

Miss Expanding Universe

a play

by

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CHARACTERS

David: 30s, aspiring writer

Amber: 17, his niece, headstrong and free-spirited

SETTING: David's apartment in the Ravenswood neighborhood of Chicago

TIME: The Present

NOTE: a slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

SCENE 1

(At rise: DAVID'S apartment. It is a small one-bedroom, fairly messy, not dirty but full of books and other bric-a-brac. DAVID sits on the couch, watching AMBER wander around the apartment, picking stuff up, looking in cupboards, poking around. This lasts for a little while. Finally, she looks in the fridge and then the freezer.)

AMBER

Do you have anything to drink?

DAVID

Uh, yeah...I've got soda, water, I think there's some / milk.

AMBER

No, I mean like a *drink*. Beer? Vodka?

DAVID

No, I don't.

AMBER

But aren't you like, a raging alcoholic or something?

DAVID

Yes, and that's exactly *why* I don't.

AMBER

Pfffft. Lame.

(AMBER keeps poking around.)

DAVID

So your mom doesn't know you're here?

AMBER

Nope, not a clue.

DAVID

And are you planning to tell her you're here at any point?

AMBER

Not really.

DAVID

Hmm. Okay.

(DAVID pulls out his cell phone. AMBER stops what she's doing.)

AMBER

What are you doing?

DAVID

What do you think I'm doing? I'm calling your mom so she doesn't have a heart attack and die.

AMBER

Don't call her.

DAVID

Amber, your mom is probably worrying herself into a stroke right now. I know her. She worries.

AMBER

Please don't call her, Uncle David, I'm serious.

DAVID

Why not? Why can't I just tell her--

AMBER

Just...please, okay? I'm begging you. Don't call her. She'll probably make me come home or worse, she'll drive all the way here and drag me home.

DAVID

You're right. She will. And before she does that, she'll absolutely have my balls in a little pouch around her neck if I don't tell her where you are immediately.

(He looks through his contacts.)

I'm not gonna be responsible for you, Amber. I can't.

AMBER

If you call her, I'll leave.

DAVID

What?

AMBER

I'll leave. I'll just take off, and you'll have no idea where I am. If you think she's mad now, just imagine how she'd be if you let me leave to fend for myself in this big, bad city.

(Beat.)

I swear to God I will.

(Beat. DAVID puts his phone away.)

DAVID

You're downright maniacal, you know that?

AMBER

I know.

DAVID

Why are you here, anyway?

AMBER

I just wanted to get away for a while, that's all.

DAVID

Is life with my sister so awful you have to escape?

AMBER

She's just...she's driving me crazy.

DAVID

She's doing her best under the circumstances.

AMBER

I know, I know. It's just...she gives me like, zero breathing room. She's always like where did you go, what did you do, who were you with. It drives me fucking insane.

DAVID

Well you know, trust has to be earned, Amber. And from what I hear--

AMBER

What do you hear?

DAVID

Nothing, never mind.

AMBER

No, seriously, what does she tell you? That I'm the town slut? That I spread my legs for everyone I meet? Well it's a lie, okay? She just doesn't trust me. God, do you two even talk anymore?

DAVID

Once in a while, we--

AMBER

Well you know what? I know stuff about you too. Stuff the family tries to ignore, like the fact that you're a loser?

DAVID

Excuse me?

AMBER

You heard me. You're an alcoholic loser and no one in the family respects you.

DAVID

Jesus, that's a great way to repay my hospitality.

AMBER

Hospitality? You've been trying to get rid of me since I walked in the door!

DAVID

Well excuse me for having your well being in mind! If you're gonna insult me you can get out of my house.

AMBER

Trust me, I'd love to get out of your shithole apartment.

DAVID

Go, then.

AMBER

Fine.

(She goes to the door.)

You know why else I came here?

DAVID

Why?

AMBER

I was worried...you were gonna kill yourself.

(Short beat. This affects DAVID more than he expects.)

DAVID

Why would you be worried about that?

AMBER

Mom told me that you missed out on that book deal and that you were all depressed. She worried you

might start drinking again. I worried you might kill yourself.

DAVID

You did?

(AMBER nods.)

That's...that's nice of you. To worry.

AMBER

I've always liked you, Uncle David.

DAVID

Yeah. Yeah, I've always liked you too. So nice of your mother to have so much faith in me.

AMBER

See? She only cares about herself. That's why I had to get away. She doesn't have any faith in me either.

DAVID

She's still doing her best. It hasn't been easy.

AMBER

She can't use that excuse forever.

(Beat.)

DAVID

Look, you can stay for a couple days, but then you have to go home. And you have to tell her where you are, otherwise she'll probably kill us both.

AMBER

That's all I need. Just a break. And I'll call her in the morning.

DAVID

Alright, fine, settled.

AMBER

We should take in a show or something.

DAVID

I'm...a little low on funds at the moment.

AMBER

That's okay, I got it.

DAVID

Where do you get money?

AMBER

Oh you know, various ways.

DAVID

You got a job?

AMBER

Sort of.

DAVID

What does that mean?

AMBER

Just...don't worry about it, okay?

DAVID

Amber...what are you / up to?

AMBER

I said don't worry about it. I get it where I get it. It doesn't matter.

DAVID

It does matter if you're doing something *illegal*.

(AMBER laughs.)

AMBER

Oh God, Uncle David, you sound like a nerd. It's not illegal. Don't worry about it.

DAVID

Fine. I'm not your dad, after all. Your dad isn't really your dad either though, is he?

(Beat.)

Sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

AMBER

Dick.

DAVID

Who, me or your dad?

AMBER

You. Both of you. All of you.

DAVID

All of who? Men?

AMBER

Exactly. You can all suck a dick. Not that you would, you expect us to.

DAVID

I know a few guys who would disagree with you on that. Don't you have school tomorrow?

AMBER

Yeah, I guess so.

DAVID

Why is it that I figure you don't care?

AMBER

I have no idea.

(AMBER crosses to the window and looks out.)

God, your view is...shitty.

DAVID

Yeah, well, those high rises downtown are a bit out of my price range, sorry.

AMBER

Still better than anything I see in Buffalo Grove. I mean, you have *everything*, right out your front door. I fucking hate Buffalo Grove. It's so small and everyone's an idiot.

DAVID

It's natural to hate your hometown, I guess.

AMBER

Do you hate it here?

DAVID

Some days, yeah.

AMBER

God, you're so lucky you grew up here. I would give my left tit to have grown up somewhere cool like this.

DAVID

Any place can seem small if you're there long enough.

AMBER

I don't think this place could ever feel small to me. I've loved it my whole life.

DAVID

Well when you're an adult you can move here and take full advantage of it.

AMBER

I think I'm plenty adult already, thank you very much.

DAVID

I think your mom would disagree.

AMBER

Good thing I don't care.

(Short beat.)

I think I wanna get into acting. Do you know anywhere I can take acting lessons?

DAVID

In Buffalo Grove?

AMBER

No, here.

DAVID

I don't know what one day of acting class is gonna do for you.

AMBER

I'm thinking more like...long term.

DAVID

What happened to just a couple days?

AMBER

Yeah...I may have just like, said that.

DAVID

Jesus, Amber.

AMBER

What?

DAVID

I told you I am not gonna be responsible for you.

AMBER

You don't have to be! I'll just stay long enough to get a job...and an apartment...

DAVID

Oh, so it's that easy? You just can get a job and an apartment, lickity split. Is that how it works?

AMBER

Lickity split? How old *are* you?

DAVID

Have you even had a job before? Do you have any marketable skills?

AMBER

I have lots of marketable skills.

DAVID

Like what?

AMBER

...Social media. That's super marketable now. And like, Microsoft Office and stuff? I'm like a wizard with Powerpoint. I made a powerpoint for my history class--

DAVID

You have no experience, you have no marketable skills...Jesus, you don't even have a high school diploma!

AMBER

So I'll get my GED or something. It's not a big deal.

DAVID

It is a big deal! It's a big fucking deal! You can't just uproot your life, Amber. You can't drop out of high school and move here.

AMBER

Hey, lots of famous people never finished high school.

DAVID

Not anymore. See what kind of jobs you can get without a high school diploma at the bare minimum. You'd be lucky if you could get a job as a dishwasher anymore.

AMBER

I'll find a way!

DAVID

What are you gonna do? Become a call girl? Sell drugs? Whatever shit you were doing in Buffalo Grove?

AMBER

I wasn't doing any of that stuff. Jesus.

DAVID

It doesn't matter what you were doing, okay? This isn't your little hometown. This is Chicago. Anyone who's anyone around here worked their ass off for it. You can't just waltz in here leaving everything behind and expect it's gonna work out.

(Beat.)

You just...you have to think about your future, Amber. At least a little bit.

AMBER

You know, Uncle David, I thought you were different, you know that? It's why I always liked you. You weren't like those other assholes that were all, where are you gonna go to *college*, what are you gonna *do* with your life? You actually seemed to get me. But you really are like all those other assholes. You think you're better than me? You think you have it all figured out? You don't have it any more figured out than I do. You're just as scared as me. Look at yourself. You think you're in any position to give *me* advice about how to live life?

DAVID

I'm trying my best.

AMBER

Yeah, that's all you adults can ever say. You're trying your best.

DAVID

At least I have an education. At least I have a *degree*--

AMBER

How's that working out for you?

(Beat. DAVID pulls out his phone again.)

You gonna call my mom on me?

DAVID

No. I'm looking up the number for a hostel. You can stay there while you get yourself figured out.

AMBER

You can't do that.

DAVID

I can't? Who says I can't?

AMBER

Me! You can't just ship me off to a hostel. I won't go.

DAVID

You'll go. If I have to have you forcibly removed from my apartment, you'll go.

AMBER

You do that, and I'll tell them you brought me back here to rape me or something.

DAVID

God, you are so fucking immature.

AMBER

I'm immature?

DAVID

Yes. This whole chain of events has proven that you are incapable of starting a life for yourself. You have no foresight at all.

AMBER

I'm not going to a hostel. You can't make me.

DAVID

Fine. We'll find you a nice hotel. You have all this mystery money, you can afford it for a couple days, I'm sure, since apparently that's all the time you need to find a job and a place to live in this city.

AMBER

Uncle David--

DAVID

You want to leave everything behind and move here? Fine, great. But don't ask me for help. Figure out your own life.

(DAVID starts dialing.)

AMBER

Uncle David, please. I'm sorry.

DAVID

Yeah, hi, I was wondering if you had any rooms available?

AMBER

I'm sorry, okay? I shouldn't have called you a loser or any of that stuff.

DAVID

Just one guest.

AMBER

Don't make me leave, please.

DAVID

Two nights?

AMBER

Don't make me leave!

(AMBER starts crying. DAVID looks at her for a beat.)

Don't make me leave.

DAVID

Actually, sorry, plans changed, I won't be needing that room anymore. Thank you.

(He hangs up. AMBER cries quietly. DAVID exits, returning a moment later with some blankets and a pillow, which he throws

down on the couch.)

Look...it's late. I'm exhausted. You should get to sleep too. Take a shower if you want. The pressure sucks, but it gets hot, at least.

(DAVID exits to the bedroom. AMBER stops crying immediately once he closes the door. A satisfied smile crosses her face. Lights dim.)

SCENE 2

(The next morning. DAVID is in the kitchen, making coffee, talking on the phone, attempting to be quiet. AMBER is still asleep on the couch.)

DAVID

Yeah, she's here. She's fine, she's with me. I don't know, she said she needed a break. I don't know from what, she didn't tell me. She's been real cryptic this whole time. I was gonna call you, but she threatened to walk out the door if I did. Well what do you want me to do, let her? God knows what would happen to her, young girl like that... Well I figured one night would be okay. She's sleeping right now. No, I'm not gonna wake her up, the last thing I want to do is poke a sleeping teenager. Just let her sleep, Ev. I'll have her call you when she gets up. Yes, I will. I will make her call you. What's that supposed to mean? You think I'm scared of her? I'm scared of a teenage girl. Yeah, right, absolutely. Okay, fine. Yes, she will call you. Okay, bye.

AMBER

(With her eyes still closed:)
Are you scared of me, Uncle David?

DAVID

Jesus! I thought you were sleeping.

AMBER

It's hard to sleep when you're stumbling around in there.

DAVID

I was just trying to make coffee.

AMBER

Oh, sweet, I'll take some. Black, please.

DAVID

You drink coffee?

AMBER

Yeah, so?

DAVID

Nothing, I just...wouldn't peg you for a coffee drinker, especially not black coffee. Maybe one of those god-awful caramel white chocolate mocha latte diabetes drinks.

AMBER

Hell no. I have more self respect than that.

DAVID

Good to know. Your mom seriously lets you drink coffee?

AMBER

I mostly get it on my way to school. I have a car now.

DAVID

Wait, you have a car, but you took the Metra down here?

AMBER

Yeah.

DAVID

Why?

AMBER

Because the car missing would arise too much suspicion.

DAVID

Wouldn't she just think you went to school early?

(AMBER gives him a "yeah right" kind of look.)

Right. Stupid question.

(DAVID gets out a couple mugs.)

You hungry? I think I've got...like I can't really make anything, but I think I've got some cereal in here.

AMBER

I'm fine. Maybe later.

(Beat.)

She sounded pretty pissed on the phone.

DAVID

Well, you know, she's just worried, that's all. I told her you'd call her.

AMBER

Yeah, I heard.

DAVID

And you are going to call her.

AMBER

Why? She's just gonna lecture me like usual.

DAVID

I don't care what she does. You are going to call her if I have tie you up and hold the phone to your head.

AMBER

Ugh, fine, whatever, I'll call her if it'll shut you up.

DAVID

That's all I ask.

(DAVID pours two mugs of coffee and brings one to her. She makes space for him on the couch.)

Couch comfortable?

AMBER

Surprisingly, yeah.

DAVID

I've broken it in, trust me. Spent many a night on this bad boy. Also all the farting. Really breaks down the cushions.

AMBER

You're disgusting.

DAVID

Yeah, well...

(He shrugs. Short beat.)

So what's the plan?

AMBER

The plan?

DAVID

Yeah, your great fuck it all and move to Chicago plan.

AMBER

I dunno, I don't really have a plan. Find a job and a place, I guess.

DAVID

What sort of work are you gonna do?

AMBER

I dunno, I could be a barista maybe? I mean I drink coffee, so... Or a waitress? I was also kinda hoping maybe your office might need like a secretary or something? Or like, someone to run and get coffee?

DAVID

I don't think they're really looking / right now.

AMBER

Oh, okay.

DAVID

I mean, I'll ask, for sure. But we've already got a secretary, and she's amazing, so. Cindy is her name.

AMBER

Cindy, right.

DAVID

But I will ask! Don't worry, I will ask.

AMBER

Great. Thanks, Uncle David, for everything. Thanks for being cool about this.

DAVID

Hey, it's no problem. If it's what you think is best, then...

AMBER

I do. I really do.

DAVID

Okay. I just hope you've given it enough thought.

AMBER

I have. I've given it a lot of thought.

DAVID

Great. Great.

(They sip their coffee for a minute.)

AMBER

Do you have a girlfriend, Uncle David?

(DAVID chuckles a little.)

DAVID

No. No, not currently.

AMBER

Why is that funny?

DAVID

It's not. It's not funny, it's just...

AMBER

What?

DAVID

It's like a bitter laugh more than a funny laugh. It's like a, "does it look like I would have a girlfriend?" kind of laugh.

AMBER

Why is that so strange? You're a perfectly marketable person, you can have any woman you want.

DAVID

I can assure you that that is not the case.

AMBER

Well when was the last time you tried to talk to a girl?

DAVID

Um, I'm not sure. Last week, I think?

AMBER

And?

DAVID

And nothing came of it. Because I'm not exactly a catch in most people's minds.

AMBER

What are you talking about? You're a novelist living in Chicago. I bet a lot of women would find that sexy.

DAVID

Well the fantasy is always more appealing than the reality, isn't it?

AMBER

Oh Uncle David, you're so naïve.

DAVID

What do you mean?

AMBER

Of course the fantasy is more appealing than reality. That's why it's a fantasy! Dating isn't about putting all your cards on the table right away; it's about hiding them until the time is right. You hook her in by saying you're a novelist. You keep her because when she finds out the truth, she really just likes you for who you are better than any fantasy of who you are. But as far as dating goes? Fuck yeah, you're a novelist! You're the best goddamn novelist the world has ever seen!

DAVID

You sound awfully grown up for a 17 year old.

AMBER

Just trust me, I've dated a lot of guys, and they always turn out to be way different once you really get to know them. First time you meet, they're all musicians or artists or star athletes. Then you find out who they really are.

DAVID

Any that you still liked even once you knew who they were?

AMBER

Not really. I usually don't let it get past that first date. I prefer to think of them all as artists or musicians or whatever.

DAVID

So really, you don't speak from any experience.

AMBER

Sure I do. I've gone out with enough guys for long enough to know that I'm right. Trust me.

DAVID

Okay, I trust you.

(Beat.)

You really need to call your mom, Amber. Just to let her know you're okay.

AMBER

She knows I'm okay, doesn't she? You told her, didn't you?

DAVID

Yeah, I did, but I think she'd like to hear it from you.

AMBER

I just don't think it's going to be a productive conversation. It'll probably end the way they all do: I call her a bitch, she calls me a spoiled brat, I hang up on her and then we just kind of avoid each other for a few days.

DAVID

Still, she's your mom, and I think you owe her an explanation. Especially if you're planning to stay here for good. Besides, you said you'd do it if it would shut me up, and I'm not shutting up about it until you do it.

AMBER

Fine, give me your phone.

(He does. She finds her mom's number and dials.)

Hi, Mom. Yes, I'm fine, I'm at Uncle David's. I left last night, after you went to bed, I took the Metra. Because...I just wanted to, okay? I don't know how long. Maybe forever. I don't care about school, it's

pointless anyway. They don't give a shit about me or what I really want to do. All they care about is squeezing you into some shitty little box. I'm just sick of it. I'm sick of everything. I'm sick of Buffalo Grove, I'm sick of school...no, I'm not sick of you, that's not what I meant. Now you're just putting words in my mouth! You want me to say it? Fine. I'm sick of you, Mom. I'm sick of you breathing down my neck all the time and never giving me any space. I'm sick of you never trusting me. See? This is exactly what I'm running away from! You don't care about what I want, you never did! Oh go ahead, threaten me with that, not like it matters anyway! You know what? Fuck you, Mom.

(She hangs up and hands the phone back to DAVID.)

Bitch.

DAVID

What did she threaten you with?

AMBER

She said if I don't come back she'll never speak to me again. Like I believe that bullshit. It's a cry wolf situation with her now. See? I knew it would happen exactly like that. I tried to tell you, it's never productive.

(The phone rings again.)

I am not answering that.

(DAVID answers the phone.)

DAVID

Hello. Yeah, I know, I was right there. Let me see.

(To AMBER:)

She wants to talk to you again. She sounds much calmer.

AMBER

I don't give a shit. I'm not talking to her.

DAVID

(Into the phone:)

She says she doesn't want to talk.

(He pulls the phone away from his ear with a grimace.)

I'm just telling you what she said, I'm just the messenger here. Well what do you want me to do? I'll give it to her and she'll just hang up, watch.

(He hands the phone to AMBER, who puts it up to her face.)

AMBER

Go to hell.

(AMBER hangs up the phone.)

DAVID

How long do these little spats usually last?

AMBER

I dunno, it depends. If I'm at home, a couple days maybe. This one though...

DAVID

She'll come around, I'm sure.

AMBER

I dunno, I think I really pissed her off this time.

DAVID

I guess we'll see in a few days, huh?

(The phone rings again. He answers it.)

Hello. I told you she would. Look, I don't think any constructive conversation is gonna come out of any talk you might have today. I think you both need a couple days to just think about everything and then regroup. In the meantime, just give her some space. No, I'm not on her side, I'm not on anybody's side, I'm the poor asshole who's been thrown into the middle of your García Lorca play. It doesn't matter. Spanish author. I wasn't trying to make you feel stupid, it was just a reference. Look, just give her a couple days, I'll watch over her, make sure she doesn't get any trouble, we'll get some culture in her, she'll feel more worldly and then she'll be ready to come home.

AMBER

Excuse me?

DAVID

Nothing's gonna happen to her, I promise. I'll call the school, tell them I pulled her out for...I dunno, religious reasons. It'll be okay. Just trust me, okay?

(Beat.)

Ev? You there?

(Beat.)

Okay, good. Thank you. I'll talk to you in a couple days. Bye.

(He hangs up.)

Well that was pretty productive.

AMBER

God, that's your idea of productive?

DAVID

Hey, I got her to agree to give you a couple days, that's something.

AMBER

What was all that shit about "I'll get some culture in her and send her on her way?" You think I just need to, what, go to a museum and then I'll be ready to go back to my bullshit life?

DAVID

I just said that to get your mom to quiet down.

AMBER

Really? Because I think that's really your plan.

DAVID

I don't know, it's worth a try. Maybe all you really need is to get the hell out of Buffalo Grove and see what's out there for a few days. I know it can be suffocating--

AMBER

This isn't just an itch I'm trying to scratch, okay? I'm serious about this. And fuck you for thinking that anyway.

(Beat. AMBER sighs loudly.)

God, I need a drink. Would it be like, super gauche or whatever if I bought some vodka or something?

DAVID

How are you gonna buy vodka? I'm sure as hell not gonna buy it for you.

AMBER

It's cool, I have a fake.

DAVID

Of course you do.

AMBER

What's that supposed to mean?

DAVID

Nothing, nothing. You're 17, you have a fake. Lots of 17 year olds have fakes.

AMBER

Did you?

DAVID

Surprisingly, no. I waited to become a drunk until later in life. Your mom had one, though.

AMBER

Are you serious?

DAVID

Yeah, totally. It was a terrible fake, but she was cute enough that she got away with it.

AMBER

God, I can't imagine her ever being interesting enough to have a fake ID.

DAVID

Yeah, she was. She went through her time. Hence...

(He gestures towards her. Beat.)

AMBER

That's a shitty thing to say, you know that?

DAVID

No, I didn't mean--

AMBER

I know she was young when she had me, okay? I can do math.

DAVID

I know. I'm not saying--

AMBER

Whatever. It's fine. Is there a liquor store around here somewhere?

DAVID

Yeah, it's right up the street. On the corner.

AMBER

Cool. I'll be back.

DAVID

Wait, are you serious? It's like, 11:30.

AMBER

Yeah, I am. I don't give a shit.

(AMBER starts to leave.)

DAVID

Hey. Let's go to the MCA today. It's free on Tuesdays.

AMBER

What is that?

DAVID

Museum of Contemporary Art. You wanna go look at some really weird shit?

AMBER

Yeah, maybe. I dunno. I don't want to get too cultured or anything.

(AMBER leaves. DAVID rubs his eyes. Lights dim.)

SCENE 3

(Later that day, much later. DAVID sits on the couch, trying to write, but he is clearly preoccupied. After trying for a while he shuts his laptop and checks his watch. AMBER enters, clearly intoxicated.)

DAVID

Jesus Christ, there you are! What the hell took you so long?

AMBER

I couldn't find the liquor store.

DAVID

It was right on the corner!

AMBER

Yeah but you didn't say *what* corner.

DAVID

Jesus. Well you must have found *a* liquor store at least.

AMBER

Yeah, no, I did. I asked this guy if he knew where one was, and he was all, "sure, sweetie, I know a good one, it's just up the road. Want a ride?" And I was like, "nah, let's walk." So we did, and he walked me there and then he bought me a fifth--

DAVID

Oh my God--

AMBER

I know, super nice, right? I was all, you don't have to do that, but he was like, no, no, I insist. It's my pleasure. And then we like, walked around for a while and drank it together. I also bought a bunch of Diet Coke 'cause that shit is nasty on its own. Anyway, it was super chill.

DAVID

You have got to be kidding me.

AMBER

What? What are you all pissed about?

DAVID

Do you have any idea how dangerous that is? Let a stranger buy you booze? I mean, he could've...he could've drugged it or something--

AMBER

Drugged it? Jesus, Uncle David, I was there the whole time, when would he have drugged it?

DAVID

I don't know, I'm just saying, it's possible. Or he could've raped you--

AMBER

God, you have no trust in anyone, do you?

DAVID

Not in some scumbag who's gonna buy booze for a clearly underage girl!

AMBER

Maybe he was just being nice.

DAVID

Amber, guys don't do stuff like that to be magnanimous. You know, in a lot of ways, you're very worldly, and in other ways you are *so, so* naïve.

AMBER

I like to think I just see the best in people.

DAVID

That's sweet, it really is, but I can guarantee you that guy had other things on his mind. Did he...proposition you, or...?

AMBER

Yeah, but like, I just said no thank you, and he was cool with it. I think he was just lonely. I mean, he had his arm around me a lot and he grabbed my tit once or twice--

DAVID

Jesus--

AMBER

But it's okay, really. I'm used to deflecting guys, trust me. I've had guys do way more inappropriate things than that.

DAVID

Like what?

AMBER

Just...don't worry about it.

(Short beat.)

God, I'm dizzy.

(She sits on the couch.)

Ugh, I hate this part. The spins. Sucks so much.

DAVID

So, what, you guys drank a little, then what? Then you just said, "well, thanks for that, goodbye?"

AMBER

Pretty much, yeah.

DAVID

And all in all, that took three hours?

AMBER

I guess so. God, I was gone that long? Felt way shorter than that.

DAVID

No, I assure you, it was three hours. I paid very close attention to the clock.

AMBER

Why?

DAVID

Because when your niece, who you've reluctantly taken charge of, says she's going out to buy booze, you expect her to be gone 15, 20 minutes at the most. So when that time passes, you get a little concerned. Then 20 more minutes pass. Then you realize it's been an hour, and by this point, you're really freaking out. You try her cell phone, no answer. You go down to the liquor store, the first time you've set foot in there in months—the owner still knows you by name, by the way—and she's not there, the owner who knows you by name says he didn't see her come in, you're *this close* to filing a missing persons report, you decide, she's okay, she wants to be here, she wouldn't do anything stupid, so you decide to try and write for a little while and let her explore on her own. Then you realize three fucking hours have passed and still no word, no sign of her, you start to get a little fucking concerned! You know!?

AMBER

Why are you shouting?

DAVID

Because you can't just disappear like that! I know this is still Wonderland to you, but you have to know, it's a dangerous place. There are still people out there who would very much love to get their hands on some young, pretty little thing like you.

AMBER

Okay, don't be gross.

DAVID

I'm not being gross, I'm being emphatic to make a point. It is not safe out there for a 17 year old girl to wander aimlessly on her own. I think we proved that with Drunky McGropey back there.

AMBER

Hey, his name was Kyle and he was actually kinda handsome.

DAVID

Oh, so he can be a child molester as long as he's handsome?

AMBER

He wasn't a child molester! God--

DAVID

Amber, he put his hands on you without permission. That counts as molestation in anyone's eyes.

AMBER

Lots of guys put their hands on me without permission. Every party I go to, every club, they do it. It's not a big deal--

DAVID

It is a big deal, and you can't keep going through life thinking it's not a big deal! Have some agency, for once!

AMBER

Okay, you are way over-reacting. I'm sorry I was gone so long, I really am, but I don't need you to look after me, okay? I can look after myself. Besides, don't pretend like this is some big scary place. There's a vegan bakery and a handmade gift shop on *this block*. It's not like you live on the South Side or something. I mean, even Kyle just looked like any other indie loser that I know.

DAVID

There are dangerous people everywhere, Amber. Bad shit happens all over the place.

AMBER

God, you sound like my mom.

DAVID

We don't have much in common, but I admit we share some tendencies. I just don't want anything to happen to you, because if it does, it'll be my ass, and I guarantee your mom can concoct a punishment way more horrible than anything that could happen to you out there.

AMBER

Jeez, that's thoughtful.

DAVID

I mean, I don't want anything to happen to you, period. End of sentence.

AMBER

Well nothing did, so can you just relax?

DAVID

I'm sorry if I don't see some stranger putting his hands on you as nothing.

AMBER

It's not. Not really.

DAVID

Fine, if you say so.

AMBER

Just...don't pretend like you have any idea what's right and wrong.

(Beat. AMBER gets up suddenly.)

Oh shit, I'm gonna puke.

DAVID

Oh, God, okay, bathroom's right over--

(She pushes past him and into the bathroom. We hear the sounds of hurling as DAVID stands by the door. They subside. Short beat.)

Are you alri--

(They begin again, lasting for a few seconds, then they stop.)

Are you alright?

(AMBER emerges)

AMBER

Yeah, I'm okay.

DAVID

How much did you have?

AMBER

I dunno, like a third?

DAVID

Of a fifth?

AMBER

I guess so.

DAVID

Jesus, I didn't think you had it in you.

AMBER

This ain't my first rodeo.

(She flops down on the couch again.)

DAVID

I just thought, tiny thing like you...

AMBER

You thought I'd be out after one shot huh?

DAVID

Kind of, yeah.

AMBER

Trust me, I've had way more than that.

(Short beat.)

God, I hate puking. I don't wanna be drunk anymore.

DAVID

You want some coffee or something?

AMBER

No, no more liquids.

DAVID

You should at least have some water.

AMBER

Ugh, do I have to?

DAVID

Yes, you do. You just massively dehydrated yourself. You'll feel better, I promise.

(DAVID gets up to get her a glass of water.)

Trust me, I have been where you are many a time, both literally and metaphorically.

(He brings the water to her and sits next to her.)

Here you go.

AMBER

Thanks.

(She takes a big drink.)

Ugh, puking's the worst.

DAVID

I never liked it either. I used to puke five, six, nine times before I was done. Of course, by the third or fourth time, there's not much left to puke. But anyway.

(A longer beat now.)

I just...if you're gonna stay here, we need to set up some parameters. You can't just not tell me where you are.

AMBER

Ugh, do we have to talk about this now?

DAVID

Yeah, we do. We need to communicate. I will worry 100% less if I just know where you are.

AMBER

Really? If I had called you and said "hey, Uncle David, I met this guy who is gonna buy me vodka and

probably touch my tits, so I won't be home right away," you wouldn't worry about that?

DAVID

Well...yeah, I would, but I just need to know you're alive and haven't been kidnapped or arrested for being a minor in possession or something. Just a phone call. You can lie to me if you want, I just need to know you're okay.

AMBER

Alright, fine.

DAVID

Secondly, we should do some stuff together. Like what happened to our MCA trip?

AMBER

Can't we do it another day? I don't feel up for it.

DAVID

Fine, but I'm just saying, I'd like to spend time with you too.

AMBER

Okay, fine. God, this is starting to feel like home already.

DAVID

Well I'm sorry, but you're still a minor, and I guess I'm technically the adult in charge of you now. It's not a responsibility I particularly want, but--

AMBER

Can't we just pretend I am an adult and move on with it?

DAVID

No, we can't. Thirdly, you have to call your mom and tell her you're not planning to come home. *You* have to deal with that, not me.

AMBER

Yeah, yeah, I will. Later.

DAVID

I'm gonna hold you to that. Fourth, if you're planning to run away to the city, you should start seriously looking for a job and a place to live.

AMBER

God, it's my first full day, can't I just, you know, chill for a bit?

DAVID

That's fine, I'm just saying, it would help me to feel like this isn't just vacation for you. You can stay for the time being, but this apartment is too small for both of us.

AMBER
God, that's for sure. Anything else, *Dad*?

DAVID
Don't call me that.

AMBER
You're sure acting like it.

DAVID
I'm just trying to protect you--

AMBER
Such a Dad thing to say.

DAVID
We don't know what your dad would say, Amber, because nobody knows where the fuck he is.
(Beat.)
I'm sorry, that was / unfair.

AMBER
Whatever, it's fine.
(Beat.)
Did you know him?

DAVID
Yeah, I did. In fact, I introduced him to your mom.

AMBER
Seriously? Who was he?

DAVID
I don't think we should / get into that...

AMBER
No, come on, tell me. You opened that can of worms.

DAVID
Uh, no, you did, asking if I knew him.

AMBER
It doesn't matter who did it, will you just tell me?

(Short beat.)

DAVID
He was a friend of mine, kinda a burnout guy, but he was cool. I met him after school one time at the

bus stop. He used to come over to our place after school and we'd smoke pot in my room, the three of us, while our parents were still at work. He ended up having the hots for your mom, and I thought it was a little weird but I said it was cool, even though I wasn't really cool with it. They started going out, dated for about a month, then he knocked up your mom and took off. He told me he went to our school, but it was weird 'cause I never saw him in the halls or anything. Turns out he was 25, just liked sleeping with high school girls. Kind of a scumbag, really. So yeah, the whole thing was...kinda my fault.

(Beat as AMBER takes this all in.)

But hey, all's well that ends well. Your mom decided to keep you, and she was really glad she did, because you were such an awesome kid. But I couldn't help but feel, I dunno, guilty about it. For even bringing them together in the first place.

AMBER

So my dad was basically a statutory rapist.

DAVID

Uh, I guess, technically yeah, but they really did like each other, so it wasn't like he took advantage or anything.

AMBER

Nice to know I'm half douchebag. That explains a lot.

DAVID

Okay, see, hence my reluctance to share details with you.

AMBER

It also explains the terrible, *terrible* taste in men my mom has. I mean, have you met some of these losers she's brought over?

DAVID

Yeah, a lot of them.

AMBER

I mean, Jesus Christ. I think the whole varsity football team has more brain cells. And those guys are fucking stupid.

(They laugh a bit.)

DAVID

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have--

AMBER

No, it's cool, I'm glad I know. It's been kinda a lingering question for a while.

DAVID

Did your mom ever tell you anything about him?

AMBER

She said he was a boyfriend and they got it on on prom night and it was super magical and then he went away to college and she never saw him again. Which, come to think of it, doesn't really make sense, 'cause my birthday's in June...

DAVID

You were better off with that story.

AMBER

Nah, I'm better off with the truth. Even if it sucks.

DAVID

I know one thing: you're better off without him. He would've been a shitty father.

AMBER

Yeah, I guess. Sometimes I wonder if a shitty father would've been better than none at all.

DAVID

I don't know about that. Our dad was pretty shitty. I think I would've been better off without him. I'm without him now, and it really doesn't feel all that different.

(A sad, strange beat.)

AMBER

I'm sorry I didn't tell you where I was.

DAVID

It's okay, don't worry about it. Just...tell me next time, okay?

AMBER

Okay. You don't have to worry about me, you know. I can take care of myself.

DAVID

I know you can, but I still will. Sorry.

AMBER

Ugh.

(Short beat.)

I'm feeling better now.

DAVID

Good. More water?

AMBER

Yeah, sure.

(DAVID takes her cup and fills it up again, bringing it back to

her.)

DAVID

What kind of vodka did he buy you, if I might ask.

AMBER

Popov.

DAVID

Ugh, seriously? Typically, if you want the girl, you buy her Smirnoff, at least, if not Stoli.

AMBER

It all tastes the same to me anyway.

DAVID

Next time, promise me, you will settle for no less than Stoli. You're worth it.

AMBER

Sure, Uncle David. The next weirdo who wants to get me drunk, I'll tell him, top shelf or nothin'.

DAVID

Niece after my own heart.

(They laugh a bit.)

AMBER

I'm just gonna close my eyes for a while.

DAVID

Okay, sure.

(AMBER shuts her eyes, lays her head on DAVID'S shoulder. He looks at her for a second, then reaches for his laptop again. He opens it as the lights dim.)

SCENE 4

(The next day. The apartment is empty when the lights come up. AMBER and DAVID enter mid-conversation.)

AMBER

You really thought that was good?

DAVID

Yeah, I thought it was amazing.

AMBER

Come on, it was complete masturbatory bullshit.

DAVID

How so?

AMBER

Taking naked pictures of yourself and calling it “art” is fucking stupid. That would make every dumbass who ever sent a girl a picture of his dick an “artist.”

DAVID

I hardly think those are the same thing.

AMBER

How are they not? I could take a picture of my cooter and put it on a wall and say it was some grand artistic statement, and who would question me?

DAVID

Yeah, but what would you be saying by doing that?

AMBER

I dunno, I'd figure something out. Something like, it's about the exploitation of women or some bullshit.

DAVID

So you don't see her photographs as making any kind of statement?

AMBER

Not really.

DAVID

I do.

AMBER

Like what?

DAVID

It was about presenting a completely uncorrupted image of the female form to make a statement about body acceptance.

AMBER

Ugh, you have to be kidding me.

DAVID

What?

AMBER

That's exactly what I'm talking about. She takes naked pictures and *somehow* gets them in a museum, and then everybody looks at them and talks about how deep they are when in reality she probably wasn't saying anything at all. All the idiots who try to analyze it do the work for her.

DAVID

Well I'm sorry that trying to engage with an artist and interpret their work makes me an idiot.

AMBER

No, I'm not talking about...forget it.

DAVID

No, this is good, I like how engaged you are. Because guess what: having a strong reaction still means you're responding.

AMBER

I guess.

DAVID

And hey, I bet you wouldn't see nude pictures in Buffalo Grove.

AMBER

I guess.

(Short beat.)

Holy shit. I just realized something.

DAVID

What?

AMBER

Maybe the fact that there is no statement...*is the statement.*

DAVID

Okay...

AMBER

No, come on, hear me out. Maybe the whole point is to put it up there and let you figure it out. You know, attach any meaning to it that you want.

DAVID

Yeah, I guess that could be / true.

AMBER

Thereby turning her image into some kinda...abstract thought. You feel me?

DAVID

Yeah, I feel you. That's...a very interesting interpretation, / Amber.

AMBER

Yeah, son! Figuring out art and shit!

DAVID

Well I don't know if you / figured it out, I mean--

AMBER

No, no, I totally did.

DAVID

I'm just saying, I think it's possible it could be saying a bunch of different things and there's no way to know what the artist intended. You know?

(She thinks for a second.)

AMBER

Nah. I think I nailed it.

DAVID

Okay, if you say so.

(Short beat.)

How's your hangover?

AMBER

It's okay. My head feels like it's gonna fucking explode. Maybe it's all that *interpreting* you made me do.

DAVID

Maybe. I'll get you some Motrin.

(He goes into the bathroom to get Motrin, then to the kitchen to get water, talking as he goes.)

You're really perceptive for your age, you know that?

AMBER

How do you mean?

DAVID

I mean, I doubt half your classmates could come to that kind of interpretation about something. They'd probably just giggle.

AMBER

Yeah, the male half. We're not all selfie-obsessed idiots, Grandpa.

DAVID

I'm not saying that, I'm just saying...you're very mature, is all.

AMBER

I told you, ain't my first rodeo.

(He hands her the Motrin and water.)

Thanks.

(She takes the pills and drinks.)

I was taking AP art history, actually.

DAVID

Really? I didn't know that.

AMBER

Well, I mean, it's not like we talk much, or anything.

DAVID

True, yeah, true. Still, that's cool. You like that sort of thing?

AMBER

I do, yeah. For a while I thought I might major in it, but everyone was all like, "You'll never get a job!" Besides, doesn't really matter now anyway.

DAVID

Yeah, I got a lot of that too. I never knew you were into that.

AMBER

Yeah, well, I had a good teacher. Mr. Forsythe. We got along really well. I was his favorite student.

DAVID

That always helps.

AMBER

I used to hang out in his room at lunch and talk about stuff. Not just art stuff, but life stuff. He was cool.

DAVID

Don't you think he'd be bummed you're not gonna graduate?

AMBER

Maybe. I dunno.

(Beat.)

I think he'd understand. Somehow.

DAVID

How so?

AMBER

I dunno. He'd just...he'd understand.

DAVID

Maybe you should write him. You know, keep in touch.

AMBER

I don't think that's a good idea.

DAVID

Why not? I'm sure he'd still love to hear from you.

AMBER

I don't think so.

DAVID

Why?

AMBER

He just wouldn't, okay?

DAVID

Okay, sure. Sorry.

(Beat.)

You should call your mom today.

AMBER

Ugh...

DAVID

I'm serious. No more putting it off. I know you feel like shit but you did say you'd be home in a couple days and it's been a couple days.

AMBER

I'll do it tomorrow, when I feel like I can think.

DAVID

You should do it now.

AMBER

I can't.

DAVID

Amber. You know your mom as well as I do. If you don't call, she will. And I think you're better off calling first.

(Beat. AMBER stares at him.)

You know I'm right.

(With a sigh, AMBER takes out her phone and finds her mom's number. She looks at DAVID again.)

AMBER

I know it's just gonna be the same old bullshit.

DAVID

No, you don't. Just try to keep your cool, be honest, be mature, don't give in to her dramatics. Tell her how it's gonna be.

AMBER

Okay.

(She hits the call button. The phone rings.)

Mom? It's...yes, I'm fine. Well that's what I wanted to tell you.

(She takes a big breath.)

Mom...I'm not coming home.

(Short beat.)

Mom? You there?

(Another short beat. We get the impression her mom is waiting for her to explain.)

I just...I can't do it anymore. I just feel so...suffocated. No, not by you, by school, by Buffalo Grove, by everything. I want to get away and start over. Maybe it has something to do with that, I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to talk about that, okay? Mom, I know what you're doing, you're trying to make me feel like shit, but it's not gonna work. I am being honest, I'm being mature, I'm...telling you how it's gonna be.

(DAVID gives her a thumbs up.)

Mom, will you not make this about you? For once? I am doing this for me, and I'm doing it with or without your approval. Because you make everything some huge issue about how I think you're a shitty mom and that's not what it is at all!

(DAVID makes a "pump the breaks" hand motion. AMBER takes a breath.)

He's cool with it. He's gonna help me find a job and an apartment and everything. He said to follow my dream.

(DAVID makes a "don't tell her that" hand motion.)

Yeah he's here. Okay, one second.

(She holds the phone out to him.)

She wants to talk to you.

(He takes the phone.)

DAVID

Hel—Would you...would you please stop yelling? Just...just calm down. Well I can't talk to you like this! Okay, just to be clear, I never told her to follow her dream. I tried to get her to change her mind but she's pretty obstinate about it. Well what am I supposed to do, tie her up and put her on the Metra? I'm not gonna do that, are you insane? You want to do that, you come and get her. I know you're busy, but this is not my issue. I'm caught in the middle of all this and I never asked to be there! Oh don't tell me to be an adult, you need to be the adult here! Oh that's great, that's just great. Really productive, Ev. You know, I think your anger is a tad misplaced here! I...I can't talk to you like this. I'm giving you back to her.

(He hands the phone back.)

AMBER

It's me. Look, we're not gonna have a productive conversation, and I think that's what we really need. We need to put our feelings aside and talk like rational adults. Well I would grow up if you'd let me! I'm not running away, I just want a change of scene. I know I only have a couple months left, I don't care, I can't do it anymore. I don't care if I'm a minor, I won't be for much longer, and I'm gonna do it anyway, and you can't stop me, and that's just how it is. Fine, come and try! I might be tiny but I got nails!

(She hangs up.)

DAVID

Well. That went well, I think.

AMBER

Fuck you.

DAVID

Woah, what?

AMBER

I needed you on my side for this one, and you just sold me out!

DAVID

You lied and said I told you to follow your dream! What the hell was that about?

AMBER

Because, I needed you to back me up! I needed you to stand up for me!

DAVID

This is not my problem! I'm not gonna lie to your mother and tell her I said something I didn't say.

AMBER

You would if you had some balls.

DAVID

Excuse me?

AMBER

You won't stand up to her because you're scared of her. You're scared of taking a stand, so you play that "don't look at me, I had nothing to do with it" card.

DAVID

I didn't have anything to do with it!

AMBER

That doesn't matter! I needed your help, and you totally sold me out.

DAVID

Do not pin this on me, okay? You need to learn to fight your own battles.

AMBER

And you need to learn to not be a pussy!

DAVID

Oh that's great, that's really great. You know, I thought you were mature, but you're not. You think I'm scared? You're the one who's scared. You can't stand up for your own decision so you want me to do it for you. Well guess what. I never said I supported you. I did tell you to go back and finish school, at *least*. I said you could stay here, since it was clear you weren't going to listen to me--

AMBER

See, there it is again. If you had any balls, you'd throw me out on the street! You'd say, "go home," and throw me out and lock the door. But you can't even do that.

DAVID

I'm not gonna throw my niece out on the street--

AMBER

Or you'd call the cops or something. You wouldn't just let me stomp on into your life and fuck shit up.

DAVID

Okay, you're not even being rational / anymore.

AMBER

You just...you don't get it, okay!?! I thought you did, but you don't. Nobody does.

(Beat. They both breathe.)

DAVID

I do get it, okay? I know your mom, I know she's intense, I know suburban life blows. I mean, not from experience, but I've read books. You know how many times I thought about dropping out of high school? Out of college? A lot. I feel like you're making a bad decision, but it's not up to me to make decisions for you. If you want to drop out of school and throw your future away, then that's on you.

AMBER

See? That's the sort of bullshit that shows that you do not get it.

DAVID

What are you running away from?

AMBER

What?

DAVID

On the phone, it sounded like your mom said you were running away from something. What are you running away from?

AMBER

Nothing. You misheard.

DAVID

I don't think I / did.

AMBER

You did, okay? I don't want to talk about it.

DAVID

See, you saying that makes me think I heard right.

AMBER

Just drop it okay? I swear to God I will leave and you will not hear from me. Then you'll have a fun time not standing up for yourself.

DAVID

Alright, you don't want to talk about it, fine. But it would help me if I knew the real reason why you were coming here.

AMBER

You know the real reason. I was feeling suffocated.

DAVID

Alright, if that's your story, you stick to it.

AMBER

It's the truth.

DAVID

The whole truth?

AMBER

Yeah.

DAVID

Okay.

(Beat.)

AMBER

God, I'd say I need a drink, but I kinda feel like never drinking again.

DAVID

You might wanna watch that, lest you end up like me.

AMBER

I don't think that's gonna happen.

DAVID

I don't know, I think more young people could be classified as alcoholics than you may think. I'm just saying, it's something to keep in mind.

AMBER

Uncle David. Not now, okay?

DAVID

Okay, sorry.

(Short beat.)

What do you want to do with the rest of the day? You wanna get dinner?

AMBER

Right now, I just want to sit here, with the lights off, completely silent, eyes closed, and wait for this fucking headache to pass.

DAVID

Motrin hasn't kicked in, huh?

AMBER

No, and this whole conversation has not helped either.

DAVID

That's fair. I accept that.

AMBER

Great. Could you turn the light off, please?

(DAVID does. The stage is now dimmer but not fully dim. A car alarm goes off, seemingly right outside the window. It is quite piercing. AMBER winces. It continues for a few seconds as the lights dim all the way.)

SCENE 5

(AMBER sits in the living room, reading a binder clipped stack of paper. DAVID enters a moment later, returning from work.)

DAVID

Hey.

AMBER

Hey.

DAVID

What did you get up to today?

AMBER

Absolutely nothing.

DAVID

Why not? You should be out grabbing the city by the balls, seeing everything.

AMBER

Yeah, I just kinda still feel like shit, so...

DAVID

Wow, two day hangover, huh? I remember those. Though usually I'd just drink some more and that'd take care of it.

AMBER

Great advice.

DAVID

Not advice, just...point of comparison. I have something that'll make you feel better.

AMBER

What's that?

DAVID

I talked to my regional manager, and he said he could get you in as a paid intern. It can even apply as college credit if you want it to.

AMBER

Great, for all that college I'm not gonna go to.

DAVID

Well, hey, you wanted me to ask about a job, and that was what was available.

AMBER

Is it even enough to live on?

DAVID

I don't know, but it's something. I bet if you got a couple roommates--

AMBER

Yeah, I kinda don't want to do that.

DAVID

Why not?

AMBER

I'd just like to live on my own, that's all.

DAVID

Roommates at your age could be a really good thing, Amber.

AMBER

I just feel like I'd get pissed off at them, they'd get pissed off at me, it's best to just avoid all that, you know?

DAVID

Alright, well...are you interested? Because I have to let him know by tomorrow.

AMBER

I don't know, it sounds really boring. I mean, what would I be doing, getting people coffee and delivering mail and all that crap?

DAVID

Probably, yeah, but I think this is kind of the best you're gonna be able to get right now, Amber. I mean, without a high school diploma--

AMBER

Can't I just lie and say I have it already? I mean, is anyone really gonna check?

DAVID

You never know, and if you lie about that kind of thing, you're not gonna get hired.

AMBER

Why do I need a high school diploma to be a waitress or something?

DAVID

You don't, I guess, but it's just not good policy to lie about that stuff.

AMBER

Yeah, I dunno, I think it'll be okay. I mean, I basically did all the education part, I just don't have the stupid piece of paper.

DAVID

Yeah, but that stupid piece of paper is really important to have. If someone does a background check--

AMBER

I just won't apply for any of those jobs.

DAVID

A lot of jobs do it. Most of them. In fact, this internship would too, but we can work it and say you're doing it for the credit and they're more lax about it. I really think you should take it. It'd be great experience.

AMBER

Yeah, thanks for asking, Uncle David, but that sounds like it would make me want to staple my labia shut.

DAVID

Wow, okay, that's a little extreme.

AMBER

It's just, if I'm gonna do a job I hate, I'd rather it be one that at least doesn't bore me to death. I mean, you hate it there too, don't you?

DAVID

I don't hate it. I mean, I don't *like* it, necessarily, but it's fine. It's a job. I get insurance. That's about all I can ask for.

AMBER

What do you mean that's all you can ask for? I think you can ask for a lot more than that. This is your *life*, you know?

DAVID

That's very sweetly idealistic, Amber.

AMBER

Don't be condescending.

DAVID

I'm not, I mean it. That's a great way to look at the world. It's not exactly accurate, but...

AMBER

Why can't it be? Nobody says you have to work for the rest of your life at some shitty job just because it pays the bills. I mean, if that's what being an adult is, then that is bullshit.

DAVID

Well, I hate to tell you, but it kind of is. You have to make sacrifices--

AMBER

That is such shit! That's so defeatist.

DAVID

I choose to think of it as practical.

AMBER

Well if I ever end up with that life, I give you permission to tit punch me.

DAVID

You're being a little insulting, you know that?

AMBER

No I'm not, I'm just being honest. Come on, when was the last time you really took a look at your life and tried to do something about it? I mean, it's obvious you're not happy.

DAVID

I don't see what that has to do with anything.

AMBER

Because it's your *life*! Jesus, you seriously don't give a shit?

DAVID

Sure I do. But I know that I have rent to pay, and my landlord doesn't give a shit about my dreams if they don't pay that every month.

AMBER

That's so shitty.

DAVID

It's life, Amber. It's my life, at least. If you can figure out the secret to happiness, you let me know. For now, I'm fine where I am.

(AMBER holds up the stack of paper.)

AMBER

What about this, then?

DAVID

Did you go in my desk?

AMBER

Yeah, I did. I was bored out of my gourd and I was looking for something to do, and I found this. I read about half of it. It seems a bit close to home, don't you think?

DAVID

Every writer incorporates elements of their own life--

AMBER

Come on. A guy who hates his job and secretly wants to be a PI? Works in a shitty office? Seems a little more than just "incorporating elements of your life" or whatever.

DAVID

It's fiction, Amber. And not particularly good fiction, anyway.

AMBER

I think it's really good.

DAVID

Well, that's great, but...

AMBER

But what?

DAVID

Nothing, it's just...you're not exactly...

AMBER

What, because I'm 17 I don't know what good writing is? Because I don't have some shitty degree that tells me that I can be some kind of authority. You can't just trust my opinion?

DAVID

It's not that I don't trust your opinion, it's just...I'm not really trying to impress 17 year olds, you know?

AMBER

Right, because we're all a bunch of idiots who don't know how to read books.

DAVID

That's not what I'm saying.

AMBER

But we're not smart enough or whatever.

DAVID

No, that's...it's more complicated than that.

AMBER

I just don't know why you wouldn't even try to get it published. Like what's the harm in sending it in?

DAVID

I have tried. Many times. I've sent it to agents, publishers, anybody I can. Nobody thinks it'd make any money, let alone if it's any good. It's not as easy as just getting something published. Most writers have to write a bunch of novels before one breaks through.

AMBER

Why don't you then?

DAVID

I've tried, I just...I haven't had much time, or energy, or whatever. And then you showed up, / and--

AMBER

Oh wow, sorry it's my fault.

DAVID

It's not your fault, I've just been...distracted, that's all.

AMBER

Why don't you self publish it? Like on Kindle or something?

DAVID

That's kind of a hack move.

AMBER

I don't think so. E.L. James published stuff online first.

DAVID

Who is that?

AMBER

Uh, *50 Shades of Grey*?

DAVID

You like that book?

AMBER

No, it's fucking terrible, but it's popular.

(DAVID laughs.)

DAVID

Maybe you do have good taste.

AMBER

This is what I'm telling you.

DAVID

It's just...you don't understand how it works.

AMBER

What don't I understand?

DAVID

Anything really. About being a published author, especially.

AMBER

You're right, I'm so naïve.

DAVID

Look, I love your spirit, but there's a lot you don't know about life.

AMBER

I think I know more than you think I do.

DAVID

Really? Because from where I'm standing, you've never lived on your own, you've never had a job, you have no idea what you even want to *do* with your life, and you're trying to tell me I'm not really living or some such nonsense. I'm sorry if I don't want to take life advice from a high school dropout.

AMBER

Wow. You don't have to be a dick about it.

DAVID

Just...don't try to tell me how to live my life, and I won't tell you how to live yours.

AMBER

Okay. God.

(Beat.)

DAVID

Did you look for apartments today?

AMBER

No, I didn't.

DAVID

Why not?

AMBER

I didn't really feel like it.

DAVID

When are you going to feel like it?

AMBER

I don't know. Soon.

DAVID

Because I've already told you that you can't stay here forever.

AMBER

I know that.

DAVID

So while I'm at work, maybe that would be a good use of your time.

AMBER

Like anyone's gonna rent to me! I'm unemployed, remember?

DAVID

Well do something about that too. I offered you an in and you don't want it.

AMBER

I will, okay? Why are you pressuring me so much?

DAVID

Because this place is too small for both of us, and you told me you were going to start looking.

AMBER

I'm sorry I came in and interrupted your exciting life.

DAVID

Well you seemed so eager to get going, I figured you wouldn't just sit around all day.

AMBER

I just...I have a lot on my mind, okay?

DAVID

Like what?

AMBER

Just...don't worry about it.

DAVID

Something that happened back home?

AMBER

No. Why would you assume that?

DAVID

I know there's something you're not telling me. It's okay, you can tell me. I promise I've done enough fucked up shit that you don't have to worry about me passing judgment.

AMBER

You know what I'm trying to get away from. That's all there is.

DAVID

I don't believe that.

AMBER

Well, it's the truth, so believe whatever you want, I guess.

DAVID

You know why I don't believe it? Because every teenager on Earth dreams of escaping their shitty hometown, but pretty much every one of them I've ever met at least sticks it out until they finish high school. That's pretty much a basic thing. And I happen to know your home life isn't bad enough that you would need to escape from it so suddenly.

AMBER

You have no idea what my life is like.

DAVID

Yes I do. I know your mom is a hardass, and she smothers you, and she's too strict, and that pisses you off. I know you have a rotating cast of father figures, none of whom have any interest in being what you need them to be. But I know your mom loves you, and would do anything for you, and she only smothers because she doesn't want you to end up like her. Am I right about that?

AMBER

I don't know.

DAVID

So, with that in mind, there has to be something else. Did one of those men do something to you? Because if they did--

AMBER

No.

DAVID

Are you sure?

AMBER

Yes, I'm sure, Jesus. They're losers but they're not rapists.

DAVID

Okay, I just want to make sure. Because otherwise I really can't see why it's so dire to escape for you. Are you in trouble with the law or something?

AMBER

No, okay? Stop fishing for stuff, please.

DAVID

Just help me understand.

AMBER

You already do! There's nothing more to talk about, so please, for the love of *dick*, stop trying to figure me out, *please*. I am not some kind of damaged little flower that needs saving. I hate it there, I hate

everything about it, and I just had to get out, okay? That's it.

DAVID

Okay. I just feel--

AMBER

How would you like it if I tried to figure you out, huh? Dig into the ways you're so fucked up. Why'd you become an alcoholic? Was your home life so terrible that it drove you to drink? Were you diddled as a child and you're all messed up about it?

DAVID

Amber--

AMBER

I'm just saying, it's annoying, okay? I don't try to solve your problems, don't try to solve mine.

DAVID

Okay, fine.

(Beat.)

It wasn't, by the way.

AMBER

What?

DAVID

My home life wasn't fucked up. No more fucked up than anyone else, I guess. I mean, your grandpa wasn't exactly loving and supportive, but lots of people deal with that and turn out fine. So why did I become an alcoholic? Because I thought it would make me interesting. All my heroes drank—Hemingway, Faulkner, Carver—so I figured I had to do it too if I wanted to be a good writer. Typical college wannabe writer bullshit. We all did it, you know, we all thought that was somehow magically gonna make us better. It didn't. It just turned me into a mess and pushed everyone away from me. It just got out of hand, like it does. I'm fucked up because I thought being fucked up was what you had to be. Now it's too late, and if I could go back, I'd tell myself that it isn't gonna change anything. So I don't want you to fall into that trap, borrowing trouble. Just...be normal, Amber. It's the only way to survive.

AMBER

Why are you telling me all this?

DAVID

I just want to make it clear, you can talk to me if you want to. Or don't. It's up to you. I'm just saying, you don't have to be alone in it.

(Long beat as AMBER considers.)

AMBER

You remember that teacher I told you about, Mr. Forsythe?

DAVID

Yeah, the one you were close with?

AMBER

Yeah. We...God, this is like, I haven't really talked about it, you know? We were, like, more than just teacher-student.

(Beat. It's really hard for her to talk about.)

He loved me. I think.

It started as just what I said it was, me spending lunch in his classroom and talking about stuff. I mean, I had friends, but I couldn't really talk about this stuff with them, you know? Like, life and future stuff. They'd probably just laugh and me and say "Oh Amber, you're so cute." Assholes. Anyway, Mr. Forsythe was really cool about stuff. He didn't talk down to me, like he knew so much more than I did or anything. He just listened to me and gave me advice. It was really cool.

So it started like that, and we got really close, and he would tell me about his life too, you know? His wife, his family, his own dreams as a kid. He wanted to be a writer, like of history books and stuff. He really encouraged me. I wasn't used to that. I was used to adults telling me the same old crap about going to college and getting married and all that bullshit. He actually encouraged me to do what I wanted to do with my life. It's sad, but that was like, huge for me. You know? So one day, we're sitting at lunch and we're talking about stuff, and he says something along the lines of, "you're a really extraordinary girl, Amber," or some corny crap like that. And...I don't know what happened, I just kissed him. It happened so fast. And at first he stopped me, but I kept at him. He didn't resist for long. We met up after school and he took me home and we fucked. In his *bed*, you know, like where he slept with his wife and everything! Where he probably had his *kids*! He took me there, and we fucked, and it was like I'd never felt before. It was tender, and sweet, and he took his time, and it was amazing. Everything aside, it was a really nice moment. His wife worked until the evening and his kids were at a day care, so we had the place to ourselves for a few hours. We laid together after we finished, and I just felt so *safe*. We started seeing each other a lot after that. It wasn't just for the sex, I promise, we really cared about each other. He used to talk about taking care of me and helping me in any way he could, and I really trusted him. I still believe he meant it. If things hadn't gone the way they did.

DAVID

What happened?

AMBER

He got so guilty he told his wife about it. People were starting to suspect, I think. They'd see us leave together. One day I got pulled into the principal's office and asked all these questions. Did he force himself on me, did he take advantage of me, all this stuff. I denied it all. I didn't want to get him in trouble, you know? I said we were just friends and he gave me rides home, and that's it. They believed me for a while. Then one day I get pulled in again, and there's Mr. Forsythe and his wife...and my mom. They said he had admitted to it, and they needed my testimony. They asked us all these questions again, and I told the truth. I couldn't do anything else, you know? And I looked over at him and he just had the kindest eyes. He didn't want anything to happen to me. He encouraged me even then. And I told them that it had been completely consensual, and that he hadn't taken advantage of me, and that if anything, I took advantage of him. It didn't really matter. I had to convince my mom not to press charges. She was out for blood. We negotiated that he would resign and lose his license instead of going to jail. His wife left him too, I think, with the kids. She hates me, I know that much. I can't blame her, really. I think he had to take some shitty maintenance job or something. And of

course, word had gotten around about everything, as soon as he left. I was the new school slut, the teacher fucker, the homewrecker. Not that my reputation was great to begin with, but it only got worse from there. I think he thought maybe we could stay together, now that there was nothing in between us, but I just...I couldn't do it.

(Short beat.)

So that's the worst part, for me, I guess. I ruined this guy's life, he lost *everything*, and all he wanted was to be with me, and I just couldn't do it! He loved me, and he gave up everything, and the idea of being like his *girlfriend*, that maybe I like owed him that, it was just fucking terrifying! I didn't ask for any of that, you know? I just wanted to feel close to somebody.

So that's why I left. I couldn't face him, I couldn't face my school, I couldn't face my mom. I couldn't face anything.

(Long beat. It's clear that AMBER is close to breaking down, but also that this is a big weight off of her.)

Feel free to express disgust. Everybody else does.

DAVID

I'm not disgusted, Amber. You shouldn't feel guilty about it. It was his decision too.

AMBER

But he cared about me so much, and I just screwed him over. I couldn't even stay with him.

DAVID

We're all responsible for our own lives. You don't owe him anything, and if he feels like you do, then that's his mistake, not yours. He made his decision, and so did you, and all you can both do is live with it and move on. That's all any of us can do.

AMBER

I don't know if I can do that.

DAVID

You have to. Even better, you can meet it head-on. Tell those kids at school to suck your dick. Metaphorically, of course.

(Beat. AMBER hugs DAVID fiercely for a long time. After a moment, she looks up at him and kisses him on the mouth. It should be clear there's no real desire in it beyond just a knee-jerk response. He stops and pushes her away.)

AMBER

Oh God. I'm so sorry.

DAVID

It's...it's okay.

AMBER

Oh God, I'm so embarrassed. I really just did that.

DAVID

It's okay, Amber, really. Let's just...let's just forget it happened, okay?

AMBER

Okay, yeah. Thanks.

DAVID

It's no problem. Thanks for...opening up to me like that.

AMBER

It felt good. To talk about it, I mean. Not the...you know.

DAVID

Right, no, yeah.

(Beat.)

I just remembered, I need to run to the store really quick, just to pick up a couple of things.

AMBER

Oh, okay.

DAVID

Yeah, so, I'm just gonna do that. You cool to hang here?

AMBER

Yeah, totally.

DAVID

Okay, sweet. I'll be right back. Feel free to...go on the internet, or whatever.

(DAVID exits. AMBER falls back on the couch. She picks up her pillow and screams into it. Lights dim.)

SCENE 6

(Lights up on AMBER packing some clothes into a backpack. After a moment, DAVID walks in on her.)

DAVID

What's going on?

AMBER

I was just...packing up my stuff.

DAVID

Are you planning to go somewhere, or...?

AMBER

Yeah, I dunno, I just...I feel like I should leave, you know, find a hostel or another couch or something.

DAVID

Why?

AMBER

I just feel like you need, like, space from me, or something.

DAVID

Is this about...?

AMBER

Yeah, and other stuff, like how it's shitty to just step into your life and mess up your shit and get all in your way and everything. You know, stuff you said before.

DAVID

You're really not messing anything up, honestly. It's been really fun having you here. I mean that.

AMBER

Yeah, I had fun too.

DAVID

So why go?

AMBER

I just...I feel really bad, about everything, and I think I just need to go.

DAVID

You shouldn't feel bad about it. It was...I don't really know what it was, but I know it was just an honest mistake.

AMBER

Honest mistake? It's way more fucked up than just an honest mistake.

DAVID

I don't see it that way.

AMBER

Well I do, and I don't think I can be here with you and not feel super fucking weird about it, so I just need to go.

DAVID

I don't really feel comfortable just letting you leave.

AMBER

What are you gonna do? Tie me to the couch? You know you can't really stop me. And don't tell me

that my mom's gonna be pissed, because I'm pretty sure that's a foregone conclusion. I just need to leave, and sort all my shit out, and not like, drag you into it or whatever.

DAVID

I'm already dragged into it, so I don't see what difference it makes.

AMBER

Yeah but this is what you wanted, right? You even offered to help find somewhere to put me so I wouldn't be in your way.

DAVID

Yeah, I know I did, but--

AMBER

So just let me go, and you won't have to worry about me anymore, okay?

DAVID

You don't have to do this.

AMBER

Yes, I do.

(She finishes packing, slings the bag over her shoulder.)

I'll see you later.

DAVID

Where are you gonna go?

AMBER

I don't know, I'll figure it out.

(She goes to the door.)

Bye, Uncle David. Sorry about...all of it, I guess.

(She opens the door, begins to step out.)

DAVID

I was gonna do it, you know.

(She stops.)

AMBER

Do what?

DAVID

What you were afraid of. I was gonna...well, I hadn't worked out how I was gonna do it, but I was. I wrote a note and everything. Well, a draft of one anyway. You want to read it?

(He pulls a folded up piece of paper out of his pocket and holds it

up to her. After a moment's hesitation, she takes it.)

AMBER

You carry it around with you?

DAVID

Yep.

(AMBER reads it, silently.)

AMBER

God, Uncle David, that's...

DAVID

I know, it's terrible, right? So derivative. I thought maybe I'd attempt one last cliché: the suicide of the misunderstood genius. Then someone, maybe you, would find all my manuscripts and get them published and I'd be the posthumous hero I never was in life, a la John Kennedy Toole or something. I mean, I actually *thought* that. How pathetic is that, right?

AMBER

That's a really shitty thing to do to somebody, you know that?

DAVID

I know, I know it is.

AMBER

So...what, if I leave you're gonna go through with it?

DAVID

No, no, that's not what I'm saying.

AMBER

Then what are you saying?

DAVID

I'm saying...when you showed up here, and you said you were worried about me, I just...I wasn't expecting it. From anyone, really. I didn't think anyone would really notice, or care. But you cared.

AMBER

That's bullshit. What about my mom? You think she wouldn't care?

DAVID

I think your mom gave up on me a long time ago. And that's okay, I don't blame her. Up until recently, I was a complete mess. Sure, she might be sad for a while, but I think even she'd think it made sense, in the end.

AMBER

You don't give her much credit.

DAVID

I give her all the credit in the world. She tried, for years. Paid to bail me out of jail when I got thrown in for being passed out on the sidewalk. She tried to get me into counseling, rehab, I can't count how many times she drove down from Buffalo Grove to try to talk me down off one of my drunken ledges. And every time, I let her down. I promised I'd get sober, and I cried, and she held me in her arms, and I knew I wasn't gonna do it. I knew she'd come, every time. And then, to my surprise, she stopped coming. Stopped answering my calls. Like I'd dropped off the earth. We didn't talk again until I called her as part of my twelve step program. Steps 8 and 9, you're supposed to make amends to all the persons you'd wronged. She was numero uno, as you might imagine. Sure, I was mad at first, but eventually I understood why. You can only do so much for a person before it's no longer worth the investment.

AMBER

But...you did it, right? I mean, you got clean or whatever.

DAVID

I did. But it was too late for us. I know she's happy for me, but she doesn't want much to do with me. Like I said, I can't blame her.

AMBER

She never told me any of that.

DAVID

Yeah, well, you were a kid. Are a kid, really. You didn't need to hear that stuff. So anyway, when you showed up here, and you said you were worried, it made me feel like...maybe somebody would care. A little bit. So that's why I want you to stay. Not because I'd go through with it if you don't, but just because...it's nice that somebody cares. Sorry. I know this is all super fucking heavy, and I don't mean to...throw it on you.

AMBER

I do care. I know we didn't used to be that close or whatever, but I still cared about you. I would've been super pissed if you'd offed yourself. I might've come to the funeral and kicked your corpse's ass.

DAVID

That would've been fun to see.

AMBER

I'm just saying, you think nobody gives a shit, but you're wrong. I do, and my mom does too.

DAVID

I'm not so sure about that.

AMBER

Well I am, okay? She may be a complete psycho bitch sometimes, but she does care. Even I can see that. Maybe you should call her and just talk sometime.

(Short beat.)

I think I'm still gonna take off, if that's okay with you.

DAVID

Sure, yeah.

AMBER

You're gonna be okay, right?

DAVID

Yeah, I'll be fine.

AMBER

Remember what I said: I'll kick your corpse's ass if you do anything.

DAVID

I won't.

(Short beat. AMBER goes to DAVID and hugs him.)

Are you gonna be okay?

AMBER

I'll be fine. I'll figure something out.

DAVID

I still don't know how I feel about this.

AMBER

Don't worry about me, and I won't worry about you. How's that for an agreement?

DAVID

I'm still gonna worry about you.

AMBER

And I'm still gonna worry about you. So there.

(She breaks the hug and leaves. Lights dim as DAVID looks around his now empty apartment.)

SCENE 7

(Lights up on DAVID, typing on his laptop. The place looks a bit neater than before but still pretty cluttered. It is several months later. There is a knock at the door. DAVID goes to answer it. It's

AMBER.)

Holy shit. Hey.

DAVID

Hey.

AMBER

Come in, please.

DAVID

(She comes in.)

The place looks like slightly less of a shithole.

AMBER

Yeah well, now that I don't have all your hair clogging my drain anymore, I figured I'd clean the place up a bit.
Your mom told me you graduated.

DAVID

You called her?

AMBER

Yeah, a little while ago. She seemed so confused, like she had no idea why I'd be calling her. But it was good. We talked.
How was it? School, I mean.

DAVID

It sucked, what do you think?

AMBER

Yeah, I guess I could've figured that.

DAVID

Yeah, I mean, I took a lot of shit, got a lot of dirty looks, all that. But I just kinda...kept my head down, you know.

AMBER

That's all you can do, really.

DAVID

Yeah.

AMBER

You want coffee?

DAVID

AMBER

Uh, sure, I mean, I can't stay long, but yeah.

DAVID

You have somewhere to be?

AMBER

Yeah, I uh...I have an audition?

DAVID

Oh cool, for what?

AMBER

I dunno, some play or whatever. It's about, like, glass animals?

DAVID

The Glass Menagerie?

AMBER

Yeah, I think that's it. Is it about glass animals?

DAVID

Uh, not really. Well, kind of. One character has a bunch of little glass animals on display. You like it black, right?

AMBER

Yeah.

(DAVID pours her a cup of coffee and brings it to her.)

Do they, like, come to life or something?

DAVID

No, no, not at all. They're more of a metaphor for her fragility and isolation, I think.

AMBER

Oh, okay. Damn.

DAVID

What?

AMBER

I kinda signed up for it because I thought it was about glass animals coming to life. That sounded like a kick-ass premise.

DAVID

You mean you've never heard of this play before?

AMBER

No, not really. Is it famous?

DAVID

Yeah, it's by Tennessee Williams. It's a very important piece of theatre.

AMBER

Hm. We didn't read many plays in school. Other than Shakespeare.

DAVID

Well, sorry to burst your bubble, but there's no living glass animals. Though you're right, that would be pretty kickass.

(They chuckle a bit. AMBER sips her coffee.)

Is there anything I can do for you, or...?

AMBER

Oh, no, I just wanted to say hi. I can go, if...

DAVID

No, no, it's okay. You're not intruding, I just...I'm just surprised to see you is all.

AMBER

Well we haven't talked since everything happened...

DAVID

I know, that's...hence my surprise. I thought I would've scared you off forever, what with my whole soul-baring thing...

AMBER

No, it was...it was a lot to take at the time, but looking back, I shouldn't have left like that. I was just so embarrassed / that--

DAVID

Don't even mention that. It's already been forgotten, I promise.

AMBER

Yeah, well...I still feel weird about it.

(Short beat.)

I...saw Mr. Forsythe again.

DAVID

Oh yeah? How'd that go?

AMBER

It was about as weird as I expected. He's working as a facilities guy for some company now. I felt so shitty, like he probably has to mop floors and clean toilets and crap, but he says he's happy. He says he likes working with his hands.

DAVID

Did he try to get you to stay?

AMBER

Yeah, I mean, it was obvious he wanted something to happen, but I told him I just couldn't do it.

DAVID

Was he pissed about it?

AMBER

I don't know, it was hard to tell. I told him I didn't want to see him anymore, and he just sort of looked away from me and said "oh, I see." Like real quiet. It sounded...I dunno, sad, disappointed, confused...not pissed though, so much.

DAVID

I see. That's progress, right?

AMBER

I guess. I still feel like such an asshole about it.

DAVID

You probably will for a while. Maybe forever.

AMBER

Gee, thanks.

DAVID

I'm just giving you a warning. You're probably gonna wake up some nights and feel so guilty you can't breathe. But that gets less over time, I promise.

AMBER

Great. So much to look forward to.

DAVID

It'll heal. Everything heals.

(Beat.)

So did you sneak away again?

AMBER

No, actually, this one has the Mom stamp of approval.

DAVID

Really? How'd you manage that?

AMBER

I dunno, I think she knew she couldn't keep me there forever, that I'd leave eventually anyway. Besides, I think she was glad to get me out of the house. More room for her and her newest loser

boyfriend.

DAVID

Yeah, she told me about him. He brews beer, I guess?

AMBER

Yeah, he does. He let me try some.

DAVID

Any good?

AMBER

God no.

DAVID

That's a shame.

AMBER

He's nice enough, at least. Not a pervert, so that's something.

DAVID

That's progress too, I guess.
So you have a place, and everything?

AMBER

Yeah, I'm renting a room in Uptown with a couple other girls. They're basically horrible people.

DAVID

That's rough.

AMBER

Yeah. I like them though.

(Short beat. AMBER laughs a bit.)

DAVID

What's funny?

AMBER

Nothing, I just...when I think about the fact that I was almost gonna drop out of high school? It seems pretty fucking stupid. I mean, don't get me wrong, high school blows, but who drops out anymore?

DAVID

This is what I tried to tell you.

AMBER

Yeah, I know. I wanted to say...thank you, I guess.

DAVID

For what?

AMBER

For telling me to go back. For letting me know it'd be okay.

DAVID

It was, wasn't it?

AMBER

Yeah, sort of, I guess. I mean, it was shitty, but it's in the past, so.

DAVID

That's right.

(Awkward pause.)

AMBER

Well, I should probably get going. I have to get out to Logan Square pretty soon.

DAVID

Oh, okay, cool.

AMBER

Thanks for the coffee.

DAVID

Yeah, of course.

AMBER

I'll stop by again sometime, okay?

DAVID

Yeah, sure. I'll...probably be here.

AMBER

Okay, cool. I'll see you around.

(AMBER starts to leave.)

DAVID

Hey, before you go...

So I was at the Art Institute the other day. I go there sometimes when I'm feeling really stuck or something, look around at all the portraits and the sculptures. There's something...weirdly comforting about it. Even when it's crowded, it's like you can look into those paintings and disappear. The rest of the world can cease to be around you. I always like to find one that nobody's really paying attention to. Maybe nobody ever does. While everyone's staring at *American Gothic* or *Nighthawks* or whatever, I'll

find some other one to get lost in. Last time I was there, I saw this sculpture I hadn't really noticed before. It was hanging from the ceiling by a few pieces of wire. It's this really abstract female figure, her hands are out, like a snow angel or something. You can't tell if she's falling or flying. There's no face to tip you off, no fear or excitement or anything. She's just...suspended there. Above everything else. Whatever trajectory she had, if any, it doesn't really matter. Falling, flying, it doesn't matter either. She's just...suspended. Like she's watching over us. It's called *Miss Expanding Universe*, it's on the second floor, modern art wing. Anyway, it...it made me think of you and...I dunno, I came home, and I just started writing, and I guess I had a little bit of a breakthrough. It just...poured out of me, like it hasn't done in years. It felt pretty amazing. I'm sure it's all shit, but hey, it's words on a page, so that's something, right?

AMBER

That's awesome, Uncle David. Glad to know I'm still an inspiration when I'm not even around.

DAVID

You want to read it?

AMBER

Yeah, I'd love to. You can email it to me or whatever.

DAVID

I'll do you one better.

(He goes to a stack of papers and pulls out a manuscript, handing it to her.)

AMBER

Wow, hard copy. Old school.

DAVID

Yeah, that's how I roll. You can read it and tell me what you think.

AMBER

You'd really want to hear my opinion?

DAVID

Absolutely. Besides, there's a character in there you might identify with.

AMBER

Did you write me into your book?

DAVID

Not you, exactly, but somebody that's kinda like you.

AMBER

That's so cool.

DAVID

You think so.

AMBER

Yeah! I always kinda hoped I'd end up in one of your stories. Though preferably with something cool, like a sword for a leg or something.

DAVID

I think you might be disappointed, it's not that kind of story.

AMBER

Bummer. Maybe it'll still be good anyway. Maybe.

(Short beat.)

Alright, I should go. It was nice to see you.

DAVID

Yeah, you too. Come back any time.

AMBER

Will do. I mean, I live here now.

DAVID

Is it everything you wanted it to be?

AMBER

I dunno, I mean, it's pretty cool. It sort of feels like...the same. You know?

DAVID

Yeah, I do.

AMBER

Alright. I'll see you later.

DAVID

I'll be around.

(AMBER exits. DAVID looks around his apartment. Finally, he sits back down and resumes writing. Blackout.)

END OF PLAY