

CONFORMITY

A teen *play* for high school

by Kevin vanMeter

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by Kevin E. VanMeter

For those voiceless people that we love, cherish, and care for no matter how lazy, annoying, or selfish they may be...teenagers.

Setting: The play takes place inside a large classroom used for Saturday School Detention at an upper-class public high school. Scenes also take place in the memories of the students.

Characters:

Ms. Blair: Assistant Principal at the school. She is young for having such a position. She is the most liked Assistant Principal at her school, but everyone knows not to cross her. As young and vibrant as she is, she's recently been informed that she can't have children and this information is taking a toll on her.

Male Adult: Role varies from one student to another. He should wear the same outfit as Female Adult (I envisioned white shirt, red tie, black slacks, but it's up to the director/costume designer). The average age of the adults is 42 years old, but again, this varies too. The adults will represent parents, teachers, uncles, older siblings, etc.

Female Adult: See Male Adult. I envisioned her wearing white shirt, red tie, black skirt.

Charles: Junior in the marching band, but he's got the build for a football player. He chose band over football because he wants to avoid being home as much as possible. His father is extremely abusive and his mother does nothing out of fear.

Mark: Senior who barely has a 2.0 GPA. Has a major substance abuse issue. The only thing he cares about less than the present is the future. His brother died in a car accident last year, which has increased his need to escape reality.

Harish: Sophomore from India. His parents have arranged a marriage for him as soon as he gets out of college. He's actually relieved by this because he hasn't had much luck with the ladies (at least he thinks he's ok with it). He's very intelligent, and mostly ignored in every facet of his life. He's quiet at first, but as the play progresses, he starts to use this opportunity to vent.

Pam: Senior with a ridiculously high GPA. She lives in her older sister's shadow at home and at school (even though her sister graduated three years ago). All she wants out of life is a studio where she can paint and draw and sculpt. No one thinks she's very good and thinks she should become a doctor or something like that.

Veronica: Freshman with substance abuse problems. She's tried to commit suicide twice. When sober she's very intelligent and insightful, but feels numb and she can't stand that feeling. Her parents have taken her to so many doctors she's lost count. Mark takes a liking to her, which upsets the rest of the group.

Joy: Senior, She's a very beautiful cheerleader and has learned to use that to her advantage. She uses sex to get what she wants from students and faculty alike. She picked up this trait from her mother, who's been divorced five times.

Cathy: Sophomore who just moved here. Her father is in the military and this is the third high school she's been to. She's a lesbian, but doesn't know how to come out. She's petrified of the idea.

Elizabeth: Junior who has a reputation for being a prude. She wants to go to Harvard just like her parents did. She feels boyfriends and sex would just get in the way of that. She's actually as innocent as she appears.

ACT I

SCENE I

AT THE RISE: *The desks in the classroom are neatly arranged in rows. Ms. Blair opens the door and enters; She walks across the room to her office, which is on the opposite side of the stage. Her phone rings before she gets there. She grabs it excitedly, then frowns when looking at the caller ID.*

BLAIR: Hello... Sorry, I was hoping you were Keith... No, he uh, didn't handle it too well... he's thinking about calling off the wedding... I... I know, I tried all that, he's just... I didn't say anything, I couldn't... It was too much info to handle in one day, I... well, I can't really blame him can I! The man wants children more than anything and I can't give him what he wants so why should he stay with me!... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to yell I just, I can't believe how selfish he's being (*breaks down*)... You'd think he could wait a week before leaving me, you know? Maybe hold me and support me, it's not like he's the only one the news affected, stupid jerk... I love him so much, I don't know what to do... I appreciate that... I know, thank you. Look um, I have Saturday school duty and the kids will be here any minute... Thanks for calling to check up on me, I appreciate it... (*CATHY enters wearing jeans and a t-shirt. She stands there awkwardly, not knowing what to do*) I'll call you later when I'm not so blah... Bye (*BLAIR retreats to her office*).

(*VERONICA enters wearing dark clothes riddled with holes. The only thing darker than her clothes are the bags under her eyes. She stumbles*)

CATHY: (*gets into position to catch VERONICA but she lands in chair*) Are you ok?

VERONICA: Peachy

CATHY: You look sick, maybe Ms. Blair will let you serve your detention next Saturday. You should go home and rest.

VERONICA: What's the point, all I'm going to do is sleep here.

CATHY: You can sleep during Saturday School?

VERONICA: Nope

CATHY: But you said-

VERONICA: Look at me. Does it look like I care?

CATHY: (*Stares a little too long, VERONICA notices*) Um, no. You don't look like someone that cares about the rules... or anything for that matter. Well, I'm not going to sleep. I know this is just a misunderstanding and I really shouldn't be here, but I called my dad last night and he told me that I have to serve this detention anyway. It'll do me

some good to learn that there are consequences for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

VERONICA: I'm so happy for you, now could you do me a favor and stop talking so I can get some sleep?

CATHY: Right, sorry. Sweet dreams!

VERONICA: Yeah, whatever (*She puts her head down*)

(CATHY gets out some homework and writing utensils from her backpack. She neatly arranges everything on her desk while humming. She's very meticulous during this process. After several zips of her zippers, VERONICA gets up and walks to CATHY's desk. She grabs one of the many books and slams it on CATHY's desk.)

VERONICA: Why don't you read this one!

CATHY: I'm sorry; I didn't realize I was making so much noise. It won't happen again.

VERONICA: Thank you, I'd appreciate you allowing me to have those *sweet dreams* you mentioned.

(As VERONICA walks back to her desk, JOY enters wearing her workout clothes. She's very stylish with everything she wears, including this garb. She's also showing as much skin as she possibly can without getting yelled at by her coach. JOY is startled by VERONICA's appearance.)

VERONICA: Well this day keeps getting better and better (*She sits in a chair closer to CATHY*).

JOY: (*Approaches CATHY*) Hi, do you know where Ms. Blair is?

CATHY: I...um...she's in...the uh...her office. She seemed pretty upset when she let us in.

JOY: Well she's going to have to get over it because I have a note from my coach and we have practice today, which means I can't be here.

VERONICA: Praise the lord!

JOY: My sentiments exactly (*JOY goes into Ms. Blair's office*).

CATHY: Who was that?

VERONICA: You're such a stupid freshman! That's Joy, head cheerleader and future business leader of America.

CATHY: Really? She doesn't seem like the type. The cheerleader thing I get, but she's in FBLA?

VERONICA: Prostitution's a business, ain't it?

CATHY: Oh, that was pretty funny.

VERONICA: Yeah, I'm a real riot.

BLAIR: *(offstage)* SIT DOWN!

VERONICA: Man, she's pissed.

(JOY enters from the office upset. She rips up the note her coach gave her and sits down on the other side of the room. She puts her head down trying not to cry).

VERONICA: *(to CATHY)* Hey dummy, why don't you wish her sweet dreams too?

CATHY: You're very rude and inconsiderate.

VERONICA: A minute ago I was funny.

(HARISH enters, dressed professionally. HE quickly assesses the situation and sits down towards the back of the room. No one notices he's there)

CATHY: *(To Joy)* Are you ok?

JOY: I shouldn't be here! I didn't do anything wrong!

CATHY: C'mon, it won't be that bad. It'll be over before you know it.

JOY: But we have a competition next week!

VERONICA: *(Gets up)* OH NO! HOW WILL THE SCHOOL EVER CONTINUE IF WE DON'T WIN ANOTHER CHEERLEADING COMPETITION! WHATEVER WILL WE DO!

JOY: Oh my God, you're such a-

CATHY: *(To Veronica)* Weren't you going to sleep all day?

VERONICA: Yeah, so what?

CATHY: Well now would be a good time to start.

VERONICA: Wow, you don't really stick to one type, do you?

CATHY: What?

VERONICA: Well when we were alone you were all nice and sweet. You even lingered at me for a bit-

CATHY: What are you-

VERONICA: And then the skank cheerleader shows up and you're taking her side. It's really pathetic, freshman.

CATHY: I don't know what you're insinuating but-

VERONICA: Don't use such big words, Joy here will lose track of the conversation.

JOY: God I hate you! Your kind! You're just a bunch of low life losers that can't get involved with anything because you're too pathetic to try! And you try to tell yourself everyday that it's the cool thing to do, but the reality is you're all just sad because the only people that can stand being seen with you are the same messed up losers that are pissing away their futures. Why don't you do the world a favor and die!

VERONICA: I'm working on it! (*SHE turns around to head to her desk and notices HARISH*) When the hell did you get here?!

HARISH: A few minutes ago...maybe.

(*VERONICA screams in HIS direction and returns to her original seat and puts her head down*)

HARISH: ...Sorry

JOY: Don't apologize to her. She's not worth it!

CATHY: Ok, maybe we should all just take a breath and calm down.

JOY: I am calm. She's the one-

CATHY: She's the one that's heard enough of your opinions for one day.

JOY: Wow, it's almost the end of the school year and you still have a shred of innocence left. That's impressive, freshman.

CATHY: My name is Cathy, I'm a sophomore, and I've only been here for two weeks.

JOY: Sorry Cathy, I heard her call you a freshman.

(ELIZABETH and CHARLES enter. ELIZABETH wears baggy clothes that nearly cover her from head to toe. CHARLES is wearing shorts and a shirt).

CHARLES: I can't believe I have to spend my Saturday here. I should be home getting my beauty rest.

ELIZABETH: There aren't enough hours in the day for you to get beauty rest.

CHARLES: That really hurts, Liz. My heart is broken for now, but mark my words: You won't be able to resist me much longer, and we've got seven hours alone together.

JOY: Charles, don't waste your time, Liz wouldn't touch you, or anyone else for that matter, with a ten foot pole.

(CHARLES and ELIZABETH sit next to each other)

ELIZABETH: You say that like it's a bad thing.

JOY: I wouldn't call it good or bad, just unhealthy.

ELIZABETH: I'm perfectly healthy. I don't do the disgusting things you and your cheerleader friends do. You're going to catch diseases if you don't stop.

JOY: What diseases are you referring to?

ELIZABETH: You know...

JOY: C'mon, humor me. Name one.

ELIZABETH: *(After a long pause, SHE whispers)* Gonorrhea.

(EVERYONE chuckles at ELIZABETH except for VERONICA)

JOY: And what disgusting things with boys were you talking about?

ELIZABETH: I'm not going to humor you anymore. Find some other source of entertainment.

CHARLES: You know, Liz, I wouldn't mind hearing about some of the disgusting things you were referring to.

JOY: Really, Charles. Why don't you come over here, I'll draw you some pictures.

CATHY: Gross!

CHARLES: ...You're messing with me, aren't you?

JOY: Maybe.

CHARLES: Damn it! Why are you always like that? Flirting with people you don't like should be illegal.

HARISH: *(After a long pause)* Can I see the pictures?

CHARLES: *(Startled)* When did you get here?

HARISH: Before you did.

ELIZABETH: Really?

JOY: Come here, Harish. I've got to do something to pass the time.

(CHARLES and HARISH get up and head towards JOY's desk)

JOY: Sorry Charlie, you had your chance.

CHARLES: But...I...I mean...crap!

(CHARLES sits down next to ELIZABETH and HARISH sits next to JOY. HARISH is absolutely enthralled for the next several minutes while JOY draws several pictures)

CATHY: Boys are so pathetic!

ELIZABETH: Tell me about it.

(ELIZABETH sits next to CATHY)

CHARLES: Liz, I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH: *(To CATHY)* What are you working on?

CATHY: Geometry.

ELIAZBETH: Need some help?

CATHY: Yeah, that'd be great. But don't you have your own homework to do?

ELIZABETH: I did it all last night.

CATHY: A week's worth of homework?

ELIZABETH: It only took me til 2.

CATHY: I'm impressed.

VERONICA: Don't waste your time, she's a prude.

ELIZABETH: I am not!

CATHY: Just ignore her.

(PAM enters. She has paint stained clothes on and is carrying several drawing books.)

PAM: Hello everyone!

CHARLES: Why are you so chipper?

PAM: It's a beautiful day. Didn't you see the sunrise?

VERONICA: You're asking the wrong group.

PAM: Well it was amazing. I drew a picture of it.

VERONICA: I saw your final project in art last year, no thank you.

PAM: It was an expressionist piece. You probably just didn't understand it.

VERONICA: I understand how to make a straight line! Use a ruler for crying out loud!

CHARLES: I'll take a look. *(PAM hands it to HIM, he flips it over several times, trying to decide which way he should be looking at it. PAM grabs it from him and hands it to him the correct way. After a moment)* Oh, I see. Yeah, that's very pretty. How's your sister doing? Any new photo shoots coming out? Can you get her to autograph one for me? She's literally all over my room! She's so hot!

PAM: You know, for once I'm not going to let some prepubescent jackass ruin my day. But I do have her latest picture. *(SHE pulls out a newspaper)* Today's newspaper, my lovely sister is on page B3. I'm surprised she didn't make the front page.

CHARLES: *(Flips through the newspaper)* I don't see her.

PAM: She's at the top you idiot!

CHARLES: That's your sister?! What happened to her?

PAM: That's what she looks like without the make-up and all the other BS they add to her photos.

CHARLES: This is a mug shot!

PAM: Yep, sure is! She was arrested for a DUI a couple of nights ago. Her agent tried to keep it out of the papers, but someone called them last night, and here we are.

JOY: You ratted out your own sister?!

PAM: I don't know what you're talking about (*chuckles*).

VERONICA: Pam, I'm impressed.

(BLAIR enters, killing the mood instantly. PAM rushes to sit down)

BLAIR: You all know why you're here today... Where's Mark? No one knows? Fine, I'll tell him later. You're all here today because-

JOY: You've got nothing better to do on a Saturday but ruin our weekends for something we didn't even do!

ELIZABETH: She has a point.

CHARLES: Yeah! And where are Todd and Brad, they're the ones that should be here, not us.

CATHY: I was lost; I didn't know where I was.

VERONICA: Can you wrap this up so I can go back to sleep?

BLAIR: Shut...up. Unless you all want to be here next Saturday too. Todd and Brad have been expelled from school for drug use (*teens are surprised by this*). Principal Newman wanted to expel the rest of you too; I talked him out of it.

JOY: But we weren't smoking with them!

BLAIR: You were still somewhere you shouldn't have been! That area is off limits to students during bell changes. Now if you'd like me to inform Principal Newman that you feel you're being treated unfairly, I can do that and he'll be happy to expel you! Then you won't have to worry about competitions ever again, Joy! Is that what you all want?

(THEY all mumble 'no ma'am')

BLAIR: That's what I thought. Now during your time here on this lovely Saturday, you will not do anything but work on the project I am about to give you. I expect you to work

together to write a four page essay on the topic. Harish has the smallest handwriting, so he'll be responsible for copying down the final draft.

CHARLES: Did you watch 'The Breakfast Club' last night or something?

ELIZABETH: What's 'The Breakfast Club'?

ALL TEENS: Are you serious?

BLAIR: Child, you are so sheltered. Anyway, Charles, it doesn't really matter what I watched last night. Maybe I'm just reliving my days growing up in the 80's. Maybe I think Judd Nelson is hot! Maybe I just want to inspire you. I don't know. But I do know that you're going to work on this assignment for the next six hours and 53 minutes, Got it?

CHARLES: Yes ma'am.

BLAIR: Your subject matter is one simple word. *(If possible, she writes this on the board so the audience can see it)* Conformity.

PAM: That's not a subject. How do we write four pages on that?

BLAIR: I'm sure you'll find a way.

(MARK enters. His clothes are ragged and dirty. He smells worse than he looks)

MARK: Hey gang! Oh, Blair must be saying something important for once. Please continue.

BLAIR: Sit down, Mark!

MARK: You're sexy when you're feisty, Ms. Blair.

BLAIR: Mark, you missed the part when I informed everyone that Todd and Brad have been expelled. If you'd like to join them, keep it up.

MARK: Please, you'd be doing me a favor.

BLAIR: Mark, I promise you-

MARK: Oh cut the crap. I don't care! And I don't want to be here. *(HE gets up and walks slowly to BLAIR while speaking)*. What do I have to do? Pay you? Promise to be a good little boy? Kick Charlie's fat ass all over this room?

CHARLES: You wish!

MARK: Shut up band geek!

(CHARLES gets up)

ELIZABETH: Charles no!

BLAIR: Sit down Charles!

(CHARLES remains standing by his desk)

MARK: C'mon Blair, why don't you just let me leave...oh, I get it. You want me. Well Ms. Blair, all you had to do was ask. You're so lonely and pathetic that you have to boss kids around to feel good about yourself. I could make you feel good, Blair. Real good.

CATHY: You're such a pig!

MARK: You're too hot to be here at this hell hole of a school 24/7. What happened? Did someone break your heart in college? Turned you into the bitter ice queen you are today. No man in your life. No friends. No kids of your own you can torture.

(BLAIR slaps MARK in the face. Silence)

MARK: Nice one. Well, I won't mention this to anyone if you let me leave right now and never bother me again. Otherwise, I'm going to have to report you. See ya babe.

BLAIR: *(steps in front of him)* You do what you need to do, but you'll do it at 3 o'clock. Now sit your ass down!

(Mark smiles and sits)

BLAIR: You all have your assignment. Get to work!

(Lights out)

SCENE 2

AT THE RISE: *Everyone is still sitting where they were at the end of Scene 1, they've just shifted a little in their chairs. It's been nearly an hour and no one has said a word. Some are bored, some are scared. All are a little on edge except for MARK who must maintain his "I never care about anything" persona. After a few seconds of silence, someone can't take it anymore.*

ELIZABETH: Maybe we should start working on that paper?

MARK: I'm not working on shit!

CATHY: Haven't you caused enough trouble today?

MARK: Me! I'm sorry, I'm not the one that hit a student and still forced him to sit here all freakin' day!

CHARLES: You deserved it and you know it!

MARK: Listen chubs, you really don't want to get on my bad side today. I'm this close to going over the edge, and you'll be the first one I go after if I do.

CHARLES: Anytime your scrawny ass feels like getting up and actually doing something besides run your mouth, I'll be right here, buddy.

JOY: Can you both please stop measuring your genitals and get over yourselves. I can't handle the testosterone in here.

MARK: From what I hear you like large amounts of test-

(ELIZABETH starts to hum while closing her ears)

CATHY: What are you doing?

CHARLES: Liz, are you ok?

ELIZABETH: Look, we don't have to write the paper. I'll write it myself. Just please don't get gross in here.

JOY: Are you serious? An AP slapped a kid in front of all of us and you're worried about us hurting your virgin ears?!

MARK: Oh, I can take care of that virgin thing for you, Liz. Anytime, anywhere.

CHARLES: That's it!

(CHARLES gets up and charges at MARK, who also gets up and pushes his desk towards CHARLES. PAM grabs Charles' arm in an attempt to stop him)

PAM: Charles, sit your ass down! He's not worth it and he never will be.

CHARLES: All it's going to take is one punch, and it'll be worth it!

PAM: Blair will expel you, Charles! She's on a warpath and will take us all out if we give her reason to. I think he got enough physical punishment for one day.

CHARLES: Alright, but if I get up again, no one in this room is going to stop me. *(HE sits back down)*

MARK: Good choice kid, listen to the ugly sister.

PAM: (*Hurt, but tries not to show it*) Charles, if you get up again, I won't stop you. Hell, I might even help.

MARK: I'd like that, Pam.

PAM: No, you wouldn't.

(*Silence*)

VERONICA: He didn't deserve it.

CATHY: What?

VERONICA: He didn't deserve to be slapped. Not by an administrator. She's supposed to be here to punish us yes, but also keep us safe. She let her emotions get the better of her, and now we sit here, arguing with ourselves, when we all should leave and report her. It isn't right. If we can't be safe here alone on a Saturday, then there is no where safe.

JOY: Safe from what?

CATHY: Yeah, what are you talking about?

VERONICA: Nothing.

ELIZABETH: Look, you can't just say something like that and brush us off. Do you want to talk about anything?

VERONICA: Screw you, prude!

MARK: I like her. What's your name sweetheart?

VERONICA: Mine? Uh...it's Veronica. Why do you care?

MARK: I know a kindred spirit when I see one. You want to make out?

PAM: Really!

VERONICA: Sure.

CHARLES: Dude, she's 14 years old, don't do this to her. She can still escape your pathetic lifestyle. Don't drag her down because she's stupid enough to be sucked into your games.

VERONICA: Hey, ass clown, I'm right here. Stop talking like I ain't.

MARK: Yeah, ass clown. She's a big girl, she can make her own decisions. It's not my fault they mix 14 year olds with 18 year olds. If we can learn together, we can be together.

CHARLES: You know what, fine. Have a blast, Mark. If you can live with yourself afterwards, be my guest. But the minute she says no, and you don't stop, I will beat your ass so bad you'll be in the hospital for weeks. It'll be really hard to get your fix then.

MARK: You coming, Veronica?

JOY: Veronica, don't do it. He's not a good guy. He'll just throw you away when he's done with you.

VERONICA: I guess you would know all about that, wouldn't you.

CATHY: Ok, you know what, everyone just shut the hell up and sit down!

(Everyone freezes, they are in shock)

CATHY: NOW!

(Without knowing why, VERONICA sits back down)

CATHY: No more threats, no more insults. I'm not going to sit here for the next five and a half hours dealing with all of this bickering. Elizabeth, I'll help you start the essay. Anyone else care to join us?

(HARISH slowly raises his hand)

CATHY: Thank you, come sit with us.

(HARISH gets up and sits with CATHY and ELIZABETH)

CATHY: Anyone else? Fine.

ELIZABETH: Where did that come from?

CATHY: I'm an army brat; I've learned to be forceful.

HARISH: I, uh, wrote some ideas down. About what to write about.

ELIZABETH: Great, can I see them?

HARISH: Sure.

ELIZABETH: Peer pressure, that's a good one, probably what Blair is after.

VERONICA: Who cares what Blair wants?

CATHY: Are you ready to help with this?

VERONICA: No, I'm just saying-

CATHY: We would appreciate your help, but please leave us alone until you're ready to commit to this assignment.

(VERONICA starts to speak, CATHY stares her down and VERONICA caves)

ELIZABETH: Yeah!

(VERONICA looks at ELIZABETH threateningly)

ELIZABETH: Sorry.

CATHY: Dress code is on here. That would be a good one.

JOY: Ugh!

VERONICA: What's a matter Joy? "Finger tip length" isn't short enough for you?

JOY: Please, you show more skin with all those holes in your pants than I ever do. Don't your parents love you enough to buy some new clothes every once and a while?

VERONICA: Actually Joy, these are new, I just like them better with holes in them. What I don't get is why they are so strict throughout the school day, but you and your trashy friends get to parade around half naked as soon as that final bell rings?

JOY: It's because we have to exercise, duh.

VERONICA: And don't get me started on how short your "uniforms" are. You give every 60 year old pervert in this town something to look forward to on a weekly basis. It's disgusting.

ELIZABETH: She has a point.

MARK: I don't really have a problem with how short they are.

CATHY: Yeah, I don't really see the big deal.

JOY: You are all so dumb, we're showing school spirit!

PAM: Oh give me a break.

CHARLES: Yeah, sorry Joy but I am not thinking about school spirit when you wear that uniform. I'm thinking about-

MARK: Hey, fatty and I have something in common! What about you, Harish?

HARISH: Do you think the cheerleader uniforms will change when we switch to school uniforms next year?

CATHY: Wait, what?

VERONICA: Do you know anything?

PAM: It's just a rumor; I wouldn't worry too much about it.

CHARLES: Easy for you to say, you won't be here next year.

JOY: Thank God we're leaving here before that goes into effect, I just couldn't deal with that. The school has no right to take away our right to express ourselves.

VERONICA: Or in your case the opportunity to advertise for future clients.

JOY: At least boys look at me and want something. All they do is pity you.

MARK: Pity is a natural aphrodisiac. It's science.

PAM: You are so gross!

ELIZABETH: I for one think it'll do us some good. We can focus on academics instead of figuring out if this skirt is going to get me sent to ISS.

CATHY: It would level the playing field a little. There's a completely different style where I lived before and I didn't have time to buy a new wardrobe.

JOY: I was wondering why you dressed like it was 2010.

CATHY: You're such a great member of FBLA.

JOY: I'm not in FBLA.

PAM: Don't you guys think it'll limit creativity? Doesn't our education system do that enough already?

(Pause)

ELIZABETH: Maybe there's something on the list we can all agree on.

CATHY: Why did you write adults down here, Harish?

HARISH: Well, we're meant to conform to them too, aren't we?

ELIZABETH: What do you mean?

HARISH: I just thought...it's a stupid idea, just scratch it out.

CATHY: I want to hear your idea, Harish.

PAM: Me too.

HARISH: *(Slow at first, then building confidence)* I just meant...uh...that every adult in our lives needs us to do something...or become something. Our parents want us to succeed, our teachers want us to listen and learn. Even Blair needed us to conform to her will, and when Mark pushed her, she brought it down on him and he conformed-

MARK: I didn't conform to that-

CHARLES: You're still sitting here, aren't you? So shut up!

JOY: Go on, Harish.

HARISH: *(Not use to the attention)*. Well, that's it really. I mean, we are all asked to conform to the adults in our lives because we're not old enough to make decisions on how we want to conform...we're not old enough to find our place in society. And when we are old enough, it's too late. We've already conformed without realizing it. Even if you're telling yourself that you're doing everything in your power to not conform, you still reach out to other nonconformists and conform to them. The question really is, does anyone have a say in the life they'll lead after high school and college? We're not as independent as we all like to think. That's all.

CHARLES: *(After a long pause)* Damn.

CATHY: That was very insightful. Thank you for sharing it with us.

JOY: I need to go to the bathroom *(Obviously beginning to cry, she exits)*

PAM: I don't think I've ever heard a more honest thing in my life.

ELIZABETH: I feel like you've just described my entire childhood.

MARK: You're not all going to fall for this crap, are you?

VERONICA: Dude, shut up! (*She walked over and hugs HARISH*)

HARISH: What was...uh, that for?

VERONICA: I don't know who needed that hug more, but I know it had to be done.

PAM: So now what do we do?

CHARLES: We should talk about this. I don't give a damn about the paper, but we need to talk about this.

ELIZABETH: I'll take some notes while we discuss it, just in case we end up writing it.

CATHY: That's a good idea, Liz.

MARK: You guys are so lame! I'm going to sleep.

VERONICA: This would be good for you, you know. It could be good for all of us.

MARK: No thanks! (*HE puts headphones on and puts his head down*)

CHARLES: Forget him. He's a loser.

VERONICA: Losers need love, too.

PAM: So, how do we discuss this?

CATHY: I say we go one at a time. Anyone brave enough to go first?

(Silence)

VERONICA: Harish started this, he should go first.

HARISH: Please, not me.

ELIZABETH: Harish has been brave enough for one day. Let him go when he's ready.

(JOY enters, trying to be her usual perky self)

JOY: Hey, what are you all doing?

CHARLES: Joy, you want to tell us why you were crying?

JOY: Crying? I wasn't...Uh, don't worry about it.

VERONICA: Why were you crying?

JOY: It was just... What Harish said just hit me, made me realize how much of a sick and twisted affect my mother has had on me (*EVERYONE continues to stare at her, not letting her off the hook*). My mother... I've been conforming to her my whole life. She's been turning me into her little puppet ever since she "lost her looks." All the partying, all the boys... she put all that there. She... turned me into the school slut because that's what she was growing up!

(Center stage stays lit and the surrounding area goes dark, we can barely see the other teens during this scene. FEMALE enters, assuming the role of JOY's mother; she brings a chair and a brush onstage. JOY assumes the role of her 13 year old self as she sits. Her mother starts to brush her hair)

FEMALE: I can't believe you got an 'F' in Science. Don't worry about it though. Girls like us don't need Science. Everything will change next year, mark my words.

JOY: How so, mom?

FEMALE: You'll be in high school my love. And you'll finish developing and everyone will be fawning all over you.

JOY: Mom, please don't say developing again.

FEMALE: It's a part of nature. It's going to happen. If you can't talk to me about it, who can you talk to?

JOY: I guess you have a point. So what changes exactly?

FEMALE: Let's just say that life will get a whole lot easier. Opportunities and men will all come knocking and you'll get everything your little heart could dream of, just like your mama.

JOY: You mean boys, mom, not men.

FEMALE: Boys at first, dearie. But before you know it older men will be attracted to you. That's when the real fun begins.

JOY: Mom, that's gross.

FEMALE: It's natural, especially for people like us. And you have to use your assets as quickly as possible, because one day you'll lose them like me.

JOY: Don't say that mom, you're beautiful. You just got a fifth man to marry you. How many people can say that?

FEMALE: Oh, honey, you're sweet. The first four married me for my looks. This one was different. This one was just lonely and had nothing better to do.

JOY: That's so sad.

FEMALE: Don't worry yourself; it's my problem, not yours. I made sure his bank account was worth it when he changes his mind about me.

JOY: You're already collecting alimony from your first four husbands, when is enough enough?

FEMALE: When my lovely girl has enough money to do whatever she wants after high school...and I can have a nice big pool in the backyard.

JOY: Mom!

FEMALE: I'm kidding, I'm kidding. You're going to be too beautiful to need any help from me anyway.

JOY: Mom...you know I'm smart, right?

FEMALE: Of course, but brains can only take you so far. You have to be smart enough to use what your mama gave you.

JOY: Are you talking about my boobs again?

FEMALE: Hey, they're called breasts at your age. In a year or two you can call them boobs.

JOY: I just don't understand how they're going to help me.

FEMALE: You know the 'F' you have now?

JOY: In science, yeah.

FEMALE: When your boobs come in, you will never get another 'F' in your life.

JOY: But how-

FEMALE: I was also bad at Science, Biology to be exact. I ended up with the highest grade in the class because I was smart enough to use my looks to get what I wanted. There is nothing like a good balance between tits and wits.

JOY: So what, you flirted with him and he gave you an 'A'?

FEMALE: Well, it started out as flirting.

JOY: Wait...you're not saying...GROSS!

FEMALE: Actually he was very handsome.

JOY: How old was he?

FEMALE: 33.

JOY: Was he married?

FEMALE: I can't remember.

JOY: And that's what you expect me to do?

FEMALE: Not now, but in a few years, yes. I expect you to do whatever it takes to get ahead in the world, and I want you to have fun while you do it. Do you understand?

JOY: Yes mother.

(FEMALE exits and the lights go back to normal)

JOY: That was the moment I knew there was something very wrong with my mother...that's not true, I always knew it, but that conversation verified it. And it set my entire future in motion. About a week later, I wanted this boy's chocolate milk. I kissed him for it. My first kiss was haunted by my mother's voice echoing inside my head. "Do whatever it takes to get ahead in the world, and have fun while you do it." I didn't have very much fun while kissing that boy, but I thoroughly enjoyed that chocolate milk. I felt like I had earned it and that my mother would be proud of me. I did a whole lot of kissing for the rest of eighth grade. That Halloween I came home with 12 bags of candy. It's really amazing how much power women hold over men. My mom...threw it all away so I wouldn't get fat. I told her how I got it, thinking she'd let me keep it. She just smiled at me and said, "Good job, Joy. But if you eat all this candy they'll stop giving you the things you want." That thought scared me so much; I started counting calories the next day. I still will not eat more than 1,200 calories a day. I didn't...I didn't want to lose my looks before I could take advantage of them. I tried out for cheerleading just for the exercise.

(Silence)

PAM: Can I ask you something?

JOY: Sure.

PAM: Were the rumors about Mr. Matthews true last year?

ELIZABETH: What rumors?

VERONICA: C'mon Liz, even I know-

JOY: I feel too guilty about that, Pam. I don't want to talk about it.

PAM: He was my favorite teacher. I would like to know.

JOY: ...Ok...

(The lights again focus on center stage with the students watching the scene. JOY is standing and ADULT MALE enters with a chair and small desk. He assumes the role of Mr. Matthews. He sits behind the desk grading papers.)

MALE: Can I help you, Joy?

JOY: Maybe *(she begins to chew her pen seductively)*.

MALE: Well, what is it?

JOY: I was just wondering if you want to hang out *(she slowly walks to his desk)*.

MALE: Um, no thanks. You should be getting to class.

JOY: Oh, you can just write me a pass, no one will care.

MALE: Joy, I'm not writing you a pass. You need to go.

JOY: Mr. Matthews, you look so stressed *(She goes behind him, rubbing his shoulders. He quickly gets up)*.

MALE: Joy, what is the matter with you. That is totally inappropriate.

JOY: You're always so appropriate. Why don't you live a little? I see the way you stare at me.

MALE: Joy, I apologize if you think I stare at you during class, but I never meant to make you feel uncomfortable.

JOY: Who said I'm uncomfortable. I like it, actually. A young, strong, intelligent teacher noticing little old me. It's so hot!

MALE: *(Taking a deep breath)* Right. Look, is this about the 'F' on your last test? I told you I drop the lowest test score at the end of the semester. As long as you study for the others you'll be fine.

JOY: I don't want to be fine. I want to be perfect. 100% class average, and no more studying of course.

MALE: Why are you doing this?

JOY: Because deep down inside you want me to. *(She is close to him. She grabs his tie and goes in for a kiss. He ducks it).*

MALE: *(Fighting the urge)* pl...please leave *(clears throat)*.

JOY: Why don't you make me?

MALE: Look-

JOY: Bill, can I call you Bill?

MALE: Please leave.

JOY: Bill, you really don't have to make this so difficult. You know what I want and what I'm willing to do for it. It's a win-win.

MALE: No! It's inappropriate. I...I can't.

JOY: I will never say anything to anybody. It'll be our little secret. I can tell you want me. Just give into temptation.

MALE: I'm begging you to-

(JOY kisses him. MALE is shocked, but eventually accepts the kiss, then he comes to his senses and pushes her off of him and onto the ground)

MALE: I can't! I'm sorry for - Will you please leave? If you don't leave I'm going to report this. I can't afford to lose this job. I'm begging you to leave my classroom!

JOY: *(Having never been rejected before)*. You...you're a coward. A scared loser that's too afraid to get his hands dirty! You have no idea what you're missing out on you moron! *(She starts to cry)* You're just like every other teacher I've slept with at this school! You're no different. You kissed me back! God you're so pathetic! I'm not the pathetic one here, you are!

MALE: I never said-

JOY: Screw you!

(She exits and MALE stands there in shock. The lights fade back to normal)

PAM: That was it, that's all that happened?

JOY: Yeah.

CHARLES: So he got fired for nothing?

ELIZABETH: How could you do that to him?

JOY: I didn't. My mother did. I told her what happened, and she called the principal that night. They kept it quiet. My mother told them he tried to take advantage of me. I went along with it. I helped ruin that man's life.

ELIZABETH: That's terrible.

JOY: I think I'm done now.

CATHY: You feel any better?

JOY: No...I feel worse, actually. I feel like you're all judging me even worse than you normally do.

HARISH: The point of this wasn't to judge others.

CHARLES: He's right. We've all done some terrible things. Joy made a mistake. A really screwed up one...but it's not our place to judge her. It's not going to make us feel better and it's not going to bring Mr. Matthews back.

(Lights fade to focus on center. Three chairs are set up to be a couch. MALE ADULT and FEMALE ADULT are watching TV. THEY are playing the roles of Charles' parents. CHARLES enters excited)

CHARLES: Mom, Dad! *(Stops dead in his tracks)* Sorry, I didn't know you guys were-

(MALE rushes over to him and punches him in the stomach. CHARLES is bent over. MALE pushes him down. FEMALE starts to leave)

MALE: Don't go anywhere, woman! Let's see what was so important that dough boy here had to interrupt us!

CHARLES: *(Struggles to get up. When he's back on his feet he hands MALE a piece of paper)*. I got my report card, sir.

MALE: And why the hell should I care about that?

CHARLES: I improved most of my grades sir.

MALE: Is that a fact? (*Looking at report card*). Honey, come take a look at this.

FEMALE: (*Slowly grabs the report card. She's scared, not for her son, but for herself. She looks at the report card*). All 'B's", nice job son (*she dares to crack a smile*)

MALE: What did I tell you, Amanda, about being soft on him! Get the hell out of here before I smack you one!

(*FEMALE quickly leaves*)

CHARLES: I did the best I could, dad. Honest, I-

MALE: (*Smacks him across the face*). What did I tell you about talking out of turn, boy!?! These grades suck. How in the hell did you get a 'B' in gym class?

CHARLES: He's just mad because I told him I quit the football team and-

MALE: You did what?

CHARLES: I decided to quit the football team.

MALES: (*Punches him in the gut again*) You're too young and stupid to make decisions fatso! Why, you going to be a queer and join Home-Ec or Drama Club. You turning on me, boy!?

CHARLES: No sir, I want to join the marching band.

MALE: (*Beats Charles down again while saying the following*) You idiot! I'm your father and I make all the decisions for you and your damn mother, you hear me! Maybe you're right! You're too soft to play football. A real football player would at least fight back! You just lie there and take it. That's ok, because this is fun for me, Charlie. All the fun in the world! Get up! (*Charles tries to get up, MALE gets impatient and drags him up*) You know, your mama must have cheated on me, because no son of mine would be as pathetic as you are! Take your straight 'B' report card that you're so proud of and go to your room you fat slob!

CHARLES: Did you ever get straight 'B's' dad?

MALE: What did you say to me?

CHARLES: Nothing, sir.

MALE: You think you're smarter than me?

CHARLES: No, sir.

MALE: Amanda, get your ass in here.

FEMALE: (*Enters*) What did he do now?

MALE: Your son seems to think he's smarter than me.

FEMALE: (*Slowly gets face to face with Charles*) Son, your father is a very intelligent man and I love him. I love him more than I love you and if you keep talking back to your father, I will throw you out of this house myself. You just need to take your beatings and stay in your room until we allow you to come out, you understand me?

(*What his mother just told him hurt worse than any beating his dad could give him. CHARLES starts to sob uncontrollably*)

MALE: Ah, the little band nerd is crying. That's a real shame. Get out of my face. You're not eating dinner tonight. We'll stomach you in the morning.

CHARLES: (*Standing his ground*) Band geek. The little band geek is crying. It's not band nerd you idiot!

MALE: Did you just-

(*Without realizing what's happening, CHARLES rushes his father and slams him to the ground. They wrestle and Charles gets the upper hand. Charles slams his fist down onto his father repeatedly. FEMALE tries to pull CHARLES off of his dad; he pushes her down to the ground. CHARLES gets up and stomps on his father, showing no signs of slowing down. FEMALE runs out of the house, screaming for help. CHARLES picks his father up.*)

CHARLES: I use to pity you! I use to feel sorry for you because of all that hate you must have inside you to beat me like you do. No more. You will never lay a hand on me again, or I will kill you. You need to take it out on someone; you take it out on her! You understand me?! I hope you two make each other miserable for the rest of your lives. I hate you and I hate her even more. You both can go die for all I care! (*He throws his father down; lights fade back to normal and MALE exits with chairs*)

ELIZABETH: How did I not know that about you?

CHARLES: You never asked.

CATHY: Don't be like that, Charles.

CHARLES: You're right, I'm sorry. My dad knew where to hit me so that it wouldn't show. Told me not to shower after the game til I got home. Football players are really mean to people that don't shower with them.

MARK: Football players are all tools! And your dad and my dad should go bowling together.

(The whole group is surprised)

PAM: Another Breakfast Club reference, really?

MARK: Sorry, I couldn't think of anything else to say.

CHARLES: Nah, it's a good line.

ELIZABETH: Is this movie on Netflix?

VERONICA: I'm going to punch you.

JOY: *(To Charles)* Thank you.

CHARLES: For what?

JOY: Telling us that to change the subject. It was sweet.

CHARLES: Anything for a pretty lady.

MARK: So, did the old man ever hit you again?

CHARLES: Not yet. Every morning while I'm getting ready for school, I hear him beating my mom.

MARK: Congrats!

HARISH: Dude, shut up.

MARK: Excuse me?

PAM: That's not really what he wanted. He was just angry when he said that.

MARK: Well, yeah...but...Harish, you ever tell me to shut up again I'll kick your ass!

CHARLES: I...I just... *(He runs to a garbage can and vomits, PAM rushes to his aid)*

HARISH: Do all of your parents suck?

MARK, PAM, VERONICA: Yes! ELIZABETH and CATHY: No!

JOY: Well why don't one of you go so we can get some positive vibes going?

CATHY: Rock, paper, scissors?

ELIZABETH: Sure!

(They play, ELIZABETH wins)

ELIZABETH: Woo hoo!

CATHY: Don't get too excited because you're going next!

ELIZABETH: Dang it!

(Lights fade to flashback sequence. CATHY enters, she's on the phone with her dad)

CATHY: Oh, dad stop it...no, there's no guys in my life you need to worry about, they're all morons. I can't wait to see you next week...Yes, I've gotten much stronger, I can do 33 push-ups now...What do you mean you don't believe me...Well, I'll just prove it to you when you get here...The only thing better than my push-ups is my GPA this semester...I know...No, I haven't joined any clubs or anything...because I just don't want to...I'm a loner, dad. I have to do my own thing...Well I just...I'm afraid we're going to move again and...Don't feel bad, daddy. I understand...This is why I didn't want to tell you...All I do is make you feel bad, but I don't mean to...I...Dad, I understand, it's your job! Stop worrying about me...Ok, I'm sorry...I'll say hello to mom for you. I love you, daddy, stay safe...bye.

(CATHY grabs a pillow and starts to cry. MALE enters wearing a robe over his costume. He approaches the couch and notices CATHY. He tries to sneak away but stubs his toe on something)

CATHY: Mom? Is that...Uncle Ryan? What are you doing here?

MALE: ...well your mother needed me to fix something in her room and I got hungry so I was going to make a sandwich.

CATHY: Why are you wearing my dad's robe?

MALE: Um...your mom said I could borrow it. Yeah, it was so nice I just had to-

FEMALE: *(Enters wearing a robe, her hair is wet)* Ryan, any chance you have time for one more-Cathy!

CATHY: Mom...what's going on? Why are you...why is uncle Ryan...What the hell is going on?

MALE: Look, I'm a...I'm going to leave. Sorry I couldn't fix that thing in there...um, yeah.

(HE exits towards the bedroom. CATHY and FEMALE just stand their silently. MALE enters again, robe off and carrying his shoes)

MALE: *(Kisses FEMALE on the cheek)* Good luck. *(Hugs CATHY)* Don't be too hard on your mom...we all get lonely sometimes *(CATHY looks at him disgusted and HE exits).*

CATHY: *(After a long moment)* Isn't this the part where you say "This isn't what it looks like?"

FEMALE: You're too smart for that, Cathy. I didn't want to insult your intelligence.

CATHY: Does dad know?

FEMALE: No, of course not.

CATHY: You going to beg me not to tell him?

FEMALE: I'm...going to ask you to think about that before you do anything. This would kill your father.

CATHY: Then why did you do it!

FEMALE: I...don't know, I-

CATHY: Don't give me that! Why him?! Why with his own brother?!

FEMALE: Because he's here...and your dad isn't!

CATHY: But it's his brother you sick, twisted...AAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

FEMALE: I know you're angry with me, and I'm sorry.

CATHY: What about Aunt Jane? Your sister-in-law...How could you do this to her, to both of them!

FEMALE: Jane isn't as perfect as everyone thinks she is!

CATHY: Oh, and you are the perfect person to judge her, little miss innocent!

FEMALE: I never said I was innocent. I know what I did was wrong.

CATHY: Don't sit there and pretend you did this years ago! It's not what you did; it's what you're doing! How long has it been going on?

FEMALE: That's none of your business.

CATHY: Is that why you've been "working" so late this month. Is it because you were with him!?! (*FEMALE is silent*) Screw you! (*She picks up her phone and dials. FEMALE grabs the phone from her*)

FEMALE: Please...don't tell your father.

CATHY: So much for not begging. Give me my phone!

FEMALE: Please, he won't be able to recover from this, not again!

CATHY: Again! What does that mean?

FEMALE: This...isn't the first time this has happened. I had an affair right after you were born with a co-worker...my boss, actually. And your father came home a day early to surprise me...he caught us. I just...felt so alone and all you did was cry those first few months.

CATHY: Do not use me as an excuse you selfish coward!

FEMALE: I'm not using you as an excuse! I'm just...trying to justify my actions so you might understand-

CATHY: Understand what?! That my father has dedicated his entire life to you, to us, and you betray him over and over again!

FEMALE: He dedicated his life to the army, not me! And not you!

CATHY: He joined the army for us!

FEMALE: You weren't there! I begged him not to enlist. I begged him to do something else, anything else with his life. He was so scared he wouldn't be able to support us he joined without even telling me. I didn't see or hear from him for three days before he got around to telling me. Your father is the selfish coward, not me!

CATHY: Give me my phone, mother!

FEMALE: I can't...I can't let you tell him. It'll kill him. It will...You know what your father did after he caught us...nothing. He didn't yell, he didn't scream, he didn't fight...He just went into the living room and sat there, waiting for him to leave...I talked at him for hours, saying the same things I'm saying to you now. He just sat there...emotionless...I wanted him to yell, and scream, and hit me. I wanted something out of him...and he gave me nothing...finally, I slapped him...again and again trying to get a reaction out of him. I ended up scratching him with my engagement ring. I don't

know if it was the pain or the blood but he finally reacted. He grabbed me by the arms and pushed me against the wall. I thought he was going to kill me...he looked me dead in the eye and told me he was sorry...he apologized to me...we fell asleep on the living room floor, crying our eyes out. The next morning I woke up and he was playing with you in your room. I made pancakes and we acted like nothing happened. Cathy, I know you hate me right now, I get it. I deserve it. But I...you can't tell him. There was something in that apology, something in the way he cried that night...If you tell him I'm sleeping with his brother, it'll kill him. I know that.

CATHY: Why Uncle Ryan?

FEMALE: We were both in the wrong place at the right time.

CATHY: Will you end it?

FEMALE: Honey, it's not that-

CATHY: Will. You. End. It.

FEMALE: Yeah...yes. I will.

CATHY: Please give me my phone back.

(FEMALE hands the phone to CATHY and CATHY exits. FEMALE starts to cry. Lights fade to normal)

CATHY: I became very rebellious for a few weeks. My dad finally straightened me out. My mother and I are civil towards each other, but our relationship is all but dead. I never told my father. I knew my mom was right, that he wouldn't be able to handle it. I haven't spoken to Uncle Ryan since that day.

PAM: I thought you said your parents didn't suck.

CATHY: Well, comparatively speaking.

(Students chuckle)

CATHY: It's weird, that wasn't the story I was going to tell...But I chickened out, I guess.

CHARLES: What were you going to tell?

CATHY: It's pretty obvious I'm not ready yet.

VERONICA: I get that, but I've heard it really helps...you know, to just get it out there in the open.