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crooked

by

Catherine Trieschmann

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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Originally presented Off-Broadway at The Summer Play Festival
Produced in London in 2006 by the Bush Theatre
Produced in New York City in 2008 by Women's Project
Julie Crosby, Producing Artistic Director

crooked was first performed in a workshop production at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2004. It was directed by Elena Hartwell. Costumes designed by Donald Sanders. Sound designed by Claire Campbell. Emily Ballou was the stage manager.

LANEY Shelly Stover
 ELISE Vanessa Shealy
 MARIBEL Katherine Sanderlin

crooked was presented as part of the Summer Play Festival in July 2005. It was directed by Lindsay Firman. The set was designed by Susan Zeeman Rogers, costumes were designed by Sarah Tosetti and lights were designed by Aaron Black. Original music designed by Shane Rettig. Madeline Hartman was the stage manager.

LANEY Shelly Stover
 ELISE Effie Johnson
 MARIBEL Katherine Sanderlin

crooked premiered at the Bush Theatre in London in May 2006. It was directed by Mike Bradwell. Sets and costumes designed by Libbie Watson. Lights designed by James Farncombe. Julia Crammar was the stage manager.

LANEY Amanda Hale
 ELISE Suzan Sylvester
 MARIBEL Debbie Chazen

crooked premiered Off-Broadway at Women's Project in April 2008. It was directed by Liz Diamond. Set designed by Jennifer Moeller. Costumes designed by Ilona Somogyi. Lights designed by S. Ryan Schmidt. Sound and original music designed by Jane Shaw. Jack Gianino was the stage manager.

LANEY Cristin Milioti
 ELISE Betsy Aidem
 MARIBEL Carmen M. Herlihy

CHARACTERS

LANEY WATERS - 14, has dystonia, which causes one of her shoulders to draw up, as though she has a slightly hunched back.

ELISE WATERS - 40s, Laney's mother

MARIBEL PURDY - 16, Laney's friend, chubby and radiant

PLACE

Oxford, Mississippi

SETTING

The Water's House - Living Room, Porch
High School Stadium Bleachers
Church Sanctuary

TIME

The Present

For my mother, Donna

*Special thanks to Elsa Neuwald, Mike Bradwell, Arielle Tepper,
Julie Crosby, Dan Kois, V. Jane Windsor and the Waterside Seven
Writer's Group, especially Gwydion Suilebhan and Mary Lane.*

Scene One

(LANEY reads her story to the audience.)

LANEY. Ernest's hands smelled like lemons and gunshot. Every Monday, he parked his lemonade stand at the entrance of the park, where it stood solid as a bank. He liked the feel of the sun on his back, hot and burning like an open sore. He liked the children's laughter and when a little face approached him cheery as a fruit loop. On weekends, Ernest left his house through the kitchen door and with his rifle and his forty-five wandered the woods, shooting at any target in sight: a glass bottle, a pinecone, a squirrel. He was as sharp as a Cuisinart. Ernest lived for his lemonade and his guns for many happy years, until suddenly everything started to get blurry and confused. He forgot what day it was and where he was supposed to be, and one day he filled his lemonade stand with his rifle and his forty-five and instead of serving up lemonade, he served up bullets, straight between the eyes.

(Pause. Lights up on ELISE who is in the living room, reading the story from a notebook. LANEY turns to her.)

What do you think?

ELISE. It has some nice imagery. I like the little details.

LANEY. What details?

ELISE. I like the fruit loops. I like the Cuisinart.

LANEY. What do you think about the plot?

ELISE. The plot is a little gruesome.

LANEY. Is it shocking?

ELISE. Yes, it's shocking.

LANEY. Is it exciting? Did you feel your arm hairs rise like you'd just been electrocuted?

ELISE. Electrocuted?

LANEY. Yes.

ELISE. Maybe not electrocuted.

LANEY. Then what?

ELISE. The plot could use some work.

LANEY. Why?

ELISE. Well, the ending comes out of nowhere. Maybe Ernest should take a little longer to deteriorate.

LANEY. It's a short story, Mom.

ELISE. Yes, LANEY. But not all short stories have to be that short.

LANEY. I want it to be that short.

ELISE. Well then, maybe you should make the ending a little more realistic.

LANEY. You always say that.

ELISE. I always say what?

LANEY. You always want me to be more realistic.

ELISE. With your fiction.

LANEY. With everything.

ELISE. Did you have a bad day at school?

LANEY. Did you have a bad day?

ELISE. I asked you first.

LANEY. So.

ELISE. No, I've had a great day.

LANEY. Why? What'd you do?

ELISE. I made a list. Lists. I listed things.

LANEY. Like what?

ELISE. Like possible jobs. I made a list of possible jobs in order of preference. You want to hear?

LANEY. No.

ELISE. Number one: Librarian.

Number two: Paralegal.

Number three: Administrative Assistant. NOT not-for-profit.

LANEY. What about social work?

ELISE. I'm giving up social work.

LANEY. Why?

ELISE. I'm becoming a misanthrope instead.

LANEY. I know what that is.

ELISE. I know you know what that is. You're gifted. Too gifted.

LANEY. Are we gonna be poor?

ELISE. No. Maybe. I should make a list. Ways to avoid being poor:

Number one: get a job.

Number two: marry a rich man.

Number three: marry a rich woman in Vermont or Cleveland, or wherever it is you can marry a rich woman these days.

LANEY. You'd have to divorce Dad.

ELISE. I have. The papers are filed.

LANEY. Oh. Who's going to take care of him?

ELISE. The doctors. His parents – your Grandma Liz and Pop – are still there, making sure he's okay. Nothing's changed.

LANEY. Except now, he's not your husband. You can get a brand new husband, make me have a brand new Dad.

ELISE. Yes, I've made a list. You want to hear it?

LANEY. No.

ELISE. Number one...

LANEY. I'm not playing...

ELISE. Holden Caulfield.

(pause)

LANEY. That's my boyfriend!

ELISE. Number Two: Heathcliff.

LANEY. Ugh.

ELISE. What? He's dark and handsome and mysterious.

LANEY. He's whiney.

ELISE. No he's not. He's in love.

LANEY. Yeah, so in love he ruins the lives of everyone he ever meets.

ELISE. You're right. He is kind of a sociopath. Number three: Atticus Finch. Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch.

LANEY. He'd be okay.

ELISE. Yeah, he would. Neck rub?

LANEY. Okay.

(ELISE massages LANEY's neck.)

ELISE. This is good for us.

LANEY. What?

ELISE. Getting away. Moving back here.

LANEY. I never lived here.

ELISE. I know, but I did. I never thought I'd move back to this house. But it's not so bad. It's got a lot of character, don't you think?

LANEY. It's got mold.

ELISE. No it doesn't. Where?

LANEY. There. That crack in the wall. It's green.

ELISE. That's not mold. That's moss. I think.

LANEY. Same thing.

ELISE. Well I'm glad we're here. This is going to be a good change for us.

LANEY. It's good for my writing.

ELISE. How so?

LANEY. Suffering is good for writing.

ELISE. Suffering is not good for writing. Suffering is good for depression. Reading is good for writing. Reading William Faulkner. He lived here, you know.

LANEY. I know. You've said that like a zillion times.

ELISE. I keep thinking you're going to be impressed.

LANEY. I am. He's on my Best American Authors list twice.

ELISE. How can he be on it twice?

LANEY. Two of his books are on it.

ELISE. Which two?

LANEY. *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

ELISE. Did you make up that list?

LANEY. No. Mr. Caruthers wrote it.

ELISE. Oh God.

LANEY. What?

ELISE. Mr. Caruthers was a failed writer trapped in a middle school library.

LANEY. I liked him. You should like him. You both make lists.

ELISE. He's a fish. A carp.

LANEY. A carp?

ELISE. Yes. A scaly, slippery carp.

LANEY. I think he had bedroom eyes.

ELISE. What do you know about bedroom eyes? You better not know anything about bedroom eyes.

LANEY. Bedroom eyes are eyes that make you want to go to bed.

ELISE. Who would want to go to bed with a carp?

LANEY. Me!

ELISE. Elizabeth Lane Waters...

LANEY. Mom! I'm kidding. Geesh...I wouldn't go to bed with Mr. Caruthers. He's like forty.

ELISE. You better not go to bed with anyone.

LANEY. Mom, who would want to go to bed with me?

ELISE. Laney...baby...

(*ELISE pulls LANEY towards her. LANEY pulls away.*)

I'm not finished.

LANEY. That's enough.

ELISE. You said it helps.

LANEY. It doesn't help. The doctors said.

ELISE. It makes you feel better.

LANEY. But it doesn't help. Not really.

(*pause*)

ELISE. He hit on me once.

LANEY. Who?

ELISE. The carp. At a P.T.A. meeting. When Peter first got sick.

LANEY. Gross.

ELISE. I thought you said he had bedroom eyes.

LANEY. A carp can't have bedroom eyes.

ELISE. No, you're right. A carp can't have bedroom eyes.
You look tired, Laney.

LANEY. I'm not tired.

ELISE. Yes, you are. You have bedroom eyes. Eyes that want to go to bed.

LANEY. I have work to do.

ELISE. Homework?

LANEY. No, my work.

ELISE. You're fourteen. You don't have work that's not homework. Child labor laws.

LANEY. I have my writing.

ELISE. You've written enough for today.

LANEY. I have to fix the plot. You're the one who said I have to fix the ending, and so I have to stay up and fix it. It's your fault!

ELISE. You don't have to fix it tonight.

LANEY. Yes I do. You shouldn't be so picky if you want me to go to bed on time.

ELISE. It's time for bed.

LANEY. Why can't you just leave me alone?

ELISE. Oh, let me see...yes, that's right, I'm your mother.

LANEY. God, I hate you!

ELISE. Oh, go to hell, Laney. *(pause)* I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have said that. It's a hard time for us. For me. Forgive me?

LANEY. No.

ELISE. Forgive me tomorrow?

LANEY. Maybe. It has to be perfect. I'm going to show it to somebody.

ELISE. Who?

LANEY. A girl at school. She likes my writing.

ELISE. You made a friend?

LANEY. Don't look so surprised.

Scene Two

(Earlier the same day. Outside the high school. MARI-BEL sits on the stadium bleachers, finishing her lunch. LANEY approaches her.)

LANEY. Hi.

MARIBEL. Hello.

LANEY. I didn't know we could eat out here.

MARIBEL. We're not supposed to.

LANEY. Oh.

MARIBEL. I just hate it in there.

LANEY. Me too.

MARIBEL. You could eat here.

LANEY. Okay.

MARIBEL. The security guard comes out here sometimes. I just hide beneath the bleachers when I see him.

LANEY. You're a rebel.

MARIBEL. No. I'm just Maribel.

LANEY. Laney.

MARIBEL. You're new, aren't you?

LANEY. Yeah.

MARIBEL. Where'd you move from?

LANEY. Madison, Wisconsin. But my Mom grew up here.

MARIBEL. I was new last year.

LANEY. Yeah? Where from?

MARIBEL. Nowhere. I mean, I didn't move. I used to be home schooled by my Mom, but she got in trouble because she never got registered as a home school teacher or something, so now I go here.

LANEY. Oh.

MARIBEL. But I'm behind. I have to take some of my classes with freshmen. It's so embarrassing.

LANEY. You don't have any classes with me.

MARIBEL. You're probably in advanced classes. You look advanced.

LANEY. I'm not. I'm not advanced.

MARIBEL. You look advanced.

LANEY. I'm not.

MARIBEL. I wish I were advanced. But I'm remedial. Remedial is worse than being advanced. Remedial is like being retarded.

LANEY. No, it's not. It just means you need to catch up is all.

MARIBEL. You're nice.

LANEY. Thanks.

(pause)

MARIBEL. So, have you found a church yet?

LANEY. Church?

MARIBEL. Yeah.

LANEY. No. I don't go to church.

MARIBEL. So, you don't know about Jesus then?

LANEY. What about him?

MARIBEL. That he died for you. That he died for you to save you from sin?

LANEY. Oh, I don't believe in sin.

MARIBEL. Why not?

LANEY. I just don't.

MARIBEL. You're kinda funny looking with your back and all.

LANEY. Thanks.

MARIBEL. Anyone talk to you since you came to this school?

LANEY. The teachers. You.

MARIBEL. Any other students?

LANEY. No.

MARIBEL. See. That's sin.

LANEY. Whatever.

MARIBEL. Don't feel bad.

LANEY. I don't.

MARIBEL. I get sinned against all the time in this school – Deedee Cummings pulled down my pants in gym class today – but I don’t mind, because I know that the things of this earth, they’re not lasting. (*pause*) You think I’m a freak, don’t you?

LANEY. No.

MARIBEL. Yes, you do. I can tell.

LANEY. Well, yeah. You’re kinda freaky.

MARIBEL. I know it’s kinda freaky to bring up Jesus when I’ve only just met you, but look at it this way: I mean, you could die tomorrow, you could die this afternoon – you know a car wreck, or a heart attack or something – and at least, I would know that you didn’t die not ever having heard of Jesus, and maybe, just maybe, because of this conversation, because I talked to you about Jesus, when those headlights are facing the passenger seat and you know you’re about to meet your end, you’ll remember Jesus and how much he loves you and you’ll ask him into your heart right then and there before you die, and then you won’t have to face everlasting hell.

LANEY. I don’t believe in everlasting hell.

MARIBEL. But there has to be punishment for people who sin and sin and keep sinning. If there isn’t everlasting hell, then Hitler and Stalin and Deedee Cummings will never get punished for what they did. All the people in this school who ignore you will never get punished either.

LANEY. That’s one way of looking at it, I guess.

MARIBEL. Thank you. I think you’re very pretty anyway. I mean, even with the hump and all.

LANEY. It’s not a hump.

MARIBEL. What is it then?

LANEY. It’s the muscles in my back. They’re working against one another. It’s called dystonia. Having a humpback is called kyphosis. I don’t have kyphosis. I have dystonia. It’s different. It’s temporary. I’m glad I have it.

MARIBEL. You are?

LANEY. Yeah. I'm glad I have it, because it has shown me how shallow people are here. At my old school in Wisconsin, where I used to go before my dystonia got bad, I had lots of friends, in lots of different groups. I was going to be on the Homecoming court. I mean, they hadn't had elections, but everyone told me I was going to be on it. Not that I really wanted to be on it. Homecoming court's kinda lame and all, but I would've been on it. Here, nobody talks to me. But I haven't changed. My essential personality hasn't changed. So I know the reason they don't talk to me is because of my dystonia, and I'm glad I have it, because now I know how shallow people are. It's a good thing to know, don't you think?

MARIBEL. Yes, it is. You would have looked amazing on Homecoming Court, especially if you put your hair in a French twist. I could do it for you.

LANEY. Maybe later.

MARIBEL. I didn't mean now. I meant for when you get elected to the Homecoming Court. Next year when your back gets better and everyone realizes how pretty you are, and I'll lose all my baby fat and grow new skin. We'll be on the Homecoming Court together!

LANEY. Except we'll turn it down, because the Homecoming court is lame.

MARIBEL. Completely!

(They laugh, a little tentatively still. LANEY grimaces.)

MARIBEL. Does it hurt?

LANEY. Sometimes.

MARIBEL. Can I touch it?

LANEY. No!

MARIBEL. It's just...when someone's sick at church, we pray for them. We lay hands on them. It helps sometimes. Sometimes Jesus chooses to make them feel better. Sometimes he doesn't though.

LANEY. Why is that?

MARIBEL. I don't know. It's one of God's mysteries. Like my little brother, Gabriel. He was born with a cleft lip. No one knows why. It's one of God's mysteries. People used to gasp when they saw him. Does that happen to you?

LANEY. No.

MARIBEL. When Deedee Cummings pulled down my pants, the whole room gasped. Like they all took in one big gulp of air together. And then they laughed. Afterwards Melissa Jenkins put her arm around me, real nice like, like she was gonna take care of me, but when we got to the locker room, she handed me a razor, and said I should use it to shave my pubes so I'd look better the next time.

LANEY. I meant to say, yes. I've had that happen. Not the pubes thing. But the gasping.

MARIBEL. Do you want to come to church with me on Friday?

LANEY. I don't know. What's it like?

MARIBEL. Well, there's a band. Piano, drums. Marcus Grayson used to play the guitar, but he doesn't come anymore.

LANEY. I know who he is. He's a Junior. He has bedroom eyes.

MARIBEL. Yes, he does. But he doesn't come anymore, so now there's only the piano and the drums. My Dad's the preacher.

LANEY. He is?

MARIBEL. Yeah, but he also sells cars, used cars like Hondas and Mitsubishis, because the church is small and can't afford to pay his whole salary. I was going to get a Mitsubishi for my sixteenth birthday, but then I couldn't because I failed the test. When the tape said to turn on the right blinker, I turned on the left. That's a stupid reason to fail a test, I know, I just got so nervous. What does your Dad do?

LANEY. I don't have a Dad.

MARIBEL. Is he dead?

LANEY. Yeah.

MARIBEL. Do you miss him?

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

MARIBEL. Sure. But going to church, you know, it might help.

LANEY. Okay. I'll go.

MARIBEL. Really?

LANEY. Sure.

(MARIBEL hugs LANEY.)

It's no big deal.

MARIBEL. No one in this entire school has ever agreed to go to church with me!

LANEY. Well, new experiences are good for my writing. That's why I said yes. Not because I need help.

MARIBEL. You're a writer?

LANEY. Yes.

MARIBEL. I've never met a writer.

LANEY. You want to read one of my stories? I wrote it during second period.

MARIBEL. Okay.

(LANEY takes a notebook out of her backpack.)

LANEY. It's a first draft, so it's not perfect or anything. You're the first person I've shown it to.

MARIBEL. Really?

LANEY. Yeah.

(LANEY hands the open notebook to MARIBEL who reads the story silently. She looks up at LANEY, eyes shining.)

MARIBEL. Wow. That's intense. You're the most talented person I've ever met.

(LANEY grins.)

LANEY. Thanks.

MARIBEL. Can I tell you a secret?

LANEY. Yeah.

MARIBEL. You swear you won't tell anyone? Promise to God?

LANEY. Yeah, I promise.

MARIBEL. I think I have stigmata.

LANEY. You mean, like when you bleed from your hands and feet?

MARIBEL. No, not that kind. I read about stigmata on the internet in the library, and I think I have the invisible kind, where you feel the pain in your hands but there's no blood.

LANEY. What pain?

MARIBEL. The pain of Jesus. The pain of the whole world.

LANEY. In your hands?

MARIBEL. Yeah.

LANEY. That's intense.

MARIBEL. It is.

LANEY. What does it feel like?

MARIBEL. It feels like my veins are about to pop, and they...

(MARIBEL looks down at the notebook.)

They "bulge beneath my skin like big blue worms, squirming just below the dirt."

(LANEY squeals in delight; she can't help herself.)

What?

LANEY. No one's ever quoted me before!

Scene Three

(MARIBEL and LANEY sit in the living room.)

MARIBEL. I wish you could spend the night Friday.

LANEY. Why'd she say no?

MARIBEL. Because she's a you-know-what.

LANEY. No, what?

MARIBEL. You know.

LANEY. No, I don't. What?

MARIBEL. You know what.

LANEY. No, I don't know what. What?

MARIBEL. Stop it!

(The girls burst into laughter. ELISE enters with a bag of groceries, a carton of cigarettes poking up out of the bag.)

ELISE. You must be Maribel.

MARIBEL. Yes. Do you smoke?

ELISE. Yes.

MARIBEL. You shouldn't smoke.

ELISE. You shouldn't judge.

LANEY. Mom!

ELISE. Right. Sorry. I've taken up bad habits in my spare time. Biting my nails, tweezing the hairs on my legs one at a time, smoking. But you shouldn't smoke, or bite your nails, or tweeze the hairs on your legs one at a time. It may not give you lung cancer, but it definitely makes your legs red and blotchy, you know, like when you get razor burn down there...

LANEY. Mom!

ELISE. What? Am I an embarrassment?

LANEY. Mom's unemployed.

ELISE. It's making me a little nuts. Sorry.

MARIBEL. I forgive you.

ELISE. Thanks. What are you two up to?

LANEY. None of your business.

ELISE. Well, would you like a cocktail to go with that? Coke, sprite, milk?

MARIBEL & LANEY. Sprite.

(They burst out laughing.)

LANEY. We're synchronized.

MARIBEL. On the same brain plane.

ELISE. I see.

(ELISE starts to exit for the kitchen.)

MARIBEL. Mrs. Waters...

ELISE. Elise. Call me Elise.

MARIBEL. Elise, have you ever asked Jesus into your heart?

ELISE. No.

MARIBEL. Do you want to?

ELISE. No.

(ELISE exits.)

LANEY. You shouldn't bring that Jesus stuff up around my Mom.

MARIBEL. I knew it wasn't the right moment, but I just thought, what if she had a heart attack or a stray bullet hit her while she was in the kitchen, and she died, and I never told her about Jesus, and then that would always be with me you know, that I had this opportunity and didn't use it.

LANEY. A stray bullet?

MARIBEL. I know. It's not likely, but there was a drive by shooting here once.

LANEY. What do you mean here?

MARIBEL. Well, not right here. But nearby the college.

(ELISE returns, gives a can of Sprite to the girls.)

ELISE. There you go.

LANEY. Maribel and me, we're going to the school dance on Friday. Okay?

ELISE. Really?

LANEY. Yes.

ELISE. I thought you said you hated school dances, that they were humiliating drills in gender oppression.

LANEY. You said that. In Madison. I said the gym stinks too bad to want to dance in it.

ELISE. Right. Why the change of mind?

LANEY. Maribel wants to go, don't you Maribel?

MARIBEL. Uh huh. I want to dance with boys.

ELISE. How old are you, Maribel?

MARIBEL. Sixteen.

ELISE. And you two have classes together?

MARIBEL. Oh no. Laney's too advanced to have classes with me.

LANEY. Maribel was home schooled, but her Mom never got certified, so she's behind. She's really smart about literature though. She's a great critic. The best.

ELISE. Oh. *(to MARIBEL.)* What books do you like?

MARIBEL. I like short stories.

ELISE. What short stories?

MARIBEL. Laney's.

ELISE. I see. So what do your parents do, Maribel?

MARIBEL. My Dad's a preacher. Of the Church of the Redeemer. It's a holiness church, but we don't pick up snakes or drink poison, or any of that crazy stuff. Just full submersion baptism, prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues.

ELISE. Do you speak in tongues?

MARIBEL. No, I don't have that gift. Laney, we should pray and see if you have it though. Maybe you have the gift of tongues, and I could interpret, since we're on the same brain plane.

ELISE. Interpret?

MARIBEL. Yeah. When someone in the church speaks in tongues, sometimes another person interprets. Like when God has a message he wants someone in the church to hear. My Mom and Dad were given a prophesy of my brother Gabriel having a cleft lip. God

gave the message to Mom in tongues, and then sister Rebecca interpreted. She said, “be comforted in your deformity.” And then Gabriel was born with a cleft lip.

ELISE. Seems kind of vague. We all have deformities. Emotional ones at least.

LANEY. Mom, I don’t think God meant it as a metaphor.

ELISE. How do you know what God meant?

LANEY. How do you know? You don’t even believe in God.

ELISE. Neither do you, young lady!

LANEY. Maybe I do.

ELISE. Oh really?

LANEY. Well, I believe in sin, I believe in that much.

ELISE. You believe in sin?

LANEY. Yes. Hurting people, ignoring people, *divorcing people*. That’s sin.

ELISE. Watch it, Laney.

MARIBEL. Sin is what keeps us from God.

ELISE. No, rationality is what keeps us from God. Seeing the world as it really is keeps us from buying into a patriarchal mythology that has kept women oppressed for centuries.

LANEY. Mom!

ELISE. What? Aren’t I allowed to express my opinions?

LANEY. No!

MARIBEL. What do you mean?

LANEY. What?

MARIBEL. (to ELISE) What you just said.

ELISE. It means, honey, that religion has been used to keep women from pursuing their full potential.

MARIBEL. I don’t feel that way.

ELISE. Well, you don’t right now. But trust me, you don’t want to find yourself having to obey some backwards Bible thumper who will only let you out of the house to go to church and to pick up a box of diapers at the Piggily Wiggily.

MARIBEL. I don't plan on getting married.

ELISE. Well, then the only choice you have is to live a life of celibacy, which trust me, is no fun. People need to have sex.

LANEY. Mom!

ELISE. What? I just think Maribel should seriously consider her options before she makes up her mind completely.

LANEY. She didn't ask for your opinion.

ELISE. Do you want my opinion, Maribel?

MARIBEL. Yes.

ELISE. See? Laney never wants my opinion about anything. She thinks I'm too critical.

LANEY. Maribel just said that to be nice, didn't you Maribel?

ELISE. Did you? Were you just being nice?

MARIBEL. I don't know.

ELISE. It's okay, honey. Just don't believe everything your Daddy says in the pulpit. And don't believe everything Laney says either, for that matter.

LANEY. Get out of here!

ELISE. I'm going. You two have fun. But I'm keeping my ear to the door. Absolutely no speaking in tongues.

LANEY. Get out!!!

ELISE. I mean it.

(ELISE exits.)

MARIBEL. I don't want to get married, because I plan on giving my life to God entirely. But I wish I could have sex. I'm still a virgin. I've been fingered once, but you can be fingered and still be a virgin.

LANEY. Maribel...just shut up for a minute okay!

MARIBEL. Why? What'd I say?

LANEY. It's just...maybe you shouldn't talk so much. You sound stupid sometimes.

MARIBEL. I'm not. I'm not stupid.

LANEY. I know you're not. But sometimes that's how you sound.

(MARIBEL, *clearly distressed, starts rubbing her palm.*)

LANEY. (*continued*) What's wrong? Are you like going to cry?

MARIBEL. No, no I'm not. (*pause*) I'm gonna go wait outside for my Mom. She'll be here soon.

LANEY. You want me to wait with you?

MARIBEL. No.

LANEY. Okay. I'll call you tonight.

MARIBEL. If you want.

LANEY. I do. I do want to.

MARIBEL. Okay. Bye.

LANEY. Bye.

Scene Four

(LANEY reads the following story to the audience. ELISE sits in the living room behind her. She cannot hear LANEY.)

LANEY. Veronica's young life was marked by one constant thing: the cruelty of her Mother...Eliza, who having stolen Veronica from her Father when she was a baby, now forced her to clean every floor in the house until it shone like aluminum foil. The only escape Veronica had from Eliza was when she rode her bike as far away from the house as she could, the cool September air filling her lungs full to capacity, just like she had filled the tires on her bike full to capacity with her bike pump. One day, Eliza found the kitchen floors not to her liking, and so she confiscated Veronica's bike and gave it to the Salvation Army (Eliza liked to keep up the pretense of being a good person to the outside world). This was the last straw for Veronica, who decided she could stand it no more. So in the middle of the night, she snuck into Eliza's room, stuck her bike pump into Eliza's belly button and filled her so full of air, she exploded, her bits and pieces decorating the walls.

The End.

(LANEY turns to ELISE and stares at her triumphantly. ELISE looks up at LANEY questioningly, wearily.)

Scene Five

(LANEY and MARIBEL sit in the church choir loft. It is dark. MARIBEL hands a flashlight to LANEY. They turn on the flashlights.)

LANEY. I like the sanctuary like this. Empty.

MARIBEL. You said you liked the service.

LANEY. I did. I just like it better like this. Quiet.

MARIBEL. You said you wanted to convert. If you convert, you have to go to service.

LANEY. I know.

MARIBEL. You could have converted during the service.

LANEY. I didn't want to convert during the service. I want to convert with you. Alone. There's nothing wrong with that, is there?

MARIBEL. No.

LANEY. I like your Mom.

MARIBEL. Why?

LANEY. She's quiet. My Mom's never quiet. I'm still not talking to her. She's so embarrassing, God...

MARIBEL. You can't do that.

LANEY. What?

MARIBEL. Take the Lord's name in vain like that. If you're going to convert, you have to stop doing that.

LANEY. Okay.

MARIBEL. Are you ready?

LANEY. We should eat first. I brought some cake from the potluck.

MARIBEL. We can't eat in here.

LANEY. Come on. It's a special occasion. I'm gonna get saved, right?

MARIBEL. Yes.

(LANEY hands MARIBEL a piece of cake. They eat.)

I told my parents we were playing flashlight tag with the youth group. The youth group always plays flashlight tag on Friday nights.

LANEY. Why couldn't you just say we'd be here?

MARIBEL. We're not supposed to be here.

LANEY. Why not? I'm converting, right? They want me to convert, don't they?

MARIBEL. Well you're not supposed to sneak into the sanctuary to convert. You're supposed to convert during the service, walk to the front of the church while everybody sings, "Just as I am."

LANEY. I like this way better.

MARIBEL. Me too. *(pause)* The adults, they all think flashlight tag is a Godly kind of fun. But it's not. I got fingered playing flashlight tag.

LANEY. How'd that happen?

MARIBEL. The whole point of playing flashlight tag is so you can hang out in the dark woods with boys. One night, I was wearing a skirt, and Marcus Grayson told me to come hide with him in this dry creek bed, and while we were crouching there, I felt his fingers all of a sudden walking up my leg. I didn't move. But they kept walking up my thigh, until he fingered me.

LANEY. Did it hurt?

MARIBEL. No, it didn't hurt. It felt good. Kinda. I just wish he had kissed me is all. I've never been kissed. Have you?

LANEY. Sure. I kissed a boy at my school in Wisconsin. Quentin Compson. We kissed in the library after school. We frenched. And then we got interrupted by Mr. Caruthers.

MARIBEL. Who's that?

LANEY. The librarian. He was cool though. We didn't get in trouble or anything. Mr. Caruthers just sent us outside.

MARIBEL. Have you ever been fingered?

LANEY. No.

MARIBEL. Well, if you want to get fingered, we can go play flashlight tag. Marcus Grayson isn't here, but Henry Bowen is, and he tries to finger everyone. He'd try to finger you, even though you got, you know, a hump.

LANEY. It's not a hump. I think it's slutty to be fingered.

MARIBEL. It's not like having sex. You can be fingered and still be a virgin.

LANEY. It's still slutty. Especially if the person doesn't kiss you.

MARIBEL. The next time I tried to hide with Marcus I followed him through the woods, but he kept zigzagging back and forth through the trees. When I finally caught up with him and tried to hold his hand, he said, "get away from me, you big fat cow." I laid down on the ground in the woods and got stigmata.

LANEY. I don't really think you're slutty. Marcus Grayson is an asswad.

MARIBEL. (*giggling*) You can't say that here.

LANEY. What?

MARIBEL. You can't cuss.

LANEY. I didn't cuss. I just said asswad.

MARIBEL. You said it again.

LANEY. You mean asswad?

MARIBEL. (*laughing even harder*) Laney, I'm serious.

LANEY. Don't be such a tightass.

MARIBEL. Laney!

LANEY. Asswad, tight ass, asshole, asinine.

MARIBEL. Stop it!

LANEY. Asinine is not a cuss word.

MARIBEL. It's not funny.

LANEY. Then why are you laughing?

MARIBEL. Because you're not being serious.

LANEY. I'm as serious as a cereal box.

(*The laughing subsides. They both calm down a little.*)

MARIBEL. Are you ready now?

LANEY. I guess.

MARIBEL. You have to be sure. It doesn't count if you're not sure.

LANEY. I'm sure. What do I have to do?

MARIBEL. First you have to confess your sin.

LANEY. Okay. I confess my sin.

MARIBEL. No, you have to be specific. List all your sins.

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