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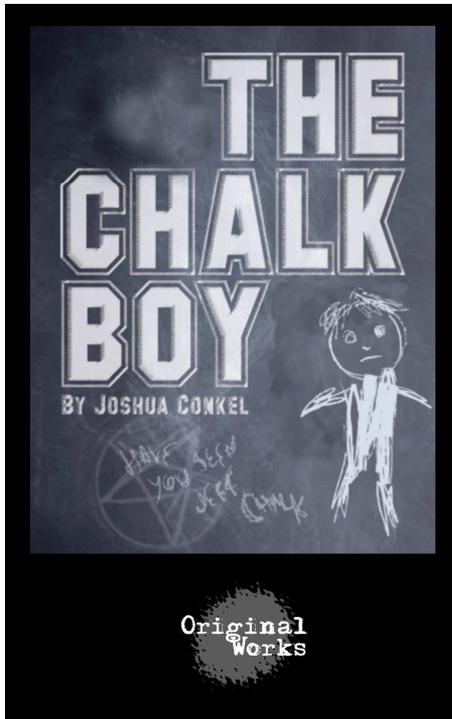
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From the 59E59 Theatre Production.

*Play Nice!*  
© Robin Rice  
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**The Chalk Boy by Joshua Conkel**

**Synopsis:** Beneath its boring facade there is more going on in the tiny town of Clear Creek than the opening of the new Taco Bell. Four of the town's local girls are here to take you on a tour of their funny, yet brutal reality. They struggle with faith, friendship, sex, the occult, algebra, and the disappearance of... The Chalk Boy. This is a deathly black comedy that punches as hard as your high school bully.

**Cast Size:** 4 Females

# **PLAY NICE!**

**By Robin Rice**

For Dodie, Pip and Patty  
-- sisters with unparalleled imaginations.

PLAY NICE! was first produced at the Venus Theatre Play Shack in Laurel, Maryland, Deborah Randall, Artistic Director. The play opened on September 2, 2010.

Producer: Deborah Randall

Director: Lee Mikeska Gardner

Set Design: Joe Musumeci

Sound Design: Neil McFadden

Lighting Design: Kristin A. Thompson

Costume Design: Marilyn Johnson

Stage Manager: Bridget Woodbury

Photographer: Richard Day, Darla Photography

The Cast:

ISABELLE DIAMOND: Kelsey Painter

MATILDA DIAMOND: Robin Covington

LUCE DIAMOND: Jay Saunders

JOANIE CALLIOPE: Nayab Hussain

PLAY NICE! opened Off-Broadway on March 8, 2011 at the 59E59 Theatre, New York City, Elysabeth Kleinhans, Artistic Director.

Producer: Ego Actus.

Director: Joan Kane

Set Design: Jason Simms

Costume Design: Catherine Fisher

Lighting Design: Bruce A! Kraemer

Sound Design: Ryan Kilcourse

Production Stage Manager: Caitlyn Lyons

Graphic Consultant: Anne Giordano

Casting Reader: Vanessa Verduga

Casting Reader: Julia Baltz

Casting Assistant: Skyler Kraemer

Electrician: West Kraemer

Master Carpenter: Daniel Stern

The Cast:

ISABELLE DIAMOND: Laura Hankin

MATILDA DIAMOND: Lauren Roth

LUCE DIAMOND: Andrew Broussard

JOANIE CALLIOPE: Debby Brand

Special thanks to the following for presenting staged readings and performances along the way as PLAY NICE! grew from a wee babe of a one-act play to a full-fledged adult. In NYC: Resonance Ensemble, The Lark, Abingdon Theatre, TADA!, HERE Arts Center, Expanded Arts, New Georges, Global Warming Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons Theatre School. Also: Alleyway Theatre (Buffalo, winner of Maxim Mazumdar Competition as one-act MARCHING ON HIGH), Toronto Fringe Festival, New Jersey Repertory Company, Cleveland Public Theatre (winner of Annual New Plays Festival), Pathway Theater Institute (Los Angeles).

Also, thanks to Jean Genet. His play THE MAIDS was the inspirational seed for PLAY NICE!.

## **CHARACTERS**

ISABEL DIAMOND: 12. Champion at pretend. Cusp of adulthood.

LUCE DIAMOND: 16. Isabel's brother. Precise. High-strung. Soft-hearted.

MATILDA DIAMOND: 18. Their sister. Brisk. No nonsense.

JOANIE CALLIOPE: 16. A poet. Street-wise. Thin. City girl. (It is extremely important that Joanie appear to be almost identical to the doll at the end of the play.)

## **SETTING**

An attic in a big, old house in suburban New Jersey.

## **TIME**

The day before and the day after Thanksgiving.

NOTE: Except for the Act break (optional), the play should be presented with no break. Scenes are separated for reading purposes only. In performance they flow together. Blackouts only when indicated in the script.

Music, creative movement, lights and sound should be added to provide additional lift for the wings of imagination.

## **SCRIPT PUNCTUATION**

-- the next speaker interrupts or the speaker interrupts his or her own thought.

... the speaker's thoughts have trailed off.

/ spot at which the next speaker overlaps.

(( )) shift to another level, a beat, a change where it might not be clear in the script.

## PLAY NICE!

(PRESET MUSIC: "Puff the Magic Dragon.")

### ACT I

#### SCENE 1: DEFEND YOURSELF!

(AT RISE: An attic. Packing cartons, large rocking chair, trunk, sofa, usual attic contents but not cluttered. Everything oversized, surreal, covered with white sheets. A grey and white world. LUCE, a plume behind an ear, has been dressing ISABEL in white curtains, silk flowers. He is elfin, odd, a bit off-kilter -- his hair spiky. He contemplates his efforts. ISABEL, standing on a stool, is tiny, very pale, grim -- wide, black smudges beneath her eyes from lack of sleep. They seem to live in Tolkien-land, not a sunny suburb.)

ISABEL: Dragon dark as cinder-rock  
Stalking steady as a clock;  
Places set for proper tea  
Gleam-eye set on morsels three.

Eat 'em up, the little kids  
Smack your lips and tuck your bibs;  
Back for seconds, back for thirds  
Tasty little children birds.

(( ))

ISABEL: I want a sword.

LUCE: Wouldn't go with the gown.

ISABEL: I need a sword.

LUCE: Luce the Illustrious will protect you, O radiant princess with a laugh like a wind chime!

ISABEL: I don't want to be a princess. I want to be a tall queen.

LUCE: Princesses get to wear white and carry fragrant bouquets. Queens wear black and carry pocketbooks.

ISABEL: I want to be grown up.

LUCE: Don't bite your nails.

ISABEL: I hate that rule.

LUCE: Rules are helpful sign posts. Ignore them and you'll get lost. Rules guide us safely on the path to adulthood. What's that?

ISABEL: Nothing. I fell down.

*(ISABEL whirls around, imagining a dragon.)*

ISABEL: She's back!

*(LUCE fights off the imaginary dragon.)*

LUCE: Scare my sister will you -- take that! And that!

ISABEL: Behind you!

LUCE: Take cover!

*(Dragon wounds him. He staggers gracefully, falls like a swan in a ballet. MATILDA enters, hair limp, glasses askew, overalls. LUCE flutters a last flutter.)*

MATILDA: Deadly dragon bite?

LUCE: (*arms out to Matilda*) The unwashed crowds huzzah! (*arms out to Isabel*) The princess has emerged unscathed!

ISABEL: Stay and play, Tilda. You can be the maid.

MATILDA: The turkey's a block of ice. I can't get the neck out.

LUCE: I'm not sticking my arm in a turkey.

MATILDA: Okay, she's a princess. What're you -- a joker? Take the feather out of your hair. She's gonna get rid of you if you don't start acting normal. Off with his head -- on with the straight jacket.

(*LUCE hits his head rhythmically against the back of the sofa or the wall.*)

ISABEL: We were having a good time.

MATILDA: Well excuse me. It's only tomorrow's Thanksgiving dinner that'll be ruined if I --

(*ISABEL sees the pretend dragon.*)

ISABEL: Watch out!

MATILDA: (*to Isabel*) I hope there's a drought and your moat dries up.

ISABEL: Defend yourself!

MATILDA: I have my ways.

*(MATILDA exits. LUCE hits his head. ISABEL puts a fist to her forehead, points a pinkie finger at him.)*

ISABEL: Think about tomorrow.

*(He stops hitting his head. She reads his thoughts.)*

ISABEL: Maroon and white. Silver and gold. Marching!

*(He points a "pinkie forehead finger" at her.)*

LUCE: You're coming downstairs for dinner in a new dress. Your hair's in French braids.

ISABEL: Will you?

LUCE: Get Matilda to iron the pink ribbons. I won't make the braids so tight this time.

ISABEL: Mummy likes them tight.

LUCE: It gives you a headache.

ISABEL: Mummy --

LUCE: All right. All right.

ISABEL: Tilda says if Mummy sees you in the Macy's parade on TV tomorrow she'll send you away. She doesn't like you being the only boy in the flag squad.

LUCE: It has nothing to do with being a boy or girl. It's about marching. It's all about the marching. I have to go practice.

ISABEL: You can't get out. The dragon's blocking the door.

LUCE: She's asleep.

ISABEL: She's a light sleeper.

LUCE: We can squeeze by.

ISABEL: I'm too big.

LUCE: I'll put antiseptic ointment on that scrape. Then you can take a nap.

ISABEL: Twelve-year-olds don't take naps.

LUCE: You look like a raccoon from not sleeping. Come on. You can't stay in the attic alone.

ISABEL: I'm not afraid.

LUCE: *(a whisper)* SH.

*(He motions "follow me," then exits.)*

ISABEL: Luce! Wait! Hold my hand! I'm not unscathed!

## SCENE 2: WHO POISONED MUMMY?

*(Two days later. The attic. Early evening. ISABEL sits on the sofa near the rocker in an absurdly frilly, white, little-girl dress. She plays an imaginary tea party, imagining that a big, stuffed teddy bear sitting in the rocker, wearing a woman's hat, is Mother. A slender, very blonde and pretty doll is herself, sitting on the sofa. A plastic teapot and cups from a child's tea set are on an orange crate -- the "coffee table.")*

ISABEL: *(voice of the bear as Mother, calls musically.)*

Is-a-bel! Isabel, my darling, kissy-kissy!

*(ISABEL has the doll kiss the bear. MATILDA enters with nails, a hammer, boards, a pillow and quilt. All business, she begins nailing a board across the window to drape material over to keep light from escaping. ISABEL continues playing.)*

ISABEL: *(as Mother)* You look adorable as a baby gone to dreamland, precious. Pour Mummy a cup of oolong.

*(as herself)* Oh no. The tea got cold, Mummy.

*(as Mother)* Matilda! Cold tea is unacceptable!

MATILDA: What are you doing?

ISABEL: Trying to remember what happened.

MATILDA: Ask me.

ISABEL: I need to remember for myself.

*(MATILDA hears something outside the window.)*

MATILDA: Shit!

ISABEL: What?!

MATILDA: SH!

*(MATILDA peeks out the window.)*

MATILDA: *(relieved)* It's just Harry after a bird in the Sugar Maple. I was scared it was her coming back early.

ISABEL: Will she be all better?

MATILDA: She'll be mad as a hornet dunked in pepper oil.

ISABEL: I got so scared -- I guess that's why I can't remember.

MATILDA: I could use some help here. I don't want the neighbors to see a light in the attic.

ISABEL: Why?

MATILDA: Hold the board so I can nail.

ISABEL: I'm confused.

MATILDA: She can't get up to the attic. She's too fat to get up the ladder. She can't get you up here.

ISABEL: I'm going downstairs.

MATILDA: You have to stay up here.

ISABEL: For how long?

*(No reply.)*

ISABEL: All night?

*(No reply.)*

ISABEL: All tomorrow?

*(No reply.)*

ISABEL: All week?

MATILDA: For always.

ISABEL: Always?! Like live in the attic?

MATILDA: Don't say "like." She hates that.

ISABEL: Live in the attic?!

MATILDA: It's how it has to be.

ISABEL: That's looney!

MATILDA: Just keep quiet like a mouse.

ISABEL: Maybe I won't.

*(ISABEL stamps a foot.)*

MATILDA: Way up here, she won't hear beans.

ISABEL: She'll search for me.

MATILDA: She won't find you.

ISABEL: She'll think I ran away. She'll call the police.

MATILDA: No she won't. That would be embarrassing.  
She'll tell people you went to live with relatives.

ISABEL: What relatives?

MATILDA: It don't matter.

ISABEL: We have relatives?

MATILDA: Sure.

ISABEL: Where?

MATILDA: Ohio.

ISABEL: Who?

MATILDA: It don't matter. You'll be safe in the attic.

ISABEL: What about the Bridge ladies?

MATILDA: Mrs. Farley and them?

ISABEL: It's Friday. Her turn to be hostess. When nobody answers the door, they'll find the window with the broken latch. The one your boyfriend sneaks through.

MATILDA: You're right. I give those ladies two seconds to hoist each other through the window and be nosing around like fleas on Harry. Not up here though. Not with the lock I put on. Hey, come on. I thought you liked the attic.

ISABEL: Not for my whole life!

*(ISABEL has a lying-on-the-floor, kicking-her-feet, pounding-her-fists, howling temper tantrum. MATILDA watches. When ISABEL stops.)*

MATILDA: She wants you to stay a baby. It makes her happy. Fine. But you're overdoing it. You're stuck in it. If you ever want to be treated your real age you better start acting it.

*(MATILDA exits, locking the door behind her. ISABEL rips off the white dress and shoes, throwing them at the locked door. In her slip SHE starts thinking. How can she get out of this? Determined, she arranges the attic to resemble rooms in the house, pushing boxes and furniture around, perhaps drawing outlines of rooms and doorways with chalk on the floor. Finally, she rips the sheets off everything. The world takes on color as furniture is revealed [See notes.] Finally, ISABEL digs in a trunk, finds a cane and a size XXXL dress.*

*MATILDA reenters with a large box with MAD RABBIT!!! DANGER!!! lettered on a side in a child's hand and a bag with volume "P" of an encyclopedia, an orange, knife, a box of rat poison: RED SQUILL.)*

MATILDA: Here's the evidence.

ISABEL: The encyclopedia?

MATILDA: It was in your bedroom.

ISABEL: How'd it get there?

MATILDA: You tell me.

ISABEL: I don't know.

*(ISABEL pushes the Mad Rabbit box into a space that will be her pretend bedroom.)*

ISABEL: My box goes in my bedroom. I'm going to act it out so I know what happened. That's my bedroom.

MATILDA: Read page 6447. That'll tell you what happened.

ISABEL: That's the living room. That's the kitchen.

MATILDA: It's almost midnight. You're going to bed on the sofa after you turn to page 6447 and read.

ISABEL: But --

MATILDA: Isabel.

ISABEL: Okay okay okay.

MATILDA: You wanna remember?

ISABEL: I said "okay."

*(MATILDA cuts the orange into a flower shape [see Notes] as ISABEL finds the page.)*

MATILDA: Top of the second column. Read it out loud.

ISABEL: "A substance that makes living things grow sick or... or..."

MATILDA: Nobody's dying. They're keeping her overnight. That's what they do when they pump stomachs. She'll be home in the morning -- loaded for bear. Keep reading.

ISABEL: "Some poisons..." Poison?

MATILDA: It was in her tea. Remember?

ISABEL: No.

MATILDA: Read.

ISABEL: Who -- ?

MATILDA: Read.

ISABEL: "Some poisons remain in the body for years.  
Scientists can trace the poison by chemical analysis  
long after the -- "

MATILDA: (*interrupting quickly*) Attempted murderer.

ISABEL: I never read this. I didn't know this.

MATILDA: Think.

ISABEL: Somebody screamed.

MATILDA: Yes.

ISABEL: Screaming.

MATILDA: You turned into the rabbit, hopping to your  
box. She was screaming.

ISABEL: Who put poison in Mummy's tea?

MATILDA: You.

ISABEL: I wouldn't!

*(ISABEL climbs in the box to contain her emotion. MATILDA holds the box of Red Squill.)*

MATILDA: Open your eyes. Look at this.

ISABEL: *(from inside the box)* No.

MATILDA: *(reading label)* "For the extermination of rodents -- mice, bats, rats, rabbits. One-fourth tea-spoon, dissolved and ingested, is quickly absorbed into the system. Red Squill is particularly recommended for ridding the household of rats due to their inability to regurgitate."

ISABEL: Regurgitate?

MATILDA: Throw up.

ISABEL: Rats can't throw up?

MATILDA: Apparently not.

ISABEL: Mummy can't throw up.

MATILDA: See I didn't know that.

*(No reply.)*

I'm the person in this family that knows the difference between real and pretend. This box of poison is real. It could really kill a person if that person couldn't throw up and nobody called the ambulance.

ISABEL: Who called the ambulance?

MATILDA: Me.

ISABEL: I wouldn't forget that dead rat picture. I never saw that box before in my whole life. I'd be afraid even to touch it.

*(ISABEL ducks into the box. She is silent.)*

MATILDA: Hey -- hey, kiddo -- want a sandwich? I'll run down -- make you a turkey sandwich. I'll cut the wishbone out. We can make a wish.

ISABEL: *(head popping up)* My wish is that Luce comes back.

MATILDA: Want an orange? It's a Valencia.

*(ISABEL disappears back down in the box.)*

MATILDA: I'm making it into a flower for you. Isn't everybody can make one of these.

ISABEL: Mummy can.

*(MATILDA drops the orange into the box.)*

ISABEL: OW!

MATILDA: I wouldn't take this drastic measure if it wasn't necessary.

*(The orange comes flying out of the box. A few moments of silence, then—)*

ISABEL: Sometimes in school Miss Atkins calls on me and I have the answer, but I just sit there because Isabel Diamond is somebody else. Some girl sitting in some other seat. She wouldn't make Mummy unhappy.

She stays straight on the path. Her hair is shiny and smells like lilies. She sits straight. She doesn't bite her nails. She's never hungry. She doesn't dream about cookies. She's so pretty. That Isabel knows what happened.

MATILDA: Please, Belle. She'll be furious. If she finds you, she'll punish you something awful. Worse than ever. I can't think about how bad it would be. Thinking about thinking about it makes me sick.

ISABEL: I'm acting my age. I'm acting totally going-on 13. Something bad happened this afternoon and I want to fix it so it never happens again. To do that I have to know what happened.

MATILDA: Mom got poisoned.

ISABEL: How?

MATILDA: I told you.

ISABEL: I told you I have to know for myself. We have to act out the tea party that ended with the ambulance. We have to. Then, when I know what happened, I can figure out a way for us all to be happy.

MATILDA: I suppose you want to figure it out with pretend?

ISABEL: Are you scared?

MATILDA: I'm sensible.

ISABEL: Please, Tilda.

MATILDA: No.

ISABEL: Luce would do it.

MATILDA: He wasn't here then; he isn't here now. Nobody's here but me.

ISABEL: Pretty please?

MATILDA: Pretend is not how I figure things out.

*(ISABEL ducks back down in the box.)*

MATILDA: All right! Cripe! All right I'll do it.

*(MATILDA reaches in for ISABEL's hand. Holding MATILDA's hand, ISABEL climbs out of the box.)*

ISABEL: You be her. I'll be me.

MATILDA: Hold it. I'm me.

ISABEL: But --

MATILDA: No "buts." I know who I am.

ISABEL: Everything has to be how it was this afternoon.

*(MATILDA puts the encyclopedia by the box.)*

MATILDA: That's where that was.

*(MATILDA spots a whiskey bottle. There's a small amount of liquid in it.)*

MATILDA: An authentic touch.

ISABEL: What?

MATILDA: Wild Turkey. Where's the bookcase?

ISABEL: There.

*(MATILDA puts the bottle on the "bookcase.")*

MATILDA: Where's the sink?

ISABEL: That old chest thing.

MATILDA: The poison was on the kitchen counter.

ISABEL: Do pretend for that.

*(MATILDA puts the Red Squill on the counter in the "kitchen.")*

MATILDA: That's where it was.

ISABEL: Okay. But don't touch it.

*(ISABEL puts on the enormous dress and the hat the bear was wearing; tosses bear behind the sofa.)*

ISABEL: Now. Pretend you're good at pretend.

MATILDA: Yeah well it was cold. She wore a coat.

ISABEL: Pretend the coat. Four-fifteen. I'm in my room. I finish "The Lord of the Flies" and start a book about a girl named Edna who lives in Newark. She has long legs with no fat and 20 best friends.

MATILDA: Bet she don't have a big sister.

ISABEL: At 4:15 you take the chocolate hermits --

MATILDA: That I made from scratch.

ISABEL: ...out of the oven. Tea is scheduled for 4:30 like always.

MATILDA: Man, I hope she's not late. This kind of cookie gets hard real fast.

ISABEL: You're nervous your boyfriend will show up.

MATILDA: This is a waste of time.

ISABEL: I wish I was Edna for a few minutes. Then I go downstairs for tea.

MATILDA: Lucky Edna. Her story ends.

ISABEL: You're in the kitchen.

MATILDA: I'm in the kitchen.

ISABEL: With a stain on your shirt.

SCENE 3: MATILDA AND MUMMY  
GO HEAD-TO-HEAD

*(Continuing. ISABEL transforms herself into a 300-pound tank: Mother. She thumps the cane once, turns toward the "house." In the "kitchen" MATILDA has mimed putting cookies on a plate. [Tea actions mimed except plastic teapot, cups, knife, bottle, poison.] ISABEL/MOTHER enters the "house.")*

ISABEL/MOTHER: *(calling musically)* Is-a-bel!

*(Entering the "living room".)*

MATILDA: Look, Mom, I made --

ISABEL/MOTHER: *(ignoring Matilda, speaking to the doll on the sofa)* Isabel, my darling. *(tapping a cheek)* Kissy-kissy.

*(ISABEL/MOTHER lowers herself to sit in the rocker with a huge exhalation of breath. She hooks the cane over the rocker arm.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: *(to doll)* You look adorable as a baby gone to dreamland, precious. Pour Mummy a cup of oolong. Pardon me? *(pause)* Cold tea is unacceptable. Matilda, be a dear.

*(MATILDA exits to "kitchen" with teapot. A pinky raised delicately, ISABEL/MOTHER stuffs her face with "hermits," licks her fingers.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Happy Landing was a veritable zoo today. Everybody and his brother had to book a cruise. They should be home with their families the day after Thanksgiving, but no, they have to book their cruises.

(MATILDA enters with "hot tea.")

ISABEL/MOTHER: (to doll) Hot oolong, chocolate hermits, you and me. I would call this picture... rapsodic!

MATILDA: Where's Luce?

(ISABEL/MOTHER piles "sugar" into her "tea.")

ISABEL/MOTHER: (to doll) Did you make scads of new friends today?

MATILDA: Ain't you gonna wait for Luce?

ISABEL/MOTHER: (to Matilda) What's that on your shirt?

MATILDA: Egg whites. I made the hermits from scratch.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Appearances count, Matilda. This is the good side of Ridgewood. People belong to Grace Episcopal. Their children are thin, blonde, and cleanly. People keep score. It is not easy -- a single parent with a single income.

MATILDA: Beds would be nice.

ISABEL/MOTHER: You have beds.

MATILDA: Mattresses.

ISABEL/MOTHER: I cannot afford to furnish the second floor.

MATILDA: Right. The neighbors don't see the second floor.

ISABEL/MOTHER: That rug under your feet was slowly and painfully woven by an insect-infested child in Morocco. Do you have any idea what a rug like that costs or would you die before showing a little gratitude?

MATILDA: Is that a threat?

ISABEL/MOTHER: You know it is not empty. You know what you will cause to happen.

*(Let it land.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Where is Volume P? When the Bridge Club arrives this evening, I do not want a gaping hole in the bookcase between O and Q-R.

MATILDA: Shucks. They might notice it's "The World Book" and not "The Britannica."

ISABEL/MOTHER: Watch it.

MATILDA: I don't have the encyclopedia. *(sarcastic)* I'm so thin, blonde and cleanly I don't need the encyclopedia.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Envy is an ugly color.

MATILDA: You should know.

*(pause)*

MATILDA: I took Volume P. I had to do research.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Research?

MATILDA: On how to get rid of the stupid rat in the basement. Poison research. I don't know where Volume P is. I put it back.

ISABEL/MOTHER: That's not egg white! It's male effluvium!

MATILDA: I -- no! It --

ISABEL/MOTHER: When was the boyfriend here? Assuming he exists because you always tell the truth.

MATILDA: I do my best.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Go change that disgusting shirt.

MATILDA: What did you do with Luce?

ISABEL/MOTHER: He is where they will fix him.

*(MATILDA exits to the "kitchen." ISABEL/MOTHER tosses the doll behind the sofa, simultaneously watching Imaginary Isabel run out of the room, upstairs to her bedroom.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Isabel! Come back! Sweetheart, I had no choice!

*(pause)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Matilda!

*(MATILDA reenters with the knife and refilled "plate.")*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Admit it. You are thrilled. With Luce gone there is --

MATILDA: One less person between you and Isabel.

ISABEL/MOTHER: You and Isabel.

*(MATILDA strokes the knife. ISABEL/MOTHER stirs her tea.)*

MATILDA: What's the word for when you've dissolved so much of a solid that the liquid can't hold more? You stir and stir, but it's reached... What's the word? When you're filled to here. When you want to gag.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Saturation.

MATILDA: Yes.

*(pause)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: I do not see anything that needs to be cut.

MATILDA: Really?

ISABEL/MOTHER: She would never speak to you again.

MATILDA: She don't love you.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Ask her.

*(A long moment, then MATILDA exits to the kitchen where she regains control over her emotions.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: You serve tea with extraordinary bitterness. You attempt to poison your sister against me. It broke my heart. My boy. My little boy.

ISABEL/MOTHER (Cont'd): I live in hell. You have no idea. Every day I wake to birds chirping and by tea time it turns dark. (*genuinely lonely, afraid of being alone, calls*) I am in here all by myself.

(*MATILDA reenters.*)

Stay. Please. Let us try to rescue what is left of the afternoon.

(*MATILDA sits.*)

Help yourself.

(*MATILDA takes tea. Silence. Silence. Silence. ISABEL/MOTHER looks at her watch, clears her throat.*)

MATILDA: I made tetrazzini with the leftovers.

(*ISABEL/MOTHER clears her throat more loudly.*)

MATILDA: More tea?

ISABEL/MOTHER: Nobody on the West Side would be caught dead drinking tea after five.

MATILDA: Supper won't be done for 45 minutes.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Top shelf of the bookcase where you put it behind Julia Child.

(*MATILDA retrieves the whiskey bottle.*)

MATILDA: Jeez, what's that word for what pigs eat?

ISABEL/MOTHER: I would not pursue this line of behavior if I were you.

MATILDA: When you almost have a word but not quite.  
Nuts.

ISABEL/MOTHER: You cannot control yourself.

MATILDA: Must be genetic.

*(ISABEL/MOTHER grabs for the bottle. MATILDA holds it just out of her reach.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: What pigs eat is called "pig food."

MATILDA: Close but no cee-gar.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Having fun?

MATILDA: Oh yeah.

ISABEL/MOTHER: At what price?

MATILDA: Don't change the subject.

ISABEL/MOTHER: I will call her.

MATILDA: No you won't.

ISABEL/MOTHER: I will tell her.

MATILDA: What?

ISABEL/MOTHER: Give it to me!

MATILDA: Left our manners at Happy Landing?

ISABEL/MOTHER: Corn.

*(MATILDA makes a "wrong answer" buzzer sound.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: How dare you patronize me! *(say "paa-tronize" not "pay-tronize")*

MATILDA: Going once, going twice... What's it called, Mummy dear? Gee and the neighbors had you pegged for a graduate of Harvard College with your mind blowing vocabulary. Too bad. I know how it feels to not be educated. To not get to go to school. To be different from everybody around. It's too bad.

*(MATILDA begins to walk away with the whiskey.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: *(quickly)* Slop.

MATILDA: *(turning back, mock innocence)* Hmmm?

ISABEL/MOTHER: Oh for godssake let me have it.

MATILDA: What?

ISABEL/MOTHER: The slop.

MATILDA: Good piggie!

*(ISABEL/MOTHER holds out her cup. MATILDA begins to pour.)*

MATILDA: Say "oink." *(as in "say when")*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Have you not mortified me enough for one day?

MATILDA: Y'know what? The maid's taking a break. Self service.

*(MATILDA exits, puts bottle by sink. ISABEL/MOTHER chugs the whiskey in her cup. MATILDA reenters.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Fine. Help me up.

MATILDA: Oink?

ISABEL/MOTHER: OINK goddamnit!

*(MATILDA hauls ISABEL/MOTHER to her feet.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Your sister will not thank you for that little scenario.

MATILDA: Stay away from her.

ISABEL/MOTHER: You stay away from her. I have had it with you. You are garbage. You are not to speak to her.

MATILDA: I've had it too.

ISABEL/MOTHER: *(brandishing the cane)* WACK!

MATILDA: I'm gonna tell.

ISABEL/MOTHER: WACK!

MATILDA: The neighbors. The cops --

ISABEL/MOTHER: Open your mouth and --

MATILDA: They'll take her away. Put her where you'll never find her.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Then you will not have her either.

*(pause)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: Call her down. I said -- call her down.

MATILDA: *(calls)* Belle.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Use your nice voice.

*(a moment)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: If she falls down the basement stairs tonight, you will have only yourself to blame. Call her. Use your nice voice.

MATILDA: *(calls)* Bellie.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Supper is ready.

MATILDA: *(calls)* Supper's ready.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Go on.

MATILDA: *(calls)* Turkey tetrazzini.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Mummy says you can eat.

MATILDA: *(calls)* She says you can eat.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Well done. You may be excused.

MATILDA: *(a plea)* Don't hit her.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Why would I do that? Because someone is disobeying again? Someone I excused from the room?

*(MATILDA scurries off. ISABEL/MOTHER sees Invisible Isabel approaching. ISABEL/MOTHER coaxes her to come closer and closer.)*

ISABEL/MOTHER: There you are, sweetheart. Come to Mummy, precious darling.

*(MATILDA is at the "kitchen" door.)*

MATILDA: *(intense whisper to Invisible Isabel)* Get back.

ISABEL/MOTHER: We will telephone your brother.

MATILDA: Don't believe / her.

ISABEL/MOTHER: Come --

MATILDA: No --

ISABEL/MOTHER: Give Mummy a / hug.

MATILDA: NO!

ISABEL/MOTHER: My precious.

*(With one swift motion ISABEL/MOTHER slices her imaginary self over the head with the cane. SOUNDS: crack of a cane hitting a head, then a piercing scream.)*

MATILDA: STOP IT, BELLE!

ISABEL/MOTHER: My darling --

MATILDA: STOP IT NOW!

ISABEL/MOTHER: Get off / me!

MATILDA: NO MORE!

ISABEL/MOTHER: Let go! LET GO!

MATILDA: ISABEL -- STOP!

*(MATILDA knocks the hat off ISABEL/MOTHER. ISABEL becomes herself. Her head actually bleeds where the cane hit her imaginary self.)*

MATILDA: Holy crap -- blood.

ISABEL: *(accusing)* You stopped it.

MATILDA: Not soon enough.

ISABEL: What happened? What happened?

MATILDA: Nothing you don't know.

ISABEL: We have to do it over.

MATILDA: Wild horses couldn't make me do that again.

*(ISABEL climbs in her box.)*

MATILDA: Aw c'mon, Belle. Knock it off. Lemme see the cut.

ISABEL: I need my brother.

MATILDA: No you don't.

ISABEL: I do! I do!

*(ISABEL ducks out of sight in the box.)*

MATILDA: Fine. Stay in there 'til you simmer down.

*(MATILDA exits, locking the door as always. ISABEL climbs from the box, takes off Mother dress, then rotates like a radar scanner, forehead-finger pointing, trying to locate LUCE in her mind.)*

#### SCENE 4: LUCE MAKES A SAFE SPACE

*(MUSIC fades up -- a marching band: "The National Emblem March." It is yesterday in LUCE's mind. He runs in through the audience wearing pressed jeans, a very white t-shirt and a jacket, carrying a backpack. He runs to a space apart from the attic (or, perhaps, to the side in the attic). He falls, lies curled in a ball. As He falls, the band MUSIC runs amok -- CACOPHONY. ISABEL is forehead-finger pointing, scanning, trying to locate him.)*

ISABEL: There you are.

*(ISABEL "unzips" a door in the air between the attic and where LUCE is and goes to him.)*

ISABEL: Luce?

*(No reply.)*

ISABEL: Come home, Luce.

LUCE: I don't listen to voices in my head.

ISABEL: The other ones don't matter. Just me. Listen to me.

LUCE: You laughed at me.

ISABEL: Mummy got poisoned.

LUCE: She's dead?!

ISABEL: No. In the hospital.

LUCE: You did it?

ISABEL: I can't remember! You have to come home and play act with me so I can remember.

LUCE: Get Matilda.

ISABEL: She won't. She says I did it. She's making me live in the attic so Mummy won't kill me when she gets home.

LUCE: That's messed up.

ISABEL: Tell me about it!

LUCE: Go shopping. Buy a present for The Mom so she's not mad. Like an economy size bag of Mrs. Fields double-double-chocolate-chocolate-fudge-chunk cookies.

ISABEL: This is serious.

LUCE: Cookies aren't serious?

ISABEL: I need you!

LUCE: I need to be here.

*(LUCE begins frantically feeling the air, looking for a special space. He is agitated, anxious. He must find the space.)*

ISABEL: Here is horrible!

LUCE: You don't even know where it is.

ISABEL: Do too.

LUCE: Where?

ISABEL: Real or pretend?

LUCE: It's a subway station in New York City.

ISABEL: Subways are dirty. You would never make up a dirty place.

LUCE: If I had to.

ISABEL: And go there? At night?

LUCE: Read the sign.

*(She points a forehead-finger at an imaginary sign hanging over imaginary train tracks.)*

ISABEL: "High Street -- Brooklyn Bridge."

LUCE: You have to leave so I can concentrate.

ISABEL: *(making it up as she goes)* I can't. I'm lost.

LUCE: *(playing into the pretend)* Ask for directions.

ISABEL: Nobody's here.

LUCE: Go up on the street.

ISABEL: It's a bad neighborhood.

LUCE: There's a deli.

ISABEL: It's closed.

LUCE: It opens in two minutes.

ISABEL: They don't speak English.

*(LUCE squeezes his temples. A moment, then—)*

LUCE: You're gone.

ISABEL: I'm behind your eyeballs, stuck like glue, curled in your skull with a plan.

LUCE: I've got my own plan.

ISABEL: Staying away isn't a plan.

LUCE: What's yours?

ISABEL: There's a dark, empty cave in my head. Except it's not empty. Something ugly and snarly is inside, drooling and licking its chops. I have to get it out in the sunlight. If I can see what it is --

LUCE: You'll turn into the rabbit and hide in your box you'll be so scared.

ISABEL: No I won't.

LUCE: Say you remember what happened. Then what?

ISABEL: Then we can figure out how to make Mummy happy.

LUCE: If I had the vaguest idea how to make her happy would I be here?

ISABEL: I can't figure it out without you, Luce.

*(LUCE is feeling the air, desperate to find a spot that's right for what he has to do.)*

ISABEL: She'll be home in a couple of hours.

LUCE: There's something I have to do first.

ISABEL: Who poisoned Mummy? What's a very, very special present that'll make her happy? These are very, very, very important things to figure out and my own brother won't help me!

LUCE: You didn't even notice I was gone yesterday.

ISABEL: I thought you were practicing.

LUCE: When I didn't show up to braid your hair, didn't that give you a clue? When did I ever dare miss Thanksgiving dinner? Where was I later? This morning? Did you hear me in the bathroom? Did you see me in the hall?

ISABEL: I thought you were with friends.

LUCE: I'd hate to count on you if I was drowning. Maybe you'd notice the 10th time I went under.

*(She holds back her bangs to show him where the cane hit her.)*

ISABEL: Look.

LUCE: Darn it, Belle! How many times do I have to tell you? Turn on the light before you go down in the basement.

ISABEL: I didn't fall down by myself. I don't ever.

*(LUCE gives ISABEL a tight hug.)*

ISABEL: Please come home.

LUCE: I will. Oh, Bellie-Boo, I will. Meanwhile, you have to follow the rules.

ISABEL: They're not keeping me safe.

LUCE: I have to fix my mistake.

ISABEL: From yesterday?

LUCE: I can't do anything before. Help me find the spot.  
Feel around.

ISABEL: What spot?

LUCE: *(to himself)* Not here.

ISABEL: *(rolling her eyes)* Oh -- the space.

LUCE: Conducive. Inspirational. Calm. Filled with the  
spirit of movement. At the same time --

ISABEL: You're definitely coming home after, right?

LUCE: Cross my heart.

ISABEL: Here. I mean it. Here.

*(He feels the air where she is.)*

LUCE: Yes! I need a stone -- a stick -- some kind of  
marker. Four. I need four markers for the corners.

ISABEL: You gotta quit being like that. It doesn't have to be exact. What's important is to hurry up and get it over with.

*(He remembers a packet of Kleenex in his pocket, carefully folds a tissue into a square, spits on it, places it down, pats it to make it stay -- marking the first corner. He begins pacing out a rectangle -- focused, extremely precise. ISABEL hears MATILDA coming, "unzips" air between the subway and the attic, jumps back in the rabbit box. LIGHT dims on LUCE.)*

SCENE 5: THE GIRL IN THE OTHER SEAT

*(The attic. MATILDA enters. ISABEL is in the box.)*

MATILDA: Here's some Band Aids for your head.

*(MATILDA drops the Band Aid box in the rabbit box. A moment.)*

MATILDA: You're welcome.

*(The Band Aid box comes flying out.)*

MATILDA: Goddamnit! What do you want me to do -- send you to Ohio? I could. I could tape that box shut with you in it and mail it to Aunt Peggy and Uncle Ned. Tonight I could. Right now. Get you away and safe. Is that what you want? To be away from me?

All right. I'll lie. Tell the cops I did it. I hope I get the electric chair. Just end it. When they reach for the switch, you'll be in Aunt Peggy's kitchen eating peach pie. Hot gooey peach pie better than I can make. Pie and milk -- new milk -- straight from a cow. She puts the glass of milk down for you on a gravy spot on the tablecloth. There's food spots all over the tablecloth, but they don't bother anybody. They're reminders of the happy meals you had during the week. I hear Uncle Ned's riding mower out back. They all have riding mowers in Ohio. The whole state smells like new cut grass and peach pie. He finished mowing. The screen door slams. He sits down at the table with you and Aunt Peggy. The three of you join hands for a blessing. It's a picture of happiness.

*(ISABEL's head pops up.)*

ISABEL: You'd mail me to Ohio?

MATILDA: It was just talk.

*(ISABEL allows MATILDA to help her out of the box and to lead her to the sofa.)*

ISABEL: One time I almost told Miss Atkins about her.

MATILDA: Shhh. It's all right.

ISABEL: The girl in the other seat wouldn't let me.

MATILDA: What girl?

ISABEL: The good girl. The pretty Isabel.

MATILDA: That's crap. You couldn't be prettier. Anyways, looks don't matter. You like Mr. Grundle and he has that oozy eye. Uncle Ned loves Aunt Peggy and she looks like Abraham Lincoln.

ISABEL: The kids call Miss Atkins "squirrel face."

MATILDA: Then there's me.

ISABEL: Then there's Mummy.

MATILDA: I'm no Miss New Jersey, but you love me.

*(ISABEL turns away.)*

MATILDA: If I had a world full of little sisters to choose from, there wouldn't be no contest. I'd keep bad things away from you. You'd never be hungry or scared or mad. I'd cook your favorites and bring them to you on

a tray with a little vase of flowers. I'm your sister. I choose you. Even if you weren't pretty. Even if you didn't like me...

*(ISABEL walks away toward LUCE.)*

MATILDA: I'd choose you, little sister.

*(LIGHTS are dimming in the attic.)*