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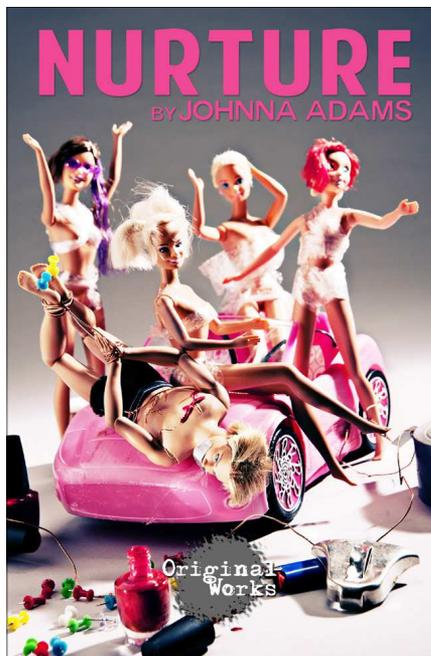
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NURTURE by Johnna Adams

Synopsis: Doug and Cheryl are horrible single parents drawn together by their equally horrible daughters. The star-crossed parental units' journey from first meeting to first date, to first time, to first joint parent-teacher meeting, to proposal and more. They attempt to form a modern nuclear family while living in perpetual fear of the fruit of their loins and someone abducting young girls in their town.

Cast Size: 1 Male, 1 Female

Branched
a comedy with consequences
by Erin Mallon

Branched had its World Premiere produced by InViolet Theater (co-artistic directors, Angela Razzano and Michael Henry Harris) at HERE Arts Center in New York City on February 20th 2014. The play was directed by Robert Ross Parker with sets and lights by Nick Francone, sound by Shane Rettig, costumes by Kristina Makowski, puppet design and construction by David Valentine, fight choreography by Alexis Black, production management and technical direction by Dylan Luke and stage management by Fran Rubenstein.

The cast was as follows:

Tamara.....	Tara Westwood
Ben.....	Michelle David
Martin.....	Andrew Blair
Belinda.....	Marguerite Stimpson

CHARACTERS

TAMARA: (Pronounced TA-mara. Accent on the 1st syllable) 30s, Author, Speaker, Activist, Mother

MARTIN: 42, Manager of an HSBC Bank in Park Slope

BEN: 5 and 1/2, Boy in Belinda's classroom (Ben can be played by any gender).

BELINDA: 30s, Kindergarten teacher at Park Slope Independent Learning School

BEATRICE: Newborn, Ben's little sister. She is "played" by freakish baby doll/puppet creations. She "ages" very quickly throughout and should be "played" by larger, freakier baby doll/puppet creations.

Place: Scene Park Slope, Brooklyn, NY

Time: November into December

BRANCHED

SCENE 1

(November. The first movement of Vivaldi's "Autumn" plays slowly on a violin. Lights up on a modern dining room/kitchen in a Park Slope, New York City apartment. Ben, 5 1/2, stands behind a music stand, practicing his violin while Tamara, 34, places three plates of food down at a beautifully set table. She is hugely pregnant and dressed professionally. Ben wears dress pants and a collared shirt with the top buttons undone. He finishes the piece and looks to Tamara. Silence.)

BEN: Mommy?

TAMARA: Yes angel?

BEN: Was that good?

TAMARA: I don't know Benjamin, was it?

BEN: I think... maybe I played it too adagio?

TAMARA: You sure did. You're getting so good at self-criticism sweetheart! Mommy's so proud of you. See, Vivaldi calls for more of a grandiose style than what you played. What does it say at the top? Certainly not adagio.

BEN: No, certainly not. It says allegro.

TAMARA: Right. Allegro. Do you think you played it allegro?

BEN: No, I think I played it adagio.

TAMARA: You sure did. Good boy. So let me ask you, do you think Mr. Vivaldi up in Heaven feels happy listening to your adagio version of his allegro song?

BEN: No?

TAMARA: That's right. He's doesn't. Remember love, just because some people are dead doesn't mean we can stop respecting them and their music. Should we try it again?

BEN: Yes Mommy, we should.

TAMARA: Terrific. What a determined boy I have.

(Ben launches into his piece in full allegro fashion. Martin, 42, walks in the door, wearing a classy suit.)

BEN: Daddy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(Ben puts his violin down, runs and straddle jumps his father.)

MARTIN: Hey Benny Boy! How you doing buddy?

BEN: Great Daddy! I was positive and assertive at school today even in the midst of a conflict!

MARTIN: That's fantastic pal! Proud of you!

BEN: Yes, Daniel Marsh made fun of my suit and I told him he wouldn't be laughing in 30 years when I turn him down for a mortgage!

MARTIN: That's- uh- that's- good, pal.

(Martin and Ben do a lengthy choreographed handshake, which ends in a piggyback ride for Ben. Martin approaches Tamara, Ben still on his back.)

MARTIN: Hi Mommy.

TAMARA: Hi Daddy.

MARTIN: Kiss?

TAMARA: Kiss.

(Martin and Tamara quickly kiss on the lips.)

BEN: *(to Tamara)* Kiss?

TAMARA: Kiss.

(Tamara and Ben quickly kiss on the lips.)

BEN: *(to Martin)* Kiss?

MARTIN: Kiss.

(Martin and Ben quickly kiss on the lips.)

TAMARA: Alright Benjamin. Dismount Daddy so we can disrobe.

(Ben dismounts. All three maintain serious eye contact with one another as they ceremoniously disrobe, revealing Tamara in an elegant slip, and the boys in matching white undershirts, “tightie whities” briefs, and knee-socks pulled all the way up.)

TAMARA, MARTIN, BEN: *(in unison)* Ahhhhh. Good to be home!

(They quickly and expertly fold their clothes. Tamara suddenly grabs her belly and yells out in pain.)

MARTIN: Tam?

BEN: Mommy, are you ok?

(Beat.)

TAMARA: Mommy's fine. She's just very excited about our bun-less bison burgers. Benjamin, could you be an angel and put our clothes in the family hamper?

BEN: Yes Mommy.

TAMARA: Good boy.

(Ben runs off stage with the clothes.)

MARTIN: Tam? Is it time? Should I blow up the inflatable pool?

TAMARA: Absolutely not. Dinner is on the table. Beatrice can wait until after dessert to be born. *(Tamara grabs a huge pair of earphones and places them around her belly.)* She'll listen to Tony Robbins until we're ready.

(Ben returns.)

TAMARA: Come here angel, it's time for our invocation.

(Tamara and Ben join hands. Martin stares off in the distance.)

TAMARA: Martin!

MARTIN: I'm sorry, what?

TAMARA: I need you awake! *(She snaps.)* Alert! *(She snaps.)* Alive! *(She snaps.)*

MARTIN: Sorry.

(Martin joins hands with them and they all bow their heads. Tamara seizes her stomach again and lets out another painful sound, louder than before. She recovers quickly.)

BEN: Mommy, I'm scared. Hug?

TAMARA: Hug.

(Ben runs to Tamara and hugs her stomach. He is immediately flung across the stage and lands on his bottom.)

BEN: Beatrice kicked me!

TAMARA: *(chiding her stomach)* Beatrice, that's enough. Mommy asked you to be patient and listen to your affirmations. Now apologize to your brother for attacking him.

(Tamara clutches her stomach a third time. She roars in pain while Ben watches from the floor.)

MARTIN: Tamara, I really think I should blow up the pool.

TAMARA: Screw the pool! Get me my birthing stool!

(Martin runs offstage.)

BEN: Mommy?

TAMARA: There's nothing to worry about Ben. Mommy's just going to push a baby out of her nah-nah now. It's all very natural and beautiful. Do you remember what we discussed?

BEN: Yes. "Nah-nahs are channels for children...

BEN AND TAMARA: ...And occasionally portals for pleasure."

TAMARA: That's exactly right. Mommy's nah-nah was born to do this. So now do you think you can serenade Mommy and Daddy while they Hypnobirth your baby sister into the world?

BEN: Yes Mommy, I can.

TAMARA: Such a good boy.

(Ben runs to his violin while Martin returns with the birthing stool. Tamara straddles it. Martin kneels behind her. Ben is ready with his bow. For a moment they are all very still.)

TAMARA: And...Begin.

(Ben slowly plays "Autumn." Martin begins massaging her low back. Tamara breathes slowly and deeply.)

MARTIN: *(in a soothing "hypnosis voice")* "I am fully preparing myself and my baby for a beauuuuutiful, comfortable birthing."

TAMARA: *(in pain, but dealing)* "I am fully preparing myself and my baby for a beauuuuutiful, comfortable birthing." Benjamin sweetie, allegro, remember?

BEN: Oh, yes Mommy. Thank you for your feedback.

(Ben plays quicker. Tamara grabs her belly.)

MARTIN: “I am so relaxed and so safe....”

TAMARA: I AM SO RELAXED AND SO SAFE!!!!
Benjamin darling, where are your dynamics?

BEN: Mommy, I’m allegro-ing as much as I can!

(Tamara grabs her belly again.)

MARTIN: “I am a rainbow... from my pot of gold springs
a beauuuuutiful cloud of baby...”

TAMARA: I AM A RAINBOW!!! FROM MY POT OF-
BENJAMIN, BRING ME THAT SHEET MUSIC
RIGHT NOW!

*(Ben stops playing and brings the book over. Tamara
grabs it and reads.)*

MARTIN: “I am fully preparing myself and my baby for
a beauuuuutiful, comfortable birthing.”

*(For the rest of the scene, Martin repeats the above man-
tra under Ben and Tamara’s lines.)*

BEN: Mommy shouldn’t you focus on your nah-nah right
now?

TAMARA: Mommy’s very good at multi-tasking, Ben.

(Beat. Tamara sniffs the air.)

TAMARA: Benjamin, what is that smell on your breath?

BEN: Nothing Mommy.

(Ben backs away.)

TAMARA: Benjamin, you come back to Mommy right now!

(He does.)

TAMARA: Open.

(Ben opens his mouth slightly.)

TAMARA: Wider.

(Ben opens a tiny bit more.)

TAMARA: Benjamin. Did you eat grains?

(Ben shakes his head “no.” Tamara pries his mouth open with one hand grasping his upper jaw and the other grasping the lower. Note: this should be weird as hell, but not violent.)

TAMARA: Say “Ah” my love.

(Tamara places her nose into Ben’s mouth as she inhales deeply.)

BEN: Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.....!

(Tamara is in full labor now and seizes her belly one more time.)

TAMARA: AHHHHHHH.....!!!!!!!

BEN: Mommy? (*Beat.*) Are these leaves?

MARTIN: Tam? Is everything ok?

(*Beat.*)

TAMARA:AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

BEN:AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.....!!!!

MARTIN:AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

SCENE 2

(The following morning, 7:20am. Park Slope Independent Learning School. The room is cheerful with children's artwork hanging about on clotheslines. There are various "work stations" along the perimeter, all the proper height for small children to access. Belinda is writing in a festive journal with a girly pen. She is startled by two loud raps on the door. Tamara juts her head into the classroom, her body remaining in the hall.)

TAMARA: Miss Cartwright?

BELINDA: Uh, Belinda, yes. Hi. Ms. Jenkins?

(Belinda's eyes shoot up to her watch.)

TAMARA: Yes, Tamara's fine. I just saw you look at your watch. I realize I am 10 minutes early, but we have a lot to discuss so—

BELINDA: Oh, no, please— I didn't mean to look at the— Please, come in.

(Tamara's body is still partially in the hallway. She speaks to Ben who sits unseen in the hall.)

TAMARA: Now Benjamin, you be good while Mommy speaks with your new teacher. Eh! No. *(covering her breasts with both hands)* Absolutely not. You have ostrich jerky in your pouch if you're hungry and coconut water if you're thirsty. Work on our crossword puzzle. Mommy loves you.

BELINDA: Ms. Jenkins, Benny's welcome to come in and start working if he likes.

TAMARA: Thank you Miss Cartwright, but no, “Benny” is not welcome. He’ll wait. Kiss kiss, angel.

(Tamara slams the door. She finally enters the room and can be seen in her full glory, perfectly dressed in an eggplant-colored suit, her hair tied back tightly and elegantly. Her body shows no signs of ever being pregnant. She wears a flesh-tone baby sling strapped across her chest, which carries a baby sleeping, hidden inside. Tamara makes a beeline to Belinda and offers her a firm, quick handshake.)

TAMARA: Thank you for meeting me on such short notice.

BELINDA: Happy to! Would you like to sit down?

(Belinda gestures to a child-size table and chair set. Note: There are no adult-sized chairs in this room. They sit.)

TAMARA: Alright then.

BELINDA: What a beautiful baby! Is she playing with a... stick?

TAMARA: Let’s! Get something straight before we begin.

BELINDA: OK.

TAMARA: You are completely taking over for Mrs. Weisenhutter while she’s on maternity leave, yes?

BELINDA: *(trying to peek in the sling)* Yes.

TAMARA: So you’ll be spending a solid six months in the classroom with my son. Correct?

BELINDA: Correct.

TAMARA: Good. I wouldn't want to spend time building a foundation with you, only to find out you're a run-of-the-mill substitute teacher who will be out of here in a few days. I'm sure you understand.

BELINDA: I— think I do.

TAMARA: Terrific. *(She suddenly looks down at her wristwatch)* Ah. Belinda, pardon us a moment, would you?

BELINDA: Uh— Sure, sure...

(Tamara takes a deep breath, closes her eyes and puts her hands purposefully on the baby.)

BELINDA: Is everything ok?

TAMARA: Shh!

(Belinda is silenced. Tamara starts making swirling, whooshing sounds with her mouth for a good thirty seconds. She finishes. Belinda remains silent.)

TAMARA: Thank you for that. Today is Beatrice's first day on the planet. I'm providing womb sounds for her every hour on the hour so she doesn't feel abandoned by my body.

BELINDA: Sure, sure.

(Beat. Belinda looks at Tamara's stomach.)

BELINDA: I'm sorry— you gave birth... yesterday?

TAMARA: Last night, you bet.

BELINDA: Wow! But you're so— shouldn't you be resting?

TAMARA: What for? Labor's a breeze if you know how to breathe, and believe me, I do. Do you have children?

BELINDA: No. Not yet, no.

TAMARA: Stay away from women who tell you giving birth is painful. Those women are weak. Here's my advice: have a talk with your uterus now, today, before you even conceive. Unless of course you are pregnant already. Are you? Are you pregnant?

BELINDA: No, I'm not.

TAMARA: Terrific. Here's what you do then. Tell your uterus that you are the boss. You decide when the contractions come and how long they last. You create your birth story. You are the dominatrix of your birth canal.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: Oh! Now? Talk to it now?

TAMARA: No time like the present.

BELINDA: Um. I— think we'll chat later. If you don't mind.

TAMARA: Why would I mind? You are entitled to make your own decisions, however misguided. I've only written a slew of books on feminine energy, natural

birthing, and proper parenting. Surely I don't know what I'm talking about.

BELINDA: (*pronouncing her name taMAra*) No, I'm certain you do! I just— forgive me Tamara, I didn't mean to offend.

TAMARA: You're forgiven. Alright, enough of that! Let's—

BELINDA: Gosh, I'm sorry to interrupt you— I'm working on not doing that— but... (*looking her up and down*) I'm just so distracted by your... (*looks down and considers*)

TAMARA: Physique?

BELINDA: Well, yes! How did you...?

TAMARA: Easily. I went to the gym this morning and everything went right back into place. Being slim is a decision. You either make it or you don't.

BELINDA: Tell that to my thighs!

TAMARA: Gladly. Swing them this way please.

(*Beat.*)

BELINDA: Oh. I was just— joking actually. I don't need you to tell them anything.

TAMARA: Fair enough. Although I wouldn't joke about my thighs if I were you, Belinda. (*quick beat*) Alright, you've gotten us off-track. We are not here to talk to your thighs...

BELINDA: No, we're not.

TAMARA: ...nor are we here to chat with your uterus.

BELINDA: Certainly not.

TAMARA: I'm sure you are well aware of why I'm here.

BELINDA: Actually... no. I'm not.

TAMARA: No?

BELINDA: No.

(Beat.)

TAMARA: No idea.

BELINDA: No.

TAMARA: Fascinating.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: *(pronouncing her name taMara again)* Um. Tamara, you should know that Ben is really doing beautifully. Even after just one day with him, I can tell how bright he is— and funny! So funny! Oh gosh, you have to hear this— listen to this— he comes up to me yesterday and says—

TAMARA: Don't bother. I can hear his witticisms at home. I'm here because of the Cheerios incident.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: The "Cheerios Incident".

TAMARA: Indeed.

BELINDA: (*pronouncing it wrong a third time*) Forgive me Tamara, but I don't know what "incident" you're talking about.

TAMARA: It's TAMara, not taMAra. The accent is on the first syllable, not the second.

BELINDA: Oh. I'm sorry. (*trying it out and failing*) TAM-ra.

TAMARA: Let's just stick with Ms. Jenkins.

BELINDA: Great.

TAMARA: Great. Now, since you don't seem to know what goes on in your classroom, let me fill you in.

(*Beat.*)

TAMARA: (*getting a little choked up*) I'm sorry. This is difficult for me.

BELINDA: Oh my goodness, what is it?

TAMARA: Benjamin came home last night with—
Cheerios on his breath. It seems that little Jeremiah Parker boy took it upon himself to share his snack with my son.

BELINDA: Ok...

(*Beat.*)

BELINDA: I'm sorry, is that the problem?

TAMARA: You allow snack sharing?

BELINDA: Sure. We encourage it!

TAMARA: He gave him Cheerios, Miss Cartwright!
With MILK! Is that something you encourage?

BELINDA: Well, I don't know. Ben doesn't have any
food allergies, does he? I checked!

TAMARA: Benjamin, I'll have you know, is a strict fol-
lower of the Paleo Diet.

BELINDA: The Paleo Diet?

TAMARA: Yes! No carbs, no dairy, and no grains of any
kind. If Benjamin can't pick it from the ground or
chase it and kill it, then he should not be eating it.

BELINDA: Tama- Ms. Jenkins, I apologize for the over-
sight, truly. We pay great attention to what the kids are
eating, but when it comes to these fad diets—

TAMARA: Whoa, whoa whoa. Fad diet, did you say?

BELINDA: Poor choice of words. It's just— I am Ben's
kindergarten teacher, not his personal trainer and—
Oh god, that sounded ruder than I intended. Not that I
intended to be—

(Beat. She breathes.)

BELINDA: Actually, yes! This may make you feel bet-
ter! I know for a fact that Jeremiah's mother packs
him "Oat-holes." They are a *(singing a little commer-
cial ditty)* "Sugar free, healthy alternative to Cheerios!

Bing!” No big deal, right? Ben had a little snack, made a new friend, and certainly did not die.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: Right?

(Tamara covers the baby's ears.)

TAMARA: You're damn right he did not die! No thanks to you! Thank God he had the good sense to confess so we could get them out of his system immediately!

BELINDA: Immediately? You mean— I'm sorry, what do you mean?

TAMARA: We threw up those Oat-holes.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: Wait— you made your son throw up?

TAMARA: No, I did not make him throw up. He chose to throw up. We did it together. I lent him my support.

BELINDA: You and your five-year-old purposely vomited together.

TAMARA: You bet we did. And we would do it again.

(Beat.)

TAMARA: Belinda, how many stomachs do you have?

BELINDA: How many...

TAMARA: ...stomachs do you have?

BELINDA: Uh... one.

TAMARA: Correct. One. And how many does a cow have?

(Tamara pulls a cow puppet out of her bag and places it on Belinda's hand. Beat.)

BELINDA: Four?

TAMARA: Gold star. Four. Now, how many breasts do I have?

(Tamara pulls out two squeazy stress balls that look like squeazy breasts. Note: these exist. They're fantastic)

TAMARA: Go on.

BELINDA: You have two breasts. Ms. Jenkins, this is—

TAMARA: Excellent. Now describe to me how a cow's udders differ in appearance from a woman's breasts.

BELINDA: Ms. Jenkins, this is starting to get offensive.

TAMARA: It certainly is. Congratulations, that is the first intelligent thing you've said today! Moral of the story: cows and humans are different. Now, how "offended" would you be if I stuck my breast into your cow's mouth?

(Tamara places her stress ball in the cow puppet's mouth.)

TAMARA: You'd be VERY offended. Not only would your cow be confused and emotionally damaged, but he would get sick. Terribly, physically sick. His four stomachs cannot tolerate the milk from my two breasts. It's not meant for him. *(Beat.)* When you expose my child to "Oat-Holes" and bovine milk, that's exactly what you are doing. You are shoving your cow udders into my human baby's mouth and I will not sit idly by and watch that happen.

(Tamara has the cow puppet's udders dangerously close to Belinda's mouth. A long silence. Tamara breaks their face-off, tears the puppet off Belinda's hand and places her props back in her bag.)

TAMARA: *(suddenly cheery)* I trust that we have learned something here today, and there will be no further incidents of this nature.

(Beat.)

TAMARA: A pleasure to meet you. Your skirt is just darling.

(Tamara exits. Belinda is left alone and bewildered.)

SCENE 3

(Later that same day. A practically empty living room. Two bowls of ice cream are placed on the coffee table, along with whipped cream, chocolate sauce and cherries. Belinda wears an ill-fitting “business” blazer. She’s gripping a baseball bat, ready to attack.)

BELINDA Yes?

MARTIN: *(from offstage)* Hi! I’m here to look at the apartment?

BELINDA: Your name?

MARTIN: It’s Martin? We spoke on the phone?

BELINDA: Can you prove that?

MARTIN: I’m sorry?

BELINDA: Can you prove that we spoke on the phone and you are who you say you are?

MARTIN: Oh yes! The uh— the secret word is— “platypus”?

(Belinda drops the bat and lets Martin in.)

BELINDA: *(cheery)* Hi! Apologies for the terrible customer service you just received there. I’m new to this real estate adventure and I’m still experimenting with how not to get raped and pillaged whilst on the job.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: I watched “The Accused” recently.

MARTIN: O-K?

BELINDA: Jodie Foster film? 1988? Let’s start from scratch. (*extending her hand*) Belinda Cartwright, real estate agent.

MARTIN: Martin Laurence, banker.

BELINDA: Martin Lawrence?

(*Beat.*)

BELINDA: As in “Bad Boys”, “Blue Streak”, “Talkin Dirty After Dark...?”

MARTIN: Yes, sounds alike but spelled differently. His Lawrence is spelled with a “W”, mine has a “U” like Laurence Olivier.

BELINDA: Oh. I can tell by the way you had that little speech prepared that people do that to you all the time, don’t they?

MARTIN: It does come up. Not to worry though—

BELINDA: No. That’s a very annoying thing to do to a person. You, Martin Laurence, should be able to say your own beautiful name out loud without me listing the titles of violent films you did not star in.

MARTIN: Thank you.

(*Beat.*)

MARTIN: So. Can I... have a look?

BELINDA: (*confused*) Um. Sure— Uh...

(*Belinda spins around awkwardly, thinking he wants to “have a look” at her. Beat.*)

MARTIN: I meant the apartment, but... you look lovely.

BELINDA: Oh gosh, of course! Forgive me, I didn't mean to wrestle that compliment out of you.

MARTIN: Not a problem. Freely given.

BELINDA: (*dropping into a seductive voice*) So... Wrestling, huh?

MARTIN What?

BELINDA: (*“normal” voice*) Your body looks strong, like you maybe wrestled in high school?

MARTIN: No no. Never wrestled. Do you... mind if I—
?

BELINDA: (*gesturing to the apartment*) Please, look, look!

(*Martin walks past her and begins looking around. Belinda whips her head left and right. She shakes her suit, trying to smell it.*)

BELINDA: Ohmygod what is that?

MARTIN: Pardon?

BELINDA: Do I smell?!!

(Martin sniffs the air.)

MARTIN: I don't think so? I mean, not that I can tell.

(Belinda flops down on the couch, relieved.)

BELINDA: Oh god, sorry! You know when you catch a whiff of something... pungent, and you're instantly terrified it's you?

MARTIN: Sure, sure.

(Beat.)

MARTIN: Is it— me?

BELINDA: Of course not! *(seductive voice)* Someone as attractive as you couldn't possibly smell.

(Beat. Martin can't help laughing.)

BELINDA: *(normal voice)* It's official, I've decided to plan all my sentences in my head before I dare let them out into the world. Who cares if there are inappropriately long pauses in my conversations? At least I won't live in a constant state of regret.

MARTIN: No, no. It was a compliment. *(quick beat)* I liked it.

BELINDA: *(seductive voice)* And you didn't even have to wrestle me for it.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: (*normal voice*) So! How can I service you here today Martin Laurence? Wait, before you answer! Full disclosure? We have ourselves an absolute first-timer here. Passed the real-estate exam through some act of god or computer malfunction, because seriously? NO clue what I'm doing.

MARTIN: Alright then.

BELINDA: Times are hard. Gal has to juggle a few professions.

MARTIN: Sure, sure.

(*She mimes juggling.*)

BELINDA: Yeah, got lots of ball-jobs up in the air.

MARTIN: Huh?

BELINDA: Just— you've been warned.

MARTIN: Fair enough.

(*Beat.*)

BELINDA: Please. Continue.

MARTIN: Alright. Well, I'm considering— and only considering at this point— certainly not ready to put down a payment or anything... A change.

BELINDA: Well don't.

MARTIN: I'm sorry?

BELINDA: Don't you dare change, you! I was just thinking how fantastic you look in that suit. (*singing*) "Don't go changin' to try and please me...."

(*Beat.*)

BELINDA: (*spoken*) "Just the Way You Are"? Billy Joel? The Stranger album!!!!

MARTIN: No no, I'm familiar with the song, I just—

BELINDA: Oh good. I was gonna say!!!

MARTIN: I was just talking about a change in my - my uh - my living situation. I guess you'd say.

BELINDA: Oh, say no more! Roommates?

MARTIN: (*quick beat*) Sort of.

BELINDA: Roommates suck! As does the awkward way you're standing up while I'm sitting down. Come. Sit beside me. Have a sundae.

(*Beat. Martin stays standing.*)

BELINDA: I prepared rapidly melting ice cream sundaes in honor of my first "client."

(*Beat. Martin doesn't move.*)

BELINDA: Too much?

MARTIN: No, it's just— I don't normally ingest lactose, so—

BELINDA: Oh! Well then today's your lucky day Martin Laurence! I didn't put an ounce of lactose on this ice cream! So you'll be just fine.

(Martin laughs.)

MARTIN: Then I guess... I guess... I'll be fine then.

(He sits on the couch, a cushion of distance between them. Belinda picks up a spoonful of ice cream and raises it in his direction.)

BELINDA: Cheers.

(Martin lifts his spoon.)

MARTIN: Cheers.

(They clink. Belinda watches Martin as he eats. It's clear it's been a very loooooong time since he's had ice cream.)

MARTIN: Mmmmmmmmmmmmm.

BELINDA: Mmmmmmmmmmmmm. Good, huh?

MARTIN: Mmmmmmmmmmm-Hmmmmmmmmmm.

BELINDA: *(seductive voice)* Yes, Mmmmmmmmmmmmm. I wasn't sure which... condom-ints... you preferred though.

MARTIN: What?

BELINDA: *(back to "regular" voice)* Feel free to throw some cherries and chocolate sauce and such on your ice cream.

MARTIN: Oh, great. Thank you.

(Martin piles on the condiments.)

BELINDA: So. How many roommates you got?

MARTIN: *(while he eats)* Uh... two. Well, no. I guess it's two and... a half now? She's new. The half, I mean. No. I'm sorry. She's not a half, she's a whole, she's a person. So yes, she is definitely whole.

(Beat. Belinda is confused. Martin looks up.)

MARTIN: Three. I have three roommates.

BELINDA: Gotcha. Three's a lot! I lived with three girls from college once. Did not go well, so I feel your pain.

MARTIN: Well, it did go well. In the beginning. *(quick beat)* Wait.

BELINDA: What?

MARTIN: Did it?

BELINDA: Did what?

MARTIN: Did it ever go well?

BELINDA: I don't know, I don't know these people.

MARTIN: No, I'm asking myself.

BELINDA: Oh. *(quick beat)* Well did it?

MARTIN: Maybe it didn't.

BELINDA: Huh.

(Beat. Martin is lost.)

BELINDA: Well, it sounds like maybe you should get the hell outta there! Being alone is fantastic — or so I tell myself on the rare occasion when I'm not crying. Seriously though, I do everything alone! Eat! Bathe! Watch "Hoarders!" Everything. It's great!

MARTIN: No no, I can't — just leave.

BELINDA: Why not?

MARTIN: My uh... My — younger roommate. He's.... Well, he's amazing. Gosh, I used to hate when people said the whole "You won't understand love until you have..." roommates — thing. But, they were right! I didn't understand. Now though. Now — I want him to proud of me, ya know? I want him to really know me. And — if I only saw him on weekends? I don't know if— No. No, I couldn't do that. No.

(Beat.)

BELINDA: You're such a tender and devoted roommate.

MARTIN: Thanks.

BELINDA: I like that.

(Belinda makes a quick move and slides next to Martin, pushing her nose into his neck. She inhales deeply. Beat. Martin is frozen.)

BELINDA: Oh, that smell is you.

MARTIN: (*startled*) It is?!?

BELINDA: (*still smelling his neck*) Yeah, but it's not — bad. It's just... spicy?

MARTIN: I wear old spice cologne.

BELINDA: Mmmm. So does my Dad.

(*Belinda slides her nose upward to reach his cheek.*)

BELINDA: Ohhhhhhhh. Now that I like.

MARTIN: What's that? What-what-what what do you like?

BELINDA: I'll admit it, your neck-smell had me feeling conflicted a moment ago, but your face?? Your face-smell is delicious! Like gum. Or clean teeth.

MARTIN: I wash with peppermint soap.

BELINDA: You have such a festive hygiene routine, Martin Laurence!

MARTIN: Thank you.

(*Belinda pulls back a few inches and looks him deeply in the eyes.*)

BELINDA: No, thank you.

(*Beat.*)

MARTIN: Um. I think I need some whipped cream.

BELINDA: Go right ahead.

(Martin grabs the bottle of whipped cream.)

BELINDA: Martin?

MARTIN: Yes?

BELINDA: *(seductive voice)* This has been really great. But you didn't come here for an ice cream social, did you. You came to see some real estate. And I'm the agent that's going to show it to you. Let's start with the basement.

(She moves his hand between her legs.)

BELINDA: Shall we?

MARTIN: Um.

(Martin shoots his whipped cream into the air.)

SCENE 4

(Tamara and Ben stand “disrobed” in the living room, holding hands. Beatrice is still strapped to Tamara, only this time she is “awake.” She is a frightening baby with shocking red hair, and beady eyes which never blink. Instead of arms and legs, Beatrice has four branches sticking out from her hard little torso. Perhaps some dark berries or leaves grow on them. Tamara and Ben stare at the door in silence. Martin rushes in, completely out of breath. Beat.)

BEN: Hi Daddy.

MARTIN: Hi Bud. *(quick beat)* Hi Mommy.

(Beat.)

TAMARA: Hello Daddy.

BEN: *(to Martin)* Kiss?

MARTIN: Kiss.

(Ben and Martin quickly kiss.)

BEN: *(to Tamara)* Kiss?

TAMARA: Kiss.

(Ben and Tamara quickly kiss.)

MARTIN: Sorry I’m late Tam. Kiss?

(Beat. She makes him wait.)

TAMARA: Kiss.

(Martin attempts a longer-than-usual kiss.)

TAMARA: Oh my lord, did you ingest lactose?

MARTIN: No! Of course not.

(Martin crouches down to see Bea. It's clear he has a hard time looking directly at her.)

MARTIN: Well, look who's... up! Hey there Bea! How's Daddy's... little girl?

BEN: *(loudly)* Yeah, hi Bea! How's... brother's... little sister?

(Tamara covers the baby's ears.)

TAMARA: Martin and Benjamin, that is much too loud! This is her first day outside the womb!

MARTIN: Sorry Mommy.

BEN: Sorry Mommy.

(Beat.)

TAMARA: It's OK boys. She's just used to my amniotic fluids softening the sounds she hears, so you'll both need to be more gentle with your decibels.

MARTIN: Right. Of course.

TAMARA: We were about to start dinner without you. Where were you?

MARTIN: I'm sorry, I should have called. I had a last minute meeting I had to take as the bank was closing.

TAMARA: Alright, well can we start our meal now please? It's past 6 o'clock.

MARTIN: Absolutely. There's nothing I'd like more.

(Martin sits down at the table. Ben follows suit.)

TAMARA: Excuse me gentlemen! Is this a world where we eat before connecting and invoking?

BEN: No Mommy it's not.

MARTIN: No Mommy it's not. Sorry Tam.

(Martin quickly strips down to his underwear and folds his clothes. Ben runs his clothes to the family hamper.)

TAMARA: What's come over you today? You're late, you smell like a cow teat, and now you're running to your food, fully-clothed like an animal at the trough?

MARTIN: I suppose I am just... going-with-the-flow today.

TAMARA: Well please don't.

MARTIN: Alright I won't.

TAMARA: Good. Let's join hands.

(Ben returns. All three join hands, bow their heads, and speak in unison.)

TAMARA, MARTIN, BEN: Dear Universal Energy, we invoke you now to bless this food. May it nourish our very attractive bodies. May you always guide us as your stewards of magnificence on this planet. And may our subordinates stand forever in awe of us, quaking in fear of us when it is appropriate. We are powerful, we are delightful, we are the Jenkins-Laurence Family. Amen.

(They sit. Tamara moves the baby to her breast. Everyone begins eating. Tamara winces.)

BEN: Mommy, does that hurt?

TAMARA: Yes. At first it does hurt Ben. But after a moment it's actually quite... pleasurable.

BEN: Mommy?

TAMARA: Yes Ben.

BEN: Why didn't Bea do the invocation with us?

TAMARA: Your sister is still very little sweetheart, so she can't talk yet. Until she learns to verbalize, we all have to be very sensitive to her signals. Did you see how just a moment ago, I moved Beatrice to my boobie?

BEN: Yes, I did.

TAMARA: I could tell by her squirming that she was hungry and needed Mommy's milk.

BEN: I didn't see her squirm.

TAMARA: *(an outsized reaction)* WELL SHE DID!!!!

(They continue to eat. Ben starts to squirm.)

BEN: I'm squirming too Mommy. Can I have some of your milk for dessert?

TAMARA: No Benjamin, you'll be having poached pears for dessert. You drank from Mommy's boobies for almost five whole years. It's Bea's turn. You're a big boy now, and...?

BEN AND TAMARA: "Big boys don't need boobies."

TAMARA: That's exactly right. Drink your lemon water.

(They eat in silence.)

BEN: Mommy?

TAMARA: Yes angel.

BEN: Why does Baby Bea have sticks where arms and legs are supposed to be?

(Tamara slams down her fork.)

TAMARA: *(trying to stay composed)* Benjamin, you can ask me that question a million times and the answer will still be the same. Your sister is...

BEN: "a creative soul who marches to her own drummer. We support her unique appearance no matter how humiliating it is for us as a family."

TAMARA: Good boy. *(to Martin)* Sweetheart, how are the Portobello pods?

MARTIN: Outstanding.

TAMARA: I'm glad you like them. Things go well at the bank today?

MARTIN: They did. How was your day sweetness?

BEN: Mommy yelled at my new teacher.

MARTIN: She did? You did?

TAMARA: Benjamin, were you eavesdropping on Mommy's grown-up conversation?

BEN: No. Yes. Oops.

MARTIN: Was everything alright at school, Tam?

TAMARA: Fine. I did not yell at your teacher, Benjamin. I simply yet aggressively informed her of the way we deserve to be treated. Remember sweetheart, most people aren't as smart as we are, so we need to teach them how to behave, even if that means losing some friends. Mommy doesn't have any friends. And Mommy doesn't care.

BEN: I'll be your friend Mommy.

TAMARA: You're my son, silly. We can't be friends.

MARTIN: So Benny boy, tell me about your new teacher. Is she nice?

BEN: Oh yes, she's nice and pretty and-

TAMARA: Meek. I have no tolerance for women like that.

MARTIN: No, you don't.

TAMARA: Nor should I!

MARTIN: No, nor should you! I agree!

TAMARA: Beatrice, are you squirming again?

(Tamara moves Beatrice to the other breast and is in obvious agony. Ben starts squirming again.)

TAMARA: Benjamin?

(He stops.)

TAMARA: Benjamin, could you please consult Calvin and tell us what our family can look forward to these next few days?

BEN: Of course Mommy!

(Ben runs up to the family planner which hangs on the wall.)

BEN: Calvin the Calendar says tonight is Educational Game Night, so we will be playing "Trivial Pursuit: Book Lover's Edition" after we eat. Oh I hope we touch on Charles Dickens, I really do.

TAMARA: Me too Ben. Stories of orphans are always good for lifting the spirit and making one grateful.

BEN: Ooh! And tomorrow night is Classical Music Night! Mommy will lead us in a dinner discussion on Tchaikovsky and his contributions to the Romantic Era, followed by a brief violin concert in the living room performed by me, Ben.

MARTIN: You'll do great Buddy.

BEN: And speaking of the Romantic Era, Saturday of course is Mommy and Daddy's "Sex and Recreation Day", so I will be visiting with Grandma.

TAMARA: Yes you will. Come finish your pods, Ben. Excellent job with Calvin. Mommy and Daddy are looking forward to their special time together Saturday, aren't they Daddy?

MARTIN: They sure are. It's been a long week.

TAMARA: Though we will miss you very much angel. Won't we Daddy?

(Martin leans over and kisses Ben's head.)

MARTIN: You betcha kiddo. You're our best boy.

(Tamara kisses Baby Bea's head.)

TAMARA: And you're our best girl Beatrice. We are so very lucky, aren't we Daddy?

(Beat.)

TAMARA: Aren't we Daddy?

MARTIN: Oh! Yes we are sweetheart. We are very lucky indeed.

END OF SAMPLE.