

Becoming Family

By

Carmen Hamilton

CHARACTERS

Sarah - a girl in her mid-teens, probably around fifteen or sixteen.

Lindsay - a girl in her mid-teens, a year or two younger than Sarah. Sarah's half-sister.

Marion - a woman in her mid-thirties. Sarah and Lindsay's mother.

Daniel - a man in his mid to late thirties, Lindsay's father and Sarah's step-father.

SETTING

A small home in a quiet neighborhood. We see the living room, and upstage, a bar separating the living room from the kitchen.

Lights up on SARAH, curled up on the couch, wearing a large robe and holding a coffee cup. She hugs it to her chest and wipes a tear from her eye. After a moment, MARION enters stage left.

MARION

What are you doing?

SARAH

Huh?

MARION

Have you been here all night? Why didn't you go to bed?

SARAH

I couldn't sleep.

MARION

Oh. That cup is filthy. Let me wash it for you.

SARAH

No. It's... I didn't use it.

MARION

It looks like it should have been tossed out years ago. Where'd you get it?

SARAH

I brought it with me.

MARION

I'm almost afraid something's growing in it.

SARAH

It's not. It's fine.

MARION

Well, either wash it or throw it out.

SARAH

Sure.

MARION

Look, I know it's going to be strange adjusting to a new place and new people, but you'll fit in with everyone in no time.

SARAH

Yeah.

MARION

Good. Now it's time to get ready for school. You go ahead and get dressed.

(SARAH begins toward stage left, carrying cup still.)
Sarah? The cup?

SARAH

I've got it.

(SARAH exits stage left.)

MARION

(To no one) I see that.

(DANIEL enters stage left, also wearing a bathrobe.)

DANIEL

Hey honey, have you seen my new shirt?

MARION

I washed it and haven't put the clothes away yet.

DANIEL

Hmm. I wanted to wear it today. I've got a meeting with Mr. Compton this afternoon. I think he might just give me the Russo project. And if I impress him on this one, I'll be designing skyscrapers before you know it.

MARION

That's lovely, dear.

DANIEL
Yep. The meeting is right after lunch.

MARION
Oh?

DANIEL
Yes...

MARION
I suppose I could iron it for you.

DANIEL
(quickly) Would you? That would be great. Could you bring it to me at work?

MARION
Anything else I can do while I'm at it? Sew a new button on your jacket? Polish your shoes? Wash the car?

DANIEL
Marion, I didn't mean...

MARION
I know. You never do.

(LINDSAY enters stage left, fully dressed.)

MARION
Oh, honey, you look lovely!

LINDSAY
Thanks Mom.

MARION
You're trying out for cheerleading today, right?

LINDSAY
Yeah.

MARION
You'll get on the squad this year. I can feel it.

LINDSAY
Maybe. If I'm good enough.

MARION

Of course you're good enough! And Sarah should try out too. Take her along, will you?

LINDSAY

I'm not sure Sarah is really interested in cheering.

MARION

What girl isn't interested in cheering? Try introducing her to your friends, too. Then she won't worry so much about not knowing anyone.

LINDSAY

I don't think she's all that worried, actually.

MARION

What makes you think that?

LINDSAY

You mean besides the fact that she holes herself up in her room and the most she's said about school is that she wouldn't care if everyone in it fell victim to radiation poisoning and grew extra limbs?

MARION

She was probably just kidding. (pause) I hope.

DANIEL

Just remember that you two need to come home directly after the tryouts and get started on your homework.

LINDSAY

I know the rules, Dad.

DANIEL

I know you do, sweetheart, but you might remind Sarah.

(SARAH enters stage left, wearing ripped jeans and a tight shirt.)

MARION

Oh dear.

DANIEL

What happened?

SARAH

What do you mean?

DANIEL

It looks like you've been in a construction accident.

SARAH

(Sarcastically) Oh that's funny.

MARION

Lindsay probably has some clothes that will fit you.

LINDSAY

My clothes? Why should I let her borrow my clothes? She'll probably spill ink all over them like she did to my shoes. She won't fit them anyway.

MARION

Don't be silly, you're almost the same size.

SARAH

I don't need them.

MARION

They might fit just a bit awkwardly, but I'm sure they'll do. At least until we go shopping.

SARAH

What's wrong with the clothes I have on?

DANIEL

Have you seen yourself in the mirror?

MARION

They do look a bit... worn.

SARAH

They're supposed to look like this.

DANIEL

Like they've been through a wood chipper?

MARION

I have a thing or two that might fit you, but we can go shopping after you finish your homework.

SARAH

I don't need new clothes. These are fine.

MARION

Sarah, your jeans are mangled, and that shirt is at least a size too small.

SARAH

I like them this way. It's how everyone dresses. It's sexy.

LINDSAY

It's nasty, not sexy. Nobody dresses that way here.

SARAH

That's because no one here has any taste.

DANIEL

Taste or no taste, people expect a certain code of behavior and appearance from decent girls. You look like a slut.

SARAH

A slut?

DANIEL

Your underwear are showing through the tears on your butt.

SARAH

Of course they are. Why have cute undies if people can't see them?

MARION

Dear lord, is this child really mine?

SARAH

Who are you people anyway, the Cleaver family?

DANIEL

I will not have anyone living under my roof going out into public looking like a homeless streetwalker.

SARAH

No, you prefer whores that actually make money at it.

MARION

Sarah!

DANIEL

Watch your language!

SARAH

You're not my father.

DANIEL

I'm the closest thing you've got right now!

(SARAH looks as if she's just been slapped.)

MARION

Oh god.

DANIEL

You will follow the rules of the house as long as we pay the bills. (looks at watch) Great. I have to get going, or I'm going to be late for work. (to SARAH) Change into something decent and be home after tryouts.

(DANIEL kisses MARION on the cheek and exits stage left.)

MARION

Are you alright, Sarah?

SARAH

(Abruptly) Fine.

MARION

He didn't mean to say that about...

SARAH

(interrupting) I said it's fine.

MARION

Ok, well, let's go get you changed.

SARAH

I'm not changing.

MARION

But you're dressed like a...

SARAH

I don't care. I don't care what you think or what he thinks. I'm not going to change clothes.

MARION

You may not see why you need to obey Daniel, but I am your mother, and you will wear something more appropriate.

LINDSAY

The bus is here.

MARION

(to Sarah) You will not walk out of this house wearing that.

SARAH

Watch me.

(SARAH quickly exits stage right with backpack in hand.)

MARION

Sarah Nicole Miller, you get back here!

LINDSAY

I'll see you after school, Mom.

(LINDSAY exits stage right with backpack).

LINDSAY enters stage right, looks around the room, and sprays herself all over with perfume.

LINDSAY

Mom, I'm home!

(She sits down on the couch and pulls homework out of her backpack.)

MARION

Is that a new perfume?

LINDSAY

Yeah. It's called *French Musk*. You like it?

MARION

It's a little powerful. But I guess girls will be girls.

LINDSAY

Heh. Yeah.

MARION

So how was school?

LINDSAY

Good. I got an A on my math exam.

MARION

That's great. Now tell me all about cheer tryouts.

LINDSAY

I... Well I...

MARION

(Confident) They liked your routine.

LINDSAY

Well... not really.

MARION

They didn't?

LINDSAY

No.

MARION

That's ridiculous! You worked so hard - Oh, I understand now!

LINDSAY

You do?

MARION

Of course. They didn't like your routine...

LINDSAY

Yeah.

MARION

They loved it!

LINDSAY

Mom...

MARION

Oh Lindsay, I'm so proud of you.

LINDSAY

Thanks. But mom...

MARION

My little girl is a cheerleader, just like her mommy was.

LINDSAY

Mom...

MARION

I've waited for this day for so long. We have to celebrate.

LINDSAY

We really don't have to do that.

(SARAH enters, stage right.)

MARION

Of course we have to. My baby has finally gotten her dream come true. (to Sarah) How was school, sweetie?

SARAH

Sweetie?

MARION

(to Lindsay) I've got the perfect idea. I'm going shopping. We're going to have my famous lasagna tonight. I know it's your favorite.

(MARION grabs her purse and exits stage right)

SARAH

That was... interesting. Is she always so... exuberant?

LINDSAY

Just when she's happy.

SARAH

Right.

LINDSAY

She thinks I made the cheerleading squad.

SARAH

(Falsely enthusiastic) Great! Now I have even more fun stuff to play with. Pompoms!

LINDSAY

That's just it. I'm not a cheerleader. I didn't make it.

SARAH

And you're going to let her make lasagna anyway? Nice.

LINDSAY

I don't know what to do! If she finds out, she'll be

crushed.

SARAH

(Sarcastically) Poor thing.

LINDSAY

This isn't funny, Sarah. The first game is coming up, and she's gonna see that I'm not cheering.

SARAH

Sucks to be you.

LINDSAY

You have to help me.

SARAH

Why? What's in it for me?

LINDSAY

I'll clean your room for a week.

SARAH

A week? Come on.

LINDSAY

Two weeks?

(SARAH stares at her.)

Three weeks?

SARAH

Two months.

LINDSAY

Two months? No way.

SARAH

Then no deal.

LINDSAY

Wait! How about a month and a half?

SARAH

Well...

LINDSAY

And I'll keep quiet about the firecrackers at school.

SARAH

(Innocently) I don't know what you're talking about.

LINDSAY

Everyone knows you set them off.

SARAH

Then why haven't I gotten in trouble?

LINDSAY

Because everyone thinks it's too funny to snitch on you. But I could tell Mom. She'd go crazy. She'd ground you for a year.

SARAH

And I could tell her about your smoking habit and make her forget all about it.

LINDSAY

(shocked) What?

SARAH

Oh please, like that perfume hides it? You might get away with it for a little while, but they're gonna figure it out eventually.

LINDSAY

Oh god.

SARAH

And besides, *French Musk*? Seriously? Even if they don't find out, they might give you the boot just so they can actually breathe.

LINDSAY

But Dad would totally freak if he knew!

SARAH

Calm down, would you? It's not the end of the world.

LINDSAY

What do I do?

SARAH

That'll cost you extra.

LINDSAY

What do you want?

SARAH

To know where you went after school instead of tryouts.

LINDSAY

I was... smoking.

SARAH

It doesn't take an hour and a half to smoke a cigarette.

LINDSAY

Maybe I smoked more than one.

SARAH

(Disbelieving) Uh huh.

LINDSAY

Wait, how'd you know I didn't go to tryouts anyway?

SARAH

I have connections.

LINDSAY

Connections? That fast?

SARAH

I'm from the city. I know how to get what I want. A little dirt digging here, a little bribery there. It's all about saying the right thing to the right people.

LINDSAY

Why would you want information on me?

SARAH

Who better to blackmail?

LINDSAY

You were planning on blackmailing me?

SARAH

You act so surprised.

LINDSAY

You're evil, you know that?

SARAH

Thank you. I work hard at it. So where were you?

LINDSAY

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

SARAH

Try me.

LINDSAY

I was at (turns away and mumbles the rest)

SARAH

What was that?

LINDSAY

Math Club, okay! I was at math club.

SARAH

Math Club? You?

LINDSAY

And what's so crazy about that?

SARAH

What's his name?

LINDSAY

Who's name?

SARAH

The guy.

LINDSAY

What guy?

SARAH

The one you're going to Math Club for.

LINDSAY

Pythagoras.

SARAH

There's no one at our school with that name.

LINDSAY

He's a famous historical mathematician, genius.

SARAH

So you're actually going because you want to? For math?

LINDSAY

I'm not going for the cookies.

SARAH

Sarcasm is my thing. Get your own.

LINDSAY

You have a monopoly on it?

(SARAH gives her a look.)

Ok, fine.

SARAH

Don't you have to be smart to be in Math Club?

LINDSAY

I *am* smart, for your information.

SARAH

Really?

LINDSAY

Are you going to help me or what?

SARAH

Okay, okay. Fine. But don't think I'm letting you off the hook on the room cleaning deal. Okay. Carry an extra top in your backpack.

LINDSAY

Why?

SARAH

Because smoke clings to clothing. I thought you said you were smart.

LINDSAY

Oh. But won't they notice if I leave with one top on and come home with another?

SARAH

(dramatic sigh)

That's why you change your shirt before you smoke and then change back to it after you're done. It's not rocket science, you know.

LINDSAY

You don't have to be so mean about it.

SARAH

Whatever. And chew gum before you come home.

LINDSAY

Gum. Check.

SARAH

And you might tie your hair back when you smoke too.

LINDSAY

My hair? Smoke clings to it too?

SARAH

How did you get away with this for so long?

LINDSAY

It's only been a week.

SARAH

Exactly. For someone who sucks at lying and sneaking as much as you, that's a long time. Don't you ever research before you try to get away with something?

LINDSAY

Fine. Anything else?

SARAH

Wear a different shade of lipstick?

LINDSAY

Why? Does the smoke cling to my makeup too?

SARAH

No, that color just looks horrible.

LINDSAY

(Sarcastically) Thanks a lot.

SARAH

No problem.

LINDSAY

So what about the cheerleader thing?

SARAH

Oh yeah. That. Say you broke your leg and can't cheer?

LINDSAY

I have a feeling she'd notice that my leg wasn't really broken.

SARAH

Not if it *was* really broken. I'll do it for you.

LINDSAY

Very funny.

SARAH

Who's joking?

LINDSAY

I'm not breaking my leg, and neither are you.

SARAH

You said you didn't want to crush your dear Mommy's dreams.

LINDSAY

If you're not going to help, you can clean your room yourself.

SARAH

Fine, fine. So picky. Pretend you're sick for the game, then.

LINDSAY

I can't do that for all of them.

SARAH

Then make up some other excuse.

LINDSAY

Like what?

SARAH

Say you got into a car accident.

LINDSAY

A car accident?

SARAH

A fender bender.

LINDSAY

She'll notice there's no damage to the car.

SARAH

So get in a real one...

LINDSAY

First you suggest bodily injury, now you suggest vehicular injury? I'm not sure which one Dad would freak out about more.

SARAH

The car, hands down.

LINDSAY

The sad part is, you're probably right. I can just see the vein in his neck exploding at the mere sight of it. The newspapers will read "Girl dents car, kills father." The scandal will hit presses all over the world.

SARAH

(Chuckles) My dad was the same way.

LINDSAY

He was?

SARAH

Yeah. I accidentally ran his car into a fence once and put a big dent in the side. He was so mad he didn't even notice the cut on my arm.

LINDSAY

That's terrible!

SARAH

Well, I guess it was more of a scratch, really. And it probably didn't help that he found a can of beer in the floorboard too.

LINDSAY

You were drinking?

SARAH

Yeah, and?

LINDSAY

But you're too young to drink!

SARAH

You're too young to smoke too, but that doesn't stop you.

LINDSAY

That's different.

SARAH

What's different about it?

LINDSAY

My dad's an architect. Yours was a cop. You're not supposed to do anything illegal when you live with someone who can arrest you.

SARAH

You don't stop breaking the rules because you're dad's a cop. You just learn to hide it better. How'd you know what he did, anyway?

LINDSAY

Mom told me.

SARAH

Naturally. What else do you think you know?

LINDSAY

That he used to write her love letters.

SARAH

She did not tell you that.

LINDSAY

Dad said something about it.

SARAH

How would he know?

LINDSAY

I overheard them having an argument once. He found them.
(awkward pause)

SARAH

(lightening the mood)

So you smoke, lie, and eavesdrop now? Wow, you are a rebel.

LINDSAY

Ha ha. Seriously, how are we going to keep Mom from finding out about the cheerleading sham?

SARAH

Sheesh, give me awhile to think. Rome wasn't built in a week, ya know.

LINDSAY

A day.

SARAH

What?

LINDSAY

The saying is Rome wasn't built in a day.

SARAH

Well I doubt they did it in a week either.

(Lights dim)

MARION enters stage left, carrying the cup SARAH had earlier.

MARION

Ugh. What was in this thing?

(Goes behind bar and we hear water running as she washes.)

She holds it up, inspecting the inside.)

It's stained.

(Begins to throw it out, but DANIEL enters stage left.)

DANIEL

Morning honey. Could I have some coffee?

(MARION looks at DANIEL, then at the cup.)

MARION

Of course.

(Pours coffee into the same cup.)

Here you go.

DANIEL

Thanks.

(Takes a drink and looks disgusted for a moment.)

Is this a new blend?

MARION

Nope. Same one.

DANIEL

It tastes... different. Maybe that's just because it's cold.

MARION

I didn't notice.

DANIEL

Huh. The girls up yet?

MARION

I heard Lindsay in the shower. I don't think Sarah's up.

DANIEL

How has that girl lived this long being so irresponsible?

MARION

Were you responsible when you were her age?

DANIEL

Of course I was. My father had me up at oh six hundred hours every day. Even Saturday.

MARION

Oh, that's right. I forgot. You were always the image of perfection.

DANIEL

It's all to do with raising, you know. She probably learned to be careless like this because her father wasn't around enough to teach her anything about civilized behavior.

MARION

Lindsay's managed somehow.

DANIEL

What's that supposed to mean?

MARION

What do you think it means, Daniel?

(SARAH enters stage left, wearing a robe.)

DANIEL

Well, look who finally rolled out of bed.

SARAH

It's only seven thirty.

DANIEL

And if you don't get a move on, you'll be late.

SARAH

Right. (Yawns)

DANIEL

Well?

SARAH

Well what?

DANIEL

Don't you think you should get dressed?

SARAH

Whatever...

(SARAH looks at cup in his hand.)

Where did you get that?

DANIEL

What?

SARAH

That's MY cup. I didn't say you could use it.

DANIEL

It's a cup. There are more in the cabinet.

SARAH

Keep your nasty lips off of it.

MARION

Sarah!

SARAH

It's mine!

DANIEL

Christ, it's just a cup.

SARAH

Give it back. Now!

DANIEL

I'll give it back when I'm done with my coffee.

SARAH

I said now!

(SARAH tries to grab the cup and spills coffee on DANIEL'S shirt. The cup drops to the floor and breaks.)

DANIEL

What the hell?

SARAH

Keep away from my stuff!

DANIEL

Great, now I have to change. Do I even have anything clean?

MARION

You've got plenty of shirts.

(MARION looks at SARAH picking up the pieces of the cup.)

Sarah, what are you doing? It's broken, I'll clean it up.

(Looks at DANIEL)

I clean everything else.

(Kneels down to pick up the pieces.)

SARAH

It's mine, keep your hands off it!

(MARION backs away.)

MARION

What is wrong with you?

SARAH

(Finishes gathering the pieces and stands.)

Stay out of my room, and stay the hell away from my stuff.

MARION

Don't you talk to me like that.

SARAH

If you come near it again, I'll... I'll...

DANIEL

You'll what?

SARAH

I'll make you wish you were dead. Both of you. Stay away.
(Runs off stage left, hugging pieces to her and crying.)

(Pause)

MARION

Did you have to push her like that?

DANIEL

Like what?

MARION

(Mimicking him) I'll give it back when I'm done with my coffee.

DANIEL

You're blaming this on me now?

MARION

It was your fault.

DANIEL

It wasn't *my* fault. It was that father of hers she learned it from.

MARION

Steven may have been reckless, but at least he could wash his own damned clothes.

DANIEL

Is that what this is about? Clothes? I've worked my ass off my whole life to get to where I am.

MARION

I know. You tell me all the time.

DANIEL

I put myself through college, and I worked extra hours so that I could get to my position.

MARION

I know you worked extra. I was there cleaning up after you, remember?

DANIEL

Jesus, is it any wonder that I want a break? I don't ask for much.

MARION

No, of course not. You just want a maid, a cook, a babysitter for your child...

DANIEL

My child? Excuse me? Since when is Lindsay just my child? If I remember right, you did give birth to her.

MARION

And whose fault was that?

DANIEL

What?

MARION

Maybe if you had a little bit more control...

DANIEL

You are not pinning this on me. It takes two to make a baby, you know.

MARION

I am aware of that. I've had more than one.

DANIEL

And you're never going to let me forget it, are you?

MARION

Excuse me?

DANIEL

Even when Sarah didn't live with us, you never let anyone forget about her.

MARION

She's my daughter!

DANIEL

It's was never about that, and you know it. You just wanted to feel good about yourself again.

MARION

What are you talking about?

DANIEL

You feel guilty. You did something wrong. You cheated on your husband, and you feel guilty, so everyone else has to be miserable too.

MARION

How dare you? You weren't exactly oblivious to the fact that I was married.

DANIEL

You made it sound like he neglected you, like he was awful to you.

MARION

When did I ever say that?

DANIEL

You always talked about how you were home alone with the kid, how he never helped.

MARION

So, what? You felt sorry for me and decided to comfort me by inviting me to your place?

DANIEL

You know what? I'm not getting into this now. (Looks at watch) I've got to get going.

MARION

You are not leaving in the middle of this.

DANIEL

Yes I am.
(Starts toward stage right.)

MARION

Coffee stain!

DANIEL

DAMNIT!

(Exits stage left, comes back a moment later with a clean shirt in hand, tosses the dirty shirt on the floor,
and exits stage right.)

(LINDSAY enters stage right and finds SARAH on the couch, trying to piece the cup back together.)

LINDSAY

What's that?

SARAH

Nothing.

LINDSAY

If it's nothing, why are you working on it so hard?

SARAH

It's an old cup, okay? Just a nasty, ratty, deformed, stupid old cup. It's no big deal.

LINDSAY

Fine.

SARAH

What are you doing home so early anyway? You're usually off with the Math Club pretending to be a cheerleader.

LINDSAY

Mom plays bridge on Thursdays, so it's my only chance to relax at home without her hovering.

SARAH

Hovering?

LINDSAY

You've seen her. She's always hanging around, asking questions. She's always so, "How was your day, honey?" and she always expects you to have a nice answer about how wonderful cheerleading was and how much everyone just loved my new skirt.

SARAH

Yeah. Must just suck for you growing up with a mom like that.

LINDSAY

Believe me, it does sometimes.

SARAH

I wouldn't know.

LINDSAY

Jeez. I guess you wouldn't. Sorry.

SARAH

It's fine. At least I didn't have to deal with the brutal interrogation.

LINDSAY

It's not the questions. It's... she doesn't even care what my answers are. She asks, but she doesn't want to really hear how my day went. She wants to hear that the girls just loved my new skirt, and the cheer squad is working on a new routine.

SARAH

So what are you going to do when she finds out?

LINDSAY

That I'm not on the squad?

SARAH

Yeah. One of these days, she's gonna notice.

LINDSAY

That's what you're supposed to help me with, remember?

SARAH

Yeah, yeah. But parents are weird that way. It's like having a child gives them this gene that tells them all your secrets.

LINDSAY

Really?

SARAH

My dad always figured out mine.

LINDSAY

But he was a cop.

SARAH

Yeah. He was a good one, too.

LINDSAY

Mom's not like that.

SARAH

You sure? Sometimes they know and they don't tell you.

LINDSAY

You're gonna make me paranoid if you keep talking like that.

SARAH

It's true.

LINDSAY

But Mom couldn't keep her mouth shut if she knew something.

SARAH

Maybe.

LINDSAY

Trust me, if she knew, I'd hear about it.

SARAH

What about your dad?

LINDSAY

Are you kidding? He's not around enough to notice anything.

SARAH

Just because he's not around much doesn't mean he doesn't know. My dad was hardly ever home, but nothing ever surprised him.

LINDSAY

That must have been nice.

SARAH

It was annoying is what it was. Every time I did something wrong, he knew about it. I played hooky and went to this cheesy horror movie one time, and he asked me how the special effects were the next morning. It's like he never noticed when I was doing everything right, but the minute I made an F on a science test because I didn't study, he was out buying me *Chemistry for Dummies*. And you know what he did when I was stupid enough to bring my first boyfriend home? I hadn't even told him I *had* a boyfriend, but when we walked into the apartment, Dad was cleaning his guns. His *guns*, Lindsay. He *never* cleaned them in the afternoon. He always did it while I was at school. I didn't have another date for three months.

LINDSAY

At least he cared.

SARAH

Your dad cares about you.

LINDSAY

Oh come on. Don't pretend you didn't hear his fight with Mom this morning. They were yelling loud enough I'd be surprised if the neighbors didn't hear. He thinks I'm a mistake.

SARAH

He was just mad.

LINDSAY

Why are you defending him? You don't even like him.

SARAH

Well yeah, but he's your dad. I mean, you've only got the one.

LINDSAY

Sometimes I hate him.

SARAH

I used to think I hated mine too.

LINDSAY

Do you miss him a lot?

SARAH

Sometimes. Yeah, I guess I do. This was his, you know.

LINDSAY

The cup?

SARAH

No, the glue. Yes the cup. I made it for him when I was in kindergarten.

LINDSAY

It's cute.

SARAH

No it's not. It's hideous. But he kept it.

LINDSAY

I'll bet he thought it was beautiful.

SARAH

Nah. He was just a creature of habit.

LINDSAY

What do you mean?

SARAH

It was his coffee cup. He didn't want to buy a new one, so even when this one broke, he just glued it back together. He didn't like change. He even used the same brand of shampoo that he used before I was born.

LINDSAY

If he kept fixing it, though, it couldn't have been just habit.

SARAH

Maybe not. There was also the taste.

LINDSAY

Taste?

SARAH

Dad had this strange, really gross idea that the coffee tasted better if you didn't wash the cup.

LINDSAY

Ew.

SARAH

(Laughs a little.)

Yeah. He had to wash it when it broke, because the glue didn't stick as well when it was dirty. He'd complain for a week after that it didn't taste right.

LINDSAY

That's disgusting.

SARAH

Told you.

LINDSAY

My dad has my sonogram picture in his office.

SARAH

Seriously?

LINDSAY

It's not out or anything. It's in the drawer of his desk. I saw it once when I was visiting him, and he opened it up to get a pencil.

SARAH

See? There's no way he doesn't love you.

LINDSAY

Maybe.

SARAH

Maybe nothing. They'll get over being mad at each other, and things will go back to normal.

LINDSAY

You think so?

SARAH

Sure.

LINDSAY

Thanks Sarah. That really means a lot to me.
(Leans over to hug her.)

SARAH

(Hugs her back, then pulls away.)
You know if you tell anyone about this I'll deny the hell out of it, right?

LINDSAY

Well, duh.
(Gets up and moves to exit stage left, but stops.)
Hey Sarah?

SARAH

What?

LINDSAY

I'm sorry about... you know... about your dad.

SARAH

(quietly) Me too.

(LINDSAY exits. Lights dim.)

MARION sits at the bar, and DANIEL walks in and sees her. She looks up at him, and they both pause.

DANIEL

I'm sorry.

MARION

Me too.

DANIEL

I was out of line this morning.

MARION

So was I.

DANIEL

I didn't invite you to my place because I felt sorry for you.

MARION

Why did you?

DANIEL

Because you were the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

MARION

It didn't bother you that I was married?

DANIEL

It did. But I guess I convinced myself that he was a bad guy.

MARION

I never said that.

DANIEL

I know. But you complained sometimes, and you said how lonely you were, and I guess it made me feel better to think that he was even worse than you were saying. So I justified it to myself.

MARION

I guess I told myself he was worse, too.

DANIEL

I was also jealous of him.

MARION

Jealous? Why?

DANIEL

He had a job, a gorgeous wife, and a beautiful kid. And I had to see you and the baby every day in the elevator when you went to the park, and it got harder and harder to take.

MARION

What do you mean?

DANIEL

I was in college, wondering if I'd ever get out of school, and scared out of my mind that I would graduate and not be able to find a job. And then there's this girl - this young, beautiful girl, about my age, showing me that it's possible to be happy even if I'm not making a million bucks a year. And the baby in her arms shows me that there really is such thing as a future even if I do somehow screw up and have to drop out. And he had it all, just two floors up.

MARION

You had so many possibilities.

DANIEL

But he had everything that really mattered.

MARION

An uneducated, unemployed, nineteen year old mother?

DANIEL

A family.

MARION

Something like that, anyway.

DANIEL

What about you? Why did you say yes to me?

MARION

Because you wanted me.

DANIEL

I never wrote you love letters like he did.

MARION

He never actually wrote those.

DANIEL

What do you mean?

MARION

He paid a guy in his English class to write them. I found out my senior year of high school. I never told him I knew, though. I guess I thought it was kind of cute.

DANIEL

If you knew they weren't really his, then why did you keep them so long?

MARION

I guess - I guess I thought that keeping them around would make you want to do something like that.

DANIEL

Pay someone to write a letter?

MARION

No. I wanted you to do it yourself. To be better than him.

DANIEL

So you were comparing us?

MARION

No, it's just that... I like to feel wanted, ok? Appreciated.

DANIEL

And what makes you think you're not appreciated?

MARION

Let's not get into this.

DANIEL

No, I want to hear it.

MARION

It's just that I cook and I clean and I take care of the kid. I'm the wife and mom, and that's it.

DANIEL

And? What's wrong with that?

MARION

It's no different than what I was doing before.

DANIEL

So you are comparing me to him.

MARION

No. I just... I want to see what's out there, you know? I want to try something else.

DANIEL

Someone else, you mean?

MARION

No, damnit! Listen, will you?

DANIEL

What do you want to try then?

MARION

I don't know! Something. Maybe a job.

DANIEL

Well, what are you qualified for?

MARION

Nothing.

DANIEL

So what are you going to do, be a waitress?

MARION

At least I wouldn't be cooped up here all day.

DANIEL

I will not have my wife wait tables.

MARION

I already wait on you, I just don't get paid.

DANIEL

What's so bad about your life here? Do you ever need something you don't have? Do you ever worry about where your next meal will come from?

MARION

No, it's all very safe. Very organized.

DANIEL

Then what's wrong?

MARION

Nothing! Nothing is wrong. Everything is perfect. You're the perfect husband who goes to his perfect job every day and always impresses the boss. I'm the perfect wife who stays home to vacuum and wash the clothes and scrub the dishes. I do all the Mommy Homemaker stuff and never step out of my place. We're perfect, the house is perfect, the kids are perfect. Everything is perfect!

DANIEL

You make perfect sound like a bad thing.

MARION

Sometimes it is!

(Lights dim.)

DANIEL sits at the bar with the lights dim, and SARAH enters stage left, carrying a shoebox. She hugs the box close and carefully places it in the trashcan.

DANIEL

Barbie collection?

(SARAH jumps in surprise and turns to look at him.)

SARAH

Y-Yeah. Something like that.

DANIEL

Why don't you have a seat?

SARAH

No thanks.

DANIEL

Please.

(SARAH reluctantly sits.)

Thank you. Look, I know you and I haven't gotten off to the best start.

SARAH

That's an understatement.

DANIEL

It is. But I want you to know that we are trying.

SARAH

Yeah.

DANIEL

It's hard adjusting to a new person.

SARAH

(Sarcastically) I can see how it would be tough for you.

DANIEL

I understand that you're having a tough time.

SARAH

Do you? You don't know squat about me.

DANIEL

You're right. I don't.

SARAH

Glad we got that straightened out.

(Starts to get up to leave.)

DANIEL

Not yet.

(SARAH sighs and sinks back down.)

It won't kill you to sit for a minute.

SARAH

But why take the risk?

DANIEL

Very funny.

SARAH

What can I say, I'm a regular clown.

DANIEL

I heard about the firecrackers at school.

SARAH

What firecrackers?

DANIEL

Please don't play innocent, Sarah. I'm not in the mood, and we both know you're only doing it to piss me off.

SARAH

Fine. What about them?

DANIEL

Why'd you set them off?

SARAH

It was fun.

DANIEL

I realize that when times are strained...

SARAH

Strained?

DANIEL

... it's easy to feel the desire to lash out. But what you said this morning was hurtful to both me and your mother.

SARAH

(Sarcastically) So sorry.

DANIEL

You threatened us. You can't say stuff like that lightly.

SARAH

What makes you think I didn't mean it?

DANIEL

Listen to me, you have got to realize you're not the only person in this house. There are others living here too. You have to behave more respectfully.

SARAH

You mean like you?

DANIEL

Yes.

SARAH

Great. Next time I see a guy I like that's married, I'll be

sure to steal him from his wife. Just like you.

DANIEL

That's uncalled for.

SARAH

I think it's very called for. You're such a hypocrite.

DANIEL

What?

SARAH

You heard me. Hypocrite. You steal my father's wife, then try to act like you're better than me? Better than him? At least he wasn't a home wrecker.

DANIEL

I *made* a home.

SARAH

I can see that. And you only had to screw up another one to get it.

DANIEL

Hold it right there.

SARAH

Why should I?

DANIEL

I am your superior, and you should show respect.

SARAH

You're not my superior, you're just older.

DANIEL

(flabbergasted for a moment.) Why... why can't you be more like Lindsay?

SARAH

Lindsay?

DANIEL

The girl makes straight A's, is on the cheerleading squad, people like her. You don't see *her* setting off firecrackers at school or breaking the rules.

SARAH

You don't really know her at all, do you?

DANIEL

What are you talking about?

SARAH

You are completely dense.

DANIEL

Do not speak to me that way.

SARAH

Or what? What will you do? Kick me out? Go for it. I don't like this place anyway.

DANIEL

We took you in out of the goodness of our hearts...

SARAH

No, you took me in because Marion wanted you to. And she did it because she felt guilty. So let's not dress this up as some act of charity or loving towards me.

DANIEL

Sarah, stop it. Right now.

SARAH

Why?

DANIEL

Because I will not be spoken to like this.

SARAH

Do you ever think of anyone but yourself?

DANIEL

I think of my family all the time.

SARAH

You have a funny way of showing it.

DANIEL

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

SARAH

When's the last time you sat down and actually talked to

Lindsay. Or to your wife for that matter?

DANIEL

I talk to them all the time.

SARAH

You talk *at* them. There's a difference. Talking *to* them requires listening.

DANIEL

That is it. I won't stand any more of this.

SARAH

Ooh, he's getting mad. I'm scared.

DANIEL

You go to your room. In the morning you will be up and ready for school early, and you will not even think about breaking a single rule, is that clear?

SARAH

You really do think it's that easy, don't you?

DANIEL

What?

SARAH

You think that your word is law, and if you say something, we'll all just drop everything and do it.

DANIEL

I am your step-father.

SARAH

Emphasis on the "step."

DANIEL

Watch yourself young lady.

SARAH

Let's get one thing straight, okay? I'm not scared of you. Lindsay may be, but I'm not. And I don't think Marion is either. I'll bet that's what you hate most.

DANIEL

What's that?

SARAH
Losing control. It must drive you crazy.

DANIEL
This discussion is over.

SARAH
You just can't bear that you're not all-powerful anymore.

DANIEL
I said this discussion is over.

SARAH
And I don't care. Ain't it lovely how that works? Welcome to the real world, Daniel. It's full of chaos. You don't get to be the commander all the time.

DANIEL
I am the leader in this house.

SARAH
Yeah. Good luck on that.
(SARAH turns and exits stage left.)

DANIEL
Teenagers.
(Moves to trash and picks up box)
What is this anyway?
(Opens it up, then closes it, looks confused for a moment,
and exits stage left with the box under his arm.)

SARAH enters stage left, with MARION sitting on couch.)

MARION
You're up early. Have a bad dream?

SARAH
I'm not nine years old.

MARION
Small children aren't the only ones who have bad dreams.

SARAH
Whatever.

MARION

Sarah, can I talk to you?

SARAH

What is it with everyone wanting to talk?

MARION

Please. Just give me a chance here.

SARAH

(sits beside MARION)

Fine. What?

MARION

I know it's been hard on you, and sometimes I haven't helped matters.

SARAH

Ya think?

MARION

Don't take that tone, I'm trying to talk seriously. Look, I know you think you're basically an adult, but you're not. You're part of this family, and we're all struggling to make it work out. We may have our differences of opinion, but we need to stick together to pull through.

SARAH

Stop trying to patronize me.

MARION

I'm not trying to patronize you.

SARAH

You're acting like I'm a little kid. I'm not. I'm a lot more grown-up than you are.

MARION

What is that supposed to mean?

SARAH

You think I don't see how you treat Daniel? You pick at him and pick at him. And then you do these little attacks like put a little too much pepper in his food instead of just talking to him about what's got you so pissed. It's no wonder he's such an asshole.

MARION

Watch your language.

SARAH

Why? It's not like you haven't heard it before.

MARION

I don't want to hear it from my daughter.

SARAH

Your daughter?

MARION

That's what you are, Sarah.

SARAH

Oh please.

MARION

You don't believe me? I can show you the video.

SARAH

Giving birth doesn't make you a mother.

MARION

Oh really? Then what does?

SARAH

Oh, I don't know. Giving a shit maybe?

MARION

I care very much about you.

SARAH

Yeah right.

MARION

What gives you the impression I don't? What don't I do? I cook for you, clean for you...

SARAH

Yes, you're a very respectable housekeeper.

MARION

What have I neglected to do?

SARAH

How about help raise me? Be in my life? Teach me how to braid my hair, how to put on my makeup. You throw around words like "daughter" and "family," but you have never, in all of my life, been a mother to me.

MARION

Don't even think about blaming that on me.

SARAH

Who else is there to blame it on? Dad?

MARION

Stop it.

SARAH

You left him, remember? It wasn't the other way around.

MARION

That is enough.

SARAH

Fine. You know what? It doesn't matter anymore. I don't care.

MARION

I thought of you every day since I left.

SARAH

Yeah? It would have been nice if you'd let me know.

MARION

I'm sorry I wasn't around, okay?

SARAH

No, it's not okay. That's not the point anyhow.

MARION

Then what is?

SARAH

You didn't even try.

MARION

Try what? I couldn't stay with your father. That's just how it worked out.

SARAH

So you couldn't be there every day. I get that. What about my birthday, or Christmas?

MARION

He wouldn't have let me come around.

SARAH

Did you even bother to ask? What about call? Hell, a card would have been nice.

MARION

I thought it would be less confusing for you if I stayed out of it. My parents were divorced, and every time my father would visit and then leave, I always wondered why he didn't stay. It just hurt all over again. I thought it would be better this way. Better for you if you didn't have to deal with me leaving all the time, over and over again.

SARAH

No, you thought it was better for you if Lindsay was your only daughter.

MARION

That's not true!

SARAH

Yes it is. But you know what? You're doing a crap job of that too. You know almost as little about her as you do about me.

MARION

Excuse me?

SARAH

What's her favorite class in school?

MARION

Home Economics.

SARAH

She hates Home Ec. What's her favorite sport?

MARION

Football. She likes to watch.

SARAH

Soccer. She likes to play. What's her favorite color?

MARION

Pink.

SARAH

Blue. She hates pink. See? You don't know her.

MARION

I think I know more about her than you do. I watched her grow up.

SARAH

You may have watched, but did you ever really see?

MARION

Of course I saw. I saw every time she fell down doing a cheer, and I saw every time she got back up. Her knees were scraped and there were tears in her eyes, but she'd look at me and try again anyway. She's strong and she lives her dreams. I know exactly who my daughter is, so don't try to tell me I'm a bad mother.

SARAH

She doesn't live *her* dreams, she lives *yours*.

MARION

Excuse me?

SARAH

Did you ever ask her if she wanted to be a cheerleader?

MARION

Of course she did. What girl doesn't?

SARAH

Lots.

MARION

What would you know, anyway? I know my daughter better than anyone else.

SARAH

Keep telling yourself that.

MARION

Just what makes you so sure of yourself?

SARAH

You tell her all about how proud you are of her for being popular, for living her dreams.

MARION

I am proud of her.

SARAH

But did you ever ask her what her dreams were?

MARION

I know what they are.

SARAH

Did she tell you, or did you just guess?

MARION

She... a mother knows these things, alright?

SARAH

A good mother, maybe.

MARION

Stop implying that I'm a bad mother!

SARAH

I'm not implying anything. I'm saying it. You've never been a good mother. Not to me, and not to her.

MARION

Watch your mouth!

SARAH

No. You're an overbearing, hypocritical, egotistical monster.

MARION

How dare you?

SARAH

You think the world revolves around you and you're entitled to everything. You think that just because you want something, so will everyone else, and then you get pissed off because it doesn't work out that way. Guess what? Lindsay's not you, Daniel's not you, and I sure as hell am not you. We don't want the same things. If you'd pull your head out of the sand long enough to recognize that, maybe

you'd actually *know* who the people around you are.

MARION

That is it. I have had enough of you and your antics.

SARAH

Antics?

MARION

Go to your room and get ready for school, young lady. You are to come straight home after. You're grounded until further notice.

SARAH

Grounded for what? Telling the truth?

MARION

Now!

SARAH

I can't wait to graduate and be out of this stupid, Barbie-doll hellhole.

(Exits stage left.)

(LINDSAY is reading a *Playboy* magazine, eyes wide in shock, and DANIEL enters stage right.)

DANIEL

Hey there.

LINDSAY

(Surprised, straightens quickly and hides magazine.)

Hi. You're home early.

DANIEL

I thought I'd take some time off today. What are you reading?

LINDSAY

(too quickly) Nothing.

DANIEL

It's one of those girly magazines, isn't it? *Seventeen*, or whatever they call it?

LINDSAY

Y-Yeah. That's it. *Seventeen.*

DANIEL

I've got a question for you, honey. What do you think of Sarah?

LINDSAY

Sarah? She's okay, I guess.

DANIEL

You two get along?

LINDSAY

Sure.

DANIEL

She's not too... I don't know... too mean or anything?

LINDSAY

Not to me. Not so much anymore, anyway.

DANIEL

Huh. You two have bonded, then? Good. That's good. The thing is, she said something last night...

LINDSAY

What did she say?

DANIEL

Well I'm not sure how to interpret it.

LINDSAY

Oh God. She told you?

DANIEL

Told me what?

LINDSAY

She said she wouldn't tell!

DANIEL

What are you talking about?

LINDSAY

It's no big deal, anyway.

DANIEL

What's no big deal?

LINDSAY

I mean, she told me about her drinking that one time. What does it matter if I smoke every now and then?

DANIEL

You WHAT?

LINDSAY

Uh...

DANIEL

You smoke? When the hell did this happen?

LINDSAY

Uh...

DANIEL

You're too damn young to smoke! What are you thinking? Where do you get them? Who's buying them for you? Who?

LINDSAY

Some guys at school.

DANIEL

Guys? You're hanging around the kind of guys that would buy a teenaged girl cigarettes? Jesus, Lindsay, who knows what other kinds of stuff they do?

LINDSAY

I'm not hanging out with them! Not really. And they do it for everyone.

DANIEL

Of course they do!

LINDSAY

(Stands up.)

It's my body, anyway.

DANIEL

Not until you're eighteen it's not.

(Sees magazine.)

What the hell is that?

LINDSAY

I was just...

DANIEL

What? You were just what?

LINDSAY

I just wanted to see what everyone gets so excited about.

DANIEL

You want to be like those girls? You want to be a slut that sleeps around with everyone?

LINDSAY

No.

DANIEL

You want to be just like that?

LINDSAY

I said no.

DANIEL

Then why are you looking at it?

LINDSAY

I just wanted to know!

DANIEL

Wanted to know? My daughter is turning into a slut! It's because of Sarah, isn't it? She comes in and suddenly you're acting like-

LINDSAY

Did you ever think that it might just be me?

DANIEL

What are you talking about?

LINDSAY

Maybe it's not her fault. Maybe it's just because I'm curious. Because I'm a teenaged girl who wants to know what's going on. What guys are into. What looks good and what doesn't. Maybe I'm just trying to figure stuff out.

DANIEL

Lindsay, you're a good girl.

LINDSAY
How would you know?

DANIEL
Because I'm your father.

LINDSAY
Well you're never around enough to act like one!

DANIEL
Lindsay.

LINDSAY
You know, Sarah told me that I shouldn't hate you because you're the only father I have. But I do. I hate you!

DANIEL
Don't say that.

LINDSAY
It's true!
(LINDSAY runs out stage right.)
(SARAH enters stage right.)

SARAH
What's wrong with her?

DANIEL
(Sighs and sits on couch.)
Am I really that bad of a father?

SARAH
What do you want me to say to that?

DANIEL
You had plenty to say last night.

SARAH
What happened?

DANIEL
You knew she smoked.

SARAH
Maybe.

DANIEL

You knew she looked at this trash?

(Holds the magazine out to SARAH, who takes it.)

SARAH

No. But I'm not surprised. She's curious. What teenager isn't?

(Looks at magazine.)

Hey, at least this is a fairly innocent one. As far as this kind go, anyway. It could be worse. She could be playing doctor in the tree house.

DANIEL

Too much information, Sarah. She said you told her not to hate me.

SARAH

I don't think those were my exact words.

DANIEL

Thank you.

SARAH

For what? I was trying to cheer her up.

DANIEL

You know, my dad was in the army. We moved around all the time. I never even had time to make friends at one school before I was taken away to the next. I always felt like he didn't make the time to know me or my mom, and I swore that I would be different. That if I ever had a wife or a kid, they'd love me. They wouldn't be angry at me all the time like I was angry at my dad. Lindsay and Marion are all I've got. I've worked so hard for this life. I wouldn't know what to do without them.

SARAH

(SARAH sits down on couch beside him.
So why don't you tell them that?)

DANIEL

They know. I mean, why wouldn't they?

SARAH

My dad bought me a prom dress once.

DANIEL

Huh?

SARAH

Yeah. It actually fit, too.

DANIEL

I'm confused.

SARAH

A dress? You know, an article of clothing that girls wear to formal events...

DANIEL

I know what a dress is. But why are we talking about it?

SARAH

If you'd listen for a minute without trying to control the conversation, you'd know.

DANIEL

Sorry.

SARAH

The point is, I hadn't told him about the prom.

DANIEL

Okay?

SARAH

I hadn't told him, but he still knew about it. Up until then, I hadn't realized he even had a clue about what was going on with me unless I did something wrong.

DANIEL

But he found out.

SARAH

Yeah. And realized that I'd want to look my best.

DANIEL

He cared enough to get you the dress you loved.

SARAH

I didn't love it.

DANIEL

You didn't?

SARAH

No. It was this ugly orange color. I looked like a pumpkin the whole night. I was so embarrassed.

DANIEL

You've lost me.

SARAH

(Rolls eyes)

He still got it and I still wore it. Because for a long time, I had thought he didn't give a flying-

(DANIEL gives her a "look.")

Sorry. Anyway, he never asked me what was going on or tried to hang out or anything, so I just figured that he was cool as long as I didn't bother him.

DANIEL

So you're saying I should buy Lindsay a prom dress?

SARAH

Prom isn't for another five months.

DANIEL

What do I do, then?

SARAH

Give a shit about your daughter. Show her that you care. Put yourself out there. Do something lame. Write her a poem, play her a song, make her a coffee cup.

DANIEL

A coffee cup?

SARAH

I was kidding.

DANIEL

Maybe I'm not cut out for making nice. She's going to hate me for the rest of her life, isn't she?

SARAH

She'll probably get over it. Or she'll get a bunch of tattoos and take up prostitution to feed her cocaine addiction.

DANIEL

That's not funny.

SARAH

Lighten up, will ya? It's not like the world's gonna end just because you crack a smile.

(MARION is preparing food at the bar while SARAH reads a book on the couch and LINDSAY cautiously enters stage left.)

MARION

Hey honey.

LINDSAY

(Wary) Hi.

MARION

Something wrong?

LINDSAY

No...

(sighs)

Did Dad talk to you?

MARION

He said hi when he came home. He's been shut up in the bedroom most of the afternoon. I think he's working on something, but he won't say what it is. Was there something he was supposed to talk to me about?

LINDSAY

I hope not.

MARION

What?

LINDSAY

Nothing. Um, what are you making?

MARION

Just a quick dinner. Don't worry, we'll be done in time.

LINDSAY

In time for what?

MARION

The game, silly.

Oh god.

LINDSAY

What's wrong?

MARION

I can't go to the game.

LINDSAY

(SARAH gets off the couch and stands up.)

Why not? You've got to go. To cheer.

MARION

She can't go because she's sick.

SARAH

Sick?

MARION

(Puts hand on LINDSAY'S forehead.)
You don't feel feverish.

LINDSAY

It's not a fever. It's...

SARAH

Her stomach doesn't feel good.

MARION

Did you eat something wrong? You don't need to go to the doctor do you?

LINDSAY

No! I mean, uh... it's not that. It's... uh...

SARAH

Cramps.

LINDSAY

Yeah. Cramps.

MARION

Well why didn't you say so? I should have some Midol in the bathroom. You know I still sometimes get the worst cramps.

LINDSAY

Ugh. Mom, do we have to hear about this right before

dinner?

MARION

I'm just saying, I know what you're going through. I remember my first time was so embarrassing, I...

LINDSAY

Mo-o-om!

MARION

Okay, okay. Just let me get you some Midol then, and I'll stop talking about it. You'll feel fine in no time.

(Starts toward stage left.)

LINDSAY

No wait! It's not just that. I... I've also got something wrong with my... toe.

MARION

Your toe?

LINDSAY

Yeah. I dropped something on it.

MARION

When?

LINDSAY

Earlier?

MARION

You were walking just fine a moment ago.

SARAH

You know how it is, though. I mean, sure she can walk fine, but running and jumping? Out of the question.

MARION

What exactly is going on here?

LINDSAY

(Sighs in resignation)

I'm not actually... in the mood for eating in tonight. Can we go out?

MARION

Lindsay?

LINDSAY

I'm just really craving Chinese food. You know how it is, that time of the month, aches all over, weird cravings...

SARAH

Cravings come with pregnancy.

MARION

You're pregnant?!

LINDSAY

No! Jeez. What is it with you and Dad blowing everything way out of proportion?

MARION

Lindsay, tell me what is going on right now.

LINDSAY

I'm... Ok, fine. I didn't make the cheerleading squad.

MARION

What? But you said... Why did you tell me you made it, then?

LINDSAY

I didn't. You told me.

MARION

You never corrected me.

LINDSAY

You were so proud. I didn't want to hurt your feelings.

MARION

So you faked being a cheerleader?

LINDSAY

Actually...

MARION

There's more?

LINDSAY

Well...

MARION

Let's have it. What else is there?

LINDSAY

I faked going to tryouts.

MARION

You didn't even go?

LINDSAY

I hate cheerleading, Mom!

MARION

But you always had so much fun when you were younger.

LINDSAY

No I didn't. I lied about that, too. The other kids always teased me because I wasn't good.

MARION

I saw your routines. You were good.

LINDSAY

I was six. You can flap your arms like a duck and look good when you're six. It's part of the kid cuteness. But I still don't have any coordination. And you know what? That's ok with me.

MARION

But I thought...

LINDSAY

That I wanted to be a cheerleader, just like Mommy? But I don't.

MARION

Then what do you want?

LINDSAY

I want to be an engineer.

MARION

An engineer? Why?

LINDSAY

Because I'm good at it. Because I like it. Because math and science explain the world. I mean, why is the sun hotter than all the other stars? Because it's closer. Why is it

that the skyscrapers Dad's company designs don't fall down when the wind blows? It's all about math and engineering. It's the reason a sandcastle will always collapse but the Eiffel Tower doesn't. It's the reason the huge dome of St. Peter's Basilica and the Capitol in Washington D.C. don't cave in. You know what I love best about math, though? You always have a direct answer. You don't have to try to figure people out, or wear the right clothes. Math doesn't change its answer because it's in a bad mood.

MARION

You really like that stuff?

LINDSAY

Yes. Okay? Yes. I'm a nerd. Glasses turn me on.

MARION

Lindsay!

SARAH

(amused) You might have taken that last one a little too far.

LINDSAY

I'm not interested in cheering, or in sports, or in shopping-

SARAH

Wait, you're not interested in shopping?

LINDSAY

No... Alright, I might be a little interested in shopping, but that's not the point. I'm just not the kind of girl you want me to be, Mom.

MARION

I don't know what to say.

LINDSAY

What else is new?

(LINDSAY runs off stage left.)

SARAH

"I'm proud of you no matter what you want to be," would have been a good starting point.

MARION

Sarah. Not now.

SARAH

Just trying to help.

MARION

Sarah.

SARAH

I know, I know. I've got to get ready for my date tonight, anyway.

MARION

What date?

SARAH

This guy from the school asked me out. Zeke.

MARION

You're still grounded.

SARAH

I thought you were joking.

MARION

I wasn't. And I'm not.

SARAH

I haven't been grounded since I was eight years old.

MARION

Then I'm sure it'll bring back memories.

SARAH

Come on. This is the first guy that's asked me out since I got here.

MARION

I sympathize with that.

SARAH

And he's really cute.

MARION

I'm sure he is. You're still not going.

SARAH

But he's a senior. You know how hard it is to get the *seniors* to notice you?

MARION

You're definitely not going.

SARAH

You are so prude.

MARION

That's enough.

SARAH

God, what's wrong with you? It's not like you had any problem dating an older guy when you were in school.

MARION

I-I can't deal with you right now. Go to your room.

SARAH

Of course you can't deal with me. You never could.

MARION

Excuse me?

SARAH

That's why you left, right? You couldn't handle having a kid, so you took off with some other guy.

MARION

That's not true at all. Your father and I... we had problems.

SARAH

What kind of problems?

MARION

It just didn't work out, okay?

SARAH

No, it's not okay. What happened?

MARION

We fell out of love with each other.

SARAH

You fell out of love.

MARION

I could see it in his eyes. He didn't trust me anymore.

SARAH

You got pregnant by another man. Of course he didn't trust you.

MARION

It was before that.

SARAH

Before the pregnancy or before the affair?

MARION

I would never have gotten with Daniel if I had thought your father still cared.

SARAH

You're blaming it on Dad now?

MARION

He was never an easy man to live with.

SARAH

You think I don't know that? I know he was cynical, and bossy, and sometimes downright unreasonable. He snored too loud and never said anything right. That still doesn't mean he deserved for you to cheat on him.

MARION

I didn't have the courage to leave him at first. I was scared of losing what I did have.

SARAH

Then what the hell were you doing with another man?

MARION

Daniel loved me.

SARAH

My father loved you! He would have given you the freaking Empire State Building if you wanted it.

MARION

What are you saying?

SARAH

I'm saying that if you'd bothered to stick around and pay attention, you would have realized that he worshipped you.

MARION

No he didn't.

SARAH

How would you know? You were too busy having a good time with Daniel.

MARION

That's enough.

SARAH

No, it's not enough. Dad loved you. You didn't see the way he looked at your old letters sometimes. You didn't hear him call for you in his sleep.

MARION

You're lying.

SARAH

I'm not lying! My father loved you and you left him. You left him, and you left me.

MARION

I was scared!

SARAH

Scared of what?

MARION

I was nineteen, ok? I was a teenage mother, married to my high school sweetheart before I had a chance to do anything. I wanted to have a real life, get out in the world, make a difference. I didn't want to be stuck at home, the cliché little housewife and mommy. I wanted more than that. More than this! Your father was a good man. I realize that. He just didn't know how to express himself, and that made it practically impossible to see what he felt sometimes. I thought he was a stone, emotionless wall, and I needed someone who wasn't. I couldn't take it anymore. I'm sorry.

SARAH

That's not good enough.

MARION

What do you want from me?

SARAH

I want my life back! I want my mom to pick me up from girl scouts. I want a woman to confide in when I get my first period. I want to have the sex talk with someone who won't threaten the lives of my future boyfriends.

MARION

I'm sorry. I wish I could give you that.

SARAH

I wanted a mom my whole life. A mom like Lindsay had.

MARION

I'm here now.

SARAH

And now I just want my daddy back!

(MARION puts her arms around SARAH.)

MARION stands at the bar when DANIEL walks in, carrying a shoebox and a magazine under his arm.

DANIEL

Where are the girls?

MARION

In their rooms. What's in the box?

DANIEL

Just something I've been trying to fix.

MARION

Are we ok? Us, I mean. We've both been stressed, and we've been fighting, and... Are we...

DANIEL

I'm ok. If you're ok, that is. Are you ok?

MARION

I think so. Or at least, I will be.

DANIEL

Then I am too. You know what? You should rest a little.

MARION

I've still got to make dinner.

DANIEL

Leave it to me. I can cook a little every once in a while. And the girls can do the dishes. We can all help out.

MARION

(suspicious) Why?

DANIEL

Because we don't do enough around here.

MARION

I never said that.

DANIEL

I know you didn't.

MARION

Well... thanks.

DANIEL

And I talked to the local college about tuition.

MARION

Do we need to do that yet? I mean, Sarah's not a senior yet, and it'll be even longer for Lindsay.

DANIEL

I was actually thinking that you could take classes. If you wanted to.

MARION

Me?

DANIEL

A lot of women go back to college after they've had kids. It wouldn't be weird or anything. Of course, it's not like I'm forcing you. I just know that you never really had the chance to go before, because you had a baby. I thought that maybe you'd like some options, now that the girls are old enough that they don't need someone to watch them all the time. It's not like it has to be a full-time thing, either.

It could just be a class or two. Like I said, it's only if you want to...

MARION

Daniel?

DANIEL

What?

MARION

Shut up. And thank you.

(They hug, and SARAH and LINDSAY enter stage left.

SARAH

clears her throat loudly. Both parents take a step back.)

DANIEL

Girls. I have something to discuss with you.

SARAH

Oh boy. Here it comes.

DANIEL

Sarah. I know we don't see things the same way a lot of the time.

SARAH

Understatement.

DANIEL

But we're going to work on it. I need your help on that.

SARAH

We're not going to have some emotional heart to heart moment, are we?

DANIEL

I just want you to give me a chance, ok? I'll try to give you your space if you'll try to be more respectful to both me and your teachers.

SARAH

The teachers?

DANIEL

Please? I know this is a hard time for you, but we'll make it through if we work together, and...

SARAH

I'll do it if you'll stop with the sensitive understanding thing. It's creepy.

DANIEL

(smiles) Alright then. Here.

(Hands the box to SARAH.)

SARAH

A present? And I didn't get you anything.

(SARAH opens the lid and looks inside.)

MARION

What is it?

SARAH

(SARAH closes the box quickly.)

(Smiling) It's nothing. Just a dumb old cup. Thanks.

DANIEL

(Smiles back)

Now Lindsay. This is for you.

(Hands her the magazine.)

LINDSAY

Seventeen Magazine?

DANIEL

I got you a year subscription. To replace your, uh, others. Do me a favor and get your beauty tips from this one?

LINDSAY

(Quickly) Sure. Yeah.

MARION

Lindsay?

LINDSAY

Yeah?

MARION

I didn't say the right thing earlier.

LINDSAY

Yeah, well. What parent does?

MARION

Truce?

LINDSAY

Truce.

MARION

Well. You know, I think I'll take you up on your offer, Daniel. I'm going to go get some rest. Call me when dinner's ready?

DANIEL

(laughs) Sure.

(MARION exits stage left.)

And Lindsay?

LINDSAY

Yeah?

DANIEL

If I ever catch you smoking again, you'll be grounded until you're eighty. Understood?

LINDSAY

Yes sir.

DANIEL

Alright, let's make some dinner. Anyone know how to cook something besides sandwiches and cereal?

(DANIEL and LINDSAY look at each other and shrug. They look
at SARAH.)

SARAH

(sighs) Fine, I'll cook, but you guys are gonna wash the dishes.

The End.