

The Monkeyhouse
by Ryan F. Hughes

Characters:

CAMERON-17 years old
ANGIE-17 years old
NAOMI-17 years old
MATT- 17 years old
MARY-17 years old
CRYSTAL-17 years old
MAVIS-Colleen's mother, can be doubled with Crystal
EARL- Colleen's father, can be doubled with Matt

(SCENE 1: A line of chairs across back wall. Seated in the chairs are the CAST, dressed for a prom. Perhaps a disco ball hanging. Music starts. Sinister-sounding dance techno stuff. They rise (not all at once) and begin to dance. The lighting changes to dance lighting. As the dancing continues, the CAST notices the audience, and they begin sneering at them rather aggressively and disdainfully. This behaviour continues to build until their main focus is on making the audience feel uncomfortable. As this reaches its peak, possibly with a change in the music, a strobe light is switched on, very fast at first, but as its tempo slows, they begin to regard the audience with surprise, then alarm, and they begin to glance at each other, worried. Then, blackout.)

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(CAMERON, not dressed very well, bit of a nerd, near-trembling with rage.)

CAMERON:

In the monkeyhouse, Ms. Hendrykse told me "You really don't belong here, Cameron. High school is a zoo." Like an idiot I nodded my head and agreed. But I don't think so. Zoos have cages. There's a limit to what's acceptable. And preferring a zoo to what my father used to call "the best years of your life" is not acceptable. Hiding in a cage to keep the animals off you is. Not. Acceptable.

ANGIE:

(From another part of the stage, as lights go out)

Boo-hoo.

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(NAOMI, not dressed for the prom, enters dressed as a waitress, on her way somewhere with a tray, perhaps, stops to tell us:)

NAOMI:

No, I didn't know her. She was in one of my classes. Home Ec I think. I can't remember. It was a while ago. Seems longer. I'm finishing by correspondence. I like that alot better.

(Begins to exit, stops)

I think it's awful what they did, and I'm glad I wasn't there. Cause I don't know what I would have done. Cause I don't know if I would have done anything.

(As she exits, ANGIE, again elsewhere on stage, bursts into laughter. This carries through the next scene, getting meaner and wilder)

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(MATT, good looking, athletic)

MATT:

I don't know why we did it. It wasn't on purpose. It was just going that way, and I went along. That's life.

(ANGIE's laughter stops)

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(SCENE 2:ANGIE)

ANGIE:

Y'ever fuck up someone's life? Anyone's life, just grab it like it isn't theirs, and shake the shit out of it till it looks nothing like it did? Y'ever done that? *(Indicates herself)* Four times. Levelled to the ground. It was easy. Few phone calls, couple of lies. Or even the truth, if it's any good. And that's it. The phone stops ringing, they quit showing up at the mall or the restaurant, or the dances. They just disappear cause everyone suddenly hates them. And here's why it works: Cause no one thinks it's that easy. It's got to be more complicated than that. Well it's not. And of course they deserve it. Everyone deserves a good shake. Christ, I do. Just no one knows how. Except me.

* * *

(SCENE 3: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

Ms. Hendrykse... She was my biology teacher. She smiled, and she never used charts or diagrams, she just explained it to us. The methane cycle and the double helix, and all the chains and reactions, just stood there and told us about them and we understood. Because we wanted to. For her.

(Sounds of boredom and scorn from the OTHERS)

Or I did, anyway.

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(SCENE 4: MARY, giddy with fatigue, her prom dress noticeably ripped, one shoulder strap ripped and hanging off.)

MARY: *(smiles)*

I've been up all night! My dress look okay? I looked for it for three months. My mother must have taken me to every dress shop in the city!

(Laughs)

God, I tried on so many dresses! Well, I thought it was kind of silly, but Mom said, "Mary, this is your night! A girl only has one prom." She said that. And the prom was fabulous! Everybody was so... shiny! Sparkles, and satin, and the disco ball! Everybody was so bright! So beautiful. Even the losers! And when my friends Angie and Crystal, and my boyfriend Matt pulled Colleen Fitch's corsage off and threw it in the punchbowl, and she went all red and started screaming, I didn't laugh. I mean, I didn't stop them. They're my friends. But this was the prom! And if we can't forget She's fat and gets good marks for one night...well, what kind of people are we? Angie says she hates Colleen because Colleen is epileptic, but Crystal has diabetes, and that's fine, so I don't get it. I think Angie just likes being mean. So when Angie took the ladle from the punch bowl and poured it down the front of Colleen's dress, well I just looked away. I mean Colleen was bad enough off as it was, with her corsage in the punchbowl, and punch on her dress, and crying like she was, and Angie could have left it at that, but, but then it got really bad and they had to call an ambulance, and there were police, and someone said "assault", and... well that was pretty much it for the prom. We're all in so much trouble. But I didn't do anything... And Angie couldn't have known... I mean this can't be anybody's fault, it just. Happened. Didn't it?

* * *

(SCENE 5: Dark. Hospital sounds. Audience is COLLEEN)

MAVIS:

Colleen? Colleen? Oh, please! Coleeen!

(Lights up minutely, we see two vague shapes)

Earl! Earl she's back! Colleen!

EARL:

(As lights come up full)

Now, you come to this minute, young lady! No more of this unconsciousness nonsense!

MAVIS:

How's your head, honey?

EARL:

She's fine now.

MAVIS:

She's awake.

EARL:

She's fit as a horse!

MAVIS:

She'll be alright.

EARL:

Let's see a big smile from my big girl!

MAVIS:

She can't move her face, Earl, the drugs.

EARL:

Well I bet she's smiling in her head!

MAVIS:

(Sighs with relief)

She's fine now.

EARL:

Happy, and conscious, and ready for school on Monday!

(Blackout)

MAVIS:

(In dark)

Did she go out again?

EARL:

She'll be fine by Monday!

(SCENE 6: CRYSTAL and ANGIE. CRYSTAL holds a hypodermic needle full of insulin. She tries for several seconds to inject herself, but is uncomfortable with this. She holds it out to ANGIE)

CRYSTAL:

Angie? Will you do my needle?

(ANGIE looks at CRYSTAL for a long beat. Maybe toys with her. Then she takes the needle, begins to inject CRYSTAL)

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(SCENE 7: CAMERON takes pictures of someone out past the audience)

CAMERON:

She was a wonderful subject. Long limbs, round face, and she dressed well. And soft. So soft to look at. Always wore fuzzy brown turtlenecks. It looked like she was made of velvet. You'd almost forget she was your biology teacher. Student teacher actually, but after she came our real teacher never showed up.

The most amazing thing was her noticing me. I was taking pictures of her across the parking lot.

(Does this rapidly, almost desperately)

And she saw me!

(Stands stiff, embarrassed, excited)

What do I do! She's coming over! Eeeee! She knows I was following her, and she'll misunderstand. She knows I think she's soft to touch! She'll spray me with mace! She'll sue!

("Normal", to her)

Hi. She asked if I was a photographer. I said I liked to think so. She asked if I charged alot. I said I didn't charge. She mentioned it was mating season. I didn't say anything. She explained she was doing a paper for one of her university classes on the mating habits of monkeys in captivity. She needed someone on the weekends to come to the monkeyhouse at the zoo and take pictures of the beasts mating while she recorded it onto tape.

Well, what do you say to that? I said yes. She said great. Saturday. Ten. The monkeyhouse. And her BOYFRIEND could get us in for free. Cause her BOYFRIEND worked there.

Boyfriend. Hm.

Still. We would have the monkeys.

Definitely a step in the right direction.

* * *

(SCENE 8: MATT)

MATT:

My parents want me to go to University. Well, my Mom does. My Dad just wants me out of the house. And that's fine by me, believe me. But not University. No way. I'm joining the army. No more friggin school, just right into the army. And high school? Is perfect training. Coach always screaming at you, calling you a fairy, screaming. That's like drill, right? And respect! Like all these years, and I never once took a swing at Coach. Cause he knows what he's talking about, and he'd just kick my ass. That's respect. Just let them think whatever about you, and let them think they're right. Like Coach thinks I'm an idiot and a fairy, so I say "Yes, Coach, I am." And they feel better about themselves. Or that thing with Fat-Chick, Colleen? At the prom? Afterwards Mr. Green is screamin about how it's our fault, and we acted, um, atrociously, and didn't represent the school very well at all. Well who voted me president? The school. And it's such a joke cause all the teachers saw and they didn't do anything. And now they're sayin we're all terrible so the parents will get off their backs, and we're all sorry cause that's what we're supposed to be is sorry. And that's totally the army. Chain of command, you know? And that thing with Mary-

(Pause. Maybe he doesn't want to go there)

So I'm going to the army, and it's gonna be me, a uniform, and a whole buncha guys, just runnin around, yelling and shooting, and no women. Well, army women, but no girls. And I won't have to deal with girls, except for certain things, like on the weekend. And that'll be fine. Real easy. Real uncomplicated.

* * *

(SCENE 9: NAOMI)

NAOMI:

When I quit school, Mother threw me out. Daddy had left the month before so she had the house to herself. Which is, I think, all she ever really wanted. Am I sorry? No. That place was a dungeon. I mean the school. Dungeon. Complete with torture chamber. The gym. Some days in class, halfway across the school you could hear the screaming. Coach Himmler, or whatever. Just screaming. I can't believe they let him near people. That's how I think of that place. Screaming and ugliness. Well, says Mother, that's life, and wherever you end up working will be like that too. Well I've been here four months, and not one suicide. There were three attempts when I was in Grade Eleven. A girl with pills, a guy who dove off the roof, and another guy who put his head in one of the electric home ec ovens. But that was just funny.

(Beat)

I like working here. It isn't ugly.

* * *

(SCENE 10: MATT, MARY, CRYSTAL. ANGIE passes by them. They all crowd her urgently)

ALL THREE:

(Variously ad lib trying to get ANGIE's attention; "Hey Angie!" "Ange, can I-?" etc., until the proper build has been established. Then they freeze, and face front. This next section is rapid and rhythmic)

MARY:

Angie says I should fear men.

CRYSTAL:

Angie says I'm useful.

MARY:

Angie says that guys are sick.

MATT:

Angie says I'm good in bed.

Angie says she loves me.

MARY:

Angie says a lot of things.

ANGIE:

Angie says she'll do my needle.

CRYSTAL:

She was laughing when she said it.

MATT:

Anytime I want, she says.

CRYSTAL:

Angie says that everyone is sick.

MARY:

Angie says she loves me.

CRYSTAL:

That I need help.

MARY:

(Angrier, realizing)

MATT:

She didn't mean it!

MARY:

That she'll help me.

CRYSTAL:

Angie never says I'm sick.

ANGIE:

(Breaking the pace)

Out loud.

(Beat)

MARY:

Angie says that my virginity is the only weapon a girl like me has.

NAOMI:

(From elsewhere on the stage)

Who the hell is Angie?

(All look at her)

CRYSTAL:

Angie's my best friend.

MARY:

Angie's in charge.

MATT:

(Still angry)

Angie's a bitch!

(This is considered for a moment)

ALL:

(Grudgingly)

She is.

ANGIE:

(In full agreement)

I am.

(All move off except CRYSTAL and ANGIE. CRYSTAL approaches ANGIE with a hypodermic needle, holds it out to her. ANGIE waits a moment, then takes it)

CRYSTAL:

Angie says-

ANGIE:

(As she does CRYSTAL's needle for her)

People are so weak. Sick. Everybody's sick. You can smell it everywhere, that stink. Everyone I know is sick somehow. Crystal is sick, diabetes. Fat-Chick was sick. Is sick, whatever. Mary, who just goes along with everything, follow the leader wherever he goes. And Matt... well, Matt is stupid, which is the worst kind of sickness. I mean at least AIDS kills you. I've never been sick a day in my life. And they know it. Not in their heads, but they do. Crystal coming to me with her needles and Christ that makes me puke. But I like it. I like giving the needle, because it makes me different. Proves I'm healthier. I don't have what everybody else has.

(SCENE 11: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

I like taking pictures. I'm good at it. Really good. I don't get noticed much; it's great cover. Recently I've been taking pictures of girls at my school.

(Takes a picture of MARY and CRYSTAL, who affect grotesquely sexual poses. CAMERON, to audience as if they were responsible)

That's not what I meant!

(Takes another picture and they freeze in normal conversation)

I just like to look at the pictures and Imagine. What they think, what they say, what kind of movies they watch. Cause I don't know really. Girls are...out of my realm of experience. Also I like to imagine what they say about me.

(Snaps a picture)

MARY:

Who's that?

CRYSTAL:

Where?

MARY:

There. Taking pictures.

CRYSTAL:

Hm. Yearbook Geek.

(CAMERON snaps another picture, the conversation starts again)

Someone's taking our picture. CRYSTAL:

Where? MARY:

There. CRYSTAL:

Oooh, mysterious. Who is he? MARY:

I've seen him around. What's his name? CRYSTAL:

Alfa? MARY:

(They laugh. New picture)

Isn't that Cameron? MARY:

The photographer? CRYSTAL:

It is! He's photographing us! MARY:

Wow! CRYSTAL:

We're his subjects! MARY:

Exciting! He's such an artist! CRYSTAL:

Mysterious! MARY:

Yes, and screwed up! CRYSTAL:

Neurotic! MARY:

CAMERON:
(This isn't supposed to happen)

No...

(Another picture, but this time the conversation continues.)

He looks anaemic! CRYSTAL:

And let's not forget that SCREWED UP FAMILY of his! MARY:

No, let's forget it! CAMERON:

(Continues desperately taking pictures, to no avail)

He's not got a dad! CRYSTAL:

Or a mother to speak of! MARY:

One night, she threw him down the stairs! CRYSTAL:

Cameron? Or his Dad? MARY:

Both! Probably! CRYSTAL:

(They laugh)

MARY:

I feel so sorry for him!

CRYSTAL:

Just looking at him makes me sad!

CAMERON:

NO!

(Takes a picture. GIRLS point at him)

GIRLS:

(As they point)

HA!

(Picture)

MARY:

Stalker!

CRYSTAL:

Police!

(Picture. The GIRLS embrace lustfully. Picture. They look at him like an intruder, then walk away disdainfully.)

CAMERON:

(Lowering his camera)

Goddammit.

* * *

(SCENE 12: NAOMI)

NAOMI:

That's another reason I left. Because nobody is "just" anything, and none of you see that. Don't you think I would have killed myself by now if I was just a waitress? Luckily I'm not. I am going to have adventures. I believe they still exist. The way you all talk, life is this sewer that your parents dropped you in and you're just treading water till your arms get tired and down you go. Bullshit. Life is full. Full of...of stuff! Good and bright stuff that's right there, it's right there and you just look away. Too busy drowning. Two months ago, a bit after I moved out, my Gramma died, and it was great! Not her death, but... But what happened. What she left behind. She was pretty stoned on morphine the last month or so, so it really surprised us, when I met my

Mother at the hospital, and then Daddy showed up, and we went in together, and the doctor said she would be gone in a few minutes, and she was just sitting there. Calm. All full of tubes, but smiling. She'd been waiting. And right away she said "Don't think I've been too busy dying to notice all the bullshit that's been going on." And I giggled, because Gramma never swore and Mother shushed me, "Don't laugh at Gramma, she's dying." And Gramma held out her hand, like for silence. "I'm dead! You're dying. It's not too late for you. Fix it while you can." And that shut everyone up. "I want you to look at each other. Look. In the eyes. And remember that connection. You were all connected once. And you have to keep that. It's not too late. You remember it now. I can see. Don't forget it again. Promise me. Promise." And we did, not looking at her, looking at each other. "Because no one wants to be alone at the end. Or ever." We all stood there looking at each other, mom dad and I, together again, somehow. And there was a cloud of nurses and she was dead. And I had parents again, for that minute or two before the spell was broken. We had all looked at each other for the first time in years. Connected. And that's what Gramma left us.
And all you would have seen was Gramma dying.

(SCENE 13:ANGIE, CRYSTAL, MATT, MARY at the prom, standing together, pointing at different sections of the audience [not actual members])

ANGIE:

Nice shoes!

CRYSTAL:

God!

MARY:

I like them.

ANGIE:

Puke. They're puke.

CRYSTAL:

Puke.

MATT:

Huh!

(He snakes his arm around MARY's waist)

MARY:

Matt!

ANGIE:

(Pointing)

Fat!

CRYSTAL:

Oh my god!

MARY:

Yikes!

MATT:

(Pointing)

Homo, for sure.

ANGIE:

How can you tell, Matthew?

MATT:

Fuck you.

(Bites MARY's neck)

MARY:

Matt, stop it!

(He doesn't)

Matt! We're in public! Angie!

ANGIE:

Matt.

MATT:

You can't tell me what to do.

ANGIE:

Now.

MATT:

You're a bitch.

(But he stops)

CRYSTAL:(pointing)

Anorexic! Look!

ANGIE:

I think she's pretty.

CRYSTAL:

Oh.

ANGIE:

Probably a whore.

CRYSTAL:

Right. Good call.

MARY:

(Sick of MATT's attention)

Leave me alone!

(She moves to another part of the stage)

ANGIE:

(Pointing at MARY)

Virgin!

(The light lingers on MARY for a moment)

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(SCENE 14: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

When I started helping Ms. Hendrykse on the weekend, it was exciting, cause she told me not to mention it at school. To anyone. She knew there could be problems with my "peer group" she called them, and that was a laugh. Cause they're like that. They can't leave stuff like that alone.

(The GROUP has arranged itself into classroom rows around CAMERON, facing away from the audience. CAMERON, who is front and centre, faces away for a moment too, then turns around)

Last year there was a girl behind me in English, new I think, new to me anyway, and we hit it off, started talking about the stories we were studying, and then about books in general. She read

a lot. More than me, and that's something. So one Monday, I don't know why, I brought her a book. One she hadn't read, and she just lit up, big smile, and "thank you", and I loved it. That smile. Next week, I brought her another book. Same thing! It became a ritual. Another book every week, talk about the last one, and the smile. Never saw each other outside that room. Never became friends, really, except for the books. I think maybe we might have, but my peer group had noticed little quiet Cameron giving little quiet New Girl books, and smiling, and actually talking, and of course-

(Furtive and rather condescending hubbub from the group, "aaawww"'s and giggles, which stop abruptly)

Embarrassing. But, for me anyhow, kind of exciting. So another month, and I'm handing her that week's book, and this guy in my class, Matt, he's president this year, he said-

MATT:

(Beside CAMERON in the rows, turns to him)

Hey Cameron, just jump her man, you must be running out of books.

(Split second of silence, then ALL laugh)

CAMERON:

And I was stuck there. Holding the book like I'd been caught with it, and my face was burning, and hers was red. We were caught in this trap because neither of us had thought of it like that and now it was all we were thinking. And everybody staring and she wouldn't take the book, she wouldn't take the book! I turned around and stuck the book back in my bag, feeling like an idiot!

(He turns, there is a collective "aaawww" from the GROUP as they break up and wander to other parts of the stage)

Idiot!

(Turns to face audience again)

If we saw each other in the halls now, I probably wouldn't recognize her. I hope I wouldn't. I don't even remember her name. I wish I didn't.

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(SCENE 15: MARY)

MARY:

Angie says my virginity is useful. It either scares guys away or keeps them at my heels, is what she says. Calls it my Trump Card. Then she calls me Virgin right in front of everybody, like I

was one of the sick people she's always talking about. This is a choice. And everyone respects that, right? Except Angie, and who needs... Well, except Angie. That's jealousy. She told me once she never was a virgin. When all my friends became- Why isn't there a word for people who aren't virgins?- When they started having sex, they got all weird. Running to the doctor every week and crying about things that just-

(Gesture of bafflement)

Sex screws things up. It screws your body up, and friendships, and marriages, and I bet it's what screwed Angie up, too-

(Stops herself)

But don't tell her I said that, okay?
I can wait.

(She waits)

I just wish I had someone to wait with.

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(SCENE 16: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

I stepped into the monkeyhouse and- the smell! I flinched like someone swiped a hand at my face. Excrement and wood shavings, urine and rotting leaves. Maybe blood. And the shrieking. Oh, God, just, just hang on a few minutes, and you won't notice it anymore, there's lots of people standing around like nothing's wrong, looking, even eating. Laughing at the monkeys. Enjoying the monkeys. But I wanted to run. The smell. And the shrieking. Just run! I never got used to the smell.

* * *

(SCENE 17: CRYSTAL, trying to go up on pointe. She winces in pain and comes off her toes. As she speaks, she increasingly acts out more of her story)

CRYSTAL:

I think it's a question of how much can you take. Like in ballet. I was in ballet for like eight years. And the teacher was this old, old woman who couldn't even dance, her spine was all twisted out of whack, like this.

(She contorts herself briefly)

I guess she used to be beautiful, and she was this close to being famous, and some disorder or something started messing with her spine and it twisted her all around and made her useless. Useless was her word. She said if I was gonna be useless, to get out of her class, because she hated all useless people, including herself, that the Useless are what the Useful feed their dogs for treats. She wouldn't call us ballerinas, we were just "girls". When I was seven she screamed in my face,

(Contorts again)

"You are not a real ballerina until you bleed through your pointe shoes!" And pointe shoes are so hard to bleed through. But I tried. I walked around at home on pointe. I scraped, grinded my toes into the stiff old carpet in the basement for half an hour before class. I cried, I was in pain, for months. One class I was gasping and sweating and I couldn't hear the piano for the pain, and she was still screaming at me, my toes were sticky in my shoes, I could feel them, but not enough because the screaming, still, so when she looked away I kicked my toes into the FLOOR! And I was down, screaming into the floor, they dragged me into a corner, and the shoes were coming off, sliding away from my toes, I couldn't stop screaming, it hurt so MUCH! And she was over me and she was smiling! She! Smiling! I was looking up at everyone looking down at me and she held up the bloody shoes and she said, "We have a BALLERINA!"

(A moment of suspension. Then, everyone on stage applauds her quietly. She smiles, in great pain, and the memory and the applause fade. Pause.)

I don't dance anymore. That moment went away, and it never came back. When I was twelve I met Angie and ballet didn't seem as important, so I quit. Angie is more challenging. It's that moment again and again with Angie. That moment forever. You just take it all, and bleed through your shoes, and smile. I should have quit sooner. Ballet, I mean.

* * *

(SCENE 18: MAVIS and EARL at the hospital. They are talking to each other, not aware that COLLEEN has come to)

MAVIS:

This is horrible. Waiting to see if she'll stay awake. If she'll speak when she does. All this waiting.

EARL:

I don't understand why she lets them do this to her.

MAVIS:

She doesn't let them-

EARL:

Well, she's big, Mavis, she could fight back-

MAVIS:

Jesus!

(Silence)

Why can't she talk? What if she's got brain damage?

EARL:

She's just on drugs, Mavis, nothing to worry about.

MAVIS:

She hit her head pretty hard.

EARL:

(Reassuring her)

I've hit my head plenty of times.

(Beat)

MAVIS:

Well I feel awful.

EARL:

And I don't?

MAVIS:

Just awful.

EARL:

We should sue that school.

MAVIS:

Earl, I said no!

EARL:

Well they're obviously not doing their job-

MAVIS:

They're not babysitters, Earl. You can't tell those little shits to do anything-

EARL:

Sue the shits then! Or the parents. Or the DJ-

MAVIS:

Or we could just sue Epilepsy, Earl, there's an idea!

EARL:

It's somebody's fault! Every kid at that school doesn't go through this hell. Someone has to be responsible.

(Beat)

MAVIS:

Maybe it's our fault.

EARL:

Oh, come on!

MAVIS:

Not just this, Earl. I mean.. I don't know, just the way she is.

EARL:

There is nothing wrong with the way-

MAVIS:

Isn't there? Earl? She comes home from school and hides in her room, and goes back to school in the morning?

EARL:

She's studying.

MAVIS:

All weekend?

EARL:

Mavis-

MAVIS:

All summer, Earl? You're never there, at those parties I take her to, at my mother's-

EARL:

Well you drag her to those things, what do you expect-

MAVIS:

She sits there, terrified, with these eyes... she begs everyone not to talk to her. With her eyes. So they don't.

EARL:

I don't believe you.

MAVIS:

You're never there, you don't know. She's scared of everything.

EARL:

You think I don't care?

MAVIS:

My god! With those eyes, I mean Jesus no wonder they pick on her!

EARL:

Mavis!

MAVIS:

Well I would! If I were her age!

EARL:

Enough.

MAVIS:

Wouldn't you?

EARL:

That's enough! Is that what you want for her? Jesus! To be like everyone else? Like those shits who did this to her? Just hang out and treat her education like a singles bar? To act like a goddam animal? Christ! Is that it? Alright Mavis. She's yours. Give her a makeover. Put her on a diet. Drag her screaming to all the parties. Just throw her to them. She'll have a ball I'm sure, but I'll tell you. She knows she's better than that. And when she ends up like us, pissing her pants at the end of the month cause the cheque barely covers everything, I will make damn sure she knows who's to blame for that, and what I had in mind for her. So go ahead. Be my guest. She's yours!

MAVIS:

(Has just noticed COLLEEN is awake)

Earl.

(DAD follows her gaze. Smiles broadly)

EARL:

Back again! Can you speak yet, kitten? I brought you your textbooks!

(Blackout)

Goddammit.

* * *

(SCENE 19: NAOMI)

NAOMI:

Gramma, sometimes you can't keep a promise. You think you can and then it's too late. It's an awful thing to do, promising. You were right. For awhile. But then you died, and you were gone, and so was the promise. After the machines were shut off and the papers signed, it was done and we started forgetting. We didn't mean to, but it hurt less. Then Daddy mentioned how you were rambling at the end, and that was it. We were off the hook. It was the drugs talking. It wasn't possible, Gramma. It's too late. To go back. To...hold hands and smile at each other. You should have known. Too late. It's too late.

* * *

(SCENE 20: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

One day at the monkeyhouse, I took a picture of her. Closeup of her neck. She asked me why I looked at her so much. I said I was sick of staring at the monkeys. But they're more entertaining she said, more interesting. One was hitting another with a stick just then. You're a very interesting person, I said. She laughed and told me to get a picture of the monkey with the stick. I told her I thought a lot of people were interesting, that there were at least five interesting people in the monkeyhouse right now. But no one ever looks at them. There are more monkeys, she said. They steal focus. She wouldn't talk about her boyfriend. Never told me who he was. I imagined he was the one who cleaned the shit off the floor. I guess I imagined a lot that month.

(SCENE 21: After-grad party. ANGIE, CRYSTAL, MATT and MARY sit on a couch. All of them are very drunk. MATT is constantly at MARY, grabbing and nuzzling and trying to unzip her dress.)

ANGIE:

(Giggling)

BAM! Into the wall! And everybody was so freaked out! They didn't know what to do. Didja see, except for like that one kid, who was yankin on her arm for some reason-

MARY:

He was moving her head away from the wall.

ANGIE:

-most of them just kept dancing around her.

MARY:

(Trying to ignore MATT)

We were just there Angie, you don't have to-

ANGIE:

Flopping around on the floor and they're all just staring and dancing.

(Laughs)

MARY:

(Shoving MATT away, giggling)

Ow! Matt! I can't believe they didn't turn off the music! Why didn't they-

ANGIE:

No one knew what to do. Panic! Hilarious!

CRYSTAL:

(To herself)

It was awful.

ANGIE:

Oh, it was funny! It looked like she was breakdancing.

MATT:
(To MARY)

Come on!

MARY:
No, Matt. Leave my dress alone! Don't! I want to wear it.

MATT:
We're all changed.

MARY:
So? It took me forever to find this dress and I want to wear it as long as I can.

MATT:
Shit. It's just a dress.

MARY:
You said you liked it.

MATT:
At the prom. It was fine there.

MARY:
Well-

MATT:
It just looks stupid now! You're on a couch in a basement at a party and you look like- All I can hear when you move is the dress!

MARY:
It looks stupid now?

ANGIE:
It's in his way.

MATT:
Fuck you, Angie! I'm in enough trouble now cause of you!

ANGIE:
I didn't do anything you didn't do, Matthew.

MATT:

(Over ANGIE's next line)
I didn't turn on the goddam strobe lights!

ANGIE:

(Over MATT's last line)

You were there too! You didn't stop me! I wanted strobes! We all wanted strobes. You did too Matthew. She could have left the gym. What the fuck makes her so special?

(Small pause)

How was I supposed to know? She probably would have had it anyway. Sit down before you puke.

MARY:

Well I'm wearing it, I don't care what you think.

MATT:

Bitches! You're all of you just are- Fuck!

ANGIE:

Have another drink, Matt.

MATT:

If you-

ANGIE:

SIT DOWN.

(He sits next to MARY in a quiet rage. Pause)

Well this is the lamest after-grad. Where is everybody?

MARY:

I don't think many people felt like partying.

ANGIE:

Their loss, right?

(Pause)

Good times.

CRYSTAL:

(Quiet, but near boiling over)

She was sick.

ANGIE:

You're still alive over there!

CRYSTAL:

She was sick, she couldn't help that.

ANGIE:

Sick! Right, she was sick, she was sick, I know, you all keep reminding me-

CRYSTAL:

(Explodes)

WHAT MAKES YOU SO SPECIAL?

(Silence)

You're sick too. You're just as sick, just as sick as me. As her.

ANGIE:

No.

CRYSTAL:

As all of us!

(Silence)

How come we ran? If we didn't do anything wrong, howcome we ran? We ran away like we threw a brick through a window.

ANGIE:

Well, Mr.Green caught us anyway.

CRYSTAL:

But we ran!

(She is hysterical)

I know it was our fault. I know if we left her alone-

ANGIE:

No, hey, Crystal, no, shut up! Okay? We didn't do anything. We didn't give her epilepsy. She was sick to begin with. You're shaking.

CRYSTAL:

(A wail)

I FEEL LIKE I KILLED HER!

ANGIE:

Will you quit crying. She's not dead, she's in the hospital. Hey, did you take your needle? Crystal? Did you?

CRYSTAL:

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

ANGIE:

Probably you didn't. That's why you feel like shit.

(Produces needle)

I have your extra right here. Hold still.

CRYSTAL:

No! You're drunk!

ANGIE:

Crystal. You need this.

MATT:

(Rises)

Fuck this. I'm going to lie down.

(Begins to exit. To MARY)

You coming?

ANGIE:

Hold still.

MATT:

Mary?

CRYSTAL:

You'll hurt me! You'll hit a vein! I know it!

ANGIE:

You don't know anything.

MATT:

I won't touch your dress. I promise. You can wear your dress just come lie down with me.

CRYSTAL:

OWWW!

ANGIE:

If you don't quit crying, I will hit a vein! Hold still!

MATT:

Are you coming?

CRYSTAL:

No, no, no!

MATT:

Christ.

(He exits to another part of the stage. MARY starts to rise)

ANGIE:

Are you going to trust me and hold still, or do you want to do this yourself?

CRYSTAL:

I don't want to do it.

MARY:

(Looking off after MATT)

Angie, if I- Should I- Will you-

ANGIE:

(Intent on CRYSTAL)

Yeah. Yeah. He's cool. You'll be fine. Go.

(MARY exits and joins MATT. They form the first tableau of the next scene)

Now hold still. This is for you.

CRYSTAL:

(Calmer, but still crying)

I just wish it was over.

ANGIE:

What was?

CRYSTAL:

I don't know. Ow!

ANGIE:

Christ, this is a lame party!

* * *

(SCENE 22: MARY and MATT)

(Throughout this scene, MATT circles MARY and, where indicated, viciously rips parts of her dress. MARY reacts to this, physically and vocally, with great pain. Short tableau: MATT and MARY, close, he behind, arms around her. MARY looks uncomfortable. Then she turns to us.)

MARY:

Well, he was very gentle.

(MATT rips her shoulder strap, she yells in pain)

He was drunk- we were drunk, so it wasn't quite perfect.

(Another rip, she yells again)

I don't remember it all-

(Rip)

I DON'T REMEMBER IT ALL, but I think he said he loved me.

(Rip)

I was very nervous, so it hurt a little-

(Rip)

JUST A LITTLE! It might have been romantic. I didn't really feel like I was there.

(Rip)

(Pause)

He ripped my dress.

(MATT returns to his first position, arms around her)

MATT:

(This is sincere)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. God, I'm so sorry...

(This continues under, ad-libbing)

MARY:

(Under MATT's apologies, numb, frightened)

I said yes.

Angie said she'd...

I must have said yes.

Angie said "go"...

I must have. Didn't I? Say...

(Long beat, with MATT, apologizing quietly)

...yes?

(MATT abruptly walks away from her)

(SCENE 23:ANGIE addresses the school administration; she is reading off a card)

ANGIE:

Ladies and gentlemen of the administration. I am deeply sorry for what happened. My behaviour, and the behaviour of my friends, was deplorable, vicious, and unrepresentative of the school-

(Off the card)

Which it wasn't. There's nothing more representative than vicious and deplorable behaviour; that's life, and that's this school Mr. Green, and it doesn't stop at the students, to be perfectly frank.

(Back to card)

In hindsight we are all deeply shocked by our behaviour, and were we in the same situation again we would...

(Giggles)

Sorry. We would undoubtedly follow the example of Christ-

(This is too much for her, she howls with laughter)

Sorry! I'm sorry, everyone, but you really are a terrible writer, Mr. Green. And I think this is ridiculous, calling us all in one by one to read off the same card so it can be put in the minutes that you did something about what happened. Yeah I thought it was pretty funny. Yes, I know how horrible it was. Life is pretty horrible. But some things are so horrible you just have to laugh at them. And Mister Green, you were there weren't you? And you didn't do anything to stop it, did you? Is that going in the minutes? Mrs. Rogers? Mrs Schmidt? Weren't you there? Mr Harris? You were all there weren't you? Well, it was the prom! You were there for your kids! And you didn't do anything! Does that get set down for the school board too? Or just my apology?

(Holds out the card to the audience)

So, who's next?

* * *

(SCENE 24: CRYSTAL, fussing with a needle)

CRYSTAL:

(Looks at needle)

I can do this by myself.

(Tries, but she is shaking)

But it's so scary. When the phone doesn't ring? Scarier than anything else.

* * *

(SCENE 25: ANGIE on the phone. No phone, she simply addresses the audience)

ANGIE:

Hi, is Crystal there?...It's Angie...

(A pause as CRYSTAL looks at ANGIE long and hard. Then, she injects herself with her needle, turns and exits)

Hello?

(Blackout. Beat. Lights up. CRYSTAL is not onstage)

Hi. You hung up on me. Is Crystal-

(Blackout)

* * *

(SCENE 26: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

Last day at the monkeyhouse. There was a moment. A definite moment. Next to each other on a bench, putting pictures in the proper order, tape recorder playing, her voice on the tape as she wrote her own words down, and in the background on the tape: mating. The cages around us were quiet, the monkeys asleep, or listening to themselves on the tape, horrible vicious grunts, and I couldn't stop staring at her neck, watching her neck, and she saw me, finally saw me, and then it was her eyes I was staring at, and she staring back, and that! Was the moment. She shut off the tape. Smiling, she said, "Don't look at me like that."

"Like what?" And then she kissed me! I might have made some of this up, but I am sure she kissed me! Hands on my face, and her tongue! Could anyone be so soft?

This was new, this was entirely new! This was, this was, electricity, this was every book, every thought, every photograph I'd ever taken turned into pure beauty and poured onto my lips and into my mouth, washing away the humiliation, the FEAR, THIS WAS MY REWARD! For finding her beautiful. For looking deeper, thinking harder, feeling more! For suffering. Anything. I could take anything now. I had been forgiven. I had been cleansed. I had been accepted.

And the moment was over.

And we separated. Her eyes were enormous and maybe a bit scared.

And we smiled.

And the sounds of the monkeyhouse slowly rose around us.

And we smiled.

And she turned the tape back on and we got back to work.

And I was still smiling.

(He smiles for a long long time.)

* * *

(SCENE 27:ANGIE on the phone again)

ANGIE:

If you hang up, I'm coming over! I want to talk to Crystal.... Of course she wants to talk to me. This is Angie!... No, well then you misunderstood her, Mrs.-... Well, what did she say?...Those were her words?...Exactly?...Okay. Cool. Well, I got some stuff over there, could I-...Right. Well do you need my address...No. Okay.

(Sudden)

It wasn't my fault! I didn't know! You can't take Crystal away- You have no right!...How could it be her decision?...

(Calmer)

Right... Alright... No, you won't hear from me again. Can I leave a message?...Please!...Thank you. Tell her that one day, she'll be out somewhere with someone who isn't me, and she'll be far away from home, and she'll forget her insulin, cause she can't take care of herself, and she doesn't want you to, and she'll start to shake, and she'll wet herself, and tell her I hope she DIES! Because I won't be there with her extra needle! I have her extra needle! And she'll die! And I hope someone at least learns something from all that. See you at the funeral!

* * *

(SCENE 28: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

And that next Monday, after it happened, I walked into her class, and, “Cameron, can I speak with you after class, please?”

(Grins)

Yes, Ms. Hendrykse.

(The OTHERS make knowing, suggestive sounds, giggles and “who-hoo”’s, etc.)

And you know what? I didn’t mind at all!
Then the bell rang, and the class disappeared, and I leaned on her desk.

(To her)

Hi.

“I guess no one told you. You’ve been transferred out of this class. You’re in Mr. Gardener’s advanced class now. You’ll be very happy there. You don’t really belong here. Congratulations.”

She said that, and looked at me with these scared eyes, these running away eyes.

“I’m sorry”, she said.

She probably meant it.

“Of course... please don’t mention...it. To anyone. There could be problems with your... peer group. I was wrong, Cameron, it was wrong. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

I LOVE YOU!

“NO! No you don’t! YOU DO NOT LOVE ME! You can’t! You have no right. You’re just- What are you? I don’t know you, it didn’t mean anything! It was stupid, it was such a mistake, my god I was so stupid, I DON’T LOVE YOU! Please! Just don’t look at me in the hallway. Don’t say hello. I won’t answer you. If you talk to me, I’ll tell them you’re stalking me. Stop looking at me like that. I’ll tell them. Go away. Just go away, please. Stop looking at me, just go away and hate me. Go. Go. Go!

(Throwing them)

“Take back your pictures. I can’t use them.
GO!”

She was crying when I left. I just closed the door, and then. I don’t remember.

Or maybe she was laughing. I couldn’t see her face.

She's the one who can move people around! She's the one who can change lives! Why is she scared?

Look somewhere else, please?

(Lights change)

* * *

(SCENE 29: MAVIS and EARL)

EARL:

(To COLLEEN)

"Don't want to"?

MAVIS:

Earl-

EARL:

Don't want to? Nonsense. You're going. You're better now and you're going.

MAVIS:

Colleen, your father-

EARL:

Don't explain me, Mavis.

MAVIS:

Earl, you heard her, didn't you? They-

EARL:

I know what they did. I was listening, and it's nothing they haven't done before.

(To COLLEEN)

And you've always gone back. If you stop now, they win. You want them to win?

MAVIS:

Earl, I don't care if they win-

EARL:

I know you don't! And she doesn't either. But you are going to school on Monday, young lady, and you're going to go to classes, and you are going to put up with the names, and the spitballs and the orange peels and cigarette butts and whatever else it is they throw at you, and you will not hide, you understand me, you will endure and you will smile at their hatred and you will be better than them.

MAVIS:

It's one more month, kitten. One more month and you'll never be afraid again. I promise. Once you're out of high school you can do whatever you want-

EARL:

-and apply for University-

MAVIS:

-and go into whatever you like-

EARL:

-like medicine! And get a good job in a hospital and do anything you like-

MAVIS:

-after you get married and have some children!

EARL:

There are so many options! But you can't get married and become a doctor unless you go back to school.

MAVIS:

Just one month!

EARL:

Monday! I forbid you to be afraid. It will get you nowhere. You'll miss opportunities we've spent your whole life setting up and you'll hate yourself forever after. Forever. Mavis?

MAVIS!

(MAVIS can not speak)

Monday! You are going! Have all the seizures you like! My mind is made up!

(Blackout)

Wake up!

MAVIS:

Let go of her!

* * *

(SCENE 30: CAMERON)

CAMERON:

And then: The Prom.

(Explosion of music. Same song as at the top. ALL but CAMERON dance wildly. Music suddenly cuts out, ALL freeze)

The Reward For a Lifetime of Education. But before we can forget it all, we must have the ceremony. The rite of passage in the gym. The Moment of Truth!

(Another explosion of music, another cut and freeze)

And you're all here. Between me and Point B. The equipment room. Escape. A nice strong skipping rope and a good sturdy ceiling beam. Something, finally, that will hold all my weight. You wanna know why!

(No response from frozen dancers)

Let me tell you why. Because you chased me through the woods and beat me up. Because you jumped on my head in the playground. Because you sicced your dog on me. Because none of you came to my birthday party. Because you told everyone you let me walk home with you cause I begged you to. Because you told your mother I looked up your dress, and laughed when she hit me. Because you pulled my pictures off the wall and ripped them up at recess. Because you made me take my pants down and show everyone. Because you spit gum at me. Because you asked me out on my first date and when you were late and I phoned you told me you forgot, and giggled while you said it. Because you whipped me with licorice in the movie theatre. Because you made me take gym. Because you made me run around the track until I could taste blood. Because you hid my camera and wouldn't give it back until I cried. Because you went into a closet with me at that STUPID PARTY, and said, "You just better stay away from me!" Because you all laughed at me on the other side of the door. Because you told everyone I had AIDS. Because you unscrewed one of my crutches, and it collapsed and I dislocated my shoulder. Because you poured sand into my cast. Because you broke my leg. Because NO ONE SIGNED THE CAST. Because you yelled at me when I came home crying, WHY DON'T YOU HIT THEM BACK? Because you wouldn't let me stay home from school. Because you left my mother! Because you forgot you had a son! Because you ignored me whenever I came home from Dad's. Because you kept asking me why I have no friends. Because you yelled from the

back of the class during public speaking, HEY CAMERON'S GOT A BONER! Because you pushed me into a locker every time you failed a test. Because you ganged up on me cause I dressed like a "faggot". Because you wouldn't take my book! Because YOU TOUCHED ME AND DIDN'T MEAN IT! Because YOU ALL LAUGHED AT ME! Because I can't be like you, and I can't really be like me. Because you made me feel it was all my fault. Because I'm scared of everything. Because I don't know how to make it better. Because none of you would let me be a human being! Because you acted like animals and you treated me like an animal! BECAUSE YOU MADE MY LIFE A FUCKING JUNGLE! Because there's nothing left. Nothing. How many times did I try to be like the rest of you, but I guess I just missed the last foothold, and my rotten luck, because you never stopped reminding me what I was, am, will always be!

So this is it, guys. The geek. The gallows. The trek across the gym. That's what all your hard work got you. Your Reward For My Lifetime of Education. The rite of passage. The Moment of Truth.

I HOPE YOU ENJOY YOURSELVES!

(Explosion of music and dancing. CAMERON makes his way slowly across the stage, looking at the dancing bodies. He gets all the way across the stage and is about to exit, when he suddenly whips around to face the audience. Music cuts, another freeze)

And then...

(Music back in, this time with strobe light. ALL face front, staring at the audience, growing more alarmed and surprised, and then they turn to each other, looking worried. Except CAMERON, who stares out front and slowly reaches out to the audience. Lights, music all out at once.)

* * *

(SCENE 32: NAOMI)

NAOMI:

Gramma said it's not too late. It can't be too late. For us, sure. Me and Mother and Daddy, sure. I believe that. But not for everything! For something...right to happen. Something...good! Anything!

It's not! Watch me Gramma! It's not too late!

(She exits)

* * *

(SCENE 33: MARY stands shakily, staring at her torn dress, in shock, fighting tears)

MARY:

Angie says...

Angie says that...

Angie never said.

Angie said "go". Said she'd look out. I'd be alright. She'd know if something bad was happening and fix it.

Why didn't I know? Angie! Why didn't I know it was wrong, that I should have said no, that it had to stop!

Tell me what's wrong cause I don't know!

Where were you!

ANGIE! HELP ME! I don't know anymore...

I can't tell anymore...

(ANGIE is standing over her, looking down)

I don't know! Help! I don't know. Help me...

ANGIE:

Get up, Mary.

(Pause. She reaches down and tries violently to yank her up)

GET UP!

MARY:

NOOOO! Leave me alone!

ANGIE:

Get the fuck up!

MARY:

I don't want to.

ANGIE:

Then just lie there.

(MARY does)

Christ! Crystal won't talk to me and you- This isn't my fault, what happened, it isn't, so GET OFF MY BACK!

(MARY sobs. ANGIE kneels and sort of hugs MARY)

Okay. It's okay, okay? Just stop crying. Alright? Stop it.

MARY:

He ripped my dress. My dress was perfect.

ANGIE:

I know. We'll get him. You wanna get him?

MARY:

No. I don't know. Help me.

ANGIE:

That's what you want. That'll make you feel better.

MARY:

Will it?

ANGIE:

Nothing else will.

(she stands)

Come on. We'll start phoning people.

Come on.

Please.

(MARY stands and goes to ANGIE. They exit)

* * *

(SCENE 34: CAMERON, but something is different. he is still awkward and kind of nervous, but there is a sort of happiness and even serenity about him now)

CAMERON:

She's alright now. Stable condition. She was unconscious when I went to see her. I want to go back. Oh, God, I hope I do! I mean I didn't do much, but I think I helped. I did help! I held her. I moved her away from the wall. I moved the people dancing around her out of the way. I mean, really I just held her hand, but that sometimes is everything. It was...right. You know? So! Forget everything I said before. I don't mean it now. This is new for me. This is... or is it old and I've forgotten it. Yes. I think that's it. Contact. Human contact.

(Laughs at himself)

Listen to me. Maybe she'll thank me and then want to have nothing to do with me. Maybe she'll hate me for helping her.

But maybe she won't. Maybe she'll let me take a picture of her. And talk to me. And touch my hand and laugh. I don't know!

It's wide open!

(He exits)

* * *

(SCENE 35: NAOMI in the dark)

NAOMI:

Colleen? Colleen?

(Lights up)

Hi! How are you? Do you remember me? I was in Home Ec with you. I think. I just came to see if you were okay.

(As lights dim)

Aw, Christ, don't cry. Stop it, now.

(Lights out. In darkness)

You don't have to cry.

(End.)