

Bubble Gum  
A play in one act and three scenes

by  
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SCENE 1: LONNQVIST FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

There is an old, threadbare sofa in the middle of the stage. Beanbag chairs, big pillows, and rolled-up sleeping bags and vanity cases and backpacks and duffels abound. From offstage we hear the sound of laughter from a half-dozen girls.

MRS LONNQVIST (40) enters with a stack of a half-dozen Japanese pop music CDs.

MRS. L  
Kjersten! Kjersten!

KJERSTEN (O.S.)  
Yes, Mom!

MRS. L  
Kjersten!

KJERSTEN (O.S.)  
I'm in here!

MRS. L  
Kjersten!

The dog, BOUFFANT (played by a human) comes scampering in.

MRS. L (CONT'D)  
Hello, Bouffant. Would you please go bite your mistress and drag her in here?

KJERSTEN (14) enters, impatient. Bouffant listens, then wanders around doing annoying things. Scratching her butt on the sofa, chewing on one of the pillows and dragging it around, tugging at Kjersten's pantsleg.

KJERSTEN  
I have guests!

MRS. L  
And I have a stack of Japanese pop CDs. You promised me that I wouldn't have to listen to any Japanese music if I let you have York's birthday party at our house.

KJERSTEN  
Mrs. Van Boom asked you to have York's birthday slumber party at our house because Mr. Van Boom was giving a big speech somewhere.

MRS. L  
 If I hear one screechy Japanese  
 voice -

WILEE [pron. Willie] (14) and DEB [pron. Debbie] (14) enter  
 from the garage and watch in fascination.

KJERSTEN  
 Oh, you can't hear any Japanese,  
 but I have to listen to you yelling  
 my name all over the house like I  
 was a cow you were calling in from  
 the pasture.

MRS. L  
 (sweetly)  
 The sooner you come, the less I  
 yell. Now, do you put these CDs  
 back on the floor of your rat-  
 infested pigsty of a room, or do I  
 put them in the garbage?

WILEE  
 (brightly)  
 You can give them to me.

MRS. L  
 Now, WiLee, don't interrupt when  
 I'm busy being the worst mother in  
 the universe.

KJERSTEN  
 (to DeB)  
 I don't know you.

WILEE  
 This is DeB [Debbie] Simpson. Her  
 family just moved in and I invited  
 her to come along to the slumber  
 party.

DEB  
 You mean you didn't ask them if I  
 could come?

MRS. L  
 She doesn't have to! You're  
 perfectly welcome.

KJERSTEN  
 Did you tell her about the birthday  
 concept?

DEB

It's a birthday party?

WILEE

I forgot. It doesn't matter. The presents are kind of a joke anyway.

KJERSTEN

York is turning fourteen, and so we're making this sort of the last birthday of her childhood. So all the presents are, like, stuff we loved when we were like six.

WILEE

My Little Pony.

KJERSTEN

Barbies.

DEB

Oh. I feel terrible. I could have -

MRS. L

It is against the law to feel terrible in my house. No one will be keeping a tally of who gives what gifts so it truly truly doesn't matter.

Mrs. L thrusts the CDs into Kjersten's hand and then bodily steers her daughter toward the hall.

MRS. L (CONT'D)

And don't let me catch you laying them down somewhere else! Your room is the only stop for this train.

KJERSTEN

... only stop for this train oh get some new lines, Mother.

MRS. L

Get some new behavior and I'll get some new lines.

Kjersten is gone. Mrs. L turns back to the other girls.

MRS. L (CONT'D)

Kjersten and I are completely devoted to each other. We get along perfectly. Any allergies?

DEB

What?

MRS. L

If I serve you a rice krispie treat are you going to break out in hives or go into anaphylactic shock or something? If you're diabetic I have orange juice on hand. If you have a bladder infection you'll have to fight Petunia for the bathroom.

DEB

I, um, hate chocolate?

Mrs. L does a long take, then turns to WiLee.

MRS. L

WiLee, I don't mind you bringing human girls to the party, but aliens?

(to DeB)

Nobody's going to make you eat chocolate, my dear. In fact, I've hidden all the chocolate so I can eat it myself later. Introduce her to the other girls, WiLee.

Mrs. L says this last as she leaves.

DEB

Oh, please don't make a big deal out of introducing me.

WiLee leads DeB to a corner where they dump their sleeping bags, pillows, and other stuff.

WILEE

Why, you want to have a secret identity? Are you in witness protection?

DEB

I hate being the center of attention.

WILEE

Wow. Everybody's gonna love you. You'll be the designated audience for the biggest bunch of drama queens in the world.

BOUFFANT

Yip yip yip!

WILEE

Oh good, somebody else is here! We weren't the last to arrive!

WiLee heads toward the door just as LA RAIN CROFTS [14] enters like a freight train and flings her stuff on top of the pile of everybody else's.

LA RAIN

Somebody shoot me and put me out of my misery!

Shouts from the other room.

GIRLS (O.S.)

Weather Girl!

Weather Girl is here!

The remaining girls - STEFENEE HEBBLEBEVVER and CINDIA RUTKOWSKI ("the twins," both 13), HOWARD MERRYMAN (14), PIZZAZZ ANDERSEN (13), YORK VAN BOOM (13), and AGNIESZKA LONNQVIST (11, Kjersten's little sister) - come bounding into the room. Bouffant is scared of the whole group and scampers out toward the hall.

GIRLS (CONT'D)

What's the forecast!

What's the weather!

Stefenee tosses a handful of popcorn at La Rain.

STEFENEE

Will it snow?

Cindia tosses about a half-inch of water from a paper cup onto La Rain.

CINDIA

Will it rain?

LA RAIN

If that was anything but water, Cindia, you're dead meat.

CINDIA

It was rain, La Rain!

YORK

No fighting at my party! What's the forecast, Weather Girl?

LA RAIN

My forecast for tonight is:  
Darkness, three quarrels, two  
secrets, and a fifty percent chance  
of sleep!

Everyone cheers.

HOWARD

Come on into the kitchen, we're  
decorating cookies to look like  
York in ten years.

PIZZAZZ

Mine is covered with red hots.

AGNIESZKA

(outraged)

They said I couldn't use dog poop!

Kjersten reenters, sans CDs but carrying Bouffant. She  
staggers to the couch and dumps Bouffant on it as:

KJERSTEN

Aggie, can't you go five minutes  
without saying something  
disgusting?

AGNIESZKA

Oh, your dog can poop in my shoes,  
but I can't talk about dog poop?

KJERSTEN

Bouffant did not poop in your  
shoes, you put it there yourself to  
get her in trouble!

AGNIESZKA

Oh, like I'd put my own foot in poo  
on purpose!

DEB

Is this the first quarrel?

Dead silence from everyone as they look at her, curious. DeB  
is mortified by the attention.

DEB (CONT'D)

From the ... um ... forecast.  
"Three quarrels, two secrets ..."  
Sorry ...

KJERSTEN  
Oh, that wasn't a quarrel.

WILEE  
They're sisters.

Agnieszka gives Kjersten an exaggerated hug.

AGNIESZKA  
That's how my big sis shows love.

York strides up to DeB and thrusts out her hand.

YORK  
I'm York and it's my birthday. I'm  
the last in the group to turn  
fourteen.

AGNIESZKA  
What am I, canned ham?

KJERSTEN  
Not. In. The. Group.

DEB  
I'm DeB Simpson.

STEFENEE  
Are you related to Jessica?

All laugh.

DEB  
No. O.J.

A beat of silence. Then everybody laughs. The twins  
(Stefenee & Cindia) fall off the sofa and roll on the floor.

DEB (CONT'D)  
(mortified; to WiLee)  
I want to go home.

WILEE  
No, they love you!

YORK  
You're funny!

HOWARD  
We adore you. Did WiLee find you?

WILEE

Her family just moved in. My mom knew her mom in college - I think they both dated my dad and her mom isn't over it yet ...

DEB

They what?

HOWARD

Too much information, WiLee.

(to DeB)

What WiLee meant to say is you're a friend of the family -

DEB

We only met today for the first time in our lives -

LA RAIN

It's clear you are burdened with an excessive commitment to accuracy -

YORK

Did you bring me a present?

DEB

No, I - WiLee said - no one would -

WILEE

She didn't even know it was a birthday slumber party.

YORK

Oh, come on, WiLee, you know the rules!

WILEE

They're only rules if you enforce them!

YORK

If you don't bring a present you have to sleep in front of the bathroom door which means Pizzazz will step on you and wake you up eight times -

PIZZAZZ

Oh, like, shut up, York!

WILEE

I told her she didn't have to have  
a present, you dork!

YORK

My friends never call me dork!

WILEE

I wasn't calling you dork like it  
was your name, York, I was calling  
you dork because you're acting like  
one!

DEB

Wait. I have a present.

WILEE

(skeptical)  
You do?

YORK

(clearly disappointed)  
You do?

HOWARD

Sorry, York, you don't get to do  
one of your horrible punishments.

YORK

Is it wrapped? It's not a present  
if it isn't wrapped!

DEB

It's wrapped. Definitely.

She has her purse now and pulls out a piece of bubble gum.

DEB (CONT'D)

The concept was the last birthday  
of childhood, right? So ... bubble  
gum!

This works like a magic word.

GIRLS

Bu! Bul! Gum! Bu! Bul! Gum!

They run around and form themselves up with two girls - it  
doesn't matter which, except they're the two tallest -  
pretending to turn a very long jump rope. All the other  
girls line up as if jumping the same rope. The twirlers  
start to turn, and the girls jump together as they chant:

## GIRLS (CONT'D)

Chew it on the left!  
 Chew it on the right!  
 Chew it till the flavor's gone!  
 Chew it all night!  
 Chew it till your cavities  
 Are filling up with germs!  
 Chew it till it's squishy  
 Like a bucketful of worms!  
 Poke it with your tongue!  
 Fill it full of air!  
 Blow and blow and blow  
 Until it's bigger than your hair!  
 It's growing, it's growing,  
 I'm blowing, I'm blowing -  
 Pituitary, cassowary, ossuary, pop!  
 Bubblegum's addictive  
 And I just can't stop!

Then they drop the "rope" and everybody jumps up and down and cheers.

## WILEE

(to DeB)

It's like our theme song.

## DEB

So my gift counts?

## YORK

(comically disappointed)

It was perfect. Thank you very much.

Everyone is still laughing and lolling around, when Pizzazz jumps up.

## PIZZAZZ

Out of my way! Train coming through!

She rushes for the bathroom (hall exit). Bouffant gets tangled up in her legs.

## PIZZAZZ (CONT'D)

Kjersten, curb your dog or I'm going to pee on her like a tree!

## KJERSTEN

Bad girl, Bouffant! Bad girl!

Kjersten drags Bouffant back into the room and then puts her out on the kitchen side.

CINDIA  
Pizzazz has a bladder infection.

STEFENEE  
So she runs to the john every like  
three minutes.

HOWARD  
Only Pizzazz is a shy and delicate  
flower so we don't talk about her  
little problem in front of her.

PIZZAZZ (O.S.)  
I heard that!

Howard makes a show of clamping her hand over her mouth.

YORK  
You should be punished for that,  
Howard.

DEB  
Is Howard, like, your last name?

HOWARD  
I wish! My last name is Merryman.  
Howard is, honest to goodness, my  
first name.

LA RAIN  
It's part of the whole last-names-  
as-first-names thing. Like  
Courtney and Whitney and Lindsey  
and Ryan and Leslie and Smith.

HOWARD  
So my parents figured any last name  
could be a girl's first name.

DEB  
Oh. I thought maybe your parents  
wanted you to be a boy.

HOWARD  
A boy, or not a boy, that is the  
question!

LA RAIN  
She's playing Hamlet in the school  
play.

DEB  
Hamlet himself?

HOWARD

Speak the speech trippingly ...

She deliberately trips and does a squealing tumble into some pillows.

DEB

Didn't any boys try out?

WILEE

She beat out two boys for the part.

HOWARD

Mrs. McComber, our drama coach - yes they call them coaches here because all extracurricular activities are treated as athletics - Mrs. McComber is a feminist. "There is no reason why gender should automatically entitle one to the leading role."

KJERSTEN

(continuing to imitate)

"Most drama students are girls, while Shakespeare, the finest playwright who ever lived, has very few female parts. Why should girls be deprived of the opportunity to play these leading roles merely on the basis of gender?"

DEB

So did she cast a boy as Ophelia?

HOWARD

She's not insane. If a boy put on a dress in one of our plays the school board would come after her with torches and crucify her.

WILEE

How do you crucify someone with a torch?

HOWARD

Matchlessly!

YORK

Heatedly!

CINDIA

I was going to say "heatedly"!

STEFENEE

Then I was going to say  
"matchlessly."

CINDIA

I meant it! I really was!

STEFENEE

But nobody cares what you were  
going to do, you big crybaby!

CINDIA

You don't have to call me a  
crybaby, I wasn't crying, I -

STEFENEE

But you're crying now! Look, she  
has tears in her eyes! Gonna cry!  
(sings; cf. "Gotta Dance")  
Gonna cry! Gonna cry!

Cindia bursts into tears.

CINDIA

I was not going to cry!

STEFENEE

You're always just about to cry!  
Your whole life is one big bathtub  
full of tears!

CINDIA

I only cry because you - I hate  
you! You are the most evil witch  
in the whole universe!

Cindia runs from the room.

KJERSTEN

You really are evil, Stefenee.

LA RAIN

You know how easy it is to make her  
cry and you still do it.

STEFENEE

Well I wouldn't do it if it was  
hard! But you're right, Ms.  
Congeniality, I'm an evil witch and  
I'm going to get you! And you!  
And your big stupid dog, too!

Cackling, she runs from the room.

DEB

Was that real? Did they really fight or was that some kind of ...

LA RAIN

Act? Oh, no, they're always completely sincere.

WILEE

We call them "the twins" because their mothers are best friends and they were born on the same day and they grew up together, so they fight like sisters all the time.

YORK

Stefenee's going to find Cindia and continue to torment her until Cindia laughs and then Stefenee will apologize and Cindia will give her a big hug and they'll both cry and then they'll come back downstairs and eat cookies like nothing happened.

AGNIESZKA

They might as well be married.

Dead silence from all.

AGNIESZKA (CONT'D)

What did I say?

KJERSTEN

You said anything at all. I told you not to say anything at all.

HOWARD

(dramatically)

For your information, Ag, not everybody's parents fight like that, even if yours do.

AGNIESZKA

I wasn't saying anything about anybody's parents, I -

HOWARD

Give it up, my child. Everything you say digs you deeper into a hole.

Mrs. L enters from the kitchen.

MRS. L

I have a whole bunch of half-decorated cookies in here. Is it time to throw them away, eat them, or invite some boys over here to finish decorating them?

LA RAIN

Boys don't decorate things, they destroy them.

MRS. L

Have you looked at my kitchen? The boys must already have been here.

Mrs. L exits again.

LA RAIN

I'm going to take a big bite out of mine and call it "half-eaten birthday girl."

YORK

If you do then you will have to be punished! I will put frosting on your face and you have to let Bouffant lick it all off!

Only WiLee and DeB remain.

WILEE

Well, what do you think of my friends?

DEB

They must think I'm an idiot.

WILEE

Come on, they've accepted you completely! You got to see Pizzazz go pee, Kjersten and Mrs. L have a fight, the twins have an even bigger fight, and Agnieszka make a dog poop joke. You are one of us.

Pizzazz comes back in from the bathroom.

PIZZAZZ

So my mother and the doctor both say, drink lots of cranberry juice, it will make it all better!

(MORE)

PIZZAZZ (CONT'D)

But if I drink lots of cranberry juice, then I have to pee, and it hurts to pee. But if I don't drink it, then it will go on hurting for the rest of my life. Why couldn't God have made peeing optional?

WILEE

It is optional. You chose to pee. Plato said so. Or Descartes. One of the philosophers.

PIZZAZZ

Yeah. A man. Who didn't have a bladder infection.

She stalks out, headed for the kitchen.

WILEE

Don't I have a great bunch of friends?

DeB laughs.

DEB

They'll do.

As they exit, Bouffant does a few tricks on the couch, then begs the audience for applause. If they don't respond, then Bouffant claps her front "paws" together and says, "Clap! Clap! Woof!"

SCENE II: LONNQVIST FAMILY ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

While Bouffant is putting on her show, girls come in and set up Monopoly, Chutes & Ladders, and Life on the floor; others rummage through their bags and leaving them in various stages of chaos. Some of them are in pajamas, some not. Some wear dorky party hats, some don't. Cindia is wearing a monster mask. Various large bowls and bags of different snacks are left around, as are paper cups and glasses with different levels of ice and soft drinks. In short, it's the middle of the party.

Cindia, Stefenee, and York are playing all three board games at once. DeB is laying out her sleeping bag alongside the couch and watching them play.

STEFENEE

Ha! I got another baby!

YORK

But you're not going for a baby victory. You said you were doing money.

STEFENEE

No! I always go for babies!

CINDIA

Kjersten, please take your dog out of here, she's trying to eat my money!

KJERSTEN

Bad dog! Never eat money!

Kjersten drags Bouffant out of the room.

CINDIA

Spin or roll, York!

YORK

Just because you get a lot of babies doesn't mean you can change from money!

CINDIA

It doesn't matter, [Monster name] is winning.

STEFENEE

Take off the mask, [monster name], we can't understand you.

Cindia takes off the mask as York spins.

CINDIA

I have five hotels on Boardwalk and Park Place, I am going to win.

STEFENEE

Not if nobody ever lands on them.

YORK

I go down the chute fourteen spaces and ... Lucky Day! Ha ha! Cindia, I take Boardwalk with all five hotels!

CINDIA

No! No! No! No!

DEB

How can you have five hotels on Boardwalk? And since when is there a Lucky Day space in Monopoly?

YORK

We're not playing Monopoly. We're playing Life-Opo-Ladders.

STEFENEE

Life, Monopoly, and Chutes and Ladders combined.

YORK

And so I just got a chute that took me back to a Lucky Day space in Life, so I was able to claim any property on the Monopoly board, with all its hotels.

CINDIA

We buy all those hotels because what else do we do with all the thousands of dollars from Life? Only then somebody comes along and steals them!

YORK

I am a vengeful, evil person, and I steal whatever I want because it's my birthday and the dice love me.

WILEE

DeB, ignore the insane people and put your bag over here by mine.

Kjersten reenters.

LA RAIN

But she's already put her bag over there by mine and just because you brought her doesn't mean you own her.

DeB makes a noise of frustration: anything she decides to do will offend somebody.

KJERSTEN

Why don't we have a big fight about it? It's not as if anybody's actually going to sleep anyway.

LA RAIN  
I am. I can't help it. I always  
fall asleep.

HOWARD  
And she snores.

LA RAIN  
I do not snore.

HOWARD  
She wakes up children in  
Afghanistan.

KJERSTEN  
Really, Rain, you lie there on your  
back with your mouth wide open and  
we throw M&Ms into it.

Kjersten has got into position and Howard is now lobbing  
M&Ms.

LA RAIN  
Then how come I don't wake up  
choking on M&Ms?

HOWARD  
Because you chew them up and  
swallow them in your sleep.

KJERSTEN  
It's the only thing that stops your  
snoring.

HOWARD  
You were talking and you made me  
miss!

KJERSTEN  
But this time we're going to stuff  
the M&Ms up your nose.

HOWARD  
We're betting on whether you blow  
them out of your nose and eat them,  
or sniff them back inside and  
swallow them like snot.

Everybody reacts: "Ewww!" La Rain stands up and extends her  
arms, palms out, pantomiming a bubble around herself.

LA RAIN  
 Personal bubble alert! My snot is  
 not open to discussion.

HOWARD  
 Oh, you can say snot but we can't?

LA RAIN  
 I said personal bubble!

HOWARD  
 (to DeB)  
 When she does her personal bubble  
 we're all supposed to act as if she  
 never existed so we can't even talk  
 about her.

LA RAIN  
 La la la la la la. I am in a  
 beautiful place, surrounded by  
 pretty trees and grass and flowers.

HOWARD  
 These would be snot-bearing trees  
 and nose-shaped flowers with M&Ms  
 in them.

LA RAIN  
 See the pretty lake. Oh, look,  
 mermaids!

KJERSTEN  
 Snoring mermaids.

HOWARD  
 With runny noses.

WILEE  
 As I said, DeB, come and sleep by  
 me!

DEB  
 I'm going to have nightmares about  
 mermaids stealing hotels full of  
 mucousy M&Ms.

WILEE  
 Welcome to the asylum.

Pizzazz comes in carrying Bouffant and dumps the dog onto the  
 couch.

PIZZAZZ

Who put the dog in the bathroom?

CINDIA

She was eating my money.

PIZZAZZ

I can't use the toilet with a dog watching.

YORK

Then that's your cure. Keep the dog with you and you'll never pee again.

La Rain, still in her bubble, sits on the back of the couch and, arms extended, begins to recite a poem.

LA RAIN

Thou art --  
You are --  
The winter of love.

WILEE

Oh, good, it's a weather poem!

PIZZAZZ

Winter is a season, not weather.

YORK

Do we have to have a poem on my birthday?

HOWARD

You can't stop her, she's in her bubble.

LA RAIN

Thou art -- bare branches,  
Thou art -- the carpet of brown leaves  
On the soggy earth.

HOWARD

And this is somehow better than snot-covered M&Ms?

LA RAIN

Thou art -- the nothing living in my heart.  
You are -- the cold air  
In the shivering sunlight.  
I go outside to see my breath.

(MORE)

LA RAIN (CONT'D)

That's how I know that I'm alive.  
Thou art -- you are -- winter:  
I tremble in thy sharp embrace.

DEB

Wow. That was wonderful.

HOWARD

Oh, don't encourage her.

WILEE

La Rain's poems are always  
wonderful, but we never tell her  
so.

KJERSTEN

She has enough self-esteem.

YORK

There is no such thing as enough  
self-esteem.

STEFENEE

(indicating Cindia)

It's either too little or too much.

CINDIA

It's not too much self-esteem if  
you deserve it.

STEFENEE

(holding up her Life car)

All the babies in my car think I'm  
wonderful.

Howard pops La Rain's invisible bubble, and La Rain agrees.

LA RAIN

All right, bubble's gone.

DEB

I thought your poem was beautiful.  
Did you write it for school?

LA RAIN

I don't write poems for teachers to  
grade. It's demeaning.

WILEE

You do too.

LA RAIN

No, I write anti poems for school.

WILEE

Yes! Your seventh-grade haiku!

La Rain counts syllables on her fingers as she recites.

LA RAIN

Please do not make me  
Write any stupid po-ems  
For this English class.

DeB laughs in delight.

DEB

I wish I ever dared to do anything  
defiant. But no, I always get all  
"satisfactories" on my report card.

WILEE

That's a good thing.

DEB

I just sit there and listen and  
obey all the rules no matter how  
stupid they are. In my old school,  
we weren't even allowed to talk to  
our friends in the cafeteria?

HOWARD

Not talk in the lunch room?

PIZZAZZ

Where did you go, Adolf Hitler  
Middle School?

DEB

The principal was obsessed with  
keeping a "quiet, orderly learning  
environment."

PIZZAZZ

What are you supposedly learning at  
lunch?

DEB

I guess we were having a "quiet,  
orderly digesting environment."

KJERSTEN

Your digesting environment is  
inside your stomach, where it's  
always dark and gurgly.

LA RAIN

Please don't make me go back into  
my personal bubble.

DEB

In your poem, La Rain, you know how  
it ends?

LA RAIN

Of course I know how it ends.

DEB

But I mean ... "I tremble in thy  
sharp embrace" ...

HOWARD

She memorized a line from La Rain's  
poem!

As if directing music, she gets about half the other girls to  
say, at once:

GIRLS

Suck up!

LA RAIN

Some people are able to receive  
beauty and genius into their  
hearts.

DEB

What I mean is, did you write that  
to a real boy or did you just make  
it up?

LA RAIN

You're asking if I've ever had a  
boyfriend?

HOWARD

Specifically a boyfriend with a  
sharp embrace?

LA RAIN

I'm not one to kiss and tell.

WILEE

Meaning nobody's ever kissed her.

LA RAIN

Is an imagined kiss less real, less passionate, less life-changing than a messy kiss with an actual stupid boy?

KJERSTEN

At least with imaginary kisses he never has bad breath.

HOWARD

Oh, no, Kjersten. In La Rain's imagination, her imaginary boyfriend's imaginary kisses will taste like the worst bad breath ever, only she'll decide that she loves his bad breath because it comes from deep inside him.

La Rain "takes stage."

LA RAIN

I live to suffer! Agony is what lets me know that I'm alive!

HOWARD

It's alive! It's ali-i-i-ive!

LA RAIN

To be! Or not to be! That is the question!

York leaps to the middle of the group.

YORK

Time for The Truth!

PIZZAZZ

No! Please! Not The Truth!

THE TWINS

Yes! Yes! The Truth!

PIZZAZZ

All that ever happens when we do The Truth is that people lie.

STEFENEE

But, we have to think up lies that we think people will believe!

CINDIA

Lying is just poetry by untalented people.

YORK

Here is the Question-That-Must-Be-Answered-Truthfully-Or-You-Will-Be-Punished:  
Have you ever kissed a boy?  
Hands first!

Howard's hand shoots up. Both Cindia and Stefenee raise each other's hands. Kjersten raises Bouffant's front paw.

YORK (CONT'D)

Truth or you will be punished!

Cindia and Stefenee both lower their hands. Pizzazz slowly raises hers.

STEFENEE

Pizzazz is lying. Only she thinks if she acts reluctant to say it, people will believe her.

Pizzazz, put out, lowers her hand.

DEB

What about you, York?

YORK

Oh, right. I'm just a kiss factory waiting for boys to line up.

KJERSTEN

I think we need to define "boy."

YORK

A member of the male conspiracy who is not a brother.

KJERSTEN

Second cousin?

WILEE

When I was six?

YORK

(to WiLee)  
At school?

WILEE

In the back yard during a birthday party?

Several "woo-hoos" and whistles.

YORK

No!

DEB

Why not?

YORK

She's talking about Bubby Whitaker and he kissed everybody in the back yard during WiLee's birthday party.

DEB

So ... pathological serial kissers don't count.

WILEE

I need chocolate! Where's the chocolate!

Three people hold out bowls that once held candy, then turn them upside down all at once.

LA RAIN

DeB must have eaten all the chocolate, WiLee.

WILEE

DeB does not eat chocolate.

KJERSTEN

Please don't tell me you're on some diet, you do not need to lose weight.

DEB

I just hate chocolate.

STEFENEE

It's just a myth that chocolate gives you zits. It's sugar that gives you zits.

CINDIA

It's oils that give you zits.

LA RAIN

No zits! Nothing pus-filled can be discussed or I will go back into my bubble!

DEB

My parents say it was because when I was, like, two I was traumatized by some movie where somebody eats a whole huge chocolate cake and then throws up or something.

PIZZAZZ

My older brother saw a scary movie when he was a five and it turned him into a bed wetter.

YORK

Truth or lie?

A show of hands. York counts quickly.

YORK (CONT'D)

We don't believe you, Pizzazz.

CINDIA

Your brother Gerbil is too dreamy to be a bed wetter.

DEB

Her brother is named Gerbil?

PIZZAZZ

My name is Petunia, what do you expect?

STEFENEE

Her brother's name is Gerald.

PIZZAZZ

He prefers Gerbil. And whether you like it or not, he didn't stop wetting his bed until my parents made him wear Depends to bed and then it was so humiliating he finally started making it through the night.

LA RAIN

What is it with your family and urine?

YORK

We have still not finished with The Truth!

KJERSTEN

Well we still haven't answered about second cousins.

YORK

If you can legally marry, then it's a kiss.

DEB

Was it a go-kiss-your-cousin kiss or were you a volunteer?

YORK

Excellent distinction!

KJERSTEN

I was not only a volunteer, it was completely my idea.

YORK

How long ago?

KJERSTEN

At the family reunion last summer. He was fifteen. We were alone in the swimming pool.

WILEE

That is just sick. Sick sick sick. Kjersten, you are disgusting.

YORK

What's sick about it?

WILEE

They were half naked in the swimming pool and it was at a family reunion and they were relatives!

Now that she puts it that way, most react: "Ewww!"

LA RAIN

Kjersten made it sound sick so that we'd believe her. She just made it up.

Agnieszka rises up from behind the couch.

AGNIESZKA  
I'm telling Mom!

KJERSTEN  
Go ahead, you bog-dwelling demon  
baby!

WiLee and DeB catch Agnieszka as she tries to run from  
Kjersten.

AGNIESZKA  
Let go of me!

KJERSTEN  
I should have killed you years ago!

YORK  
No killing! Against the rules!

York and La Rain hold Kjersten.

KJERSTEN  
Don't you dare tell Mother, you  
burning bag of poo! I'll rip your  
arm off and beat you over the head  
with it!

AGNIESZKA  
I'll only promise not to tell her  
if you admit that it's a big fat  
lie.

KJERSTEN  
It's not a lie. I really did kiss  
him!

AGNIESZKA  
Big fat lie! He never noticed that  
you even existed!

KJERSTEN  
He did too!

YORK  
Vote!

They vote.

YORK (CONT'D)  
Not believed.

HOWARD  
Why didn't anybody doubt me?

LA RAIN

Oh, come on, Howard, we all saw you kiss Nerfball Johnson in Romeo and Juliet.

KJERSTEN

And we know how many extra practice sessions you had. Before and after the play was put on.

HOWARD

Well, I wasn't counting kisses in plays. Those are fake.

DEB

It's real lips and a real boy!

LA RAIN

Exactly!

HOWARD

But he's pretending to be somebody else who is in love with somebody that you're only pretending to be. So it might be real, but it's not true.

YORK

OK, so here's the official question: Have you ever had a true kiss, as just defined, with a boy who is not too close a relative to marry, and who is not a serial kiss-stealer, in which you were a voluntary participant in the kiss?

Howard's hand shoots back up. But this time La Rain's hand goes up too, and so does DeB's.

HOWARD

I'm not naming names but I thought I was truly in love and we kissed three times under the bleachers at a basketball game and if you don't believe me you can ask Coach Slaughter.

YORK

We believe you, Howard. La Rain?

## LA RAIN

It was summer vacation and I got lost from my family on a trail at Yosemite and this other family found me and I stayed with them and I hung out the whole time with their son who was exactly my age and a little shorter than me and just before we got back to camp he thanked me for the best day of his whole vacation and he kissed me.

## THE TWINS

Romantic!

## STEFENEE

And then?

## LA RAIN

And then we got back to camp and my parents yelled at me for running off and didn't I know how worried they were though in my opinion they probably didn't even notice I was gone till they got back to camp themselves and anyway I never saw the boy again. His name was Steve and he most definitely did not have bad breath.

## YORK

DeB?

## DEB

He was my boyfriend at my old school.

## ALL

Boyfriend!?

## DEB

No, I mean a friend who was a boy, that kind of boyfriend. But he kissed me when I went over to his house to say good-bye right before I moved.

## LA RAIN

Tragic kiss!

DEB

I don't think so. Because right after that he told me that he wasn't going to write to me or call me or text me even though he has free long distance, because, as he said, what was the point when we live two thousand miles apart?

KJERSTEN

Definitely not romantic.

DEB

I think he had already picked out his next friend-who-happens-to-be-a-girl. He was just a gotta-have-a-girlfriend kind of guy.

LA RAIN

So it's a good thing you found that out.

DEB

I kind of knew it all along.

LA RAIN

Then why were you with him?

DEB

Maybe I'm a gotta-have-a-boyfriend kind of girl.

YORK

I don't think that's what happened.

DEB

Why would I lie?

YORK

Oh, I think you probably had a friend-who-was-a-boy and he probably kissed you, but I think it wasn't the move here that broke you up.

DEB

Well it was!

YORK

I think his parents told him he couldn't see you anymore.

DEB  
They did not!

LA RAIN  
Cut it out, York, this is just  
mean.

KJERSTEN  
You can't possibly know anything  
about it anyway!

During York's next speech, DeB turns to glare at WiLee.

YORK  
I know that they moved here because  
her brother did some terrible crime  
and went to jail and nobody would  
talk to them anymore back in their  
old town and I bet that's why her  
boyfriend broke up with her.

Everybody stares at York and at DeB and back and forth.

DEB  
I will never forgive you for  
telling.

WILEE  
Me? Tell what? You mean that's  
all true?

DEB  
You're not a good enough actress to  
pull off this innocent act. You  
know everything about my family,  
even stuff I didn't know.

HOWARD  
WiLee did know that her mom and  
DeB's mom both dated WiLee's dad.

WILEE  
Well I didn't know that and even if  
I did I'd never tell!

DEB  
Well somebody told and you're the  
only one who knows my family. I  
bet you and your parents had a  
great time talking about my evil  
brother before I came and then you  
bring me here to show everybody the  
sister of the murderer.

The word "murderer" stops them cold.

DEB (CONT'D)

Well he's not a murderer, he didn't mean to kill anybody, and he was convicted of manslaughter, not murder!

Mrs. L comes in.

MRS. L

What's going on in here? This does not sound like a party!

DEB

It's a freak show, and I'm the designated freak!

In tears, DeB flees the room, heading outside, as if she's going to run home.

MRS. L

I don't know what's going on here, but I have one key question: Who's going after her?

STEFENEE

She's WiLee's friend.

LA RAIN

Not anymore.

KJERSTEN

She's my friend now.

PIZZAZZ

Mine too.

HOWARD

And mine.

MRS. L

Oh, good, are we going to take a poll while she runs home crying?

Kjersten, Pizzazz, and Howard head for the door. Pizzazz comes right back in.

PIZZAZZ

I can't run after anybody. I hate my bladder.

She heads off the other way, toward the bathroom.

MRS. L

I'm sure everything will be straightened out soon. But maybe you should all start getting ready for sleep.

YORK

Oh, right, like this is still a party.

MRS. L

These things happen, and everything always works out.

Mrs. L leaves for the kitchen.

LA RAIN

I think it was really lousy of you to tell, WiLee.

WILEE

I didn't.

YORK

You told somebody who told somebody who told me.

WILEE

Nobody heard it from me.

LA RAIN

Who else could it have come from?

YORK

Vote!

Stefenee raises her hand just a little, so no one sees except the audience.

WILEE

So you're all sure I'm a liar and blab.

She walks toward the door.

WILEE (CONT'D)

Don't bother tripping over each other chasing after me. If you don't know that I'd never tell a secret like that, then I have no friends here.

BOUFFANT

Arf! Yow!

WILEE

Except you, Bouffant.

Bouffant, panting, follows her out the door. WiLee at once pushes Bouffant back in.

WILEE (CONT'D)

You can't come with me, Bouffant,  
or somebody will think I stole you.

A moment of silence, all looking at the door.

CINDIA

I am so bummed!

LA RAIN

It really isn't the kind of thing  
WiLee would ever do. She's the  
most honest, loyal person I know.

La Rain rushes out the door after her.

YORK

Wow. This is, like, the best  
birthday party ever.

CINDIA

What was she saying? That the rest  
of us are, like, not as loyal and  
honest as WiLee?

Stefenee sits down at the game again.

STEFENEE

I guess that was the second  
quarrel. Which means the rest of  
the party will be fine.

YORK

How will it be fine when  
everybody's out chasing everybody  
else?

Cindia sits across from Stefenee.

CINDIA

We're still here.

STEFENEE

And so's Pizzazz, when she gets out of the bathroom.

CINDIA

So let's finish the game and wait for everybody to come back.

York sits down on the floor with them.

YORK

How weird would that be, if your brother really killed somebody.

CINDIA

Do you think he was one of those guys who goes crazy and shoots up the school? Or starts sniping at people out of the trunk of his car?

STEFENEE

Maybe he got high and pushed his best friend out of a moving car or something.

CINDIA

How do you think of weird stuff like that?

YORK

Will somebody please land on Boardwalk?

STEFENEE

Your turn, Cindia.

CINDIA

Who did tell you, York?

YORK

Oh, is it my turn to tattle?

STEFENEE

It's your turn to spin.

Bouffant leaps into the middle of the game.

STEFENEE (CONT'D)

No!

CINDIA

Oh, I give up!

YORK  
 Bad dog. Stupid dog. Miserable  
 party-wrecking dog!

York drags a whimpery Bouffant out of the room.

CINDIA  
 We might as well clean this mess  
 up.

STEFENEE  
 You're happy to end the game  
 because York took Boardwalk away  
 from you.

CINDIA  
 I'm sure that's my evil motive.  
 Wanna watch Pirates for the seventh  
 time?

STEFENEE  
High School Musical. For the  
 twentieth time.

CINDIA  
 You can never beat Lily's record,  
 she watches it every night as she  
 goes to sleep.

STEFENEE  
 It only counts if you're awake at  
 the end.

They've left the room. Pizzazz comes back in and announces:

PIZZAZZ  
 My bladder is gladder!

She notices that nobody's there except Agnieszka.

PIZZAZZ (CONT'D)  
 Where is everybody?

She starts cleaning up the games.

Bouffant comes bounding in and "helps" her. Others come in,  
 help clean up, then lay out bags and lie down in or on them.

SCENE III LONQVIST FAMILY ROOM - TWO HOURS LATER

WiLee, DeB, La Rain, and Kjersten are still not there;  
 everyone else is lying around in various positions, asleep.

York is lying awake playing with a handheld videogame and singing or chanting angrily. La Rain enters during the song and leans in the doorway.

YORK

(sings)

I'm fourteen now and nobody cares.  
I might as well get eaten by bears.  
All my birthday guests have been  
missing for hours.  
This could be my funeral if we had  
any flowers.

La Rain comes in and sits at the foot of York's "bed."

LA RAIN

Happy birthday, York.

YORK

(sings)

Now my friend La Rain's gonna tell  
me I'm wrong.  
Happy happy birthday is the name of  
this song.

LA RAIN

That's a really funny song, York.  
And I don't have to tell you you  
were wrong to tell everybody DeB's  
secret because you already know.

York rolls over, turning her back to La Rain.

LA RAIN (CONT'D)

Don't go to sleep with your  
[handheld game machine] on.

YORK

It turns itself off after five  
minutes.

(beat)

I wish I could go back in time and  
keep my stupid mouth shut.

LA RAIN

No, York, for heaven's sake, you  
were only thirteen then.

YORK

I'm still only thirteen until seven  
twenty-one in the morning.

LA RAIN

OK, so we have a few hours till  
you're all growed up.

YORK

Everybody hates me.

LA RAIN

Nobody hates you. But there's one  
thing WiLee and DeB both have a  
right to know.

YORK

Why I'm so stupid? Because my  
parents never should have gotten  
married.

LA RAIN

The only way people are going to  
believe WiLee never told anybody is  
if you tell us who you heard about  
her brother from.

YORK

So, let's see, the thing I did  
wrong was to blab, and so the only  
way to fix it is to blab.

LA RAIN

You have to clear WiLee's name.

YORK

But for all I know, the story did  
come from her.

LA RAIN

York, the story came from you.

YORK

I didn't make it up!

LA RAIN

WiLee is your friend.

YORK

And so's the person who told me.

LA RAIN

You're the only one who can make  
this right.

YORK

Blab once, you're a jerk. Blab twice, you're a saint.

STEFENEE

It was me.

Stefenee was behind the sofa. She now rests her arms on the back of the sofa, but she's hiding her face.

LA RAIN

Stefenee?

YORK

I wasn't going to rat you out.

LA RAIN

How did you even know about it?

STEFENEE

My mom's realty company found them their house, and the agent who worked with them here talked to the agent who sold their old house and heard all about the trial and told everybody at the office including my mom and then my mom told me that the daughter in their family would be going to my school and I was supposed to stay away from her because her brother did drugs and killed people and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree so when DeB came to the party I realized it was that very girl because my mom told me about her weird way of spelling her name and I told York about it. I didn't know York was going to tell the whole world.

YORK

Well there was DeB being all nice and popular with my own friends at my own birthday party and bragging about the boy she kissed when she probably never kissed anybody cause she's not all that pretty anyhow. And now that I've said it out loud I sound like the stupidest, most immature person.

York buries her face in her pillow.

STEFENEE

(to La Rain)

Does everybody have to know?

LA RAIN

Duh, yes. It's not right for WiLee to get blamed for telling a story she didn't even know.

STEFENEE

But Cindia will be so mad at me.

LA RAIN

We'll all be mad at you, Stefenee, and then we'll get over it.

STEFENEE

Cindia will kill me.

LA RAIN

Why? I mean why her in particular?

STEFENEE

Because I told York and not her.

LA RAIN

Oh. You're right. You're dead meat. But look at it this way.

La Rain makes an ugly face. Stefenee laughs in spite of herself.

STEFENEE

No, I'm going to look at it this way.

She makes an even uglier face. La Rain laughs too. During the laughter, WiLee comes to the door and stands there listening.

LA RAIN

Look at it this way -- I'm going to kill you if you don't tell everybody.

WILEE

She doesn't have to.

LA RAIN

Yes she does.

STEFENEE

WiLee, I'm so sorry I didn't speak  
up right away.

LA RAIN

She was more afraid of Cindia than  
of you.

WILEE

Who isn't?

Pounds (lightly) on her own head with her fists.

STEFENEE

I'm so ashamed I could kill myself.

LA RAIN

Don't ever say that. Don't even  
think it. There is nothing so  
embarrassing that you can't get  
through it and come out the other  
side.

STEFENEE

Everybody's going to hate me.

LA RAIN

Not if you tell them the truth  
yourself.

STEFENEE

It's too late. They're all asleep.

HOWARD

Right, like anybody could sleep  
through all this.

Howard curls herself up into a sitting position, sleeping bag  
and all. La Rain gets up and starts kicking the sleepers  
awake. Bouffant joins in, licking [pretending to lick] the  
faces of the sleepers (which by now includes only Pizzazz and  
Cindia).

LA RAIN

Rise and shine. Out of the sack.  
Don't you whine, or I'll give you a  
smack.

CINDIA

What are you doing? It's still  
dark out there!

PIZZAZZ

I finally got to sleep for two  
hours in a row and you're waking me  
up?

LA RAIN

Someday you'll thank me for this.

La Rain shepherds all the girls to the area in front of the  
sofa, then sits on the back of the sofa and pats the space  
beside her.

LA RAIN (CONT'D)

Come on, Stefenee, front and  
center.

As Stefenee climbs into place:

STEFENEE

I can't I can't I can't.

LA RAIN

WiLee and I are beside you in this.

WILEE

I am?

LA RAIN

According to the weather report,  
there's a fifty percent chance you  
will.

WILEE

Well, if it's the weather.

The three of them sit on the back of the couch, Stefenee in  
the middle.

STEFENEE

I can't say it.

WILEE

It was Stefenee who told York about  
DeB's brother.

Cindia leaps to her feet.

CINDIA

You told York and not me?

STEFENEE

I was going to tell you but --

WILEE

Are you insane? Nobody should have been telling anybody!

CINDIA

But I want to know all about what DeB's brother did!

WILEE

Then the only person you should ask is DeB.

CINDIA

I can't ask her!

WILEE

Why not?

CINDIA

Because that would be, like, rude! "Hey, I hear your brother pushed his friend out of a car when they were going sixty miles an hour. What's the 4-1-1 on that, girlfriend?"

LA RAIN

You could ask her -- as a friend.

CINDIA

But she's not my friend.

STEFENEE

My mom told me to stay away from her.

LA RAIN

Cause your mom was afraid for you.

STEFENEE

No, actually, it's cause my mom loves to make a big mysterious deal out of everything.

WILEE

I brought her here as my friend. She was under my protection.

HOWARD

Well, you didn't do a very good job of it!

(beat)

(MORE)

HOWARD (CONT'D)

In case everybody's forgotten what a "joke" is, that was one.

LA RAIN

None of us did a very good job of anything. But we can do a good job of trying to set things to rights.

Mrs. L bustles in from the inside door.

MRS. L

That's an excellent idea, La Rain. I'm glad to see you're all awake. I can't believe I just said that at three a.m. during a slumber party, but it's true. Kjersten and DeB and I have been over at the Simpsons' house talking to DeB's parents. I was planning to give you all the tongue-lashing of your lives, but I can see that you're already handling things yourselves. So I'm going upstairs to bed. I'm going to hit the sack, catch some zees, drool on the duck. Unless anybody wants brownies.

Stefenee bursts into tears.

STEFENEE

I want brownies!

WiLee hugs her.

WILEE

So do I!

Howard stands up, holds a "microphone" in front of her mouth.

HOWARD

With ninety-eight percent of the precincts reporting, it appears that the pro-brownie vote is unanimous.

All cheer.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Back to you, Mrs. L.

MRS. L

All right, get your tiny fourteen-year-old derrieres off the back of my sofa and I'll make a batch of disgusting, gloppy, unhealthy, sugar-filled, tooth-rotting, double-chocolate extra-fudgies.

As La Rain, Stefenee, and WiLee slide down onto the seat of the sofa, Mrs. L goes back to the door she came in from.

MRS. L (CONT'D)

All right, you can come in now.

Agnieszka comes in, to Mrs. L's surprise.

AGNIESZKA

I can?

MRS. L

What are you doing up? I was calling to your sister and DeB.

AGNIESZKA

But I'm awake now, can't I stay?

MRS. L

You can help me in the kitchen. When I fall asleep, you wake me up and wipe the brownie dough off my face.

Mrs. L drags Agnieszka out the kitchen-side door. Bouffant follows. Mrs. L comes back in to yell at the dog.

MRS. L (CONT'D)

Bouffant! Bad dog! Wicked dog! Evil dog! Don't you even think of coming into that kitchen!

Bouffant slinks back and climbs up onto the laps of the girls on the sofa.

STEFENEE

You are not evil, Bouffant. You're just inconvenient. I'm evil.

YORK

No, I'm evil and I deserve to be punished.

HOWARD

Your punishment is that you are being held back a year. You will not turn fourteen! You must remain thirteen for another twelve months!

YORK

OK, but I'm not giving back any of my birthday presents.

She makes a protective gesture around her little pile of retro presents.

PIZZAZZ

Not even DeB's?

YORK

Especially not DeB's!

She pulls out the gum, unwraps it, and puts it in her mouth and starts chewing.

{If the actress playing York has braces or for some other reason cannot chew bubble gum:

YORK (CONT'D)

My real punishment is that my {mother} {orthodontist} {wicked stepmother} won't let me chew gum. You, Pizzazz! Chew it for me!

Pizzazz does.}

YORK (CONT'D)

Even if DeB wants her present back, she can't have it. Unless she actually kills me, we're going to be friends. Even if it takes all year to get her to forgive me.

HOWARD

Only then shall you be fourteen.

Kjersten and DeB enter. DeB is very shy and hangs back. Kjersten is eating a homemade roll.

KJERSTEN

What are you dorks all doing up?

LA RAIN

Waiting for a change in the weather.

Stefanee and York go straight to DeB and both of them kneel in front of her.

STEFENEE

I'm so sorry, DeB. I heard about it from my mom who got it from your family's realtor back where you used to live and I was too mean to keep my mouth shut and too cowardly to admit it was me who told.

YORK

And if I hadn't been so jealous of how much everybody liked you and how cool you are, I wouldn't have blabbed to everybody and none of this would have happened and I'm sorrier than anybody.

DEB

When you're on your knees like that I don't know if you're joking or you really mean it.

They bound to their feet.

YORK

We mean it.

STEFENEE

We would have hugged you but we didn't know if you'd want us to.

DeB hugs each one, but it's a light hug, brief, uncertain.

DEB

I don't know any of you yet, not really.

HOWARD

Come on, you know us. We're completely ordinary.

Agnieszka leans in the kitchen door, eating another homemade roll. Cindia dances around chanting:

CINDIA

No we're not, we're special, we're special, we're special!

PIZZAZZ

No, Cindia. You're special.

KJERSTEN

Here's what we know about you. You came into a house full of strangers and within a couple of hours we all liked you and thought you were cool. Even the dog liked you. Then we heard a mixed-up version of a sad story and because of the way it was told, it hurt you and you left.

LA RAIN

And nobody blamed you for that.

WILEE

It sounds like you're going through something really hard. We want to be help you through it.

HOWARD

We want to be your friends.

KJERSTEN

Here's something else we know about you. You came back.

WILEE

If you don't want to talk about it, we'll understand.

LA RAIN

But when the weather's right, we want to know the truth.

DeB looks around at them, then turns her back to the audience, hunches over, and begins to cry into her hands.

WiLee and Kjersten go to her, put their arms around her.

WILEE

You don't have to.

KJERSTEN

We didn't mean to pry.

DeB turns around, and head still down, speaks to them.

DEB

None of my friends back home would even talk to me after it happened.

WILEE

Then they weren't your friends.

KJERSTEN

And this is your home.

Kjersten and WiLee bring her over to the sofa, where the others make room and form a close circle around her, including sitting on the sofa (and on the back of the sofa). The dog comes up and puts her head on DeB's lap.

DEB

My brother Luke is really good. He was always nice to me and he didn't even hang around with bad friends. It was just the once that he took drugs, at a party.

HOWARD

It was in the punch, right?

DEB

No. He knew he was taking them. An senior in high school had them and Luke wanted to be cool so he and his friends all took some and then they just got crazy. They were going home and clowning around in the car and Luke and Eddy were in the back seat and they started pretending to push each other out of the car. They got both back doors open and Vaughn, he was driving, he was yelling at them to cut it out, but right then they hit a curve in the road and Luke almost fell out. Eddy grabbed him and saved his life. But Luke thought it was all part of the game, and he gave Eddy a shove just as the road curved the other way and Eddy fell out and Luke couldn't save him because a car was coming the other way and ...

DeB cries.

WILEE

So nobody meant to do anything bad.

HOWARD

I guess that's why it was manslaughter instead of murder.

AGNIESZKA

Your brother must feel awful. Eddy saved his life and then --

DEB

Eddy was his best best best friend forever. Luke tried to kill himself that night, before the drugs finally wore off. But then he got sober and he wanted to plead guilty to murder so he could pay for what he did. He said, "If Eddy doesn't get to have a life, I shouldn't have a life either."

WILEE

But it wasn't murder. He didn't mean to.

DEB

The judge only let him plead guilty to manslaughter, and because there were drugs involved and Luke admitted he took them on purpose, he gave him a year in prison.

STEFENEE

That's real different from the way my mom heard it.

CINDIA

Stefenee!

STEFENEE

No! I believe DeB! I'm saying my mom heard it wrong.

DEB

It's OK, that's what everybody says back there. We drive up and visit him every Saturday. It's like he's so old now. He doesn't look like a kid anymore. He turned sixteen in the juvenile detention facility. He says when he gets out, he never wants to go back to our old town again. That's half the reason Dad and Mom decided to move. So he'd never have to.

KJERSTEN

Your brother sounds like a really good guy.

HOWARD

And he's paying for what he did.

DEB

He says when he comes out he's going to work extra hard so wherever Eddy is, Eddy will think that Luke's "stupid life was worth saving."

DeB looks around at them all and says, fiercely:

DEB (CONT'D)

I love my brother!

Kjersten walks over to Agnieszka and hugs her tight.

KJERSTEN

I understand completely.

PIZZAZZ

Man. You think you're just playing a game, and suddenly you find out it was real life after all.

HOWARD

No. It's not Life. It's Life-opo-Ladders. You never know where you're going to end up or what it's going to cost.

Mrs. L comes in with a plate with a slab of homemade bread covered with honey.

MRS. L

I know you don't like chocolate, darlin', so here's a slab of hot, freshly-nuked homemade bread with butter.

AGNIESZKA AND KJERSTEN

Tooth butter!

LA RAIN

That's butter so thick you leave tooth marks in it when you take a bite.

MRS. L

Well, it's all melted so, no toothmarks, I'm afraid.

DeB takes a big bite.

CINDIA

Wow, if there's homemade bread, who wants brownies.

MRS. L

You do. And you're going to eat every last one of them or I'm going to put them under your faces while you're sleeping.

Mrs. L starts to exit, then whirls on the dog.

MRS. L (CONT'D)

And Bouffant, if you make a grab for that bread I'm going to shave you bald all over.

Mrs. L exits.

DEB

Come on, everybody break off a piece.

YORK {OR PIZZAZZ}

Wait! Let me blow one bubble before I take this out of my mouth!

She blows the bubble.

ALL

It's growing. It's growing.  
I'm blowing. I'm blowing.  
Pituitary, cassowary, ossuary ...

The bubble pops, or someone pops it. As York {or Pizzazz} cleans up the gum and/or puts it on a napkin:

ALL (CONT'D)

Bubblegum's addictive and I just can't stop!

They reach in and break off pieces of bread as the lights dim out.

ALL (CONT'D)

(ad lib)

This is so good.  
One bite is not going to be enough.  
Man, Mrs. L is the best.

WILEE

Thanks for sharing with us, DeB.

DEB  
That's what friends do.