

YOU SHOULD NEVER EAT YOUR HEROES

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By Jonathan Dorf

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## Cast of Characters

BETTY, shy teenage bookworm with a side order of weird. A senior in high school, but a junior when the events in the play transpire.

LEILA LEILANI (pronounced LAY-LUH LAY-LAH-NEE), celebrated self-help author, Miss Congeniality on the surface and anything but beneath it.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE, trying to keep a lid on an active volcano. Either gender.

OSCAR, Betty's friend, same age.

BOOKSTORE VOICES, various ensemble members.

BOOKSTORE MANAGER, male or female, has a product to deliver and the peace to keep.

LEILA'S HANDLER, probably female but could be male.

EYEWITNESS, either gender, from the bookstore debacle.

WE WITNESS NEWS ANCHOR, either gender.

SCHOOL SECRETARY, Royce's minion, probably female but could be male.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS, flexible in number and gender, though four of 'em would be ideal.

FIRST and SECOND REPORTERS, either gender.

MICHELLE, baddest of the bad, smartest of the smart and not quite who she seems.

ELYRIA, an emo/goth friend of Betty and Oscar's.

CHEER 1, mean girl.

CHEER 2, follower-in-chief.

CHEER 3, Tweedle dumb.

LUNCH LADY, not going to take it anymore.

POLICE DETECTIVE, either gender.

It is possible to multiple cast most roles (other than Oscar and Betty, everyone else is fair game), thus reducing the cast size considerably.

## Potential Multiple Casting

BETTY  
LEILA LEILANI/WE WITNESS NEWS ANCHOR/SCHOOL SECRETARY/SECOND REPORTER  
PRINCIPAL ROYCE/BOOKSTORE MANAGER/POLICE DETECTIVE  
OSCAR  
LEILA'S HANDLER/FIRST REPORTER/LUNCH LADY  
MICHELLE  
EYEWITNESS/USUAL SUSPECT/ELYRIA  
CHEER 1/BOOKSTORE VOICE/USUAL SUSPECT  
CHEER 2/BOOKSTORE VOICE/USUAL SUSPECT  
CHEER 3/BOOKSTORE VOICE/USUAL SUSPECT

## Production Notes

It's important that the "out of time" moments, when Betty (occasionally joined by Oscar) steps out of the play, be distinct

from the rest of the play. Lighting is probably the best way to accomplish this.

In Scene 6, Michelle may say "dumbass" or the word in [ ], "genius," depending on your production requirements.

If you are performing this in a country other than the United States, feel free to change the United States reference in Scene 9 to a more suitable one. On that note, feel free to change Elyria's lunch in Scene 6 to something equivalent to the Sloppy Joe in your own country (e.g. shepherd's pie in the UK).

SCENE 1

BETTY, a bit too interested for her own good and a senior in high school, stands in a spotlight.

BETTY

There are some things you should never do. Never talk with your mouth full. Never text and drive. Never hitchhike. Never spit gum onto the street in Singapore... Last year, I ran into the mother of all nevers.

The lights come up on the rest of the stage. It's a high school cafetorium, or failing that, a cafeteria. Betty takes a seat among the rest of the assembled STUDENTS. LEILA, alum, superstar author and hiding an uncongenial soul behind the veneer of Miss Congeniality, stands at a podium. She's wearing a red dress that screams expensive.

LEILA

Even when life stings, it's up to you to turn that sting into distinguished. And with that I thank you, students of Jefferson Carver High School, for honoring me as Alumna of the Decade.

Applause. PRINCIPAL ROYCE gets up.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Ms. Leilani has graciously agreed to sign a limited number of copies of her latest book, *Winning Nice: How to Give 'Em Hell With a Smile on Your Face*.

There's a mad rush for the book signing table. Betty gets pushed aside. A kid or two might selfie with the signed book. The rush subsides and the place starts to empty out. Betty finally starts to slide forward. Principal Royce cuts in front of her.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Thank you again, Ms. Leilani. It has been such a pleasure.

LEILA

All mine.

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PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Is there anything else I can get you?

LEILA

(So finished:)

My driver should be outside. But thank you.

Principal Royce shakes Leila's hand and departs. Leila sanitizes her hand. Betty finally gets her turn. There are no more books in the pile, and Leila looks like she's ready to bounce.

LEILA

I'm sorry, but we're out of books. If you'd like, have your principal call my office and tell them I said you could still get the two-percent discount.

Betty pulls a copy of the book from her bookbag.

BETTY

I already got my book. Is that OK?

LEILA

Sure.

BETTY

I bought it last month for my generic e-reader right when it came out, but obviously you can't sign the screen, so I bought it again.

LEILA

I'd be happy to sign it.

BETTY

I was afraid if there was a line I wouldn't get one. I don't do well in lines.

LEILA

(Taking the book:)

Thank you.

BETTY

(As Leila is signing:)

I just had one question. Is it all right if I ask a question?

(As Leila smiles indulgently:)

On page 98 - well, maybe it's different in the printed version and I have to admit that I only read the hard copy three times-

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LEILA  
(Handing her the book:)

Here you go.

BETTY  
Let me see if I can find it real quick. Oh my gosh - I practiced this conversation every day once I found out you were coming and now I am totally babbling.

LEILA  
(Packing up her plaque:)

Thank you.

BETTY  
But obviously talking to a picture of you taped in the corner of the mirror isn't the same as talking to you-

LEILA  
(Starting to leave:)

I'm sorry-

BETTY  
I don't normally talk this much. Normally until I know someone well, like really know them - like the way I know Oscar - we've been in the same classes since we were five - I hardly talk at all-

LEILA  
-I have another engagement.  
(Under her breath:)  
Where is that driver? Oh crap - I told him to keep the engine running.

Leila looks confused as to where to go, and heads back toward the kitchen, mistaking it for the exit.

BETTY  
(Keeping up with her:)  
I'm just like exploding that you're here. I can't believe I used the word "like" twice - really three times but only two were wrong. But I just don't do that - that's how nervous I am.

They're now in the kitchen.

BETTY  
Maybe I could walk you to your-

LEILA  
Can I give you some advice?

BETTY

Oh my gosh - yes! I could take you to coffee. I think the only place open has a non-functioning bathroom - really, they don't have any bathroom at all, but they put a bathroom closed for repairs sign on a storage closet to keep from getting shut down by the health department or the zoning board or the-

Leila holds up her hand for silence.

BETTY

I'm so sorry. I'm doing it again.

LEILA

Are you done? For 10 seconds?

Betty nods.

LEILA

Do you have a recording device? Are you recording this?

BETTY

No. I would never-

Leila frisks her.

BETTY

What are you-

Leila again holds up her hand for silence.

LEILA

I absolutely hated this school when I went here, and it looks like they haven't made a single repair since I left. The only reason I'm here in this armpit of academia is because my book tour goes right through here and my publicist thought it would look like a giant Mark of Cain if I skipped my alma mater's little awards ceremony. But the ceremony's over, I'm late for something that actually matters, and I didn't sign up to be your mommy and hold your hand crossing the metaphorical street of your future.

BETTY

(Beat.)

Look both ways before crossing the metaphorical street of your future.

LEILA

What?

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BETTY  
Page 127 of your book. At least the e - version.

LEILA  
Great. You've memorized the e-book.

BETTY  
Well...you're my hero.

LEILA  
Oh god. Don't play the hero card.

BETTY  
But you are.

LEILA  
First it's you're my hero and memorizing my book and delivering practice speeches to some imaginary me slash photo of me taped on your mirror, then it's a full-blown shrine in your bedroom complete with clippings and life-size photos and my face taped onto the dolls that you should have thrown out when you were five-

BETTY  
I'll throw them out!

LEILA  
-and then come the weird dreams where we're pals and doing strangely inappropriate activities like braiding each other's hair and wearing one another's clothes, and then you use mind control to get your school to make me alumna of the decade so you can stay after the ceremony and follow me to a secluded location at your school when no one is around, and-  
(Looking around:)  
That's it! You lured me here to kidnap me and keep me forever, you sick, sick-

BETTY  
No-

LEILA  
-celebrity stalking-

BETTY  
That's not it at all!

LEILA  
-mousy teenage sociopath. You messed with the wrong woman!

Leila picks up a large bottle of ketchup or the like and takes a massive swing at Betty, who slides out of the way.



The momentum carries Leila  
straight into a stove. Boom.  
She's out. Beat.

BETTY

Ms. Leilani? Ms. Leilani, are you OK?

(Nudges her shoulder:)

This is bad. This is so so so so bad.

(To Leila:)

You're OK. You have to be OK. I've waited my whole life to  
meet you.

(Beat.)

This can't be happening.

Betty is shaking so much that she  
can barely get her cell phone  
out. She dials and waves it  
around to find a signal. Finally,  
she gets a ring. Lights up on  
OSCAR, same age, in his room in  
his pajamas. The room is probably  
implied/suggested, as we won't be  
back. We might, however, see a  
worn picture of a man who could  
be Oscar's father.

OSCAR

The new pajamas are a total win. They're like sexy massage  
therapists hugging my legs.

BETTY

Oscar-

OSCAR

I'm gonna selfie so you can see.

BETTY

Oscar-

OSCAR

One sec.

He takes a photo of his pajama  
bottoms.

BETTY

Oscar.

OSCAR

OK - I'm sending.

BETTY

Oscar! I need you to come to school. Now.

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OSCAR  
But I'm in my PJs.

BETTY  
It's not even seven.

OSCAR  
They're comfy. Don't hate.

BETTY  
This is DEFCON 0.

OSCAR  
There's only DEFCON 1. That's the highest there is.

BETTY  
This is zero.

OSCAR  
I just told you-

BETTY  
I am telling you to get down here stat, or you will never  
copy another line of my homework again.

OSCAR  
No need to use the nuclear option.

BETTY  
Are you in the car yet?

OSCAR  
I'm not getting dressed for you.

End of scene.

## SCENE 2

The sounds of a bookstore, but  
this scene could take place  
completely in the dark. Or not.

## A SERIES OF VOICES

Her water is right here.  
That's too far.  
That's too close.  
Three inches, forty-five degree angle, right side. How hard  
is that, people?

## LEILA'S HANDLER

Limo says he's still waiting.

## BOOKSTORE MANAGER

She's coming, right? We sold 500 advance copies. They'll  
riot.

## LEILA'S HANDLER

She never misses a signing.

## BOOKSTORE MANAGER

Look at those mothers. They're going to rip our guts out.

## LEILA'S HANDLER

Pregnant women with strollers. Don't be hysterical.

## BOOKSTORE MANAGER

The pregnant ones are the worst.  
(To an Employee:)  
Go over to the cafe and tell them you need all the chocolate  
they've got.

(Beat.)

Tell them to go into my reserve.

(Beat.)

The code phrase is "naughty peanut."

## LEILA'S HANDLER

(On the phone:)

What do you mean she's not in the school?

## BOOKSTORE MANAGER

Is she on her way?

## LEILA'S HANDLER

(Waits for a reply, then:)

Of course she's not answering her cell. Don't you think I  
tried that first?

(To the Bookstore Manager:)

We've got this under control.

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## BOOKSTORE MANAGER

Oh, this is not looking good.

(As the mob advances:)

Excuse me, Miss, no- Ma'am- Wait- Stop! Help!

## NEWS ANCHOR

This is We Witness News, [insert name of your town]'s source for up to the minute news provided by people you wish you could stare at for hours on end. In tonight's top story, a group of mostly pregnant women rioted at Books 4 All - that's the number 4 - when special guest and hometown girl turned achievement icon Leila Leilani failed to appear for tonight's long awaited signing of her latest opus. The store is expected to be closed through the weekend for repairs and inspection. According to We Witness eyewitnesses, the Books 4 All staff attacked the crowd with chocolate:

## EYEWITNESS

The chocolate. The chocolate was everywhere. Dark, milk, white, almonds... We had to get out.

## NEWS ANCHOR

But a store spokesperson said that the chocolate was meant as a goodwill gesture after Ms. Leilani's failure to appear.

## BOOKSTORE MANAGER

Refunds and chocolate. That's all we wanted to do.

## NEWS ANCHOR

Instead what they got was a crowd that thought they were about to become victims of choco-terrorism, and in their desperation to escape, they surged into one of the store's load-bearing pillars.

(Beat.)

We are pleased to report that the last two employees are expected to be released from the hospital sometime tomorrow. But the bigger question is "Where is Leila Leilani?"

(Brief pause.)

Later in this broadcast, could the food at the [insert name of your school] cafeteria be so bad as to force the entire building to be shut down for decontamination...?

## SCENE 3

Later. The high school kitchen.  
Betty paces, jumping every time  
she think she hears a noise. The  
sound of a door opening. Enter  
Oscar.

BETTY

You sure nobody saw you.

OSCAR

I was like a total stealth bomber. I was-

He sees Leila's prone body. He  
freezes, takes a moment to  
process, then edges closer, then  
processes again.

OSCAR

Holy- Armadillo! Conjunction! Tuber! Lobotomy!

BETTY

What do we do?

OSCAR

We?! This is you! Flabbergasted! Torpedo! Mastication!

BETTY

What?

OSCAR

My new therapist says to free associate random funny-sounding  
words when I'm freaking out. Spasmodic! Heterosexual!  
Artichoke!

BETTY

It's not helping!

OSCAR

He says it calms me down.

BETTY

It's not helping *me*!

OSCAR

Plankton! Placebo! Eventually. I get tired and I calm down.  
Tweezer! Cucumber!

(Beat. Calmer:)

Regurgitate.

Silence.

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OSCAR  
(Looking at Leila:)

Who...? What...?

BETTY

It wasn't my fault.

OSCAR  
What wasn't your fault? Betty, what did you do?

BETTY

I didn't do anything. She got all-

She pantomimes Leila getting upset and attacking.

BETTY

And I...

She pantomimes freaking out but dodging the attack.

BETTY

And now she's...

She pantomimes Leila plunking her head and landing where she lies.

OSCAR

A dead woman.

BETTY

*Possibly* dead.

OSCAR  
You didn't check if she's dead? She could still be alive. Every minute counts.

BETTY

It's not like this happens to me every day.

Betty takes a few steps toward the body and then stops. This ritual repeats.

BETTY

I think you need to do it.

OSCAR

Me?

BETTY

I can't.

OSCAR  
 No way.

BETTY  
 (Beat.)  
 Oscar.

OSCAR  
 No.

BETTY  
 You can copy my homework anytime you want.

OSCAR  
 I already do.

BETTY  
 I'll throw in one paper.

OSCAR  
 Subject of my choice?

BETTY  
 Seven pages or less.

OSCAR  
 Nine.

BETTY  
 Eight.

OSCAR  
 Goober's got an eight-page minimum.

BETTY  
 Eight then.

OSCAR  
 Eight looks too short.

BETTY  
 Yeah, but your paper would actually be good this time.

OSCAR  
 I'm not dumb.

BETTY  
 You're right. I'm sorry.

OSCAR  
 I have a really high IQ.

BETTY

I know.

OSCAR

It's the whole ADHD or ADD or PTSD thing. That and my mom not reading to me when I was three. That's what my shrink says.

BETTY

Your new nonsense word therapist?

OSCAR

(Shakes his head:)

My month-old Monday-Wednesday shrink so they can drug me.

BETTY

You don't seem any different.

OSCAR

If I take the meds, I'm a zombie.

BETTY

Except when you sat down in the middle of dodgeball.

OSCAR

If I don't, I'm a pinball.

BETTY

That looked like it hurt.

OSCAR

It did. I'd rather be a pinball than a zombie.

BETTY

Heard.

(Beat.)

OK, Mr. Pinball - nine pages.

OSCAR

I want it to be on the Civil War, but not something that everyone else does.

BETTY

No Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg or assassination of Lincoln. Got it.

Oscar creeps closer. Beat.

OSCAR

There's something kind of sticky here and, uh...red.

(Lifting up his shoes:)

It's on my shoes.

(Freaking further:)

I think it got the bottom of my PJs!

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BETTY  
We can wash them.

OSCAR  
Haven't you seen crime procedurals? Blood never comes out.

BETTY  
Are you sure it's blood?

OSCAR  
Yes, it's blood.

BETTY  
We're in the kitchen. It could be ketchup.

OSCAR  
Her head is not leaking ketchup.

BETTY  
Well, it's not looking good, but-

OSCAR  
No, it's not looking good. It's looking the total opposite of good.

He pulls out his phone.

BETTY  
What are you doing?

OSCAR  
I'm calling 911.

BETTY  
Wait - why didn't I call 911?

OSCAR  
I have no clue.

BETTY  
They're going to ask.

OSCAR  
Who?

BETTY  
The police. They're going to ask why I didn't call right away.

OSCAR  
Why didn't you?

BETTY

I don't know.

(Beat.)

I was freaked out. I've never even seen a dead person before, except my grandma.

OSCAR

You saw your grandma dead?

BETTY

At the viewing.

OSCAR

Did you touch her?

BETTY

Just with my pinkie. It was weird. She looked stuffed. And deflated. I was gonna kiss her on the top of her head, but all my cousins on my dad's side, the vegetarians, were waiting behind me, and I cracked under the pressure. They brought their own carrots and broccoli to the wake.

OSCAR

Just tell the police you were freaked out. I am. Mongoose! Femur! Polyester!

(Taking a deep breath:)

I'm going to call now before I start up again.

BETTY

Wait! What if they think I did it?

OSCAR

Did you?

BETTY

No. How could you even ask me that?

OSCAR

Then what's the prob-

BETTY

But I didn't have to follow her.

OSCAR

You followed her? Like stalker follow?

BETTY

I had a question about her book. It's like going up to the teacher at the end of class - everybody does that.

Silence. Not Oscar, apparently.

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BETTY

She was my hero. The way she wasn't a doormat. I just wanted to be-

There's a sound. They freeze. Frantic gesturing about where to go. They both start to go one way, then another. Then they wind up covering their eyes with their hands, holding their breath, and hoping for the best. The noise moves away. They exhale.

OSCAR

I have to go.

BETTY

What about-

OSCAR

I'm not the one that stalked-

BETTY

Her book had inconsistencies. The arguments in her book-

OSCAR

That doesn't mean you chase her into-

BETTY

I didn't chase- I'm not the one with blood on my pajamas.

OSCAR

This is all your fault.

BETTY

If you wore boxers like everybody else-

OSCAR

Why am I even your friend? You just say mean stuff about me.

BETTY

I don't say-

OSCAR

You told Randy about my dad. That I sleep with that picture.

BETTY

Well you do.

OSCAR

That doesn't mean you tell everybody.

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The sound of footsteps and noise in the hallway. They freeze again, then look for hiding spots. Like before, there's a lot of back and forth before they again give up and cover their eyes. Beat. Oscar sneaks to the door and looks.

OSCAR

It's the janitor. He's working his way down the hall.

BETTY

That's bad, right?

OSCAR

He's got one more room before he gets here.

BETTY

(Beat.)

Help me.

(Beat.)

Oscar, grab the other end.

OSCAR

Not 'til you say you're sorry.

BETTY

Fine - I'm sorry.

OSCAR

Mean it.

BETTY

Sure - let's just stand here with this dead woman until I'm sorry enough.

Oscar shows no signs of budging.  
Beat.

BETTY

What do you want me to say?

OSCAR

I'm sorry would be nice.

BETTY

I said-

(More sincerely:)

I'm sorry. Leila says on page 14 it's important to reward your allies. I'm going to do better.

Allies.  
OSCAR

Beat. Oscar reluctantly gives in and grabs the feet, realizing time's wasting and this is the best he's going to get for now.

Where are we-  
OSCAR

BETTY  
(Indicating a storage bin:)  
He won't clean in here.

What about the blood?  
OSCAR

Betty drops the body and scans the room. She finds a chicken and kind of mops the blood with it-

OSCAR  
(Grossed out:)  
Ugh...

-leaving it there to make it look like it's the source.

BETTY  
We'll come back after he's done.

OSCAR  
You know I have curfew.

BETTY  
We're gonna have to sneak out.

OSCAR  
No can do.

BETTY  
We can't just leave her.

OSCAR  
C'mon. We didn't do anything. You didn't do anything, right?  
We just call them and tell them that.

BETTY  
It's been hours- We look so guilty it's not funny. I followed her into the abandoned kitchen, you've got blood on your PJs. And no offense, but that in-school suspension last year isn't going to look good.

OSCAR

That was for excessive absences.

BETTY

You think they're going to ask what it was for?!

(Beat.)

OK. So we get here super early and we get rid of it. Her.

(Half to herself:)

I can't believe we're doing this.

(Louder again:)

Just tell your mom you're getting extra help.

OSCAR

My mom would be like go at 4 AM if it's for extra help.

BETTY

I know, right?

OSCAR

But what are we gonna do?

BETTY

I'm gonna think and come up with something really great.

Blackout.

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## SCENE 4

4:57 A.M. The school cafeteria kitchen. The light from a cell phone comes on to illuminate it. Beat. A flashlight turns on. It's Oscar with the cell and Betty with the flashlight.

OSCAR

I officially hate you.

BETTY

Great, because this is my favorite day in the history of ever.

OSCAR

(Beat.)

What if we call 911 now and say we just found her? Nobody's gonna know.

BETTY

Yeah, we just found her while we were at school at 4:57 in the morning trying to move her body. Brilliant idea.

OSCAR

(Beat.)

My mom was good on the help class thing.

BETTY

The police are not as dumb as your mom.

OSCAR

Hey!

BETTY

They'll ask which teacher - and then what?

OSCAR

(Beat.)

So what do we do?

BETTY

There's a dumpster near the cafeteria doors, or the furnace in the basement.

OSCAR

I vote dumpster.

BETTY

If they find her, our prints are gonna be everywhere.

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OSCAR

I vote furnace.

(Beat.)

It'll be like a preview for my trip to hell.

BETTY

You think I feel good about this? I just wanted to talk about her book!

(Beat.)

You should never meet your heroes.

OSCAR

(Beat.)

Sorry, Betty.

BETTY

Let's just get this over with - in case somebody shows up early.

They open the storage cabinet in which they put Leila's body.  
Empty. Beat.

OSCAR

Are you sure this is the right cabinet?

BETTY

Oh yeah - I just mixed up where I left the dead body.

OSCAR

You were really stressed. We were both stressed. Xylophone! Uterus! Eucalyptus! OK - I'm good.

BETTY

You're right - we weren't thinking clearly.

They start opening other cabinets - pretty much everywhere else she could have been. Nothing. Long silence. Betty steps out of real time.

BETTY

There should be a book about dealing with impossible life situations. I'm good with books. If I could just interact directly with the book and skip the people, I think things would go better. But since there isn't a book, I've decided that the next best thing is to pretend there is, and to read imaginary pages from it.

(Beat. As if reading from her imaginary book:)

Everybody knows that when a dead body disappears, there are two possibilities. One, the person wasn't really dead.

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BETTY (CONT'D)

She got knocked out, we thought she was dead, but the only person who actually checked flunked his first aid certification at lifeguard camp and can't even swim properly. She wasn't dead, so she got up and left. This is good news. Two, somebody moved the body. This is bad, because they might know you were the one who put the body there in the first place. On the other hand, the fact that they moved it kind of lets you off the hook, 'cause when it comes to moving bodies, tag, they're it.

OSCAR

(Stepping into the out of time moment:)

Three, she's a zombie.

BETTY

That's ridiculous.

OSCAR

How do you know for sure?

BETTY

There are no zombies.

OSCAR

But how do you *know*?

BETTY

You shouldn't even be here right now.

OSCAR

Should you?

They are back in real time.

OSCAR

Cucumber! Pollination! Futon!

BETTY

Is that helping?

OSCAR

Not really.

End of scene.

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## SCENE 5

Later that day. The hallway outside of Principal Royce's office. Principal Royce and his SECRETARY walk and talk.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Are they there?

SECRETARY

Shouldn't we bring in the last people to see her?

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

I was the last person to see her. Or no - one of the seniors. I left. Or was it a junior? Totally unmemorable, whoever it was.

SECRETARY

This is why we need to fix those cameras.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Sure. If you don't mind not getting a raise. Again.

SECRETARY

All but one of the regulars are in your office.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Which one?

SECRETARY

You know the one.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

She's been here three weeks - she can't know all of the hiding places yet.

SECRETARY

Should we go into lockdown?

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Do you know how many parent phone calls I got last time? Just find her.

Lights up on Principal Royce's office, as Royce enters with the Secretary to find a quartet [or more] of the USUAL SUSPECTS lined up against the wall. He and his Secretary speak sotto.

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SECRETARY

We'll find her and when we do... Oh-

(Producing a tray of food:)

cafeteria sent this up. They want to know if this is better.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Get my taster.

SECRETARY

Out with food poisoning.

Beat. Principal Royce faces the Usual Suspects and has an idea. He whispers to his Secretary, who during his speech cuts the food sample into an equal number of bite-sized pieces.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Boys and girls, in the Middle Ages, people suspected of being witches were dunked in the water. If they were innocent, they drowned. But if they floated, they were guilty and, once they dried off, they were burned at the stake. Seems a bit backwards, but it worked for them. I like to think we've become more progressive in thinking that if you're good, you will be saved.

The Secretary approaches the Suspects with a tray of the food. Once they connect the dots, they freak.

VARIOUS SUSPECTS

(Feel free to ad lib a few more:)

No!

Don't make me!

Anything but that!

Somebody help-

I did it.

No - I did it.

I confess!

No - it was me!

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Confessions obtained under coercion-

Nobody knows what this means.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Duress.

Still nothing.

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Because we made you?

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Nodding and glimmers of understanding.

-are inadmissable.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Back to clueless looks from the Usual Suspects.

We can't use them.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Once more, they understand. The Secretary proffers the tray in the direction of the Suspects.

Live, and you're free to go.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

One suspect can no longer keep still and tries to make a run for it, but Royce tazes the runner. The others get the message. Beat.

Tell my parents I love them and I'm sorry.

FIRST SUSPECT

Principal Royce and Secretary go from suspect to suspect, forcing them to swallow if necessary - and making them show that they've done so. Among the suspects, some meet their doom with calm, while others are hyperventilating they're so freaked out. One kid might cross himself, while another makes the Star of David equivalent. We might hear bits of a Hail Mary or the Lord's Prayer. But as they eat, it's not bad. It's actually kind of tasty. Beat. And nothing's happening.

Tell the paramedics they can take the day off.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

(To the Secretary:)

The Usual Suspects depart as Principal Royce spins into a press conference.

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PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Of course we take missing alumna very seriously, but it's jumping to conclusions to assume that we lost or otherwise misplaced her.

FIRST REPORTER

Is it true that a 40-year-old man attended classes here for two months before-

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

We do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender-

SECOND REPORTER

Yes, but reports are that the man was not enrolled as a student-

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

We are not able to comment on an ongoing investigation.

Principal Royce's phone does not ring.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

I'm sorry. I have to take this.

(Pretending to listen:)

Yes?

(Pretends to listen again:)

Yes? I'm on my way.

As Principal Royce is leaving, a real call comes in and Royce's phone rings. Sheepish and exiting, Royce answers.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Hello?

End of scene.

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## SCENE 6

Principal Royce's office, or a random hallway. Principal Royce interrogates MICHELLE, baddest of the bad seeds, and smarter than everyone. She looks like a high school student, and she might even be one.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

We know you did it, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Did what?

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Does it matter?

MICHELLE

Not really. Got any proof?

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Not really.

MICHELLE

Call me when you got a body.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

How did you know there's a body?

MICHELLE

It was a metaphor, dumbass [genius].

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Oh.

(Beat.)

What do you know about bodies?

MICHELLE

I know that there are 206 bones, 23 combined feet of intestines in an average adult, and that we use only 10 percent of our brains.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Don't get smart with me. What do you know?

MICHELLE

I know the temperature on the surface of the sun is 5778 degrees Kelvin; the dodo bird is believed to have gone extinct in 1662, but it may have been as late as 1690, and the cafeteria food is 87 percent more flavorful than it was at this time yesterday.

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PRINCIPAL ROYCE

(Beat.)

I've got my eye on you.

MICHELLE

(As she walks out:)

I'd worry about who's got their eye on you.

She's gone.

PRINCIPAL ROYCE

Eye on me?

(To Secretary:)

What does she mean, eye on me? Who's got their-

The lights cross-fade to the cafeteria, where Betty and Oscar are looking for somewhere to sit and are contemplating ELYRIA, their emo/goth girl classmate.

BETTY

We need to look natural and blend.

OSCAR

If we're looking natural, then shouldn't we sit alone?

BETTY

Leila says on page 85 that "engagement is the key to success."

OSCAR

Do you even know what any of this stuff means?

BETTY

(To Elyria:)

Hello.

They sit at her table.

BETTY

So...did you do the haiku for class?

ELYRIA

Who are you?

BETTY

We're in English together.

ELYRIA

(Beat.)

I call this "Cannibals at the Carnival."

(Beat.)

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ELYRIA (CONT'D)

Cannibals at the carnival  
Capture the clowns  
Lunch and dinner all around.

Beat.

BETTY

I don't think that's a haiku. That's Eight-Four-Seven. Haiku is Five-Seven-Five.

ELYRIA

I'm defying form.

BETTY

The assignment was a haiku.

ELYRIA

Maybe that wasn't the assignment. Maybe I just wanted you to hear my poem.

BETTY

Why would you want us to hear your poem about death and cannibalism?

ELYRIA

Am I supposed to read it to Royce?

OSCAR

Why would you do that?

ELYRIA

That's my point, geniuses.

BETTY

So we should love your poem about murder and cannibalism because...we're your allies and we support you.

ELYRIA

(Eating:)

Duh.

OSCAR

Right. Duh.

ELYRIA

Is there something different about the Sloppy Joes?

OSCAR

I bring my lunch. My mom can't afford the barf bags.

ELYRIA

Just let fly on your tray. But today it's like kind of good.

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OSCAR

Good?

BETTY

Or not hurl-worthy?

ELYRIA  
(Pushing her tray toward Betty:)

Taste?

Betty pushes it back in Elyria's direction.

ELYRIA

You're missin' out.

Elyria takes another bite. She's obviously enjoying it. Betty and Oscar watch her. She suddenly stops, fishes in her mouth and pulls out a piece of red fabric.

BETTY

What's that?

ELYRIA

Dunno. Maybe somebody's sleeve got caught. Small price to pay for a primo Sloppy Joe.

Betty studies the fabric, picking it up and turning it around in her fingers. Beat.

BETTY

I feel sick.

ELYRIA

You haven't even tried it yet.

BETTY  
(Getting up, forced:)

I really enjoyed lunch.

Betty has the look of someone who knows she's got a finite amount of time to make it to a toilet. She bolts.

OSCAR

Betty?!

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## ELYRIA

It's weird how good it is. I was gonna burn down the cafeteria with everybody inside to protest the sewage they've been feedin' us, or maybe organize a really angry poetry slam, and now I'm like, things are lookin' up.

She doesn't even notice Oscar leaving in the middle of her speech. The lights dim on Elyria and the cafeteria and come up on...

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## SCENE 7

The girls' bathroom. Betty is in a stall, hurling. Oscar slips in, not without some trepidation.

OSCAR

Betty, are you all right?

BETTY

You shouldn't be in here.

(Beat.)

I'm fine.

She hurls.

OSCAR

I'm not leaving until-

BETTY

The red fabric - the scrap - that was from her dress.

OSCAR

Who?

BETTY

*Her.*

OSCAR

No.

BETTY

Yes. I remember because it screamed I'm wearing this just to make the point-

She hurls again.

BETTY

The point that you will never be able to afford this.

OSCAR

So her dress was in the- Oh.

(Going through an avalanche of thoughts at once:)

No. No no no no!

BETTY

Now please go before somebody-

OSCAR

Marshmallow! Alliteration! Smorgasbord!

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BETTY

Oscar!

The door bursts open. Enter a  
trio of CHEERLEADERS.

CHEER 1

I thought I heard questionably masculine squawks coming from  
in here.

CHEER 2

Questionable.

CHEER 3

At best.

OSCAR

I didn't have my contacts in. I thought that-

CHEER 1

You thought no one would notice.

OSCAR

No.

CHEER 1

Don't interrupt.

CHEER 2

We've been watching you two.

CHEER 3

Watching. Like seeing eye dogs.

CHEER 1

That's right-

(Gesturing at Betty's stall:)

We know about your uptight nerdy little accomplice in there.

CHEER 2

Don't deny it.

CHEER 3

He who denied it supplied it.

There's an awkward silence.

CHEER 1

Name names.

OSCAR

Uh...Bob? Marilyn.

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BETTY  
(In between hurls:)

Felicity.

OSCAR

I like that one.

CHEER 3

Me too.

CHEER 1

What about Leila?

BETTY

Definitely not.

OSCAR

No.

CHEER 1

I'm going to make this real simple: the cheer budget took a header because of some stupid equality rule.

CHEER 2

Equality is for losers.

CHEER 3

Losers.

CHEER 1

This will be faster if I monologue.

CHEER 2

And I comment.

CHEER 3

And I act things out.

As Cheer 1 delivers her speech, Cheer 3 should feel free to gesture in overacted fashion wherever it seems appropriate, though being sure to carry out any specific actions mentioned throughout.

CHEER 1

At first I was like, no, this totally can't be happening. Just because the school board says people should be equal - it's not like that really happens anywhere.

(Beat.)

But then I'm like, I'm angry.

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CHEER 2

Grr...

CHEER 1

They took half my cheer budget.

CHEER 2

(As Cheer 3 pantomimes giant scissors, perhaps by scissor-kicking:)

Snip.

CHEER 1

I could strangle a mathlete I'm so angry.

Cheer 3 mock strangles an imaginary mathlete in the background.

CHEER 1

The greasy hair that sticks together, the pale skin - even the tan ones are pale - and epic zits. People always thought I hurled to keep perfect - but it was the mathletes.

Cheer 3 is overzealously strangling the imaginary mathlete.

CHEER 2

(As Cheer 3 acts it out:)

Die, mathlete, die.

CHEER 1

(Beat.)

But then I'm like, what are you - crazy? Killing a mathlete won't bring back the cheer budget.

(Beat.)

But *I* can. I know I can. If I just cheer louder, keep my back straight on the pyramid, lift my leg not just to a position that's unbelievably uncomfortable, but to one that's physically impossible, I can bring it all back.

(Beat.)

Then it hits me. Like somebody dropped a brick on my chest. A big, sad brick.

CHEER 2

Boo brick!

Cheer 3 falls and can't get up like a turtle.

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## CHEER 1

It's like I've fallen and I can't get up, just like one of those little old ladies from the commercials my mom has as a creepy ringtone on her cell. The big sad brick is crushing me, and I don't want to get out of my plush king size bed with 600-thread count cotton sheets ever again. Without a full cheer budget, life just doesn't feel worth living.

## CHEER 2

Sad brick. Bad brick!

## CHEER 1

And my mom and dad are there, and they take turns holding my one hand so I can still text and tell people how depressed I am.

A series of text messages project on a wall or screen, or in the low tech version, Cheer 2 and 3 hold up a series of giant cards.

## CHEER 2

omg i am so sad  
i am totes sad  
i am like the sad r us store  
u should c how depressed i am  
rents bought me cookies n cream and i cant even  
i cant go on like this

## CHEER 1

And then one day, the therapist is giving me a facial to make sure my face doesn't get stuck on bummer, and I'm like I could totally lie here 'til college, but she isn't even that good and Jeremy Snow is singing under my window and his voice sounds like sick rabbits.

## CHEER 2

Rabbits.

## CHEER 1

Maybe our budget is droopy like that coach from Western's...face, but I have to accept that. So I can either lie around getting facials and Swedishes, or I can fight for the cheertopia we all deserve. We still have our hotness. And when your school is too poor to fix the security cameras - and don't even think about hidden microphones - hot people suddenly get more valuable than they already are. People want to tell us things so that we'll love them, and it's a known fact that hot people can sell the same info for up to 50 percent more than average looking people.

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The Cheerleaders freeze in a tableau of "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil."

CHEER 1  
Gimme a...new first aid kit!

CHEER 2  
New uniforms!

CHEER 3  
Sparkly pom-poms!

CHEER 1  
Miami!

(Beat.)  
We will not miss the national championships in Miami. Not on my watch. So talk.

Enter Michelle.

MICHELLE  
Look - it's the golden girls.

CHEER 1  
We're in the middle of something.

MICHELLE  
Don't let me stop you. Oh...let me stop you.

CHEER 1  
Begone before someone drops a pyramid on you.

CHEER 2  
A cheer pyramid.

CHEER 3  
Boom.

MICHELLE  
(Feinting at them:)  
Boom!

The Cheerleaders jump. Michelle obviously makes them - and everyone else - very, very nervous.

MICHELLE  
Why so jumpy, cheerlings?  
(To Oscar:)  
And you-



I'm leaving. OSCAR

Stay. MICHELLE

I'm staying. OSCAR

There's a hurling sound from  
Betty in the stall.

He can't be in here. CHEER 1

Call Royce on me. MICHELLE

Maybe we will. CHEER 1

Yeah, maybe we will. CHEER 2

Yeah- CHEER 3

Cheer drone number three, you have nothing constructive to  
add. MICHELLE

But- CHEER 3

Trust me. MICHELLE

You think you're all - whatever you think you are, but you'll  
get yours. CHEER 1

I already have mine. That's why it's called mine. Now if you  
said, "I'll get yours," then we'd have an issue, and you  
might find out if there's any truth to those rumors that I  
left my last school with a body count that was higher than my  
perfect GPA. MICHELLE

That's enough for the  
Cheerleaders, who start to edge  
toward the door.

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CHEER 1

(To Oscar:)

She won't always be around to protect you.

MICHELLE

Fly away, cheerodactyls.

And they're gone. Beat. Oscar relaxes. Betty comes out of the stall.

BETTY

I don't think there's anything left.

MICHELLE

Who said I was here to protect you?

Beat.

OSCAR

Pickle suspenders elucidate  
slather peccadillo kerfuffle!

BETTY

(Looking nauseous:)  
I think I was wrong.

MICHELLE

Just had to go to the bathroom.

Oscar visibly exhales with relief, and Betty perks up immediately. Beat.

MICHELLE

We all know I'm not here to go to the bathroom.

Oscar and Betty look at each other.

Want to read the rest? Follow the instructions on the play's page to order a perusal copy!

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