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Family Plays

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

A drama about codependency by
Ron Parker



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

"This is an extremely powerful piece."
(*Plays for Children and Young Adults*)

Young adult drama. By Ron Parker. Cast: 15m. or w., extras (up to 17). It is a play about drug and alcohol abuse, but not about the drug and alcohol abuser. Throughout this play the characters show us the results of their codependency. Kris's mother is an alcoholic, and Kris tries to bring her pathetic world into balance by being the perfect daughter. Jim learns to hate from his alcoholic father. Brian is very close to his athlete brother—until his brother starts having "roid rages" from using steroids. Sheri loves Russ; she would do anything for him. But Russ loves crack cocaine; he would do anything for it. Jackie is mentally handicapped because her mother was a drug addict. David isolates himself in his room, listening to loud music, trying to shut out the pain of having two alcoholic parents. These and other codependents relate their tragic stories. Each story is a complete play by itself. Throughout this play, the characters show us the results of their codependency—anger and hate, loneliness and isolation, guilt, sorrow, and shame. A "living mobile" on stage shows how the codependent's life is thrust into a state of imbalance by the person dependent on drugs or alcohol. The purpose is clear—to help bring balance back to the lives of those who cry out for it so desperately. *One act; Set: almost bare stage with a huge mobile hung or mounted in the middle. Costumes: modern clothing. Approximate running time: 120 minutes. Code: U37.*

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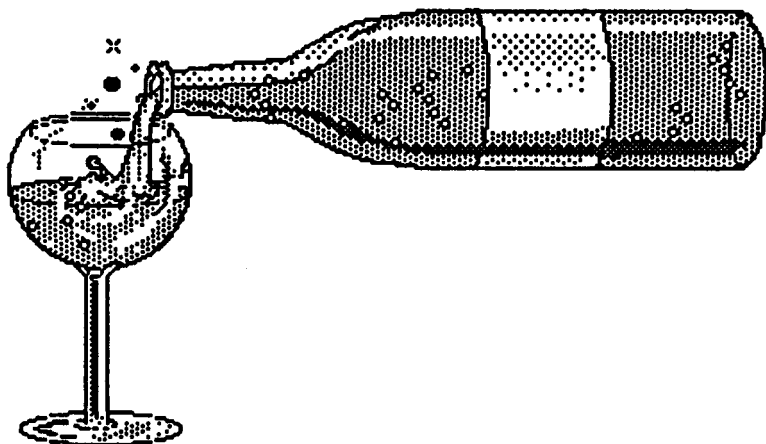
Under the Influence

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A Drama About Co-Dependency

by

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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**This play is dedicated to my wife, Nelda,
whose patience, encouragement, trust,
and wisdom made this work a reality.**

**To my children, Alex and Crescent,
who keep all things for me in balance.**

**And to the first cast of UNDER THE INFLUENCE,
whose own influence in the lives of so many is just beginning.**

Preface

UNDER THE INFLUENCE is a play about drug and alcohol abuse, but not about the drug and alcohol abuser. The latest research into chemical dependency has revealed that drug addiction is a disease that affects far more than just the person who uses the drug. The term is **co-dependency**. Family members, friends, anyone who has a relationship with someone dependent on drugs becomes an unwilling partner or victim of that dependency. Not only is the user's life destroyed by his habit, but also the lives of all those around him. The addict can no longer say that he is only hurting himself. The pain caused by his substance abuse reaches out and is felt by everyone he loves or who loves him.

This approach is what makes **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** so different from other dramatic pieces about drug addiction. There are far more young people who are affected by an alcoholic parent or a drug dependent friend than there are those who are themselves dependent. It is time that their needs are addressed, that their side is heard. This play will help provide an outlet for feelings often suppressed or difficult for the co-dependent to face. At the same time, however, **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** will reach out strongly to the user. It will in harsh, realistic terms show him the full extent of his destructive behavior—by showing him the destruction his addiction is causing in the lives of those for whom he cares—or perhaps in the lives of those he doesn't even know.

The title of the play was chosen to illustrate this. The phrase "under the influence" is normally used to describe the impaired condition of the drug abuser. But the term also has a second meaning. It is the co-dependents as well who are "under the influence" of the user with whom they are somehow connected. That influence is just as real and impairing as that of the drug itself.

Many of the stories presented in **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** are based upon actual episodes that have occurred in our local community as well as nationwide. The characters as portrayed are intended to represent the various roles that co-dependents often assume as their means of dealing with the chemically dependent person in their lives. Researchers in co-dependency have specifically labeled several of these roles. Among them are: "The Lost Child," "The Family Mascot," "The Hero," "The Scapegoat," and "The Enabler." Further information on co-dependency can be found by contacting your local drug and alcohol treatment center.

The lives of the dependent and co-dependent are inexorably linked. What happens to one, directly affects the other. Because of this, we have chosen the mobile as the central symbol of the play. In a mobile, each piece is perfectly

balanced with the others. But when one part is disturbed, all the pieces move to try and regain the original equilibrium. If a piece is put permanently off balance, all the other pieces of the mobile are in a similar state. The relationship between the dependent and co-dependent is the same.

Many co-dependents come to believe that they are the reason for this imbalance in their lives. They see themselves as the cause of the dependent's drug abuse. Much of the pain and anguish felt by the co-dependents comes from their futile attempts to make their own mobile balance—when all the while, it is not their lives or behavior that needs to change.

For the premiere performances of the play, therefore, a large free-standing mobile was constructed (see page 36). There were five large sections built and hung in such a way as to balance. On each of these sections, there were three places on which smaller pieces could be hung or attached. They were positioned and weighted in such a way so that when all fifteen pieces were attached, the mobile was in balance. Each of the five large sections abstractly represented a different emotional state felt by the co-dependent because of his relationship with the substance abuser. The five states used for our mobile were ANGER/HATE, LONELINESS/ISOLATION, GUILT, SORROW, and SHAME. Each of the fifteen major characters carried an individual piece, designed to visually express their particular story. During the course of the play, they attached and detached these pieces on the mobile, causing it to be in various positions of imbalance. (This is indicated more specifically in the beginning stage directions.) Each character also wore a black shirt with the shape of their piece painted on it. Other costume requirements are more specifically indicated in the script.

The mobile, therefore, however it is represented, becomes the main focus of the entire drama and is placed directly Center Stage, always visible to the audience to remind them of the play's theme: the devastating influence and unbalancing effect that the drug dependent has on the lives of those around him.

Finally—this play was conceived and written for one reason: to make a difference in the lives of those torn and tortured by drugs. If it succeeds in reaching just one person—dependent or co-dependent—then it will have proven itself worthy. This must be our primary hope, our primary reward for the many energies which will go into making *UNDER THE INFLUENCE* a reality on stage. There can be no greater purpose than to help bring balance back to the lives of those who cry out for it so desperately. May our “influence” prove strong and our message ring true.

—Ron Parker

ABOUT THE PLAY

The fifteen main characters in **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** have a drug and/or alcohol problem. No, they're not drug and alcohol abusers. They are victims of the drug and alcohol users in their lives—**co-dependents**. These family members, friends, and others, who are in a relationship with a person dependent on drugs, become unwilling partners of that dependency. Throughout this play, the characters show us the results of their co-dependency—anger and hate, loneliness and isolation, guilt, sorrow, and shame. A “living mobile” on stage shows how the co-dependent's life is thrust into a state of imbalance by the person dependent on drugs or alcohol.

Kris's mother is an alcoholic. Kris tries to bring her world into balance by being the perfect daughter—making perfect grades, being elected to student council, trying out for the cheerleading squad.

Jim learns to hate from his alcoholic father. He learns to hate everything about himself. Jim blames himself for not being strong enough to keep the loving father, the sober father, from slipping away.

Jan wants to be cool. So she decides that if she teams up with Micki, a girl who gets away with everything, some of Micki's slickness would rub off on her. But Micki sniffs glue.

David isolates himself in his room, listening to loud music, trying to shut out the pain of having two alcoholic parents.

Jackie is mentally retarded because her mother was a drug addict. She wonders how her mother could choose to take those “bad medicines” and carelessly hurt her own baby.

Brian is very close to his brother—until his brother starts using steroids to improve his performance in sports. Tragedy results from one of his brother's “roid rages.”

Stephanie runs away from home to escape an alcoholic father who sexually abuses her every time he gets drunk.

Pat is forced to place her son in a rehabilitation center after his drug abuse reaches chaotic levels. The stress threatens her marriage.

Sheri loves Russ. She would do anything for him. But Russ loves crack cocaine. He would do anything for it.

These and other co-dependents in this play relate their tragic stories. The purpose is clear—to help bring balance back to the lives of those who cry out for it so desperately.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Cast of Characters

KRIS

JIM

VOICE OF FATHER

MOTHER

LISA

JAN

VOICE OF MICKI

GIRL 1

GIRL 2

GIRL 3

DAVID

JACKIE

BRIAN

VOICE OF LENNY

COACH

STEPHANIE

MAN

PAT

SHERI

VOICE OF RUSS

MR. PETERS

VOICE OF GREG

SAM

KATHY

LAWYER

BAILIFF

JUDGE

SARAH

GIRL 1

GIRL 2

ROBB

ELLEN

Many characters may be played by either male or female actors.
Character names may be altered accordingly.

TIME: today

PLACE: here

Original mobile design by Kathy Mitmoen
Original theme music composed by Kristina Boerger

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Student theme on notebook paper, with grade of A—Kris

Dishes of food (food may be mimed)—Jim's Mother

Dr. Pepper can—Jan

Other soft drink cans—Micki, Girls 1, 2, and 3

Capsule filled with stage blood—Girl 2

Walkman, head phones—David

Filefolder—Coach

Envelope of pills—Coach

Wheelchair—Brian

\$20 bill—Man

Whiskey bottle—Man

Folded sheet of theme paper—Mr. Peters

Cane—Kathy

Briefcase—Lawyer

School lunch trays (may be mimed)—Girls

Sheet of brightly colored stickers—Robb

Costumes

Suggestions for costumes are given in the stage directions. Key items are listed here. Others wear everyday clothes appropriate to their age and station.

Kris—attractive school clothes

Jim's Mother—house dress

Jackie—Carelessly dressed, with a coat that is too big for her

Brian—Sweatshirt

Stephanie—Suggestive but carelessly worn dress

Pat—Conservative, mature clothes

Mr. Peters—Suit (he is a teacher)

Sam—Loud, comedian-type sports jacket

Kathy—Black dress or suit. One arm is in a sling

Sarah—Blood-soaked bandages on each wrist, hidden by a loose-fitting sweater or sweatshirt

Robb—Leather jacket

Ellen—Plain house dress, unkempt appearance

Sound

Breaking glass

2 gunshots

Door slamming

The Set

Set props are suggested in the stage directions within the script. To avoid delays in the action, the set pieces can be moved on and off while part of the stage is blacked out; that is, when lights and action are focused on Stage Right, set pieces can be moved on and off at Stage Left. If the type of stage or lack of facilities makes this impossible, a few pieces of furniture may be permanently placed—for example, a table and several chairs—on each side of the stage. Props on the tables (such as dishes and whisky bottle on page 4) may be placed and removed by actors. At Stage Center hangs the Mobile (see page 36), suspended from the loft. If Mobile cannot be suspended, it can sit atop a tripod or standard. In this case it should be above Center in order not to impede the action.

Music

As mentioned in the stage directions, music is used to open and close the performance. Music may also be used in between each of the stories. A beautiful and haunting arrangement of an original piece entitled "Innana's Exile" is available from I. E. Clark, Inc. Whatever music is chosen, it must have a slow, bittersweet quality.

A Few Suggestions on Production from the Author

There is a basic principle of acting which states “what you say is not nearly as important as how you say it.” **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** has had powerful, often life-changing effects upon audiences, due, to a great extent, not to the words in the script, but to the way those words are presented. For any group choosing to perform **UNDER THE INFLUENCE**, I have several suggestions to make the experience the most moving and successful one you may ever have been a part of on stage.

1) **Find and use pauses.** Several times places to pause are indicated in the script—but it would have been impossible and distracting to have written in every possible moment. There is often more power in the space between lines than in the lines themselves. I watched a performance of **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** given by a group of very talented middle school actors who finished the play in almost half the time of my original cast. Lines were said one after the other almost in “machine gun” fashion with very few pauses for emphasis. While the message still touched the audience greatly, much, I felt, was lost because of the rushed nature of the presentation. The characters in **UNDER THE INFLUENCE** are experiencing the great pain of co-dependency. Time must be given for them to deal with that pain and for the audience to see it, absorb it, and relate it to their own lives. A pause by an actor to wipe away a tear or to meet the eyes of someone in the audience can do much to make the role real for everyone.

2) **Real emotion is better than faked emotion.** After selecting the original cast of **UNDER THE INFLUENCE**, I required each cast member to select a personally painful experience from his/her life to share with the rest of the cast. Ground rules were set-up concerning trust and confidentiality and I enlisted the services of our school counselor to be present during the session. The results of this experience were two-fold. First, it helped bring the cast together and break down barriers which might have hindered a much-needed sense of ensemble and the play’s overall effectiveness. Second, it provided the raw material for the actors to pull from when portraying their individual roles. During rehearsal, I would ask them to recall their own painful memories as they attempted to portray their characters’ pain. This proved an invaluable tool for the young actors and created some incredibly stunning and realistic moments. Care must be taken during the sharing session that the actors reveal only what they feel comfortable in revealing and that no judgments be made by other cast

members listening. Surprisingly to me at the time, most of the painful memories shared had to do with a co-dependent situation in their lives: an alcoholic or drug abusing parent, sibling or friend. This revealed to me and the cast just how pervasive the problem of co-dependency is. The play became a process of healing for many of the cast members who were carrying the burden of being under the influence of a drug-dependent loved one.

3) Provide the cast time to “de-pressurize” after a show. Often the talk-back with the audience will serve this function, but often I held short sessions with cast members after a performance just to give them time to work out of the intensity of their character and to “come down” from the emotional high of their time on stage. This, I believe, is vital to the well being of both cast and director alike.

4) Keep open communication with the parents of cast members. I required the students in the play to take home a permission slip to their parents explaining the nature and purpose of the play and requiring that they read the script before I would allow their children to participate. This eliminated any potential problems that could have arisen from the intensity of subject matter and script. Parents can be a director’s greatest ally if they are made a part of the process from the start. Needless to say, administrators must be kept similarly abreast. An ounce of prevention works wonders here.

5) Your cast members will be role models whether they want to be or not. The actors who stand on stage talking about the horrors of dependence and co-dependence and who party on the weekends will negate any effectiveness the play could have. I required my cast members to live the message of the play. Many made a commitment to stay away from alcohol and other drugs permanently in their lives.

6) Finally, let the students know the importance of what they are doing. I told my cast that they would end up saving lives, which they did. UNDER THE INFLUENCE became much more for them than just a play. It became a mission. Give young people a just cause and show them that they can make a real difference and they will move mountains—both in their own lives and in the lives of others.

Above all else—**BE HONEST.** It is truth that sets us free. Co-dependents need the truth that they are not alone, that their situation is not their fault, that their pain is not inescapable. Thank you for caring enough to give that truth and the life-giving freedom which it provides.

—Ron Parker

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

[Before the play begins, the auditorium is SEMI-DARK. On stage at Center is the Mobile (See separate discussion of Mobile design and purpose on page 36). It is LIGHTED by a single-colored gel; the tint is appropriate to the Mobile's hue and composition. The effect should be subdued and shadowy.]

As the play opens, the HOUSE LIGHTS dim and a WHITE LIGHT slowly comes up on the Mobile. It is in balance with each of the fifteen individual pieces attached to the five major sections. As the music starts, EACH CHARACTER enters in the same order as their stories and removes his/her piece from the Mobile. There should be a lag of several beats in between each character's entrance so that the Mobile has time to shift as each piece is taken off. After removing his/her piece from the Mobile, the CHARACTER should slowly move upstage. This area should be dimly lit or gelled. Platforms may be placed upstage, but are not essential. EACH CHARACTER will begin to form a large semi-circle around the Mobile. He/She will hold his/her Mobile piece and stare out at a fixed place among the audience.

The last person to walk out to the opening music is KRIS who, instead of removing her piece from the Mobile like the others, pauses at the Mobile, and then walks forward to begin her story. At this point, the remaining MEMBERS OF THE ENSEMBLE enter, and the entire upstage GROUP reassembles themselves into a "living reflection" of the Mobile's present position. In order to do this, SOME MEMBERS will be standing, SOME sitting, OTHERS may have to crouch or bend in such a way as to give the physical impression with their bodies of the off-balance state of the mobile. They will remain frozen as such throughout Kris' story. When finished, KRIS will walk back to the Mobile and remove her piece. As she does this, JIM, the next character, enters from offstage, crosses to the Mobile, and places his piece at a different point. KRIS rejoins the upstage ensemble, while the CHARACTER who has just entered walks downstage to begin his monologue. The "LIVING MOBILE" will then shift again to match the new visual imbalance of the Mobile caused by the new character's piece. This process continues for each story with the Mobile always off-balance in a different way and the ensemble re-positioning themselves to duplicate this. During this shifting by the ensemble, those

CHARACTERS who will appear in the next scene may exit offstage to await their entrance. Music may be used to bridge the entrances.

Each of the fifteen CHARACTERS once downstage will speak directly to the audience as if the audience were the drug dependent with whom they are somehow involved. This is vital for the dramatic effect and intent of the play. When flashback scenes are played that involve the dependent, he/she will not be physically present on stage. Instead, whatever lines the dependent has will be spoken by an OFFSTAGE ACTOR via a microphone. The ACTORS ONSTAGE, however, will play as if the user is actually present: allowing space for him, reacting and speaking to the space—even though a specific visible body is not there. This is to maintain the universality of the dependent and to force the audience's attention onto the co-dependents in the scene—their words, their reactions. This will greatly emphasize the focus of the play which is on the effects of the dependent and his drug use on the lives of those around him. It will also symbolize the fact that the dependent, in the most important ways, is absent from his relationships due to his preoccupation with his addiction]

KRIS. *[Approaches forestage; in her hand she carries a school paper or assignment. A circled grade of "A" is clearly visible]* Mom, I got my term paper back today. Mr. Hinson said it was the best in the class. *[Pause]* In fact, he said it was the best paper he'd ever received. Isn't that great? *[Pause]* I told him that you gave me the idea. *[Pause]* Don't you remember? That one night at dinner when you talked about how easy things used to be when you were my age? About how different life was then? Remember? That's how I got the idea to research the changes in youth culture over the past twenty years. Mr. Hinson said he's never seen a topic so thoroughly covered. *[Pause]* He . . . he asked me if you help me with all my assignments. *[Pause]* I told him sure—I mean, I know you would do more if you felt better. And you do help me a lot. You do. Some of my best ideas have come from you. I listen all the time. I know kids aren't supposed to pay attention to their parents—but we've got to listen to each other—right? I mean we're a team. *[Long pause]* Oh . . . I didn't tell you . . . I was nominated for vice-president of Student Council. Everyone seems to think I'm going to win. *[More rushed]* Cheerleading tryouts are next week too. *[Laugh]* I thought I would follow in your footsteps. *[Pause]* You could teach me some of your routines. We could

practice—I mean, whenever you feel up to it. *[Pause]* Listen—you just stay here and I'll cook supper tonight. How does spaghetti sound? I still can't quite get your secret sauce. I think you're holding out on me. *[Laughs which quickly fades]* Mom, have you had something in your stomach today? Anything? *[Her voice turns slightly caustic]* I mean something more than scotch and water. I'm sorry—I didn't mean that. *[Attempts a smile]* Well, don't you move. Spaghetti a la Kris will be ready before you know it. *[Begins to leave and then stops and turns back to the audience]* Mom, I know it's been hard since Dad left. Our lives are so out of balance. It's like everything's been turned on its side. *[Pause]* You know—you still haven't told me why he moved out. I keep asking myself what I did to make him leave. I go over a hundred things I could have done different—better. I wish he was here to see this paper. I want him to be as proud of me as you are. You are—aren't you, Mom? *[Pause]* Don't cry, Mom. Please. It'll be all right. Don't worry about anything. Here let me get you something to eat. I'll clean up downstairs too. *[Holds out her paper]* Would you like to read my paper? *[Pause]* Well, maybe later. *[Pause]* Mom, please. I promise I'll make it all better. I will. *[Turns to leave]* I will.

[KRIS moves to Mobile and removes her piece. As she is walking upstage, JIM enters and approaches the Mobile, passes KRIS and attaches his piece. He begins walking downstage as the ENSEMBLE shifts appropriately]

JIM. You know—you were a great dad—when you were sober. Do you remember when I was nine, and you took Lisa and me to the zoo? We spent almost the whole day in the monkey house because I didn't want to leave there. You really didn't seem to mind. You taught me about the different types, how to tell them apart, where they lived. You even helped me give them all names. I wish I could remember some of them. We laughed and laughed. We had such a great time. You spent a fortune on peanuts and oranges so we could feed them. You even talked the keeper into letting me touch one of the smaller ones. I was scared, but I wanted to do it. And you were right there. Yeah, you were great. The perfect dad. I don't even think I ever heard you raise your voice at us *[pause]* unless you were drinking. What happened? How could something in a bottle change so completely your idea about what it meant to be a father? How could you look at us so differently—hurt us so much—and then tell us it was for our

own good? How could caring be replaced by cruelty so fast? I watched you one night, drunk, shake Lisa because she was crying and didn't want to go to bed. You shook her and screamed that she was spiteful. You kept shaking her until her eyes rolled back in her head, and she stopped breathing. This was the same father who just the day before held his daughter and wiped back her tears when she'd fallen off her bike. I used to tell myself that I had two fathers. One who loved us for who we were and one who hated us for the same reason. It was only later that I realized you were the same man. I never wanted you to see my confusion. I never wanted to let that hating father have more reason to think me worth his hate. I tried to be everything I could be for my loving father, but after a while, I got to be afraid. I began to wonder if it was really you or the hating father who was stroking my hair or telling me jokes. I was also afraid because my loving father came to me less and less. He was replaced more and more by an angry, punishing stranger who kept telling me that I must learn my lesson and that it was his job to teach it to me. It was during one of these "lessons" that you taught *me* to hate.

[A LIGHT comes up on the Stage Left area where a table and four chairs have been set up. The table is set for dinner. Jim's MOTHER in a house dress is busy placing dishes of food on the table. Seated at one side of the table facing Stage Left is Jim's sister, LISA, a young girl of about nine to eleven years of age. JIM walks to the table and takes his seat at the side facing upstage. The MOTHER sits opposite of Lisa. The side of the table facing full front and opposite of Jim is set with a chair, but is empty. This is where the FATHER is "seated." A bottle of whiskey and a half-filled glass are next to his plate. The VOICE OF FATHER is heard offstage from a microphone. The MOTHER begins to put some greens on Jim's plate]

JIM. Whoa, Mom. You know better. I can't eat greens. They make me sick.

MOTHER. Oh, that's right. I forgot. You know, sometimes I think it's all in your head.

LISA. I'd rather that it stay in his head than come out his mouth. Remember last time? Gross!

VOICE OF FATHER. *[Speech is loud and somewhat slurred]* Give 'em the greens.

JIM. But Dad . . .

VOICE OF FATHER. You heard your mother. It's in your head. Time you learned that there are things in this stinking world that you gotta swallow. Doesn't matter if you want to. *[To wife]* I said give it to him!

MOTHER. John, he really reacts badly.

VOICE OF FATHER. He's going to react worse if he doesn't do what I say. You hear me?

JIM. *[Softly]* Yes, Dad.

VOICE OF FATHER. What'd you say?

JIM. *[Louder]* I said, "yes." *[Looks at mother]* Put some on my plate. *[Mother pauses, looks at Father's chair]* Just do it.

VOICE OF FATHER. Now eat them. All of them. *[JIM pauses and then begins to eat little bites. We see and hear him gag]* Go on, swallow. *[Louder]* I said swallow!

LISA. Daddy, don't . . .

VOICE OF FATHER. You shut up, or you'll wish you had. *[JIM begins to gag, and then vomits into his plate]* You little . . .

MOTHER. John, don't get up. He didn't mean it. I'll clean it up.

[FATHER begins to move around table to behind Jim. All eyes and movements of the THREE VISIBLE ACTORS should indicate this for the audience]

VOICE OF FATHER. You don't touch it. *[To Jim]* You think it's going to be that easy? Well, I've got a surprise for you.

MOTHER. John, let go of his neck. *[JIM begins fighting with his neck as if he is struggling to keep from being pushed down into the plate. This struggle continues during the next lines]*

VOICE OF FATHER. *[Nearly screaming]* It's my job to teach him a lesson and damn it, he's gonna learn it! *[JIM's head is finally forced onto the plate. JIM moves it around as if being held there by his father's hands]* Now eat it. Eat it!

[There is a beat and then BLACKOUT. In the darkness, JIM slowly rises and begins to walk back downstage. His hands are over his face, and he slowly brings them down]

JIM. I learned that day. I learned to hate. To hate everything about that son

you had to teach. I blamed myself for not being strong enough—for not being man enough to meet your challenge. I hated myself for being the cause of the horrible fight you and Mom had after I left and went to my room. I hated myself for hearing Lisa cry that night and say that she hated you. I hated myself because somehow, some way, I had failed to keep the loving father, the sober father. I had let you get away. I had lost the father who taught me about the monkeys at the zoo and held my hand. I, instead, let someone else's hand teach me that I was nothing. Why did I let it happen, Dad? Why?

[JIM returns to the Living Mobile after removing his "piece." JAN begins her walk downstage. She is carrying a can of Dr. Pepper. She stops Down Center. The ENSEMBLE shifts]

JAN. I was never the smart one when it came to getting away with things—I guess that's why I started hanging around with you. I mean, you always had an angle. You could talk your way out of trouble so easy. I've seen you walk into class fifteen minutes late and give the teacher some excuse, and he'd buy it! Sometimes you wouldn't even show up at all, just roam around the school—and you never got caught. The few times I skipped alone, I ended up in the office before the period was half over. Some people live a charmed life. You're definitely one of those. Nothing ever goes wrong for you. Not me though *[Pause. Looks at can]* Not me. So I figured if I teamed with you, maybe some of your slickness would rub off on me. I think you were a little suspicious at first, but pretty soon we were cutting classes together on a regular basis. Our group of steadies—that's what you named us, steadies—ran anywhere from three up to seven or eight. Our favorite meeting place was the downstairs girl's bathroom. The Dean of Students always checked it at the same time everyday, so we knew when it was safe. I was right—with you there, we never got caught.

My grades were starting to slip, so I backed off the class-cutting for a while. I was in line for a college scholarship—a good one for Pre-Med—and I didn't want to screw it up. The next time I showed, you and the other steadies were sitting around next to the stalls. I walked in, and you handed me a can. I mean we'd always had something to eat or drink in there, and you and most of the other girls smoked all the time. So when I saw the can, it was no big deal. I naturally thought . . .

[The LIGHT has come up during these lines. Several GIRLS are seen sitting or standing at Stage Right. They each hold cans of soda. JAN begins to raise the can to her mouth and then begins to cough]

JAN. *[Moving over to the girls]* Hey! This isn't soda. What's in this?
[The OTHER GIRLS laugh]

VOICE OF MICKI. What do you think it is?

JAN. Smells like . . . *[Sniffs cautiously]* I don't know—like glue.

GIRL 1. What a genius.

GIRL 2. Yeah, all that studyin' you've been doing lately really paid off.

JAN. Is there glue in all your cans?

GIRL 3. *[Sarcastically]* No, we just put it in yours 'cause you're so special. What do you think?

JAN. When did you guys start doing this?

GIRL 1. Couple weeks ago, Micki thought it up. Even if we get busted for being in here, they'll think it's just Mountain Dew.

GIRL 3. And we can hide the cans in the stalls and stop in here for hits between classes. When we go. I mean it's perfect. *[Holds the can up to her nose and inhales deeply]* Perfect. *[Staggers slightly; the GIRLS giggle]*

JAN. *[To space where Micki should be]* Micki, this was your idea?

VOICE OF MICKI. Who else? Go on—just hold it up to your nose and breathe in. It'll take two or three times before you start feeling high. Go on.

[LIGHT slowly fades. JAN turns to audience and starts walking downstage. GIRLS at right freeze]

JAN. My first instinct was to put it down, but the others were looking at me—watching to see what I would do, and you were doing it, so I figured, why not? *[Inhales from can]* You were right, it took a while, but then I started to feel real light-headed and kind of dizzy. Everything started to seem funny. *[GIRLS laugh]* We skipped two extra periods. Almost got caught, but you got us out of there before the Dean showed up. We had a great time. *[Looks at can]* And the great times kept coming. We'd meet at our usual period and then sneak in for hits throughout the day. We got to where we started bringing the cans to lunch. I watched you take hits right in front of the teachers. You'd make faces behind their backs. Sometimes

we laughed so hard, we couldn't stand up. Not one of them suspected. For all they knew, we were just a bunch of silly girls carrying around cans of Diet Pepsi. Then we started doing it outside of school—at parties and at home. I remember my mom told me she was worried about how much soda I was drinking lately. She said that I should drink more milk. I laughed and told her, "Only if they start putting it in cans." I remember the look she gave me. I couldn't help but crack up. *[Pause]* Then I got my mid-term grades. I was bombing all my quizzes in Biology, but I figured I could make it up on the final. The problem was I didn't study for *it* either. At least not enough. It seemed harder to remember things. But I just figured I wasn't applying myself. And besides, I had the rest of the semester to make it up. That's what you told me—and you always passed. And you know, passing suddenly seemed enough. I forgot all about the scholarship—all about my dreams of being a doctor. The only doctor I cared about was the empty can of Dr. Pepper I filled everyday with glue. Then it happened. I guess I was doing more of it than I thought.

[LIGHT comes up on GIRLS still at Stage Right. JAN begins to walk over to them, but her gait is unsteady. She is obviously having difficulty keeping her balance]

JAN. Hey, Mick, I don't feel so good. Everything's real white. I . . . I think . . . *[Falls in front of the GIRLS, who jump back. GIRL 2 goes to her]*

GIRL 2. Jan, Jan! *[Touches her head which is turned away from the audience. She draws back her hand. It is red. A blood capsule can be held in GIRL 2's hand and simply broken here]* Hey, there's blood coming out of her mouth and nose. What do we do? *[There is the SOUND of faint footsteps]*

VOICE OF MICKI. Listen. There's someone coming. Let's go.

GIRL 1. We just can't leave her.

VOICE OF MICKI. They'll find her. Come on or we'll get busted. Come on!

[GIRLS 2 and 3 exit with their soda cans in their hands. GIRL 1 pauses a moment. The FOOTSTEPS are louder. She looks around and then leaves also carrying her can. There is a pause of a beat or so and then JAN slowly gets up as the LIGHT fades. She resumes her position downstage. Her can is left where she fell]

JAN. *[Coughs several times throughout]* They found me. I was rushed to the hospital where the tests they did showed I had damage to my lungs and windpipe. *[Coughs]* They also think I might have some brain problems. You know—I was in there for over a week. And you didn't come once to visit me. And when I finally called you at home, all you could ask me was if I had said anything about you to the Dean. I mean, I'm lying in a hospital bed with tubes down my throat and you want to know if I'm going to narc on you. *[Coughs]* Micki, you were my friend. Don't you care what happened? Don't you care that all my plans for the future are gone? That sometimes I can't even remember my own phone number? How can I hope to remember all a doctor needs to know? *[Coughs]* I looked up to you. I trusted you. You were supposed to protect me. To help me be as lucky and special as you were. *[Pause]* Mick, you lied to me! *[Coughs]* Listen to me—you lied. You never told me this could happen. I had a shot, Mick. I had a shot at something more, and you stood there and let me throw it away *[walks over and picks up the can]*—let me throw it all away for a few minutes of feeling weird. A few minutes of not caring where or what I was. You were with me then. You were always with me when I didn't care about myself. Where are you now that I do care? *[Coughs loudly]* Where?

[JAN continues to cough, but fades as she walks to Mobile and removes her piece. She then joins the upstage ENSEMBLE. DAVID enters and places his piece on the Mobile. He then moves Down Center. He is wearing headphones and is carrying a walkman. He removes the headphones as he begins speaking]

DAVID. With these I can shut it all out. I turn it up real loud so I can actually feel the sides of my face vibrate. It's great. I don't hear your yelling or your crying. And in here—my room—it's like a sanctuary. My own personal sanctuary. I set the rules. I control the environment. I see what I want to see, hear what I want to hear, smell what I want to smell. And when I speak, nobody listens *[pause]* but me. Contact with the outside world is kept at a minimum. It isn't safe. The threat of contamination—of getting close—is too strong. *[Pause]* Well, there is a mealtime. This usually consists of one or both of you laid out in front of the TV with your fourth or fifth glass of "It's been a hard day, I deserve this" or engaged in some major battle or other which usually comes after number five or six. Either way, it allows me to get in, grab the necessities, and get out. Sometimes I

just stay in and don't risk it. I get the usual knock at the door and the parental: "Are you eating?" That's usually all. At that point, I suppose you feel you've fulfilled your God-given responsibility. It doesn't seem to matter much if I come out or not.

You know—It's almost like being invisible. *Persona Non Grata*. I'll have to admit that being invisible does have its advantages. More for you two, I think, than for me. I mean you're obviously relieved that your kid doesn't get into trouble. That he keeps to himself. No gangs, no parties. As you're so fond of saying: "At least we don't have to worry about David." As if who I am now isn't worth worrying about. You take credit for having such a well-adjusted son. Well-adjusted. You think it's well-adjusted to stay lockedaway from the two people I should be closest to? I'm not in here with these headphones on because I want to be. You put me here. You did. And what's so funny is that you're both so wrapped up in your own liquid lives and selfish needs that you think it's perfectly normal that I am here. That spotting me in the vicinity of the supper table once in a while means everything's OK. *[Louder]* Well, it's not OK. It's never been OK. *[Pause, moves downstage]* I have thought about taking the other road—you know—getting bounced out of school or getting arrested—something like that to get your attention. Others do it. It works for them. But I figure it's too much trouble. Besides, it would just give you another excuse to have "one extra" after dinner. You don't need any more excuses, and I don't need the grief. So I'll stay in my sanctuary, crank it up, keep invisible. You're happy, and I'm, *[pause]* well, let's just say I'm safe. See you at supper—maybe. *[Smiles, puts on headphones and exits to Mobile and then upstage]*

[JACKIE enters. She walks slowly in a shuffling gait. Her whole air is one of uncertainty. She wears a long coat obviously too big for her. She speaks slowly—having difficulty with her words. Her eyes are somewhat blank. She is obviously mentally retarded. She has difficulty coordinating when she hangs her piece on the Mobile]

JACKIE. Momma, are you out there? It's me—Jackie. You maybe don't know my name since it was given to me by the hospital people after you left me there. They named me after one of the nurses. I don't remember, but they said I looked like her. Do I look like you, Momma? Is my hair the same? *[Touches her hair]* Mrs. Smith at the center fixed it for me. She's a nice lady. She's the one who told me about you. I asked her why

you left me at the hospital. Why you didn't take me home. She said she didn't know. Why did you leave me, Momma? Was it 'cause you knew I was gonna be retarded? That I wasn't as good as the other babies?

Mrs. Smith said I was very sick after I was born. That I almost died. She said that you were taking medicines that you weren't supposed to take before I was born—bad stuff and that it made me sick while I was inside you. She said that you were *[has difficulty with the word]* ad . . . addicted, which means that you couldn't help it. Momma, did you know that those medicines would make me sick? Mrs. Smith said that's why I'm so slow—that those things you took made my brain not grow right. When I have a baby, I'm not going to take any bad medicines 'cause I want my baby to be smart. Not like me. *[Pause]*

Did you know I go to school, Momma? It's a special class at the high school. I have my own desk and locker, and there are other kids there who are slow like me. One of the girls is in a foster home too, but that's 'cause her momma died. I used to pretend you died. I used to say that's why you weren't here. But Mrs. Smith said no—that you were too sick to take care of me, and that it was better that you went away. I don't think it's better. I think a lot about you. I think maybe I could have helped you not take that stuff and be ad-dicted. *[Pause]* And you could've taught me things like—like how to talk to boys. I liked this boy in lunch, you know? So I made him a card with a heart on it and gave it to him *[pause]* but he didn't even look at it; he just started laughing and threw it on the floor. Why did he do that, Momma? It was a nice card. I worked on it all night. Why did he laugh at me? Why do they always laugh at me? Is it 'cause I'm retarded? Did you laugh at me when I was born, Momma? I don't want to be retarded no more. I don't want to have him laugh at me no more. Why did you have to make me this way? Why did you take that bad stuff and hurt me and then not stay here to take care of me when I needed you? Was I so stupid—so ugly—huh? Were you so sick that you couldn't love me even a little?

Sometimes I hate you. I hate you. That boy laughed at me 'cause you loved your medicine more than you loved me. And I can't even tell you 'cause you're gone. You didn't even leave me your name. You just left me what I am—and what I'm not. All you left me is their laughter. Are you still laughing at me, Momma? Are you laughing at the stupid, ugly daughter you made? Why did you do this to me? Why? *[Pause]* I'm sorry, Momma. I don't really hate you. I love you. I just don't understand why you didn't love me too. I guess I'm too dumb to understand, right?