

REALLY BAD ADVICE

By Kelly Meadows

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CHARACTERS

CARISSA	A student forced into writing an advice column for the student newspaper.
MS. (or MR.). CARTER*	The sponsor of the paper.
CHRISTA	
LAURA	
JOHN	
MRS. ROSS	Mother of a student (Beckley)
SOCCER COACH*	
WRITER*	A sloppy dresser unhappy about critical students
STUDENT 1*	Critical of writer
STUDENT 2*	
STUDENT 3*	
WRITER'S MOTHER	
GEORGETTE	Another letter writer
HER BOYFRIEND	
GABRIEL	A letter writer
STUDENTS	(with no lines, but who laugh at Gabriel's plight)
HIS MOTHER	
HIS FATHER	
CLOSET KLEPTO*	
LAZY LONNIE*	
BECKLEY	Student on the girls soccer team
CARL*	(Carla if female), a custodian
MACK*	(Mary, if female), a custodian
PRINCIPAL*	
ATTENDEE*	At PTA meeting
CARISSA'S MOTHER	

PARENTS*

At the PTA, three with speaking roles, the others speak as a group

LETTER READER (female)

JOCK

HIS COACH (male)

GIRL 1

COLLEEN

RANDY

LEVONNE

CATHERINE

CARISSA'S FATHER

STUDENT 4*

BOY

GIRL 2

His ex girlfriend

FRENCH TEACHER*

KELLY (female)

ANGIE

MICHELLE

ALFONSO

BLAKE

PATRICK

THE U.S. PRESIDENT*

SECRET SERVICE AGENTS* (optional silent roles)

STUDENTS (non-speaking roles)

*Characters, listed in order of appearance (other than Carissa & Carter, these roles can be doubled, tripled, or more!) While many of these characters are presented as specifically male or female, many of them, including CARTER, can be played by either male or female simply by changing the references to gender in the script. ("M or F" roles are marked by a *) Since there are many small roles in this play, it offers a great opportunity for performers to play a variety of character roles. This play can be performed by a large cast of 30 or even 50, or by a smaller cast of 15-20. Total speaking roles: 12M, 18F, 18E (48 total)*

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PROPS

An apple and a rag (for John)

Three very large books (for Carter)

IPods or other portable music devices (for several students)

Cell phone for Carissa

Court Judgment (papers stapled together, for Mrs. Ross)

School supplies for the students: books, notebooks, etc. Kelly will need a notebook with a “form” or paper to tear out.

Medal on a necklace (for President)

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SCENE 1

OPENING SET: *This play happens at school in hallways, snack bars, offices, etc. The location of the action isn't as important as keeping the pace moving; much of this could even be done on a bare stage. One idea for a set, however, is to have a collage of school related areas as described earlier, or of very large "advice letters" which would even be projected on the back of the set. A "reality" based set isn't necessary, so much as a set that conveys the topics of the play. With a bit of imaginative design, the show can be set at your own school.*

CARISSA: *(begins by addressing the audience.)* I wanted to be a reporter. I wanted to write in-depth investigative journalistic articles, win Pulitzer prizes, and uncover all kinds of wrongdoing in Washington, DC! I mean, how hard could that be? But, fame and fortune would have to wait. My first step would be to take an introductory journalism class and get a mundane job at the high school student paper. You know, important stories like "are they serving junk food in the cafeteria?" *(over the top outrage)* Are you kidding me, a student is drinking a cola on campus! But sometimes, you wind up getting the job at the paper that you want the least.

(CARTER enters on this line, walking very purposefully, to address CARISSA.)

Like when the faculty sponsor of your paper comes up to you out of the blue and says:

MS. CARTER: *(leaving no room for discussion)* Carissa, our advice columnist just went into juvenile detention and I want you to take over for her.

CARISSA: *(still to audience)* Advice? I wasn't in the mood. *(a bit sassy, to CARTER)* I don't do advice, Ms. Carter.

(As CARTER speaks, three students, CHRISTA, LAURA, and JOHN, enter near CARISSA, and get into position so CARISSA can speak to them quickly, THEY don't pay attention to CARISSA until SHE speaks to them.)

CARTER: Yes you do. I always hear you telling people what to do.
(watches knowingly)

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CARISSA: *(to CHRISTA, dissing her outfit)* You shouldn't wear that, it's so 2009.

(CHRISTA is offended, then CARISSA says to LAURA.)

You don't need to do homework, let's go see a movie! *(to JOHN, indicating LAURA)* Dump Laura...

(LAURA is scandalized!)

...and go out with me! *(to audience)* Sure, I was great at giving advice—that nobody wanted to hear.

(ONE by ONE the STUDENTS approach her)

CHRISTA: If *you* don't like what I'm wearing, that probably means it's in style.

LAURA: Your taste in movies is awful. I think I'll study.

JOHN: Go out with you? I'd rather polish apples for the geometry teacher.

(JOHN pulls out a rag and an apple, and starts to polish. ALL THREE STUDENTS exit together in a huff.)

CARISSA: *(calling after)* The geometry teacher has no teeth!

CARTER: *(stepping back in, having proved her point)* So, Carissa, it's time for you to turn over a new leaf. Learn to help people.

CARISSA: *(addressing the audience)* I covered girls sports for our high school paper. Now I was supposed to help people with problems. *(to CARTER)* I have my own problems, thank you.

CARTER: *(happily laying down the law)* So do I, but you're going to solve at least one of them.

CARISSA: *(too sassy for her own good)* I already have some advice for you: ask someone who cares.

CARTER: And I have some *better* advice for you: do what you're told or I'll put you to work on the student literary publication. *(happily, knowing CARISSA won't like it)* I'll let you read all our original student poetry! Every... last... rhyme...

CARISSA: *(scared)* Anything but that! Oh, all right.

(CARTER brings a big book and lays it on a table, or hands it to CARISSA, who has trouble balancing it.)

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CARTER: Here. *Dear Abby Collected Works, 1959 to Today.* Oh, and here...

(Brings in a bigger book, piled on top. CARISSA struggles even more.)

What Teenagers Should Know. And one more. *(SHE has an even bigger book.)*

CARISSA: What's that?

CARTER: *What Teenagers Shouldn't Know.*

(Piles this one on top; THEY BOTH look at each other, noting the irony.)

I'll keep it. *(takes it back)* Now get to reading, you start tomorrow. *(hands her some letters)* Here's the first batch of letters, some for print, and some for an ongoing online column! *(exit)*

CARISSA: *(looking over the letters with disdain, then addressing the audience)* The best way to get kicked out of an extra-curricular activity is to really stink it at. Like when the girl on the soccer team who can't kick gets benched.

(Enter MRS. ROSS, mother of BECKLEY, plus BECKLEY's COACH. COACH enters first, with MRS. ROSS following uncomfortably close.)

MRS. ROSS: Why isn't Beckley getting more field time?

COACH: *(stops and whirls around to face MRS. ROSS, stopping her gait.)* Because she stinks, Mrs. Ross. Your daughter stinks.

MRS. ROSS: This isn't about winning. It's about self esteem.

COACH: We've lost 10 games because of Beckley. So right about now, *no one* has any self esteem. *(happy)* When she's on the bench everyone feels a lot better.

MRS. ROSS: That's not fair!

COACH: She's very proud. I painted her name on it. *(trying to sell the idea)* "Beckley's Bench." She'll be there all year.

MRS. ROSS: I'll see you in court. *(starts to leave)*

COACH: Better *in* court, than on it. *(follows her out)*

CARISSA: *(moving closer to the exit, calling offstage to CARTER)* Why can't Janiece keep the job? We'll call it "Ask a Delinquent!"

CARTER: *(from off stage)* I said get to work!

CARISSA: Oh, all right. *(Looks through the letters, at first bored, then shocked! And then... mischievous, to audience, unveiling her plan)* So I decided I would give everyone the absolute worst advice I could. I mean, anyone who writes their high school paper *[if desired, use the name of your high school paper throughout the script]* for advice is just asking for it. Everyone knew Janiece was gone, but they

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didn't know who was replacing her. I didn't want them to know it was me doling out the advice, so I came up with a pen name.

(Enter WRITER, and THREE STUDENTS who are in a different part of the stage than CARISSA: as this scene goes on, CARISSA is reading a letter from the WRITER as WRITER recites the letter.)

WRITER: *(hands at sides, facing the audience, and reciting)* Dear Hope
Hopeless. Nobody like the clothes I wear.

CARISSA: *(looking at WRITER)* Duh.

WRITER: People make fun of me for no reason.

STUDENT 1: When you dress like that there's plenty of reason.

STUDENT 2: It doesn't match.

WRITER: *(proudly defiant)* I don't care if it matches. I want to express myself. Freedom of speech through textile display.

STUDENT 3: *(snotty)* If you can express *yourself*, I can express *myself*. I'll express *myself* by saying that you should never express *yourself* like that where anyone can see it.

STUDENT 1: Where did you get that, anyway?

WRITER: Express Clothing, of course.

STUDENT 2: Well it's awful. And just for that, we're kicking you out of science fiction club.

(The THREE STUDENTS exit, victorious, leaving WRITER to think it over.)

WRITER: *(more relaxed)* Look Hope, when you get kicked out of sci-fi club because of your clothing, things are pretty hopeless. But I like what I'm wearing. I just want people to leave me alone about it. What should I do? Signed, Outcast Outfit.

CARISSA: Dear Outcast Outfit. First of all, I'm pretty sure I know who you are ...

(WRITER gets frightened momentarily.)

...and if I am, they're absolutely right. You really need to find a way to put it together. Most of the kids at this school aren't grown up enough to endure bad fashion, and let's be real, bad fashion is bad fashion. If you're that disorganized on the outside, you're probably a total wreck on the inside. So in summary, go shopping with your mom because she has better taste than you do.

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WRITER'S MOTHER: (*enters and approached WRITER, while speaking across the stage to CARISSA*) I've tried, Hope. I've tried taking her [*him*] shopping. I'm embarrassed to be seen in public with my own children. The only thing left is foster care.

CARISSA: See? My advice is harsh, but correct.

MOTHER: Okay, one more chance. Wal-Mart or bust!

(*WRITER and MOTHER exit, and another letter writer, GEORGETTE, enters, with her BOYFRIEND.*)

GEORGETTE: Dear Hope Hopeless, I am beyond hope. My boyfriend wants to break up. He wants to end it. I, on the other hand, want to get married. I want children. I want a life together. He says he doesn't want to spend even another ten seconds with me. In one week we went from...

BOYFRIEND: (*loving, close to GEORGETTE*) I want to spend the rest of my life with you!

GEORGETTE: To...

BOYFRIEND: (*the opposite! HE runs away*) I can't stand the sight of you!

GEORGETTE: Everything was fine until I stopped doing his History homework.

BOYFRIEND: Who cares what happened in 1980?

GEORGETTE: (*incensed*) A Flock Of Seagulls happened in 1980!

BOYFRIEND: Just another bad hair band. Bad hair, bad music, one low price! See, Georgette, we just aren't meant for each other.

GEORGETTE: What should I do hope? I love him and can't live a day without him. Signed: Lost in Love

CARISSA: (*we can see SHE'S trying to aggravate GEORGETTE*) Dear Lost. You really are lost, but in love? With yourself, maybe! How do you expect to keep a boy if you don't do his homework and listen to the kind of music he likes? The boys at this school are stupid, selfish, and ... stunningly gorgeous! So if you don't do everything they ask, you'll just get left in the cold and someone else will move in. Now buckle it up or stay single.

GEORGETTE: That's pretty bleak.

BOYFRIEND: I like it. (*hands her some papers*) Here.

GEORGETTE: What's this?

BOYFRIEND: Algebra. Seven minus negative two. I think it's six.

GEORGETTE: (*overreacting*) Six? Are you serious? What is wrong with you? Six!

BOYFRIEND: Then what is it?

GEORGETTE: I'll only tell you if you go out with me again. Forever!

BOYFRIEND: (*with no interest*) Well... okay. Forever it is.

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GEORGETTE: (*gleeful!*) It's... nine.

BOYFRIEND: Thanks! Oh, and I'm dumping you again!

GEORGETTE: (*miserable*) But you promised!

BOYFRIEND: I'll promise anything over math homework.

GEORGETTE: (*far too miserable*) My life is over!

BOYFRIEND: (*relieved*) And mine is just beginning!

(*THEY exit, opposite ways.*)

CARISSA: Then of course, there was the kid who had trouble with his parents.

GABRIEL: Dear Hope Hopeless. I never thought I'd be writing to you. I didn't think boys wrote to advice columnists. I thought everyone would make fun of me.

(*A GROUP of STUDENTS come on and laugh, then leave, GABRIEL is despondent.*)

CARISSA: And who can blame them? Next time, just text to Hope's private hotline and no one will know...

GABRIEL: (*whiny*) Won't you know the number it came from and tell the whole school it's me?

CARISSA: (*checks her phone*) Maybe... Gabriel Johnson.

(*GABRIEL reacts on hearing his name.*)

Maybe I will.

GABRIEL: I'm having a problem with my parents. They never listen to me.

(*His MOM and DAD enter, approaching him, but speak more to CARISSA.*)

DAD: We listen, Hope. We just don't like what he has to say.

MOM: Why should we listen to him? Does he ever listen to us?

GABRIEL: They always bring up stuff I did when I was a kid and use it to embarrass me.

MOM: He's been complaining about that since he was three years old and he ran naked through the unemployment office.

GABRIEL: They belittle my accomplishments.

DAD: Nobel prize? There's five, and you only got one.

GABRIEL: And they make me clean up after the dog.

MOM: (*ordering*) Clean up after the dog.

GABRIEL: I don't want to!

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MOM: Didn't you want the dog?

GABRIEL: I didn't know it would poop!

MOM: I didn't think about *you* pooping until I had you, but I cleaned up after you. What did you think it would do?

GABRIEL: I don't know. Bark? Eat? (*more to himself*) Bite you, if I'm lucky. (*approaches CARISSA*) So Hope, I'm not sure what to do. My folks just don't get it.

CARISSA: This one's easy. You're fifteen, sixteen, something like that. Your parents aren't supposed to understand you. So every time they say something, you need to play up that misunderstanding. What parent isn't tired of hearing their kid say "you don't understand?" I say use it, cop out on it, and then do what you want.

FATHER: You need to clean up the dog poop.

GABRIEL: You'll never understand me!

MOTHER: Do your homework.

GABRIEL: (*growing to like this idea*) You don't understand.

FATHER: Take out the trash

GABRIEL: (*even more expressive*) You don't understand.

MOTHER: You're grounded for a week.

GABRIEL: You don't understand!

MOTHER: (*sweetly*) I'm your mother,

DAD: and I'm our father

BOTH: (*ganging up on GABRIEL*) And we don't have to.

MOM: Now, trash...

DAD: ...homework...

MOM: ...and poop.

(THEY BOTH point, and GABRIEL goes offstage to start doing chores, PARENTS high five, then exit as well.)

CARISSA: (*to the audience*) The more bad advice I gave, the better I got at it. Soon the entire student body turned into selfish, hurtful brats.

CLOSET KLEPTO: (*enters, reading a response*) Dear Closet Klepto... You work hard. If you want to steal cheeseburgers and give them to your friends, you go right ahead. And make sure I'm the first in line. Signed, Hope Hopeless. (*thinks it over*) Cool! (*exits*)

LAZY LONNIE: (*also reading a response*) Dear Lazy Lonnie... Homework? How rude of teachers to impose upon our busy social lives. Homework is for unpopular kids who don't have anything to do, or students whose portable musical device is temporarily out of service. For the rest of you, evenings are for Facebook, texting, and fighting with your parents. Signed, Hope Hopeless. (LONNIE looks at some books, then throws them down and runs off, happily)

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CARISSA: And my favorite response, which I channeled through the soccer coach.

BECKLEY: (*lights up on BECKLEY sitting on a bench.*) I'm stuck sitting on the bench watching the soccer team. First the coach painted my name on it, and then he coated it with an adhesive. I've been sitting here for a very long time. My portable listening device ran low on batteries, and I really have to pee. What should I do? Please hurry, my batteries are really running low.

COACH: (*enters, and lectures BECKLEY, almost perverse*) You should sit there! You're a loser and you always will be! You've ruined the team's chances and you're ruined my job! There's a lot of parents who want to can your hiney, but lucky for you they can't because I had the foresight to glue it to the seat. So you can just stay there for all I'm concerned.

MRS. ROSS: (*enters, walking fast and determined, and speaking brusquely*) Now, not only are you sued, but you're fired as well.

COACH: Good. Now I can work for a school with real athletes!

MRS. ROSS: I don't think so. My court judgment requires you to perform community service by serving as assistant coach to a team of six year olds. Your job is to wipe noses, wash soccer balls, and change diapers for everybody's little brother. (*hands him the court judgment with a terse smile*) Enjoy. (*exit*)

(*COACH also exits in another direction, perturbed by the paper.*)

BECKLEY: (*looking around*) Can I get up now?

(*NO ONE answers, but SHE gets up, picking up the bench and taking it with her.*)

CARTER: (*enters, on a mission*) Carissa, there are some big problems at this school, and I believe you started it.

CARISSA: No, you started it, Ms. Carter, by making me write this column.

CARTER: This place is in an uproar! I'm afraid our graduation rate is going to be lower than 50% and we're going to have to cancel the prom due to lack of interest.

CARISSA: (*sarcastic to the last breath, the entire cast joins her for this next line, from offstage*) Cancel the prom? Noooo! (*by herself*) What memories will they have, this class of [*current school year*] as they flip veggie burgers for slightly over minimum wage, cursing the sad but true advice of Hope Hopeless? To think, people actually paid attention to me and lost their one and only chance at Senior Prom!

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CARTER: “Hope” got in a lot of trouble at the Parent-Teacher meeting the other day. You’re lucky that so far no one knows who she is.

CARISSA: *(to audience)* My mom was at that meeting. As we know, schools always encourage teens to be creative until it actually happens. Then they put a stop to it. I was being creative, and no one was encouraged.

SCENE 2

Some transition music can play as the stage is set up for a PTA meeting; rather than do this during a blackout, have some fun with it. Two custodians, CARL and MACK, are setting up chairs, along with a podium or lectern for the PRINCIPAL; any flags, state local, national, school-oriented, could be good here as well. Stage hands or other performers can also help set up.

CARL: *(THEY’re a bit gruff)* These chairs look so uncomfortable.

MACK: That’s because they don’t want this meeting to go on too long.

CARL: We used to do that with the high school play.

MACK: How many do we need?

CARL: Only *[however many are set up]*. Are parents even concerned with their kids’ education anymore?

MACK: I think they’re meeting to discuss the school newspaper. And that new advice column. *Backtalk your parents! Don’t do your homework. Dump your boyfriend! Give your little sister fleas!* It’s revolting! I never miss it!

CARL: I wish I had a column like that when I was growing up. It would have legitimized everything I ever did. *(sarcastic, looking off stage)* Oooo, it’s the principal! I was always in the office. We were close.

(PEOPLE start to enter, including the PRINCIPAL.)

PRINCIPAL: Are you finished setting up, the meeting is about to begin!

CARL: Yes, we’re finished.

PRINCIPAL: Good, then get out!

CARL: Out? What is this, the Chinese Olympics?

PRINCIPAL: I don’t want people to see the help! Only the results!

MACK: But-

PRINCIPAL: Out!

MACK: *(catty, to PRINCIPAL)* There’s gum on your chair!

PRINCIPAL: Out!! Gum on my chair, are we in fifth grade?

MACK: I was for three years. Got good at it!

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(PRINCIPAL glares at MACK, MACK and CARL both exit. SEVERAL PARENTS, including MRS. ROSS and CARISSA'S MOTHER, come in, as well as COACH and CARTER. PARENTS can start taking seats.)

MRS. ROSS: *(still bothering COACH)* My daughter Beckley deserves to play soccer!

COACH: No she doesn't.

MRS. ROSS: We still can't get her off the bench! You've superglued her!

COACH: You can get something to match at Ikea.

MRS. ROSS: Don't you impose your values on my family!

PRINCIPAL: If you'll excuse me, we'd like to begin the meeting. Take your seats please.

(PEOPLE get organized.)

MRS. ROSS: *(already riled up, now turning to someone in attendance who is already seated)* Excuse me, but I always sit there for parent-teacher meetings.

ATTENDEE: *(returning the attitude)* Excuse me, but these seats aren't reserved.

MRS. ROSS: Excuse me twice over, but everyone knows that's my seat.

ATTENDEE: Excuse me thrice and a half, but I've never heard of such a thing.

MRS. ROSS: Excuse me to the fourth power, but you're not "everyone." You're, in fact, not even "anyone." Is your kid new? Get to the back!

PRINCIPAL: Excuse ME to the fifth! But sit down and shut up! I can't even tell the parents from the children anymore.

MRS. ROSS: *(to ATTENDEE, sitting down)* I can't believe I have to sit next to you!

PRINCIPAL: Now...We're here to talk about the advice column that is ruining our civilization. First, I think I should introduce you to the person responsible for it, Ms. Carter, the sponsor of the student newspaper.

CARTER: *(defiant)* My students deserve, and will continue to demand, freedom of speech!

PARENT 1: Free speech? She told my daughter to put dog poop in the neighbor's pool.

PARENT 2: *(this character is really stupid)* She told my son to start speaking French!

CARTER: So?

PARENT 2: He's taking Spanish!

CARTER: Oh, the ignominy of it all.

PARENT 2: *(can't pronounce the word)* What's ignominy?

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CARTER: A word you should have learned in 9th grade.

PARENT 2: I didn't finish school. And I'll be doggoned if my kids will either.

ALL THE PARENTS: Do something! (*THEY ad lib their annoyance*)

CARISSA'S MOM: (*standing up, shouting over the din*) I want Hope Hopeless expelled from school.

CARISSA: (*to audience, away from the main action*) That was my mom. She didn't know I was writing the column.

CARTER: I think we can find some other way to rein her in.

PARENT 1: (*as mob mentality starts to take over*) Expelled! (*riling EVERYONE up*) Are you with me? Expelled!

EVERYONE: Expelled!

CARISSA'S MOTHER: Expelled! We don't have time for this in high school. It needs to be a positive learning environment.

PRINCIPAL: Everyone sit down! Do I have to treat you like I treat the students?

MRS. ROSS: I told you I don't like sitting next to-

PRINCIPAL: (*very authoritative*) Sit down! Even you, Mrs. Ross.

(*THEY do, disappointed.*)

CARTER: Everyone needs to think! What if it was *your* daughter?

Would you still want her expelled? (*creepy*) Because somebody here is Hope Hopeless' mother.

PARENT 1: Then we should expel her mother!

PARENT 3: How do we do that?

PARENT 2: (*comes up with a great idea!*) She can't participate. She's got to stay away from PTA, from soccer games...!

A GAGGLE OF THEM: (*chanting*) Expel Hope Hopeless, Expel Hope Hopeless! Expel Hope Hopeless!

CARTER: (*holds up her hands to quiet them down*) You realize one of you is asking for your own child to be kicked out of school.

COACH: We can't expel the goalie, we need her!

PARENT 3: I want to know who her mother is, and kick her out of the PTA. And kick her daughter out of school!

(*EVERYONE starts getting out of control and accusing everyone else.*)

PARENT 1: (*to PARENT 2*) It's you!

PARENT 2: (*to PARENT 3*) It's you, I know it's you. I never trusted you.

PARENT 3: (*to CARISSA'S MOTHER*) Your children are a menace. A nuisance. Ever since you wouldn't schedule a play date for my daughter in third grade I knew you were nothing but trouble!

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CARISSA'S MOM: How dare you! Your daughter tortures us with death metal while (*snooty*) my daughter delicately appreciates the light classics. You know they're not compatible. Now she's telling other students to follow their basest instincts. (*shouting, pointing to PARENT 3*) This is Hope Hopeless' mother! [*or father!*] (*pandemonium!!!*)

PRINCIPAL: Everyone calm down!

(*NO ONE listens.*)

I said calm down and bring this meeting to order! I said...

CARISSA'S MOTHER: (*shouting over the racket*) We heard you! We don't want order. We want action! We want expulsion!

EVERYONE: (*chants*) Action! Expulsion! Action! Expulsion! Action! Expulsion! (*THEY repeat this as the lights go down, or as THEY march out.*)

PARENT 2: (*in the blackout after things quiet down, or as the last one marching out, giggling*) Look, the principal has gum on his butt!

(*Under low lights, MACK and CARL enter to take down chairs, again, other characters or stage hands can help.*)

CARL: Darn, Mack, that was one heck of a meetin'.

MACK: I'll say, Carl. Sometimes I'm glad I didn't get any education. It'd be a shame to waste all that time in school and come out just the same as when you went in.

SCENE 3

CARISSA: As you can see, I was very unpopular, and I had a really big secret to keep from my mother. I had to take serious action, so I wrote myself for some advice.

LETTER READER: Dear Hope Hopeless. Nobody likes me, but nobody knows who I am. I can't talk to anyone about it because then everyone would know that nobody likes me. Right now somebody might like me because nobody knows my identity, but this would change from everyone to no one if anyone found out. I need someone to talk to, but not someone who would tell anyone where everyone could hear. Does anyone know what I should do? Signed, Help the Helpless, Hope Hopeless! (*exit, confused*)

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CARISSA: *(SHE then answers herself)* Dear Help the Helpless. The best advice I can offer is please see an English teacher immediately! *(to audience)* Obviously I was my own worst enemy.

WRITER: *(this is the sci-fi student from earlier... enters, with a different costume, a bit less obnoxious than the first, stands in the same position as last time and recites)* Dear Hope, I've redone my wardrobe but I still don't have any friends.

CARISSA: Maybe it's because nobody likes you, no matter what you wear.

WRITER: Dear Hope, That's not very nice.

CARISSA: Maybe you need to change yourself rather than your wardrobe.

WRITER: Dear Hope, That's too much work.

CARISSA: Then stay unpopular, see if I care.

WRITER: Dear Hope... *(thinks it over, almost ready to admit fault, then changes mind)* Okay! *(exit)*

JOCK: *(enters, wearing a letter jacket or other sports uniform, reading a letter as well)* Dear Hope, the coach won't let me play ball unless I get a B in history. How can I get the history teacher to give me a better grade? Signed, Jockeying Jockboy

CARISSA: Dear Jockeying Jockboy... Study. Or your football career will be history.

JOCK: I don't study. Studying is for losers.

CARISSA: And yet, you're a loser without studying, so apparently this is actually a club *anyone* can join.

JOCK: I want a way to threaten my teacher so she'll understand the gravity of the situation.

CARISSA: *(frustrated with JOCK)* Threaten her with taking her class over. That should do it.

(CARISSA addresses the audience, as GIRL 1 and COLLEEN walk in.)

I saw the results of my advice everywhere.

GIRL 1: *(to COLLEEN)* I don't think we should be friends any more, Colleen. You're holding me back. You're keeping me down. Besides, if we're not friends, I can move in on your boyfriend. *(very flip)* He's planning to break up with you anyway.

(COLLEEN after a pause, cries and runs away.)

JOCK'S COACH: *(enters, unfeeling)* Now, what's the problem, boy?

JOCK: *(too cocky for his own good)* Coach, if you don't let me play first string, I'm going to quit the team. I'm too good to waste my high school days on the bench.

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COACH: Okay... then you're off the team. I don't have time for you.
You're lazy, shiftless, and your girlfriend's going to dump you. *(exit)*

(JOCK after a pause, cries, and runs off just like COLLEEN did.)

BECKLEY: *(enters, still walking with a bench)* Will someone help me get off this thing?

CARISSA: *(had enough of BECKLEY)* Why don't you just change clothes?

BECKLEY: *(thinks, a bit embarrassed.)* Oh. Yeah. Duh. *(exits)*

CARISSA: Then, finally, it happened.

(Enter RANDY, LeVONNE, and CATHERINE, three students with headphones, dancing to the latest hit song—feel free to play an upbeat song over the PA to show what's going on inside their heads.)

Nothing worse than someone waltzing down the hall not paying attention to where they're going! And worse, where *I'm* going!

(THEY bump into her, any music stops, books and papers go flying all over the place.)

RANDY: *(trying to pick up his stuff)* Oh great, I have an exam in five minutes.

LEVONNE: *(sorting through papers)* Me too, can I borrow your notes, Randy?

RANDY: *(as EVERYONE continually tries to pick stuff up)* If you don't know it by now I don't think my notes will help.

LEVONNE: *(shifting blame)* What do you mean if I don't know if by now? Are you insinuating that I'm stupid?

RANDY: Uh... if you haven't studied for a test that's five minutes away, I don't think there's much insinuation needed.

CATHERINE: Just hurry and let's pick this stuff up.

CARISSA: *(wants them to move away)* I'll take care of it. You just go to class and I'll sort it all out.

LEVONNE: Hardly. My love letters are in there.

CARISSA: *(to audience)* And so were all my printouts of emails to Hope Hopeless. *(to LeVONNE)* It's okay, LeVonne I won't read them.

CATHERINE: Your love life? LeVonne, how interesting can it be?

RANDY: *(reading one)* Very interesting, apparently!

LEVONNE: Give me that!

(RANDY tries to keep it from her, but SHE grabs it and looks it over...)

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This isn't mine... this is... *(her face lights up with a great discovery! SHE reads out loud so practically EVERYONE can hear)* Dear Hope Hopeless... I'm in love with this cute guy named Randy and he doesn't know I exist. What can I do, signed Really Ready for Randy.

(LEVONNE reads reply, CARISSA wants to stop her, but then again doesn't want to give away her identity.)

Dear Really Ready for Randy: *(LeVONNE reads this emoting the jealousy implied in the letter)* You're in love with Randy? You... you... are in love, with Randy? You leave Randy alone! He's mine, I tell you, mine! Randy doesn't know you exist, and if I have my way, he never will! *(puts letter down.)* I think at least two people are ready for Randy. Really.

CARISSA: *(to audience)* Ok, that one hit a nerve. I was going to tone down my reply before it hit the presses, but... *(shrugs it off)* too late.

LEVONNE: Oh no, that means one of us is... Hope Hopeless!

RANDY: It's not me. I mean, I like myself, but I wouldn't call it obsessive. It's Catherine!

CATHERINE: Not me... I'm too sarcastic.

LEVONNE: Well... not me either, because *(inwardly seething)* Carissa took my spot on the student newspaper... uh... *(presenting CARISSA)* I think we have our Hope Hopeless...

(THEY ALL go through the letters.)

RANDY: *(reading)* I can't seem to get through to my mother, what should I do? *(can't believe the answer)* Tell her to shove off and do it your way?

CATHERINE: I'm failing English but acing French. What should I do.

CARISSA: *(to audience)* That one was easy... Go to France, duh.

CATHERINE: *(calling out!)* Hey everyone... we've got her... we've found Hope Hopeless!

(Other STUDENTS come in to see.)

CARISSA: *(seeing a mob of STUDENTS)* This was a problem I could solve very easily. *(almost shouting)* Run... run as fast as you can.

CATHERINE: *(as THEY chase CARISSA off stage)* Dear Hope, we're on the girls track team and you can't get away from us!!!!

(THEY ALL chase her out! If desired, the same song that played earlier can turn back up as THEY chase her, and continue during the blackout.)

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SCENE 4

CARISSA: (*comes in, kind of worn out...*) So... a meeting was held.

CARTER: (*enters, in "teacher" mode*) What did I tell you about passive voice?

CARISSA: Passive voice should not to be used by the writer.

CARTER: That's correct. Put some ummph into your narrative.

CARISSA: So... a meeting was held... I mean... they held a meeting.

CARTER: (*a bit snippy*) Who are "they?" You're forgetting the primary tenets of journalism. Who, what, where, when, and why? And "how," but the "w" is on the wrong end of it.

CARISSA: I wasn't forgetting any of that, I just wanted to keep all the information to myself.

CARTER: A journalist reports the news without regard to self interest or political implications.

CARISSA: Since when? Certainly not since the last election.

CARTER: At this school, that's since when. I want to see your objectivity.

CARISSA: "At this school" is not a statement of time.

CARTER: "You're in detention" is, but I have as yet to determine for how long.

CARISSA: The principal called my parents and Ms. Carter into a meeting where they tore us a new one. Or should I say more passively "a new one was torn for us."

(PRINCIPAL and CARISSA's PARENTS file into a small office, and CARISSA and CARTER join them. Another way to quickly set this up is to have the PRINCIPAL silently direct CARL and MACK to put up a few chairs for EVERYONE.)

CARTER: Leave me out of this. She did it herself.

PRINCIPAL: You're just as responsible as she is. You knew what was going on, and did nothing to stop it.

CARTER: I was trying to teach her the responsibility that comes with free speech.

PRINCIPAL: I think you were just too lazy to fulfill your duties as student newspaper sponsor.

MOTHER: I want something done! I want someone fired! I want someone sued!

FATHER: (*escalating for attention*) I want the school board to resign! I want the mayor, the governor, and the President of the United States to resign! I want the earth to give up its position in the solar system and start all over again!

PRINCIPAL: That's not going to happen.

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FATHER: (*a bit more reserved*) Can you give me half?

PRINCIPAL: We do feel there needs to be consequences.

MOM: Did you ever get that gum off your butt?

(*PRINCIPAL looks around.*)

You looked!

(*EVERYONE laughs until HE gives them a withering look.*)

PRINCIPAL: As I said... we do feel there needs to be consequences.

FATHER: (*Angry*) Not for my daughter! She's a pawn in the game of government manipulation! (*more conciliatory*) But I think a large financial settlement courtesy of the school district might change my mind.

PRINCIPAL: That's not going to happen either. However, both Ms. Carter and Miss Carissa can consider themselves relieved of their responsibilities with the student newspaper.

MOTHER: That's a relief.

FATHER: That's not enough! I want action!

MOTHER: Will you calm down? (*to PRINCIPAL*) Can you imagine being married to that?

PRINCIPAL: If you like, we can expel Carissa and send her to alternate high.

FATHER: In what, an alternate universe? I am tired of sending my children to a district that knows nothing about education!

CARISSA: Ok ok, dad... dad...? Will you stop with the conspiracy theories? You're a major embarrassment about now. (*to audience*) And as far as being relieved of my position as Hope Hopeless, I was relieved.

FATHER: There's going to be some severe punishment for you, young lady.

CARISSA: I thought you were blaming this on the President of the United States.

FATHER: I am, but I can't very well punish him.

MOTHER: You can vote him out.

FATHER: Not without the whole country on my side.

CARISSA: Well, speaking as Hope Hopeless, I have some advice for you, dad...

CARTER: (*trying to stop CARISSA*) Uh... I think we'd better discontinue this column, and fast.

MOTHER: Or you'll be grounded until you're 65.

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CARISSA: *(to audience)* So that was one less extracurricular activity for me. Did I tell you I was in the band, in the drama class, on the cheerleading squad, in French, Italian, and Swahili Club, plus a member of the Future Farmers of America? And Junior Achievement?

MOTHER: I don't recall any of that. *(to FATHER)* Let's go.

(CARISSA speaks to audience, as SHE leaves the meeting, and the PARTICIPANTS exit. THEY can take their chairs out with them, or CARL and MACK can clear away the office.)

CARISSA: Now that I'm not a journalist anymore, I don't have to stick to the truth! Because the truth was, school was not a lot of fun for a long time.

(STUDENTS approach CARISSA, annoyed.)

STUDENT 4: Dear Hope Hopeless. I have a problem, can you help me with it? *(nasty)* My problem is *(really snooty)* your advice. *(exit)*

GIRL 2: *(enters, angry)* Thanks to your advice, I lost my boyfriend.

BOY: *(enters from another entrance, angry as well)* Thanks to your advice, I lost my girlfriend.

CARISSA: *(mocking their tone)* Well, since I'm fired, you can get back together again.

BOY and GIRL 2: *(THEY look at each other, get closer and reconsider, perhaps as if THEY're going to kiss, then shake their heads)* Nah. *(BOY and GIRL 2 exit separate ways)*

BECKLEY: *(enters, happy)* Well, thanks to your advice, I'm still not on the soccer team, but I got a great new pair of designer slacks!

CARISSA: *(not sure SHE means it)* You look great, Beckley.

BECKLEY: Really? No one's ever told me that before.

CARISSA: I think you look great.

BECKLEY: Thanks, Carissa! You made my day!

(BECKLEY exits, happily, FRENCH TEACHER enters.)

CARISSA: Oh, Ms. Chouteau, the French teacher.

FRENCH TEACHER: *(snippy)* I'm banning you from anything French. No French fries, no French toast, no French doors, no French windows, no French Opera, you, Carissa, will have nothing French. Ever. And nothing from Quebec, either. And do you know why? It's because you told my best student to join the Spanish Club. He doesn't even speak Spanish! You've ruined me...

CARISSA: I'm sorry. *(in French)* Je suis désolé.

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TEACHER: (*excited*) You speak French?

CARISSA: *Oui!* (*to audience*) Actually that was all the French I knew.

TEACHER: (*Thrilled!*) Oh that's wonderful! I have an empty spot in the club. Meetings are after school on Wednesday. (*exits, happily*)

CARISSA: Somehow, I was turning over that new leaf. I managed to compliment everyone, make everything right, and make everyone happy, just by being myself. Or... despite being myself.

ALFONSO: (*enters, approaches CARISSA*) You gave me the guts to stand up to my older brother.

CARISSA: Alfonso! (*explaining to audience*) The kid with no backbone. (*to ALFONSO*) Cool!

ALFONSO: Thanks to you, I told him to take a hike in a forest filled with grizzly bears.

CARISSA: And did he? I figured he'd just sock you one.

ALFONSO: He did. But I felt better. So thanks, Hope Hopeless. And... uh... are you busy Saturday night? Maybe we can hang out at opposite ends of the coffee shop while we text our friends.

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