

FIND ME

by Dennis Bush



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CHARACTERS

(4 female, 2 male; or 5 female, 1 male)

GIL	Male; late teens; sensitive; has a strong connection to his family; feels powerless because he can't help his dying sister
JODY	Female; sixteen; abused by her stepbrother; aware of the importance of life lessons
GABE	Male; late teens/early 20's; recently dumped; angry; bitter; longs to be loved and appreciated
SHEILA	Female; late 20's; young mother; has a drinking problem; struggles with emotional abandonment; sassy; opinionated
ELISE	Female; late teens/early 20's; drowning in self-doubt; projects her inner turmoil onto others in harsh judgments and desperate attempts to feel better about herself
KRYSTAL	Female; late teens/early 20's; overwhelmed by obsessive fears; her anxiety leaves her almost unable to function

SETTING

Six separate spaces. Each character is in his or her own space.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Find Me can be presented with a very simple set. Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting, role assignments and staging.

The actor playing Gil should have one of his hands wrapped in an Ace bandage or something similar. It should be large enough to indicate substantial swelling and damage to his hand.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Reading
New York City
December 2010

Premiere Production
North Canyon Theatre Company
Phoenix, AZ
January 2011

Find Me had a reading in New York in December, 2010. The premiere production of *Find Me* was in Phoenix, Arizona in January 2011. The original cast included Alex Reust, Cera Naccarato, Connery Morano, Rosemary Zinke, Chelsea Karnes and Tyler Caldwell. The production was directed by the playwright.

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AT RISE: JODY, SHEILA, GABE, ELISE, KRYSTAL and GIL – each in a separate space – begin speaking the following six lines simultaneously. The effect should be a cacophony of sound, as if multiple televisions in the same room were switched on to six different channels at the same time.

Each CHARACTER speaks directly to the audience, as if HE or SHE is recording a vlog or YouTube video message. There should be no attempt to mime computer use, nor should there be laptops, mouses or other related items present. The more minimal the overall set, the better.

JODY: When you're two years old, you don't need to know how to do geometry. Why would you? You're two. You learn things when you need to know them.

SHEILA: Eating raw cookie dough can give you worms if you eat enough of it. *(Quick pause)* It's true. Eating raw cooking dough can give you worms if you eat enough of it.

GABE: I'm going to get a pony – a brown-and-white-spotted pony – and I'm going to ride it through your living room. And I'm going to spit on your sofa. A lot.

ELISE: I don't want to be presumptuous about your level of stupidity. I don't want to be presumptuous about anything, though, sometimes you can't help it.

KRYSTAL: It's supposed to be a mood-elevating color. *(Quick pause; explaining)* The paint. *(Quick pause)* The color of the paint I used. It's called "Bye-Bye Blues Green."

GIL: I punched the wall. I punched the wall till my hand swelled up and I couldn't move my fingers anymore. It's kind of surreal. Not being able to move my fingers.

(The lights on JODY, SHEILA, GABE, KRYSTAL and GIL fade, as the simultaneous dialog ends. From this point on, when a CHARACTER is not speaking, HE or SHE should freeze in position, as if the video is paused.)

ELISE: I think it's on. *(Pause)* The little green light is definitely on. *(Pause)* That's a good thing, I think. *(Quick pause)* I think it means the camera's on. *(Pause)* I hope that's what it means. *(Pause)* I thought a window was supposed to pop up so I could see myself

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while I'm talking. (*Quick pause*) While I'm recording. (*Pause*) Maybe it's better that I *can't* see myself. (*Quick pause*) Unless that means the camera's not working. In which case, I've been victimized by technology that I don't fully understand.

(*SHEILA has been drinking. SHE's had enough to give her the confidence of her convictions and the courage to articulate them without concern for how they'll be perceived. SHE may have a very slight hint of sloppy speech at this point but should definitely not appear to be completely drunk.*)

SHEILA: It's true. (*Pause*) Eating raw cookie dough can give you worms if you eat enough of it. (*Pause*) So I'm sure my daughter has worms. (*Pause*) Worms aren't something you should play around with. If you get worms, you have a serious problem. I have warned my daughter repeatedly about the connection between cookie dough and worms but she ignores me. She never listens to anything I say. I might as well be talking to the wall. If she was smart, she'd pay attention to me. I have knowledge to share... wisdom to impart.

JODY: When you're two years old, you don't need to know how to do geometry. Why would you? You're two. You learn things when you need to know them.

SHEILA: I've learned a lot of things in my life and hearing about them from me would save her from having to learn the lessons herself the hard way. (*Pause; a major announcement*) Sitting on cold concrete makes you constipated.

JODY: The universe drops things – learning opportunities – into your life when you're ready for them. (*Quick pause*) Whether you think you're ready for them or not. (*Pause*) You ask a question – you put it out into the universe – and the answer comes back to you. (*Quick pause*) Not right away. (*Quick pause*) Not on your timetable. (*Quick pause*) Not when it's convenient for you. But the answer comes back. The answer always comes back.

SHEILA: It's true. It's the honest-to-goodness truth.

GABE: I'm going to get a pony – a brown-and-white-spotted pony – and I'm going to ride it through your living room.

SHEILA: But that information is being kept from the public because of a conspiracy between the media, the medical community and the makers of laxatives.

GABE: And I'm going to spit on your sofa. A lot. I'm going to spit a lot on your sofa. Hopefully, you'll be *sitting* on the sofa when I spit on it. When I ride my brown-and-white-spotted pony through your living room, I'm going to spit on *you* while you're sitting on the sofa

watching a trashy TV show. I'm pretty sure that's what you'd be watching. I would bet money that that's what you'd be watching.

(GIL raises his swollen left hand, completed encased in an Ace bandage.)

GIL: *(Looking at his wrapped-up hand)* It's kind of surreal.

(GIL lowers his left hand.)

SHEILA: If people knew about the constipating effects of sitting on cold concrete and could do something about it, how much Ex-Lax or Metamucil do you think they'd sell? Somebody is slipping somebody some cash to keep it quiet.

ELISE: I'm not stupid! I understand a lot of things. *(Quick pause)* Most things. I just have difficulties... *challenges* with technology that's confusing. *(Quick pause)* Complicated. *(Quick pause)* Arcane. *(Quick pause)* A stupid person wouldn't have used "arcane" in a sentence. A stupid person wouldn't have used it at all. So clearly, I'm not stupid. *(Quick pause)* Just so we understand that. *(Quick pause)* Just so *you* understand that. *I* already understand it, because I'm the one who isn't stupid. *(Quick pause)* That's not to say that *you're* stupid. *(Quick pause)* Whoever you are. *(Quick pause)* *Wherever* you are.

GABE: You were probably watching a trashy TV show when you texted me "We're done." *(Pause)* We are not *done*. We're not finished. We're not over. Our relationship – from *your* perspective – has run its course, but that doesn't mean we're done. Not by a mile. Not by *several* miles.

ELISE: I don't want to be presumptuous about your level of stupidity. I don't want to be presumptuous about anything, though, sometimes, you can't help it. And, by that, I mean that *I* can't help it. I don't think anyone can help it. Sometimes, the presumption is just formed too fast to nip it in the bud. So it may not even be a problem with my understanding the technology. The recording function may not be functioning properly. *(Quick pause)* In which case, I'm in the possession of faulty equipment. And faulty equipment is of no use to anyone. *(Quick pause)* Except repairmen. *(Quick pause)* *Technicians*. *(Quick pause)* People whose job it is to repair faulty equipment. *(Pause)* I'm getting very fond of that expression. *(Pause; speaking it with relish)* "Faulty equipment."

GIL: I can't move my fingers anymore. It's kind of surreal. Not being able to move my fingers.

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GABE: Apparently, you weren't interested in including me in your decision-making process.

JODY: It can be something simple like thinking, "I'm hungry" as you're driving down the highway and – *bam* – you pass a billboard for a restaurant at the next exit.

GABE: Apparently, my opinion doesn't matter.

(SHEILA has gotten increasingly riled up, sipping her cocktail while SHE articulates her point of view.)

SHEILA: The cookie dough people have got to be doing the same thing. They've created a marketing juggernaut. A *juggernaut*. Look how pervasive cookie dough has become. It used to be the only time there was cookie dough was before it was baked into *cookies*. But, now? Now, it's in ice cream and frozen yogurt and who knows what else. And why? To give people worms. The pharmaceutical companies are involved. I'd bet money on it. They must not be selling enough worm medicine for dogs, so they want to branch out to humans, too. They're playing with our lives. They're playing with *worms*. And they're smart. They're diabolical. No one would think that cookie dough could be so harmful. They're counting on our ignorance.

ELISE: I feel compelled to make a list of people whose equipment is faulty. And, after I make the list, I'll walk up to each of the people on it and say, "You have faulty equipment."

SHEILA: They always count on our ignorance. But *I know* about the cookie dough and the worms. And I'm not going to be silent.

ELISE: Of course, I'm not going to make the list now. I'm in the middle of something. *(Quick pause)* As you've noticed. *(Quick pause)* If the camera's working and I'm actually recording this. *(Quick pause)* Otherwise, I've just been talking to myself. *(Quick pause)* Which is futile. *(Quick pause)* Which gives people the impression that you have faulty equipment. *(Quick pause)* In your head. *(Quick pause)* Which is where your brain is. *(Quick pause)* Which I'm sure you already know. Because if you didn't already know that your brain is in your head, I'd feel very sorry for you and, frankly, I wouldn't be able to restrain myself from making all kinds of presumptions about you and your faulty equipment.

GABE: I don't get a vote. *(Pause)* Both of us decided to start the relationship, so why don't we both get to have a say in when or *if* we break up? I want my say. I want my opinion listened to and *respected*. And that can't be done by text. It can't be done by email. You have to see my face. *(Pause; staring defiantly)* Look at my face. Look. At. My. Face.

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JODY: Bam!

GABE: You better be looking at my face.

JODY: Not when it's convenient for you.

GABE: How did we end up like this?

JODY: Bam!

GIL: I punched the wall. *(Pause)* I punched the wall till my hand swelled up and I couldn't move my fingers anymore. *(Pause)* Somebody told me that if you hit something really hard it focuses all the pain in that one spot and the pain you're feeling anyplace else disappears because your brain can only process pain in one place at a time. *(Pause)* Turns out that's not true. *(Pause)* Maybe it has to be *physical* pain you're feeling in other parts of your body. Like if I wrenched my knee and it was hurting and I punched the wall, then, maybe my hand would hurt but my knee wouldn't. Either way, it doesn't seem like a very smart thing to do. Which is one of the reasons I'm surprised that I did it. I'm not a wall-punching kind of guy. Though, I guess now that I've punched a wall, I *am* a wall-punching kind of guy. And as hard as I hit the wall and as much damage as I seem to have done to my hand, I'm probably the captain of the wall-punching guys. If they had a team. Which would be peculiar. But at least their logo would be a no-brainer: A fist hitting a wall. *(Pause)* Even as I was doing it, I knew it wasn't a good idea. I was actually telling myself, "This isn't a good idea." But that wasn't enough to stop me from doing it.

JODY: Bam!

GABE: How did we get to the point where I'm planning to ride a pony through your living room?

ELISE: I don't want to make any presumptions.

SHEILA: It's the pants. *(Pause; indignant, as if we should know what SHE's talking about)* The tight pants the baseball players wear. *(Pause)* I like to sit close to the field, so I don't miss anything. I get there early, so I can watch the players do their stretching exercises. I don't think I'd enjoy the game as much if they wore different pants. Last week, I went to a game with my friend Sherry. The other team's first baseman had dirty pants. He did one of those slide things and he got dirt all over his pants. Not just on the side of his leg. He had big streaks in the back, too. It looked like he had an accident in his pants. Served him right. He was trying to steal second base. That's when he did the slide thing. *(Pause, the verdict is in)* Stealing bases shouldn't be allowed. *(Quick pause)* I know... I know it's part of the game. But it's rude! The pitcher is busy trying to strike out the batter and some other guy is running behind his back. It's bad manners. When you look at the big picture, everything we do can be separated into either good manners or bad manners. *(Class is in session)*

Donating to charity is good manners. Robbing a convenience store is bad manners. *(Pause)* When you get right down to it... rape and murder are just very, very bad manners.

GIL: Even as I was doing it, I knew it wasn't a good idea.

JODY: The universe drops learning opportunities into your life when you're ready for them.

ELISE: Of course, I'm not going to make the list now.

SHEILA: It's bad manners.

GABE: The pony is symbolic. When I was eight, I asked my parents for a pony. *(Pause)* It was a reasonable request. We had a big dog and I helped take care of him, so how much more effort could've been involved with a pony?

ELISE: I'm not stupid!

GABE: So why not get me one? Why not *pony up* for a pony? *(Pause)* That was witty wordplay. In case you didn't catch it. You're not very quick that way, you know. And that's not an insult. It's a fact. Facts can't be insults unless they're delivered in an insulting way. But, I've digressed. I've wandered off on a tangent. I've meandered.

ELISE : Which gives people the impression that you have faulty equipment.

SHEILA: And I'm not going to be silent.

GABE: My parents didn't get me a pony. At least not to keep. *(Quick pause)* Not even to *ride*. *(Pause)* They *rented* a pony for my birthday party, but all I was allowed to do was stand next to it and get my picture taken. A photo-op pony! And, after three hours, some guy with a little trailer came and carted the pony away. *(Pause; a profound realization)* I have been *your* pony. You've stood next to me and gotten your picture taken. And I mean that literally. I have hundreds of pictures of us all dressed up at parties. I suppose your "We're done" text isn't much different than a guy with a little trailer coming to cart me away. *(Pause)* And I will not be carted away!

SHEILA: It's very, very bad manners.

KRYSTAL: I think it's supposed to be funny. Or ironic. *(Quick pause)* Having blue in the name even though the color is green. *(Quick pause)* I'm hoping it does the trick. I need to be elevated – to feel lighter, I mean. There was a shade of deep purple – like eggplant on a bad day – that was part of the mood-elevating line of paint colors, but I didn't feel any lighter when I looked at the sample of it. I don't see how a dark color can elevate your mood. It seems counter-intuitive. Light colors lighten, dark colors darken. So I didn't buy the deep purple. I'm not usually a fan of green but I did feel a little bit happier when I looked at the tiny sample square of Bye-Bye Blues Green. And I figured if a small square of it could make me feel a little bit happier, then painting my whole room with it could make a huge

difference. I stared at the walls for a while, after I was done. They're bright, that's for sure. I smiled a little. That's a step in the right direction. But nothing any more earth shatteringly mood elevating than that, so far. I was kind of hoping that, as soon as the paint dried, I'd have an overwhelming urge to laugh and do cartwheels or backflips. I've never done a backflip. Even the idea of doing a cartwheel scares me, so I'm not sure why I thought a change of paint would turn me into an instantly happy gymnast.

SHEILA: In my mind, I'm somewhere else... I'm somebody else.

JODY: It was a difficult adjustment, after my dad left. He moved to Las Vegas. In the middle of the night. Just packed a few things, threw them in his car and drove to Vegas. He left my mom a voicemail that said, "Marriage is a gamble. We lost. Divorce papers to follow." He left us with a lot of bills and no money to pay them. Things in the house started breaking and we couldn't afford to get them fixed.

GIL: What do you do?

JODY: What *can* you do? *(Pause)* My mom met a guy at her job. She's a dental hygienist. He had an appointment and she cleaned his teeth. My mom says that, when you've had your fingers and dental instruments inside somebody's mouth, you have a very good idea of what kind of person they are. Rick had never had a cavity. His teeth were naturally straight. *Bam!* He's a keeper. Well, good teeth and the fact that he had a job. A *career*. He's a chiropractor. With a bunch of big-name athlete clients. He makes a lot of money and has a big house and three cars. And a son – Ryan – two years older than me. My mom and I moved into Rick's house the day after my mom and him got married. It was nice.

KRYSTAL: I'm hoping the mood-elevating paint will help get me back on track. They didn't have any "Get-back-on-track" paint or any shades designed to keep me from worrying about things that I really shouldn't be worrying about, even though I'm can't stop myself. *(Pause; testifying)* I looked. I even asked the guy behind the counter. When I saw the mood-elevating paint, I figured they'd have a whole line of emotional and psychological improvement colors, but they didn't. Just two mood-elevating shades.

ELISE: I think that people are going to think that I have faulty equipment because I can't think fast enough. That's really what I think.

KRYSTAL: I'm worried about crock pots. *(Pause; explaining)* When people cook things in them. And leave them turned on all day while they're at work and the crock pot is cooking away with nobody watching it. It could explode. There have probably been hundreds of cases of exploding crock pots that've never made it onto the news because the crock pot manufacturers cover it up.

SHEILA: Somebody is slipping somebody some cash to keep it quiet.

KRYSTAL: I don't even own a crock pot. There's something sketchy about food that's been cooking all day. (*Quick pause*) It seems like torture for the food. (*Back on track*) But I still worry about the crock pots of the people who *do* have them. (*Quick pause*) Exploding and catching the house on fire or blasting the windows and doors out from the force of the explosion. Sometimes, I drive down the street and worry about who might've left their crock pot on. An explosion from several blocks away can still do damage to your house. (*An indisputable fact*) Debris flies! Flaming debris can land on your roof and catch your house on fire!

JODY: Conflagration was the word I was looking for. I was doing a crossword puzzle and the clue for 7-Down was "a large, disastrous fire." Thirteen letters. Rick walked into the family room and sat down in his chair and I knew that meant he was going to turn the TV on and watch some game or NASCAR race with the volume up really loud. But, instead, he put the news on – which he almost never does. And like two seconds later, the newscaster guy said they were going to be showing live footage of the "conflagration" that was burning down a bunch of warehouses on the west side of the city. (*Pause; referencing the obvious proof*) You ask a question – you put it out into the universe – and the answer comes back to you. What's a thirteen-letter word for a large, disastrous fire? *Bam!* Conflagration.

KRYSTAL: And olives. I worry about them. (*Quick pause*) Not the olives themselves but the pimento that they're usually stuffed with. There are people who actually think that's how the olives grow in nature. Seriously. There are people who believe that. It makes me feel sad for unstuffed olives. Like kalamata olives – which are *delicious* – are somehow lesser olives because they don't have pimento shoved into them whether they like it or not. (*Pause*) And how did we end up with pimento being what got stuffed into the olives? How many things did the first olive stuffers try before they went with pimento? Was their testing and experimentation a sufficiently thorough process? Was pimento a planned option or a cheap accident? Why not use lemon rind or eggplant? Why not maraschino cherries? (*Quick pause*) No, I take that back. I didn't suggest it. You didn't hear it. Never maraschino cherries. I worry about them. Little jars full of sticky sweet cherries and juice – at ten calories a pop! (*Indignant*) Ten calories for each little maraschino cherry!

JODY: Bam! (*Quick pause*) The universe drops learning opportunities into your life when you're ready for them.

ELISE: So don't call me on the phone.

JODY: Not when it's convenient for you.

ELISE: I hate the phone.

JODY: I didn't want to do it, but Rick was so excited. It was "Take Your Daughter To Work Day" and now that he had a stepdaughter, he was going to make sure I went to work with him, whether I wanted to or not. I definitely wasn't excited. I didn't think being a chiropractor was very interesting and I didn't care about sports, so seeing pictures of Rick and some basketball players with their arms around each other wasn't much of a thrill.

ELISE: Which I'm sure you already know. Because if you didn't already know that, I'd feel very sorry for you.

JODY: And then his receptionist told me about a guy in the waiting room who was unable to move his arms or hands. Important parts of his body were paralyzed because he'd cracked his neck – like a hundred million people do every single day – and paralyzed *himself*. Now *that's* fascinating. That's exciting. The universe had dropped a learning opportunity into my life and I was ready for it. Class was in session. I asked Rick all about it. And he was very informative. It was probably the longest conversation we'd ever had. He got out like a medical mannequin thing and demonstrated how it was possible to paralyze yourself by jerking your neck a certain way or just by cracking it too much. *(Pause)* Good to know.

GIL: You can go from being perfectly healthy one day to being really sick the next.

JODY: You learn things when you need to know them.

GIL: My little sister was playing princess in the backyard – laughing and running around. And then she collapsed. That was it. There hadn't been any warning signs or symptoms before it. She just collapsed mid-giggle about two feet from the swing set.

SHEILA: When you're a little girl with a bossy older sister, you don't have much say in what kind of games you play.

GIL: She just collapsed.

GABE: Just once, I'd like to not be the lucky one.

JODY: My stepbrother used to hold me down on the ground.

GIL: And she laid there. Not moving.

JODY: Sometimes in the backyard behind the recycling bins where nobody could see.

KRYSTAL: I'm worried about the women who raid our recycling bins.

JODY: Sometimes in the house, on the floor in my room. And he'd choke me. Hard.

GIL: Barely breathing.

JODY: So hard that you could see his fingerprints on my neck for two hours. They always faded before my parents came home. It's like he knew exactly how long the fingerprints would last.

GIL: We couldn't believe it. My mom and dad and me. We stood there looking at Molly laying on the ground. It was like we were in slow motion. It seemed like it took an hour for my mom to run over and pick her up off the ground.

JODY: And my parents didn't believe me when I told them he was hurting me.

SHEILA: It's bad manners.

JODY: I think my mom believed me but she wouldn't say so. She didn't do anything that would make my stepdad mad at her. She picked him over me.

GABE: Apparently, my opinion doesn't matter.

JODY: Ryan – my stepbrother – was perfect. He had all A's and was the wide receiver on the football team. The wide receiver is the one who catches the passes the quarterback throws. Everybody said Ryan had great hands. Coaches from colleges came to watch him practice. They offered him scholarships. The college coaches slapped Rick on the back as they watched Ryan catch the balls with his fingerprint-making hands. Rick liked the attention. Having a son who all the college coaches were trying to recruit made Rick feel like a big man. He didn't say so, but it did. Ryan walked around the house like he was a freakin' superhero. And when he choked me, he looked down at me like he thought I should feel lucky that he was giving me attention. (*Quick pause*) Like I should be grateful. And when I screamed, he put his hand over my mouth. He kept one hand on my throat while he put the other hand over my mouth. And he smiled.

ELISE: Texting allows me to carry on more than one conversation at the same time. You can't do that, if you're on the phone with somebody. They demand your full attention. They get impatient when you take a couple seconds to organize your thoughts before you respond. They judge you if you take those couple seconds.

GIL: When we got to the hospital, it was like an army of nurses and doctors attacked us. I know they weren't really attacking us, but that's what it felt like. They grabbed Molly and...

JODY: (*Interjecting*) Bam!

GIL: (*Continuing as if uninterrupted*) She disappeared down the hall. My mom followed them. Some nurse or whatever with a paper mask on took my dad into a room to talk about insurance and stuff.

KRYSTAL: They have long sticks and wear masks. (*Quick pause; clarifying*) The women who raid our recycling bins. On Monday morning, before the recycling truck comes to empty all the bins on our street, an army of women carrying long, pointed sticks and wearing masks invades our neighborhood and collects all the cans and bottles. With impressive precision. They're not playing around.

They're on a mission. *(Pause)* I'm not worried about the sticks or the masks or even having my recycling bin raided – though I think they should ask first. Two blocks over, there's another bunch of women who raid the recycling bins on *that* street. What's going to happen when they all start expanding their territory – gradually adding another street and another until we're right in the middle of a turf war between two gangs of recycling bin raiders?! It's a scary proposition. And with good reason! They're *armed*. A long, pointed stick can do a lot of damage. You can poke somebody's eye out. A long, pointed stick is nothing to joke about. And when everybody has one and valuable recycling bin territory is at stake, it could get ugly. Very ugly. There would be bloodshed. It could be a *West Side Story* kind of rumble except without the singing and dancing. And who wants that in front of their house? Not me. *(Quick pause)* So you can see why I'm worried. *(Quick pause)* About the recycling bins. *(Quick pause)* And the olives. *(Quick pause)* And the crock pots. *(Quick pause)* And the mood-elevating paint. *(Pause)* And me. *(Pause)* I'm worried about myself.

GABE: Just once.

ELISE: It's selfish, I know. But I care more about my communication comfort than yours or anybody else's. And I don't care if you have a problem with that. I don't. Because it's your problem.

GABE: Every relationship has one. The person that everybody thinks is lucky that their significant other is with them. You can tell if it's you. Even if your friends don't verbalize it, they'll give you a look. And you know on which side of the lucky fence you're standing.

GIL: The doctors said we were lucky we got Molly to the hospital so fast. Another few minutes and she'd probably have died.

JODY: Last Saturday, my mom and Rick went to a wedding. Somebody Rick knows from work. And they stayed overnight at the hotel where they had the wedding reception. Before they left, my mom showed me pictures of the hotel on the computer. It looked nice. She said it would be like having a princess weekend.

SHEILA: My sister and the kids in our neighborhood loved hide-and-seek, so that's what we played. *(Pause)* And it wasn't much fun for me. I didn't really like the hiding or the seeking. I still don't. If I have to look for something too long in a store, I stop wanting to find it. So, playing hide-and-seek didn't have much appeal for me. I played along because it's what my sister and the other kids said we were gonna play.

JODY: I was alone in the house for a couple hours, while Ryan was at practice or out with his friends or something. I don't know for sure. It's not my job to keep track of his schedule.

GABE: I'm always the lucky one.

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JODY: When Ryan got home, I was in the family room. (*Quick pause*) Watching TV. (*Quick pause*) It's what you do in the family room. Ryan threw his gym bag down on the floor. It wasn't zipped shut and some of his dirty clothes came out. And I said, "Smooth move, Mr. MVP." That's all I said. I didn't even laugh after I said it. And – *Bam!* – Ryan grabbed me and shoved me down onto the floor next to his gym bag and the dirty clothes that fell out of it. And he choked me. Harder than ever before. So hard that I knew it would take longer than two hours for the fingerprints to fade. He spit in my face and I called him a bad name. He didn't appreciate that. He tightened his grip around my throat. I screamed. Louder than usual. I don't know what good I thought it was going to do, since we were the only people in the house. But I screamed. He took one hand off my throat and I thought he was going to stop choking me altogether but he didn't. He grabbed the smelly T-shirt that was halfway out of his gym bag and he started stuffing it into my mouth. I gagged – from his hand choking me and from the T-shirt being stuffed into my mouth – and I thought I was going to die. I actually thought, "I'm going to die on the floor with a dirty T-shirt coming out of my mouth like cotton vomit."

SHEILA: Like I said, I didn't have much say in the matter.

GIL: The doctors stabilized her – that's what they said – "We were able to stabilize her." When they told us that in the waiting room, it was like I had a rhyme bouncing around in my head like the ball in a pinball machine. "Able to stable... able to stable... able to stable."

GABE: No matter who I'm dating, people always wonder how I ended up in a relationship with such a prize, when I'm such a... me.

SHEILA: One Saturday afternoon, when I was eight, we were playing hide-and-seek, as usual, and I just wandered off.

JODY: I passed out.

SHEILA: I'd been hiding for a while and got bored and I was annoyed that nobody had found me, yet. They couldn't have been looking very hard. Or maybe they were just really bad finders. Either way, I was bored and annoyed. So, I wandered off.

JODY: Unconscious. I don't know for how long.

SHEILA: Just walked away, like a fed-up factory worker walking off the job.

JODY: When I woke up, Ryan wasn't in the family room anymore. I looked. He wasn't there. But I know what he did.

ELISE: So clearly I'm not stupid.

GABE: Not by a mile.

JODY: (*Intensely*) I know what he did.

SHEILA: At first, I was only going to go a couple of blocks to the health food store down the street and get one of those vegan oatmeal raisin

cookies. They're delicious, though, if you eat too many of them, they're like a laxative. (*Quick pause*) That's just a tip. Do what you want with the information. (*Pause; getting back on track*) After I got the cookie, I kept walking... farther and farther away from my neighborhood. I must have walked a mile. When you're eight and you walk a mile from your neighborhood, you might as well be in a foreign country. Nothing looked familiar... not even remotely familiar. (*Pause; SHE's reliving the walk*) When I got tired of walking, I sat down on a bench outside a grocery store. They had one of those horse rides...

GIL: (*In lilted reverie*) Able stable. Able stable.

SHEILA: (*Sharply, at first*) Not a real horse. That would be messy. No one wants to step over big piles of horse... droppings, when they're going into a grocery store. (*Quick pause*) The horse was a ride for little kids. You put a quarter in it and it rocked back and forth. (*Pause*) I wanted to ride it, but I didn't have a quarter. So, I asked a lady with a big, lime-green purse to give me one and she did. I was a charming child. I was polite. I asked her with a sweet voice and a pretty smile. (*Pause; remembering*) You don't get to ride very long for a quarter. Twenty-five cents doesn't buy you much time in the saddle. And I wanted to keep riding. "Gimme a quarter to make the horse work!" (*Quick pause*) I demanded money from everybody who walked by me on their way into the store. No more sweet voice and pretty smile. I needed a steady flow of quarters to keep my horse going and I was gonna get it. I didn't care if people thought I was rude. I didn't live in their neighborhood, so good manners be damned. And demanding the money worked. The quarters kept coming and the horse kept rocking. (*A very happy recollection*) That horse kept rocking for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. You might say I rode off into the sunset. (*SHE smiles and revels in the memory, before her smile fades*) After a couple hours, I wondered if anybody was looking for me. Nobody at the grocery store seemed to care that I was riding the horse all afternoon without a parent anywhere in sight. People gave me quarters, but no one asked where my mommy or daddy was. (*A startling truth*) Children get snatched from amusement parks all the time. That's a fact. But I'm living proof that children riding horses in front of grocery store are given money but not much attention. Nobody tried to snatch me. If I was a more sensitive child, I might have taken that personally.

JODY: When I looked in the mirror, the fingerprints were already faded. I got on the computer and updated the status on my profile. "Faded."

GIL: The doctors said she'd need a bone marrow transplant. As soon as possible. They wanted my mom and dad and I to get tested to see if any of us was a donor match.



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FIND ME

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