

A DAY IN THE LIFE

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By Christopher Burruto

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SYNOPSIS: A kiss. A single, solitary, coming-of-age kiss. When Jason Henshaw turns 13, all he wants is a kiss from the Holy Grail of Girls, Erika Summers. What happens on his 13th birthday instead is a food fight, a trip to the principal's office, detention, and a basketball game gone horribly wrong. What he does receive are the best gifts of all—friendship and a special moment with his real crush, Monica.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 MEN, 5 WOMEN, 6 EITHER)

- JASON (m) A middle school or high school student.
He has a serious crush on Monica, but is too shy and awkward to admit it or do anything about it. It's his birthday. He could be 13 or 16 years old. (193 lines)
- MONICA (f) Jason's love interest. She's no pushover.
(95 lines)
- MRS. HAUSER (f) The principal's secretary. What she doesn't know isn't worth knowing.
(16 lines)
- RILEY (m) Jason's best friend. He is sly, wise, irreverent, and the anchor for humor in the play. (61 lines)
- DEWEY (m) One of Jason's friends. The light is on, but it's not always at full wattage.
(58 lines)
- SKIZ (m) Another of Jason's friends. He is a little quieter—a musician. (16 lines)

ALEXIS (f) Jason's sister. She can be younger or older. (20 lines)

DAD (m) Jason's father, middle aged. (37 lines)

MOM (f) Jason's mother, middle aged. (18 lines)

GIRLS (f) Monica's friends. (GIRL 1 - 8 lines,
GIRL 2 - 6 lines)

SCIENCE TEACHER (m/f) Severely boring. (3 lines)

ENGLISH TEACHER (m/f) Teacher who rhapsodizes over Shakespeare and whose interpretations of books often go a little too far. (7 lines)

SCHMIDT (m/f) The health teacher.

COACH (m/f) Coach of the basketball team.

TEACHERS (m/f) Extras, roaming the halls, asking for passes, seeing that the kids don't get out of line, especially during lunch.

TULLY (m/f) Teacher who supervises after school detention.

TUESDAY (f) A new girl. A throwback to the 60's hippie era. No lines but, her presence is almost everywhere.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

PROLOGUEPrincipal's Office
ACT ONE, SCENE 1.....Jason's Bedroom
ACT ONE, SCENE 2.....Kitchen
ACT ONE, SCENE 3.....School Corridor
ACT ONE, SCENE 4.....Classroom
ACT ONE, SCENE 5.....Study Hall
ACT ONE, SCENE 6.....Classroom
ACT ONE, SCENE 7.....Classroom

ACT TWO, SCENE 1.....Principal's Office
ACT TWO, SCENE 2.....Basketball Game
ACT TWO, SCENE 3.....Talent Show
ACT TWO, SCENE 4.....School Hallway
ACT TWO, SCENE 5.....Driveway

PROLOGUE
THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

In front of the main curtain. Chairs and a secretary's desk. JASON and MONICA both have spaghetti on their heads. There is a student, wide eyed and frightened at the prospect of being in the principal's office sitting in the middle of a short row of chairs.

JASON: Way to go, Monica. Did you lose your mind or something?

MONICA: Did you? Seriously? Fighting about a stupid cafeteria table?

JASON: Stupid? What's more important than that? (*Searches for the right word.*) I was defending our table.

MRS. HAUSER: (*Noting the spaghetti.*) Didn't get a chance to clean up after lunch?

MONICA: Defending from what exactly?

JASON: People...

MONICA: People? What people?

JASON: You. And that new girl, Tuesday.

MONICA: Do you hear yourself? Because you sound like an id—

MRS. HAUSER: —Children. Remember, you're here for a reason.

JASON: I've never been to the principal's office. Ever. When my parents find out, I'm dead. (*Beat.*) And it's my birthday. (*To audience.*) It really is. I'm 13 years-old. Today.

MONICA: (*Exasperated.*) Would you shut up about your birthday already? Geesh. Your birthday doesn't give you the license to...to make fun of other people, does it?

JASON: (*Lamely.*) She was the one sitting at our table.

MONICA: She's new! How's she supposed to know about your stupid table rules?

JASON: Why stick up for her? It's none of your business.

MONICA: She's my friend; she **IS** my business.

JASON: (*Beat.*) Well, now you're nosing into **my** business.

MONICA: (*Laughs.*) You know—or maybe you don't know, Jason, but it's a little...obvious.

JASON: Obvious? What?

MONICA: Erika Summers?

JASON: *(To audience.)* Erika Summers. *(Sighs. Lovesick.)* The most beautiful girl in school. *(To MONICA.)* What are you talking about?

MONICA: Your crush on Erica Summers. It's the size of a small planet...

JASON: What's it to you who I like?

MONICA: I **don't** care—that's for sure. But...you're embarrassing yourself.

JASON: *(Beat.)* Embarrass myself? Me? How 'bout **you**? With your I-don't-care-if-people-like-me-or-not uppity attitude. What's with that?

MONICA: You're very defensive. And you're **deflecting**...

JASON: **Everyone** cares what people think about them. Even you. So don't try to pretend you don't! Because you do.

MRS. HAUSER: **Children?**

MONICA/JASON: **WHAT?**

MRS. HAUSER: If I didn't know any better...Oh, *(Beat.)* Mr. McGovern is ready to see you now.

MONICA/JASON: *(Ad-libbing.)* He is? Who? Me or...

MRS. HAUSER: Both of you. Together. Now. That's what your here for, isn't it? Because of your "incident" in the cafeteria?

JASON: Sort of...

MONICA: *(Sarcastically.)* After you.

JASON: *(Sarcastically.)* No. Really. After you.

MONICA moves ahead. JASON begins to enter the principal's office, but stops at secretary's desk.

JASON: *(To audience.)* So big deal! I like Erika Summers. Who wouldn't? What junior high kid can't appreciate perfection when he sees it? Okay, maybe I stare at her. Sometimes. I can't help it. Sue me. Can you turn away from a beautiful sunset? The majesty of the Grand Canyon? A shooting star? A Super Colossal Super Nova? No! Impossible! I got sent—correction—Monica and I got sent to the principal's office *(Gestures.)* because of a dust up during lunch. It all started when Monica and her friend Tuesday sat at our table. Well...before that, really, in health class when Dewey started to make out with the resuscitation doll...maybe it was in English class with Mrs. Peppinger. *(Pauses.)* Wait a minute. *(Waves arms as if to scatter the thoughts away.)* Let's begin at the beginning. When I woke up this morning. The day of my 13th birthday. All I wanted *(Beat.)* was a single kiss from Erika Summers—the most beautiful girl in school. It began with promise. *(Beat.)* Then quickly became a disaster.

Lights down.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1
JASON'S BEDROOM

AT RISE:

A boy's messy bedroom and a "kitchen." Boy's bedroom has posters, broken electronics, unwashed plates, a cereal box or two, etc. JASON is in bed, half asleep, trying to retain what remains of a pleasant dream. On the main stage, a kitchen table and chairs. DAD at table, reading newspaper, facing audience, his face covered by paper. We see his face when he speaks and turns the page. MOM enters.

MOM: *(Enters wringing hands.)* Roger! Upstairs sleeping is our little boy! He's turning thirteen years old—even as we speak! We should be up there, sharing in that experience! Documenting it! *(Sighs. MOM crosses to stage to look wistfully out to audience.)* Oh, Roger, yesterday *(Holds in tears.)* he was making me mud pies... *(Mimes making mud pies.)*

DAD: *(To himself, as he reads.)* Yup. Yesterday, mud pies. And today? *(Checks watch.)* He'll be just like all the other teenagers: *(Turns page. Beat.)* Stark. Raving. *(Beat.)* Crazy...

MOM: Today's the day I've been telling you about, Roger. Today's the day he's going to start *(Beat. Stifling cries.)* pulling away from his mother...

DAD: *(To himself.)* Like clockwork...

MOM: That little boy who used to let me give him butterfly kisses, who held my hand, let me fix his hair. That boy is gone! Do you understand me? Gone! *(Takes out hankie.)*

DAD: Oh, brother...

MOM sighs. Lights fade. DAD continues reading paper. MOM busies self around kitchen.

VOICE OVER: *(Sports announcer-like.)* ...The rookie, Jason Henshaw, has stolen a rebound from Michael Jordan *(or other basketball star.)* Jordan wears a look of stunned surprise. Henshaw dribbles—WHAT A MOVE!—Charles Barkley's in the dust. *(BEAT.)* He passes off to Larry Bird.

JASON, half asleep, smiles.

MOM: *(Calls from kitchen.)* Jason! Time to get up!

VOICE OVER: Bird dribbles to the lane. Shoots! No good! Henshaw grabs the rebound, hustles to the outside. Pumps.

MOM: Jason?

VOICE OVER: He's all alone, fans. He shoots, misses, grabs his own rebound...

MOM: Answer me! *(Getting a little sterner this time.)*

VOICE OVER: He's up! Up! Spinning. An easy dunk!

MOM angry and impatient. She blows an air horn. JASON bolts upright in his bed, eyes large and staring at audience.

DAD: Must you?

VOICE OVER: *(Disappointed.)* Oh! Henshaw misses an easy score!
What a shame! What a colossal disappointment!

JASON: *(Shakes head from reverie. Sees audience.)* Oh. Hi.
(Swings head in direction of his Mom.) Let me apologize for Alice—my Mom, you know, interrupting my dream like that.
(Sighs.) She still sees me as that five-year-old dork making mud pies! Mud pies! *(Shakes head.)* What kind of oven would you bake them in? Who's going to eat 'em? No one, that's who. *(With a gesture, dismisses idea.)* Today is the day I've waited for—my 13th birthday! Here it is. Here I am. Waiting. For it to happen. *(JASON sits on bed, arms wide waiting for "it.")* Maturity. Angst. Heartache. Wisdom. The glories of victory. The agonies of defeat. *(Looks at audience. Beat.)* Sex appeal. *(Nods.)*

MOM: *(From kitchen.)* Jason Henshaw. If you're not out of bed soon, you're in trouble, birthday or not. Breakfast. Now.

JASON: 'Kay, Mom. *(To audience.)* I'm hoping when I walk downstairs, they'll dangle a set of keys in front of me. And in the driveway will be that yellow Lamborghini I've always wanted...I'll drive my buds to school. Maybe I'll just settle for a cake for breakfast *(Beat. Gets out of bed. He's already dressed.)* So I slept in my clothes. Who hasn't? *(Sighs.)* At school, it'll be just another day. Ordinary. Same old classes and teachers. Same old homework. But... *(Brightens.)* SHE'LL be there. Erika Summers—the most beautiful girl in school. Maybe today will be the day she looks my way, smiles and says, "Hello, Jason. I know it's your birthday, and I decided to give you this..." A great big juicy kiss... *(He hugs pillow, kissing it. At that moment MOM appears in his room. She witnesses his kiss.)*

MOM: Jason!

KEVIN: Welcome to my day! The day of my thirteenth birthday!

JASON frantically readies himself, throwing clothes, stuffing his back pack. Opportunity for some good ad-libbing and physical comedy.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2
THE KITCHEN

ALEXIS and DAD sit at table.

ALEXIS: Mom! You said you could take me and Sheila to the mall tonight!

MOM: Alexis. Jason has a basketball game, his last one. And it's his birthday. Plus, we have to pick up grandma... And if you were a thoughtful granddaughter, you'd come with me because *(Beat. She recites an oft repeated phrase.)* "She's not going to be around forever..."

ALEXIS mouths simultaneously with mother.

ALEXIS: Good grief.

MOM: *(She looks stage left.)* Jason, it's time for school, you've got to eat! *(Turns to ALEXIS.)* What did you say young lady?

ALEXIS: Nothing.

DAD: *(Still reading the paper.)* She said "Good grief."

MOM: Alexis!

ALEXIS: *(To DAD.)* Snitch!

MOM: Roger!

DAD: *(Checks watch.)* I'm afraid I'll have to leave without wishing him a happy birthday.

JASON: *(Entering from right.)* Have no fear, Jason is here!

DAD: We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

DAD stands up and walks around JASON as he stands at the table pouring milk or whatever.

JASON: What! No cake? *(Looks at family, then at audience. Characters on stage freeze.)* This is my father, Roger Henshaw, age 42. A little gray. A little tired-looking. A little overweight. Want to know something? I have no idea what he does for a living. He just leaves the house in the morning. And comes back at night. Kind of like a human boomerang.

DAD: There he is! Wait...wait a second... *(Circles him, eyes him.)*

There's something a little different about you...

ALEXIS: Yeah, he doesn't smell quite as bad as usual. Decide to use soap for a change?

JASON: Oh, Miss Sarcasm just woke up and *(Checks watch.)* is already hard at work.

DAD: There is something different. A certain...je ne sais quoi...about you.

ALEXIS: Maybe he shaved...his ONE chin hair...

MOM: *(Smiling, happy. To JASON.)* That's it! You combed your hair...for once!

DAD: You do look a little different...

JASON: More mature? *(Beat.)* Man-like?

DAD: Jason. You know what today is? Today is the day you turn into A MUTANT TEENAGE MONSTER. I'm going to run away now.

JASON: Relax. One monster in the house is plenty. Right, Alexis? *(ALEXIS sticks her tongue out at JASON.)*

DAD: Have some breakfast. I've got an early meeting with a client. See you at your game, okay? And Jason, have a good day. Today...is going to be pretty special...

MOM: *(DAD moves to exit, putting on his coat etc.)* Roger? Forgetting something?

MOM holds a plate of bagels.

DAD: Right. *(He walks over and takes a bagel.)* Thanks, hon. *(Then he hugs her goodbye.)*

MOM: *(To JASON.)* Here. *(Holding plate of bagels.)* You two are on your own. I've got to get ready for work. *(Slowly.)* Be nice to each other. *(JASON and ALEXIS fake smile at one another.)*

MOM rushes off stage. ALEXIS and JASON look at one another. They are alone, facing one another. JASON smiles uncomfortably.

ALEXIS: Don't say it.

JASON: Did I say *anything*? No!

ALEXIS: *(Beat.)* You were going to. I could see it in your shifty eyes.

JASON: Toad.

ALEXIS: Hamster head

JASON: (*Singsong fashion.*) I can't hear you...

ALEXIS: Lizard eyes.

JASON: You don't exist. You are not here.

ALEXIS: I know it's your birthday; Mom forced me to get you a present. But I don't have to give it to you. Besides, you forgot my birthday last year!

JASON: Try every year. (*Beat.*) Runt.

ALEXIS: If you're late for school don't think you're going to walk with me and Tiffany and make fun of us like you usually do.

JASON: You should be so lucky. I wouldn't be caught dead with you two grammar school refugees. (*Packing up for school. He says the next lines to himself.*) If I was ever seen walking to school with my sister, people would...shun me. I'd be a junior high social leper! I'd be in junior high purgatory. (*He looks at ALEXIS who continues to eat her breakfast. JASON stands.*) That...entity...that..."state of matter" is my sister Alexis. Her real name is Alexandria. Like the ancient realm. (*Beat.*) I'd like to send her back there. Permanently. You know what I mean? My parents have failed to provide any startling scientific findings to prove we're related. (*About to exit.*) You know, there's only one thing that keeps guys like me from behaving like perfect saints. And that's a having a sister. It really wears down your moral fiber.

JASON exits as lights fall.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3 A SCHOOL CORRIDOR

Students in school hallway.

JASON: Forget what your teachers tell you: (*Motioning to the scene.*) this is what school is all about, the number one reason we come to school. Not to say that the other stuff, the "learning" isn't important—but, this where we hang out, catch the latest gossip, all before first period.

DEWEY: Okay, here's one that's been plaguing my mind for quite some time...

RILEY: Dewey. Your mind is a plague...

DEWEY: A plague on both your horses.

RILEY: *(Beat.)* Horses?

BOYS: *(Ad-lib.)* What? Huh? Yeah right.

MONICA and her girlfriends cross and linger.

DEWEY: Come on. Listen. If peanut oil is made from peanuts, and olive oil is made from olives— *(Pause.)* —what's baby oil made from? *(Beat.)* Huh? Seriously.

GIRL 1: Can't you guys ever discuss anything important?

RILEY: *(Referring to GIRLS.)* Do any of you know? If you're so smart, answer the question. What's baby oil made of?

MONICA: Baby oil. Hmm. I don't know about that ... but I **DO** know where tanning oil comes from...

DEWEY: Tans?

The BOYS clamor for answers.

GIRL 1: *(Beat.)* No...it's probably too gross for you guys.

GUYS: *(Ad-lib interest.)* Go on...Nothing's too gross for us. We love gross.

GIRL 1: Well, long ago, the ancient Aztecs used to sacrifice people...

GIRL 2: *(With dramatic flair.)* Plunge a knife into their victim. Rip open the chest cavity, and take out the heart...

GIRL 1: ...while it was still beating....

GIRL 2: ...baboom, baboom, baboom...

GIRL 1: The king would take a bite out it...

GIRL 2: like it was a Big Mac or something...

MONICA: See...the king thought it would give him the strength and courage of the victim...

GIRL 2: All the while, it was still beating...

GIRL 1: ...baboom...baboom...baboom

GIRL 2: Then the king would smear the blood over the body of his eldest child, and place the child on a high ledge, out in the sun...

MONICA: ...so that the ancient city would be protected when the gods came down from the skies to devour the entire world...

GUYS: *(Their eyes are rapt with attention.)* Whoa! Cool! Unbelievable!

MONICA: That's how tanning lotion started.

GIRL 1: And it was great for getting rid of diaper rash.

DEWEY: *(Beat.)* Cosmic.

BOYS: *(They finally get that they've been had, ad-lib disbelief.)* No way...

GIRLS laugh at how easily the BOYS are taken in.

MONICA: I've got a real question for you guys. If you're game...

BOYS: *(Ad-lib.)* Try us!

MONICA: You're in a car. Cruising around at the speed of light. Warp 3. You turn your headlights on. What happens? Do they shine on? And if they do, what do they light up? By the time light gets there, you're already long past...

GUYS: *(Stunned silence. Three count.)* Wow.

DEWEY: *(Beat.)* What about your high beams?

MONICA: High beams. Same thing. But more so...

GUYS: *(Pause for three count.)* Whoa.

The GIRLS cross.

JASON: These "creatures" are my guys. My best buds. They're not the most popular kids in school, and have no luck with the ladies—contrary to what they might think. But we're a team. A group. A unit. Riley wants to be a comedian some day. His stage? The classroom. As a result, he's spent a lot of time in the principal's office! And that? That is the Dewey. The Dewey is an enigma wrapped in a mystery set in a puzzle.

DEWEY: Hey, Henshaw. What's new?

RILEY: *(Like a Kreskin mind-reader character.)* Oh, wait! Wait. Our boy Jason has achieved an important milestone!

JASON: *(To AUDIENCE.)* Here it comes...

DEWEY: Henshaw is thirteen years old. A teenager.

SKIZ: There goes the neighborhood!

RILEY: Head for the hills!

DEWEY: *(Slow and thoughtful.)* The last of us to hit the big time.

(DEWEY puts arm around JASON's shoulder.)

We few, we happy few,

we band of teenage brothers...

For he who is thirteen this day,

shall be my brother,

Though we don't share a mother.

We may never again pass this way.

(Tears up.) "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

GUYS: Dewey, shut up! *(In unison, then laugh.)*

JASON: *(Addresses audience.)* The thing is, the insults, the kidding around. It's like a...tribal law...a code, honored and respected by generations of men since the dawn of time. Sarcasm is our common language: it's a form of kinship.

DEWEY: Hey newly minted teenager, I got you a little gift.

JASON: *(Taking it.)* Dewey. I'm touched. Surprised you remembered, but touched. *(JASON opens it up, the guys look in, and they audibly gasp and turn away in disgust.)*

SKIZ: What is that thing?

RILEY: Is it alive?

DEWEY: It's a tie!

JASON: Dewey. Is this, by any chance, the same tie I gave **you** last year?

DEWEY: You, my friend, have a keen eye! Well...I...uh...I thought we could start a really cool tradition: Give the same tie to each other every birthday. You know, the...the... *(Slowly.)* "Brotherhood of the Traveling Tie." *(Beat.)* Plus, my mom wouldn't let me keep it anymore. Said it was too ugly to keep in the house!

RILEY: And it got uglier. How did you make ugly uglier?

DEWEY: Glad you noticed. The uglification was pure inspiration on my part.

BOYS: *(Ad-lib.)* Dew, a dud...social faux pas...ix-nay on the tie thing...embarrassment city...

The BOYS are interrupted when ERIKA SUMMERS, the most beautiful girl in school and the object of JASON's affection, crosses. All of the boys on stage stop to stare, and the corridor quiets down as if royalty is passing. The GUYS are all standing in a row watching, trying to get in front of each other so as to have a better view. Music swells as she passes the GUYS, and when she does, each guy in turn says breathlessly her name, "ERIKA." She walks off stage and the guys breathe a single sigh of longing.

DEWEY: (*Lovesick.*) Did you see...

GUYS: (*Lovesick.*) Yeah...

JASON: I mean...

SKIZ: She is so...(Searching for the words to complete sentence.)

GUYS: Uh huh...

SKIZ: Have you ever seen anything...?

GUYS: No...(Collective lovesick sigh.)

JASON: She is...the Holy Grail of girls...

BOYS: ...Holy Grail of girls....

MONICA and FRIENDS gag themselves and cross.

JASON: (*Moves down stage.*) Erika Summers. (*Sighs.*) I have loved her since the first grade, before I could walk or talk or think or tie my shoes. You know what I'd really want for my birthday? (*JASON looks at the guys.*) More than a tie or a new bike or a Lamborghini...I want—No, I NEED—one single, solitary, give-up-my-life-for coming-of-age kiss from Erika Summers...

JASON returns to friends.

JASON: Here's a question: If Giselle (*Or Megan Fox or other famous celebrity beauty.*) was thirteen years old and walking down the hall, would she be better looking than our own Erika Summers? Would our heads even turn in her direction?

RILEY: Good question. Was she a dud as a teenager, a geeky dweebette who became beautiful only after turning 13? Dew? Your thoughts on the matter?

DEWEY: What? Who?

RILEY: You know, contrary to popular myth, most celebrity beauties aren't actual people at all.

GUYS: (*Ad-lib.*) What? No way! Get outta here!

RILEY: No. They're illusions! Totally made up! Seriously, listen. Celebrities are created by a Madison Avenue Advertising Agency to lull young men—like ourselves—into buying the products they advertise. To fantasize about things we can never hope to obtain in our lifetime. Thereby creating unfulfilled desires in us, making us weak and susceptible to any suggestion to buy.

The boys are silent for a second, absorbing it all. JASON sees his sister ALEXIS walking by...

JASON: Speaking of Beauty and the Beast...

ALEXIS: You guys are pathetic...

JASON: Why does my sister have to show up all the time and ruin everything?

RILEY: See the problem with girls, the thing that ruins 'em? They're someone's sister. So to you, they're not officially girls. They're sisters.

DEWEY: Which according to evolutionary science is just one step above protoplankton. And your mother. It's hard to believe, but she was once a girl.

RILEY: Well stated, my Darwinian comrade. Science has made some important advances in de-mystifying sisters. Take my sister. If I have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, she has a cow if I leave the seat up.

DEWEY: You leave it up in case you go later in the night or you're the first one up. It saves time. Women don't understand how efficient that is.

Three count. The bell rings. Students clear off and move to class.

JASON: Forget about Giselle. Or Gazelles. Or...

JASON begins monologue, but stops, noticing a couple, arms wrapped around each other, looking dreamily into each other's eyes, obviously lost in time and space and the world around them.

JASON: Hey! This stage is reserved...

He clears his throat—an indication the couple should get off the stage. They ignore him. JASON "ahems" a little louder. In a Rod Serling—Twilight Zone tone.

JASON: The “couple” looks into each other's eyes, oblivious to both time and space. Their lips have mysteriously fused together. They believe they're invisible to the probing eyes of every student in the school. But they always choose the most public of places to display their love...

In normal voice.

JASON: No kidding. Unstick your lips, go to class and learn something useful besides how to play tonsil hockey, okay?

They go off arm in arm, still mesmerized by each other.

JASON: Speaking of class, I've got science. I'd better get going, too!

ACT ONE, SCENE 4
A CLASSROOM

Several chairs as desks.

SCIENCE TEACHER: *(In a boring monotone.)* As you know, human beings and apes are thought to have evolved from a common ancestor millions of years ago...at which point they diverged and took separate roads: one branch led up to today's apes and the other eventually led to an animal known as homo sapiens. That's people, people. *(Absentmindedly scratches self in ape-like fashion.)* After a while, humankind settled into relatively stable and permanent groups of twenty to fifty members for their mutual protection and survival.

RILEY: Like the football team!

STUDENTS chuckle.

SCIENCE TEACHER: *(Continuing.)* These groups, in order to identify themselves, developed primitive signals and gestures for the dual purposes of identification and greeting...

JASON, late, enters and sits down. A few students give high fives or other greetings.

SCIENCE TEACHER: Also, like lower animals, the males competed amongst one another in order to win favor among the females of their group.

ERIKA: *(Raising her hand.)* Does anyone have a pencil I can borrow?

The guys in the class fall over themselves trying to give her a pencil or a pen.

SCIENCE TEACHER: ...so that their genes may be passed down to future generations and keep the inexorable flow of evolutionary progress in continuance.

The bell rings. STUDENTS exit. GUYS follow ERIKA out the door, fawning in an attempt to please her.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5
STUDY HALL

Remaining students switch chairs as if they have switched classrooms.

JASON: Study hall. It's like a vacation from school for just 40 minutes...

MONICA: Remember the talent show we had in fourth grade?

DEWEY: Mrs. Barnhart's class? Room...

ALL: 121!

JASON: Remember when we dressed up as cavemen? And sang Beatles songs?

JASON: That was cool. School was fun.

DEWEY: Yeah, all those great projects and field trips.

ALL: *(Wistfully.)* Field trips.

JASON: And all those great assemblies...

ALL: Assemblies... *(Sigh.)*

GIRL 1: But when you're in the sixth-grade, you're treated like a nobody.

GIRL 2: The eighth graders looked at you as if you were a piece of lint that ended up on their sweater, waiting to be picked off.

MONICA: ...or a piece of food that gets caught in their teeth. And they're just waiting for the right moment to spit you out.

JASON: If you were in the hallway, the eighth graders would come rushing through the hall pushing aside everyone and everything out of their way.

DEWEY: Like locusts! Or like a herd of wild buffalo with a crazed look in their eyes. They just run right over you. Like you were so much artificial turf. *(Everyone pauses to digest this non-sequitur and subtly register their confusion in their eyes by glancing sideways at one another.)*

JASON: *(To AUDIENCE.)* I used to enjoy school. But then I discovered summer. No work, just play, all day...

MONICA: Did you ever notice how summer at the beginning is almost infinite? In June, school's finally over: the last test has been taken- -

GIRL: Yeah, you've cleaned out that cave you call your locker, and the summer is there. Waiting. Just for you to use it up.

JASON: Yeah, and then the weeks pass. July fourth, nothing can touch you. You've still got all of that summer left to use up. But then the weeks...move faster and faster like a locomotive gathering momentum, hurtling down the tracks to that dark and mysterious tunnel that is school. *(One by one, everyone joins the conversation.)*

BOY: Yeah, school is like...like this great big planet with all of this gravity...

GIRL 1: And we're this little asteroid getting sucked in by it. *(Makes sucking noise.)*

GIRL 2: And we're just little, so getting pulled in is easy.

JASON: And the closer we get to it, the faster we go. Closer, faster, closer, faster.

MONICA: Until we enter the atmosphere and start burning up.

JASON: And we try to cram in as much life into every minute that we can.

DEWEY: And then? September! We go into a whistling free fall and splat! *(Slaps hand on desk.)* We land on September! A lumpy bit of carnage and despair. ...Then, our lives are over.

The bell rings.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6
CLASSROOM

STUDENTS rearrange themselves as if moving to another class.

JASON: Next class is English with Miss Peppinger. She's a typical English teacher, which means she's a lot like those people who hunt for Big Foot or the Loch Ness monster—*(Beat.)* people who are desperately trying to find something *(Beat.)* that just isn't there...For example, a couple of days ago, we read the fairy tale, *Hansel and Gretel*. Then she spends an entire class period trying to prove, well, listen to what she said...

ENGLISH TEACHER: What seems like an ordinary fairy tale to you is really something much deeper...You see, Hansel and Gretel were really attempting to break from the burdensome, bourgeois posturing of their parents, so they needed a cathartic removal of their guilt, symbolized by the witch. You see, class, by popping the witch into the oven, they did away with their nullifying guilt.

STUDENTS madly flipping through their books, confused.

JASON: See what I mean? Did we even read the same story? Where do these teachers get this stuff? *(Beat.)* I just loved the candy house idea.

ENGLISH TEACHER: Today we have a real treat: *Romeo and Juliet*! One of the most romantic plays ever written! *(Students groan, one lone girl cheers.)* Mr. Riley, you're always interested in providing the class with a laugh-track. Or two. How about tackling Juliet today? Hmm?

RILEY: *(Class laughs. RILEY stands.)* Ah, gee, I'd like to, Ms Peppinger, but sadly, I'll have to decline. See, my therapist thinks that without a strong male role model in my life, I may never develop the "sensitive, warrior" side to my personality, and that may ultimately lead to gender confusion and—

ENGLISH TEACHER: *(Interrupting.)* —An unfortunate loss for us all—you would have made a splendid Juliet. Anybody for Juliet? Or Romeo? Anybody?

STUDENTS look away, trying to avoid eye contact. LIGHTS FALL on main stage while JASON stands and moves down to deliver monologue. Spot on JASON.

JASON: What we're doing here is making the teacher sweat a little, making her work to get those volunteers. We avoid eye contact. We look away. *(Like an instructor.)* Swing your gaze away from the teacher. Away from any eye contact. Then she won't call on you. It's a centuries old dodge.

ENGLISH TEACHER: How about a Juliet? Erika Summers? How about it?

JASON: Hold the phone! An opening! She's Juliet, I'm Romeo. The stars align perfectly! I get my kiss! *(to teacher.)* Ms. Peppinger, I'll play Romeo.

ENGLISH TEACHER: I have a Romeo, thank you, Mr. Henshaw! Erika?

ERIKA stands. Beat, then all the boys suddenly and awkwardly stand.

ERIKA: Miss Peppinger...I'd love to. Really. But my voice is used exclusively *(Beat.)* for cheerleading...Doctor's order's—I mean, coach's orders. Sorry! I'm working toward a cheerleading scholarship!

The boys clap, politely, at ERIKA's pronouncement.

MONICA: *(Muttering.)* Oh, brother...

ENGLISH TEACHER: Who will join Jason as our Juliet? You know, of course, that in Shakespeare's time, all of the women's parts were played by boys...

JASON: Great...happy birthday to me...

MONICA: *(Looking around.)* Conscience makes cowards of you all. *(She raises her hand.)*

ENGLISH TEACHER: Thank you, Monica! *(MONICA stands.)* I've marked the pages...let's begin!

MONICA: *(Clears throat. It's obvious MONICA has a crush on JASON. The lines are a subtext to how she really feels. Slowly, with feeling.)* Did my heart love till now?
Forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty
till this night!

The class is silent, in awe of MONICA's delivery.

MONICA: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JASON is frozen, looks at MONICA, then at audience. He opens his mouth to deliver lines, then his script falls, pulling him out of his momentary reverie. He awkwardly fumbles with the manuscript. He clears throat. JASON is taken somewhat aback by the revelation in those lines.

JASON: *(He reads woodenly.)* Good, um...pilgrim, you wring, I
mean, wrong your hand too much,
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm *(They put their palms together.)* is holy palmers'
(Beat.) kiss.

The bell rings.

ACT ONE, SCENE 7
CLASSROOM

STUDENTS rearrange themselves to signify class change.

JASON: Talk about saved by the bell. Next is health class. Yesterday we learned the Heimlich maneuver. It was a lot of fun seeing other people grunt up their breakfasts, let me tell you. I practiced on Dewey, who for a special treat launched a piece of spearmint gum onto Riley's head. Luckily, it was the kind that doesn't stick to most dental work, *(Beat.)* so we didn't have to shave his head or anything. Today we're learning how to do mouth to mouth resuscitation.

DEWEY: Mr. Schmitt, do we get to practice mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on each other? Or on the dummies?

SCHMIDT: On the dummies, Mr. Dewey! On the dummies—

RILEY: I guess he does mean you, Dewey, my man. *(Class laughs.)*

JASON: Even Mr. Schmitt, who hasn't laughed since October 4, 1972, managed to crack a smile.

RILEY: There's Erika Summers. Maybe before the day is over, she could practice a little resuscitation on you!

JASON: Yeah...you're right! Do you think she'll be my partner?

RILEY: Only one way to find out!

JASON makes his way to ERIKA.

JASON: *(To ERIKA SUMMERS.)* Hi...

ERIKA: Hi...

JASON: *(Aside.)* I'm so nervous, my armpits have armpits that are sweating... *(To ERIKA.)* I'm Jason...

TEACHER: Okay, kids. Who's going to volunteer?

ERIKA: I know. You're in my English class.

JASON: *(To AUDIENCE.)* See that? She's noticed me...

DEWEY jumps up and down in order to get called on.

JASON: Yeah, I was wondering, you know, if you and I could...maybe practice—

DEWEY: Ooh. Mr. Schmitt. Call on me...call on me...

JASON: ...you know, practice kissing. Each other.

ERIKA: What?

JASON: (*Flustered.*) I mean resuscitation.

TEACHER gives DEWEY a resuscitation doll.

DEWEY: Jason, look, it's you and Monica from English class today...How do I love thee, let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach. Here, she wants to give you a great big birthday kiss.

JASON: Dewey, what are you--

DEWEY keeps pressing for JASON to "kiss" her, but JASON tries unsuccessfully to resist. DEWEY uses the doll's arms to slap JASON. Now the three of them are in a wrestling free-for-all, tossing her around and getting out of control.

SCHMITT: Okay, Romeo. Take it easy, okay?

The Bell rings ending class.

ACT ONE, SCENE 8 THE CAFETERIA

JASON: Here's the best part of the day. The cafeteria. Food. Lunch is like the intermission to the day. We talk about what's happened and discuss strategies for the rest of the day. Plus, (*Looks around.*) I get another opportunity to (*Beat.*) gaze at Erika Summers as she eats.

JASON crosses to where the guys are standing.

DEWEY: (*Seriously looking at the cafeteria.*) Did you ever notice that the cafeteria is like a microcosm of social order?

JASON: Dewey, is your brain running on empty? Enough oxygen taking the escalator to the second floor?

DEWEY: Look at the table over there. Who sits there every day like they own the place?

SKIZ: The popular group.

JASON: They've sat there every single day since 6th grade.

ERIKA SUMMERS enters.

SKIZ: You're right. You practically need a passport just to get near it.

DEWEY: Each table and each chair is identical! Yet people sit in the same places every day! They're victims of their own mindless routine! *(Pause.)*

RILEY: Hey! Is that Monica? *(Points to MONICA.)* Sitting at our table? *(JASON and RILEY cross to table.)*

BOYS: Yeah!

JASON: *(Crosses to table.)* Hey, uh, Monica.

MONICA: Hi...what's up? Oh, and happy birthday by the way.

JASON: Thanks, you're, uh, kind of sitting at our table.

MONICA: Your table? Well, Tuesday and I are *(With TUESDAY.)* sitting here. *(Friendly and inviting.)* There's room, grab a chair.

RILEY: What's the big idea, St. George?

MONICA: Big idea?

RILEY: Big. Idea...

MONICA: $E=mc^2$ is a pretty big idea, though **you** may not be acquainted with such an important one.

DEWEY: What do you think you're doing?

MONICA: *(Looks around.)* It's a cafeteria. I'm eating. *(Increasingly annoyed.)* That's what people do here. In case you didn't know.

DEWEY: We know how to eat. And stuff. But what are you doing at *this* table?

MONICA: Eating a peanut butter and banana sandwich. Why are you guys spazzing?

DEWEY: *(Spazzing.)* This is OUR TABLE!

RILEY: Our table! Table ours! We've eaten lunch here every day since sixth grade.

MONICA: What's your point?

JASON: (*Getting annoyed, though trying to stay calm.*) What we're saying, Monica, is that this is **our** table. We pioneered this table.

DEWEY: Stuck by it through thick and thin!

SKIZ: When it was a nothing table.

DEWEY: Flung upon the scrap heap of history!

MONICA: Scrap heap of history? It's a...table...

DEWEY: (*On a roll.*) When only the nerds and outcasts of society would eat here! (*Passionately.*) We brought this table back from the brink of oblivion to the forefront of respectability.

RILEY: We were here during the chicken nugget wars of two years ago.

DEWEY: Lotta casualties in that one! Lost a lot of good men...

JASON: We were here during the unsuccessful eighth grade coup d'état.

Boys ad-lib agreement.

JASON: We held them off, and were victorious!

RILEY: We fought all who would take this table from us!

DEWEY: And **here** we're going to stay.

JASON: And we're going to stop squatters like you and this...this...hippie chick, Tuesday, from horning in on our hard won turf.

BOYS: YEAH! (*They are drawing a crowd.*)

MONICA: (*Looks in disbelief from one to the other. She quietly and slowly stands up.*) I'm not sure who you think you're talking to, but I'm not some **bimbo** saving her voice for **cheerleading**. (*Looks right at and points at JASON.*) You. Are. Pathetic!

JASON: Who? Me?

MONICA: Yes. You!

JASON: Who? Me?

MONICA: (*Exasperated.*) You just want this table so you can glare at Erika Summers. Well, I've got news for you, the answer is...

DEWEY: Uh, oh. Break out the dictionary and thesaurus. Monica is going on one of her multi-syll, multiply syllaborphon—

MONICA: —Multi-syllabic?

DEWEY: Yeah, that's it...thanks. Monica's going to use big words.

MONICA: Here's a **mono**-syllabic word you'd better get used to:
NO! (*Standing on a chair and mocking JASON.*) It's my
birthday...I've got to stare at Erika Summers or I'll be all **sad**...
(*MONICA gestures at her eyes to indicate crying.*) Go find
somewhere else to sit.

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