

The **GREAT** Cell Phone **CATASTROPHE**

Or How I Learned to Stop Texting
and Love to Talk

BY
MICHAEL PAVESE



 **Pioneer**
DRAMA SERVICE

The GREAT Cell Phone CATASTROPHE

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For preview only

~ To my sister, Joan Lucas-Anderson ~

THE GREAT CELL PHONE CATASTROPHE

Or How I Learned to Stop Texting and Love to Talk

By MICHAEL PAVESE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

of lines

Cool Kids

STELLA.....	smart and ambitious leader	124
FRANKIE	a voice of reason	63
RAMONA.....	a skeptic with Skittles	62
GUSSIE	easily confused, often hysterical	47
NINA	a dramatic actor	52

Nerds

STEVIE	intelligent and determined, but underprepared	114
LUCY	pragmatic; has a lot of questions	72
LENNY	hungry underdog; aspiring actor	60

Fosse Dancers

GWEN.....	looking for <i>Pippin</i> auditions	3
CHITA	another dancer	1
SHIRLEY	another	1

Puritans

GOODMAN CHEEVER	<i>Crucible</i> method actor	7
GOODY PROCTOR.....	another <i>Crucible</i> actor	7

Beat Poets

SYLVIA	cool cat	13
EMILY.....	digs it	12
RUTH	won't be defined	8

Chicken

CONNIE KOWALSKI.....	another actor; looking for <i>Poultry in Motion</i> auditions	11
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Bucktown Patrol

CHIEF	officer; likes the cut of Roscoe's jib	13
ROSCOE	another officer; has no idea what Chief means	12



SETTING

Time: The present

Place: Bucktown, USA

SET DESCRIPTION

The only set is a brightly colored flat with three doors and three or more windows of various sizes and varying heights. The set should resemble the *Laugh-In* Joke Wall, the scaffolding grid for *Bye, Bye, Birdie*, an iPhone display, or some combination thereof. Blocks and/or risers can also add more dimensions or suggest different locations. It needn't be elaborate or expensive, just attractive and functional!

THE GREAT CELL PHONE CATASTROPHE

ACT ONE Scene One

- 1 AT RISE: COOL KIDS, NERDS, and EXTRA STUDENTS are scattered on stage. (See PRODUCTION NOTES.) ALL except the NERDS are consumed by their phones, silently checking messages, typing, and taking selfies, but not interacting with one another. SOUND EFFECTS: 5 PHONE NOISES, including BEEPS, BELLS, DINGS, RINGS, CHIRPS, and SWIPES. LIGHTS FLASH, followed by a LOUD BANG or CRASH and SOUND EFFECTS: ELECTRICAL CRACKLING, CRUNCHING, and BUZZING. BLACKOUT, including phones.

- ALL:** *(Except NERDS. Shouts of dismay, ad-lib.)* What the...? What's 10 going on? Hey, I was doing something! Oh no, my text! There goes my post! Etc. *(ALL except COOL KIDS EXIT in darkness. LIGHTS UP. COOL KIDS stare at their dead phones.)*

FRANKIE: Stella, what happened?

STELLA: I don't know, Frankie. The phones went dead all of a sudden.

- 15 **RAMONA:** Did you hear that horrible sound?

GUSSIE: Scary.

FRANKIE: Can't be the battery. Mine was fully charged.

NINA: Mine too.

STELLA: Let's try again. *(ALL try to activate their phones to no avail.)*

- 20 **FRANKIE:** Nothing.

GUSSIE: Zip.

NINA: Nada.

RAMONA: Snake eyes. *(OTHERS look at her.)* What? My uncle shoots craps.

STELLA: Nope. Hmm...

- 25 **FRANKIE:** So, what do we do now?

STELLA: I guess... we talk.

GUSSIE: What? You mean, like, talk?

STELLA: Yes, Gussie... talk.

FRANKIE: There has to be a better solution.

- 30 **RAMONA:** Talk... like old people do?

STELLA: Yes, Ramona, like old people.

GUSSIE: I don't want to be like old people! I can't. I won't.

FRANKIE: Don't get hysterical, Gussie.

GUSSIE: *(Hysterical.)* I'm not hysterical!

- 35 **NINA:** *(Dramatically, with a Russian accent.)* No, no, no! What cruel fate! I can't go, Misha! The lights, the lights!

- 1 **RAMONA:** Who's Misha? What lights?
- NINA:** I'm using this emotional situation for my acting. Last year my universally acclaimed performance as Elle in *Legally Blonde* lost out on the coveted KLEPTA Award to Belle from East Jiminy High.
- 5 **Not gonna happen this year. (*In an exaggerated Southern accent.*)**
What will I do, Rhett, what will I do?
- RAMONA:** Who's Rhett? Also, what's wrong with you?
- STELLA:** Okay, Nina, knock it off. Act later.
- GUSSIE:** What will we do, Stella? Without texting?
- 10 **FRANKIE:** And Instagram.
- RAMONA:** And Snapchat.
- NINA:** And WhatsApp.
- GUSSIE:** And Uber.
- FRANKIE:** And Goober.
- 15 **RAMONA:** And Goosie.
- NINA:** And Snickit.
- GUSSIE:** And Snipit.
- FRANKIE:** And Flipit.
- RAMONA:** And Flickit.
- 20 **NINA:** And—
- STELLA:** And I think... (*Gestures OUT to the AUDIENCE.*) ...they get the point. (*ALL look out at the AUDIENCE for a beat, as if just realizing they're in a play.*)
- NINA:** (*To the AUDIENCE, in her Southern accent.*) Beauregard, my
- 25 **brave soldier! Whither have you gone whence, my darling boy?**
- FRANKIE:** Okay. Cut that out.
- NINA:** Sorry, Frankie. I was caught up in the moment.
- STELLA:** Let's go see if we can find out what happened. (*ALL but NINA start to EXIT as NINA turns to the AUDIENCE, about to give a farewell speech. OTHERS glare at her. She nods her head glumly, and ALL EXIT together as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.*)
- 30

End of Scene One

ACT ONE
Scene Two

LIGHTS UP on NERDS.

LUCY: Stevie, what have you done?

- LENNY:** Yeah, what gives? My phone's dead. I need to post every
- 35 **minute or so or I might lose a follower!**

- 1 **LUCY:** Lenny, you have three followers. Your mother, your Aunt Sally, and some weirdo.
- STEVIE:** That weirdo's me.
- LENNY:** Hey, thanks for following me. I sense a surge coming.
- 5 **LUCY:** Yeah, right. *(To STEVIE.)* So...?
- STEVIE:** I disabled all the cell phones in Bucktown. I call it, "The Great Cell Phone Catastrophe."
- LENNY:** Nice ring to it.
- STEVIE:** Thanks.
- 10 **LUCY:** But why?
- LENNY:** And how?
- LUCY:** Why?
- LENNY:** How?
- LUCY:** *(To LENNY.)* Should we go with the why first or the how first?
- 15 **LENNY:** *(To LUCY.)* Geez, I don't know. They're both good. Should we do heads or tails?
- STEVIE:** *(To AUDIENCE.)* I need new friends. *(To OTHERS.)* Let's just go with the why.
- LUCY:** Okay. Then why, Stevie? Why?!
- 20 **STEVIE:** Love.
- LUCY:** Love?
- LENNY:** Love? Oh, brother! *(Beat.)* Which reminds me, why doesn't my brother follow me on TikTok?
- LUCY:** Lenny, can we focus on Stevie and, you know, the whole "cell phone catastrophe" thing?
- 25 **LENNY:** Oh, right. Sorry, Lucy. *(To STEVIE.)* Love?
- STEVIE:** Yes, love. Well, one-sided love. Unrequited love. A love that shall remain nameless for now. A love that I can't yet shout from the rooftops. A love—
- 30 **LUCY:** Okay. I think we get it. So, you love someone, and that someone—
- STEVIE:** Never answers my texts.
- LENNY:** Uh-huh...? *(Expecting more but STEVIE is silent.)*
- LUCY:** Yeah, and...?
- STEVIE:** That's it.
- 35 **LUCY:** Someone doesn't answer your texts, so you disable all cell phones in Bucktown and wreak havoc on the lives of all the people in our fair town? That's it?
- STEVIE:** Uh... yeah.
- LUCY:** Sounds a little extreme, don't you think?

1 **STEVIE:** Well, when you use a phrase like “wreak havoc,” it does.
LUCY: Seems a bit... megalomaniacal.
LENNY: And a little loony.
STEVIE: Potato, potahto.

5 **LENNY:** What do potatoes have to do with this?
STEVIE: It’s from a song.
LUCY: A song about potatoes?
STEVIE: A love song about differing perspectives. It’s titled “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” and was written by George and Ira Gershwin for the 1937 musical *Shall We Dance* with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, directed by Mark Sandrich, written by Allan Scott and Ernest Pagano, and released by RKO Radio Pictures.

10 **LUCY:** I’m starting to see why someone wouldn’t respond to your texts.
LENNY: I love potatoes.

15 **LUCY:** Lenny...
LENNY: Mashed potatoes.
LUCY: Lenny...
LENNY: Scalloped potatoes.
LUCY: Lenny...

20 **LENNY:** Twice-baked potatoes. They’re baked twice!
LUCY: We’re not talking about potatoes anymore.
LENNY: Oh, sorry.
STEVIE: So you may say megalomaniacal, but I say... lovelorn? *(Beat.)* Hmm, maybe you’re right. Maybe it was—

25 **LUCY:** Bonkers?
LENNY: Whacko?
LUCY: Over-the-top?
LENNY: Insane?
STEVIE: Okay, okay! Maybe I overreacted... a little. *(Beat.)* Okay, a lot. But I’m going to follow this through and see what happens.

30 **LUCY:** Yeah, that’s always a good idea. What’s your follow-up plan?
STEVIE: Well, I haven’t really gotten that far. I’m sort of making it up as I go along.
LUCY: Also a great idea.

35 **STEVIE:** Well, let’s see how things are going.
LUCY: *(Sighs.)* Okay. *(EXITS with STEVIE.)*
LENNY: Hash browns. Potato skins. Tater tots!
LUCY: *(From OFFSTAGE.)* Lenny! *(LENNY EXITS as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene Two

ACT ONE
Scene Three

1 LIGHTS UP on STELLA, FRANKIE, and RAMONA. Throughout, NERDS
APPEAR through windows, unnoticed by COOL KIDS.

STELLA: Well, no cell phones in Bucktown. No cell phones for anyone.
(*Peers out over the AUDIENCE.*) Fortunately, everyone else in town

5 is at the big football game. We're the only ones who will notice. For
now, we're isolated.

FRANKIE: Stranded.

RAMONA: Adrift in a sea of silence.

FRANKIE: Nice.

10 **RAMONA:** Thanks. I've been practicing my phrasing.

FRANKIE: Wait, why aren't we at the game?

STELLA: You know... the silent protest? (*FRANKIE and RAMONA look
confused.*) I explained this last night when we were having pizza at
Gold Crown. You don't remember?

15 **FRANKIE:** You know how easily distracted we are.

RAMONA: (*Relishes the memory.*) Ah, Gold Crown...

STELLA: We're protesting the overemphasis on sports in everyday
American life.

FRANKIE: Good thing it's silent.

20 **RAMONA:** I love Gold Crown's white pizza...

STELLA: (*Sighs.*) Here comes Gussie and Nina. Maybe they found
something out. (*GUSSIE and NINA rush ON. GUSSIE has a large,
dusty, dog-eared book.*)

FRANKIE: What's that?

25 **NINA:** It's a book. (*SOUND EFFECT: HARP. ALL look up.*)

RAMONA: A book? (*SOUND EFFECT: HARP. ALL look up and around.*)

STELLA: Where did you get that... (*Looks up.*) ...item?

GUSSIE: It was on the prop table backstage. The stage manager gave
it to me. You know, she can be very curt sometimes.

30 **STELLA:** (*Sighs. Deliberate.*) Where did you get that?

GUSSIE: Uh... yard sale?

STELLA: (*Frustrated. More deliberate.*) Where did you get that?

GUSSIE: (*Catches on.*) Oh, oh... (*To NINA.*) ...where did we get it?

NINA: (*Dramatically.*) We went to the slightly haunted house on Marion
35 Street. We crept in through an open window and made our way to
the musty library...

FRANKIE: Slightly haunted? How can a house be slightly haunted?

1 **GUSSIE:** The ghosts have commitment issues.

STELLA: Why did you go to the slightly haunted house in the first place?

GUSSIE: Oh, we were walking down Scrub Oak Mountain Road and out of nowhere a note dropped right in front of us. It said, “Go to the

5 slightly haunted house on Marion Street.”

RAMONA: Convenient.

NINA: (*Annoyed by the interruption.*) Um, as I was saying. We made our way to the musty library and there, on a table, was this... book. (*ALL look up. No harp. ALL shrug.*)

10 **GUSSIE:** And there was a note on top of the book, and it said, “Take this book and read.”

RAMONA: Very convenient.

STELLA: Let’s have a look. (*GUSSIE hands the book to STELLA, who blows dust from it, opens it, and reads the title page.*) *How I Learned to Stop Texting and Love to Talk*, by Anonymous.

15 **FRANKIE:** Catchy title.

GUSSIE: Little obscure, I thought.

RAMONA: The author’s name doesn’t ring a bell.

FRANKIE: Wait! Look at how old this book is! It’s falling apart. How

20 could the author write about texting before texting existed?

STELLA: Maybe the author is like Nostradamus.

RAMONA: Nostradamus?

STELLA: Nostradamus, who lived from 1503 to 1566, was a French astrologer, physician, and seer. His book of prophecies

25 was published in 1555 and has almost never been out of print since. He supposedly predicted disasters of all sorts—plagues, earthquakes, floods, droughts, invasions, war, the Great Fire of London, the French Revolution, and the rise of Napoleon and Hitler.

FRANKIE: Way to bring us down, Stella. (*To AUDIENCE.*) And she

30 wonders why no one wants to be her lab partner.

STELLA: Anyway, don’t you see, guys? It’s some sort of self-help book. We can use it as a guide to solve our current dilemma.

NINA: What does it say?

STELLA: (*Reads.*) “You can use this book as a guide to solve your

35 current dilemma.” (*Gives OTHERS a knowing look.*) “If you are reading this book, you must have undergone ‘The Great Cell Phone Catastrophe.’”

RAMONA: This Anonymous guy is good.

FRANKIE: Or gal.

40 **RAMONA:** Goes without saying.

FRANKIE: Does it, Ramona, does it?

- 1 **STELLA:** Uh, excuse me. (*Continues to read.*) “You find yourself without phones and apps and alerts and updates, without all the distractions of modern life. You are lost. You are forlorn—”
- FRANKIE:** Forlorn?
- 5 **STELLA:** Forlorn. Pitifully sad or abandoned or lonely.
- RAMONA:** I changed my mind. This Anonymous guy is a bummer.
- STELLA:** (*Reads.*) “What will you do? What will you do?!”
- GUSSIE:** What will we do? What will we do?!
- STELLA:** “First, you must learn how to talk.”
- 10 **NINA:** But we know how to talk. We’re doing it now.
- STELLA:** (*Continues to read.*) “Yes, I know you know how to talk.” (*Looks at NINA.*) “However, your conversational skills are rusty, like a bicycle pump left out in the rain.” (*Shrugs.*) “You must engage in rich conversations, bouts of bountiful banter.” (*Stops and shakes her head.*) “So, to enrich your conversation, you must explore new worlds—the world of nature, the world of history, the world of poetry, the world of...” It’s smudged.
- 15 **RAMONA:** The world of smudge?
- STELLA:** No, there’s a smudge on the paper. I can’t read the whole word. It begins with an L.
- 20 **FRANKIE:** Lox.
- GUSSIE:** Lobster.
- RAMONA:** Lorax.
- NINA:** Loch Lomond.
- 25 **STELLA:** Doubtful. (*Beat.*) I’m not completely sold on this book. And the writing! What’s with the “bicycle pump” simile? (*UPSTAGE, LUCY and LENNY look at STEVIE, who shrugs.*) But it’s the only thing we have so far. Might as well take the advice of Anonymous. Ramona, you and Nina explore the world of nature. Frankie and
- 30 Gussie will explore the world of history, and I’ll explore the world of poetry. (*ALL EXIT as NERDS duck OFF. LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.*)

End of Scene Three

ACT ONE
Scene Four

LIGHTS UP. STEVIE and LUCY ENTER through doors.

LUCY: How do you think it’s going so far?

STEVIE: Not bad, could be better. Should have worked on that book a little longer. Oh, well.

35

LUCY: Boy, that Stella’s a know-it-all, isn’t she?

STEVIE: I wouldn’t say that. She’s well-informed.

1 **LUCY:** Hmm... Kind of pushy.
STEVIE: She's a take-charge kind of person.
LUCY: Uh-huh.
STEVIE: What does that mean?

5 **LUCY:** Uh-huh? It means uh-huh.
STEVIE: Oh, no, it doesn't.
LUCY: You're right. It means, "So Stella is your unrequited love and you thought up this whole scheme so you could find some way to get her to notice you and perhaps requite your love."

10 **STEVIE:** I thought that's what you meant. Yes, I did it all for Stella!
LUCY: Oh, boy.
LENNY: (*ENTERS.*) It's quiet out there. Too quiet. I miss the buzzes and beeps and chirps of the phones.
STEVIE: You'll get over it.

15 **LENNY:** I don't think I will. Plus, everyone is at the game so there's no one around.
LUCY: Wait, why aren't we at the game?
STEVIE: I explained this last night when we were having pizza at Grande.
LUCY: You know we never listen to you.

20 **LENNY:** (*Relishes the memory.*) Ah, Grande...
STEVIE: (*Sighs.*) I said I heard about a... (*Air quotes.*) ..."silent protest" from the... (*Air quotes.*) ..."cool kids" and that I had hatched a... (*Air quotes.*) ..."secret plan."

LUCY: Did you use air quotes last night? No wonder we didn't listen.

25 **LENNY:** I love Grande pepperoni pizza...
STEVIE: Remember how mysterious I was last night?
LENNY: I remember the pizza.
LUCY: Okay, you were mysterious. Very mysterious. So you told us why we didn't go to the game and you told us why you did this, but you didn't tell us how.

30 **STEVIE:** How?
LUCY: How.
LENNY: How.
STEVIE: Okay, I'll tell you. But it gets very technical, and in consideration of certain audience members—

35 **LENNY:** Geezers?
LUCY: Less technically savvy—
LENNY: Fogeys?
LUCY: Less aware of the terminology of computer science—

1 **STEVIE:** Luddites?

LENNY: Luddites?!

STEVIE: A Luddite is a person who is opposed to technological change and shuns new technology. The term comes from the
5 Luddite movement in England in the eighteenth century when textile mill workers rioted and destroyed the new machinery that was slowly replacing them. The name is supposed to have come from Ned Ludd, a man who—

LUCY: Okay, thanks. *(To LENNY.)* He can't help himself. *(To AUDIENCE.)*
10 In order for everyone to understand his complicated process, Stevie will now tell us how he did it... in mime.

LENNY: Mime? You promised there wouldn't be mime.

LUCY: There will be mime. So, it went something like this... Stevie?
(STEVIE mimes sitting at a keyboard and typing. This goes on for quite a while.)
15 Could you juice it up a bit?

STEVIE: *(Begins with standard mime routines—walking against the wind, stuck in a box—and ends in a torrent of increasingly absurd actions like gazing off into the distance, running, choking someone, skipping, sobbing, pleading with clenched hands, etc. The weirder the better. He concludes with raised hands and a silent “ta-da,” then pants from the exertion.)*
20 And that's... how I... did it.

LENNY: Glad that's all cleared up.

LUCY: Now what?

STEVIE: Now... we see what Stella and her friends are up to. *(NERDS EXIT as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*
25

End of Scene Four

ACT ONE
Scene Five

LIGHTS UP. RAMONA and NINA ENTER through a door. RAMONA is carrying a sad-looking potted tree, which she places between NINA and herself.

RAMONA: Well, let's explore nature. *(Stares at the tree.)*

30 **NINA:** *(Stares at the tree.)* This is it? This sorry tree is supposed to represent all of nature?

RAMONA: The Drama Club has had to tighten its belt. The Piccolo Club nabbed half of our budget.

NINA: Those piccolo players are so aggressive.

35 **RAMONA:** Tell me about it. So... nature. *(They stare blankly at the tree.)*

NINA: Hmm... Maybe if we heard nature sounds.

- 1 **RAMONA:** Right! The sounds of nature... (*SOUND EFFECTS: PLEASANT BIRDSONG builds to a CACOPHONY of JUNGLE SOUNDS—PARROTS, MONKEYS, LIONS, ELEPHANTS, etc. SOUNDS go on for a moment, then FADE OUT.*)
- 5 **NINA:** Did you hear a lion?
RAMONA: Nope.
NINA: So... (*Looks around.*) Nature.
RAMONA: Yeah, nice, huh? (*SOUND EFFECT: BIRDSONG.*)
NINA: (*Looks up and points.*) Oh, look! A bird.
- 10 **RAMONA:** What kind of a bird?
NINA: (*Covers.*) Uh... bluebird? Robin? Sparrow?
RAMONA: Oh, he's playing with another bird.
NINA: Yeah, is that a crow? Hawk, maybe? Bald eagle?
RAMONA: Aww, that's cute! (*BIRDSONG turns to BIRD FIGHT, with HORRIBLE SCREECHING and FLAPPING. If possible, feathers fall from the sky. NINA and RAMONA share a concerned look.*)
- 15 **RAMONA:** Well, that was... disturbing.
NINA: (*Points OFF.*) Oh, hey, a squirrel. (*They peer at the "squirrel."*)
RAMONA: He sees us! Aww, he's waving at us with his little paw.
- 20 **NINA:** Aww... Wait a minute. That's not a wave. He's making an obscene gesture.
RAMONA: That squirrel is flipping us the bird!
NINA: He's laughing at us! He's laughing so hard he's holding his sides with his little paws! (*Beat.*) I've never seen that before.
- 25 **RAMONA:** (*Points.*) Look, there's another one! He just dropped his acorn, and he's whispering to the other squirrel.
NINA: (*Points.*) There's another one.
RAMONA: (*Points.*) And another, and another... There's a mob of squirrels!
NINA: And they're all glaring at us... and grunting!
- 30 **RAMONA:** I don't like the looks of this.
NINA: I've never liked squirrels. (*They cower.*)
RAMONA: Run! (*They scream and start OFF but RAMONA stops them.*) Wait! Take the tree! (*Runs OFF as NINA grabs tree. SOUND EFFECT: LION ROAR. NINA screams and runs OFF with the tree as LIGHTS*
- 35 *FADE to BLACK.*)

End of Scene Five

ACT ONE
Scene Six

1 LIGHTS UP on NERDS.

LUCY: So, how's it going?

STEVIE: Well... could be better. I think— (*FOSSE DANCERS ENTER. They do various Fosse dance moves throughout.*)

5 **GWEN:** (*To STEVIE.*) Excuse me, are the auditions for *Pippin* being held here?

STEVIE: *Pippin*?

FOSSE DANCERS: (*With jazz hands and a flourish.*) Yes, *Pippin*!

LUCY: We're not doing *Pippin*.

10 **CHITA:** What?!

SHIRLEY: No!

GWEN: Budget cut?

STEVIE: Yep.

FOSSE DANCERS: (*Together, as they put their bent hands against their foreheads in classic Fosse fashion.*) The Piccolo Club!

15 **LENNY:** Yep. (*FOSSE DANCERS perform an elaborate dance of woe, perhaps accompanied by a JAZZY MUSICAL or SHOW TUNE VAMP.*)

LUCY: Stop that! Please.

GWEN: Well, someone doesn't appreciate dance.

20 **STEVIE:** I'm sorry. No *Pippin*.

FOSSE DANCERS: (*Sad.*) No *Pippin*! (*They dance OFF, mournfully.*)

STEVIE: (*Sighs.*) Let's go see what Stella and her friends are up to. (*EXITS with LUCY. LENNY remains, clumsily tries a few Fosse moves, then EXITS as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.*)

End of Scene Six

ACT ONE
Scene Seven

25 LIGHTS UP on STEVIE, who ENTERS, looks around, hangs a sign that reads "Open Door to History" on one of the doors, and EXITS.

FRANKIE: (*ENTERS with GUSSIE.*) Well, let's explore history.

GUSSIE: Okay... (*They look at each other.*) How are we going to do that?

FRANKIE: Hmm... (*Looks around, sees sign on door.*) Hey, a sign.

30 **GUSSIE:** Yes, we need a sign. Like a rainbow.

FRANKIE: No, there's a sign. Right there. (*Points.*)

GUSSIE: Oh, okay. So, are you going to open the door?



1 **FRANKIE:** (*Hesitates.*) Uh, sure... (*Gingerly opens door. FLICKERING LIGHTS as from an old movie projector shine through it, bathing FRANKIE and GUSSIE in LIGHT. At the same time, VIDEO PROJECTS on a wall or screen visible to the AUDIENCE. [See PRODUCTION*
5 *NOTES.] When the video ends, FRANKIE gingerly closes the door.*)

GUSSIE: Well, that was... fun?

FRANKIE: Wow, no wonder nobody knows history. It's pretty scary.

GUSSIE: We should find Stella. (*EXITS with FRANKIE as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK. During the BLACKOUT, door sign is removed.*)

End of Scene Seven

ACT ONE

Scene Eight

10 **LIGHTS UP** on **NERDS**.

LUCY: So, status update?

STEVIE: Well, could be better. I think—

GOODMAN CHEEVER: (*ENTERS with GOODY PROCTOR. To STEVIE.*)
Excuse me. Where are the auditions being held?

15 **GOODY PROCTOR:** (*Stage whisper.*) In character.

GOODMAN CHEEVER: (*Stage whisper.*) Right. Thanks. (*In character.*)
I am Goodman Cheever, and this is the virtuous Goody Proctor.
Prithee, whither do the theatrical hijinks commence?

GOODY PROCTOR: (*In character.*) Yes, sirrah, prithee, whither?

20 **GOODMAN CHEEVER:** (*As himself, stage whisper.*) Nice! (*Back to character.*) Dost thou refuse to reply to me, unholy wretch!

GOODY PROCTOR: (*Wails.*) I saw Tituba dancing in the woods with the devil! Ahh! (*NERDS exchange glances.*)

LENNY: No auditions. (*Shrugs.*) Sorry.

25 **GOODY PROCTOR:** (*As herself.*) What?

GOODMAN CHEEVER: (*In character.*) Foul fiends! Infidels! Spawns
of Satan!

GOODY PROCTOR: (*As herself.*) Okay, Fred. You can drop it now.

GOODMAN CHEEVER: Sorry, Greta, but you know I'm a method actor.

30 It's hard for me to shake the role.

STEVIE: I take it you're auditioning for *The Crucible*.

GOODMAN CHEEVER: Oh no, we're going out for *Crucible: The Musical*.

LUCY: *Crucible: The Musical*?

GOODY PROCTOR: Yes, *Crucible: The Musical*.

35 **CRUCIBLE ACTORS:** (*Sing.*) Where's that witch?
There's that witch.

- 1 **GUSSIE:** I dig all the time.
SYLVIA: Cool.
EMILY: Cool.
RUTH: Cool.
- 5 **EMILY:** Let's lay it on them. (*COOL KIDS sit at the table. RUTH sits cross-legged on the floor, nods, and snaps her fingers to the poetry. EMILY grabs the bongo.*)
SYLVIA: (*Recites.*) I wandered lonely like a cloud down Seventh Avenue...
EMILY: Dig it.
- 10 **SYLVIA:** Just me and my muse.
And I gazed at all the lovers and the loonies,
And the hipsters and the squares,
All the cats and the cubes,
And the happy and the sad...
- 15 **EMILY:** Oh, so sad.
SYLVIA: And I spied a little baby in a little baby carriage.
RUTH: Little baby, yeah.
SYLVIA: And I said to the little baby,
"What do you see, little baby?"
- 20 And the little baby said, "America."
EMILY: Zowie! (*COOL KIDS exchange glances, then applaud tentatively.*)
SYLVIA: Was it a gas?
STELLA: Yes, a big ball of gas.
RUTH: Was it the end?
- 25 **FRANKIE:** Hopefully.
EMILY: Dig it, Clyde.
GUSSIE: Stop calling me Clyde.
SYLVIA: Cool. My next swinging poem is called, "Sheep! Sheep! Sheep!"
STELLA: (*To FRANKIE.*) Don't we have to go do that thing?
- 30 **FRANKIE:** What thing?
STELLA: The thing with the thing after we do the thing.
FRANKIE: Huh...? (*Catches on.*) Oh, that thing. Oh, yeah, we better go do that thing.
EMILY: (*To GUSSIE.*) You cats speak cryptically, Clyde.
- 35 **FRANKIE:** I get it from my mother.
SYLVIA: Mothers, man. I have a poem about mothers.
RUTH: We all have poems about mothers, man.
EMILY: Ouch, I feel negative vibes all of a sudden. Cool it, you two.
Consider the squares.

- 1 **SYLVIA:** Right. So, for my next poem...
STELLA: Gotta run!
FRANKIE: Yeah, we left something in the oven.
EMILY: Ovens are so bourgeois, man.
- 5 **RUTH:** Dig it.
STELLA: Thanks, guys. (*COOL KIDS run OFF.*)
SYLVIA: (*Shakes her head.*) Squares, man. Don't appreciate culture.
EMILY: Those dudes are from Dullsville.
RUTH: They brought me down, man.
- 10 **SYLVIA:** Ditto. I need an espresso. (*EXITS with BEAT POETS through the door, taking their props with them as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.*)
- End of Scene Nine

ACT ONE
Scene Ten

- LIGHTS UP on STEVIE, LENNY, and LUCY.
- LUCY:** So, how's the plot—? (*CONNIE KOWALSKI ENTERS in a chicken costume.*)
- 15 **STEVIE:** Oh, come on! (*CONNIE dances ballet, maybe turns a few pirouettes, as NERDS exchange glances.*) Uh, can I help you? (*CONNIE does a few more steps and bows. NERDS exchange more glances and tentatively applaud.*)
- CONNIE:** (*Bows again and removes the chicken head.*) Connie Kowalski.
- 20 **STEVIE:** I'm Stevie, and that's Lucy and that's Lenny.
CONNIE: Pleased to meet you. I'm here for the audition.
LUCY: Audition?
CONNIE: For *Poultry in Motion: A Dance Extravaganza*.
LENNY: *Poultry in Motion*?
- 25 **CONNIE:** Colon. *A Dance Extravaganza*.
LENNY: Not a semicolon?
CONNIE: Of course not! Where did you learn punctuation?
STEVIE: Uh... in any case, there are no auditions here.
CONNIE: No auditions?
- 30 **LUCY:** No auditions. And no chickens in this show.
CONNIE: No chickens?
LENNY: No chickens.
CONNIE: (*Deeply offended.*) Well, aren't we special? (*Puts the chicken head back ON and attempts to walk OFF with dignity.*)
- 35 **LENNY:** I think we've offended the chicken.

1 **LUCY:** In my experience, chickens are easily offended.

STEVIE: *(Sighs.)* Let's go see...

LUCY/LENNY: What Stella and her friends are up to?

STEVIE: Uh... yeah. *(LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene Ten

ACT ONE

Scene Eleven

5 LIGHTS UP on the COOL KIDS. NERDS peek OUT through the windows, unnoticed by COOL KIDS.

STELLA: Well, what did we learn?

RAMONA: I miss my phone.

NINA: Nature is noisy.

10 **RAMONA:** And much nicer on a phone.

NINA: There are lions in the woods.

RAMONA: Squirrels are obnoxious.

GUSSIE: History is depressing.

FRANKIE: And sort of obnoxious—like squirrels.

15 **GUSSIE:** Poetry is strange.

STELLA: And poets are stranger. Hmm... None of that really helps us much with our situation. We should consult the book. Where did we put the book? *(ALL look around. STEVIE quickly runs down from a window and unnoticed, opens a door, places the book in front of the door, then closes it again and runs back to his spot in the window. STELLA sees the book.)* Ah, there it is. *(Flips through the pages, then reads.)* "You've explored nature, you've learned history, you've experienced poetry. 'Now what?' you ask."

20

FRANKIE: Yes, that's what we're asking.

25 **STELLA:** "Now you..." *(Comes to the end of the book.)* Uh-oh, missing pages.

GUSSIE: "Missing pages"? What kind of advice is that? I don't get this book at all.

30

STELLA: It's not the advice! We're actually missing the pages. Hmm, now what?

STEVIE: Uh-oh. *(Pulls out pad and pen, furiously writes, then tears out the page and drops it down toward the COOL KIDS.)*

RAMONA: It's raining paper! *(COOL KIDS look up as NERDS duck OFF.)*

STELLA: Odd...

35 **NINA:** *(Picks up the note. NERDS poke their heads back ON.)* Hey, it's handwritten. In cursive. *(SOUND EFFECT: HARP. ALL react.)*

- 1 **FRANKIE:** What does it say?
- STELLA:** *(Takes the note and studies it.)* Hmm... Sloppy handwriting. I'm beginning to wonder about this book...
- GUSSIE:** *(To AUDIENCE.)* I'm beginning to wonder about this play.
- 5 **LENNY:** *(From a window.)* Me, too.
- FRANKIE:** *(Looks around as NERDS duck OFF.)* Did you hear someone?
- RAMONA:** Nope. *(Beat.)* Hey, I'm getting a little hungry. Think they'll sell Skittles at intermission?
- STELLA:** *(To GUSSIE and RAMONA.)* Hello? The note? *(NERDS stick*
- 10 *their heads back ON as STELLA reads.)* "Find the Off-the-Gird Man." *(To OTHERS.)* "Gird"? *(ALL gather around, trying to decipher the handwriting.)*
- FRANKIE:** "Girth"? Is he a large fellow?
- RAMONA:** It says "Garth." Find Garth Brooks?
- 15 **STEVIE:** *(From a window, in a stage whisper.)* Grid!
- GUSSIE:** "Grid." It says grid. *(Beat.)* How do I know that?
- STELLA:** That's it! "Find the Off-the-Grid Man." But where do we look? *(STEVIE shakes his head, writes furiously, and tosses down another note, which hits GUSSIE or falls nearby. NERDS duck back OFF.)*
- 20 **GUSSIE:** *(Looks up and sees nothing, then picks up the note and reads.)* "In Sherwood Park."
- NINA:** In Sherwood Park?
- GUSSIE:** *(Looks at the note again.)* Yes, in Sherwood Park.
- STELLA:** That's it! Find the Off-the-Grid Man in Sherwood Park.
- 25 **FRANKIE:** *(Half-heartedly.)* Oh boy, another adventure.
- NINA:** Will there be squirrels?
- STELLA:** Once we solve our cell phone catastrophe, you guys might want to talk to someone about your squirrel obsession.
- RAMONA:** Can we at least get something to eat before we head into
- 30 the forest?
- STELLA:** Sure. It is intermission, after all. We've got about fifteen minutes. *(COOL KIDS EXIT as NERDS exchange looks. LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of ACT ONE

ACT TWO
Scene One

- LIGHTS UP. RAMONA ENTERS with large bag of Skittles, looks around,
- 35 and then opens adoor, from which a HAND reaches ON and takes the Skittles. OTHER COOL KIDS ENTER.



- 1 **STELLA:** I'm going to Sherwood Park to find Off-the-Grid Man, and I have to go alone.
- FRANKIE:** Why?
- STELLA:** During intermission, someone left a note in my dressing room.
- 5 **FRANKIE:** What does it say?
- NINA:** You have a dressing room?
- STELLA:** *(Pulls out the note and reads.)* "Stella, you must go into Sherwood Park alone. There, you will learn your destiny."
- GUSSIE:** Who writes these things?
- 10 **STELLA:** *(Still reading.)* "This is your personal quest."
- RAMONA:** You have a personal quest?
- STELLA:** Well, I'm off. You guys see what you can discover in the forest on your own, or in conveniently paired groups. We'll meet back here before nightfall.
- 15 **RAMONA:** You really should leave the forest before nightfall. Who knows what kinds of beasts are lurking in Sherwood Park?
- FRANKIE:** Stella.
- STELLA:** Yes?
- FRANKIE:** Be careful.
- 20 **STELLA:** Got it. Wish me luck, gang. See you later. *(EXITS and OTHERS exchange looks.)*
- GUSSIE:** So... I guess we should go?
- RAMONA:** Now, which direction did Stella go...? *(ALL answer at once.)*
- FRANKIE:** North.
- 25 **NINA:** South.
- GUSSIE:** East.
- RAMONA:** West.
- GUSSIE:** We don't know directions, do we?
- FRANKIE:** No.
- 30 **RAMONA:** Oh, well, let's just head off in... *(Points over the AUDIENCE.)* ...that direction. *(ALL climb down from the stage and EXIT out the auditorium, shouting to one another as they go: "Bye!" "So long!" "See ya later!" "Where am I going?" Etc. LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene One

ACT TWO
Scene Two

1 LIGHTS UP on NERDS.

LUCY: So, who is this Off-the-Grid Man?

STEVIE: There is no Off-the-Grid Man.

LENNY: Well, that's a problem, isn't it?

5 **STEVIE:** No, I'm going to be Off-the-Grid Man.

LUCY: You?

STEVIE: I'll cleverly disguise myself, enter the forest, and meet Stella.

LENNY: And then what?

STEVIE: I haven't figured that part out yet.

10 **LUCY:** Not much for planning ahead, are you?

STEVIE: You guys keep an eye on Stella's friends, and we'll meet back here before nightfall. I'm off. (EXITS.)

LUCY: Oh, he's definitely off.

LENNY: Where should we go?

15 **LUCY:** Well, I'll go... (Points OFF LEFT.) ...there, and you... (Points OFF RIGHT.) ...there.

LENNY: Okay. But can I go... (Points OFF LEFT.) ...there, and you go... (Points OFF RIGHT.) ...there?

20 **LUCY:** Well, alright. (They start OFF in the wrong direction, then switch and EXIT as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)

End of Scene Two

ACT TWO
Scene Three

LIGHTS UP on RAMONA.

RAMONA: (Looks around.) This must be Sherwood Park. (Clears her throat. Louder.) This must be Sherwood Park! (A door opens, and a hand pushes the sad-looking tree ON through the door.) That's it?

25 That pathetic tree is supposed to represent the whole forest?

VOICE: (From behind the door.) Budget cuts.

RAMONA: Curses on that Piccolo Club! Hey, is that the same lame tree from Act One?

VOICE: No! (Shuts the door.)

30 **RAMONA:** I'm pretty sure it's the same lame tree from Act One. (EXITS as CAMPY CHASE MUSIC PLAYS. OTHER COOL KIDS and NERDS engage in a cat-and-mouse, coming ON and OFF, crisscrossing the stage, popping up IN windows, coming ON through doors, running IN front of the stage, etc. CONNIE, in chicken costume, should pop

1 *her chicken head IN windows and doors a few times. LIGHTS FADE to BLACK. MUSIC OUT. The tree is removed.)*

End of Scene Three

ACT TWO
Scene Four

LIGHTS UP on STELLA as she searches for Off-the-Grid Man. CHIEF and ROSCOE ENTER.

5 **CHIEF:** *(To STELLA.)* Excuse me, have you seen a chicken backstage?

STELLA: A chicken?

ROSCOE: Yes, a chicken.

STELLA: No, I haven't.

CHIEF: Okay. But remember, if you see a chicken, say something.

10 **STELLA:** What'll I say?

ROSCOE: Say, "Look, there's a chicken."

STELLA: Uh... okay. *(EXITS.)*

CHIEF: Nice work, Roscoe.

ROSCOE: Thanks, Chief.

15 **CHIEF:** I like the cut of your jib.

ROSCOE: I have no idea what you mean but thank you.

CHIEF: Now, let's go find that chicken. *(EXITS with ROSCOE as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene Four

ACT TWO
Scene Five

SOUND EFFECTS: DARK FOREST SOUNDS like OWL HOOTS and FROG
20 CROAKS. The tree is back in place by a door. (NOTE: The tree remains ONSTAGE through ACT TWO, Scene Seven.) LIGHTS UP on LUCY, who looks around, frightened. SOUND EFFECT: LION ROARS.

LUCY: *(Cowers.)* Where's Lenny when you need him?

FRANKIE: *(Pops IN from the windows with RAMONA and GUSSIE. To*
25 *RAMONA and GUSSIE.)* Isn't that Lucy, who hangs out with Lenny?

GUSSIE: I think it's more like Lenny hangs out with Lucy.

RAMONA: Isn't that the same thing?

GUSSIE: No, it's completely different.

FRANKIE: Hey, Lucy!

30 **LUCY:** *(Jumps, startled.)* You scared me!

FRANKIE: Sorry. Hey, are you the one who hangs out with Lenny?

LUCY: It's more like Lenny hangs out with me.

- 1 **GUSSIE:** *(To FRANKIE.)* Told you.
FRANKIE: What are you doing in Sherwood Park?
LUCY: Looking for Lenny. What are you doing?
FRANKIE: Well, it's a long story, but right now we're sort of lost.
- 5 **GUSSIE:** We don't know our directions. We found moss on the side of a tree but couldn't remember what moss on the side of a tree meant. *(Beat.)* Other than there's moss on the side of the tree.
RAMONA: Hey, do you want help finding Lenny? We're lost anyway.
LUCY: That would be great. Thanks.
- 10 **FRANKIE:** *(COOL KIDS duck OFF and then ENTER through doors.)* Okay, let's go.
RAMONA: Wait a minute. *(Opens the "Skittle" door from earlier and a HAND reaches out with a bag of Skittles. RAMONA takes the bag. To LUCY.)* Skittle?
- 15 **LUCY:** Wow, thanks! I love Skittles.
RAMONA: Me too. I could eat Skittles all day.
LUCY: Me too.
FRANKIE: *(Annoyed.)* Okay, are we good now? Let's go. *(EXITS with RAMONA and LUCY.)*
- 20 **GUSSIE:** *(To AUDIENCE.)* I feel a little left out of the Skittle conversation. *(Yells OFF.)* Hey, what do you guys think of Mountain Dew?! *(EXITS as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene Five

ACT TWO

Scene Six

- LIGHTS UP. NINA ENTERS LEFT, looks around, pulls a script from her pocket, and silently rehearses. LENNY ENTERS RIGHT, looks around
- 25 but does not see NINA, pulls a script from his pocket, and silently rehearses. As they rehearse with their heads buried in their scripts, they bump into each other DOWN CENTER and drop their scripts.
- LENNY:** Oh, I'm sorry!
NINA: No, it's my fault! I wasn't looking.
- 30 **LENNY:** I was going over some lines.
NINA: Hey, me too! *(BOTH bend down, pick up each other's script, and look at the titles.)*
- LENNY/NINA:** *Moon Over Minooka!*
NINA: Are you auditioning for the production at the Northeast Academy
- 35 of Dramatic Arts, Crafts, Sciences, and Dinner Theater?
LENNY: The NADACSDT? Yes! Which part are you trying out for?

- 1 **NINA:** Gladys, the good-hearted oyster shucker at a seafood restaurant, whose dreams of being a violinist are thwarted by forces beyond her control. How about you?
- 5 **LENNY:** Charlie, the good-hearted lightweight boxer whose dreams of being a potter are thwarted by forces beyond his control. *(BOTH get the same idea and open their script. They perform their roles with over-the-top, working-class, East Coast accents. Reads, as Charlie.)* “Gladys, these hands ain’t meant for shucking oysters. I’m gonna win the big fight on Saturday night, and you know what I’m gonna do with the prize money?”
- 10 **NINA:** *(Reads, as Gladys.)* “Ain’t got a clue, Charlie.”
- LENNY:** “I’m gonna send you to the Eastman School of Music up in Rochester, so’s you can realize your dream of being a violinist.”
- 15 **NINA:** “But Charlie, you know what the doctor said, if you hurt the third knuckle on your left hand one more time you won’t be able to spin your potter’s wheel! I can’t let you risk your dream of being a potter! What about your plates and bowls and ashtrays, Charlie? What about the ashtrays?!”
- 20 **LENNY:** “That’s a chance I’m willing to take. My ashtrays, however intricate and impressive, ain’t nothing compared to your happiness, Gladys.”
- 25 **NINA:** “Oh, Charlie, you ain’t like the other fellas. They make me feel like a twice-baked potato left out in the rain. You make me feel like a lady bowler who rolls a seven-ten split and then wins the Irish Sweepstakes and then goes home to find a beautiful birthday cake on her kitchen table with all the candles blazing. You get me, Charlie, me and my crazy metaphors.”
- LENNY:** “Ain’t they similes, Gladys?”
- NINA:** “A simile is a type of metaphor, Charlie.”
- 30 **LENNY:** “Oh, Gladys!”
- NINA:** “Oh, Charlie...!”
- LENNY:** *(As himself.)* Wow, we’re really good. I’m Lenny.
- NINA:** *(As herself.)* Yeah, we are. I’m Nina. Say, aren’t you in my biology class?
- 35 **LENNY:** Physically. I’m the guy sleeping in the back of the classroom.
- NINA:** Oh, yeah. I didn’t recognize you with your eyes open. Do you want to go somewhere and rehearse the scene at the Café Cha, Cha, Cha?
- LENNY:** You bet! *(EXITS with NINA as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene Six

ACT TWO
Scene Seven

1 LIGHTS UP on STEVIE, now dressed in his “Off-the-Grid Man” costume—a grey wig, a long grey beard, and a long, weathered coat over his regular clothes. He starts to set up his “cave” by hanging a sign on the door next to the sad potted tree. The sign reads, “Off-the-
5 Grid Man Cave. Do not knock, do not enter, do not bother me.”

STELLA: (*ENTERS before STEVIE finishes hanging the sign. Shakes her head, allows him to finish, then clears her throat and approaches.*) I’m looking for Off-the-Grid Man.

STEVIE: (*In a weird, deep voice at first, though he breaks character early and often.*) Well, you’ve come to the right place, strange woman
10 who I’ve never met. I am Off-the-Grid Man.

STELLA: Do you have identification?

STEVIE: I, uh... left my wallet in my other cave. (*Searches his pockets.*) I think I have a Subway card. Will that work?

15 **STELLA:** Um, that’s okay.

STEVIE: And how may I help you, strange woman?

STELLA: Well, it’s a long story and for some reason it has a chicken in it. I’ll give you the short version. Some geek—

STEVIE: “Geek”? Why do you call him a geek?

20 **STELLA:** Why do you call the geek a “he”? Couldn’t this be a female geek?

STEVIE: Well, yeah, but—

STELLA: (*Continues.*) So, some dork found a way to disable all the cell phones in Bucktown, and my friends and I discovered an old book
25 that deals with just that situation and we’ve gone on adventures—well, more like wild goose chases—and now I’m in search of a solution from you, Off-the-Grid Man.

STEVIE: (*Awkward.*) Oh, uh... gee, that’s... awful. Is there anything else you seek from me, Off-the-Grid Man?

30 **STELLA:** I’m also wondering why the nerd would do such a thing.

STEVIE: Well, perhaps he—if he’s a he—wanted to send a message that we should turn off our phones and turn to one another—to talk, to engage with one another, to interact as humans, off the screen...

35 **STELLA:** Have you been practicing this, Off-the-Grid Man?

STEVIE: I have a lot of free time in the cave.

STELLA: Uh-huh. And couldn’t this “he” have made some kind of public service announcement?

STEVIE: Maybe he didn’t think that would be as effective.

- 1 **STELLA:** Uh-huh. And he did this for others?
- STEVIE:** Yes, he's an altruist. You know, someone who is unselfishly concerned for or—
- STELLA:** (*Annoyed, completes the definition.*) —devoted to the well-being of others. I know what an altruist is.
- 5 **STEVIE:** Oh, sorry. Definitions are sort of a habit with me... (*STELLA notes this common interest and smiles but doesn't say anything.*) You don't think he's an altruist?
- STELLA:** No. I think he did it because of a girl.
- 10 **STEVIE:** What?#! No. He did it for the betterment of the good citizens of Bucktown.
- STELLA:** Nah, it was for a girl. He might really believe that cell phones and all our electronic devices are ruining our attention spans and impairing our ability to really connect with one another, that we
- 15 need to speak and look into each other's eyes...
- STEVIE:** He does.
- STELLA:** But...
- STEVIE:** But?
- STELLA:** But he did it for a girl. I think he couldn't get a reaction out
- 20 of this one girl—
- STEVIE:** A special girl?
- STELLA:** Sure, this one special girl. So rather than talk to her, he decided to use his intelligence—
- STEVIE:** His brilliant mind?
- 25 **STELLA:** Um, okay... He used his self-proclaimed brilliant mind to wreak havoc on the whole town, or at least on the few who weren't at the football game. He couldn't get what he wanted, so the whole world had to suffer. Or at least the whole town. Or me and my friends, mostly.
- 30 **STEVIE:** You know, when you put it that way, it doesn't sound so noble or romantic...
- STELLA:** Yeah, it sounds kind of dumb, actually.
- STEVIE:** But what if she didn't answer his texts?
- STELLA:** (*In mock horror.*) Oh, no! No texts for him! So does that justify
- 35 no texts for anyone? Seems kind of selfish and self-absorbed.
- STEVIE:** (*Downcast.*) I'm sure he didn't mean to hurt anyone...
- STELLA:** I'm sure you didn't, Stevie.
- STEVIE:** (*In a weird, deep voice, again.*) Stevie? Who's Stevie? I'm Off-the-Grid Man.
- 40 **STELLA:** Come on, Stevie.

- 1 **STEVIE:** (*Drops the character.*) You saw through my clever disguise?
STELLA: Uh, yeah.
STEVIE: (*Takes off the wig and beard. Has a sudden realization.*) Wait, you know my name?
- 5 **STELLA:** Of course. We were lab partners in Mrs. Murraco's biology class. You fainted when she brought out the frogs to dissect.
STEVIE: You noticed me!
STELLA: Yeah, but you never said a word to me.
STEVIE: I texted you, though. Really clever texts. And you never
- 10 answered me.
STELLA: (*Shrugs.*) I never got your texts.
STEVIE: Aren't you 555-555-5555?
STELLA: No. 555-555-5550.
STEVIE: Oh.
- 15 **STELLA:** Yeah, "Oh." A zero. It's ironic.
STEVIE: I'm not sure if that's ironic, as irony is—
STELLA: (*Cuts him off before the definition.*) Stevie, why didn't you just talk to me?
STEVIE: I was... afraid. And I didn't know what to say.
- 20 **STELLA:** You could have figured out something to say. You know, with your brilliant mind and all.
STEVIE: Yeah, well, it didn't really help me out there.
STELLA: Stevie, why me?
STEVIE: Because you're just so smart and confident. I see you
- 25 in class or in the cafeteria or at a game and you're really... there, you know?
STELLA: Um, I think?
STEVIE: And you're not afraid of frogs. It seems like you're not afraid of anything.
- 30 **STELLA:** I'm afraid... sometimes.
STEVIE: I'm afraid all the time.
STELLA: Even with your brilliant mind?
STEVIE: (*Laughs.*) Yeah.
STELLA: And your weird-yet-loyal fellow nerds?
- 35 **STEVIE:** Yeah... (*Pause.*) I guess I did a stupid thing.
STELLA: Smart people can be really stupid sometimes. Even me. (*Laughs.*) Yeah, well... I gotta go. I have to find my friends. They're probably lost in the forest.
STEVIE: Do you hate me now?

1 **STELLA:** No, I don't hate you.

STEVIE: Are you mad at me?

STELLA: Hmm... no. I'm not mad at you.

STEVIE: Stella...

5 **STEVIE:** Yeah.

STEVIE: I'm...

STELLA: *(Waits, gets annoyed, and shrugs.)* Whatever, see ya.

STEVIE: But... *(STELLA EXITS.)* See ya, Stella. *(Brightens.)* She knew my name! *(Dims.)* But she thinks I'm a jerk. *(Brightens.)* But we talked! *(Sighs, then gathers the costume pieces, sign, and tree, and EXITS with them as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

10

End of Scene Seven

ACT TWO

Scene Eight

SOUND EFFECT: SIRENS. CONNIE runs ON in the chicken costume as a SPOTLIGHT searches for her, like a prison break. She runs IN and OUT of the SPOTLIGHT, then finally stops in the SPOTLIGHT. She does

15 some ballet—perhaps from *Poultry in Motion*—as SIRENS become CLASSICAL MUSIC. As MUSIC SHIFTS to CONTEMPORARY, CONNIE'S dance changes. Then, MUSIC SHIFTS to jazz as FOSSE DANCERS ENTER and dance with CONNIE. If not doubling, BEAT POETS and PURITANS ENTER and join the dance. Then LUCY, FRANKIE, RAMONA,

20 and GUSSIE ENTER and join in. ALL dance together, then form a kickline and dance OFF as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK. MUSIC OUT.

End of Scene Eight

ACT TWO

Scene Nine

LIGHTS UP. FRANKIE, RAMONA, GUSSIE, NINA, LUCY, and LENNY ENTER and EXIT randomly, crisscrossing the stage, poking their head ON through the windows and running IN and OUT of doors, yelling for

25 Stella in various Brando-esque and less Brando-esque ways (e.g., tentative, questioning, loud, dramatic, etc.).

FRANKIE: Stella!

RAMONA: Stella!

LUCY: Stella!

30 **GUSSIE:** Stella! *(After some time, NINA and LENNY have a "Stella-off.")*

NINA: Stella!

LENNY: Stella?! *(When ALL have EXITED, LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)*

End of Scene Nine

ACT TWO
Scene Ten

- 1 LIGHTS UP on ALL KIDS ENTERING except STELLA and STEVIE, FOSSE DANCERS, and CONNIE. They converge CENTER. (By the end of this scene, COOL KIDS and NERDS should be intermixed, LENNY standing with NINA, and LUCY with FRANKIE, RAMONA, and GUSSIE.)
- 5 **STELLA:** (*ENTERS.*) I'm right here.
FRANKIE: We were looking all over for you.
LUCY: And repeatedly screaming your name.
RAMONA: Did you find Off-the-Grid Man?
STELLA: Oh, I found him.
- 10 **GUSSIE:** And...?
STEVIE: (*Screams "Stella!" from OFFSTAGE and then runs ON.*) Oh, Stella, I was looking all over for you.
STELLA: I'm right here.
STEVIE: After you left, I put all the Off-the-Grid Man stuff away. Neatly.
- 15 That stage manager can be pretty testy... Anyway, I stood next to the prop table for a long time, thinking. And I had an epiphany.
LENNY: An epiphany?
GUSSIE: An epiphany?
STEVIE/STELLA: (*Together, at first without realizing it, then slowly making the connection... [See PRODUCTION NOTES.]*) An epiphany is a generally sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something, or an intuitive grasp of reality through something, such as an event, usually simple and striking, or an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.
- 20 **STELLA:** (*Touched by their mutual definition, but still wary.*) And...?
STEVIE: And I realized that you were right and...
STELLA: And?
STEVIE: ...and I was wrong. I shouldn't have plunged all of Bucktown into cellular darkness and chaos. (*General consternation among OTHERS.*)
- 25 **NINA:** (*To LENNY.*) What?! Isn't he the guy who fainted at the frogs in biology class?
LENNY: Yep.
STEVIE: Or at least chaos for all of Bucktown that isn't at the football
- 30 game, which I assume is just you guys. In any case, I shouldn't have taken my personal pain out on others, and I shouldn't have acted like I was the center of the universe, and I shouldn't have used my exceptional computer skills and keen mind for bad purposes. (*Pause.*) And I should have talked to you.



- 1 **STELLA:** And?
STEVIE: And... I'm sorry.
STELLA: Apology accepted.
STEVIE: Let's... talk some more?
- 5 **CHIEF:** (*ENTERS with ROSCOE and CONNIE, who is handcuffed in her chicken costume. The handcuffs should be large and feathery as if designed for a chicken.*) Well, we've got our chicken. Good work, Roscoe.
- ROSCOE:** Thanks, Chief.
- 10 **CHIEF:** (*To KIDS.*) We've apprehended her for jaywalking, dancing without proper certification from an accredited dance academy, and—according to an FBI alert—embezzlement. (*CONNIE hangs her head.*) You have the right to remain silent. (*CONNIE looks out over the AUDIENCE silently.*) Anything you say can and will be used
- 15 against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney, avian or otherwise. If you cannot afford an attorney— (*FOSSE DANCERS dance ON exaggeratedly.*)
- ROSCOE:** (*Points.*) Chief, I think those dancers are trying to tell us something—in dance. In the famous style of Bob Fosse.
- 20 **CHIEF:** Bob Fosse?
FRANKIE: (*To LUCY.*) Here we go...
STEVIE/STELLA: (*Together, happily.*) Bob Fosse, 1927 to 1987, was an American dancer, musical theater choreographer, and theater and movie director. His musicals include *Sweet Charity*, *Pippin*,
- 25 and *Chicago*, and the movies *Cabaret* and *All That Jazz*. He had a distinctive style of choreography, which included turned-in knees, sideways shuffling, rolled shoulders, and jazz hands. (*They smile at one another.*)
- ROSCOE:** That's right, oddly informed kids. (*To CHIEF, who looks at ROSCOE curiously.*) What? Before I joined the patrol, I was a student at the Miss Milford Academy of Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Salsa, and Cha, Cha, Cha.
- 30 **NINA:** Cha, cha?
ROSCOE: No, cha, cha, cha. Miss Milford was a purist. She wouldn't
- 35 settle for just two "chas."
CHIEF: Never mind that! (*Points back to FOSSE DANCERS.*) What are they saying? (*FOSSE DANCERS continue to dance exaggeratedly, pointing at CONNIE and flapping their arms like a chicken.*)
- ROSCOE:** (*Takes out a notepad, studies them closely, and takes notes.*)
- 40 Oh, no! Bad news, Chief. We've got the wrong chicken. (*FOSSE DANCERS indicate that this is correct.*)

- 1 **CHIEF:** Again?! (To *CONNIE*.) Well, sorry for the inconvenience. (Removes handcuffs and *CONNIE* bows her head magnanimously. To *ROSCOE*.) Hey, maybe we can catch the last few minutes of the football game?
- ROSCOE:** (To *ALL OTHERS*.) Carry on.
- 5 **CHIEF:** Roscoe?
- ROSCOE:** Yes, Chief?
- CHIEF:** I say, “carry on.”
- ROSCOE:** Sorry, Chief.
- CHIEF:** (To *ALL*.) Carry on. (EXITS with *ROSCOE*.)
- 10 **CONNIE:** (Removes her chicken head. To *FOSSE DANCERS*.) I owe you guys! (*FOSSE DANCERS* bow and then put their hands out, as if to say, “don’t mention it.”)
- STELLA:** (Turns back to the group of *KIDS*.) Okay, where were we?
- STEVIE:** I was apologizing.
- 15 **STELLA:** That’s right. You know, Stevie, while the chicken was being arrested, I’ve had time to think about texting and talking. Words are words. It’s not the technology, it’s the thought behind the words.
- STEVIE:** And the emotions?
- STELLA:** Yep, and the emotions.
- 20 **LENNY:** And the symbols? Tell me about the symbols, Stella.
- STELLA:** And the thoughts and feelings conveyed through the symbols, Lenny.
- STEVIE:** (To *STELLA*.) What are we, ancient Egyptians? (*BOTH laugh. No one else does.*)
- 25 **STEVIE/STELLA:** (To *AUDIENCE*, together.) The ancient Egyptians used hieroglyphs, a writing system combining symbolic, alphabetic, and logographic elements— (*ALL stare at them, and they stop.*) Sorry.
- FRANKIE:** Wait, you mean, like emojis?
- STELLA:** Yes, because what’s an emoji but a condensed thought
- 30 or feeling?
- STEVIE:** I’ve been working on an experiment. I believe that even without texting we can manifest emojis with our minds, just by concentrating on our thoughts and feelings.
- NINA:** What? We had the power in our minds all along?
- 35 **RAMONA:** We can communicate them without a phone?
- STEVIE:** Without a phone. (General hubbub ad-lib: “What?” “No way!” “How?” “Really?” “I don’t believe it.” Etc.)
- NINA:** I’m trying it. (Concentrates. SOUND EFFECT: EMOJI CREATION. THEATRE EMOJI APPEARS. [See PRODUCTION NOTES.]) Look! It
- 40 worked! Lenny, you try.

- 1 **LENNY:** Okay, here goes. (*Concentrates with a goofy face. SOUND EFFECT: EMOJI CREATION. GOOFY FACE EMOJI APPEARS. He tries again. ANOTHER GOOFY FACE EMOJI. Tries once more. THEATRE EMOJI appears. NINA smiles, and they hug.*)
- 5 **RAMONA:** My turn! (*Concentrates. SOUND EFFECT: EMOJI CREATION. PIZZA EMOJI APPEARS.*) I'm hungry!
- FRANKIE:** I'm up. (*Concentrates. SOUND EFFECT: EMOJI CREATION. FOOTBALL EMOJI APPEARS. Shakes head.*) Should have gone to the game.
- 10 **LUCY:** Oh, well! (*Concentrates. SOUND EFFECT: EMOJI CREATION. CLOWN FACE EMOJI APPEARS. OTHERS give her a look. Defensive.*) I like clowns, okay? (*GUSSIE concentrates. [SOUND EFFECT: EMOJI CREATION continues as appropriate.] SQUIRREL EMOJI APPEARS. RAMONA and NINA scream. FOSSE DANCERS concentrate. DANCER,*
- 15 *BOWLER HAT, and CANE EMOJIS APPEAR, respectively. [Based on doubling, if PURITANS and/or BEAT POETS are ONSTAGE, add in emojis that they concentrate to create. For instance, GOODMAN CHEEVER can concentrate and have a POOP EMOJI APPEAR. GOODY PROCTOR can giggle and respond with a FACE WITH TEARS OF JOY*
- 20 *EMOJI.] CONNIE concentrates. A ROW of CHICKEN EMOJIS appear. STEVIE looks at STELLA and concentrates. HEART EMOJI APPEARS. STELLA responds with a HEART EMOJI. They go back and forth until the wall is covered with DIFFERENT HEART EMOJIS.*)
- STEVIE:** Oh, Stella.
- 25 **STELLA:** Oh, Stevie.
- LUCY:** We didn't even need phones! This is unbelievable.
- STEVIE:** Yes, you see our brains are essentially binary systems, a series of either/or, if you will—
- STELLA:** Stevie? (*STEVIE stops and looks at STELLA.*) Let's not overthink
- 30 *it. Life is more than either/or.*
- STEVIE:** Right again, Stella. Why are you always sort of right and I'm always sort of wrong?
- STELLA:** Well, you're a boy, and, not to stereotype, but boys can be kind of dense, at least when it comes to emotions.
- 35 **STEVIE:** I see.
- STELLA:** No offense.
- MALES:** None taken.
- CONNIE:** (*Moves DOWN CENTER. To AUDIENCE.*) So, what we have learned, folks? We come to the theater to rediscover ourselves,
- 40 *and tonight, through the words and actions of this admittedly motley group of characters, we attempted to communicate about communication. "Only connect," the great twentieth-century British*

1 author E. M. Forster once wrote. Does it matter how we connect?
Isn't it more important that we connect? Sure, cell phones are
annoying and maybe mentally and socially damaging. They distract
us and jolt us and keep us buzzed and emotionally caffeinated
5 all the time. We crave constant connections, and perhaps we're
less present to the people in front of us and less aware of the
world around us. On the other hand, when we're texting, we're
communicating, one person reaching out to another to tell their
story, and to cry and console and laugh and love. What could be
10 more human than that? (*Awkward silence.*)

STELLA: Uh, thanks...?

CONNIE: Connie. Connie Kowalski. My pleasure.

GOODY PROCTOR: (*Stage whisper, to GOODMAN CHEEVER.*) How did
the chicken get the climactic monologue?

15 **GOODMAN CHEEVER:** (*Stage whisper, to GOODY PROCTOR.*) This
entire play is chicken-centric.

RAMONA: Well, it's been fun, but I'm hungry! I'm going to Grande.
Who's with me? (*ALL but STELLA and STEVIE ad-lib: "Me!" "Me,
too!" "Definitely." "I'm down." "Let's go!" "I'm going." Etc.*)

20 **STEVIE:** (*To STELLA.*) So, we'll talk?

STELLA: We'll talk.

STEVIE: We'll text?

STELLA: We'll text. (*To ALL.*) I think we've reached the denouement.

FRANKIE: Denoue-who?

25 **LUCY:** Denoue-what?

STEVIE/STELLA: (*Together, like a romantic duet as they look in each
other's eyes.*) Denouement is a French word that literally means
the action of untying, from a verb meaning to untie. It's the final
part of a play, movie, or narrative in which the strands of the plot
30 are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.

LUCY: (*To LENNY.*) This sort of thing makes you miss the mime,
doesn't it?

LENNY: Sadly, yes.

GUSSIE: I don't get it. Some guy likes some girl and somehow he
35 turns off all cell phones so she'll talk to him. And then we find
this book and then we're attacked by squirrels and scared by
history and insulted by poets. Then we get lost in a forest. And
then we dance with a chicken wanted by law enforcement. What
does it all mean?

40 **LUCY:** Forget it, Gus. It's Bucktown.

STEVIE: I guess I should turn the phones on now.

1 **STELLA:** Yeah, I guess you should. (*STEVIE pulls out his phone and taps the screen.*) Done.

FRANKIE: That's it?

5 **STEVIE:** (*Shrugs.*) That's it. Nice and simple. (*LIGHTS FLASH, followed by SOUND EFFECTS: PHONE NOISES, including BEEPS, BELLS, DINGS, RINGS, CHIRPS, and SWIPES. ALL pull out their phones and start to check messages, swipe, take selfies, etc.*) Looks like we're back on... (*Starts to look at his phone, but then he and STELLA look up at one another simultaneously and smile. One by one, two by two,*

10 *OTHERS make eye contact and do the same. ALL simultaneously turn off their phones with a SOUND EFFECT: LOUD CLICK, and ONE HEART EMOJI APPEARS. BLACKOUT.*)

END OF PLAY

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE

Painted flat with doors, windows.

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON

ALL characters carry phones and actively use them at the beginning and end of the show and wherever else indicated in the script. In addition, the following props are required:

ACT ONE

Scene Three

Book (GUSSIE)

Scene Five

Potted tree (RAMONA)

Feathers (CREW)

Scene Seven

Sign that reads "Open Door to History" (STEVIE)

Scene Nine

Bongo drum, chairs, wine bottle with candle in it, small table with checkered tablecloth (BEAT POETS)

Scene Eleven

Book, notepad, pen (STEVIE)

ACT TWO

Scene One

Bag of Skittles (RAMONA)

Scene Three

Potted tree (CREW)

Scene Five

Bag of Skittles (CREW)

Scene Six

Script (NINA, LENNY)

Scene Seven

Sign reading "Off-the-Grid Man Cave. Do not knock, do not enter, do not bother me." (STEVIE)

Scene Ten

Feathered handcuffs (CONNIE)

Notepad, pen (ROSCOE)



SOUND EFFECTS

Phone sounds including beeps, bells, dings, rings, chirps, and swipes; electrical crackling, crunching, and buzzing; harp; birdsong; jungle sounds including parrots, monkeys, lions, and elephants; bird fight including horrible screeching and flapping; lion roar; sirens; campy chase music; dark forest sounds like owl hoots and frog croaks; emoji creation (phone notification or music sting); click.

MUSIC

In addition to the campy chase music, music is recommended pre-show, curtain call, and for any dance sequences. Music must be original, public domain, or used with permission.

COSTUMES

Costumes should be over-the-top theatrical and fake rather than authentic or overly detailed.

ACTORS doubling as more than one character should wear black bodysuits or other dark clothes over which they can quickly pull on a costume.

COOL KIDS and NERDS wear clothing with distinguishing features that match their personalities.

STEVIE dresses as “Off-the-Grid Man” in ACT TWO, Scene Seven. This consists of a gray wig, a long gray beard, and a long, weathered coat.

FOSSE DANCERS wear black leotards and tights or bodysuits, plus bowler hats or fedoras.

BEAT POETS wear striped shirts, berets, and optional goatees.

CONNIE KOWALSKI wears a full chicken costume with an easily removable headpiece.

PURITANS dress in black and white with high-neck smocks, wide collars, buckles, etc.

CHIEF and ROSCOE wear equally large handlebar mustaches.

FLEXIBLE CASTING

Can be performed with as many as 19 players or more with all parts assigned individually. The play can be done with as few as 14 players with an ensemble of three doubling as FOSSE DANCERS, BEAT POETS, and PURITANS. In this case, leave out the BEAT POETS and PURITANS from ACT TWO, Scenes Eight and Ten.

In the opening scene, FOSSE DANCERS, BEAT POETS, PURITANS, BUCKTOWN PATROL, and CONNIE appear as EXTRA STUDENTS.

EMOJI EFFECTS

Ideally, EMOJIS can be digital projections that appear on a wall above the ACTOR summoning the emoji and can be accompanied by a SOUND EFFECT. If this is not possible, EMOJIS can also be hand-painted signs held up by CREW or EXTRAS in black bodysuits. Signs should be accompanied by a SOUND EFFECT and SPOTLIGHT.

VIDEO

A montage of public domain YouTube clips is noted for ACT ONE, Scene Seven. This montage should be a strange and funny mix that's not too extreme or violent, with some familiar and some unfamiliar footage.

Some suggestions from the original production include a montage of stock footage scenes such as failed first flight attempts, train wrecks, volcanic eruptions, mob scenes, buildings imploding, exploding, or falling, scenes from old movies [e.g., Westerns, musicals, silent movies], elaborate dance routines, gunfights, cavalry charges, pie fights, Keystone cops, etc. Ending with a mushroom cloud is not necessary, but there should be a climax. Perhaps a final explosion and then an image of Charlie Chaplin or two lovers walking into the sunset.

All images and video must be public domain or used with permission.

LOCAL REFERENCES

There are many Pennsylvania-specific references in the play, such as Bucktown (the nickname of Dunmore, PA), Minooka (a borough outside of Scranton), and Sherwood Park, as well as street names and pizza places. Feel free to replace these with your own local cities, landmarks, and pizza places!

NOTES ON PERFORMANCE

The play should move quickly like a farce, with the scenes blending into one another and characters coming and going from the wings and through the doors, heads popping out at various times through the windows, characters entering the auditorium, etc. The director and actors should take full advantage of the playing space and set. The actors should at times acknowledge the audience and perhaps interact with them. Everyone is aware that they're putting on a show and of course having fun doing it. They should, however, play all the comedy straight.



STEVIE AND STELLA'S SHARED LINES

If STEVIE and STELLA can't say their shared lines together intelligibly in ACT TWO, Scene Ten, they could alternate sentences or phrases in a way that still shows that they are connecting.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The Great Cell Phone Catastrophe, or How I Learned to Stop Texting and Love to Talk, was originally produced in November 2019 by the Crimson Players of Dunmore High School, in Dunmore, Pennsylvania, and directed by Celine Carlier. Thank you to Celine, Dana Jackson Burke, the talented cast, and hard-working crew.

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