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"...Into Something Rich and Strange"

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"...Into Something Rich and Strange"

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with honors from the Department of English at Carroll College, Helena, Montana

Michele Marie Firpo
April 7, 1986
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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of English.

Ron Stottlemyer  4-7-86
Dr. Ron Stottlemyer, Director  date

Jim Bartruff  4-7-86
Mr. Jim Bartruff  date

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Mr. Henry Burgess  date
The changes a person experiences at college are those of a child becoming an adult. The following is a collection of creative works designed to illustrate the internal and external situations that bring about those changes. Compromise, rejection, reality, honesty, self-awareness, and awareness of others create the symphony of a student's growth; people are the instruments. As the journal entries thread together the pieces of this college story, so do they draw the adultlike child of the beginning back to the childlike adult of the end.
August 31

Kim and I just got back from the orientation meeting. Nothing really important. Just general rules. We seem to be getting along okay. I must be passing inspection after all. That look she gave me when I first walked in this afternoon just about killed me...Went across the hall to Shelly and De's room to introduce ourselves. We talked for a little while...I have to go to bed now. I'm kind of confused about what's what. I'd better get it together, though. I think I'm going to like it here.

November 11

...It turned out that Shaun was locked out of her room so she and Kim were going to sleep in the same bed. After they were in bed, they called over to Frank and Jake's room. They were supposed to be quiet, but they kept giggling...
Roommates

Unless a student is very lucky, when she attends college she will end up with more than one roommate. Some unlucky, girls have so many roommates during their four-year journey to real money that they live with one of every type. The types range from the Partyer to the Studyaholic, from the Overachiever to the Homebody, from the Religious fanatic to the Generic. Each type has a distinctive set of activities and a unique style of conversation.

The first kind of roommate a fresh-faced freshman might encounter as she lugs the first of many boxes into her room is the Partyer. This roommate begins planning her weekends on Monday and begins weekending on Wednesday. (Tuesday is reserved for washing laundry.) She knows where every party is, whether on or off campus, and she appears at most of them. Her fellow partyers do not believe a party truly swings until she arrives; any party she does not attend is a flop. When asked, she can instantly disclose which bars have taco night, margarita night, fifty-cent beer night, and lady's night. All the bartenders call her by name and remember her drink, the bartender's iced tea. A typical conversation with her non-Partyer roommate begins like this:
"Hey, Brenda, you schoolgirl, did you go to Latin this morning?

"Yes, I did, April, you party machine. Don't you remember me trying to wake you up?"

"Was that you? Oh, how weird! I thought you were part of my dream, y'know, like my Mom in her bathrobe but with a monkey's face, or something. Man, I can't handle those eight o'clock classes."

"I know. You haven't gone to class for a week and a half."

"Hey, what can I say? I couldn't skip Dennis' or JR's or Michelle's party and that trip out to the hotsprings was set up for da...weeks. Who cares, anyway, I mean, Sherrie hasn't gone to her chemistry class since September."

"Whatever."

"Hey, Brenda?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I borrow some money?"

Lend her some cool cash, and she's a party animal.

At the other end of the roommate spectrum is the Studyaholic. She's the girl whose only room decorations are a portrait of her parents, a single fern, a calender with scenes of forests and ocean breakers, and a plaque with the quote declaring, "A job done well once is done forever."

She keeps a notepad with list after list of assignments and
projects due anytime from the next day to the next semester. Not a single trinket clutters the bookshelves holding her texts and reference books. Her loose-leaf folders are color-coded for quick reference. Red is Calculus. Yellow is Comp. Blue is Psych. She gets up at 5:30 a.m. to review her notes before classes begin for the day and she eats a proper breakfast of scrambled eggs, whole wheat toast, Grape Nuts, orange juice, vitamins, and a big glass of milk. Recopying her classnotes immediately after class is more important to her than brushing immediately after every meal. If a foolish roommate happens to suggest going out for a movie or a drink, the following lecture will surely ensue.

"Muffy, have you any sense of responsibility at all? Do you ever work diligently at anything besides having fun? How can you even dream of going dancing with that History of Civ. exam coming up?"

"Well, Barabara--"

"Oh, I know what you're going to say. 'That test isn't for two weeks, Barbara!' Well, if it were me who got a B on the last one, I certainly wouldn't feel like dancing. You have to be more sedulous, like me."

"More what?"

"Hardworking! Zealous! Industrious!"

"But what about having fun?"

"Don't you think I enjoy studying? A scholar's life
is always full if she has a book in her hand. If you were more organized and had less distractions around your work area, you'd be here studying just as much as I am."

"I highly doubt that, Barbara."

"Well, being a student is rigorous work, Muffy, and you really should spend more time at it."

Sagacious words, Muffy.

Diligence is important to the Studyaholic, but it is a way of life for the Overachiever, the campus Wonder Woman. She diligently pursues the path of all-around niftyness—she lives to excel in every endeavor. Being a good student is not enough; the Overachiever must get an A on every paper and one hundred percent on every test. Having a moderate number of friends is not enough; she must have hordes of them calling to her from every corner of the campus.

Devoting herself to one organization is not enough; she must belong to Circle K and Life Science Club as well as the school newspaper and the yearbook staffs. The Overachiever also manages to look organized and polished whether she is helping paint a poster for a dancathon or reading scripture from behind the lectern at mass.

The Overachiever's sketches her everyday schedule for her roommate in this way:

"Susan, do you want to go to dinner at 5:00 tonight?"

"Well, let me see, Joanne. I have to get to the chapel
at 11:10 after my morning classes so I can sing for the Board of Trustee's Mass, then I'm leading one of those luncheon discussions that the philosophy department puts on, and I have to meet Brian after that to study for our Abnormal Psych. test, and I called a cheerleading practice for this afternoon at 3:00. After that aren't you and I going to dinner?"

"Yeah, you said we were last night."

"That's right, and then I'm going to the library to get some research done for that history paper, then Marc and I are going to the play, and I think Ellen called a floor council meeting, so I'll have to be back for that by 10:30. Dinner at 5:00 sounds super, Jo. Do you mind if those girls from my party last weekend join us? They were so fun and I really want to spend some quality time with them. Thanks bunches."

Nifty.

Neatness, rather than niftyness, characterizes another type of roommate, the Homebody. This roommate loves to straighten up, to make everything neat, whether it is her desk, her roommate's clothes, or a hallmate's life. People swear she is just like their mom, only younger. If a safety pin is called for, she has one. Extra bobby pins? You bet. Munchie food? She's got a cupboard full. Anything at all you want? It's yours. She will give away her favorite teddy
bear for a broken heart and listen to one person's problems until the sun comes up. If cookies need to be baked for the floor party, Homebody does it. If an outfit for the big dance is just not right, she will add a little here, take a little there, and make it perfect. Essentially, Homebody is a cross between a grandmother and a best friend from high school.

Care and concern permeate the Homebody's conversations. She is a mother away from Mom.

"Becky, did you have any laundry you need done? I'm going to do a delicate and a warm load, if you do."

"Yeah, I think I have a sweater and a couple pairs of jeans."

"Is there any wool in the sweater?"

"I don't know."

"Well, Melissa, it makes a difference how I can wash it, you know. I can't just toss it in with a load of darks. It might get ruined."

"It's just an old pep band sweater. Don't worry about it."

"All right. If you don't care, I certainly don't. How is your paper going? I'll have time to type it tomorrow night, if you still want me to."

"Oh, I can do it, I guess. Besides, I thought you were going to that women's forum. 'Friendship and Intimacy'
"Not if you need me to type your paper. And I thought I might have a little surprise party with cupcakes or something for Tina. She broke up with Doug, the poor thing. What a horrid boy he is, dropping her like that. I'd like to talk to him for a minute or two, I'll tell you. Have you noticed how thin she's getting, too? I just know she's anorexic. And that Shaun! Blowing up like she only eats Ho-Ho's. I just don't know."

Yes, Mom, I washed behind my ears.

An easily identified type of roommate is the Religious fanatic. It doesn't matter what religion she belongs to because each one has unique characteristics, but the Catholic and the Fundamentalist roommate are the most devoted. The Catholic goes to mass as often as classtime allows. She has at least four crucifixes in her room, one for each wall, and five pictures of her favorite saint, usually St. Bernadette or St. Theresa. She has two rosaries, one by her bed and one in her backpack, and she idolizes all priests. Her "Good morning, Father" is spoken in such soft tones of reverence, the holy men don't even hear her. Any problem that confronts this pious girl elicits the same response: "I will light a candle."

Secretly, the Catholic roommate wishes with all her heart she could become a nun, but her parents pressure her to find a good husband and have lots of kids.
On the other hand, the Fundamentalist roommate wants to have lots of kids, if only to have someone to preach at. She will harangue anyone she can catch to listen—her roommate, her R.A., or her theology professors. Pasting bible verses on her bulletin board, on the door to her room, and in the hall is her favorite pastime. She greets every morning, whether cloudy, snowing, windy, or bright with a bellow: "Paraaisse the Lord, it's a beeautiful day!" The Fundamentalist lives to spread the Word of God, but only as she sees it. She does not want discussion; she wants enthralled sponges. If her roommate or anyone else tries to explain their own faith, or why they don't believe as she does, she informs them with a sigh and a shake of her head, "You are most certainly going to hell."

Bless you, too.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the last type of roommate is that she has no distinguishing characteristics. She is the Generic roommate, the girl who is no one until she has a roommate to model herself upon. When her new roommate stumbles in the door with her load of boxes, the Generic's first job is to memorize every detail of her paradigm's hair, clothes, and make-up so she can have them duplicated before dinner. Next, she opens herself up completely to her roommate: she says, "Hi." The other girl then starts talking so the Generic can begin to acquire all
"like, y'knows" per sentence or "shit" as every other word. After Miss Sponge USA has reproduced most of the external characteristics of her model, she ferrets out some internal qualities through subtle interrogation techniques. They are best employed as the unsuspecting roommate is falling asleep:

"Petra, how many times have you been drunk?"
"Hhhmm?"
"I said, how many times have you been drunk?"
"Marsha, do you realize I was just getting into a dream starring Robert Redford and myself?"
"I'm sorry, Petra, but some of the girls were talking about getting drunk and I was wondering if you ever drank very much. I like Robert Redford, too."
"I have been drunk about six times. Now can I get back to Robert?"
"Well, you know, Sally's having a party on Saturday after the game. Maybe we should go and get drunk."
"Marsha, what's the big deal about getting drunk? Haven't you ever been drunk?"
"Once or twice. But if you like to drink, we can have lots of fun. We'll go out and party all the time."
"I'm going back to find Robert. Good night."
"Hey, can I borrow that yellow baggy sweater tomorrow? You look so good in it and my mom isn't sending me one until
yesterday."

"Yes and you're welcome. Go to sleep."

"Petra, you just got a perm didn't you? I think I'm going to get my hair permed, too. It's too straight."

"Good night, Marshal!"

"Good night, Petra."

Good night, Johnboy.

The Partyer and the Studyaholic, the Overachiever and the Homebody, the Religious fanatic and the Generic are the girls that make up the spectrum of roommates a freshman survives with or in spite of during her first semester at college. Considering the great variety, the chances of two girls hitting it off right away seems slim to non-existent. Surprisingly, most freshmen do survive. And they manage to live with and even like their roommates. As students and people, the girls adapt and grow; they make concessions and learn what it takes to live with another human being. No matter how mismatched the roommates may be, friendship is always a possibility lurking in the popcorn popper or under the sink.
January 19

...I danced nearly every dance! I love college.

May 6

He asked me if I had fun, and I said yes and he asked me if I wanted to go out again and I said yes...just as friends. For many reasons. He asked if any of the reasons were problems with him and I told him no, even though some of them were.
Palms fishy with sweat,  
the glass slips through  
the spasm of his fingers.
To smooth the jerk,  
a blurt,  
"Whaddaya think?"

An ice arrow  
shot from her eyes,  
threatens.  
He snatches  
at her cellophane smile—
and sinks.  
No heart to buoy  
a sigh,  
"Whaddaya think?"

Dentist-visit minutes  
fill the cavity between them.  
Her yawn is pink.  
No mask to smother it,  
"Whaddaya think?"

He'll use the clicked words  
before the terminal shot  
at the front door.  
No hole to hide in,  
"Whaddaya think?"
October 11

She said she is sick of the cutthroating and the brownnosing. She also said the teachers encourage it. I couldn't believe it. There are two guys who steal all the reference books for certain classes that all the biology majors have to take, so no one else can use them for research. No one stops them either... They think everything is separate, but she can see how things connect.

December 3

today has started out poorly. i think gravity is heavier today. more later.
Of Mice and George

George walked down the empty hall of the science building with a Mini-Mart mug brim-full and steaming. His forward motion pushed the steam into his face, fogging his wire-rimmed glasses. The aroma from the India-ink coffee fought with the odor of formaldehyde for control of his nose.

He set his feet down deliberately, heel and toe, heel and toe, staring at the sloshing surface of the liquid. Every once in awhile he'd glance at the cuffs of his oxford shirt, making sure the coffee hadn't splashed onto the light blue fabric.

"I wish I hadn't lost the lid to this mug," he muttered to himself. "Jeannie probably took it to put under a plant. Or else Barry used it as a Frisbee during that water fight last night."

He held the mug with the fingertips of both hands as if he were carrying his grandmother's favorite crystal vase. When he got to the door of the zoology lab, he began to push it open with the toe of his tennis shoe. As he prepared for the final shove that would swing the door wide enough for him and his coffee to slip through, something hit him in the back of the head.
Losing his balance because he was standing on one foot, the coffee sloshed over the rim of the mug, scalding George's hands.

"Yooouuch!"

His hands flew away from the sides of the mug. It bounced off his right shoe, pouring the rest of the hot liquid on his left.

"Shit."

As the coffee soaked into his shoes, staining the white, red, and blue leather to an ordinary brown, George turned to confront the tiny corpse he knew he'd find.

"Hello, Number Five."

He reached out mindlessly and set the overturned mug on its base and squatted down to examine the dead mouse. The pool of spilled coffee had reached the animal and was pasting its fur into a smooth brown skirt against the floor. The scene was the same as the first time he had turned to find a dead mouse lying on the veined linoleum behind him. He had been studying for a zoology practical, one of those wrenchers that send every biology student into hypertension. His eyes were dry and blood-shot from staring into his microscope eyepiece all afternoon; his neck was as stiff as the limbs of the preserved animals that lined the shelves of the lab.

He had just begun a second run through the wonders of
amoeba structure when his face was driven into the microscope, his eye squishing into the eyepiece.

"What the hell," he yelled, pressing the back of his fists against his eyes. "God! That hurts!"

The blow to the back of his head had been sharp and forceful, but not painful. The pain came from his right eye. When he pulled his damp hands away from his face, he realized that his outburst had totally silenced the lab except for the giant bee-hive buzz of the fluorescent lights. He had jumped up from the table at first and now stood with unconscious tears rolling out of the wounded eye. He looked into the surprised eyes of his lab partner, Jerry. The two girls studying at the other end of the lab stared at George as if he had suddenly thrown his microscope at them.

"What's the matter, George," asked Jerry.

"You hit me in the back of the head, that's what's the matter!" He lurched toward his cringing partner. "You nearly poked my eye out!"

"I didn't touch you!"

"Well, who did then?"

"I don't know. I was just sitting here studying my notes. All the sudden you jump up and start yelling like a maniac. Scared the heck out of me."

"Me, too," one of the girls said.

"Yeah. Me, too," the other added.
"Sorry. That really hurt, though," he said, motioning with his right hand toward the microscope as if he'd like to push it off the table. "Did somebody come up behind me," he asked, rubbing his eye again.

"I don't think so," Jerry said, looking around.

"Did you guys see anyone," George asked the still-staring girls. They shook their heads in unison, looked at each other, then back at George.

"We were studying," the blond girl said.

"Actually," the darker girl answered, "I did see something behind you right before you jumped up."

"What was it?"

"It wasn't a person or anything, just something moving. Maybe it was your hair." She fixed a wary gaze on him. He stared back for a moment, shrugged a little uncomfortably, then looked back at his partner.

Jerry's gaze had stopped at a point behind George, his face frozen in disgust. His hand slowly came up and pointed at the floor.

"What...is...that?"

George had swiveled, then stopped. Nearly touching the toe of his left shoe lay what he thought was the deadest mouse he had ever seen. Its eyes were squeezed tightly shut, like a child watching a scary movie; its mouth, a perpetual
0. The tiny claws had curled into themselves, begging for a favor.

"Yuck!" had been his first response.

Looking at mouse number five, however, his response was quite different. This corpse seemed almost familiar and even welcome now that he thought it proved his latest and final hypothesis.

The first hypothesis he'd offered his girlfriend Jeannie the day that the first mouse hit him had been an unkind one. She had listened to him sort out his theory for half an hour, his head on her lap.

"But they were throwing dead rodents at me, Jeannie! What else am I supposed to think?"

"All I'm saying is that there's has to be a better explanation besides the whole zoology class wanting to make fun of you," she said. "I mean, it's not like you get zeroes on every test or you can't answer Dr. Petersen's questions in class very well. Why would they want to tease you?"

"To boost their egos. To get their jollies. To give me cardiac arrest. I don't know!" She smoothed his hair and forehead with a calm hand. When he continued, his voice was softer, but whiney.

"What I do know is that someone threw that mouse at me in lab today and I haven't been able to study since."
"Well, you're just going to have to forget about it. Study now. Find your 'mouse thrower' after the test."

George tried to forget about it until after the test, but could not. He got a low grade on his practical and subsequently cursed every rodent, two- or four-legged, that had ever walked the earth.

He had cursed, that is, until the next mouse appeared. Squatting in the hallway outside the zoology lab, George felt a shiver slide up his back again, just like it had in the empty hall the night of the second mouse. He had come back from an almost all-nighter in the chemistry lab and had just walked onto his floor. The long hall was totally quiet except for the squeak of George's tennis shoe's on the waxed floor. No lights shown from underneath the dorm room doors. Single fingers of green reached toward George from the hall's exit signs; they traveled along the floor as he walked.

When the mouse hit him, he froze. I know there's no one else in this hallway, he thought. And I just got hit with another mouse. I think. He began to turn slowly, only his eyes moving at first, then his head; then his shoulders twisted until he was half-turned and could see the small black shadow on the shiny floor. Yep, he decided. Another mouse. I'm getting out of here.

George launched himself toward his room three doors
down, making it there in four leaps. He tore open the door, jumped in, slamming it behind him, then leaned back panting, his body pressed against the bathrobes, his backpack hanging from one arm. Barry looked up from his desk, and the roommates stared wide-eyed at each other for a long moment.

"What in the world are you doing?"

George continued to stare at Barry, not answering, edging toward his bed. He crouched like a basketball player across the rug—knees bent, arms slightly raised, his face wary. He dropped his pack on the bed and deepened his crouch until his 501's hit the bedspread.

"Barry, something very strange is happening to me."

"I could have told you that a long time ago," he said, turning back to his History of Western Civilization.

"No. I mean it, Barry. Something really weird is happening. Remember the other day when I told you about that thing in lab? That dead mouse hitting me in the back of the head?"

Barry's nose wrinkled with distaste at the thought.

"Of course I remember. You gave me all the graphic details. 'It was so gross, Barry! All hairy and curled up and puffy. You should've been there.' Sick."

"Well, it gets sicker. I just got hit with another one."

"When? Down at the science building?"
"No. Just now. Out in the hallway."

"What's so much sicker about that?"

"There was no one else out there but me, Barry."

"There had to be. The hallway isn't the transporter room, stupid. Dead mice don't just materialize like Captain Kirk and Spock."

"Yes they do. One just did."

"Oh, please."

"Do you want to see it? Why don't you just go grab it. It's still lying out in the hall. Maybe you'll get a thump on the head, too."

Barry shuddered. "I'd really rather not. Why don't you just start your studying and let me get back to mine."

"Someone's out to get me."

"Oh, please."

They stopped talking since they both had tests the next day. George tried to study for his chem test but could only think of the tiny shadow on the hall floor.

The odor of fresh formaldehyde from the zoology lab brought George back from that frightful night to the quiet hall and the damp dead mouse before him. Picking it up by the tail, he dropped the mouse in his empty mug and pushed open the door to the lab.

George glanced at the glass cases of specimens. The panes reflected the long bars of fluorescent lights but
revealed the distorted bodies curled and stuffed into jars. His dreams of preserved animals bursting from their jars in showers of glass and formaldehyde made him uneasy around the specimen cabinets. He looked away from them quickly. Tilting his mug over the plastic-lined garbage can, George allowed the dead rodent to slide out and land with a sodden thud on the bottom.

"'Good night, sweet prince,'" he said.

The microscope sat waiting on the table. He returned to it and the paramecium he had begun to copy with the miniscule dots of stippling. A skewed version of the frozen microorganism was half-drawn on the paper, so he picked up his pencil to continue. As he looked back into the eyepiece, he heard a soft feminine "Hello, George" behind him.

His precisely sharpened pencil ripped through the nucleus of the paramecium.

"I'm sorry, George!" Jeannie said. "I didn't mean to scare you."

"That's okay. I'm just a little jumpy."

"Have you been working on that stipple long?"

"Oh, no. Only twenty minutes or so," he lied, smiling despite the anvil that had just landed at the bottom of his stomach.
"Why are you so jumpy?" She waited for an answer as he smoothed his fingers over the gash in his drawing. "Did something happen?"

George tried to decide whether to tell her about the fifth mouse or not. The third one had caused their first big argument and the fourth had nearly caused them to break up; talking about Numer Five and his final hypothesis didn't seem like such a good idea after the previous two.

Mouse Number Three had hit George in Jeannie's room. They had been studying, George at the desk and Jeannie on the floor. George felt it was one of those afternoons in late fall that seem to call back the summer with warm winds and puffy clouds. Everyone is wearing shorts and T-shirts 'cause they know it's their last chance, he thought.

They had the door and the windows open to get a cross-breeze; it fluttered Jeannie's papers around on the rug. George was watching the clouds drift overhead when he felt the mouse-thump on his head.

"Hey!" He spun around in disbelief. A look of shock was pinned on Jeannie.

"What?" She looked up at him, her face innocent, puzzled.

"How could you do this to me?"

"Do what?"

"You're in on it, too. They couldn't be satisfied with
just the whole class laughing at me. They had to get you to do it, too."

Before he spat the last words out of his mouth, Jeannie screamed and jumped up onto her bed. She had glanced down at the floor while George was speaking and had seen the dead mouse.

"What's that? What's that?" she squealed, her feet and legs squirming to get further away from the corpse.

"Oh, don't try to act scared now. I'm not buying it. 'What's that? What's that?' That's a dead mouse! The one you just threw at me."

"The one I what?"

"Threw at me! I can just see you and Barry and Jerry cooking this up to freak me out. I bet you've had a ton of laughs over it. 'You should have heard him yell! It was the funniest thing I've ever seen!' Well, no more!"

He began to gather his things together as she stood on her bed, mouth wide, staring now at George, now at the mouse.

"Why should I be the butt of your sick jokes? As if I don't have enough problems already with my grades, you people have to make it even harder for me to do well. You--"

"Shut up, George! Just shut up!" Jeannie stepped down from the bed and stomped over to where George stood holding
his books in front of him.

"I would never do anything like that in a thousand years, and you know it. I can't believe you! You stand there with your books and your microscope and your dissected fetal pig and say I'm persecuting you? Why would I have to persecute you? You do that enough for all of us."

"I what? You--"

"Shut up and listen! No one else makes you stay up at lab until you can't see straight. No one else makes you forget to meet me on Thursday afternoon for hot fudge sundaes like you promised. No one else makes you paranoid enough to accuse your friends of hurting you when all they do is worry!"

"Jeannie--" George began.

"Did it ever occur to you that those mice could be a message? Did it--"

"Jeannie!"

They stood toe to toe, Jeannie glaring up into George's stony face. He set his books down on the desk.

"I'm sorry, all right? I flew off the handle."

"You bet you did."

He sat back down, his elbows resting on the desk, his head on his hands.

"You have to understand. I'm really freaked out about this. I mean, how often does a person have to deal with
dead mice? Especially ones that are hitting him in the back of the head."

"That's no reason to attack the people who care about you," she said, pouting.

"I'm just trying to figure out what's going on," he replied, turning to look at her. "You were the only person in the room and the mouse had to come from somewhere."

"But, me? The window is open, you know," she snapped, pointing. "And the door."

George thought for a moment. He looked at the open window, then at the open door, then back at Jeannie.

"That's true." He let out a couple of choppy laughs. "It could have been anybody!"

Jeannie was not amused.

"That's right. It could have been anybody. But you accused me."

"I'm really sorry, Jeannie. I have to learn to deal with stress."

"Well, you better do it quick. 'Cause if you don't mellow out," she had said more calmly, holding his hand in hers, "no one--and I mean no one--will want to be around you."

George took the hint and promised to go talk to one of his professors. The following week was the most distressing he had ever known. The argument in Jeannie's
room was their first and it made them a little itchy around each other. They didn't bicker, but she didn't hold his hand when they walked to lunch and he didn't call her very often.

The professor George decided to go talk to was his zoology teacher, Dr. Jepson. When he got done with his story about the three mice that had struck him, Dr. Jepson leaned back in his chair and gazed at George. The toes of his maroon wingtips, hooked on the legs of his desk, were the only things keeping him from falling backward through the floor-to-ceiling window behind him.

"Dead mice, huh?"
"Yes, sir."
"Three of them?"
"Yes, sir."
"I wonder if they were blind," he said, winking at George and chuckling to himself.

"Dr. Jepson, I'm really worried about this." He scooted forward in his chair suddenly, making the vinyl squeal obscenely.

The professor lifted his toes and his chair sprang back into place without a squeak. He put out his hands to stop his chest from slamming into the desk, then used the forward motion to push himself out of the chair.

"George, do you want to be a doctor?"
"Yes, sir. A surgeon."

"You know that it takes a very long time and lots of hard work to become a doctor, don't you George?"

"I'm prepared to devote my life to it, sir."

"Good, good," the professor said, picking imaginary lint from the sleeve of his tweed jacket. "But you realize that not everybody who wants to become a doctor--"

"A surgeon, sir."

"All right. A surgeon. Not everybody who wants to become a surgeon is going to make it. But those who don't make it can still help those who do. Do you understand what I'm trying to say, George?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Let me put it another way." Dr. Jepson walked around to the front of his desk and sat sideways on the edge, his right foot pressed firmly to the floor, his left swinging back and forth. George edged back in his seat.

"We in the biology department realize that you freshmen are under a lot of pressure. As a matter of fact--I'm going to let you in on little secret here, George--we create extra pressure to weed out the weaker students. The stronger students have to find avenues to relieve that pressure and playing jokes on the weaker students is a particularly effective form of release. Do you understand now?"
George's neck was slowly turning red and his lips white.

"I think I'm beginning to...sir."

"That's very good, George. Now, you shouldn't feel poorly about some little prank one of your classmates seems to be pulling on you. You're actually performing a very great service to the department. We need people like you George."

George stood up, looked into Dr. Jepson's cool grey eyes, and extended a stiff arm.

"Thank you very much for you time, sir. You've been very enlightening."

Dr. Jepson took George's cold hand and limp fingers briefly in his, then he let them drop.

"Glad to be of service, young man."

George left the office and went to get Jeannie for dinner. His pounding brought her to the door quickly.

"What is it? What happened?" Like a teapot steaming full, he launched into a tirade against the Dr. Jepson, his zoology classmates, and the college in general. It began with "condescending, patronizing, asinine, and stupid," and ended with a simple "I'm going to kill them."

After many soothing words and caresses, Jeannie was finally able to calm him down and they left for the cafeteria. They walked along holding hands again, a comfort
they both needed.

Neither of them spoke until George said solemnly, "Jeannie, I promise you. I am going to forget all about these stupid mice and the immature people in my class and I'm going to work my butt off getting my grades up. And I'm going to be nicer to you and to everybody 'cause dead mice aren't worth losing your friends over."

"I'm real glad, George," she said, squeezing his hand.

As they ate their dinner, George's sense of relief enabled him joke with his friends.

"Hey! That roast beef looks just like some striated muscle tissue I was examining today. And look at that au jus, Jerry! Isn't that just the color of formaldehyde?"

"Your're sick," Jerry said, stabbing another bite of the grey meat and placing it in his mouth. A drop of au jus dribbled down his chin and landed on the front of his shirt, dampening a small circle of the yellow cloth to tan.

George even noticed how pretty Jeannie's hair was in fluorescent light, and he said to her, "Let's go get those hot fudge sundaes tonight. I'm buying."

"Okay," she said, relieved, her eyes cast down shyly.

Only once during dinner did he cringe, remembering the humiliating conversation with Dr. Jepson. But he refused to think about it and forced himself to concentrate on spreading the chunky peanut butter into each corner of his
toast. He completed the construction of his usual dessert by slicing a banana into perfect disks and arranging them in a pyramid on the peanut butter.

As he held the caloric creation up to his mouth and moved his teeth in for the first bite, the fourth mouse hit him. His control dissipated like the smoke in a magic trick.

"All right! Who is it?" He threw the dessert down and stood up, wiping banana off his nose. "I've had all I can take and I want the jerk who's doing it to come over here and talk to my face!"

A wave of silence moved out from their table until five hundred-odd faces stared at George—some chewing, some not. The clatter of the dishroom echoed across the dining hall.

"Come on! Or are you too chicken to stand up face to face?" George twisted around as he yelled, trying to take in the whole cafeteria. No one stood or even spoke. "I figured. You're only brave enough to throw dead mice at the back of my head!"

The laughter wasn't loud at first; it began with a single giggle from a girl at the table next to them. It spread to the rest of the girls at the table, then to tables around them. It moved outward in rings, until the whole
cafeteria was filled with swells of laughter that broke over George in waves of derision.

"George, sit down!" Jerry hissed at him. He lowered himself into the chair as if his bones would shatter with any sharp movement. Jeannie sat staring straight ahead, her face empty of any emotion. He looked at her as the laughter waves became ripples, then stopped and the typical sounds of dinner hour returned to all the tables except theirs.

Everyone seemed to be waiting for someone else to say something. But George just sat looking at Jeannie, and she sat staring ahead. Finally, Jerry stood up.

"That was very interesting. Maybe you should try it again tomorrow, George. Only warn me if you do. I'd like to make it to the door before people start throwing things."

As he strode toward the dishroom, the other people at the table stood up quietly and followed.

"George, I don't know what to say to you," Jeannie began, turning toward him. "There was no one behind you and I didn't see anything fly toward you," she said. Then she took a deep, shaky breath, and pointed. "But there is a dead mouse behind you and I don't know where it came from." She stood up quickly and looked him in the eye. "I don't want you to call me or come see me for a few days. I need time to figure some things out. I'll get ahold of you."
She hurried to the dishroom with her tray, dumped it on the conveyor belt, and ran out the back door. As George sat at the table by himself, he thought only of how prettily her hair swayed when she ran.

Now, sitting in the lab, his microscope before them both and dead mouse Number Five in the garbage can, George made a decision.

"Jeannie, I just got hit with another mouse."

"Oh, George! Not this again. I thought we decided we weren't going to talk about that. You were just going to ignore them."

"But I've figured out what they are. Or, better yet, what they mean. Remember when I thought that you had thrown that one mouse at me? And we had that big argument?"

"Yes."

"You said maybe the mice were a message, remember? Well, you were right! Wherever they're coming from, I think they're telling me to stop trying to be a biology major. I never was cut out to be a surgeon, really. And the classes are driving me crazy. So tomorrow I'm going to see my advisor and I'm going to change majors."

"Really? Is that really what you want?" She took both his hands in hers and looked into his eyes, unsure.
He smiled at her and said, "Yep! You sure look cute in that sweatshirt." Then he began poking her in the sides, tickling her until she could barely breathe.

The next morning before classes, George walked to the administration building to his advisor's office. The building had two stories and was almost completely made of tinted, reflecting windows. George watched himself approach in one of the panes, arms swinging, head held high, his image getting closer and closer. He made faces at the striding figure.

He walked into the alcove where the door to the offices were and grabbed the doorhandle. Then he froze. The reflection before him showed the back of his head mirrored in the glass behind him. What it mirrored was a door, two inches wide and three inches tall, opening in the back of his head. His hair neatly parted when the door opened and from the hair-bordered rectangle a tiny dead mouse fell out. The door slammed shut, forcing George's head to bob forward.

He loosened his grip on the doorhandle and slowly lifted his hand toward the back of his head. He paused, his fingers barely touching his hair, then he tapped his head twice. He felt the little door snap closed. It had bounced back open like a cupboard door whose latch is worn.
His hand dropped back to his side. He gazed at his reflection in the window, one eyebrow raised in puzzlement and disbelief. Then he lifted his shoulders and straightened his back; grasping the handle of the door in front of him, he cleared his throat and pulled the door toward him, walking through. It closed behind him with a squeak.
January 15

So here I am again. I guess I'm pretty happy. My life is easy. My only problems or bumps seem to be people. Myself included. At least, they're the only problems that matter...

February 14

Do I love anyone? Good question. Do I even know what love is? How does a person feel? Sometimes I feel like I love everyone, no matter who they are or what they do.

May 1

I think he heard me say something about him that was mean. True, but mean. I hope he didn't hear me...
Honesty is (not always) the Best Policy

From the age of five to the age of fifty people learn that honesty is the best policy; yet these same people learn that the truth hurts. Thus, the search for maturity and care with honesty begins. How can the best policy be one that causes so much pain? How are people to know what to do since most people are not raised to be cruel? Those who advocate total honesty do not realize that some of the worst moments in a person's life occur when he is being confronted with honesty. Being called upon to respond honestly can be difficult, too.

Since honesty can cause pain, and it is natural for people to avoid hurting others, it follows that there are a number of social situations in which people should not be honest. In these "silent" situations a person must keep his mouth shut so as not to hurt another person. Mary is leaving the small town she grew up in to make her way in the big city. Another young woman named Patty, who is an obnoxious and clinging bore, comes to say goodbye. She mistakenly believes that she and Mary are the best of buddies. Mary knows that she will never see Patty again and that she could be as vicious as she ever wanted to be with only a small twinge of conscience. But she does not tell Patty that she actually never liked her and that she is
blissfully happy to be getting away from her as well as the hick town they are both from. Instead, she smiles and thanks Patty for seeing her off, gives her a hug, and wishes her luck. Her silence about her true feelings is dishonest since it perpetuates an illusion in Patty's life, but the illusion does not hurt Mary and it makes Patty happy. Therefore, Mary's silence is kind.

Silence is also golden in those situations in which people seek our approval of their personal accomplishments. Speaking honestly about their achievements (or lack thereof) would do no good. Shane is an actor. He reads books on acting and acting methods; he practices soliloquies from Hamlet; he takes as many acting courses as his schedule can handle; he auditions for as many plays as he can. If he does get a part in a play, he studies the character and rehearses his lines until his eyes and tongue are about to fall out of his head. When opening night finally arrives, Shane presents a very studied performance. But that is all. He does not truly take on the part; he does not let go of his control and become the character. However, he believes he has delivered an Olivier-esque performance, listening only to those who hold the same high opinion. When he asks his friends what they thought of his performance, he expects them only to praise him; he expects them to sprinkle his head with rose petals. No amount of criticism, constructive
or otherwise, would do a bit of good because Shane would not listen or believe it. Thus he silences his friends.

Hopeless situations also demand our dishonest silence. When Fred committed suicide, he left his wife Sheila and their two children numb and impoverished. He had been laid off and feared he would not be able to support his family. When the police tell her of her husband's death, Sheila is nearly overcome with grief and hangs on to her control with the slightest possible grip. Her only comfort, although irrational, is that poor Fred never really had a chance to improve his life. She believes that his job was lost to him forever and that he would never have been happy again. To deprive her of this false comfort would be cruel. Her late husband's co-workers realize that relating any good news about Fred's job would shred the fabric of Sheila's peace; they never tell her that he was supposed to get his job back the following week. It was too late for honesty.

Sometimes honesty not only does no good, but it does ill. Anthony is screaming at Mateus because Mateus scraped the paint on Anthony's new car. The $1,700 that he had spent to get the special finish inspires him to yell so loudly and curse so strongly that the neighbors blush. All Anthony thinks about is his nifty paint job and eleven-inch scratch Mateus has put in the driver's door; he is so caught up he does not even ask Mateus if anything else happened to
the car. At this point, it would have been wise for Mateus to be silent and not to say, "Well actually, Tony, I didn't just scratch the paint. I put a huge dent in the front fender and I lost two hubcaps, too." If he had been less honest and more silent, he would have been much more likely to keep his neck intact and Anthony's blood pressure at the merely critical level. He should have waited for Anthony to calm down a little before he honestly assessed the damage.

Avoiding honesty when it might cause pain is admirable and has made many lives more bearable. But people are not always admirable. Because they are not sensitive enough to other people's feelings or they feel obliged to be honest at all times, they end up causing much pain. Situations can become harrowing because someone chose honesty instead of sensitivity.

Such a painful predicament arises between Jeannie and Kathryn, who share an apartment. Jeannie is getting ready for a date with a young man she has never gone out with before. She is very nervous. Although she is neither overweight nor homely, Jeannie lacks confidence in her appearance. She finally decides she is ready to go and asks Kathryn, "How do I look?" Right then, it is important for Kathryn to say something complimentary so Jeannie can leave with the confidence that will make her more than pretty. Kathryn, however, prides herself on being completely honest
at all times and says, "That outfit is okay, Jeannie, but I must say it isn't the most flattering thing I've ever seen you in." The doorbell rings just as Kathryn destroys the fragile web of Jeannie's serenity, causing the poor girl to endure an evening of anguish. A little silence on Kathryn's part, or a few confidence-building remarks focusing on Jeannie's shining hair or lovely smile, would have been far more kind and appropriate than her brutal honesty.

Unfortunately, honesty can destroy more than confidence. The most painful type of honesty situation is one in which a friendship is destroyed. Lee and Cindy are friends in college: Lee is a junior; Cindy, a sophomore. They do everything together. They eat together, go to the movies together, party together, study together, and cry together. Theirs is the closest of friendships. It is the closest, that is, until one morning Lee wakes up and realizes he loves Cindy as more than a friend. He is confused about his feelings, but he knows he needs to tell Cindy what he can; the problem is how to tell her. So he waits for the proper moment. And he waits. And waits. And waits. All the while he is tortured by the feelings he wants to share with Cindy, yet he is unsure how she will react. Well, the decision makes itself when Cindy glances at his journal, left lying open on his desk. Her discovery frees Lee because now he can be open and gladly honest; he
tells Cindy everything.

But there is one problem--Cindy is not ready for all this honesty. She is not as mature as Lee had thought and responds to his feelings by running away from them emotionally. The only thing she says to Lee after he pours his heart out to her is, "I don't know what to say." Lee is quiet. He says sadly, "Then we'll talk about it later." Cindy is relieved because she thinks she can just drop the whole uncomfortable subject. She decides to pretend that everything is normal, just like it was before. But everything is not normal for Lee. He needs to know how Cindy feels; he needs a response from her. He does not get it, and it tears their friendship to pieces.

Silence and speeches, words and weeping, all move through the interplay of honesty and dishonesty. Calling a policy "the best" when it creates a spectrum of pain is distorted. Deciding when to say something honestly or when to remain silent requires maturity and careful thought. Many people do not call on either of those resources in social situations so they learn the hard way--through loss and tears. Even Othello learned the lesson: "Take note, take note, O world! To be direct and honest is not safe."
September 14

I wish I could read my feelings clearly and understand myself. I guess that is part of maturity of the soul and person (ality). What am I going to do with my life? Classic. Too classic for me.

January 5

I feel translucent, like I'm not really here...Sometimes I can almost reach someone, touch them. But they never really touch me or reach for me. We're all separate. No matter how close we get, we're still separate...With all these people around me, I'm so alone. Who is there? Only me? What's the rest of this? Nothing? It must be real.
Toes

Tiny nuns in flesh habits,
forever at prayer,
The little one a hunchback.

Kneecap

Threatened by
a joking father.
The hard contact
on the knee.

Arm

Amputated,
a short-lived paperweight
For the coroner's secretary.

Fingernails

Pale pink sunsets
at my fingertips,
Carrying personal copies
of evening originals.
Shoulders

Aggravators of mothers,
Indicators of mood,
Gatherers of tension
Angry rest for wood.

Eyelashes

Centipedes catching dustballs without mitts.

Constant followers of direction.

Eyebrows

Funnel the forehead into the nose.

Human antennae, or the vain perfection of a painted line.

Roof of the Mouth

Conducts Neopolitan I Scream pain to the forehead.

Shelf at the edge of the deep.

Epiglottis

Please let that go by.
Heart

Squeezed by a smile,
emptied with a word.

Lock your secrets there--
Mostly it's safe.
August 26

I shouldn't have to depend on other people for my happiness. They should just enhance what's already there. I shouldn't be made unhappy by others. That too should come from inside me. Is other people's happiness my responsibility? Why should I have to worry about someone else's feelings all the time? Why can't I worry about myself...I want to be able to deal with them on an equal basis. Why should I be the one who's always intimidated by other people? Why do I always have to move aside? Why is it half the time I'm too worried about what other people want, think, or feel, and the other half I'm being selfish?...

December 21

What do I want? Who do I want to be?

March 17

I'm a person. I have a glow. I'm not yucky. There's a light inside me that's worth something no matter if not a soul sees but me and God. I'm worth something to me!
A PERFECT LIFE
A Discovery Play

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BARBARA- tall and slim, stylish dark hair

PATRICE- medium build, thick and curly light brown hair

TERRY- athletic, with light brown, very short hair--looks sun-bleached

RING- short and curvy, cutsie, very curly dark blond hair

--All Seniors in college and roommates

TIME: Today

PLACE: College of the Hills, Haley, Indiana
A PERFECT LIFE

SCENE I

The setting is a small house, with a full living room, a small kitchen/dining area, a bedroom, a rowing machine, a desk, and a front door. The scene is black at first, then lights come up to a very dim. A pool of light comes up downstage right. PATRICE is sitting at her desk, then stands and moves to light. She looks between the ages of 25 and 30. She glances back into the room, and begins...

PATRICE

I remember us in those full and self-important days. We had the energy of youth and what our parents called "the right attitude." Terry called it something else: "Having a poop in a pile." I guess we all thought that. And we were all wrong.

(As PATRICE speaks, the lights come up to three-quarters and the three other girls become visible. TERRY, wearing sweats, sits at the couch and coffee table with a pile of books and papers. RING, wearing new jeans, a frilly shirt, and an apron, stands in the kitchen cleaning up after baking cookies. BARBARA, wearing classic shirt and pants, studies in the bedroom. PATRICE points...)

That's Terry there. Our resident athlete. Her real name is Terece, but no one ever called her that. The results were life-threatening. She just wanted to make it through school so she could be a world-class rower...single scull, of course. It was an "arrangement" with her parents. Over in the kitchen is Ring. A nice young girl with one ambition: to become Mrs. Somebody. She thought it would make her life a fairy tale. Her latest frog-prince was
make her life a fairy tale. Her latest frog-prince was an aspiring lawyer named David. That's Barbara, soon to be Mrs. Mike Jacobsen. June 21. In her mind, that date made her transcendent of our mundane college-girl lives. She knew marriage wouldn't be a fairy tale, but it made things a helluva lot easier to plan. And I'm Patrice, Patty then. I suppose I was the "smart" one. Nice to have around during exams but "I wouldn't ask her to come to the movies. She's too busy studying." Pretty accurate, I guess. I didn't mind, you see. I thought I didn't need them either.

(Pause) They told us those would be the best years of our lives. Y'know what's funny? We believed 'em.

(Lights up full)

TERRY Have you guys seen Patty? I can't get this stupid history assignment.

PATRICE I'm right here.

TERRY Hey, can you help me with this?

PATRICE What is it?

TERRY That History of Modern Europe. God! I can't believe all this. What does that frigging Dr. Warner think, I sit around dying to do history assignments? I've got practice tonight!

RING Oh, Terry, I took that class. Well, for a week at least. The professor was cute, but I didn't like all that reading and stuff. History of Civ. is loads easier.

BARBARA If you ask me...

(Pause, frowns at book, then closes it)

TERRY (Aside)

I didn't.
BARBARA
...all those history courses are a waste of time, anyway.

RING
Why's that?

BARBARA
Because you'll never use them.

RING
Well, David told me his history class really helps him understand why we all think like we do. Something about "tribal consciousness" or something. I wasn't really sure what he was talking about. I don't think about that kind of stuff like he does. Barbie, can I borrow your car to run over to the library? I want to drop off these cookies for David. He's got a quiz in Urban Politics tomorrow, and I want him to have some study food.

TERRY
Heaven forbid he should eat Cheetos!

BARBARA
I could just drop them off for you. I have to go to the health service, anyway, and the library's right on the way.

RING
Aren't you feeling well?

BARBARA
I feel fine. Mike just thinks it's time I had a physical.

RING
Is there something wrong?

No.

RING
Well, I hope everything turns out okay.

BARBARA
(Gathers together purse, papers and books)
Don't worry. The way things are going right now, I mean, with Mike so attentive and my classes breezing by, I couldn't catch a cold, even if I wanted to.
RING
(She hands her the cookies)
Thanks loads for doing this, Barbie.

BARTBARA
No problem. See you later.
(Exits)

RING
B'bye!

TERRY
God, she's so stingy with that damn car. And she makes me sick with her "Oh my life is so perfect" stuff. I can't wait 'til she gets married and finds out it's no fun.

PATRICE
I think she realizes it won't be all fun.

RING
But Mike is so neat!

TERRY
Oh, yeah. (mimics BARBARA) "With Mike so attentive!" With Mike jumping her all the time, is more like it. He'd probably explode if Barbara didn't put out for him every time he wants it.

RING
Terry!

TERRY
What?

RING
Sex doesn't mean that much to them; they're happy together 'cause they're so in love.

TERRY
You must be kidding. Those two don't love each other. The whole thing is just a business arrangement.

RING
What's that supposed to mean?

TERRY
You know what I mean; all marriages are like that. It's cheaper for two people to live, the man gets free sex and a housekeeper, the woman gets a credit card and a secure place to live.
RING
But what about love? You can't tell me all married people don't love each other.

TERRY
If they do, it's got nothing to do with their being married. And it's got nothing to do with Barb and Mike.

How can you say that?

RING
Easy. I just open my mouth and...

(Terrupts)
You're just jealous 'cause you don't have a serious boyfriend like me and Barbie do!

TERRY
Hal. Who wants a "boyfriend like you and Barbie do"!
Davey's gonna be a lawyer, just like Daddy, and Mike's gonna be a doctor, just like Daddy. Both boring. Both useless.

PATRICE
(Terrupts)
Terry, if you want me to help you with this, let's get to it. I've got to get back to my own books.

RING
Patty, what do you think about Barbie and Mike?

PATRICE
I think they are planning on getting married June 21.

TERRY
C'mon, don't cop out. (Sarcastic) Do you think they love each other?

PATRICE
As much as either of them can, yes.

RING
(goes to kitchen)
See, Terry? You're just jealous.

(Terrupts)
Well, it's better than being desperate! God, I can't wait to get out of this place. All this goddamn
relationship garbage makes me want to puke.

Let's get back to work.          PATRICE

A perfect life. Hal            TERRY

(Blackout)
SCENE TWO

PATRICE
(Walks to pool of light downstage right)
A perfect life. Maybe that's what we all wanted and
didn't think we'd ever have. It looked like Barbara was
the closest to it, so we were drawn to her like moths
fluttering around a light. We'd touch on it for a
second, get burned, and flutter off. Of course, she
didn't know about our fascination; we never let her see
it. That would have been admitting our lives were out of
control, not perfect.
(Pause)
The tragic thing about picture perfect lives is they
usually haven't finished developing yet.

(Lights up as she goes back to
desk to study. TERRY is gone.
BARBARA enters through front door.
She looks dazed. Drops purse,
papers, cookies, and a paper bag
on the coffee table.)

BARBARA
Has Mike called?

PATRICE

Nope.

(BARBARA, upset, grabs only her
keys and purse off the table, and
knocks over the bag. She doesn't
notice and rushes out the front door.
PATRICE looks over because of the
noise.)

Hmph.

(Gets up to pick up the spilled
contents of the bag and sees the
box that has fallen out. She picks
it up and stares in shock.)

A pregnancy test!

(TERRY and RING heard outside.
PATRICE hides the box in the desk.)
Throughout the next exchange, PATRICE recovers from her shock and returns to her studies. However, her concentration is poor and her attention is drawn back to the box.)

TERRY
(Offstage, yelling)
Y'know what you can do with that? You can stick it up your...

RING
(Interrupts as they enter)
Terry! How many times do I have to tell you? Those kind of boys just love it when you react that way. If they hoot like that, just ignore them. When you yell and do that with your hand, they just love it.

TERRY
I don't give a shit! They think they're studly and can give any girl a hard time. Well, I wanted them to know they'd better not try it with me. God, I'd love to go back there and beat the hell out of 'em.

RING
Oh, that would solve the problem. And I'm sure you could do it, too.

TERRY
Well, it's better than what you did. "Giggle, giggle! Tee hee! Tee hee!" You ate it up!"

RING
I did not. That's just my automatic reaction around boys like that.

TERRY
(Sees cookies on the table)
Aren't these Davey-wavey's cookies?

RING
They are! I wonder why Barbie didn't drop them off?

TERRY
He probably sent them back. Didn't want to get sick.

RING
Oh, drop dead, Terry. Patty do you know where Barbie is?
PATRICE
(Forced nonchalance)
Uh, oh, she just ran in and ran out. Didn't say a word.

RING
Well, maybe I'll just walk over to the library myself. I haven't seen David all day, and besides, we still have to decide what we're doing tonight.

TERRY
I thought poor Davey had an Urban Pol...

RING
(Interrupts)
You know, Terry, he really hates it when you call him "Davey." I don't like it much, either. Anyway, (Before TERRY can respond)
he does have a test tomorrow, but tonight's our six-month anniversary and he promised me an evening out.

TERRY
My God, how domestic. You'd think you two had been married for years. (Before RING can respond)
I'm going to that new Clint Eastwood movie with Sherrie and Kate, then we're going out for pizza and beer.

RING
Oh, how cultural. (Once again, before TERRY can respond)
Patty, what are you doing tonight? Studying? Again?

PATRICE
Yes, I suppose so.

TERRY
(Picks up her gym bag)
Well, I'm heading for practice. (Sarcastic) You girls be good tonight! (Exits)

RING
Y'know, sometimes she really makes me mad. (Pause)
I guess I'll just make some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches real quick for David before I go over there.

(Goes into kitchen, puts on apron, and begins to make sand-
wiches. Throughout the next speech, PATRICE continues to try to study, but has trouble concentrating still because of the box. She pays little attention to RING.)

Y'know, Patty, I've been thinking. Maybe this will sound like a mom, but I think it might be a good idea if you started going out more. I know you think your studies are important, but the rest of us girls have homework, and we get it done and have fun, too! Look at Barbie. She's got good grades and Mike, right?

(Pause. PATRICE doesn't answer)

And I've got David. And, well, maybe my grades aren't the best, but I'm not too worried about my education or getting a job and stuff. I'll have my hands full with kids and a house. Now I realize Barbie doesn't want that for herself; she wants a career. But being married will set her up for life, too. No more worries. The only reason I'm saying all this is because, well, the semester will be over soon and you haven't...

(BARBARA enters, still dazed)

Is that Barbie?

(Comes out of the kitchen)

Hi Barbie! Did you ever get over to the health service? I found David's cookies here and I thought maybe you forgot or something.

BARBARA

Oh. Sorry, Ring. I did forget.

RING

That's okay. I decided to make some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and bring them over with the cookies. I'll just walk down there in a little while.

BARBARA

Here, take my car.

(Both PATRICE and RING surprised)

RING

What?

BARBARA

Take my car.

RING

You never let anyone drive that car!
BARBARA
Well, if you don't want to...

RING
Oh, I do! I do. Just one second.
(Runs to kitchen, grabs sandwiches, runs out, grabs cookies and keys)
Thanks a lot, Barbiel Bye, you girls!
(RING exits. PATRICE looks back to her books as BARBARA goes to coffee table, searches around for the pregnancy text box. PATRICE sees what she's doing and holds it up. BARBARA sees it, rushes over to grab it.)

BARBARA
How dare you! That's something I'd expect from Ring or Terry, but I thought you had more class. I thought...
(She starts to sob, then catches herself)

(Pause)
Are you pregnant?

PATRICE
(Gains control)
I don't know. The results won't be back 'til minday. But...I didn't have my period last month and it's overdue this time. The man at the drug store said this is a pretty good test and lots of women buy it...
(Has to stop again)

PATRICE
Those things aren't one hundred percent accurate, you know.

BARBARA
They're accurate enough.

(Pause)

PATRICE
Does Mike know?

BARBARA
I can't find him! He wasn't at his apartment or the library and no one's seen him. I can't find his roommate, either.
(Pause)
I'm going to try his apartment again.

(Goes to phone, dials, waits long enough for eight rings or so, then slams down the receiver and yells.)

Where the hell is he?
(Pause, then bitter, slightly hysterical laugh)

Ha! Here I stand, goddamn knocked up and I can't even find the guy who did it to tell him!

(As she begins this last line, TERRY and RING enter through the front door behind her, and stop in shock at her words. All remain frozen for a moment, then blackout.)
SCENE THREE

(Dark stage, PATRICE walks slowly into pool of light downstage right)

PATRICE

That afternoon, those "best years of our lives" changed from a comfortable existence of hiding under a rock, to a frightening struggle in an open field during a thunderstorm. I think we asked ourselves more questions about our lives...or anyone else's, for that matter...than we ever had.

You see, see were the "good girls." At least, I thought we were. I knew I was, and I assumed Terry and Ring were. And Barbara, too, even with a fiance. None of us were going to do anything asinine to destroy our "best laid plans." Besides, bad things aren't supposed to happen to good people.

(Pause)

But they do...and they had.

(Lights slowly up to full as PATRICE goes to bedroom where BARBARA is sitting with TERRY and RING. All are subdued.)

TERRY

I saw Mike's roommate, Paul on my way to practice, and he told me to tell you that Mike got called in for an interview at Feldholm Hospital over in Lawrence, and that he wouldn't be back until tomorrow. I left my gloves here, so I came back to get them and see if you were around. Mike is supposed to call tonight, if he can. I guess Paul was going to call you earlier, but he forgot. Typical.

RING

Yeah, and I saw Terry walking home again, so I picked her up.

(Pause)

Barbie, are you sure you're okay? You don't want me to get anything for you?

BARBARA

I'm fine, Ring, and no I don't want any tea, I don't want any milk, I don't want any salad, I don't want anything! I'm pregnant, no incapacitated.

(Pause)
So, are you going to get an abortion?

My God! No! You can't!

Why the hell not?

Because there's a baby, a new life! You can't just vacuum the poor thing out.

Ring, now isn't the time for hysterics.

But Barbie, you have a new person inside you that you and Mike made. You can't just get rid of it like...like a cold or something!

Why not? This thing is screwing up Barb's life.

I am not going to argue the "right to life" with either of you. I'm not even sure what I think about it right now.

I think you should just get it taken care of. Don't even tell Mike. He'd probably just get pissed and tell you it was your fault. And to get rid of it.

I can't believe this.

I have to tell Mike. And he won't get pissed. If he's one thing, he's level-headed. He'll decide what's best for us.

Maybe you should decide what's best for you.

What do you mean?

Well, it seems to me that when you put a man in a situation like this he won't always react reasonably.
BARBARA
Mike will react reasonably. He always knows what's best for him. And for me.

TERRY
What about your big plans for a career? I really can't see you running around your advertising agency pushing a stroller. And I don't see Mike getting up in the middle of the night to feed a screaming kid.

RING
How do you know? Maybe Mike will be a wonderful father.

TERRY
His first thought is to get through med school and then to get a practice somewhere.

RING
His first thought is of Barbie, right Barbie?

BARBARA
Of course.

(Pause)
Well...sometimes...I don't know. It probably is, most of the time, but his career is very important to him.

RING
Don't you worry, Barbie. I'm sure it will work out all right. And Mike's a good boy. He'll do what's right.

(Phone rings. They all start, then TERRY jumps to answer it)

TERRY
Hello!

(Listens for a moment)
Oh, glad you could find time to call, Mike.
(At Mike's name, BARBARA jumps up. But TERRY's not done with him yet)
I don't care if you don't want to hear it, you're going to. You guys think you can do whatever you want and to hell with...

(BARBARA wrenches the reciever from TERRY's hand)

BARBARA
(Trys to sound normal and calm but looks terrible and sounds plastic.)

Hi, Honey!
(Listens and sits down)

No, she's just upset about something.
(TERRY goes back to bedroom and sits down. All three girls watch BARBARA attentively, anxiously.)

Yes, I know she can. But how did the interview go?...With who?...Is he the one with the big lab?...Oh my goodness, how exciting...That would be just perfect for next year with both of us in school...No, he forgot to get ahold of me. Terry ran into him a little earlier and he asked her to tell me that you were out of town...Well, yes, I was a little upset...Yes, I understand you have to do things like that sometimes...Oh, by the time you're a doctor, I'll be well used to it...

(Becomes a bit more distraught)

Yes, I do have something on my mind, but I don't know if I can tell you over the phone...Well, when do you think you'll be back?...Can you come back right away? I need you, Mike...

(Looks like she might cry, but doesn't)

RING

She sounds awful scared.

Oh, I wonder why?

PATRICE

Quiet!

BARBARA

All right, all right, I understand...Okay, I'll tell you...

(Pause)

Yes, I'm still here...Mike, this isn't easy for me to tell you, and it's not going to be easy to hear, but please, please, don't get--angry or anything...Yes, I know you do, I love you, too...Okay...I went to the health service today...I think--I think I'm pregnant...Pregnant!

(BARBARA really upset now. TERRY can't sit still, goes to rowing machine and starts to row. Gets glares from PATRICE and RING, so she goes back to bedroom and sits.)

I don't know! I missed my period last month and I'm late this time...Because I didn't think that was it! I used to have problems all the time and I thought maybe they were starting again...Mike, don't say that. You know I
would never do that to you...You promised you wouldn't get angry!...Why would I want to trick you?...My career is important to me, too!...I'd never ask you to give up yours...

TERRY
(Quietly seething)
Goddamn him.

TERRY and RING

Sh!

BARBARA

(BARBARA suddenly turns white with shock, sits perfectly still and says, very quietly, very frightened, but very determined...)

Mike, you can't mean that...You're not thinking straight, you can't be...It's not either of our faults and we both have to deal with it. Don't do this to me!...Calling off the wedding won't solve the problem...

(RING lets out a cry at this line, then covers her face with her hands. TERRY looks at BARBARA and phone with disgust and anger. PATRICE shakes her head and looks at the floor.)

If you do this, Mike, you will never forgive yourself and neither will I...You never ran away from problems before, don't start now...I know it's a lot to handle...(yells) I'm the one who's pregnant, remember?...I'm sorry...Maybe it would be best if we just met when you get back and we can discuss it...Fine...Fine...Oh, I understand perfectly, I just thought it'd be different.

(Hangs up receiver, sits looking at the floor. RING is still crying into her hands, PATRICE is looking at BARBARA, and TERRY is just standing by the front door; she suddenly kicks the wall, then blackout.)
SCENE FOUR

PATRICE
(Walks to pool of light downstage right)
They met the next afternoon. I don't imagine it was easy for either of them. Facing responsibility rarely is. Neither is letting go.
They agreed that calling off the wedding was best for everyone involved because their "arrangement" was no longer beneficial.
But the new arrangement wasn't beneficial for the rest of us. You see, we all wanted a "happily-ever-after" ending. And it didn't look like we were going to get one. I guess there was a little bit of Ring in all of us.

(Pause. Lights up on TERRY and RING in kitchen, preparing food.)

TERRY
But I really would have wrapped an oar around his head.

PATRICE
Terry wasn't the only one thinking of doing physical violence to Mike, either.
You see, none of us knew where our worlds had gone; they had fluttered away from us like loose papers in a breeze while each of us chased them with desperate hands. We gradually abandoned that chase, however, when we realized our old worlds weren't important. It was the new one we needed.

(Lights down on PATRICE. Lights up on rest of stage. TERRY and RING enter from the kitchen carrying plates of food. They go to the coffee table, set down the food, and sit.)

TERRY
I'm serious, Ring. If he had come over that night, Mike wouldn't have lived to see his next Micro test.

RING
I might have even helped you.
TERRY
Oh, what would you have done? Cried on him 'til he drowned?

RING
I'd have grabbed him by the hair and kicked him where it counts.

(They pause, then burst out laughing. As they are chuckling, BARBARA and PATRICE enter through the front door carrying shopping bags.)

BARBARA
No, it's just that pink doesn't look good on you. I liked the style of the dress, but you looked like an upsidedown ice cream cone.

PATRICE
I'll take your word for it. I haven't been shopping for clothes, let alone a dress, since second semester of my sophomore year.

BARBARA and RING
I know.

RING
Well, let's see it!

(PATRICE takes the dress out of the shopping bag and holds it up to herself.)

How pretty!

BARBARA
I guess all it takes is a date to get the old shopping genes in gear.

And such a date!

PATRICE
Don't start in, Terry. I know he's one of my T.A.'s, but a woman has to start somewhere.

TERRY
Okay, okay. I guess if I don't stop, you'll all be forcing me out on dates, too.
BARBARA

Only if you want us to...

BARBARA and RING

...only if you want us to.

TERRY

No, thanks. I might end up with someone like Weinie-Ass Mike.

(Everyone freezes at the mention of Mike's name. No one looks at BARBARA. The silence isn't broken until TERRY says a little apologetically...)

You know, I've been thinking about him, though. And I realized that even though he did what he did in a shitty way, Mike was just a regular guy in a tough situation.

(There is another pause as they relax a little and take in what TERRY has said.)

BARBARA

Well, I'm glad someone has finally brought up his name. I didn't think we were ever going to talk about it.

(Pause. The other three girls look at each other)

RING

We all thought you wouldn't want to, Barbie.

BARBARA

Of course I want to. I need to. Because I've been thinking about him, too, and I agree with Terry. Not that being a "regular guy" absolves him of his mistakes.

RING

It makes them easier to accept, though, I guess.

(Pause)

It sure is hard to give up those knights on white horses.

BARBARA

(Nods)

Mike and I had something important, but it wasn't as important as we both thought. It would have been a bigger mistake for us to stay together. I can just see us fighting about who should take care of the baby, whose turn it is to cook, whose idea it was to get married, whose fault...
(She stops because she's getting too upset. They all look a little depressed.)

PATRICE
So, Barbie, do you want a boy or a girl?
(Immediately the mood lightens, and little smiles break through)

BARTBARA
How many times are you going to ask me that?

TERRY
Until you give us the right answer. Of course.

RING
She already has. She wants a girl and she knows it's going to be one, right Barbie?

BARTBARA
Well, I can't tell for sure...

RING
You told me yesterday it felt like a girl!

TERRY
Wrong, wrong, wrong! You have to have a boy. That way, we can help raise him and there'll be one male on the face of the earth with his head on straight.

PATRICE
Did it ever occur to you that she might have twins? I think the most reasonable way to have children is to have a set of twins first, one boy, one girl. That way, nobody has to be the oldest and take all that responsibility, and there will be someone to play with from the very beginning.

RING
That's a really nice idea, Patty.

PATRICE
(With an uncharacteristic dramatic touch)
Thank you so very much.

BARTBARA
Whatever the baby is, it'll have a big jump on every other baby around.
RING

Why's that?

BARBARA

Because it'll have one fantastic mom and three of the best aunties there ever were.

(They all smile and look at each other, pretty pleased with themselves, then lights go down as PATRICE steps out to a pool of light downstage right.)

PATRICE

So we were no longer alone in our little worlds. We had our good friends, however recently realized, and we had a good little friend on the way. We were hoping she'd arrive by graduation. Why she? Well, I wanted a little niece to dress up and fuss over. But I would have taken a nephew, too.

We all stayed in the house for as long as we could after graduation, and the baby arrived. Our days were full and important there; we felt a part of something that was alive and which gave us a life.

(During the next speech, PATRICE moves over to each girl as she tells what happens to them. They perform a typical action, then freeze when PATRICE is done talking about them.)

Eventually, we had to begin the growing away process, and Terry was the first to go. The oars were calling her; her arrangement with her parents being honored, she left for California to complete her training for the next Olympics. She missed a medal by this much and is training again, probably harder this time, and griping with every stroke.

Ring had the hardest time leaving, I think. Her domestic streak was screaming to her that she was leaving her little family. But she moved on to another little family—actually, a family of little people, since its members are all first graders. And she is dating a man instead of a frog or a prince or a knight on a white horse. They're to be married in the spring.

Barbara honored the arrangement she had made with herself; she kept the baby and got her degree, too. Being a single parent seemed to add facet after facet to her mind and heart, as she learned with her baby. She
just opened her own advertising agency with the help of her husband. Barbara found a man who could appreciate and love her. And her little boy. Oh yeah, she had a boy. Cute and smart as a little pin. His name is Andrew.

And I stopped reading other people's books and began reading people instead. I got a job with a small magazine in town and wrote about the people I met. And now I'm telling you about four of them. We started out alone and foolish and ended up friends. I don't think any of us would say we've got a perfect life, but who needs it when you have very real people, real friends.

(She sits down at her desk, looks at the three frozen girls, then back to the audience.)

I guess "happily-ever-after" isn't always packaged the way you'd think.

(Blackout)
May 9

I feel I have more control over me and my life than I ever have. That's why I'm living for me. No one else is going to do it.
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