



A Playin' For Actby:

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<http://offthewallplays.com>

Taylor

CAST

John – father of Taylor, middle aged writer

Taylor – eight year old daughter of John and Sarah

Sarah – Wife of John

Jenna – Good friend of Sarah and John

Antonio – One time boyfriend of Jenna

Mrs Richardson – Sarah's mother

Glen – Sarah's father

Father Smith – family priest

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Act One

Scene One

John sits in front of a desk, holding, and looking at a portrait that is not visible to the audience.

John: It's almost amusing, how pain circumvents itself into every aspect of life. It's like a desire to drink, or smoke, or to need that, which is characteristic of every addiction. And don't be fooled, pain is an addiction. The suffering brings about a sort of masochistic pleasure because of the guilt that was its predecessor. All pain is a repercussion of guilt, manifesting itself one way or another. And all addictions are manifestations of pain. Pain is the initial addiction though. (*Sits photograph on desk, picks up beer, and stands*). Pain is an odd sort though, isn't she? Pleasure is the catalyst of the guilt that brings about these bouts of depression, and the greater the pleasure, the greater the guilt. And what's more amazing is that in our tears, in our sheer and utter grief - these are the only times when we can formulate a mental projection of bliss. It's at this point that we truly become one with ourselves, and the truth of existence, that not only surrounds us, but that is us. This addiction supplies us with a point of excess that enables the perception of the unbounded. And it feeds that addiction with a new high and height of awareness that we subconsciously cannot bear the loss of. So the next morning we go about in our usual manner, but now with more of a desire to abstain from any kind of joy. Don't be fooled though, this addiction, this way of life that so many have had thrown upon them isn't necessarily a bad thing. Any time barriers of normal societal thought and behavior can be broken down and surpassed it is a personal success. So I will do my pain like a rosary, and pray to it and feed it, for - in essence - it's the only thing that can keep me aware of who I truly am, and what I am truly a part of: Reality.

Enter Taylor with a book in her hand, who speaks with the normal, slight lisp of a 7 year old.

Taylor: Dad?

John: Yes dear?

Taylor: Would you help me with this, some of the words are too hard?

John: Of course.

Taylor sits on her father's lap.

Taylor: Are you sad again?

John: I'm never sad Taylor.

Taylor: *(Doubting)* Okay.

John: *(pause)* It's just that I don't smile, or get excited about stuff because I'm very weary. Don't you worry your little head about me though, OK? *(Taylor nods in affirmation)* Okay. Now, where did you start having trouble?

Taylor: *(pointing at the title)* Right here.

John laughs lightly, opens the book and starts reading.

Scene Two

John stands alone on stage.

John: It's in the midst of our greatest fears that we enable ourselves to accomplish the most. The definition of fear though is not unlike the definition of God; confusing and vague and without intellectual substance. This being the case, I'd like to clear a couple things up before any of our lives proceed further.

Let us break fear down into what it is, and how it affects us. Fear is intangible, and it causes the intangible: angst, grief, stress, and undo worry. And it is in every facet of our lives. Fear to love, fear to talk to strangers, fear of water, fear of being in large crowds – I could go on for days. The thing is, fear only exists because of one unifying reason: the denial of truth. It's our inability to accept the possibilities of what might occur – the truth of a situation, the truth of life for that matter – which brings about fear. I'm sure you're all thinking, sitting in your uncomfortable chairs, it cannot be that simple; but alas, it is. And this, my friends is what leads to the guilt that causes the pain that defines our temporal existence in these shells that our eternal spirit, our Reality, use to learn from. This is just a natural part of existence though. *(Pause)* I'm not defining this so that you and I can learn how to subdue these experiences, just so that you understand the process. And in understanding the process, the process and experiences coinciding with them can be harnessed so that we don't have to take this evolutionary step called humanity over again, like 10th grade chemistry, because we weren't paying attention.

Enter Taylor.

Taylor: Can I go out and play, dad?

John: Who are you going with, and where are you going?

Taylor: Jamie and Brandie, and we're going to the park.

John: Okay, just be very, very careful crossing the streets, alright?

Taylor: Okay. *(smiles and exits)*.

John: Parenting. Nothing but worry, aside from the occasional satisfaction of seeing them learn and be happy. It's my fear though that causes the worry. And the precursor of that fear, or what defines it, is my inability to assess the truth of the situation. She's 7, and she's getting older and more responsible and more capable, but I can't see the truth of that. I don't want to see the truth of that. I fear her getting hurt, or getting hit by a car, or any number of possibilities. The truth is, she will be fine. However, my inability to accept that truth causes the fear that makes me worry. Enough said about this rubbish though.

John exits stage.

Scene Three

Enter John, who sits at his desk, picks up a pen and starts writing. Enter Sarah, who quietly approaches John, then motions to whisper into his ear.

Sarah: *(whispering)* John.

John yells, throws his pen in the air in his shock, and turns toward Sarah.

John: Jesus Christ Sarah! Why do you always do that to me?

Sarah: *(with a hint of sarcasm)* God, sorry. I thought by now you wouldn't be horribly frightened at my presence.

John: O hush, you know that's not it. You have to stop doing that to me though! You're gonna give me a heart attack one of these days!

Sarah: Doing what?

John: The laundry. *(Yelling)* Sneaking up on me!!! *(Rolls eyes)* You are certainly in dense form today. So, now that we're done with the pleasantries, might I ask what I owe your presence to?

Sarah: Nice John, always the asshole. Oops, I mean gentleman. (*Snickers*) Well, if you insist on me being curt I will. I'm here to see Taylor.

John turns around and starts writing again.

John: She's at the park with her friends.

Sarah: Which park?

John: The only park she can get to without me driving, or her hitchhiking to.

Sarah: Ha, ha. Well, I guess I'll go and see how she is.

John: I guess you should.

Sarah turns to leave, then reconsiders.

Sarah: Ya know, I was hoping that you and I could talk for a bit, while Taylor wasn't around.

John: And what pray-tell would you like to talk about?

Sarah: You are such a jerk, God! Goodbye.

John: (*turns around*) Wait, please. I'm sorry Sarah, it's been a rough week, rough year for that matter. Just stay, I beg you.

Sarah smiles, but before she can verbally respond Enter Jenna.

Sarah: (*snobbishly*) Hello Jenna.

Jenna walks by and doesn't acknowledge her presence.

John: Hi Jenna.

Jenna smiles, approaches John, and kisses him on the forehead.

Jenna: Hey you. Whatcha doin'?

John: (*looks at Sarah queerly*) Nothing, really. What are you up to today?

Jenna: Well, if that's your way of asking me out, I'm not up to anything.

John lightly laughs.

Jenna: Actually, I was thinking that if you haven't eaten yet maybe you and I could go out for dinner? And then maybe out for a bit afterwards? If you're up for it, that is?

John: Well, I'd really like to, but you know spur of the moment stuff is hard for me... *(Jenna looks at him, confused)*...because of Taylor. I'd need to have someone to watch her.

Jenna: God, I'm such a dork. I'm sorry, I should've mentioned that first off, duh. I asked my mother before I came by and she said that she would love to watch Taylor this evening. *(Pauses)* She even said Taylor could spend the night, need be.

John: *(in apparent miscomprehension of Jenna's meaning)* Well, that's sweet of her, but Taylor's weird about not sleeping in her own bed. In any event, it sounds like a plan. What time you want me to pick you up?

Jenna: Not to rush or anything, but couldn't we just leave from here? I mean, I don't need to change or get ready or anything.

John: Um, yeah, that's fine. Taylor's at the park though, we'll have to wait til she comes home.

Jenna: I can go collect her, if you want?

John: That's a good idea. She likes you a lot, and I would much rather have her walk home with you.

Jenna: Walk? I was gonna drive there.

John: *(laughing)* It's only four blocks, but that's fine. I mean, it's up to you.

Jenna: *(touching her hair)* It's just that it's really windy.

John: Either way is fine, honestly. It's really sweet of you to do this.

Jenna: Think nothing of it. Be right back.

Jenna kisses John on the cheek and exits without so much as a glance at Sarah. Sarah watches Jenna exit with looks of anger mixed with jealousy. At Jenna's exit, Sarah approaches John.

Sarah: Ack! God, I can't believe her and I were friends! What do you see in that whore anyways?

John: *(sternly)* That is enough. She is not a whore, not in the least. And Jenna and I are merely good friends, so you can just get off that saddle of jealousy you seem to be riding.

Sarah: Well, regardless, I don't like the idea that she gets to spend so much more time with Taylor than I do.

John: Sarah, that is unavoidable. Not to mention, you should be really happy that she has another female figure in her life; one that she can trust and one that cares for her deeply.

Sarah: I suppose you're right, but I still hate it. *(Pause)* So, where are you and Jenna going tonight?

John: You know as much as I do regarding that. You were here. You heard everything I did.

John turns to his writing again.

Sarah: You do know she's trying to get you into bed.

John: We're just good friends, nothing more.

Sarah: And that she eventually wants to marry you.

John: I sincerely doubt that.

Sarah: And that she wants to have your next baby and adopt Taylor.

John: *(turns around)* Stop this! Stop doing this to yourself Sarah. *(Pause)* I know what you're worried about, but it's not going to happen. Jenna, or any other woman for that matter is never, can never replace you as Taylor's mother. She loves you, and will always love you, regardless of who comes in and out of both of our lives. You have got to believe that, or learn to believe it. If you don't it will tear you apart, then tear me apart, and eventually tear Taylor apart. Is that what you want?

Sarah: *(beginning to cry)* Of course not John. I just, I just miss her so much!

John stands, approaches and embraces Sarah.

John: I know you do. You have to know that she loves you with all her being though.

Sarah: Does she still miss me bunches?

John: More than bunches. She misses you everyday and every night, but at the same time she knows you love her with all your heart.

Sarah: *(wipes eyes)* Really?

John: Really. And she'll be here in a couple minutes, then you can see how much she

misses you.

Sarah smiles.

Sarah: You know I've always loved you. Always have and always will.

John: And I you.

A door is heard slamming off stage.

John: That's her, why don't you go see your daughter.

John and Sarah kiss briefly. Sarah exits. John watches her exit then returns to his seat. After a brief moment Taylor enters. She approaches her father and taps him on the shoulder.

Taylor: Dad?

John: Yes dear?

Taylor: Why do I have to go to Mrs. Brentwood's house?

John: Well, your Aunt Jenna and I are going out to dinner. And unfortunately it's only a place for adults.

Taylor: Jenna isn't yours or mommy's sister!

John: *(laughing)* I know. Sometimes family is more than a blood relation, though. It's someone you care for, and who you know cares for you. Someone who would take care of you no matter what happened.

Taylor: Then I think Jenna is your aunt too. *(Jumps up onto John's lap)* And I think I'm your aunt too! What would you do without the two of us?

John: I can't imagine. So, are you okay with going to Mrs. Brentwood's tonight?

Taylor: Yeah. She's nice, but not very fun, and her house smells funny, and she's always trying to feed me!

John laughs. A voice from off stage is heard.

Jenna: You two ready to go?

John: Be right there. *(To Taylor)* Why don't you go put yourself in the car and buckle up, okay?

Taylor: Can I sit in the front?

John: Ask Jenna, now scoot.

Taylor jumps off Johns lap and darts off stage. John stands and approaches audience.

John: What a convoluted mess. The level of complication in life never decreases, no matter how much you try to simplify. And it never simplifies because we retain memories our entire lives, memories often laced with guilt. I'm a perfect example of that. I have no bills, no worries regarding money, no worries regarding getting baby sitters or day care. I own only the bare necessities in life, with the exception of what's in Taylor's room, and I have no desire to own more. I'm not a materialistic person. I get to spend my free time with a daughter whom I adore, and friend who is caring and beautiful. However, my life is complicated to the tilt. Why? Because of guilt! And it only expounds upon itself daily. I feel guiltier today for spending time with Jenna, and not spending enough time with Taylor than I did yesterday, and everyday that has preceded that! And what makes it worse is when Sarah comes for one of her visits. She doesn't get to spend anytime with Taylor, and no real time with me, and she loves us both dearly, but I have Taylor at my discretion and her best friend holding my hand on Christmas Eve, when it should be Sarah's. *(Pause)* This is my guilt, and the origin of the pain that holds me down. What did I say before? It frees us in some capacity? I'm a fucking idiot. But I will probably feel different in the morning. In the morning I'll be numb. Not by the alcohol I consume tonight, but by the blinding pain I feel. And in that numbness metaphysical realizations will consume my being. As I said before, pain is a drug. The question is, is its abuse of an ethical nature? *(Pause)* Many things I try to keep to myself, as to not hurt or cause any pain to those around me - there's a contradiction eh? I talk about how liberating all this pain can be, yet I try to shield those I care for from it. However, I fear my covering the blemishes on my soul causes a different kind of pain on those I care for.

I do love Taylor, and Jenna, but I know they read that I'm not open with them. They do their best to comfort me and try to get me to open up, but I refuse. I tell them nothing is wrong. I do this to try to protect them, when in essence I'm betraying the bonds of our love by lying to them. Some of you might believe that not volunteering information isn't lying – I used to believe that myself. But as of late I've come to realize that a lie of omission is still a lie. *(Pause)* In hindsight, I think that Sarah visits me and asks for advice so that I can help myself. In looking back on our conversation earlier, I know now that I have to take my own advice to her, or I will end up hurting and tearing apart those dearest to me.

Exit John

End Act One.

Act Two

Scene One

Setting of a bar, 8 years prior. The bar is filled with several patrons, a bartender and a waitress. Enter John and Sarah who are silently approached by the waitress and seated at table at front, center stage.

John: God this feels good. Being out, knowing that I don't ever have to work again.

Sarah: Well, we don't know about ever yet John.

John: Just think though, with this play going into production I'll have more time to write. I won't have to find time to be inspired, or find time to actually sit in front of the computer. Things are going to be perfect. *(Takes and kisses Sarah's hand)* Things are perfect.

Sarah: You think they're perfect, as they are?

John: Well, yeah, I suppose. We both have everything we want, everything we've ever dreamed of.

Sarah: Well, not both of us.

John: What's that supposed to mean...

John is cut off by the waitress, who hands them both menus.

Waitress: Can I get you two anything to drink while you look over your menus?

John: I'll take a Bud, draft.

Sarah: Water, please.

John looks at Sarah queerly as the waitress exits.

John: Water? Sarah, if you're worried about driving don't. We can take a cab home.

Sarah: It's not that. *(Pause)* So you think you, we, are perfectly happy? That things can't get better? *(Pause)* And what if they get worse? Will you abandon me because I brought you down?

John: Sarah, where is this coming from? I would never, ever abandon you. You know that. As for things getting better or worse, I accept and welcome both of those possibilities. That's just part of life. Hopefully though, they will only get better. Actually, I don't see how they couldn't.

Sarah: It's just that...

John: I think you just misunderstood what I was saying. I spout off about things sometimes and don't choose words wisely.

Sarah: You always choose words wisely.

John: *(smiling)* On paper, perhaps, but that's still up for debate. Real conversation is a different animal though. Here, in the right now, the present, I'm susceptible to linguistic flaws along with the rest of humanity.

Sarah: *(lightly laughing)* Would you just listen to yourself? Sheesh.

John: I'm not finished yet. When I said things are perfect, I just meant right now - tonight, at this very moment. I know things might change later tonight, or tomorrow or next month. And I definitely know they will change sometime. *(Pause)* I'm just enjoying this, being here with you, sharing in the second most important dream of my life, getting my work to the production level.

Sarah: And what is the most important dream of your life?

The waitress returns and sets the two drinks in front of their respective recipients.

Waitress: Are you ready to order, or do you need a couple more minutes?

Sarah: A few more minutes please. *(Waitress nods and leaves table)* Well, Mr. Thomas, what is the most important dream of your life?

John: The Dionysian charm in my hand that our lovely waitress just handed me.

Sarah flicks him in the forehead.

Sarah: *(laughing)* Ass.

John: *(laughing)* Why do you ask questions to which you already know the answer?

Sarah: Because it's nice to hear, All the time! Not just sometimes, especially now.

John: Sarah, you know I love you. And you are without an inkling of doubt the most important person, the most important anything in my life. You're my dream, the first dream, the most important and most significant dream of my life. You are what makes

me, me. *(Pause)* And what do you mean, “especially now?”

Sarah: We really need to talk John, but I’m not sure this is the place?

John: Well, after that statement this is going to have to be the place. I can’t just sit here all night trying to prepare myself for something unknown regarding you, and I can’t pretend that you’re not going to hit me with some kind of bombshell when we get home. So spill, woman.

Sarah: I hate to sound so cliché, but I have good news, and maybe some bad news, but I’m not sure yet. And I do hope you think the good news is good news, but it might be bad news to you, and if it is I’ll understand completely. I just hope that if you do think it’s bad news right now, that you’ll come to think of it as good news in the not too distant future because I’m going to need your support regardless of whether you think it’s good news or bad news and...

John: Sarah stop. You’re confusing me. Please, just say what you need to say.

Sarah: I guess I should just blurt it out.

John: No, no, string me on for a couple more hours and drain me of all my sanity.

Sarah: *(smirks)* Well Jonathan, I, Sarah Michelle Thomas, am going to have your baby.

John drops his beer on the floor. The waitress promptly comes to assist.

Waitress: Are you okay sir?

John: Yes, yes. I’m so sorry. It just slipped.

Waitress: It’s okay, I’ll get someone to clean this up and get you another beer.

John: *(grabs the waitress by the sleeve and stares at her vacantly)* Could you make that a pitcher, please?

Waitress nods and exits, as one of the staff members quickly cleans the broken glass and liquid. Upon his exit, conversation resumes.

John: Pregnant?

Sarah: Pregnant.

John: How long have you known?

Sarah: Well, I found out today for certain, from Dr. Cassidy, along with some other stuff, but I’ve kinda personally known for about a month. I hope you’re not mad that I didn’t

tell you earlier.

John: Not at all. No, no, I could never be mad about that. I know you just wanted to make sure before you told me.

Sarah: That's it exactly. I didn't want to get your hopes up, then have you disappointed, especially considering what you've been going through the past couple weeks, with your play and all. *(Pause)* There is something else though.

John: What?

Sarah: It may be nothing, so don't worry too much, but it may be something.

Scene Two

The setting remains the same, however it is now present day. As the scene opens enter John and Jenna, who are silently seated to a table adjacent to the one in which our hero was seated in the previous scene. Upon being seated the waitress hands the apparent couple their menus, John nods in mute appreciation, and the hostess/waitress returns to her duties.

Jenna: This is nice.

John: Indeed.

The two look around and get a feel for their environment. The silence however, is making both of our dinner guests obviously uncomfortable.

Jenna: So, uhmm, do you think Taylor will be okay at my mom's house tonight?

John: I'm sure. *(Pause and looking deep into Jenna's eyes)* I need a drink.

Jenna: You can say that again? *(Motions to get waitress' attention who then approaches table).* Could we get some drinks before we order?

Waitress: Of course, I'm sorry. I should have asked earlier. What would you like?

Jenna: I'll have a Bud Light.

John: The same.

Waitress leaves to retrieve order.

John: I thought you hated beer Jenna?

Jenna: Usually, but I'm in the mood for it tonight, don't know why.

Waitress returns with the order.

Jenna: Thank you.

Waitress leaves.

Jenna: You know John, I was hoping that we could talk tonight.

John: *(to audience)* What is it with women today, and their need to have a "talk?"

Jenna: I mean, I don't want to come off as Miss Serious or anything, but there are some things that have really been on my mind as of late and I'm afraid if I don't purge them some how I'm going to lose it.

John: *(Intrigued)* Go ahead.

Jenna: How long have we known each other, 10 years?

John: Yeah, about that.

Jenna: I know things haven't been easy for you, since, well, you know. And I've tried to be the best friend that could to you and Taylor, but...

John: But?

Jenna: Look, I know you are a very ethical person, and would never do anything to hurt me intentionally, but you are hurting me John. *(John opens his mouth about to speak)* Please, let me finish. I know it's mostly my fault that I feel this pain, as I expect something to happen or keep hoping that you'll see some light and come running to me one day, but it's gotten to a point that I just need to know! I need to know that if not now, that there might be some chance for us in the future, something beyond friendship. This not knowing is killing me, and the truth is, I don't think I could bear to be around you if that hope is decimated.

John stands and approaches the front of the stage. The stage is darkened and a spotlight is put onto John as the remainder of the cast becomes motionless.

John: There it is again. Pain. And now it seems I've brought this addiction onto another soul. None of this is Jenna's fault, and she doesn't deserve this pain or any other for that matter. I'm not a complete idiot. I know she has feelings for me. I've known for several years actually. But I tease her because I'm selfish. I know she needs more from me so

every once in a while I give her a little more of myself, but it's always as little as possible, just enough to sustain her needs and keep her coming back to keep me company. And what's worse is that I've gotten her so good that she blames herself for the pain she feels, and thinks I'm "ethical" regarding this. She thinks I'm blind to her actions, her looks, her casual flirtations and subtle hints of seduction. *(Pause)* God she is so beautiful. *(Pause, and serious)* But it's inappropriate. Why? Because I've become so accustomed to this pain – a pain that was thrown upon me that I've nurtured for 4 years now into something beyond initial shock and depression. It's like a second child to me, my other silent invisible daughter. And it's gone on too long for me to abandon her now, for this pain has evolved into a consciousness of its own, a living and breathing organism on a transcendental level. *(Pause)* So I'm left with several choices regarding this matter, and all of them will have damaging repercussions on many people. However, my first and only concern should be, and is of Taylor. I cannot let her down in any capacity. I have to put her first regardless of who gets hurt or damaged, even Jenna, even myself. Funny thing when you have children, ethics take on a whole new meaning. I question my ideals so often now, as how they pertain to her, when I used to consider the eternal ramifications. This may be a salvageable situation though. I might be able to get through this without any adverse effects on Taylor, no sacrifice of my personal pain, and no more damage to Jenna.

I know many of you are probably thinking that this situation isn't that difficult. Probably a no-brainer to most of you! Take the girl, your daughter won't be affected, and get over your selfish obsessions! Easy enough, so you might think. The thing is, right now Taylor has a structured life, and I don't want that to change. I'm not an easy person to love though, and as Jenna probably knows this - as she was a friend and confidante of Sarah and thinks she has mentally prepared herself for all my quirks and oddities - planning and preparation regarding relationships does not work. If it did, divorce wouldn't exist. And if we did get together, and I was to lose her somehow it would destroy Taylor, and I will **NOT** allow that to happen. I'll spend the rest of my life alone if necessary, and abandon my friendship with Jenna if that's the only possibility, but I won't let Taylor become a dysfunctional adolescent or adult because she had an unstructured and undisciplined childhood.

So what do I do? I've already been unethical to Jenna, and my awareness of this makes allowing it to continue on the border of unconscionable. And if I tell her the truth I risk ending our friendship, but my first and only concern has to be of Taylor, so what might be unethical in the world of Reality will again succumb to a change of interpretation regarding my daughter.

John returns to the table.

Jenna: You know what, just forget everything I've just said. I'm putting you on the spot in a really unfair way. I have no right to ask you these questions. If it's right between us, it'll surface in time. I just need to be patient. *(looks around room frustrated)* Patient.

John: *(to the audience, lights dim and spotlight on John)* Wow, this could be a ticket out of this conversation, but I can't take it. I've got to do the moral thing here. *(To Jenna,*

lights return to their previous status) Jenna, Jenna, Jenna, how perfect but silly you are. You have every right to inquire as to the possibilities of our relationship. More than a right, it's your duty! I've kept you in a limbo worse than the original that submits itself to un-baptized children. The fact of the matter is...*(turns to audience as stage lights dim and a spotlight is again set onto John)* ...it's time I stopped this masquerade of hope regarding Jenna. I've been an unethical man long enough, and as unethical is forgivable, unconscionable is not, so I'll bear the potential heartbreak and tragedy and be completely honest for a change. *(John turns towards Jenna and the light return to their previous status)* ...the fact of the matter is I love you Jenna. Not just for all the wonderful things you do for Taylor and I on a daily basis, but because of all the wonderful things that are you. *(Jenna tries to restrain her tears)* Am I in love with you? I don't know. And even if I am, I don't think it would be right to tell you.

Jenna: Why?

John: Because I think it would do much more harm than good, even though it's probably something you might want to hear in the moment. *(Pause)* If I were to tell you that I was in love with you it would undoubtedly accelerate our relationship, and perhaps take it to a level that isn't necessarily inappropriate, but one that needs to be earned, forged over time. Relationships are fragile creatures Jenna, as I'm sure you're aware, and jumping to a level such as the one I'm describing without us having even kissed could have repercussions more damaging than any other scenario that might play itself out over time. *(Pause)* Is this making any sense?

Jenna: Plenty. *(Smiling)* So, you think we need to take baby steps if were to have any hope for a time honored love? *(John nods in affirmation)* Well then, welcome to the ladder Mr. Thomas.

Jenna leans over the table and softly kisses John on the lips.

Jenna: Small enough of a step for ya?

John: Indeed.

Jenna: Dance with me?

John stands and leads Jenna to an improvised dance floor at center stage as a romantic song begins playing. Mr. Director, you may indulge yourself.

Scene Three

The same restaurant as before, 4 years prior. Enter John, with a 3 year old Taylor in his arms, and pushing Sarah in a wheelchair. A hostess approaches and seats them to a table. Conversation is made that the audience cannot hear. The hostess leaves the table and a waitress shortly returns with a beer for John, water for Sarah, and a soda for Taylor.

John: You know what they need here, a playroom.

Sarah: If you just wanted to bring Taylor somewhere where you could drop her off and forget about her you should have taken us to Chuckie Cheese.

John: (*frustrated*) I know it's been a hard week Sarah, (*covering Taylor's ears*) but don't say things like that in front of our daughter. It's not benefiting anyone, no matter how funny you think it is.

Sarah: (*angered*) Funny, ha ha ha!!! And a hard week? You have no idea. (*Pause*) God damnit! I hate this fucking chair!

John: Sarah!! Watch your language!

Sarah: O right, what does it matter anyways. She'll hear it from someone else at this or some other stupid bar, as I'm sure you'll be taking her to plenty of them once I'm not around.

John: That is enough Sarah. What is with you tonight?

Sarah: What's with me? What's with me John?!! Look at me for Christ's sake! I'm stuck in this ff...freakin' chair for the remainder of this so-called life. God, I just hate it when you take me to places like this. I hate seeing all the people that aren't disabled. I hate having people treat me so special and fake 'cause they feel sorry for me. I hate all of it, and I hate this Goddamn chair!

Taylor starts crying.

John: Do you want to leave Sarah? We did come hear at your request, if you forgot.

Sarah: I just named this place because I know you like it here.

John: (*puts his head in his hands*) Just tell me what you want Sarah?

Sarah: I want out of all this! This restaurant, this chair, this mockery of life!

John: (*angry*) Look, I'm sick of this too. You think I don't cry everyday because my wife, the only woman I've ever loved in my life, is sick? But I deal with it, and I try to be strong, for your sake and for Taylor's. I know this is hard on you. Hard isn't even the word, impossible! But you have got to be strong, if only for your daughter. You cry on

my shoulder and take anything you want out on me, but don't you dare cry on Taylor's shoulder. She needs you so much, and if you alienate those needs you are as good as dead to her. *(Sarah starts crying)* Worse than dead for that matter as the dead can't cause anymore pain. So you better summon whatever strength you've got left and focus it all on Taylor, and consider her with every breath you take and every word you speak because I won't allow our daughter to be irreparably damaged because of your selfishness.

Sarah begins to weep, Taylor begins to cry again. Enter Jenna and a young man who accompanies her. They look around briefly, notice John and Sarah, and approach the table.

Jenna: *(slaps John on the back of the head)* What in the hell did you do to her?

John: *(in a low tone)* Keep your diseased hands off of me.

Jenna motions toward Taylor, in a gentle manner. John quickly maneuvers Taylor closer to him.

John: And my daughter.

Jenna: *(sarcastically)* Nice John, nice lessons yo're teaching your daughter.

John: I just call 'em as I see 'em. So, who's the new beau this week?

Jenna: Sarah, *(addressing John)* Dick, this is Antonio.

Antonio reaches down and kisses Sarah's hand, as John stands and holds out his hand and the two men shake.

John: Antonio, is it? Hope your wear a condom.

Antonio laughs lightly as Jenna and Sarah shoot John a look that would strike fear in the hearts of most men.

John: Please, sit down.

Antonio and Jenna sit. Antonio seats himself next to Sarah, and Jenna seats herself in between her new beau and Taylor. By the way, it's a round table, for all of you reading this that are slightly confused.

Jenna: How has your week been Sarah?

Sarah: Don't patronize me Jenna. Nothing disgusts me more, except for John right now.

John: Lovely. So Antonio, what do you do?

Antonio: I am an artist.

John: Really, in what capacity?

Antonio: What do you mean?

John: I mean, what is your point of focus in the artistic community? Are you a musician, an actor, a writer, a painter, sculptor?

Antonio: I am all of those things.

Jenna: He's quite talented. You'd do well to take some advice from him. It would certainly help you to improve those half-witted nonsensical plays and poems you write.

John: (*sarcastically*) Indeed. And you make a comfortable living doing all these things, without a point of focus? That's amazing.

Antonio: Well, I wouldn't say that's how I earn my keep, if you know what I mean. I sometimes have to find outside sources of income as the masses haven't accepted the awesome brilliance of my works.

John: I see. So, what might these other sources of income be?

Antonio: (*looking around as if ashamed*) Well, I wait tables at the Che' Rober. But it's only temporary.

John: Of course, nothing wrong with that at all. I used to enjoy the servitude of society myself, until I got my break.

Antonio: You are a writer, yes?

John: Yes.

Antonio: I've yet to read any of your works, for as my speaking the English isn't bad, my reading of the word needs some work. Jenna has told me though that you are quite talented and have a great gift.

John: (*surprised*) Really? Very interesting.

Jenna: (*defensively*) I'm not so un-evolved that I'll condemn literary art because I detest the instrument of design.

John: (*grinning*) I think that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

Jenna: O shut-up.

John: And we're back to where we should be.

Sarah: Can't you two try and get along, for my sake?

John: Of course dear. (*Sarcastically*) My apologies Jenna.

Jenna. (*Sarcastically*) Accepted. (*Impatient*) Antonio, would you like to dance?

Antonio stands and leads Jenna out to the afore mentioned improvised dance floor.

Sarah: I really wish you two would try and get along?

John: (*focusing his attention to Taylor*) I think we should probably work on us getting along first.

Sarah: You know you're spoiling her. She's gonna turn out to be a brat if you cater to her every whim.

John: I didn't get an instruction book along with the placenta when she came out of you dear. I'm doing the best I can, and considering the circumstances I think her dependence is good thing because it's only going to get exaggerated in the years to come.

Sarah: Don't speak of such things. God, I feel horrible enough just thinking about that stuff on my own without you lecturing and pointing out my worst fears.

John: I'm sorry. I'm not being a good husband, I'm not being a good friend for that matter. I'll try harder, I promise. I know this is an unbearable situation, for all of us, but mostly you.

Sarah: Thank you. And I'll try not to be so down all the time, and do better for the three of us.

John: Thatta girl.

Sarah: Do me a favor?

John: Of course.

Sarah: Dance with Jenna.

John: (*shakes with disgust*) Eeewwwwww. Why?

Sarah: Because I *need* you two to get along, especially now. I do Jonathan. I don't know why you two hate each other so much, but it pains me to no end that I can't have my two best friends in each others company without making me want to cry. I wasn't

kidding earlier when I said I want you two to get along. And I think the best way for that to begin is for you to be a man and drop all this anger and distaste you have for her and be the first one to offer an olive branch. She's not a bad person, not in the least. Do you think I would consider someone a friend of mine if they were?

John: Of course not Sarah, but...

Sarah: But nothing! Do it!

Sarah smiles. John stands, leans over and kisses Sarah, kisses Taylor on top the head, and approaches the dancing couple.

John: (*addressing Antonio*) May I?

Antonio: (*bows to John*) Of course.

Jenna: (*shocked*) So, what's up with this? I had figured you would just poison my drink, not "accidentally" break my neck while we danced.

John: Jenna, poisoning someone's drink is so Caesarian. I prefer the dramatic.

Jenna chuckles briefly.

John: Well, that's a start I suppose.

Jenna: Don't get your hopes up, you're still an ass. One dance with me isn't going to change that.

John: (*slightly perturbed*) Calm down John, do the happy dance, I'm doin' the happy dance.

Jenna: What's up with you, freak?

The music suddenly changes from a medium paced rhythmic tune to a slow romantic ballad by Spandau Ballet called "True."

John: O great!

Jenna: (*giggling*) Don't worry I won't bite.

John: It's not you I'm worried about, it your cooties.

Jenna: (*laughing*) Now that was actually funny, and without your usual harshness. (*Pause*) So John, why are you out here?

John: Because we both have to be better people for our mutual best friend.

Jenna: And you just suddenly came to this realization?

John: With a little help from Sarah, but she's right. We have to put whatever it is that makes us detest one another aside and be there for her. I'm not saying we have to be friends or anything, but I do think it's imperative for Sarah's happiness that we at least get along. She's got so much on her plate right now, and we don't need to make her any more miserable by causing her to worry about manipulating time between those who are closest to her.

Jenna: *(smiling)* You think she'd be used to it by now.

John: *(laughing)* Yeah, you'd think.

The stage darkens, and all who are present exit, with the exception of John and Jenna. The stage then gradually resumes its previous luminescence as the two are still in each other's arms dancing, but now at a much more intimate level. They remain silent for a moment, just enjoying one another, before John speaks.

John: *(in a loud whisper)* How about this for a change...

And here I sit
Betrayed by the fascination of past ironies
And myths of cyclical events
That bask in contemptuous smiles.

As I back myself into this proverbial corner
I keep telling this physical embodiment –
That is deaf to all occasions –
To take one last dramatic stab at Glory
And leave the rest in posterity's hands,
And all I keep ending up with is paper cuts.

Jenna: That's lovely John, but almost sad. Did you just make that up?

John: No, actually I think I wrote that about two years ago, but this moment seems to be characterized by that poem.

Jenna: You think this moment is sad?

John: Not in the least. *(Exhales)* The jist of the poem is that of my personal failure, and how I won't allow myself to attain or achieve what I probably deserve. The poem states that I make vain or lacking attempts at all my prospects, even though at the time I think they are justified and appropriate efforts. The fact of the matter however, is that I only get small abrasions because my fear, my pain, won't allow me to make a full attempt. I think I try, but if that were the case I would either succeed or be severely wounded. Neither of those ever occur, at least as of late.

Jenna: (*confused*) So, how does this relate to this moment?

John: Because it's with you that I don't let myself completely go. I hold back, even when I think I'm making progress or think that I'm opening up to you, and because of that I only allow myself to get paper cuts, not real wounds or real joy for that matter.

Jenna: You don't have to hold back with me John. I know you've been through hell, and I swear on my life that I would never hurt you.

John: (*smiling*) I know. I might take some time Jenna. That's why I said what I did earlier, because I wanted to be true to our friendship, our current relationship. I don't want to hurt you either, but I do need you to know that I am truly trying.

Jenna: (*kisses him on the forehead and holds John tightly*) I know you are.

The two exist in a moment of silence as Sarah and a three year old Taylor enter the stage. Sarah and Taylor walk close to John and Jenna as John looks on. Sarah sits and starts blowing soap bubbles as Taylor jumps around trying to catch them. Sarah then looks at John and speaks.

Sarah: Do you know what defines the subtle perfection of a rose?

John looks at her queerly.

Sarah: She doesn't outlive her beauty.

John looks at her even more strangely, but eventually smiles. At that moment Sarah collects Taylor into her arms, approaches John and kisses him on the cheek, then exits.

End Act Two.

Act Three

Scene One

The scene opens in John's home. Two thirds of the stage is comprised of his living room, which occupies a couch and coffee table. The other third of the stage is Taylor's room, which has a bed and scattered toys on the floor along with a PPG theme. The background has a setting of a bay window behind the couch, and a door on the living

room side of the stage. Enter Taylor and Mrs. Brentwood through the door.

Mrs. Brentwood: So Taylor, is this better?

Taylor looks at Mrs. Brentwood strangely.

Mrs. Brentwood: Now dear, where is your room? We should get you to bed right quick as it's way past your bedtime and I don't want your father reigning down any wrath on me because I was delinquent in my duties.

Taylor: But you were gonna rob that house!!! That would have made me so late it wouldn't even matter because I'd be sleeping in jail with you!

Mrs. Brentwood: Dear, I'm going to say this for the last time, I was not going to burglar you're neighbor's home! I just walked up their walkway by accident. It was dark and I've only been here once before.

Taylor looks at her suspiciously.

Mrs. Brentwood: I am serious. Now, where is your room?

Taylor: *(leading Mrs. Brentwood)* Over here, *(seriously)* but I know every single thing that's in my room, so no funny stuff.

Mrs. Brentwood: *(trying not to laugh)* I promise, now let's get you to bed.

Mrs. Brentwood tucks Taylor in and kisses her on the forehead as Taylor timely falls asleep. She then leaves Taylor's room and sits on the couch in the living room and soon follows in the same pattern as John's daughter. After a brief moment enter John and Jenna, in each other's arms, and all over each other, but in more of a romantic manner as opposed to lustful. Mrs. Brentwood suddenly wakes, turns and witnesses the two, and clears her throat in an obtrusive manner. John and Jenna cease their visit to adolescence and in shock respond.

John: Mrs. Brentwood!

Jenna: Mom! *(Pause)* What are you doing here?

Mrs. Brentwood: Taylor couldn't sleep. Actually she refused to sleep. She said she would only be comfortable in her own bed, so after an hour of trying to coarsen her I gave up and brought her home.

Jenna: *(frustrated)* How did you get here mother? I didn't see your car outside. Did you walk here at this time of night with a seven year old!?

Mrs. Brentwood: No dear. If you must know I parked in front of the neighbor's house as

I'm not that familiar with this neighborhood and in the dark I can't see the numbers. Actually, it's quite a funny story. Taylor thought...

Jenna: That's enough Mother. (*Pause and exhales deeply*) Is Taylor asleep?

Mrs. Brentwood: Yes, like a bug in a rug. (*Pauses realizing the situation*) Well, I think I'll be going.

John: Thanks again for watching Taylor Mrs. Brentwood.

Mrs. Brentwood: Call me Gladys, John.

John: (*smiling*) Gladys, and thank you for bringing Taylor home. That wasn't necessary, but was quite considerate.

Mrs. Brentwood: (*patting John on the cheek*) My pleasure dear. I just wanted her to be happy. (*Pause and looks at her daughter*) Good night Jennifer Rose.

Jenna: Goodnight mother.

John: (*Nervously*) Just so you know, Gladys, what you saw wasn't what it looked like. There is actually a new technique in checking for cavities with one's tongue, and since it's hard to be objective when doing it on your own, (*slowing down, realizing the futility of his argument*) I thought I would assist your daughter, just to save her a trip to the dentist.

Mrs. Brentwood: Of course dear, it never is. Now you two kids have a good night.

Jenna: Good night mother!

Mrs. Brentwood exits.

John: (*uncomfortable*) Well, I should probably check on Taylor. Make yourself comfortable.

Jenna: I should probably go.

John: No, please. Stay, for me?

Jenna: (*smiling*) Ok. Can I say goodnight to her too?

John: (*smiling*) Of course, she'd love that.

John and Jenna enter Taylor's room. John sits on the bed and gently shakes Taylor as Jenna stands and leans against John. Taylor slowly wakes.

John: Hey sleepy head.

Taylor: Hi dad.

John: How was your night as Mrs. Brentwood's?

Taylor: It was okay. (*Yawning*) I'm sorry I came home.

John: Hey, don't say that. This is your house as much as mine. You have every right to come home if you want.

Taylor: I think I made Mrs. Brentwood mad.

Jenna: She wasn't mad at all dear.

Taylor: I think she was. (*Whispering*) I think I made her mad enough that she was going to rob the neighbor's house.

Jenna: (*laughing*) What?

John: (*grinning*) She was going to rob the neighbor's house?

Taylor: Yeah! She parked in front of their house, and then start walking up to break in! (*Proudly*) I stopped her though.

John: (*sarcastically*) Did you?

Taylor: (*enthusiastic*) Yeah! I said, "Mrs. Brentwood, I don't live there. I live here, so stop these shenanigans!"

Jenna: (*laughing*) Shenanigans?!

Taylor: (*Proudly*) Yes, I learned it from one of daddy's books. Anyhow, she ceased her attempt, and then denied what she was trying to do! But I didn't believe her.

Jenna: Good for you sweetie.

John: Jenna! (*to Taylor*) I am certain it was just a mistake on Mrs. Brentwood's part. She's not a thief dear.

Taylor: (*doubtfully*) Uh huh.

John: Anyhow, why don't you get back to sleep, okay Princess?

Taylor: (*embarrassed*) Dad, (*whispering*) not in front of her. I'm a big girl now.

