

The Fighting Frogs vs. Victoria
Vanderbilt

by

Valerie Work

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Characters

<u>COLLEGE SAM:</u>	Male, age 19.
<u>SAM</u>	Male, age 14.
<u>WALLY:</u>	Female, age 14.
<u>VICTORIA:</u>	Female, age 14.
<u>MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM:</u>	Female, late middle age.
<u>FLUFFY:</u>	Female, age 14.
<u>MUFFY:</u>	Female, age 14.
<u>TUFFY:</u>	Female, age 14.
<u>JACQUES:</u>	Male, age 14.
<u>MONA:</u>	Rebel.
<u>LORRIE:</u>	Eccentric.
<u>HERBERT:</u>	Nerd.
<u>THE FIGHTING FROG:</u>	Their mascot.
<u>VOICEOVER SAM:</u>	Age 9-10. Prerecorded voice of actor playing SAM.
<u>VOICEOVER WALLY:</u>	Age 9-10. Prerecorded voice of actor playing WALLY.

Setting

Slumberburg Middle School and its environs.

Time:

The present. Five years in the past.

Scene 1

Slumberburg Middle School, an old fashioned brick schoolhouse that is, somewhat miraculously, still standing. Five years ago the building was sold to the town historical society and students were moved to a neighboring town to join a consolidated school district the next fall. The school building, now enjoying landmark status, has been partially restored and has become a popular neighborhood space for the annual art fair, traveling exhibits, poetry readings, guest lectures and the like.

When the building was converted a number of walls were knocked out so the former auditorium/multi-purpose room was enlarged to encompass space that was formerly occupied by the eighth grade classroom. No one is using the space at the moment and it is piled full of decades of school and community detritus: curtains, chairs, desks, posters, boxes, theater props and costumes, graduation robes, a disco ball. A large stuffed Fighting Frog mascot (the FROG) leans against one wall.

COLLEGE SAM enters in a clearly nontraditional way: perhaps a trap door, slithering under bleachers, through a door hidden behind flats. He has a backpack with him. The room is dark except for a security light. He trips over something, finds the light switch, turns it on, sees the Frog.

COLLEGE SAM

(reacting to Frog)

Whoa. Hi there.

(The FROG winks. COLLEGE SAM blinks. He is not certain whether or not the Frog actually winked. He goes to examine it and discovers the MAGIC WAND, which was partially hidden. He picks it up.)

COLLEGE SAM

Hey, it's the wand.

(SAM gives the WAND an exploratory shake. The FROG twitches. SAM spins around but it has already returned to its former pose. SAM puts his backpack down, takes out a laptop and begins to pace.)

COLLEGE SAM

Well, here I am. The Slumberburg Middle School Auditorium. And my eighth grade classroom. I thought, being here will help me remember everything. But telling this story is still so hard.

(College SAM sits down and begins to type. The current school fades and is replaced by his eighth grade classroom as it was five years ago, along with eighth grade SAM, who addresses the audience during the transition.

The classroom as a heterogenous mixture of detailed realism, myth, and exuberant wackiness. There are splashes of bright color which do not quite coordinate. On the walls are the type of ridiculous posters that are actually found in real middle school classrooms. One proclaims 'E is for Effort,' another depicts a pelican struggling to swallow a frog which is in turn strangling the pelican, and reads, 'Never Give Up.' A third more quietly reads 'No Gum.' The FIGHTING FROG perches on a table against the back wall, asleep.

SAM

We perceive the world in categories. It's a psychological scientific fact--we learned it at school. Like color, for instance. A beam of light with wavelength 370 zooms through space and strikes your retina. You see blue. Another beam smacks into your eye, with wavelength 360. Looks blue. Take a second pair of light beams, also only 10 nanometers apart in wavelength. Beam number three, wavelength 240, enters. Blue. But beam number four, wavelength 230, hits your consciousness and suddenly...GREEN! It has to be that way. If everyone could really tell the difference between red-orange and orange-red, how would anyone ever match their socks? It goes beyond science too, into things I personally think are

more important. Like war. In school you learn all about famous battles. There was Waterloo, where the English finally defeated the mighty Napoleon. And D-Day, when the Allies entered Hitler's Europe. The English were Right. Napoleon was an Evil, Imperialist Dictator. The Allies were the Bold Defenders of Liberty. Hitler was a Madman. And then there was the battle fought by my eighth-grade class and our fearless leader Wally Jones against Victoria Vanderbilt. Where things got so much more complicated... To understand this battle and why it was fought you first need a little background. My name's Sam, and this -

(gestures)

--is my eighth grade class.

(looks back to see unoccupied classroom)

Or classroom, anyway. Eighth graders are not too early.

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM enters casually, munching a sweet breakfast pastry, perhaps a frosted donut. Casting about for something which will make her appear busy, she finds a letter in an envelope on her desk, sits, opens it, reads it leisurely, replaces it in the envelope, puts the envelope at the corner of her desk. She opens a notebook and pretends to review it.)

SAM

This is Ms. Plimplebottom, our teacher. She's been teaching eighth grade forever--longer than we've even been in school.

(HERBERT enters, carrying an apple, which he shines on his sleeve and places on MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM'S desk, flashing her a big smile. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM smiles back; yes, HERBERT is such a nice, well behaved boy. He takes his seat in the front row and begins to carefully arrange the materials he will need for his first class, opening his book to the correct page, removing his homework from its protective plastic covering, examining the points on his pencils and finally reviewing his notes from the previous day.)

SAM

Herbert. I don't have to say anything more.

(LORRIE enters, carrying an overstuffed, heavily stickered bookbag and wearing a distinctive hat.)

SAM

This is Lorrie.

(LORRIE dumps her bag in at the desk nearest the FROG and shakes his shoulder to wake him up. The FROG stretches. LORRIE and the FROG play a game of imitating each others' gestures like faces in a mirror.)

FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY burst through the door in a group and making a great deal of noise, heavy on the giggles and squealing.)

SAM

These are the cheerleaders, Fluffy, Muffy, and Tuffy.

(FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY sit down at the same time at their nearby desks. FLUFFY reads a magazine, twirling her hair. MUFFY powders her nose. TUFFY checks to make sure there is nothing stuck in her teeth and then takes out a string game.)

FLUFFY

Look Muffy! '10 Ways to Tell if He Likes You.' We can find out who Jacques really likes, once and for all! One. 'Does he ever call you?'

MUFFY

He called me for homework last week.

FLUFFY

That doesn't count. Two. 'Does he talk to you in school?'

TUFFY

Jacques doesn't talk to anybody, ever.

FLUFFY

Of course he does!

SAM

They are all madly in love with Jacques, the class jock, captain of the football team, the wrestling team, and, at the moment, the baseball team.

(By this point JACQUES is onstage, in a concealed nook near the school but not inside the classroom. He has a sketchpad out and is drawing. He grunts.)

SAM

He is sort of going out with all three of them. When he pays them any attention at all.

MUFFY

No, he really doesn't.

FLUFFY

Okay, fine. Three. 'Does he find excuses to touch you, as if accidentally?'

MUFFY

Yes.

FLUFFY

Yes! Well obviously, he really likes me.

MUFFY

Fluffy, according to the test, he likes both of us equally.

FLUFFY

You just think that because you're dumb.

MUFFY

I'm not dumb. There's no reason he can't like both of us equally.

FLUFFY

Not possible. You're dumb.

MUFFY

I am not dumb! Tuffy am I dumb?

FLUFFY

And doesn't Jacques like me more than Muffy?

TUFFY

I don't think Jacques likes either of you.

FLUFFY

Oh and I suppose he actually likes you. Whose side are you on Tuffy?

TUFFY

I don't want to pick sides. I'm neutral--like Switzerland!

FLUFFY

You're not allowed to be. Do you want to be popular in high school next year, or not?

TUFFY

That's a given.

FLUFFY

Well then you'd better stay friends with me.

(In a quick movement, FLUFFY scissors through MUFFY's string game, then laughs fiendishly.)

MUFFY

Hey!

TUFFY

(To FLUFFY)

Muffy...

FLUFFY

She's Muffy, I'm Fluffy!

MUFFY

She's Fluffy, I'm Muffy!

(FLUFFY and MUFFY exchange evil looks, then turn back on TUFFY)

FLUFFY

Get it right!

MUFFY

Get it right!

TUFFY

I think we should call Jacques. That always makes us feel better.

FLUFFY

All right. I'll call.

(FLUFFY takes out her cell phone and calls JACQUES. His phone goes off. He picks it up and grunts.)

FLUFFY

Hi Jacques.

MUFFY and TUFFY

(pushing in towards the phone)

Hi Jacques!

(JACQUES grunts.)

FLUFFY

Whatcha doing?

JACQUES grunts uncertainly, hides his drawing materials, grabs his baseball from his backpack, tosses it into the air, then grunts again with restored confidence. He notices the time and grunts again.)

FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY

Bye Jacques.

FLUFFY

See you soon.

(JACQUES enters the classroom.)

FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY

Hi Jacques.

(JACQUES grunts acknowledgement, takes his seat, and practices his grip on his baseball.

MONA enters, wearing all black.)

SAM

Mona, Nonconformist.

(MONA slaps LORRIE five, then the FROG, then takes her seat, crosses her arms, and stares fixedly at a point on the ceiling.

WALLY enters.)

SAM

This is Wally.

(WALLY takes her seat and pulls a half-dissected radio out of her bookbag.)

SAM

Wally has been my best friend since...since I can remember. We lived across the street from each other until last year. I can't count the number of crazy crusades she's led me on.

VOICEOVER WALLY

Sam! Come on! The candy store is going to get rid of its slushy machine! We have to do something!

VOICEOVER SAM

Oh yeah?

VOICEOVER WALLY

Yeah, I'm thinking, make a petition! I'll get my brother to sign, and Lorrie and Mona, and you can start working on the guys...

(LORRIE turns from the FROG, mouths "homework" to Wally, who fishes it out of her bag and gives it to LORRIE to copy. When LORRIE is finished, she passes it back to MONA. After finishing her copy, LORRIE stuffs it into her messy backpack and falls asleep at her desk. MONA returns to staring at the ceiling. WALLY continues work on the radio.)

SAM

Wally is easily the smartest person I know. Much smarter than Herbert. Just not so obvious about it. Back in fifth grade, we held a class bridge-building contest. Wally's bridge held 15 pounds more than anybody else's. It was the only arch bridge ever to win. Wally does just exactly enough work to get all A's. If the cutoff is 89.9, she never goes higher than 90. I do that too. But for Wally, it's an art.

There's an important thing you need to know about Wally. Two years ago, right near the end of our sixth grade year, her father died. He was perfectly healthy, there was no warning. He was getting in his car to go home from work and he had a heart attack. No one got to say goodbye. She hasn't been exactly the same since. She's started taking things apart, to see how they work, she says, like she'd done sometimes before, but now she rips into them,

with intensity, and has lost all interest in putting them back together. First her doorbell, then her alarm clock. I have little hope for this radio she's dissecting now, swiped from the Lost and Found, with jagged wires and stripped guts spilling out everywhere.

(SAM pauses, thinks.)

SAM

Okay, I guess that's everyone.

(The FROG jumps off its table and gestures dramatically.)

SAM

Oh, of course! Our school's amazing amphibious mascot, the Fighting Frog!

(FROG bows, then pantomimes its life story as SAM narrates each event.)

SAM

You might think it's an unusual mascot, but it has a very noble history. Our town's founder, Hosiah Slumberburg, was the fifth son in his family, so he left home to seek his fortune in the wilderness. He wandered and he traveled and one day, just as he was about to move on yet again, he came across a Frog. But this Frog wasn't just snoozing on a lily pad, awaiting the kiss of a fair princess. It was trapped in thick, sticky mud and fighting for its life. Hosiah watched the struggle, mesmerized. He wondered why he was so interested in whether the Frog won or lost. Why should he or anyone else care about an ugly old Frog in a small pond in the middle of nowhere? But he did. And he decided to settle and build his home right by that pond. To this day, the descendants of the original Fighting Frog live there, and if you really want to, you can visit them. But you don't have to. Our class has its very own Frog.

(All of the students applaud the FROG's performance. The bell begins, starting the school day. SAM takes his seat at his desk by WALLY.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Now, class. Class. Good morning, class! That's better.
(with a sadistic little smile)

Now, before we caper on into our history lesson, I want you all to hand in your math homework so I can check it during lunch.

(Chaos ensues. HERBERT whips his homework out of its protective covering and is the first to hand it in to MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM. Someone pokes LORRIE, who has fallen asleep. She wakes up with a gasp, tries to figure out what is going on, and then empties her horribly disorganized backpack all over the floor as she tries to find her homework.)

WALLY

Almost done, Mona?

(MONA passes WALLY's homework back to WALLY. At least one of the CHEERLEADERS spills makeup on her homework. Another pulls out two copies and hands one to JACQUES to turn in. Eventually everyone has discovered and passed forward their work, except for LORRIE, who finally exclaims in triumph upon finding the now torn and bedraggled scrap.)

LORRIE

Got it!

(Cheers and applause from the other students. LORRIE writes her name on it, turns it in, takes a bow, then picks up all her other papers and stuffs them back in her bag before returning to sleep.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(already tired)

Wonderful. Now. History. Everyone is supposed to be ready to present their report today. Who will volunteer to start us off?

(HERBERT raises his hand. No one else does. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM ignores him. HERBERT strains his arm, contorts his body, and finally falls out of his chair.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

All right. Mona.

MONA

On September 7, 1968, a group of feminists led by Robin Morgan, former television star, staged the first major demonstration for women's liberation. Protesting at the entrance to the annual Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, they held up posters like this one --

(Shows image of naked woman with body parts labelled like a side of beef.)

-- and gave the crown to a live sheep, like in a county fair. They marched, carrying their signs: "Welcome to the Miss America Cattle Auction." These women were angry. Righteously angry.

And yet the news media dissed them, calling them "bra-less bubbleheads," "ridiculous exhibitionists" and even "man-haters" while ignoring all of the really important issues. Like the fact that women were (and still are) paid a fraction what men are for the same work, and that hiring and promotion practices at most major corporations were deeply sexist. Eventually, after a fight, the media came to accept that the women's economic demands were moderately reasonable. But the news continued to view feminism as a disease taking over the country, subsuming perky, cheerful wives into karate-chopping, unshaved, monstrous fiends. Well so what if we really are? I mean, come on, folks. WOMEN ARE POWERFUL! The Y-chromosome is a pathetic genetic mistake. One day we will rise up and dominate the world, using men only to do our chores and assist in continuing the species.

Anyone who says otherwise is a dirty rotten pig. I could go on to talk about the specific and pitiable current condition of women in, say, Afghanistan.

(The STUDENTS throw rotten fruit and paper wads at MONA.)

MONA

Okay. I get the hint. Sheep, honestly.

(MONA takes her seat.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(rising)

So, I think that's quite enough history for one day. On to science!

(jerking open her teacher's manual)

This morning, class, we will be talking once more about wetlands. Wetlands --

MONA

I'm going to hold my breath until you talk about something relevant!

(MONA stands on her chair, pinching her nose. LORRIE starts timing her, other students watch with interest.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Mona, sit down. As I was saying, wetlands vary widely due to local and regional differences in aquatic saturation, soil condition, climate, topography, water chemistry, vegetation and human disturbance.

(MONA gasps and falls to the floor dramatically. LORRIE checks her pulse. WALLY raises her hand.)

WALLY

Ms. Plimplebottom, Mona's dead.

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM crosses to MONA, assists her in rising from the floor, and directs her back to her seat. As soon as MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM's back turns on her return to the front of the room, LORRIE throws something to WALLY, who throws it back. They toss the object back and forth.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

At first glance, a wetland might appear to be nothing more than a smelly, mucky swamp, but in fact each and every wetland is unique and collectively, they shelter as much biodiversity as rain forests and coral reefs.

(LORRIE misses her toss and the object lands too far in front of WALLY. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM picks it up and puts it on her desk.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

End of the day. Sadly, wetlands are in danger.

(FLUFFY raises her hand. LORRIE nudges the FROG.)

FLUFFY

Bathroom. I need Muffy.

(FLUFFY followed by MUFFY then TUFFY cross and exit.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Two minutes.

(While MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM's attention is on the cheerleaders, LORRIE motions for the FROG to GO! It retrieves the object and gives it back to LORRIE.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Due to the forces of development and urban encroachment, many of these fragile habitats have already been destroyed or polluted, and many more are threatened.

(The CHEERLEADERS return. Sit. TUFFY raises her hand. They rush out again.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

One minute. If our wetlands are not protected, currently endangered species will become extinct. The food web will be disrupted. Global warming will increase.

(FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY reenter. WALLY sticks out her foot and trips TUFFY, who falls.)

TUFFY

Wally tripped me!

(General laughter.)

MS PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(aware that absolutely no one is listening)
So remember, students. Time is like a fish swimming against the current. Eventually, it drowns.

(A bright, imperious knock sounds, freezing the action in the classroom. SAM takes a deep breath and rises.)

SAM

(to audience)

I'd better let Victoria introduce herself.

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM opens the door. VICTORIA enters, brightly, chewing pink bubble gum.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM
You must be Victoria, our new student.

STUDENTS
(whispering and poking each other)
New student? We're getting a new student? Did you hear anything? No. Me either. What's her deal? Etc.

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM
Would you like to introduce yourself to the class?

SAM
She did it much better than I ever could.

(VICTORIA pauses inside the door. Blows a gigantic bubble. It pops. She licks the gum off her face, puts it back in her mouth, flashes a giant smile to MS.PLIMPLEBOTTOM, but directs her first words to SAM.)

VICTORIA
I'd love to.

VICTORIA
(to class, with the air of having practiced her speech)
My name is Victoria Vanderbilt. Actually, it's Victoria Vanessa Valeria Viola Vanderbilt, but most people just call me Victoria. I let my friends call me Vicki. I'm from Japan most recently but I've also lived in Boston and New York and for just a little while in southern Italy. It's my mom's job, she has to travel a lot. I'm living with my dad now though. Here. It's a cute little town though, I like it a lot, I'm starting to ramble now so I'll stop...

(FLUFFY uses her cellphone to take a picture of VICTORIA with a bright, blinding flash)

VICTORIA
Oh!

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(taking phone)

Fluffy! End of the day.

(to VICTORIA)

I'm sorry, dear, please continue.

VICTORIA

It's all right. I am an actress, I can handle this. I was just startled.

(to MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM)

Where do you want me to sit?

MUFFY

(to FLUFFY and TUFFY)

Check out her clothes.

TUFFY

She looks like a model.

FLUFFY

Or a skank.

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Ummm, just take this empty seat right here, and before you do please spit out your gum. As you can see,

(gestures to NO GUM sign)

chewing gum is against the rules here at Slumberburg.

VICTORIA

(confidentially, pulling the teacher aside)

Ms. Plimplebottom, is there any way I could possibly be allowed to chew? My Daddy owns the big gum plant here, you know.

WALLY

(aside, to SAM)

The gum plant?

VICTORIA

He mails me so much bubble gum, I've been chewing it ever since I had teeth. It's kind of a comfort thing.

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Well...

VICTORIA

Please, Ms. Plimplebottom? It would mean a lot to me...

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Well all right then. Just don't stick it under your desk or on the carpet.

VICTORIA

Wouldn't dream of it.

(gives MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM a big hug)

Thanks so much Ms. Plimplebottom!

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Well. You're welcome. Now, you can take this empty desk over here next to Herbert, and here are your textbooks - let's see, math, history, English, science - I hope someone told you to bring your lunch -

VICTORIA

I have it here.

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Very good. You should be all set.

(The lunch bell rings. Students take out their lunches. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM retreats to her desk, grades the math homework with superhuman speed, takes out a hidden romance novel, disguises it, and reads.)

SAM

(to WALLY)

How's your radio coming along?

WALLY

Good. It's been a pretty good project so far, lots of wires to strip out, circuits, batteries. How's your poem coming along?

SAM

Eh. It's not the greatest. I've written so many Odes to the Frog, this one keeps coming out like the others. I'm just getting started though.

WALLY

You could try writing down your dreams I suppose. See where that takes you. I had the weirdest dream last night. Someone was wrapping my face up in plastic wrap. You know, like a sandwich. Like half a sandwich left over after you

eat the first half, and want to save the rest for later. My face was being plastic wrapped to some kind of plate. The plastic was squishing my nose up. It was totally gross. Have you had any weird dreams lately?

SAM

No.

WALLY

Well, better luck next time.

FLUFFY

What did you bring for lunch, Muffy?

MUFFY

Lettuce salad. How about you?

FLUFFY

Garden salad. How about you, Tuffy?

TUFFY

Pasta salad.

MUFFY,

Eeww, your pasta is all spiral.

TUFFY

It's rigatoni. It's supposed to be spiral.

FLUFFY

It's weird.

TUFFY

Sorry. It tastes pretty good.

MUFFY

It jiggles like a worm.

FLUFFY

Eeww. Muffy, stop talking about worms.

(HERBERT approaches VICTORIA.)

HERBERT

Hi. I'm Herbert.

VICTORIA

Victoria.

HERBERT

Pleased to meet you. I'm very excited for Ms. Plimplebottom's lecture this afternoon. She will be continuing our discussion of the vital importance of wetlands in today's modern ecology.

VICTORIA

Oh, I know all about wetlands! My uncle is a wetlands biologist. He's probably referenced in the textbook. So what's your favorite kind of wetland? Coastal? Inland?

HERBERT

My favorite wetland? I don't really have a favorite kind of wetland. Um, I'm going to go...review my notes. Nice to have met you.

LORRIE

(to VICTORIA, after crossing to her through non-normal movement)

I'm Lorrie.

VICTORIA

Victoria. Glad to meet you.

LORRIE

This is the Frog.

(Gestures to FROG.)

VICTORIA

Um, hello.

(LORRIE stares at VICTORIA.)

VICTORIA

So. We're in the same class, aren't we?

(LORRIE nods vigorously, bursts out laughing.)

LORRIE

Do you have any pets?

(Still laughing hysterically, LORRIE moves away.)

MONA

(to VICTORIA)

Did you know that last year over five million sheep were exported just for being ugly? I'm Mona. You didn't want to come to Slumberburg, did you? I mean they did drag you here, right?

VICTORIA

Basically, yeah.

MONA

'Cause I'm warning you, middle school is rough. We're not the "Fighting" Frogs for nothing; Slumberburg is a war zone. Of course, I don't know what your last middle school was like...

VICTORIA

I've never been to a normal, public middle school before. They were all international or private.

MONA

Hmmm. Well you should know that Ms. Plimplebottom's husband is dying.

VICTORIA

Really!

MONA

Yep. They say it's cancer or something but really, small-town narrowmindedness. Sheep, like them --

(gestures towards the CHEERLEADERS)

-- could do anybody in. And watch out for Mr. Thompkins, the PE teacher. He makes the girls do jumping jacks and stares at their breasts.

VICTORIA

That's gross!

MONA

Uh-huh. You're telling me. See you around.

(The CHEERLEADERS converge on VICTORIA.)

VICTORIA

Hi, I'm Victoria.

FLUFFY

Fluffy.

MUFFY

Muffy.

TUFFY

Tuffy. That's Jacques.

(JACQUES hears his name and grunts from across the room.)

VICTORIA

Is he your boyfriend?

(FLUFFY, MUFFY, and TUFFY giggle hysterically.)

FLUFFY, MUFFY, and TUFFY

Uh-huh.

VICTORIA

Oh. That's...nice.

FLUFFY

We're cheerleaders.

VICTORIA

I can see that. Are those your school colors? Green and white?

MUFFY

Yeah. It's like the colors of the Frog.

VICTORIA

The Frog?

TUFFY

The Fighting Frog. Our mascot. Like on the posters?

VICTORIA

Oh. What a weird mascot.

(CHEERLEADERS exchange another glance.)

VICTORIA

But, then, I've never actually had a school mascot! My other schools didn't have them.

MUFFY
No mascot?

TUFFY
Ever?

FLUFFY
That's weird. (pause). I love your ring.

VICTORIA
Thanks.

TUFFY
Where did you get it?

VICTORIA
Tiffany.

MUFFY
Your friend?

(VICTORIA laughs. The CHEERLEADERS stare at her and move on.)

SAM
(to WALLY)
Come on. Let's go.

(SAM goes to introduce himself to VICTORIA, pulling a reluctant WALLY along with him.)

SAM
(to VICTORIA)
Grape?

(VICTORIA takes one.)

VICTORIA
Thanks.

SAM
I'm Sam. You're from Japan? That's really --

WALLY
Your dad owns the gum plant, doesn't he? My stepdad works there. I hate the smell of gum. It's too sweet. And it's pink. I hate pink.

SAM

This is Wally, my best friend. Of all the places you've lived, which did you like the best?

WALLY

Do you build rockets?

VICTORIA

Uh, no, I never --

WALLY

Well, you're going to. We have a big rocket launch project coming up next month. You'll love it. Rockets are lots of fun. I'm already thinking about my design. I don't know whether to use three fins, or four. Whichever, though, I'm going to win.

SAM

Wally is really into rockets, so into rockets that she sometimes gets carried away --

WALLY

I can help you with your design, if you want. But you'd better get started soon.

VICTORIA

Guess I'll get on that.

(WALLY stomps away. SAM remains, and moves to introduce a new subject.)

WALLY

Hey, Sam, I have a question for you.

(SAM sighs. The bell rings, ending lunch.)

END OF SCENE

Scene 2

Later that day, SAM and WALLY are walking home from school.

SAM

So what do you think of the new girl?

WALLY

I haven't. We just met her today.

SAM

She seems really interesting. She's different from everyone else I know around here. The kind of interesting person I never expected to meet, at least before we move up to high school.

WALLY

What do you think will be so great about moving to high school?

SAM

It's so much bigger. We'll meet lots of new people that we've never been to school with before. And some of them are bound to be different, in an interesting kind of way. Like Victoria seems to be. And --

WALLY

Sam.

SAM

What?

WALLY

I am not talking to you about high school. Or Victoria. Any more today. Okay?

SAM

Okay. So. Uh. How's your family?

WALLY

Oh they're fine. My stepdad had another one of his brilliant ideas this weekend. Let's conserve energy, he decides, by funneling the leftover heat from the dryer fan in the basement, up to the floor level, and using it to heat the house, instead of the central system we have,

engineered to do this. So now our whole house is as loud as a dryer and as full of steam. A perfect combination.

SAM

That sucks.

WALLY

So I complain about it at dinner last night. Which he was five minutes late to, as usual, just so we would notice and welcome his grand entrance. And he goes, it's good for the environment and our wallets. Both should make you happy, little girl. And I go, pig! We wouldn't need to save money if you'd get a decent job! Both of us are standing yelling across the table by now. He says, I'm perfectly satisfied with my work, Wally. If you have a problem with it, that's your problem, not mine. I spat in his food, and got his face a little, too. You know how well I spit. They sent me to my room. But it was worth it. I gave myself three points, 'cause he was really mad, had to get a new plate of food, and wash his face. So the score is now 77-me, 89-Daddy Dan. I'm catching up. That 50-point lead he got for marrying my mom is disappearing fast.

SAM

Have you ever thought maybe this competition concept is counter-productive? My mom says --

WALLY

What makes you think you have any right to tell me what to do about this? Any right at all? You just go on talking about stuff you know all about like Victoria and high school and stepfathers.

SAM

Wally. I'm just trying to --

WALLY

No. You listen to me. You, Sam, are a boy, and boys like you spout off all the time about stuff they know nothing at all about. And often we listen and I listen too. But not about this--Morlock my stepfather. When my father died it was like a huge hole opened in the middle of my home, a vortex to the netherworld, and sucked out everything that was good. We couldn't have family dinners anymore without being sad. There's no way to arrange three chairs to make it look like there's not an empty place.

After Dad died all I kept thinking about, and dreaming about, was magic wands. Magic wands like in the fairy tales he used to read and tell my brother and me before we went to sleep, every night when we were little, and then later just on special occasions, once or twice a month. I wanted a fairy godmother to wave one and bring him back, to make everything okay again. And then later I wanted to be the fairy godmother and have one, be officially in charge of things like this, because maybe I actually have one, and she's just not doing a very good job. And you know I've always wanted to take over the world.

SAM

Yep. Yeah. Remember your tree crusade, back when we were ten? The borough wanted to chop down the old oak tree just so they could put in a new power line. You rounded up all the kids to march in protest.

WALLY

For fourteen days. I remember. The Borough of Slumberburg didn't stand a chance.

SAM

You haven't changed one bit.

WALLY

I have changed though Sam. I am the farthest thing from a little girl, by now.

SAM

I don't know what to say.

WALLY

Promise me right now that everything about us and our lives will stay exactly like this always. That I won't grow up anymore, that you won't grow up anymore. That high school will be exactly like middle school, with the Frog always there. That everything between us will stay exactly the same as it has always been, you won't leave for any one or any reason. That no one else we know will ever die --

SAM

Wally, that's ridiculous, I have no power over --

WALLY

Promise! That you'll never leave me!

SAM

Wally, I'm not your father!

WALLY

I know!

(WALLY offers her hand to initiate their secret handshake.)

SAM

I promise.

(SAM and WALLY execute secret handshake as following voiceover text is heard.)

VOICEOVER WALLY

We should have a secret handshake, Sam.

VOICEOVER SAM

Okay.

VOICEOVER WALLY

Great. Let's make one up. Hook your thumb like this.

VOICEOVER SAM

Like this?

VOICEOVER WALLY

No, the other direction. Now punch - slap - flip - backhand - reverse hook - okay. Got it?

VOICEOVER SAM

It's good. Let's practice.

VOICEOVER WALLY

Awesome. Now remember, it's our secret, only us!

VOICEOVER SAM

Duh. That's why they call it a secret handshake.

VOICEOVER WALLY

Right.

SAM

Come on. Let's go home.

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

The classroom, a week later, before school. The CHEERLEADERS are gossiping with each other as before. VICTORIA is by herself, perhaps filing her nails, chewing gum as before. MS. P eats an iced danish.

SAM

(to WALLY)

I think we start working on the rocket launch project today.

WALLY

(to SAM)

I know! Knives and explosives. What could be better?

(The bell rings to begin the day.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(laughs an evil laugh, closes notebook, rises, clears throat)

I have a special announcement to make: We will not be doing the traditional eighth grade rocket launch project this year.

WALLY

(Leaping from her seat)

What?

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(sweetly ignoring WALLY)

Instead, we will be invoking our own, new tradition: an end-of-the-year class play. The play that I have selected is Cinderella and the Glass Slipper. Any questions?

(The outburst is more or less simultaneous, but everyone can be at least partially understood.)

WALLY

You can't cancel the rocket launch! It's been Slumberburg tradition for a decade!

MONA

That story is sexist! Classist, anti-democratic, politically incorrect, not to mention stupid.

LORRIE
We can't act. Are you kidding?

FLUFFY
I want to be Cinderella!

MUFFY
No, me!

TUFFY
Me! Me!

FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY
Me!

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM
(cutting through the noise)
Quiet!

(The class silences in shock. MS.
PLIMPLEBOTTOM smiles.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM
Good! Due to the inherent safety hazards associated with the rocket project, and the presence of, ahem, exceptional talent in our class this spring, I feel that a theatrical production will be a far more appropriate way to end our time together.

(Crosses to VICTORIA's desk; speaks in a normal, but not overly quiet voice)
Victoria dear, I would very much like you to be my assistant director. I don't know much about theater, so you'll have a lot of, ah, creative input. But I do want you to audition too.

(VICTORIA opens her mouth. HERBERT raises his hand urgently.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM
Yes Herbert, I do indeed have a special job for you as well. You will be our stage manager. Yes. Auditions tomorrow! Good luck everyone. On to language arts...

(WALLY glares at VICTORIA and pretends to choke, loudly. LORRIE and MONA get her drift and join in, followed by FLUFFY, MUFFY, TUFFY

and JACQUES. The choking increases to a furious pitch; the students fall to the floor and writhe around VICTORIA's chair. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM deliberately fails to notice, and moves into teaching the next lesson. VICTORIA looks uncomfortable, then terrified as she stands and shrinks away from flailing limbs.)

END OF SCENE

Scene 4

(The end of the same school day. The final bell rings. The students, except VICTORIA, SAM and WALLY, and MS. P collect their things and exit. MS. P eats a candy bar on the way out. VICTORIA hesitantly approaches SAM.)

VICTORIA

Uh, Sam, would you be my assistant director for this play?

(SAM hesitates, off guard, and glances at WALLY, who is observing this conversation intently.)

VICTORIA

Please, Sam. Ms. Plimplebottom changed the project so she doesn't have to teach for the rest of the year. She's going to make me do everything. And now the whole class hates me!

SAM

But, Victoria. I don't know anything about directing. I've never even been in a play before.

VICTORIA

Doesn't matter. I've never directed before, either. People here - know you better than they know me. They'll listen to you. Please. This could be a disaster if you don't help-- for the whole class.

SAM

Well...okay.

VICTORIA

(hugs him)

Thanks so much Sam! This is going to be a good play, in spite of everything. First, I have to think. Tomorrow, we should conference. Where should we meet?

SAM

Uh, how about, the boiler room?

VICTORIA

The boiler room?

SAM

Yeah, it's in the basement. Of the school. You go down the outside steps next to the gym, turn right, and then look for the third basement window on the left. Wally busted open the lock last year, and no one's found out yet. There's a table right below you can climb down on. I'll meet you there tomorrow, before school.

VICTORIA

Well, okay. See you tomorrow.

SAM

Bye.

(VICTORIA exits. Everyone else is gone by now. WALLY glares, locking eyes with SAM. She starts to leave the room, then stops, daring him. SAM makes a move to head out. WALLY plows past him through the door.)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 5

The next day before school. The boiler room. Besides the boiler, there are an old table and a bunch of assorted chairs in various stages of disrepair. SAM paces, waiting nervously for VICTORIA. After a moment VICTORIA enters through the window, chomping her gum with purpose.

VICTORIA

Hey Sam.

SAM

Uh, hi Victoria.

VICTORIA

I'm really glad you're helping me with this.

SAM

Me too.

VICTORIA

I feel terrible that the rocket launch got cancelled, and it's all my fault.

SAM

It's not all your fault. Everybody knows how much Ms. P hates that unit. She's, uh, not exactly the crafty type.

VICTORIA

The most awful thing is, I don't even like to act that much.

SAM

You don't? But the first day, you said --

VICTORIA

I haven't acted or modelled in anything since I was a little kid. I just said that on the first day because I wanted to impress everybody. Now I know it was a bad idea. (pause) So, Cinderella. The challenge is that it's practically the most common story that there is, so I'm thinking, we have to do something interpretational with the script, because otherwise it will be really boring.

SAM

What do you have in mind?

VICTORIA

When I was in Japan, I saw a kind of Japanese classical theater called Noh drama, where all of the actors wore masks, and told the story a lot through gestures. I think we should do a Noh Cinderella. We can conduct research, to make it authentic. No one around here will have seen anything like it. And everyone can make his or her own mask. That way, the people who want to make something out of cardboard can do it.

SAM

That is one attraction of the rocket launch, but -

VICTORIA

There will still be props, and costumes, so we will all get to dress up. And plus, we can have ghosts.

SAM

Ghosts?

VICTORIA

Ghosts are huge in Noh. Cinderella's dead parents can come back as ghosts and haunt everybody after they vanish.

SAM

Hmmm. These all sound like a great ideas, but I'm not sure how they will go over with the other kids.

VICTORIA

Well, we can try it anyway, and see how it goes.

SAM

We can always try.

(pause)

SAM

I've been wondering. How did you end up in Slumberburg, when you've lived all those exciting places?

VICTORIA

They probably were not as exciting as you think. My parents divorced when I was a baby. I stayed with my mom, but she travels a lot for her job. I never stayed anywhere for longer than two years. Every school was different. It was

hard to make friends, before I would have to leave. I'm supposed to stay with my dad now, so I can go to one high school, all the way through.

SAM

Is that what you want?

VICTORIA

I guess. I want to be a marine biologist when I grow up, and we're nowhere near the ocean. But I suppose that's true of lots of places.

SAM

Why a marine biologist?

VICTORIA

I think it must be true that dolphins and whales are smarter than people, and I'm going to find a way to prove it.

SAM

I want to be a writer.

VICTORIA

Do you write anything now?

SAM

Well, kind of. The problem is, my life is really boring.

VICTORIA

I'm sure it's not that boring.

SAM

No, it really is. Both of my parents are alive, and married. I have no siblings to fight with or look out for. Just a big golden retriever named Bob.

VICTORIA

So write about Bob.

SAM

(shaking his head)

Writers are supposed to be deeply abnormal, disturbed people. They cut off their ears and mail them to ex-lovers, shoot themselves full of drugs to escape their crazed minds, and die young, tragically, leaving the world the faintest glimpse of their talent.

VICTORIA

That doesn't sound like fun.

SAM

No, I guess not. But I feel the need to introduce some deep artistic angst into my life, or I will never write anything truly great. And where is it going to come from, around here?

VICTORIA

Not from Ms. Plimplebottom, that's for sure. Are all the teachers in this school as bad as she is?

SAM

No, she is unusual. They say her husband is dying of cancer.

VICTORIA

That's awful.

SAM

In any case at this point I think she just wants to retire.

(A bell sounds.)

VICTORIA

Only four minutes til class! Walk you up there.

(VICTORIA grabs SAM's hand and pulls him towards the door. SAM is surprised to be holding VICTORIA's hand, and blushes.)

SAM

Uh, okay, sure.

END OF SCENE

Scene 6

The stage of the school auditorium. First rehearsal for Cinderella and the Glass Slipper. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM distributes scripts to the assembled company, which includes all students and the FROG.

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

...Wally, Mother and Fairy Godmother; Victoria, Director...oh, I mean Assistant Director, of course, and Cinderella. Everyone has their scripts? Oh, good. I'm going to turn this first rehearsal over to our assistant director Victoria while I go grade papers in the back. Be good dears; listen to Victoria.

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM laughs maniacally, and moves away from the students to a separate area of the auditorium, where she half-watches the ensuing scene while popping candy and reading tabloid magazines.)

FLUFFY

Why do you get to be Cinderella?

SAM

Fluffy, Ms. Plimplebottom did the casting. Victoria is just doing what Ms. Plimplebottom told her to.

FLUFFY

Whatever.

MUFFY and TUFFY

Whatever.

WALLY

Why are we doing "Cinderella" anyway?

MONA

Yeah!

SAM

And as we all know, Ms. Plimplebottom also picked the play.

VICTORIA

Why don't I explain my concept for this play. It is not going to be as stupid as you think. We're going to do it like Noh drama.

WALLY

What drama?

VICTORIA

Noh? It's from Japan, a kind of ritualized gesture theater with masks.

WALLY

Um, no!

SAM

Wally...

HERBERT

How about we do "yes" theater instead!

MONA

This play is fascist.

LORRIE

Double-fascist.

MONA

Yeah.

VICTORIA

Let's take a look at the first page of the script.

WALLY

Are the masks going to be pink?

MUFFY

Oooh, I want my mask to be pink!

FLUFFY

My mask gets to be pink!

TUFFY

Mine too!

FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY

Pink! Pink! Pink!

(The CHEERLEADERS continue to chant, but fade from focus after the initial burst)

LORRIE

We're frogs. Frogs are green.

VICTORIA

Noh masks are all white.

MONA

White? Why are the masks white? Are you trying to say something?

(SAM whispers in VICTORIA's ear.)

VICTORIA

Okay. No masks.

WALLY

Noh masks!

WALLY, LORRIE and MONA

Noh masks! Noh masks! Noh masks!

LORRIE

Gestures!

(LORRIE breaks into her mime routine with the FROG, and MONA joins.)

MUFFY

(pulling at the corners of her eyes in an extremely offensive Asian imitation)

Look! I'm from Japan!

(FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY giggle hysterically)

WALLY

Bring back the rockets!

MONA and LORRIE

Bring back the rockets!

FLUFFY, MUFFY, TUFFY

Rockets! Rockets! Rockets!

HERBERT

Rockets! Rockets!

VICTORIA

Guys!

(SAM whispers in VICTORIA's ear, suggesting
that she change tactics.)

VICTORIA

Okay. Let's talk about character.

MONA

My character thinks this is bullshit.

LORRIE

What if Cinderella burns down her house with fire and
knives and murders her stepfamily with an ax?

WALLY

Look, I'm in character. Poof! I just made your character
disappear!

VICTORIA

I am trying to direct here!

WALLY

You're not doing a very good job.

VICTORIA

Do you want to direct this play?

WALLY

No. I want to build rockets. I could build a rocket that
would kick your play to Mars.

SAM

Wally --

WALLY

You think you can just move in here and take charge of
everything because you're rich and your father runs the
bubble gum plant.

VICTORIA

It's not my fault he owns the sole means of economic
production in this entire county. Anyway he gives your
father a job.

WALLY

That's STEPFATHER and don't you forget it!

VICTORIA

Look. Okay. I know that doing a play is not everyone's favorite idea and that "Cinderella" is not everyone's favorite play. But we still have to do it. And it's the end-of-eighth-grade class project. This is the last time before high school that you all--that we all--get to do something big and cool together. Now you can fool around and ignore me and look stupid on stage opening night, or you can listen to me now and look as good as possible. (pause, seeking consensus) Who can tell me what a motivation is? To act?

(WALLY leans over and whispers to FLUFFY)

FLUFFY

My motivation is Jacques!

(FLUFFY rises to begin the chase. MUFFY and then TUFFY jump up to join the charge.)

FLUFFY

Jacques!

FLUFFY, MUFFY, and TUFFY

(repeatedly, as they chase JACQUES around the stage)

Jacques! Jacques! Jacques!

VICTORIA

Animals!

LORRIE

I'm a fire demon!

MONA

Burn!

LORRIE

Once upon a time -

MONA

In a really crappy school -

LORRIE

They did a really crappy play that no one wanted to do -

MONA

And then everything burned!

LORRIE and MONA

Burned! Burned!

HERBERT

Burned!

(FLUFFY, MUFFY and TUFFY stop chasing JACQUES and pick VICTORIA up. LORRIE, MONA and HERBERT assist. VICTORIA screams. WALLY applauds. The FROG hops wildly.)

SAM

What are you doing?

FLUFFY

We're carrying her to the ball!

MONA

Off we go!

(STUDENTS carry VICTORIA around the stage, then spin her in circles. FLUFFY snaps VICTORIA's bra. VICTORIA screams again, louder. Finally, the students drop her to the floor. VICTORIA curls up into fetal position. WALLY hi-fives all around.)

VICTORIA

Vicious tomboy from hell.

WALLY

Ha. At least I have friends.

VICTORIA

You don't. Just people who take your orders.

WALLY

That's all you're trying to do right now, order people around a stage. You can't even do that.

VICTORIA

I am trying to create something beautiful. You are trying to destroy it.

WALLY

I'm trying to destroy you.

VICTORIA

I hate this town! You all make me want to vomit.

(to the CHEERLEADERS)

Airheads! One of these days you are all going to flunk out of school and end up working at Wal-Mart.

(to JACQUES)

Your "boyfriend" is so stupid he doesn't even talk.

(to everyone)

And this school! And the school mascot, the Fighting Frog. Talk about stupid mascots!

(kicks the FROG)

Frogs are ugly and disgusting and they can't fight. The Frog is a worthless joke. Like all of you. All of this. Stupid little town that's not even on the map.

WALLY

I think it's time for a secret meeting in the boiler room. I'll see everyone there.

(WALLY continues to stare down VICTORIA as the other students slowly file out.)

WALLY

Come on Sam.

(WALLY grabs SAM's arm and drags him offstage behind the other students. SAM looks back at VICTORIA but allows himself to be dragged. When everyone has gone VICTORIA sits on the floor of the stage once more, hugging her knees to her chest.)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 7

THE BOILER ROOM.

The CHEERLEADERS are crafting a cheer. LORRIE, MONA and JACQUES paint a banner reading "S.S.A.V.V." and then hang it. HERBERT and WALLY supervise. SAM stands by himself, looking on with disapproval. Everyone is wearing an olive green army helmet. WALLY is also in combat boots. Once the banner is hung, WALLY surveys her camp, then turns to make an announcement.

WALLY

Attention! The meeting will now convene.

(WALLY moves to the head of the table.
Everyone else gathers around.)

WALLY

We are gathered here today, against all odds, to form S.S.A.V.V., the Secret Society against Victoria Vanderbilt. Sometimes, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a people to stand up for what they believe in and to separate themselves from an evil, self-serving tyrant like Victoria Vanderbilt. A people can only be trampled upon and oppressed for so long before they decide to fight back. We have reached this point. Victoria Vanderbilt is taking over our school. The annual, traditional rocket launch project was cancelled this year because of her. Now we are doing a stupid play in her stupid Noh style and we are all going to look retarded in front of hundreds of people. And, worst of all, she has mocked the Frog! We are gathered here today to say that we will not allow this travesty to continue. We will fight back. All of us are here today because we have had enough!

(The STUDENTS cheer, except SAM.)

WALLY

Now, what do we want to do to Victoria?

LORRIE

Crucify her!

MONA

String her up!

HERBERT

Gouge out her eyes and rip her limb from limb!

WALLY

(feigning shock)

Well, I wasn't thinking quite that bloody. But my plan will expose her as the nasty, manipulative brat that she is. It'll cut her right down to size. Come close and listen.

(WALLY describes her plot to the other students with large gestures, but too quietly for the audience to hear. She finishes her explanation and is hailed with a burst of wild applause. FLUFFY, MUFFY, and TUFFY rise and FLUFFY whispers in WALLY'S ear. WALLY nods regally. The CHEERLEADERS do a cheer for S.S.A.V.V. and continue to jump until everyone has exited except SAM and WALLY, then they turn to chase after JACQUES. WALLY removes her helmet.)

WALLY

(to SAM)

What do you think?

SAM

(removing his helmet)

I don't even know what to say.

WALLY

What do you mean?

SAM

I mean, Wally, this is absurd. Did you really have to paraphrase the Declaration of Independence?

WALLY

Oh good, you got my reference!

SAM

Wally, this is not about displaying your intellectual prowess. So I'm impressed, blown away by the ever-burning blazes of your genius mind. I'm glad you got such a power trip out of this meeting. But your plan is really mean. You are talking about destroying another, basically innocent human being.

WALLY

'Basically innocent?' I --

SAM

Yes, basically innocent. What did she ever actually do to you? Name one thing.

(pause)

See?

WALLY

I don't see anything except that you seem to have forgotten who is your best friend here.

SAM

Wally, you're still my best friend. But I do not agree with this, at all. It may be the first time in your entire life, but this time, you are wrong. Admit it. Victoria is not that bad. I like her. You would like her too if you gave her half a chance.

WALLY

I don't know what has gotten into you, Sam. Best friends support each other, no matter what.

SAM

No, Wally. It shouldn't be like that. I mean, it's not like that! It's not fair, to make me choose sides, between the two of you.

WALLY

Sam, I need you to be my second-in-command! Like always. Like with the tree, remember? We always win, don't worry! It will be just like when we were younger.

VOICEOVER WALLY

I think it landed outside of the line.

VOICEOVER SAM

No, try from this side. From this side, it's right on top.

VOICEOVER WALLY

Hmmm.

VOICEOVER SAM

See, if anything, it's on the inside.

VOICEOVER WALLY

I don't know. I don't know what to do, in this case.

VOICEOVER SAM

Is there a rule for the line?

VOICEOVER WALLY

I don't remember. I don't remember reading one. It's never come up before.

VOICEOVER SAM

I think we made the lines too thick.

VOICEOVER WALLY

It was a bad piece of chalk. My brother keeps eating all the good pieces.

VOICEOVER SAM

That's gross.

VOICEOVER WALLY

It's a really bad habit.

VOICEOVER SAM

Your brother is weird.

VOICEOVER WALLY

I know.

VOICEOVER SAM

So what do we do?

VOICEOVER WALLY

Maybe, do it over?

VOICEOVER SAM

That's a plan.

VOICEOVER WALLY

Okay.

WALLY

Sam. I can't do this without you.

SAM

Well I think if you are, you're going to have to.

WALLY

(extending her hand as if to initiate their
secret handshake)

You PROMISED!

(SAM regards WALLY for a long moment, then
stomps out.)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 8

The stage of the school auditorium, shortly before Cinderella is to begin. The curtain is down.

Each student plays one or more characters in the story of Cinderella, with appropriate costume pieces, and a base character who is a narrator and stagehand.

The Cast:

VICTORIA: CINDERELLA

SAM: CINDERELLA'S FATHER (THE DUKE),
KING

WALLY: CINDERELLA'S MOTHER, FAIRY
GODMOTHER

FLUFFY: WICKED STEPMOTHER

MUFFY,
TUFFY, MONA: WICKED STEPSISTERS

JACQUES: PRINCE

HERBERT: HERALD

LORRIE, FIGHTING FROG: FROGS, PALACE GUESTS

LORRIE, MONA and FROG are peeking under the curtain and through the crack in the middle to see how big the audience is. LORRIE beckons to another student in the wing. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM enters and hisses at them to get to their places, and where is the MAGIC WAND? HERBERT enters, concerned about a slightly damaged prop. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM shoos him away. WALLY goes through her checklist, making sure the S.S.A.V.V. plan is set to go. It is. SAM observes her, disturbed, and pulls WALLY aside.

SAM

I'm only going to ask this one last time. Wally, are you sure you need to go through with this?

(pause)

We did drop the Noh concept. The show is actually going to be good.

WALLY

I'm sure.

(She brushes past him.)

SAM

Wally --

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM crosses the stage once more, still looking for the MAGIC WAND. HERBERT comes at her again about the prop and she shoves him into the wing. Finally, she finds the WAND. MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM steps in front of the curtain to address the audience.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to this year's end-of-eighth grade class project. I would like to thank all of the students at this time for their hard work, especially Victoria, our assistant director, and Sam, our assistant assistant director. We now present Cinderella and the Glass Slipper.

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM waves the magic wand, emits a self-conscious laugh that reveals a hint of madness, and exits. As she waves the wand, the curtain rises on the Prologue. LORRIE, HERBERT, and JACQUES are the first narrators. As they relate the story, the actors playing the characters mentioned pantomime the actions described.)

LORRIE

Long long ago in a Kingdom

HERBERT

(Not necessarily)

LORRIE

Far from here
Lived a Duke and his young daughter,

HERBERT

Whose mother had died the day that she was born.

(WALLY-MOTHER chokes to death, sprawling dramatically on the stage floor.)

LORRIE

And they loved each other very much.

HERBERT

One day the Duke remarried, and then his daughter had...

(FLUFFY enters as STEPMOTHER.)

LORRIE

...a stepmother.

HERBERT

The stepmother did not like her. She preferred her own daughters, but not too obviously until...

LORRIE

The Duke suddenly died.

(SAM-DUKE dies an equally if not more dramatic death.)

LORRIE

The wicked stepmother turned the Duke's daughter into a servant.

(On the word "turned" FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER waves the MAGIC WAND, which has appeared suddenly in her possession and disappears immediately afterwards. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA makes some kind of onstage costume change.)

HERBERT

They called her --

FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER and MUFFY-TUFFY-STEPSISTERS

(mockingly)

Cinderella!

(Everyone onstage looks at JACQUES expectantly.)

JACQUES

'cause, uhhhhh, ...uuuuuhhhhhh...uuuuuuuuuuuhhhhhh...

LORRIE

It was her job to sweep the cinders.

JACQUES

(with an enormous 'Right! And aren't I cool' gesture, directed towards the fictitious audience)

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!

(JACQUES exits. Everyone else stares at and after him for a moment. Then the scene abruptly changes. Everyone exits except VICTORIA-CINDERELLA and the STEPFAMILY (FLUFFY, MUFFY, TUFFY AND MONA). LORRIE and FROG re-enter as FROGS; SAM and WALLY exit, discard costume pieces and hastily reenter as narrators.)

SAM

Her only constant companions were two small frogs who lived with her in the kitchen.

WALLY

Time passed.

(SAM and WALLY exit.)

TUFFY-STEPSISTER

Scrub harder, Cinderella!

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

(Striking a dramatic pose, or even multiple dramatic poses)

Oh! Woe is me! I do nothing all day but wash and scrub, scrub and wash!

(Meanwhile, back at the palace...SAM-KING and JACQUES-PRINCE enter along with WALLY as narrator.)

WALLY

The King of the land had a son the Prince who happened to be just about Cinderella's age. One day the time came for father and son to have a crucial conversation.

SAM-KING

Son, it's time you were married.

(JACQUES-PRINCE grunts.)

SAM-KING

There's going to be a huge royal ball tomorrow night. Every maiden in the country has been invited. I want you to chose one to be your wife.

(JACQUES-PRINCE grunts.)

SAM-KING

Is that all right with you, son?

(JACQUES-PRINCE grunts, indicating "whatever," and walks off. SAM makes a disgusted "grunt" of his own to the audience. He snaps his fingers and HERBERT appears as the ROYAL HERALD.)

HERBERT-HERALD

Yes, your majesty?

SAM-KING

Send the proclamation!

(HERBERT-HERALD crosses to the STEPFAMILY and begins to read the proclamation.)

HERBERT-HERALD

His royal highness the Prince is giving a ball and cordially invites all eligible maidens in the country --

FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER

Girls, the Prince is giving a ball!

(HERBERT-HERALD is quickly drowned out by shrieks of excitement from MUFFY- and TUFFY-STEPSISTERS, gives up, and leaves. MONA-STEPSISTER remains still with her arms crossed.)

TUFFY-STEPSISTER

Cinderella, you'll need to wash my stockings!

MUFFY-STEPSISTER

And you must sew more ribbons on my ball gown!

(MONA-STEPSISTER shrugs. STEPSISTERS file out.
VICTORIA-CINDERELLA kneels in a begging
posture.)

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

Dearest stepmother, may I go to the ball, too?

FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER

Well, if you finish all your chores and you are very very
good tomorrow, then you can go to the ball too.

(FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER exits. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA
rises expectantly. The FROGS and VICTORIA
perform her chores in fast motion, then
collapse in exhaustion.)

HERBERT

(enters as narrator)

The next evening.

(The STEPSISTERS and FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER reenter,
dressed in ball attire, and stride across the
stage past VICTORIA-CINDERELLA.)

FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER

(over her shoulder to VICTORIA-CINDERELLA)

Be good dear and take care of the house!

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

But you said I could go to the ball too!

FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER

Of course you could, dear, but you don't have a dress!

(FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER and MUFFY- and TUFFY-
STEPSISTERS laugh fiendishly and exit. MONA
mopes along out with them and then reenters as
a narrator.)

MONA

Cinderella was left behind alone while her "family" went to the ball without her. Only the frogs remained.

(MONA exits.)

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

(to FROGS)

Alas, my only true friends! However shall I get to the ball now?

(FROGS pantomime wild suggestions, all of which VICTORIA-CINDERELLA rejects. WALLY enters as FAIRY GODMOTHER, carrying the MAGIC WAND. FAIRY GODMOTHER costume is an old-fashioned, full-length gown, very lacy, very pink.)

WALLY-GODMOTHER

Have no fear, my dear, the Fairy Godmother is here.

(WALLY-GODMOTHER waves the WAND and the "FROGS" help VICTORIA-CINDERELLA remove her rag outfit to reveal a high fashion ball dress. The GLASS SLIPPERS are handed to VICTORIA-CINDERELLA and she puts them on. WALLY-GODMOTHER waves the WAND over the FROGS and they transform, becoming "horses" which rush offstage and back on again with a flashy-looking scooter. LORRIE- and FROG-HORSES take the handles, VICTORIA-CINDERELLA poses precariously and off they go to the ball...by the time VICTORIA-CINDERELLA enters the ballroom from the opposite side of the stage everyone else is already there and WALLY-GODMOTHER has apparated. The JACQUES-PRINCE is dancing with both MUFFY- or TUFFY- STEPSISTER. LORRIE has become a male courtier and dances with MONA. The FROG, still of indeterminate gender, serves bonbons. HERBERT-HERALD stands at attention. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA enters. JACQUES-PRINCE notices her immediately, grunts approvingly, abandons the STEPSISTERS, crosses to VICTORIA-CINDERELLA and begins dancing with her. JACQUES-PRINCE dances VICTORIA-CINDERELLA outside the ballroom to place designated as a garden by WALLY, holding a single rose. On WALLY's other arm is a large alarm watch marking the time left before midnight.)

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

So. Here we are. Alone, in a beautiful garden, drowning in moonlight.

(JACQUES-PRINCE grunts.)

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

Romantic, isn't it?

(JACQUES-PRINCE grunts.)

VICTORIA-CINDERELLA

What a lovely ball this has been!

(JACQUES-PRINCE grunts. The ALARM WATCH attached to WALLY's upraised arm goes off, signaling midnight. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA gasps and runs off, losing a slipper in the process. JACQUES-PRINCE picks it up, tosses it into the air, catches it, and grunts as the BALL CROWD disperses. SAM-KING and HERBERT-HERALD rush over to JACQUES-PRINCE. HERBERT places the slipper on a velvet cushion, and SAM-KING signals, 'after her!' JACQUES-PRINCE, HERBERT-HERALD and SAM-KING exit. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA reappears onstage and runs into FLUFFY-STEPMOTHER, who pantomimes shoving her into a closet and locking it. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA mimes the existence of the walls and beats on the "door." JACQUES-PRINCE, SAM-KING, HERBERT-HERALD and the STEPSISTERS converge upon the scene, and the slipper is tried unsuccessfully on each STEPSISTER'S foot, in turn. VICTORIA-CINDERELLA breaks out of the closet and holds out her foot. Suddenly, WALLY storms onstage in FAIRY GODMOTHER attire plus army helmet and combat boots, holding the MAGIC WAND. LORRIE and the FROG carry the S.S.A.V.V. banner and follow her onstage.)

VICTORIA

Hsst! Wally, you're not back on yet!

WALLY

(regally ignoring VICTORIA)

Citizens of Slumberburg, I am compelled to interrupt tonight's performance to expose the tyrannical evildoing of our "star," Victoria Vanderbilt, who has taken over our class and deserves everything she is about to get.

(WALLY waves the MAGIC WAND grandly. Other STUDENTS rush offstage and then back on carrying buckets of rotten fruit and vegetables.)

VICTORIA

You guys, what's going on!

(Everyone except SAM and, surprisingly, JACQUES takes the rotten produce and throws or smashes it all over VICTORIA. This goes on for some time until they run out of gunk. VICTORIA stands there for a moment in shock, looks SAM in the eyes briefly, and then runs offstage. There is an awkward pause.

The curtain is abruptly dropped, and MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM runs onstage.)

MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM

(to audience)

And that's it, ladies and gentlemen, our end-of-eighth grade class project! Ah, let's give the kids a hand!

(claps nervously)

Okay then!

(MS. PLIMPLEBOTTOM rushes offstage in the direction VICTORIA took. The other students remain onstage, now hidden from the Cinderella audience.)

TUFFY

Now what?

MUFFY

You guys. I think that was kind of mean.

MONA

Um, yeah, you look like Hitler Wally.

HERBERT

Jerk.

LORRIE

Sheep.

FLUFFY

Let's go.

(JACQUES lets the unthrown trash in his hand drop to the floor, walks up to WALLY and glares at her, silently instead of with a grunt. He looks at SAM, then at the other students, then back at WALLY and exits in the opposite direction. EVERYONE ELSE follows JACQUES out except SAM and WALLY. SAM removes his army helmet and throws it across the stage.)

WALLY

What?

SAM

Wally. That was so awful, I don't know what to say.

WALLY

It was all a lie!

(WALLY throws the MAGIC WAND violently to the floor.)

SAM

You've turned into a monster.

WALLY

Magic wands have no power.

SAM

Some kind of soul-sucking zombie ghost.

WALLY

They just blur things for a while.

SAM

The beast from the forest.

WALLY

Not even as long as the story lasts.

SAM

Yeah. I'm really glad you figured that out.

WALLY

So what now, Sam. What now. I'm sorry but there's nothing to do about anything now.
You're such a boy, Sam --

SAM

(roaring over her)

What does that have to do with anything!

WALLY

You know I hate that about you! You never have to make decisions about anything, and everyone always like you. This is life! Make a choice!

SAM

I already had to, thanks to you!

WALLY

Sam, I am not some flat category! Don't you dare make me one!

SAM

Neither was Victoria!

WALLY

I know! But it's too late now, and I couldn't help it. You can only take so much change so fast or you go a little crazy. I did. Forgive me.

SAM

No. I can't. I cannot believe you did this to another human being. You're not the Wally I grew up with. You--she--would never do such a thing. Who are you Wally Jones?

WALLY

I don't know anymore. I wanted to you to tell me--you know me better than --

(SAM has turned his back to her, picked up the MAGIC WAND and makes as if to snap it in half.)

WALLY

SAM! DON'T!

(He pauses on her cry but does not look at her.)

SAM

Get out.

(WALLY stamps first one foot, then the other, in place, standing firm. Slowly, SAM turns to look at her, then at the WAND, and then out to the audience. He decides not to snap the WAND after all, but tosses it aside, turns back to WALLY and embraces her. She collapses in his arms, sobbing. SAM and WALLY remain onstage as COLLEGE SAM reappears, typing at his laptop. The rest of the scene does not change yet.)

COLLEGE SAM

We never saw Victoria again. She vanished from our lives, more completely than any fairy tale heroine. The last month of eighth grade, we kept thinking she would come back, the next day, the next week, at least for the final dance. We would get to say we were sorry. We never did. Rumors surfaced, some more believable than others. She went back to her mom. She moved to L.A. She got cast in American Idol.

I remember the way she smelled, like a fresh pack of the bubble gum she was always chewing.

I remember the way she looked, at the end, covered in - produce.

Victoria was my first love.

She left a great, gaping bubble in my heart that has never healed. To this day.

Two weeks after Cinderella, the school board voted to close down Slumberberg Middle School and combine it with a neighboring school. So ours was the very last end-of-eighth grade class project.

I don't remember much else from that year. I guess there was a dance.

(CHEERLEADERS shriek offstage. LORRIE, MONA and HERBERT shriek in response, making fun of the cheerleaders but also joining their excitement. SAM and WALLY break from their embrace, leave the stage.)

COLLEGE SAM

Graduation.

(COLLEGE SAM types these final sentences on his computer, and returns mentally to the present day, remodeled stage. His cell phone rings.)

COLLEGE SAM

(into phone)

Hi Wally.

(listens)

Yeah, I got in.

(listens)

Yeah, it's amazing. The never did fix that boiler room window. The table was still there. I made it to the auditorium. Yeah, I'm sitting right here now, with the magic wand, even the Frog. Yeah, it's incredible. I finished my essay. I think it's pretty good. Uh-huh. Do you still want me to go over your speech? Sure, I'll be there in 10 minutes. Bye.

(COLLEGE SAM packs his things up, looks around one last time, gives the wand back to the FROG. FROG winks at him again. COLLEGE SAM is still not sure whether it really winked.)

COLLEGE SAM

Bye Frog. Thanks.

(Pats FROG on the head and exits.)

END OF PLAY