



**Sample Pages from
Sweep Under Rug**

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SWEEP UNDER RUG

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



Sweep Under Rug

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Characters

COUNSELLOR KELLY

Early twenties. Government worker, counsellor for blocks 7A to 7E. Believes in the program 110%. Has been on the job six months. Counsellor Kelly can also be played by a male. Rename him Counsellor Kyle.

CONRAD

Eighteen. Miranda's boyfriend. He hasn't seen her in a year. Revolutionary.

MIRANDA

Seventeen. Elder sister. A secret poet. Very smart, but defeated. Has lost most of her vocabulary.

ARIEL

Sixteen. Younger sister. Extremely smart. Also believes in the program.

BOBBY SUE

No age, but looks like a fresh-faced teen from the 50's. She is a highly advanced computer. Always happy. Moves mechanically but should never speak like a robot. I suggest that she sits in a chair for the whole play – Bobby Sue does not come to you, you go to Bobby Sue. A guardian of sorts.

Time

The future. The City.

Set

An upstage platform represents a tiny run down apartment where there is an old couch, a ratty blanket and a chair where Bobby Sue sits. Other locations should only use pools of light.

Sound Effects

Throughout the play a musical alarm plays when Bobby Sue is about to make an announcement. This can be a sound effect, or it can be done live by the actor. Also, during the birthday celebration, crowd sounds should be used as the event grows out of control.

Lights come up. Downstage left is COUNSELLOR KELLY. Downstage right is CONRAD. Upstage on a platform is MIRANDA and centre stage is ARIEL.

MIRANDA is dressed in a way that shows she doesn't take care of her appearance. She is listless and still.

MIRANDA: There's no more paper for poetry.

It is Un-Useful. Un-Productive.

Un-Effective.

My fingers ache to guide a pen across a white plain.

To build mountains and bridges.

To be my champion. My saviour.

COUNSELLOR KELLY has the tone of an overly cheerful children's entertainer/camp counsellor.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Counsellor Kelly here on C-I-T-Y with the evening announcements for Blocks 7A through E. I'm so excited to announce the upcoming plans for the Tenth Annual Bobby Sue Birthday Celebration! I can't wait! Can you believe it's been ten years? "A Bobby Sue in every home that needs one" has been the motto from the very beginning. We see no reason to change it.

ARIEL is clearly poor but well-presented. She is neat and clean. She is happy and cheerful, in a pleasant way. She's pleased, perhaps programmed, to talk about Bobby Sue.

ARIEL: Well, Bobby Sue wakes me in the morning. Bobby Sue compliments my outfit. Bobby Sue reminds me the breakfast program requires City Student ID. Bobby Sue tells me to have a great day at school. If she could, she'd stand and watch me out the window till I was out of sight.

CONRAD has a soft smile, but he's dressed as an underground soldier. He's dressed for battle.

CONRAD: It's not difficult. But it's not easy. You only get one chance.

MIRANDA: There's no more voice for poetry.

I cannot speak my words aloud for fear I am found

Un-Useful.

Un-Productive.

Un-Effective.

CONRAD: Early versions have flaws, remarkable flaws, which we continue to take advantage of, but later models are...

MIRANDA: Words are only to be used for a finite number of activities.

CONRAD: More of a challenge.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: When you have a Bobby Sue to tell you what to do, life gets better! Employment is way up; crime is way down. Just the way we like it. Yay! You guys are so good. We're so proud of you!

ARIEL: Bobby Sue knows what day I have band and what day I have yearbook. She never mixes it up and she never forgets.

MIRANDA: And so my words are stacked piled into corners and boxes.

CONRAD: The easiest thing to do with the Mach I and II is bash it on the head.

MIRANDA: They clog my pulsing veins.

CONRAD: One of the biggest mistakes they made in the beginning was trying to make it human. It powers down at night to simulate sleep, it sees with its eyes, talks with its mouth and thinks with its brain: the most important circuitry is in the head.

MIRANDA: They clamour for space in my head.

CONRAD: Easy to get to. Easy to deal with.

MIRANDA: They cry at the gates demanding to be set free.

CONRAD: They stopped doing that with the Mach III's and then they stopped talking all together.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: To help celebrate ten successful years, we're going to have an extra special celebration. Party hats and noisemakers for everyone! Just remember to treat them nicely, we'll be collecting them at the end. We'll do a countdown, just like New Year's Eve, and we'll all sing together. Won't that be fun? And then, very exciting, a confetti cannon! And then we'll hold a lottery to see who gets cake.

ARIEL: Bobby Sue asks me how my day was, even if she already knows. Bobby Sue tells me to set the table because it'll help my mom out. She's there when I wake up, she's there when I come home. She's there when I wake up again. I can't say that for... *(her face clouds for a second and then she smiles and continues on)* I can't always say that.

Lights fade on ARIEL. She exits.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: I know, I know, I know. Yes it would be great if we could give everyone cake. But in these times, it's just not possible. What can we do? You don't have to eat your piece if you get one. You can always share. That would be such a good thing to do!

CONRAD: Never try to disconnect a Mach IV. They've added the self-destruct feature, which we've learned about the hard way, I'm afraid. We're still working on how to deal with the Mach IV's.

Lights fade on CONRAD. He exits.

MIRANDA: My words have only one escape:
 To slip out my pores.
 To jump through my sweat.
 Vapour suicide into the air.
 For vapour poetry hurts no one.
 Harms no one.
 Reaches no one.
 Affects no one.

Lights fade on MIRANDA.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: So come on down to Chapman Square and be part of the action! I don't think I have to say that rowdy or insubordinate behaviour will not be tolerated. Make sure you're there early to be part of the fun! I'm Counsellor Kelly, signing off!

Lights fade on COUNSELLOR KELLY. She exits. A pleasant musical alarm plays in the darkness. A voice is heard. It is cheerful and smooth.

BOBBY SUE: Wake up Miranda! Miranda! Wake up Miranda! Rise and shine sleepy head!

Lights come up on the apartment.

Sitting on a chair is BOBBY SUE. BOBBY SUE looks like large doll. When she turns her head it is slow and mechanical. She looks fresh and starched, dressed in a blouse, skirt, white knee-high socks and Mary Jane shoes. Reminiscent of a teenager from the 50's.

MIRANDA is curled up into a ball on the couch.

BOBBY SUE: *(cheerfully)* Wake up Miranda! Miranda! Wake up Miranda!
 An employment improvement opportunity is coming your way!

MIRANDA groans.

BOBBY SUE: (*bright and chipper*) Miranda Kane — How will you become a productive member of society curled up in a ball on the couch? You are being given a chance to better yourself. (*as if this is the greatest thing since sliced bread*) You have been chosen for employment improvement opportunity 67000931!

MIRANDA: N-no work no. No job.

BOBBY SUE: Miranda. Speak properly please.

MIRANDA: Hope. Less.

BOBBY SUE: (*continuing to be chipper*) Please present yourself at the City Block 7E Employment Opportunity Office for further instructions.

She raises her wrist as if to look at a watch. She does not move her head to look at the watch and she's not really wearing a watch.

MIRANDA: I. Hope. Less.

BOBBY SUE: You have five minutes to get yourself dressed and out the door. (*there is a pause. BOBBY SUE speaks cheerfully*) Miranda. First warning.

BOBBY SUE tilts her head to the side and starts to hum something pleasant. MIRANDA looks at BOBBY SUE. Lights fade.

COUNSELLOR KELLY enters wearing a party hat, holding noisemaker. Things are not going smoothly; she is trying to be cheerful and is failing miserably.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Everyone hats on! Hats on! You all have hats and I expect to see them on. If there's one bare head out there Counsellor Kelly is going to get angry. (*to someone offstage*) Are they always like this? All right, are we ready? (*she blows her noisemaker*) Welcome to our Bobby Sue Birthday Party Celebration! When we start to sing, I don't want to hear anyone singing badly. That is not being a good sport. Counsellor Kelly sees some grumpy, grouchy faces out there and she doesn't like it! Now. We'll count down from five, the confetti canon will go off and then we'll sing. Here we go! Five, Four, Three, Two, One! (*nothing happens*) Where's my confetti canon?! Where's my canon?!

COUNSELLOR KELLY rushes offstage. The focus shifts to the other side of the stage. During the above, ARIEL has entered. She wears a party hat.

CONRAD also enters during the above, wearing a party hat. He slips behind ARIEL, who is not aware of him till he speaks.

CONRAD: The lovely Ariel.

ARIEL: (*turning back*) You!

CONRAD: Don't look back please. Face forward. Don't want to cause a scene.

ARIEL: (*facing front*) What are you doing here?

CONRAD: I want a piece of cake.

ARIEL: They'll drag you away in two seconds.

CONRAD: Only if they recognize me.

ARIEL: Your face is plastered everywhere!

CONRAD: I know. It's a terrible picture.

ARIEL: Ha. Ha.

CONRAD: People only see what they want to see.

ARIEL: I know what I see.

COUNSELLOR KELLY enters waving a clipboard.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Here's the first round of names! This is so exciting! When your name is called, please proceed in an orderly fashion to the cake line. Have your identification out and ready. No identification, no cake. Don't be alarmed by the metal detector, it's just a precaution.

CONRAD: I wonder what kind of cake it is. Which do you like better, chocolate or vanilla?

ARIEL: Would you go away? I don't want to be seen talking to you.

CONRAD: Why don't you turn me in then? Ariel the good.

ARIEL: (*mocking*) Conrad the criminal.

CONRAD: (*pointing out people*) There's police there, and there, and there and there and there.

ARIEL: Those aren't policemen. They're people.

CONRAD: You think? People aren't always what they seem. (*pause*) Are you turning me in?

ARIEL: I could, you know.

CONRAD: I do.

ARIEL: I'd be a hero.

CONRAD: You would. A lot of people want my head on a silver platter.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: S. Burns, B. Kurtz, J. Thompson, C. Markey, C. Song, *(she looks annoyed)* you're getting too loud... K. Parco, A. Vasquez...

ARIEL: Miranda would never forgive me.

CONRAD: *(kissing ARIEL on the cheek)* Thanks, kid. You're a doll.

ARIEL: *(wiping her cheek)* Don't touch me! I won't get into trouble over you.

CONRAD: Do you always do what you're told?

ARIEL: Do you always not?

CONRAD: When things aren't right I do.

ARIEL: What do you know about right and wrong?

CONRAD: And what do you know?

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Too loud! Too much noise! I'm not going any further until you settle down. I can wait a long time. I'm not in a hurry. I had cake at the office.

CONRAD: Where's Miranda?

ARIEL: Not here.

CONRAD: I can see that. *(wistful)* I was hoping to talk to her.

ARIEL: You stay away. If you go anywhere near -

CONRAD: Take it easy kid. Calm down.

ARIEL: You want to get us in trouble.

CONRAD: I don't. Scout's Honour.

ARIEL: *(getting heated)* Ha! I don't believe you. I'll never believe you.

CONRAD: You look like you're yelling at the air... It would be better not to draw attention...

ARIEL takes a breath. She folds her arms tightly in front of her and holds herself close.

ARIEL: Go away. Please? Just go away.

CONRAD: Why didn't she come?

ARIEL: She didn't want to.

CONRAD: Why not?

ARIEL: She's not -

CONRAD: What? What's the matter?

ARIEL: Nothing.

CONRAD: Is she sick? Tell me!

ARIEL: I don't have to tell you anything.

CONRAD: Listen. Ariel, I'm not... *(he breathes noisily in frustration)* I don't want to get you in trouble. I'd never do that. I love Miranda too much to put you in danger.

ARIEL: Maybe she doesn't love you anymore.

CONRAD: Did she say that?

ARIEL: Maybe she wants nothing to do with you.

CONRAD: Is that true?

ARIEL: Maybe it is.

CONRAD: Ariel, look me in the eye and tell me that's how she feels.

ARIEL: I won't.

CONRAD: *(putting a hand on her shoulder)* Tell me!

COUNSELLOR KELLY: *(sing song)* I can wait all day long... I can wait all day.

ARIEL: *(looking down at her feet)* I wish she didn't love you. But she does.

CONRAD: Kid, you almost gave me a heart attack.

ARIEL: Good.

CONRAD: How is she? Is she OK? Is she still writing?

ARIEL: She... she's fine.

CONRAD: Is she?

ARIEL: (*very unconvincing*) She's fine.

CONRAD: Ariel...

ARIEL: She's fine, she's fine, OK?

She turns and looks CONRAD in the eye. There is a pause. CONRAD looks away first. ARIEL turns back to the front.

CONRAD: OK. Thanks. I know you don't like me.

ARIEL: You're a monster.

CONRAD: People aren't always what they seem, kid.

CONRAD slips away. ARIEL sighs.

ARIEL: I don't know what Miranda sees in you. I hate it. But I know she misses you. She hurts. Even if she doesn't say anything. Not that she says much anymore. (*she rubs her eyes*) I don't know what to do. It's like she's... (*there is a pause*) Conrad?

ARIEL turns but CONRAD is not there. ARIEL exits. The Birthday Celebration is turning into a riot. KELLY has lost all pretence of cheerfulness.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: If you push like that there will be no cake for you. Do you hear me? No cake! No cake! Bad man gets no cake! Security! Security! Honestly. There's always one bad apple who has to spoil it for the bunch. That's it for today. Disburse. Disburse! If you know what's good for you - Disburse.

COUNSELLOR KELLY exits.

Lights come up on MIRANDA in the apartment.

MIRANDA: Getting worse out there.

Anger under lock and key.

One with Knife.

One with Nail.

Yesterday one just takes your stuff

Today you're dead.

Today there is a never ending rain,

Never ending in your bones.

Flood up to the ears, up to nose, up to eyes.

It's the knowing we will drown.

That's the worst part.
We will drown.

MIRANDA lies on the couch. CONRAD enters downstage left and speaks to the audience.

CONRAD: The Bobby Sue is the most advanced computer of our time. It can be dropped, pushed, bumped, banged about and spilled on. It's dustproof, tamperproof and can't be hacked. It will not freeze. It will not overheat. It cannot be melted with a blowtorch. It cannot be stabbed or shot. It can be drowned. But that takes too long. If it was used for any other purpose, I suppose it would be an amazing thing. It seems a shame to destroy them.

Lights change. MIRANDA is dreaming. She cries out in her sleep. CONRAD crosses to her. He is in her dream.

CONRAD: Hey. *(he blows on her face)*

MIRANDA: *(playfully)* Stop it.

CONRAD: Miranda.

MIRANDA: *(with her eyes closed)* Don't bother me. I'm dreaming.

CONRAD: I know. That's why I'm here.

MIRANDA cracks her eyes open. She sees CONRAD, who wiggles his fingers at her. She sits up.

MIRANDA: You can't keep showing up like this.

CONRAD: They can't get me in your dreams.

MIRANDA: They'll get you. There's no safe place. Not even in my head.

CONRAD: They have to catch me first.

MIRANDA: Have they caught you?

CONRAD: Shhhh. Don't let on. I'm hiding behind your left ear.

MIRANDA: Where are you? Are you safe?

CONRAD: I'm safe as houses. I made it out of the city and all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

MIRANDA: Where the water is warm.

CONRAD: And the sun wraps around you like a blanket.

MIRANDA: You have a good job.

CONRAD: And no one cares where you come from. Everyone comes from somewhere else here.

MIRANDA: And before I know it...

CONRAD: You'll find a plane ticket in your mailbox. You'll fly to me...

CONRAD & MIRANDA: And we'll live happily ever after.

MIRANDA: Sounds nice. Completely impossible but nice. Tell me you're safe.

CONRAD: I love you.

MIRANDA: That's not the same thing. Tell me you're safe.

CONRAD: I'm safe.

MIRANDA: I don't believe you.

CONRAD: You shouldn't. I'm not a trustworthy guy. Everyone says so.

MIRANDA: Everything's a mess here.

CONRAD: It's a mess everywhere.

MIRANDA: Why? What happened, Connie?

CONRAD: I don't know.

MIRANDA: I can't write anymore. I can't speak. I wake up and another word has disappeared. Run away in the night. I sit and I lose words and Mom's got that look in her eye, that panic and I don't say anything. Why aren't you here? Why?

An unseen voice cuts into the moment. It is BOBBY SUE. She is cheerful.

BOBBY SUE: Wake up Miranda. Miranda. Rise and Shine sleepyhead!

CONRAD grabs MIRANDA. MIRANDA is now dreaming a moment from her past.

CONRAD: *(abrupt tone change)* I have to go.

MIRANDA: Why?

CONRAD: I have to go. Someone told.

MIRANDA: What? What happened?

CONRAD: I don't have time.

BOBBY SUE: Wake up Miranda!

CONRAD: Come with me.

MIRANDA: What?

CONRAD: Come with me! Will you?

MIRANDA: I -

CONRAD: Yes or no. There's no time.

MIRANDA: I can't! I can't leave Ariel. I won't.

BOBBY SUE: Rise and Shine!

CONRAD: I love you.

He runs out.

MIRANDA: Wait!

She reaches out. The lights change. MIRANDA is awake, no longer dreaming. She is reaching to air.

MIRANDA looks around. BOBBY SUE is on the chair but is underneath the ratty blanket. MIRANDA stares at BOBBY SUE. She does not move.

BOBBY SUE: (*pleasant and cheerful*) No, no, no, no. This will not do. This is not nice. No one puts a blanket on Bobby Sue. No one tries to hide from Bobby Sue. Miranda. Miranda. I can hear you.

MIRANDA reaches forward and pulls the blanket off of BOBBY SUE. She scuttles back to her corner of the couch. She rocks back and forth, not looking at BOBBY SUE. BOBBY SUE turns her head slowly to look at MIRANDA.

BOBBY SUE: Miranda. Miranda. You know what's happened here.

MIRANDA: No.

BOBBY SUE: You know...

MIRANDA: (*looking down, shaking her head*) Sleeping.

BOBBY SUE: Yes. Miranda is always sleeping. Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. That's what Miranda does.

MIRANDA: She -

BOBBY SUE: She what?

MIRANDA shakes her head.

BOBBY SUE: She what, Miranda? (*MIRANDA doesn't answer. BOBBY SUE tilts her head. She is cheery.*) What a shame. You know what will happen.

MIRANDA: No.

BOBBY SUE: (*cheerful*) The Perez family went to jail.

MIRANDA: (*moaning*) No.

BOBBY SUE: Twenty-five years. The Millers were given seven years. The Lamott family -

MIRANDA stands. She speaks right at BOBBY SUE.

MIRANDA: She didn't mean it! She didn't mean it!

There is a pause. MIRANDA stares at BOBBY SUE, who stares back, smiling gently. MIRANDA sinks back onto the couch, hiding her face in her hands, rocking back and forth.

BOBBY SUE: A whole sentence, Miranda? Well done. How long has it been? Your mother should break the law more often.

The lights fade slightly on the apartment. Light comes up on CONRAD, stage right, and COUNSELLOR KELLY, stage left.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Counsellor Kelly here on C-I-T-Y with Counsellor Corner where you get to know your Counsellor! It's my first time here on the program, so I hope I'm able to shed a little light on the counsellor, who is me. (*she giggles*) Let's see...

CONRAD: You would think the Bobby Sues with flaws would be the easiest to disconnect.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: I come from a small town...

CONRAD: The major circuitry in the brain,

COUNSELLOR KELLY: I love Chinese food...

CONRAD: The reconnect rewind problem where the Bobby Sue actually erases time,

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Especially that orange sauce you get with chicken balls? I could eat that with a spoon!

CONRAD: The simulation sleep flaw, and so on. (*CONRAD sighs and scratches his head*) The obvious question here is why don't they fix these flaws?

COUNSELLOR KELLY: I have a double dose of doctor in my parents. Hey there Dr. Bob and Dr. Linda! Love you!

CONRAD: It's a good question.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: It's my parents who instilled in me a desire to help people. That's all I've ever wanted to do. That's why I love the Bobby Sue Program. (*very sincere*) It's here to help, you know. She is here to help you.

CONRAD: I don't have a good answer. I have a bad answer.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: You can't fight her. You have to love her.

CONRAD: If I'm right, it's the worst answer for all of us.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: If you love her with all your heart, she'll love you right back. I truly believe that.

Lights change. CONRAD and COUNSELLOR KELLY exit. Lights come up full on the apartment. A door slams offstage.

ARIEL: (*off*) Hi! (*she enters during her speech*) The birthday celebration was a madhouse. People rushed the cake table and the police went in with riot gear and - (*seeing MIRANDA and BOBBY SUE*) What's the matter? Did someone see - what's wrong?

BOBBY SUE: Miranda. Tell her.

MIRANDA shakes her head.

BOBBY SUE: (*cheerful*) Miranda.

MIRANDA: Parrot think it night.

ARIEL: I don't understand.

BOBBY SUE: Of course you don't. If Miranda would only speak properly. Another example of her increasing laziness.

ARIEL: (*surprised*) She tries. Don't you, Miranda.

BOBBY SUE: Like mother, like daughter.

ARIEL: What?

BOBBY SUE: It's bad news I'm afraid, Ariel. Please sit down.

ARIEL: (*sitting*) What's wrong?

MIRANDA laughs.

BOBBY SUE: It's your mother. She's run away again.

ARIEL: What?

BOBBY SUE: She threw a blanket over my head to make me think it was night and she ran away.

ARIEL: But... you don't power down at night. A blanket wouldn't do anything.

BOBBY SUE: I suppose she was desperate. Desperate people will do anything.

ARIEL: I - there must be a mistake. Mir? (*MIRANDA does not react. ARIEL turns back to BOBBY SUE.*) It's not what you think. It's been a whole year, she said she didn't need... she said wouldn't leave.

BOBBY SUE: Ariel. You look very respectable today. Very smart.

ARIEL: (*looking down at her clothes, distracted by the change in topic*) Thank you. What are we going to do?

BOBBY SUE: And you got an A on your Science Fair project. Well done. As a reward, I will report this as an accident.

ARIEL: Why do you have to say anything at all?

BOBBY SUE: Ariel. Your mother has left the home.

MIRANDA gives a short bitter laugh.

BOBBY SUE: (*looking at MIRANDA*) Do you have something to say?

MIRANDA: Home. Hole with door.

BOBBY SUE: Miranda.

MIRANDA: And the dirt.

BOBBY SUE: (*to ARIEL*) Your mother must be held accountable for her actions.

MIRANDA: Crumbling.

BOBBY SUE: Accident or not.

MIRANDA: Walls crumbling away.

BOBBY SUE: (*cheerful*) Miranda. That doesn't make any sense.

MIRANDA: Crumbling. Down.

BOBBY SUE: The walls aren't made of dirt.

MIRANDA: Down. Down.

Lights fade on the apartment. CONRAD enters downstage right.

CONRAD: The key to getting out of the city is to make it look like you want to come back in. You have to look like you can't wait to get back. *(he smiles slightly)* We're not supposed to leave. That's what they don't tell you.

Light comes up on MIRANDA. She moves centre stage.

MIRANDA: I fear I
I fear I am forgetting
I fear I
I fear losing
I am losing.

CONRAD: We're supposed to love looking for work or taking employment opportunity courses or lining up for cake. We love being told what to do. We love running up and down narrow hallways because there might be a piece of cheese.

MIRANDA: I am forgetting life
What it is to live
What silence sounds like.

CONRAD: We can't make our own decisions, our own choices, because if we could, we wouldn't be in this situation...

Pause. CONRAD clears his throat and rubs his face. He looks tired and lost in thought for a second.

MIRANDA: I fear I
I fear I am forgetting

CONRAD: On another note, we regret to announce that the Sher family was apprehended Tuesday evening after a successful disconnect. There will be a memorial tomorrow night.

CONRAD exits.

MIRANDA: Your face
Your face
Disappears so easily.

COUNSELLOR KELLY enters to stand beside MIRANDA. She holds a large file - MIRANDA's. She looks at it and then looks up at MIRANDA.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: (*pleasant*) Miranda Kane. Nice to meet you!
Okey-dokey on time and everything. Come on in.

She gestures offstage. MIRANDA looks like she wants to run in the other direction, but doesn't. She exits and COUNSELLOR KELLY follows.

Lights up on the apartment. BOBBY SUE is alone. There is a pause as BOBBY SUE sits staring - motionless and emotionless. A musical alarm sounds. BOBBY SUE gives a jerk and a wide smile.

BOBBY SUE: 4:00 pm. Ariel is due.

A door slams offstage.

ARIEL: (*off*) I'm home!

ARIEL enters.

BOBBY SUE: Ariel. How was school today?

ARIEL: Is she here? Did she come back?

BOBBY SUE: Not yet.

ARIEL: Oh. (*she sits*) Oh. It's only been three days. She'll be back.

There is a musical alarm. BOBBY SUE gives a jerk.

BOBBY SUE: Congratulations! Bobby Sue wishes you heartfelt congratulations on your automatic acceptance to College Sub Level One. Congratulations Ariel.

ARIEL: I... thank you... but...

BOBBY SUE holds her arms out stiffly.

BOBBY SUE: Give me a hug.

ARIEL pauses for a second and then moves to hug BOBBY SUE. BOBBY SUE's arms do not bend. When ARIEL backs away, BOBBY SUE slowly lowers her arms.

ARIEL: I have to talk to you about college.

BOBBY SUE: Of course. That's why I'm here. You can talk to me about anything.

ARIEL: OK. I -

BOBBY SUE: Don't you worry about a thing. You will graduate with honours. You will be a wonderful secretary or file clerk. If you try really hard, you may even become a paralegal.

ARIEL: That's what I wanted - I wanted to talk about -

BOBBY SUE: That's why I'm here. For talk. For advice. For wisdom.

ARIEL: I know...

BOBBY SUE: A Bobby Sue in every home that needs one. When you have a Bobby Sue to tell you what to do, life gets better.

ARIEL: I had a meeting today with my teacher.

BOBBY SUE: Where you learned of your automatic acceptance to College Sub Level One.

ARIEL: Mr. Currie... he suggested, he strongly suggested, I not take the automatic acceptance. He thinks I should apply for one of the top schools. Level Ten.

*BOBBY SUE slowly turns her head to stare at ARIEL.
ARIEL turns away.*

BOBBY SUE: Ariel. Look at me.

ARIEL looks up.

BOBBY SUE: You have been automatically approved. Do you know what that means?

ARIEL: Mr. Currie thinks my grades are too good for Sub One.

BOBBY SUE: *(cheerful)* City students do not go to Level Ten schools.

ARIEL: I want to be a -

BOBBY SUE: City students do not go to Level Ten schools.

ARIEL: But if I -

BOBBY SUE: *(cheerful)* End of discussion.

ARIEL: Bobby Sue, that's not fair.

BOBBY SUE: End of discussion.

ARIEL: I want to be a doctor! I want to leave the city!

There is a pause. BOBBY SUE tilts her head and hums a pleasant tune, not responding to ARIEL.

ARIEL: Bobby Sue? Did you hear me?

BOBBY SUE: (*righting her head*) Of course. I listen to everything you say. But you are wrong.

ARIEL: How can you just say -

BOBBY SUE: (*interrupting*) Your future has been decided for you. I know what's best. I always do and I always will.

ARIEL: But it's my future and I think I -

BOBBY SUE: Why are you still talking? You have always listened to me.

ARIEL: Because it's my life.

BOBBY SUE: When Bobby Sue tells you what to do, life gets better.

ARIEL: But -

BOBBY SUE: You'll tell your teacher tomorrow.

ARIEL: But -

BOBBY SUE: (*cheerful*) End of discussion.

Lights fade on ARIEL and BOBBY SUE. COUNSELLOR KELLY enters with MIRANDA downstage left. MIRANDA sits on a small stool.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: (*always pleasant*) Ms. Miranda Kane. What happened, huh? It's only been a year since your last session with Counsellor Sandy. It's a doodle shame these appointments couldn't happen more often, but there are so many of you and only one of me. (*she gives a big clown sad face*) What can we do? It's not been a good year, has it? More of a downhill slide. A plummet. A plunge. (*She makes the noise of someone falling from a great height and then splatting to the ground. She laughs as if she's done something funny.*) Why is that? I don't understand it at all. You used to be such a talent. I read the articles: the dynamic duo of Miranda and Ariel. Counsellor Sandy had them all laminated. It's hard to imagine. What happened to the shining star of Block 7E? Such good girls. Don't you want to be a shining star? A good girl? I have Bobby Sue's latest report. (*she sighs*) You've been red-flagged.

Lights up downstage left. ARIEL runs in. She is breathless, almost panicked.

ARIEL: Mr. Currie, Mr. Currie! Wait! Wait!

COUNSELLOR KELLY: It's been, what, a year since the Barlow incident?

ARIEL: I know I said things were final, end of discussion, Bobby Sue said end of discussion. But... I want... I can't...

She bends over to catch her breath.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: When they tried to disconnect their Bobby Sue? On the instruction of your boyfriend?

ARIEL: I've been thinking all day.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: And were killed? I read all about it.

ARIEL: I don't know what to do. Mr. Currie... I don't know how to explain. You don't know what it's like to live in the city. Sometimes people need help. I need help. Bobby Sue helps me. She's always been there for me.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: I guess they forgot to publicize the new self-destruct addition to the Mach IV's. *(she tilts her head to the side, not unlike BOBBY SUE and smiles)* Terrible, huh?

ARIEL: My father has never been there. My mother, I don't know where she is and now my sister...

COUNSELLOR KELLY: Thankfully, there are still good people out there. Letting us know who's responsible for such bad behaviour.

ARIEL: Bobby Sue says she knows what's good for me. Doesn't she? Shouldn't I listen to her like always? Aren't I a bad person if I don't listen to her?

COUNSELLOR KELLY leans in close to MIRANDA.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: You think sitting there silent, looking at the floor that you win something? That you keep something? What could you possibly keep? All you have is what we give you. What could you possibly win? Everything you know, we know. *(there is a pause)* Miranda. Look at me.

MIRANDA looks up.

ARIEL: I'm supposed to know what's good and what's bad.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: We know everything.

ARIEL: If we do what they say, nothing bad will ever happen.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: We know you didn't go to Chapman Square.

ARIEL: Good people don't do bad things. Good people don't like bad people.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: We know you slept from 1:07pm to 1:53pm yesterday afternoon and you cried Conrad's name out. Twice.

ARIEL: But this feels like a bad thing. *(she balls her hands up in total frustration)* And there's no one to ask! I'm just supposed to do what they say and climb in the box and ask nothing.

COUNSELLOR KELLY: We know the instant your mother picked up that blanket.

ARIEL: Why is that good? Why is that right? Why don't they want me to do better?

COUNSELLOR KELLY: *(with a smile)* We know everything.

Lights fade on COUNSELLOR KELLY and MIRANDA

ARIEL: I changed my mind. I want to apply to Level Ten. I'm going to do it.

Lights down on ARIEL. Lights up stage right on CONRAD.

CONRAD: People ask me when they come here why I do this. *(he smiles slightly and scratches his head)* Some days, I'm not sure. Some days the boat's sinking faster than we can patch it up. I see a lot. I saw... My parents were very grateful to get a Bobby Sue. We all were. Back then. They opened up the bear traps and we gladly stuck our necks in. When the jaws slammed shut, and we cried out, they blamed us. Why didn't we behave? Do what we're told? I see things. I saw things. I'll never forget.

Lights up on the apartment. MIRANDA is curled up into a ball on the couch. She is dreaming. She cries out in her sleep. CONRAD crosses to her.

CONRAD: Hey. *(he blows on her face)*

MIRANDA: *(playfully)* Stop it.

CONRAD: Miranda.

MIRANDA: (*with her eyes closed*) Don't bother me. I'm dreaming.

CONRAD: I know. That's why I'm here.

MIRANDA: (*sitting up*) Oh Connie. She didn't mean it.

CONRAD: (*joking*) Hey, you're supposed to say, "you can't keep showing up like this" and then I say -

MIRANDA: I should have known.

CONRAD: It's not your fault.

MIRANDA: That's what I want you to think. But I don't know, do I?

CONRAD: It's your dream.

MIRANDA: I'm sorry.

CONRAD: You couldn't have stopped her.

BOBBY SUE: Wake up Miranda. Miranda. Rise and shine!

CONRAD grabs MIRANDA.

CONRAD: I have to go.

MIRANDA: (*this has just occurred to her*) They didn't stop her.

CONRAD: Someone told.

MIRANDA: She picked up the blanket.

BOBBY SUE: Wake up Miranda!

CONRAD: Come with me.

MIRANDA: What?

CONRAD: Come with me! Will you?

MIRANDA: I -

CONRAD: Yes or no. There's no time.

MIRANDA: I can't! I can't leave Ariel. I won't.

BOBBY SUE: Wake up, Miranda!

CONRAD: I love you.

He runs out.

MIRANDA: Wait! I changed my mind!



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