got...he has a black eye.

PAUL

I—I work with Taylor.

PENNY

It's nice to meet you, Paul Jacobs. I'm glad she's getting that work 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! That is the point of having a contract! 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? And he’s got a black eye? 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. And until then, you are grounded. No more boyfriends!

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

Stop it! Get control of yourself, Taylor. It isn't the end of the world.

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.)

Act II, Scene 10: Taylor Runs

(Slow motion. Taylor runs.)

PENNY

Taylor, you have to tell me where you are going!

PAUL

Taylor! We need to talk!

KODY

WHAT THE HECK?

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 starts opening the letters. She reads each page and throws it on the ground. And 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. She eats all the gum she has. Darkness falls.)

Act II, Scene 11: 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. They took them to Japan and then four breeding pairs were imported to the USA as lab animals.

(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.)* 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. Pulls out the last letter from her pocket and looks back at where she's thrown the others—they make a clear trail.)

I am not hurt. 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 am going inside because I have work to do.

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!

Act II, Scene 12: 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. That's exactly what I want to know! I want to know exactly what this Paul character has done to you.

TAYLOR

Stanley is in the play, not Paul. Stanley is the character. Paul is real and he is my—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 choosing life over death, 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

Paul does not do inappropriate things!

PENNY

You are not to see that Paul person again, and what's more, 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 a plan changer! 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.

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

And when I opened the letters, Dad said he wants me to visit. He wants me to visit him. And I think I might go.

PENNY

You—you've opened the letters? Your father's letters? Well that's a real surprise. A good surprise! And I guess--of course you can go. He's your father. We've been trying to encourage you—so don't pin that on me! 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? Have they? Or made you—uncomfortable? Uncomfortable in any way?

TAYLOR

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

PENNY

Deal with what? Tell me!

(Pause.)

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. Difficult but possible, Mom!

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. 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 all, Mom. I am not the boss of you either. 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 and then you do not want him anymore.

PENNY

Things have gone to shit! 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 need.

PENNY

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

TAYLOR

Time is the same as it's ever been, not faster, not slower. It's fear that changes things. It's fear that changes things, Mom! But we can still go on.

PENNY

Taylor, if we could leave Friday, I would be so—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. With Danny. And you can catch others. Other boyfriends. You can catch more of them. If you want to, that is. Until you find a good one. And then you can be the belle of the ball. If you want to. But you don't have to. You don't have to, Mom.

PENNY

Don't I?

TAYLOR

No. No, I don't think so.

PENNY

Sometimes it feels as if I am going to spend my whole life looking...

TAYLOR

What I'm wondering about is... what I'm wondering right now is... 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 like how he makes you feel. But you do not like *him*. Especially if he talks in nines. Did...did Dad...?

PENNY

No, honey. No. He never did.

TAYLOR

Okay, good. Good.

Act II, Scene 13: 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'm trying not to.

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.)

Maybe you could write me some letters.

PAUL

What?

TAYLOR

Maybe you could write me some letters. And I could write you back. Letters are like a trail through the forest. Sometimes they can help.

(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*. And then when Kody...when he...and I...and then he said I was....

(Pause.)

And when to 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

I think you are not going to give up.

PAUL

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

TAYLOR

What happened?

PAUL

What I said about that kiss...

TAYLOR

It's because I have...it's because I'm a...

PAUL

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

TAYLOR

Marriage. Marriage means commitment and concession. Concession and commitment.

PAUL

Maybe. Maybe, yes.

TAYLOR

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

PAUL

Crossed over?

TAYLOR

I think it is like a bridge. For a while you are on the bridge. But once a person is an adult, there is no going back. You can remember what it was like before but you cannot go back there. Nobody can.

PAUL

Well, welcome to the other side.

TAYLOR

It kind of looks the same.

PAUL

Yes.

TAYLOR

But it isn't.

PAUL

No. That's why I can't write you those letters.

(Pause.)

Someday someone else will want to kiss you, Taylor.

TAYLOR

Not Kody.

PAUL

No?

TAYLOR

Because of the black eye. Because of the black eye. But also because I made a decision.

PAUL

A decision?

TAYLOR

I have given my notice. So I will not be working here much longer. I might be going back to Saskatoon with Mom. Or I might be going to live with my dad in Wyoming. I don't know yet. But it's my decision. I am an adult and adults make decisions like these every day. Independently of their mothers.

PAUL

Well. Whatever happens, I wish you the best. And—and I won't forget you.

TAYLOR

Unless you have a concussion.

PAUL

A concussion?

TAYLOR

Sometimes when people get a concussion they forget things.

PAUL

(Laughing.)

Well, I hope that doesn't happen.

TAYLOR

Some things are just out of our control.

(Pause.)

But some things are not.

PAUL

I'd better...

(He stands.)

TAYLOR

Even if there's a precipice.

PAUL

Even if there's a precipice.

TAYLOR

Best foot forward.

PAUL

Just... forward.

TAYLOR

(Pensively.)

I never saw that orchid.

PAUL

Not yet.

TAYLOR

But I can keep looking.

PAUL

Yes.

(Paul raises his hand in farewell and then goes inside the Nature Centre.)

TAYLOR

Because it is possible. Possible and necessary.

(Pause.)

I know what I have to do.

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

THE END