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SF PERUSALS

Advance Man

Part One of
The Honeycomb Trilogy

Mac Rogers

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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THE HONEYCOMB TRILOGY was originally presented by Gideon Productions in three separate productions over the first half of 2012 at The Secret Theatre in Long Island City, New York. ***ADVANCE MAN*** ran in January 2012, ***BLAST RADIUS*** in March and April 2012, and ***SOVEREIGN*** in June 2012. The performances were directed by Jordana Williams, produced by Sean Willams and Shaun Bennet Fauntleroy, with sets by Sandy Yaklin, costumes by Amanda Jenks, lights by Sarah Lurie, sound by Jeanne Travis, props and effects by Stephanie Cox-Williams, fight choreography by Joseph Mathers, alien leg design by Zoe Morsotte, and publicity by Emily Owens PR. The Production Stage Manager was Devan Hibbard. The cast was as follows:

BILL . . . . . Sean Williams
AMELIA . . . . . Kristen Vaughan
RONNIE . . . . . Becky Byers
ABBIE . . . . . .David Rosenblatt
CONOR . . . . . Jason Howard
VALERIE . . . . . Shaun Bennet Fauntleroy
BELINDA . . . . . Rebecca Comtois
RAF . . . . . Abraham Makany
LYNN . . . . . Amanda Duarte
KIP . . . . . Brian Silliman

THE HONEYCOMB TRILOGY was subsequently presented by Gideon Productions in repertory at the Gym At Judson in New York City in October and November of 2015. The performances were directed by Jordana Williams and produced by Sean Williams, Rebecca Comtois, and Mikell Kober, with sets by Sandy Yaklin, costumes by Amanda Jenks, lights by Jennifer Wilcox, sound by Jeanne Travis, blood effects by Stephanie Cox-Williams, alien leg design by Zoe Morsotte and Lauren Genutis, fight choreography by Adam Swiderski, and publicity by Emily Owens PR. The Production Stage Manager was Viki Barclay and the Assistant Director was Sara Thigpen.

BILL . . . . . Sean Williams
AMELIA . . . . . Kristen Vaughan
RONNIE . . . . . Becky Byers
ABBIE . . . . . .David Rosenblatt
CONOR . . . . . Jason Howard
VALERIE . . . . . Shaun Bennet Fauntleroy
BELINDA . . . . . Rebecca Comtois
RAF . . . . . Carlos Martin
LYNN . . . . . Ana Maria Jomolca
KIP . . . . . Brian Silliman

CHARACTERS

The Cooke family members can be any race/ethnicity. It would probably work best if they look biologically related.

BILL COOKE – 40s, male

AMELIA COOKE – 40s, female

RONNIE COOKE – 18, female

ABBIE COOKE – 15, male

CONOR – 40s, male, any ethnicity

VALERIE – 40s, female, any ethnicity

BELINDA – 30s, female, any ethnicity

RAF – 30s, male, Latino

KIP – 40s to 60s, any ethnicity

LYNN – 30s to 50s, any ethnicity

SETTING

Coral Gables, Florida, a few years in the future. The play takes place in the Cooke family's living room.

ACT ONE

One

(The living room of the Cooke home, an upper-middle-class house in Coral Gables, Florida. A front door leading outside is visible, as is another leading to the kitchen. A staircase leads upstairs.)

*(***LYNN** *watches* **AMELIA COOKE** *minister to a distressed man,* **CONOR**.*)*

AMELIA. All right, now sshh, sshh, Conor, you're all right. You're okay. Right?

CONOR. Meel-ee-yah.

AMELIA. That's right, Conor! That's so good!

CONOR. Eh-mee-lee-yah.

AMELIA. That's just so good. Now, Conor, are you on me? Are you watching me?

CONOR. Mee-lee-yah.

*(***AMELIA** *stands a little away from* **CONOR** *and holds her hands out.)*

AMELIA. That's right, now walk to me, Conor. Walk to me.

(He does, slowly, then holds on to her. She moves away again.)

Now again, Conor, walk to me. (*to* **LYNN**, *as he does*) The ritual, it…

LYNN. Sure.

*(***CONOR** *walks to* **AMELIA**.*)*

AMELIA. Now Conor, when I say "When is dinner?" When I say "When is dinner?"

CONOR. 'N is dinner?

AMELIA. What do you say?

CONOR. "D'ner esss soon."

*(***LYNN** *picks up a few college brochures on the table, studies them.)*

AMELIA. When is dinner?

CONOR. D'ner iss soon.

AMELIA. Conor, when is dinner?

CONOR. When is dinner, dinner is soon.

(They are now in an upstage corner.)

AMELIA. That's perfect, Conor. I'm so proud of you.

(She returns to **LYNN**.*)*

He'll stay there. That's his spot.

LYNN. That's fine.

AMELIA. Of course eight years ago he would have made anyone's shortlist of the ten best astronauts in the world.

(Beat. **LYNN** *holds up a college brochure.)*

LYNN. Veronica.

AMELIA. My daughter – we call her Ronnie – who just –

LYNN. The one with blood on her clothes.

AMELIA. I'm sorry you had to see that.

LYNN. Good school.

AMELIA. *(reflexively cleaning up the brochures)* Well, we'll see what happens.

LYNN. Because we'd talked about meeting alone…

AMELIA. I wasn't expecting – I got a call from their assistant principal to pick them up.

LYNN. Both of them?

AMELIA. And then of course anything unpredictable puts Conor in a tailspin, and if it involves Abbie being upset you can double that.

LYNN. So Abbie's your son, Ronnie's your daughter, and I'm…your friend from college.

AMELIA. Thank you for going along with that.

LYNN. Reflex in my line of work. If she'd started asking questions, though…

AMELIA. Well, fortunately, her need to affect utter boredom about anything concerning me worked to our advantage. *(meaning* **CONOR***)* Is it all right that he's here?

LYNN. He can't understand us, right? Or repeat what we say to your husband? Unless he's recovering faster than reports suggest.

AMELIA. *(taking that in)* You're…remarkably prepared.

LYNN. A case like this, I don't have to prepare. I already read the news every day.

AMELIA. I don't know how we start this conversation.

LYNN. I got the basic idea from the email. Pretty standard, it's the job I do the most. Now how sure are you it's one of the other astronauts?

AMELIA. God, I hate this.

LYNN. Of course.

AMELIA. I might call this off. I can pay you for coming out here. How much would that be?

LYNN. Of course you hate this. This type of job, every time, woman or man, they always say, "I can't believe I'm doing this, I'm a cliché, I thought I'd have some dignity."

AMELIA. Yes! Exactly!

LYNN. I always say: "Why should you have dignity? Seriously. This is the most important thing in your life, the foundation of your adult life. If you still had dignity it would mean you didn't actually care." *(beat)*

AMELIA. If I'm right – *if* I'm right – it's one of the crew of the *Celeste Farrow*.

LYNN. And we're sure – and it'll help me if you're honest – we're fairly sure it's a woman.

AMELIA. Would be. If it's true.

LYNN. Guys can hide it for decades.

AMELIA. You have to know Bill. He could be gay; he could never be closeted.

LYNN. That squares. So: five astronauts with Bill on the *Celeste*. Tom Wiley, died on Mars, Conor Wells *(gesturing at* **CONOR***)*, Raf Nevares, and our two suspects: Valerie Tindal and Belinda Phifer.

AMELIA. Oh my god, "suspects."

LYNN. And you and Bill have been married…

AMELIA. Nineteen years.

LYNN. And you've never been concerned before now?

AMELIA. No, I, no.

LYNN. Why not?

AMELIA. It's not just that the, the intimacy had continued to – Jesus, I'm being ridiculous – We still had sex. On a regular, on what seemed to me to be an admirable basis.

LYNN. No dry spells.

AMELIA. Well, the three years he was flying to Mars and back.

LYNN. Sure.

AMELIA. And a bit after he came back.

LYNN. Because of Tom Wiley, because of… *(indicating* **CONOR***)*

AMELIA. I'm doing this wrong, I'm sitting here talking about the sex, and I'm completely talking around the real thing.

LYNN. The attention. *(beat)* It's the job I do the most.

AMELIA. All right, the attention, but Bill takes it to another level. When he turns it on you… Everyone else I know is sort of listening and sort of thinking about what they need to do later. You're doing it now, I'm sorry, just to illustrate the point.

LYNN. But not Bill.

AMELIA. For Bill, there's his family, and there's the crew of the *Celeste*. He doesn't give away his attention – or his heart – easily, but when he does it's absolute. *(meaning* **CONOR***)* Why do you think he's here? He should be in

a hospital, of course he should be in a hospital, but he served on the *Celeste*, so he's Bill's brother.

LYNN. So if he's having an affair:

AMELIA. Then he's having an *affair*, with feelings and the whole catastrophe. It's possible that you think I'm naïve.

LYNN. Nah. Client instincts are usually pretty good on these jobs. Anyway, it's the best place to start. So, Valerie Tindal and Belinda Phifer. You like one more than the other?

AMELIA. Like meaning "suspect"?

LYNN. Sorry, yeah.

AMELIA. Well, that's the problem. He spent two years of training, three years in flight, and now works far into the evening with both of them.

LYNN. He works late every night?

AMELIA. Which doesn't necessarily mean anything. Chinampas is a huge project, farms to oversee all over the world, and they won't bring in extra staff.

LYNN. *(checking notes)* The… "Chinampas Terraform Initiative." This feed-the-world-with-swamp-vegetables thing that they quit being astronauts for. "Chinampas…"

AMELIA. Originally a method of swamp-farming favored by the Aztecs.

LYNN. I had a chance to look over a couple interviews he did about it. He's outspoken.

AMELIA. Certainly my husband's political views have earned him more enemies than friends. Do you have something you want to say about it?

LYNN. Hey, a job's a job. Nobody pays me to have opinions. All I'm saying is it's possible that your husband has more than one reason right now to be distracted and less frisky in the bedroom, right?

AMELIA. No one pays you for opinions, but they do pay you to speculate?

LYNN. Well, until you pay me my day rate to follow your husband around, speculate is all I can do.

AMELIA. I'd like to pay your day rate to follow my husband around.

LYNN. I'll get you an invoice. The email's private, right?

AMELIA. I created it for this purpose.

LYNN. And generally speaking, when they're not flying to farms or speaking engagements, they're at the Chinampas offices?

AMELIA. Nearly always.

LYNN. Then it's time to buy some snacks and start sitting in my car.

AMELIA. Or – I don't know if this is helpful or – they will all be here Saturday.

LYNN. Here at this house?

AMELIA. Primarily in this room, I expect.

LYNN. What's the occasion?

AMELIA. We're having a dinner party for one of the investors.

LYNN. The whole crew's gonna be here?

AMELIA. There's dinner with Mr. Jackson – that's the investor – and then after he leaves the drinking and the war stories begin. Bill's already said that I'm welcome to stay up with them, of course, but I'll probably be bored, not knowing the references.

LYNN. Code for: put the kids to bed and let me and the boys watch the game.

AMELIA. As you say.

LYNN. You know what I could do.

AMELIA. I'm sorry?

LYNN. I could wire it up.

AMELIA. Wire what up?

LYNN. This room. I could wire it up and record the whole night.

AMELIA. Everything they say in this room.

LYNN. I mean, it'll be a big group hang, they won't be alone, so we may not get anything, but it's easier than wiring a secured office. It's a start.

AMELIA. What would you need to do?

LYNN. Come back with my gear. Some time when it's just you here, no kids. Barring another call from the assistant principal, I guess.

AMELIA. I'm sorry about that.

LYNN. Couldn't care less.

AMELIA. About the blood on Ronnie's shirt –

LYNN. Someone was picking on Abbie and Ronnie gave them a bloody nose.

AMELIA. How could you possibly know that?

LYNN. Abbie looks like the type of kid who gets hurt so easily it makes other kids wanna hurt him more. And Ronnie's got a temper. And they called you to pick up *both* of them. It doesn't take Sherlock Holmes.

AMELIA. Abbie's like his father: He's brilliant and he feels everything in the world. Ronnie's like her father: She's so angry and she never backs down.

LYNN. They must take after you a little bit.

AMELIA. No. Send me the invoice. I'll email you back with a time.

Two

(Later that night. **BILL** *and* **AMELIA** *are in the living room.)*

BILL. So, okay, just let me understand:

AMELIA. Bill, look –

BILL. Our son has, for months now, been the target of a pack of teenage shitheads, a pack of fucking vicious, homophobic animals who –

AMELIA. You know what, don't even bring that into it.

BILL. Why not? We know that's part of it.

AMELIA. And can we please not decide our son's sexuality before he decides it for himself?

BILL. We know when our daughter caught them in the act, she didn't hesitate before walking –

AMELIA. What I'm talking about is what we want Ronnie to –

BILL. Walking right into harm's way and punching their ringleader in the fucking face –

AMELIA. "In harm's way," for God's sake –

BILL. Which brings us to now, when we are somehow *not* taking them out for pizza and beer.

AMELIA. What I'm saying is: what do we want Ronnie to take away from this?

BILL. Besides a medal?

AMELIA. That's what you want? That when faced with a challenging situation, your advice to her, as her father, is that she should start throwing punches?

BILL. Jesus Christ, Milly –

AMELIA. What do you want her to take away –

BILL. I say, "Our daughter stood up for our son, and that's commendable," and you say I'm condemning her to a life of fistfights in alleys!

*(***CONOR** *appears at the top of the stairs. He descends slowly over the following.)*

AMELIA. How is saying "That's commendable" any different from saying, "You made the right choice today, so in a similar situation tomorrow, you should do the same thing"?

BILL. How is not reacting to bullies any different from telling them they can keep on doing –

AMELIA. You're saying "reacting" as a way to avoid saying "punching" –

BILL. Can I get to the end of a sentence?

AMELIA. Conor. *(beat)*

BILL. Hey bud. What's up? How are you there, bud? You can come on down. Come on down. Look at you walking! Look at you, that is some fine walking. That is some advance-level walking, bud, look at you.

*(***CONOR** *gets all the way to* **BILL**.*)*

CONOR. Bill.

BILL. You see? A genius. People ask me about you all day long, and I say, "Conor's a genius." Now her. Now do her.

AMELIA. Bill, he's really tired, you shouldn't –

CONOR. Eh-mee-lee-yah.

BILL. Yeah, bud, that's right! That's absolutely right!

AMELIA. That was lovely, Conor.

*(***CONOR** *goes to his corner.)*

BILL. I mean…

AMELIA. We have to tell her something.

BILL. Why? Why don't we just talk to her? Why don't we just have a conversation?

AMELIA. Because we're not her pals, we're her mom and dad. I'd love to have a conversation with Ronnie, you think I wouldn't love that? But she's our teenage daughter, that won't happen again for a decade. Right now we have to tell her something.

BILL. Ah, shit. *(***BILL** *goes to the stairs.)* Ronnie? Ronnie!

AMELIA. Bill. She can't hear you from her room. How long have you lived here?

BILL. Yeah, all right, I'm going.

(He starts up the stairs when **RONNIE** *appears from where she was hiding – just out of sight at the top of the stairs.)*

RONNIE. Okay guys, seriously: in what world was I not listening in on everything you guys said?

AMELIA. Ronnie, come downstairs, please.

BILL. So you were what, you were lurking?

RONNIE. You think I'd walk into this unprepared?

BILL. Fair enough.

AMELIA. Ronnie, come downstairs and have a seat, please.

RONNIE. See the thing is, Mom, I would? But it doesn't seem like there's a united front yet. And while you guys are busy getting your shit together, my brother's hungry and he's too scared to come downstairs. So I'm thinkin', maybe I'll grab a box of cereal or whatever and you guys can call me when you get on the same page?

AMELIA. You know what?

BILL. I actually brought home some sandwiches –

AMELIA. Sometimes you're just a jerk. It's not that you're an adolescent or you're smarter than your peers or you're trying on identities or any of it. Sometimes you're just a jerk.

RONNIE. That's right. Work off your guilt on me. I won't cry, unlike my *hungry brother.*

AMELIA. All right, that is *it*, if you're not able to act in a –

BILL. *(overlapping)* Why don't we – Milly – Milly – there's sandwiches, actually, I was thinking, there's a silver bag in the fridge, it's like four or five sandwiches, we ordered in today, we ordered too many, so in the silver bag, if you look in the fridge, I brought some home, you can't miss it, it's the totally out of place silver bag.

AMELIA. You want me to bring you *sandwiches*?

BILL. Not *me*, I'm saying –

RONNIE. *Abbie*. He wants you to feed Abbie. He wants you to feed dinner to your son.

BILL. Oh Ronnie, shut up.

AMELIA. So, I leave, and you two just sort it out.

BILL. Look, we're all tired, we're all –

AMELIA. You just have a quick, quiet talk and you sort it all out.

BILL. It's just, we're all wrung out, so…

(Beat. **AMELIA** *leaves to the kitchen.)*

It's just, it's there, it's a silver bag, if you look in the fridge, you should just be able to…

*(***AMELIA** *re-enters with a silver bag and walks past them and up the stairs and exits.)*

RONNIE. *(calling after* **AMELIA***)* Don't like get a plate or a napkin or anything.

BILL. Do you know how to knock somebody out?

RONNIE. You wanna know what everybody's missing here?

BILL. I don't care. Do you know –

RONNIE. It's all the times I saw it and I *didn't* do anything. That's what's hilarious. You're all focused on today, and nobody gives a shit about all those times I saw them shoving him, and I did nothing. Somehow I'm not being punished for *that*. Somehow it's all about –

BILL. *Do you know*. How to knock a person unconscious?

RONNIE. Um…

BILL. You want the brain to hit the side of the skull, so you need their head to snap to one side fast. So generally the jaw punch is what you're looking for. Do what I do.

RONNIE. For real?

BILL. So, left leg forward, knees bent – c'mon, are we doing this or not? Left leg forward, knees bent…

RONNIE. Okay…

BILL. Right arm starting at the side, twist at the waist, aim for the jaw, just the jaw…and as you go, tighten up your body into the twist. You're not punching with your fist, you're punching with your whole body.

(They punch together.)

RONNIE. Okay, is class dismissed or whatever?

BILL. Now you by yourself.

RONNIE. Can I just please sit through the lecture and go to –

BILL. Now you by yourself.

*(***RONNIE** *punches, then looks at* **BILL** *with a "Happy now?" shrug.)*

Number one: if you disrespect your mother again I will actually, I swear to God, spank you. I will actually do that, I will actually resurrect that, I will spank you. Right? *(beat)*

RONNIE. *(quieter)* And now, like, what, a lecture on "Violence doesn't solve anything"?

BILL. Well…okay.

RONNIE. What?

BILL. Here's the thing. Let's say you're an adult, you're an adult in the world we have now.

RONNIE. Oh, what, this is, like a –

BILL. Yeah, this is a hypothetical.

RONNIE. What's "the world we have now"?

BILL. You're an adult in the world we have now. Somebody hurts you, or humiliates you –

RONNIE. "If standing up for the people who cannot stand up for themselves is not the noblest pursuit of humankind, then nobility has no meaning."

BILL. Okay, seriously?

RONNIE. Celebrated astronaut William Cooke.

BILL. Did you seriously Google my speeches so you could come down here with some half-assed piece of ammo like that?

RONNIE. Did you mean it or was it just something –

BILL. I've walked on another planet, how easily impressed do you think I am? Somebody hurts you in the world we have now. And you see their face, and they're sneering, and they're so happy about how they hurt you, and you have two choices: you back down, they go off laughing, you carry the humiliation with you, you fantasize about revenge – which makes the humiliation worse – but then time goes by, and you think about it less and less until you hardly ever think about it again.

RONNIE. Okay, I get it –

BILL. Or, you clock him in his laughing face, and then when he's startled, keep hitting him until he doesn't laugh again for a long time. Now all of a sudden you've got police, you've got a guy and his friends out there thinking about revenge, and more than any of that, you've got a habit. And that makes it easier to do it again the next time, and the time after that, even though each time the consequences get worse: police, courts, criminal records, enemies looking for revenge. What I'm saying –

RONNIE. Dad, I *got* it, I got it like several sentences ago –

BILL. *What I'm saying is*, you want a united front? Here it is: your mom's right. In the world we have now, back down.

RONNIE. Why do you keep saying –

BILL. But if the world *changed* – and this is the only place where your mom and I differ – if the world changed, and the things that are in place now aren't in place anymore… I just wouldn't want you to forget how to use that right arm. *(beat)*

RONNIE. All right.

BILL. Well, then, yeah. We should eat something.

RONNIE. Dad, Abbie's gonna come down in a minute.

BILL. Sure.

RONNIE. Or in an hour or…whenever.

BILL. Or I can go up, if that's –

RONNIE. Is it possible to…not even bring it up? Like, at all? I'm not saying *ever*, just not tonight. *(beat)*

BILL. You're my favorite. Of my two children.

RONNIE. Okay you are so full of shit –

BILL. Other parents say, "I could never choose between my children," but I just say "Ronnie."

RONNIE. You completely don't, that never happens.

BILL. Do you think they ate all the sandwiches…? *(turns toward the stairs, sees* **ABBIE***)*

ABBIE. *(terrified)* Dad?

BILL. I haven't seen anything on "The Honeycomb" for I think a week, is that possible?

ABBIE. Um…

BILL. Actually, I've been coming home pretty late, I think it's been two weeks, right?

ABBIE. I do have some new stuff.

BILL. Well where is it?

ABBIE. Just a second! *(He runs up the stairs and exits.)*

BILL. Sandwiches – Abbie – sandwiches!

RONNIE. They're gonna kick me out of school.

BILL. Well, except that your dad's a famous astronaut who's going to pull strings unavailable to other students.

RONNIE. You can joke about it, but it actually isn't fair.

BILL. Well, maybe there's a time coming when things will be fair, but until it does, I'm gonna revel in the unfairness just a little longer.

*(***ABBIE** *comes running down the stairs with several drawings.)*

ABBIE. This is everything I've done for two weeks.

BILL. Hand it over.

(As **BILL** *takes the drawings and looks through them,* **RONNIE** *scoots over next to him to look.* **ABBIE** *goes to* **CONOR***.)*

ABBIE. Conor? I wanna say… I'm really sorry I scared you. I was really upset when I came in, and I didn't think how it would…

CONOR. Abbie.

(It's quiet and tender and **BILL** *and* **RONNIE** *don't hear.)*

RONNIE. *(studying the drawings)* So are they like monks?

BILL. They do look like monks.

ABBIE. That's what I was thinking. They live together on one big monastery on their planet and they each have their own cell they pray in and if you looked at all the cells from above –

BILL. *(holding one drawing up)* Oh yeah.

ABBIE. Yeah, where if you looked at it from above it would look like a honeycomb.

BILL. You know, you don't have to call it "Honeycomb," that's just a suggestion –

ABBIE. No, it's perfect.

*(***AMELIA** *comes part-way down the stairs with the sandwiches.)*

RONNIE. So…they're monks…with three eyes.

ABBIE. *(going to the couch)* I don't know, that's just what I'm trying.

RONNIE. Where are the balloons?

ABBIE. Balloons?

RONNIE. Don't people usually talk in comics?

ABBIE. Oh, I'm so not there yet. I don't know what anybody even looks like.

BILL. Have you thought about insects?

ABBIE. Is that too crazy? I was thinking about that.

BILL. Well, who lives in a honeycomb?

ABBIE. I guess.

BILL. You know what? Look at hive minds, look up um… can you reach my phone…?

RONNIE. *(getting the smartphone)* You guys are like, whatever's *beyond* nerds.

BILL. Look up eusocial behavior, look up… *(speaks into phone)* Look up swarm intelligence. Okay, yeah, now we're onto something.

*(***AMELIA** *watches the rest of her family gathered around* **BILL***'s phone.)*

Three

(Night. **ABBIE** *is at the living room table, drawing on a pad. There are papers scattered everywhere with drawings of strange insects on them.* **CONOR** *watches* **ABBIE** *draw.* **RONNIE** *enters over the following.)*

ABBIE. Okay…just a sec…and…

(He shows the drawing to **CONOR.***)*

Yeah?

*(***CONOR** *reacts positively.)*

CONOR. Abbie.

ABBIE. Better?

CONOR. Abbie. Abbie.

ABBIE. Yeah, yeah, I know, I'm gonna do that part, I just haven't done it yet. But this is okay?

CONOR. Dinner is soon.

ABBIE. Okay then. Let me do it.

RONNIE. Abbie what the hell, why are you up?

ABBIE. You're late.

RONNIE. Are Mom and Dad up?

ABBIE. You are so deeply late.

RONNIE. I'm not *late.* I wasn't supposed to be out of the house at all.

ABBIE. So you're like, what…

RONNIE. I'm AWOL.

ABBIE. Shut up.

RONNIE. I'm so totally AWOL.

ABBIE. Were you out getting fingerblasted?

RONNIE. What?

ABBIE. Is there a guy, right now, in like his early twenties, driving back to his dorm room getting the secretions from your vagina all over his steering wheel?

RONNIE. Oh my god!

ABBIE. What, now you're shocked?

RONNIE. I'm so shocked!

ABBIE. Shocked and fingerblasted. Fingerblasted and shocked.

RONNIE. Look at you, you're so proud of your new word.

ABBIE. You didn't answer the question.

RONNIE. The answer's no.

ABBIE. Really?

(She sits next to **ABBIE** *and starts paging through his drawings.)*

RONNIE. He totally washed his hands. He's more into the car than me.

ABBIE. Okay.

RONNIE. Aw, did I ruin your awesome burn? It was a good burn, Abbie. I'm crying all the tears.

ABBIE. Shut up.

RONNIE. If you came home from a date and I was like, "Haha you got a handjob" would you brood and cry forever?

ABBIE. Okay, no.

RONNIE. Getting finger-blasted is *good*, it feels *good*. If you're getting finger-blasted it means you're doing something right. I snuck out in the middle of the night, when I'm *already in trouble*, and I took that risk specifically so I could get finger-blasted.

ABBIE. Okay, I've now mega-absorbed your point.

RONNIE. *(rising to leave)* Go to sleep, dickhead. You can't get through school on nothing.

ABBIE. You didn't say anything.

RONNIE. About what?

ABBIE. About the new stuff.

RONNIE. Okay, so I didn't.

ABBIE. Well…say something.

RONNIE. Abbie, you can't do that.

ABBIE. Do what?

RONNIE. Just demand people say what they think of your stuff. If people wanna tell you, they'll tell you.

ABBIE. Why can't I just ask?

RONNIE. You're just basically begging people to lie to you.

ABBIE. Because it's bad?

RONNIE. Because they're not ready to say something. You have to let people come to you.

ABBIE. What about you? Can I just ask you?

RONNIE. Well, unfortunately, yeah.

ABBIE. So? The new characters, what do you think?

RONNIE. You mean the giant roaches?

ABBIE. They're not roaches.

RONNIE. Whatever they are.

ABBIE. Look at them! Do they look like roaches?

RONNIE. Hey! Guess who likes fingerblasting and isn't an entomologist?

ABBIE. So you don't like them.

RONNIE. I mean just like as drawings they're good, nobody else can draw giant roaches like you – or not roaches, fine – but like: this is supposed to be a comic, right?

ABBIE. So?

RONNIE. So, characters in comics have emotions and feelings, right?

ABBIE. What does that have to do with what –

RONNIE. So, where do I look on this not-a-roach guy to figure out what his emotions are?

ABBIE. But doesn't that make it better? That you have to work harder to guess?

RONNIE. It barely has a face!

ABBIE. So you look at body language, you watch its actions, you work it out! Faces are so fucking obvious, I'm so sick of faces!

RONNIE. I liked your faces.

ABBIE. You and everybody.

RONNIE. How you'd draw somebody and then they'd freak out, and be like, "Does he think I look like this? Wait *do* I look like this?"

ABBIE. But I'm not doing that anymore.

RONNIE. No, now you're doing…whatever this is.

ABBIE. A graphic novel.

RONNIE. And why?

ABBIE. Because this is the next thing.

RONNIE. Because it was Dad's idea.

ABBIE. Because this is the next step for me.

RONNIE. Because Dad's ideas are always awesome, and anything Dad suggests is totally the greatest. "You know what you should draw? A comic book called 'The Honeycomb'!"

ABBIE. "Honeycomb" was my idea.

RONNIE. No. It wasn't. Dad said it first. This is what he does. He puts ideas in your brain and makes you think they're yours.

ABBIE. Me?

RONNIE. Everybody.

ABBIE. So you're saying what, there's no way I could actually just care about this myself, I'm just Dad's puppet.

RONNIE. I just liked your faces, okay? I don't like this. I'm sorry. Oh Conor, honestly.

ABBIE. What?

(They both look at **CONOR**.*)*

RONNIE. It's like he's your dog. You get upset, it's like you can see the hairs on his back stand up.

ABBIE. Conor likes them.

(He shows the drawing he's been working on over the course of the scene to **CONOR**.*)*

See, Conor? See look, I drew more. I drew that part. See?

CONOR. Abbie.

ABBIE. Is that right? Did I get it right?

CONOR. *(reaching for it)* Dinner is soon.

ABBIE. You want it?

CONOR. Dinner is soon.

*(***ABBIE** *hands* **CONOR** *the picture.)*

ABBIE. *(to* **RONNIE***)* He helped me draw that one.

RONNIE. Um, he can barely hold a *fork*, so –

ABBIE. He watched me. I was drawing an insect, like Dad said, but Conor didn't like it.

RONNIE. 'Cause it was a roach?

ABBIE. So I kept changing little things. Any time he liked something, I kept it. Any time he didn't like something, I started over. *(He gestures at the discarded drawings.)* That's what all this is.

RONNIE. So this is Conor's monster.

ABBIE. Yes – YES! That's it!

RONNIE. What is?

ABBIE. It's like…okay. Remember the Bald Woman?

RONNIE. What? No.

ABBIE. That I used to draw? You don't remember the Bald Woman?

RONNIE. I don't know. Maybe.

ABBIE. No hair, super-super-thin, her hands were like *(crooks his hands into claws)*?

RONNIE. All right, yeah. I remember.

ABBIE. You do?

RONNIE. Yeah, she was like, really sick-looking, like in a hospital gown, she was crawling…see now you're not gonna sleep tonight, why would you bring this up?

ABBIE. It scared me the most was when it looked like she was begging for something.

RONNIE. If she scared you, why did you keep drawing her?

ABBIE. *(indicating the drawing)* But this is different. The Bald Woman is *my* monster, she came from inside me.

(indicating the drawing) This is *Conor's* monster. This is what I wanna do from now on: other people's monsters. I don't wanna look at myself anymore, I hate it. So I tried looking at other people's faces, and I hated that more. But this, this is perfect. Other people's monsters. This is what's going to be my life.

RONNIE. I mean, you're fifteen. You don't have to be like "This is my life."

ABBIE. Like you're so old and wise just 'cause you got finger-blasted.

RONNIE. It makes you smarter. Seriously.

ABBIE. Thank you for kicking Jeff's ass. *(beat)*

RONNIE. Whatever.

ABBIE. Why didn't he tell them what you did?

RONNIE. He did.

ABBIE. He told them you hit him. He didn't tell them you kept kicking him while he was on the ground. If he did you'd be expelled no matter what Dad did. So why didn't he tell them?

RONNIE. I told him to. We were waiting to see the counselor, I said, "If you want me kicked out, all you have to do is tell them I put you on the ground and kicked you till you begged me to stop." All seventy pounds of me. I don't know why he didn't do it. *(pause)*

ABBIE. Hey Ronnie.

RONNIE. Good night, good night, oh my *god* goodnight.

ABBIE. I saw the Bald Woman.

RONNIE. That's great and wonderful.

ABBIE. You know where I saw her?

RONNIE. Um, nowhere, because she doesn't exist.

ABBIE. On the porch. Right outside that door.

RONNIE. I'm really happy for you.

ABBIE. She's on her knees, crawling across the porch, right outside that door. I saw her there.

RONNIE. Yeah, well, you didn't, so…

ABBIE. Then open the door. Open the door.

RONNIE. Fuck you. I'm not humoring you, okay?

ABBIE. If she's not out there on the porch, then open that door. Do it. Open it.

BILL. *(offstage)* Who is that?

RONNIE. Shit!

BILL. *(offstage)* Who's down there?

RONNIE. Get the, get the –

(They scurry around picking up the drawings.)

ABBIE. Conor. Conor!

(But **CONOR** *won't give up his picture.* **BILL** *appears at the top of the stairs, half-awake, in sweatpants.)*

BILL. Ronnie?

RONNIE. It's cool, Dad, it's cool, we're just hanging out.

BILL. It's…something in the morning, it's two in the morning.

RONNIE. We're drawing, we're just hanging out drawing. *(She holds up a bunch of the drawings.)*

BILL. Drawing?

RONNIE. *(handing* **ABBIE** *the drawings)* Here, Abbie, here's the rest of your…wonderful artworks.

BILL. It's two in the morning! Or – I think it's later than that!

RONNIE. We should be in bed!

BILL. You both have school tomorrow!

ABBIE. You go to sleep this instant, young lady.

(They hurry up the stairs, passing **BILL.***)*

RONNIE. You go straight to your room!

ABBIE. You go straight to *your* room!

BILL. I don't understand…

RONNIE. Goodnight Dad!

ABBIE. Goodnight Dad!

(And they're gone. **BILL** *stumbles down the stairs.)*

BILL. *(calling up the stairs behind him)* Go straight to bed!

(He sees **CONOR**, *who is holding the drawing to his chest.)*

Conor? You all right? Hey, bud, what is that? Can I see that?

*(***CONOR** *starts to go for the stairs but* **BILL** *cuts him off.* **BILL** *carefully prizes the drawing from* **CONOR***'s grip. He looks at it. He looks at* **CONOR.***)*

Who are you?

Four

(Saturday night. **ABBIE** *is drawing* **RAF**. *Party sounds from the next room.)*

RAF. Can I drink? Will it mess it up if I move?

ABBIE. It's fine.

RAF. Thanks for making an exception, buddy.

ABBIE. This'll be my last one.

RAF. It'll be like a collector's item.

ABBIE. If you hate the way they make you look, why do you keep asking me?

RAF. Who said that?

ABBIE. You did. Last time I drew you. You said to my dad, "Does the kid think I'm clinically depressed?"

RAF. You heard that?

*(***ABBIE** *keeps drawing.)*

Maybe I like that I hate it. Are you old enough to understand that?

*(***AMELIA**, **VALERIE**, *and* **BELINDA** *enter.)*

VALERIE. It was really delicious, Amelia.

AMELIA. Thank you, Valerie.

BELINDA. It really was, seriously.

AMELIA. Thank you, I appreciate you saying that, I was scared shitless, which…wow, I could have said that differently.

BELINDA. *(calling off)* Your wife's cursing at me Bill!

BILL. *(from the next room)* Welcome to my world!

AMELIA. What?!

BELINDA. *(to* **AMELIA***)* Seriously, you think we were on a tin can in space for three years saying "Pass the tea"?

*(***BILL** *and* **KIP** *enter.)*

BILL. And that's – literally, I'm talking about – that's just the first year's yield. Back me up, Val: I'm talking about

the crop yield we expect from *only* the first year. The food we're going to generate in *one year* of this project.

VALERIE. Which anybody will tell you is the warm-up year. The year you expect –

KIP. Exactly, the year you're just figuring things out. It's the same in any startup.

BILL. But we're actually going to *gain*. That's my thing. That's my answer when people say, "Weren't you supposed to colonize Mars?" I say, "We were, but we got a better gig. We're going to re-imagine *Earth*."

KIP. Incredible.

VALERIE. Now Mr. Jackson, if you want to see exactly how your funds are being used –

KIP. *(to* **VALERIE***)* You can call me Kip.

VALERIE. I'm sorry?

KIP. It's just, you just called me Mr. Jackson, I just wanted to say that you could call me Kip.

VALERIE. Thank you, I will – Kip.

AMELIA. Abbie, are you sure Mr. Navares wants you drawing him?

RAF. He's sure.

BILL. *(to* **KIP***)* Now, you wanna talk about the *second* year –

AMELIA. *(to* **RAF***)* Do you want anything to eat?

RAF. Hey Bill.

AMELIA. Just, you didn't eat anything, so…

BELINDA. Seriously, Amelia, don't worry about it.

RAF. Hey Bill. Is Conor coming down? *(beat)*

KIP. Conor Wells. *That* is one man, I won't lie, that is one hand I'd like to shake.

BILL. I hear that, Kip.

KIP. I mean I understand that he's delicate, and of course I respect that – and not to forget Tom Wiley's…memory, of course.

(Everyone's gotten quiet.)

BILL. Of course, Kip. And I know we all appreciate your saying so.

RAF. *(to* **ABBIE***)* Sorry, sorry, I moved too much, right?

ABBIE. It's okay, I'm done.

RAF. Lemme see.

(He takes the drawing from **ABBIE** *and studies it.)*

KIP. *(to* **BILL***)* That's not a bad thing is it, bringing up – if it's understood that you don't bring up Tom Wiley – or Conor –

BILL. Not at all, Kip, it's not like that.

KIP. I just know there's a lot of history, you know, among you guys, and I'm not –

VALERIE. Of course there is, but you know what? Everyone here has a role in making sure we have a beautiful world to give to our children. But we don't all have to get our hands swampy. Investors are our patron saints, Mr. Jackson. There is no Chinampas without you.

KIP. Well, like I said, "Kip." I like "get your hands swampy."

VALERIE. Of course, Kip, my apologies.

KIP. It's a good turn of phrase.

BELINDA. Yeah, you know, I thought your first name was Christopher, I've just been calling you Chris all night. You're not Chris?

KIP. It is Christopher on the birth certificate, of course, I'm just trying to make this Kip transition happen. It's all part of a sense that I'm moving into a new phase of my life –

BELINDA. Hey, I'm on board. Kip it is.

KIP. It's crazy, you know how many boards I've resigned from, just in the past year? My life was just meeting, meeting, phone call, you know, meeting…

BELINDA. Jesus *God*.

KIP. And then I saw this guy speak, right?

BILL. You're really too kind to me, Kip.

KIP. Everybody says it to you. You hear it forty times a day: when people hear you speak –

BILL. You know what, at most I'm a catalyst –

KIP. It's not just me. I'm not making this about me. If you go on the message boards –

BILL. At most I'm a catalyst. I happen to be in the right place at the right time –

KIP. It's more than that – for me it was like –

RAF. You never let me down, kid.

(He shows the drawing to **BILL**.*)*

Right? Right?

KIP. Huh. Look at that.

ABBIE. Last one, Mr. Nevares.

RAF. Too bad. You draw like a motherfucker.

ABBIE. I'm not quitting drawing, just not people. I'm drawing a comic book.

KIP. How about that? You know, I was a comic collector for a little while there.

BILL. So at any rate, with the farming sites –

KIP. What's your comic about, Abbie?

ABBIE. It's called "The Honeycomb." It's about a race of insectoid aliens that share a hive mind.

(reactions around the room)

KIP. Well. Well. Imagination, right? Runs in the family! In the genes!

AMELIA. I was thinking of opening a bottle. Would there be some demand along those lines? Red?

BILL. Yeah, um… Actually, get the one, the uh…

AMELIA. I know the one. You know, I did at one point this evening have a lovely assistant…

BILL. You did, what happened to your lovely assistant?

AMELIA. *(calling off into the kitchen)* Lovely assistant? A little assistance?

(**RONNIE** *enters.)*

RONNIE. We're not done? We're totally done. Everyone's in here.

AMELIA. They're our guests in this room too. Maybe you'd like to take drink orders for people who don't want wine.

RONNIE. Yep, that's what I'd like to do.

*(***AMELIA** *exits.)*

BELINDA. Wine's good.

VALERIE. I'll be fine with wine.

KIP. Yeah, I wanna hear more about this mysterious bottle!

RAF. I don't want wine.

RONNIE. Okay.

(She looks at his drink. It's mostly full.)

So you're good?

*(***RAF** *downs his drink and holds out his glass.)*

RAF. No.

RONNIE. You wanna tell me what that was?

RAF. I trust you.

*(***RONNIE** *takes the glass and exits to the kitchen.)*

BILL. *(to* **RAF***)* Really?

RAF. "The Honeycomb"?

VALERIE. Mr. Jackson – Kip – I think you know we all feel great gratitude –

RAF. Hey so Bill, where's Conor?

VALERIE. I think you know we feel –

RAF. Is he talking yet?

BELINDA. Raf. Smoke with me. I'm going outside. Smoke with me.

RAF. *(to* **BILL***)* What words can he use?

KIP. Is – is everything good, or –?

BILL. Yeah, I'm sorry, we're all a little –

RAF. How many words can he use?

BELINDA. Seriously, why don't you step outside with me?

VALERIE. We're all tired, why don't we –

KIP. *(to* **RAF***)* Look, I hear you, man, if a friend of mine had an injury like that –

RAF. *(to* **BILL***)* Bill: How many words can he use?

BILL. About twenty, Raf, which by my count is fourteen more than you. *(pause)* Kip.

KIP. Yeah, Bill, what's up?

BILL. You went to law school, right?

KIP. Yeah, yeah, of course, uh, U-Penn –

BILL. You had study groups, presumably, people, friends, you'd be studying all night.

*(***RONNIE** *enters with* **RAF***'s drink. She watches* **BILL** *over the following.)*

KIP. Sure, definitely – actually I remember one time –

BILL. And you were in corporate law, what, eighteen years?

KIP. Almost exactly eighteen – I can't believe you remembered that –

BILL. And that too, a lot of late nights, a lot of deadlines –

KIP. Oh my god, you can't even imagine – well of course you can imagine, you were in *space*, you were all in *space* –

BILL. You know what? I bet it's not that different. Those long hours, those long nights with your co-workers, with your fellow students, trying to make something really important happen with almost no time. So of course you fight, and you make up, and you fight again, and you make up again, and you strive together, and you come out the other side, and you say, "Those assholes are the most important people in my life." You know that feeling?

KIP. I do, I guess I do.

BILL. Kip, I want you to stay. I want you to stay here all night and drink wine with us and tell stories with us and plan for this future with us. But – *(He looks at* **RAF***.)* – it looks like my little band of assholes has some personal business to take care of first, so as much as it

pains me personally, I think we're gonna have to have that night of wine and stories the next time. I hope you can tell from looking at my face how much I'm looking forward to it. *(pause)*

KIP. God, Bill, I don't know what to say.

BILL. Don't worry about it.

KIP. It means so much that you would say that to me.

BILL. It's just the truth.

VALERIE. Kip, the chance to get to know you tonight has been an honor.

KIP. Wow, God, I…that's amazing. I mean, I know I wasn't part of your crew, it's not like –

BILL. You're part of our new crew.

(As **KIP** *goes around the room shaking hands,* **RONNIE** *brings the drink to* **RAF**.*)*

RONNIE. *(to* **RAF***)* I hope you like it.

RAF. I love it. I want another one just like it.

RONNIE. You haven't even tried it yet.

*(***RAF** *downs the entire drink.)*

RAF. I love it. I want another one just like it.

RONNIE. Okay.

BILL. You know what, sweetheart, it's gonna be self-service from here on out. You too, Abbie.

RONNIE. All right, space people. Smoke 'em if you got 'em.

ABBIE. Good night, everybody.

RAF. *(to* **RONNIE***)* You can find me online.

RONNIE. I bet.

*(***RONNIE** *and* **ABBIE** *leave.)*

BILL. All right, Raf –

RAF. Where the fuck is Conor?

*(***AMELIA** *enters with wine and too many glasses.)*

AMELIA. I think I may need saving here.

*(***VALERIE** *and* **BILL** *go to take glasses from her.)*

VALERIE. Oh, Amelia, you should have taken me with you.

AMELIA. Overestimated my capacities, I think.

BILL. Never.

AMELIA. *(about to pour)* Kip? Wanna say when?

KIP. Mrs. Cooke, I want to thank you for your hospitality tonight.

AMELIA. Oh, you're leaving?

KIP. I believe the time has come, yes. But I hope you know I'll be seeing you very soon.

AMELIA. Well I hope so.

KIP. And I hope you know – I hope you *all* know – that this has been one of the finest nights of my life.

BILL. Well, I hope you know we feel the same.

AMELIA. Let me walk you out.

KIP. Goodnight everybody.

(The others say goodnight, except for **RAF**. **AMELIA** *and* **KIP** *exit through the front door.)*

BELINDA. *Jesus.*

VALERIE. Wait.

BELINDA. I thought I was just gonna have to hang myself.

VALERIE. Wait for him to leave.

BELINDA. I was like, I'm just gonna have to literally end my life, because this…

VALERIE. Wait until he drives away.

BILL. *(to* **RAF***)* What the fuck is wrong with you?

BELINDA. Bill –

BILL. Hey! What the fuck is wrong with you?

BELINDA. He's not really hitting on Ronnie, he's just being an idiot.

BILL. Ronnie can take care of herself. I'm talking about Raf pulling out his dick and pissing on forty million dollars 'cause he's too drunk to find the bathroom.

VALERIE. He's driving away.

BILL. Do you have any idea how much we need him?

VALERIE. Amelia's coming back.

BILL. How many people are there in the world who are that rich but stupid enough to think you can save the world with experimental swamp-farming? 'Cause if we lose him you'd better find us another one!

VALERIE. Bill she's at the door.

RAF. I'd like to say hi to Conor, please.

*(***AMELIA** *enters.)*

AMELIA. He's off.

BILL. Is he all right?

AMELIA. Bill, if you break that poor girl's heart…

BILL. Yeah.

RAF. I'd like to say hi to Conor, please!

*(***BILL** *looks at* **AMELIA**.*)*

AMELIA. No. *(beat)* No.

BILL. You don't think…

AMELIA. Look at everybody, look around this room. Tell me he's ready for this. *(beat)* If he melts down, not only does it ruin your night…

BILL. …it's also pretty terrible for him.

RAF. I'd like to say hi to C –

BILL. Well you're not going to.

AMELIA. Be his friend, Raf.

(Beat. **RAF** *moves away from them.)*

VALERIE. You've made an amazing evening for us, Amelia, and we can't begin to express our gratitude.

AMELIA. Ah. My cue.

VALERIE. Oh, I don't mean it like –

AMELIA. No, you're quite right. The space-stories hour approaches.

BELINDA. One time I was replacing this lug nut in Airlock C, it was awesome.

*(***BILL** *walks* **AMELIA** *to the stairs.)*

BILL. Milly…you know I never know the words.

AMELIA. Try to get a couple hours sleep. Seriously.

BILL. Yeah.

*(***AMELIA** *exits up the stairs.)*

VALERIE. I don't know if anyone wants refills on…?

(She trails off as **BILL** *signals her to wait, listening to* **AMELIA***'s footsteps departing.)*

BILL. The packages?

RAF. "The Honeycomb," huh?

BELINDA. In my trunk – but Bill –

RAF. A "hive mind"?

VALERIE. It's not right, Bill.

BELINDA. You told us not to prepare our people. Not that I *have* any people.

BILL. It's not preparation, it's just…

RAF. It seems like preparation.

BILL. It's just putting the idea in his mind! Guys…he's not like Ronnie. He won't just survive.

VALERIE. It's a risk. Anything's a risk.

BILL. How about this: if you get the packages I'll grovel for the rest of the night.

BELINDA. Deal.

(She exits out front.)

VALERIE. Twenty words?

BILL. He's doing good.

VALERIE. Yeah?

BILL. Honestly I wanna cry some days, he's working so hard.

RAF. Who is? Who's working so hard?

BILL. Raf, for God's sake –

VALERIE. It's a fair question.

RAF. Is it Conor?

VALERIE. If not a tactful one.

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