

CHARLIE: Oh God, not the Haunted Hussie parade?  
TINA: No! You. You, Charlie. It's *you* I'm proud of. I always have been. Always. *(Pause.)* Oh shoot, we're not gonna get all mushy. It's not our style. So would you like to see your acceptance letter, young man?  
CHARLIE: Yes. Maybe we could bring it to the bowling alley. I'd like to show it off.  
TINA: Yeah? Then we could invite the whole obnoxious lot to a certain b-day party?  
CHARLIE: Okay. But no Hawaiian theme!  
TINA: What?! Who put you in charge? It will be Hawaiian all right! I got a dozen lays, and a couple of hoola-hoola skirts to prove it. I know it's *your* party, but *I'm* throwing it. Now, shut up and get the car. I'll grab the letter.  
*(She starts to move.)*  
CHARLIE: *(Calling.)* Mom? *(She stops, but doesn't turn.)* I'll miss you too. Tons.  
TINA: I know, Charlie. I know.

## MAINTAINING SANITY

*Clover, 22, has been taking care of her little brother, River, 19, since she was a little kid. Their mother Mimi, an artist, was an unpredictable lady who had periodic psychotic episodes. As a result, the kids have fallen into definite roles. Clover plays the mother and River, the troubled child. Two years ago, their mother died after a quick bout with cancer. As she was dying, Clover vowed she would take care of River and the house. River, now in his first year of college, is starting to resent his sister's constant need to keep things under her control. He uses the basement of their house to get a little privacy. His sister wants to know exactly what he does down there. She fears that he may have a breakdown someday like their mother. River is also concerned. He fears that his sister has no life of her own and that she will never let go of his. In this scene, they confront each other.*

CLOVER: Where have you been for the last two days?  
RIVER: *(Shrugs.)* Hanging out at the library.  
CLOVER: *(Not sure she believes him.)* Uh-huh. Sit down. Eat with me. I made spaghetti.  
RIVER: It smells good, but I have work to do.  
CLOVER: What sort of work?  
RIVER: Can't tell you. It's top secret.  
CLOVER: You're kidding, right?  
RIVER: No. Yeah. Sort of. *(Starts to go.)*  
CLOVER: *(Jumping in front of his path.)* Wait! *(He stops.)* You're not pulling a Mimi on me, right? *(Looking right at him.)* You're not, right?  
RIVER: No. But I went to her grave yesterday.  
CLOVER: You did? *(He nods.)* Why didn't you tell me? I would have gone with you.

RIVER: I don't know. I wanted to go alone this time.

CLOVER: I miss Mom too, but just because we miss her doesn't mean we want you to be like her. I mean, that part of her. She didn't want that for you either. She didn't like it. She never wanted to be peculiar. Eccentric, flamboyant, dramatic—yes, but not a sick person. Not put away over and over. That's not a happy thing.

RIVER: (*Irritated.*) I know that! So what's your point?

CLOVER: My point is I'm not sure I could do that again.

RIVER: Who says you'll have to? (*Beat.*) Anyway did you hear about that fourth pipe bomb in Chicago?

CLOVER: Who hasn't? It's terrible. You can't know what to expect these days. What makes you bring that up?

RIVER: It was on the news. It's interesting. Wondered what you thought about the kid.

CLOVER: He's sick or just mentally disturbed. What is there to think? The mayor might end up blind over it.

RIVER: Like that would make a big difference. He's blind already if you ask me.

CLOVER: Jesus! What a thing to say.

RIVER: It's the truth.

CLOVER: See this is exactly what I mean. Is there something going on in your head or are you just trying to make me think there is something going on in your head? Bringing up this pipe bomb thing? Is it attention or psychosis?

RIVER: It's research actually. Could you imagine me doing that?

CLOVER: Doing what—research?

RIVER: No, creating a pipe bomb. I have the technology you know? Twenty-one-year-old engineering genius. You'd be all over the papers too. All that publicity.

CLOVER: What the hell are you talking about?!

RIVER: (*Shrugs.*) Nothing.

CLOVER: Are you trying to tell me that you . . . what are you trying to tell me, River?! Are you asking me if you're nuts enough to make a pipe bomb? Yes, I think you're nuts enough—

you win, but tell me that you didn't! Tell me that you had nothing to do with the Goddamn—

RIVER: I didn't! God! I'm just trying to make light of the fact that you think I'm crazy.

CLOVER: There's nothing light about it. And it's *really* not funny because I don't know what the hell you do in that basement. And I don't know what you do with all your time either. But I won't put up with crap, River. I won't let you fall apart on me. If you fall apart, that's it. You're out of here. It doesn't matter if you have a full scholarship to Northwestern or that you can make something great out of yourself with engineering or computers or something. If you fall apart, you can't do anything. Your life is crap. So listen to me.

RIVER: I told you I don't want to be an engineer or work with computers.

CLOVER: Fine. Whatever. That's not at all what I was saying anyhow.

RIVER: So what were you saying?

CLOVER: I'm saying be normal. Please. I know that we were taught that that is the worst thing you could possibly be, but the fact is that you'll be a lot happier. Some people think that we have no control over maintaining sanity, but I think we have a hell of a lot more control than people think. You have to do things. If you need Dr. Roberts back again, please tell me. I'll scrape together the cash. And the other thing is you've got to get out and be with people. Socialize. Are you socializing these days, River?

RIVER: Oh God, not again.

CLOVER: That's what people do in their first year of college. They party a little.

RIVER: That's why I don't sit down with you to eat, Clover. I get a lecture every time. Why aren't *you* socializing?

CLOVER: I did in my first year. I'm not in that place anymore. Now I just want to graduate and make some real money.

RIVER: You never had a date. You never have one now either.

CLOVER: Why are you distracting things? We're not talking about me right now. I'm talking about *you*. I'm thinking you might want to live on campus next year instead of commuting.

RIVER: Why? You want to get rid of me?

CLOVER: No! Absolutely not! But it's hard to get into the social scene having to commute to college. If I get a full-time job this summer after graduating, I could probably help you swing a dorm room.

RIVER: Why don't you get rid of me? I would! So I could have the place to myself.

CLOVER: What are you talking about? This isn't about me.

RIVER: But why isn't it about you?

CLOVER: I'm trying to say that I want you to make more friends. I think it'll help keep you healthy.

RIVER: What about what would keep *you* healthy? Why are none of the choices you make about *you*? Do you ever wonder that? You're asking me about my friends. Well, I never cared much one way or another about friends. Lately, I care a little more, so things might change. But you do. You always wanted lots of friends. You love parties. So where are they, Clover? Why are you always here with me?

CLOVER: It's a little difficult to have friends over all the time while I'm working full-time and going to school full-time. I have to do that if we're going to keep the house.

RIVER: So why keep the house?

CLOVER: Why keep the house?!

RIVER: Yeah. Keeping the house isn't going to bring Mimi back, no matter how much we want that. And the fact is we don't want to bring all of Mimi back. Neither of us do. So why keep it? Why do you fight so hard to keep it?

CLOVER: I don't know. Where the hell would we live? Besides, I thought you—

RIVER: Well, stop thinking for me, Clover! I don't want you to.

I want to have my own life now. I may not do what you

want me to, but I won't go crazy or, at least, I'll try my best not to.

CLOVER: So if you didn't live in the house with me, where would you live?

RIVER: Share an apartment with somebody maybe.

CLOVER: How would you pay for it?

RIVER: (*Shrugs.*) Job probably.

CLOVER: Oh yeah. Right. And what job could help you afford an apartment? Besides, you're not steady enough with jobs, River. You know that. Howard told me you've missed work six times in the past month.

RIVER: Why did you take it upon yourself to talk to Howard about *my* job?

CLOVER: Because I've been concerned. You seem to have less cash. I was concerned you might lose it.

RIVER: Who cares if I lost it? I hate it. And how is your asking going to change things anyhow?

CLOVER: What's going on, River? Why don't you show up to work?

RIVER: Because he charges too much for toilet paper. Because he has a lot of beer-belly hicks with annoying vocabulary in there. Because it's a convenience store and I've never wanted convenience. And because I hate it!

CLOVER: Why?

RIVER: Because I do! I don't like selling cigarettes and beer and nachos to a bunch of idiots.

CLOVER: Oh, well, too bad. We can't do everything we like all the time. I'm sorry you're afraid of a little hard work.

RIVER: I'm not afraid of hard work. But I'd rather get a job landscaping or cleaning out pet cages. Something else. But *I'll* find the job this time.

CLOVER: Fine. Do whatever you want. By the way, cleaning out cages is no picnic either, believe me. My concern was that you were missing work because of whatever you're doing downstairs in the basement.

RIVER: So? What if that were true?

CLOVER: So I think it's foolish. And I want to know exactly what it is now. It's my basement too. So if something illegal is going on down there, River, I—

RIVER: Illegal?!

CLOVER: I thought I smelled some chemical down there when I was doing my laundry today. If you don't come clean, I'll break that damn padlock and look myself.

RIVER: Oh my God. You *do* think I'm making pipe bombs?

CLOVER: Well what am I supposed to think?! Dr. Roberts said if you had a breakdown, it would happen now or in the next few years.

RIVER: I'm not having a breakdown. I'm stripping that old dresser I bought at the garage sale if you must know.

CLOVER: Really?

RIVER: Really. But that's not all. I'm also creating something. *(Clover looks concerned.)* A novel.

CLOVER: A novel?

RIVER: Yeah. That's why I've been at the library. I got the idea from all those news reports about that kid making the pipe bombs. It's a pretty cool plot idea actually.

CLOVER: Yeah, cool. So where did this novel thing come from all of a sudden?

RIVER: Can you leave your agenda for one second to get in touch with my enthusiasm about this?

CLOVER: Hey, writing is great, but I don't want you to ignore your homework. You have a lot of difficult engineering classes to keep on top of.

RIVER: What if I told you I might be dropping one of those classes?

CLOVER: What?! River, you have a scholarship in engineering. You have a huge opportunity. Dr. Roberts said an artistic field would not be the best choice.

RIVER: I knew you'd jump to conclusions. I knew it. He said, it was not the best choice because it's unpredictable. But if I choose it then it's *my* unpredictable life, not somebody else's unpredictable weirdness affecting me. And besides I

didn't say I was changing my major anyway. I'm just excited about playing around with the idea of writing a novel. And I'm tired of taking a million difficult classes at once.

CLOVER: Yes, but it's best to get all the requirements in—all the really tough requirement courses done within the first year.

RIVER: Just like it's best to socialize in the first year. And I should move to campus. And I better never miss work even if it's a job I hate. You always know exactly what's best for me, don't you, Clover?

CLOVER: I'm just telling you my experience.

RIVER: Well, my experience isn't yours. And I know you're afraid I'll blow up just like Mimi if I do something really creative and something goes wrong, but it doesn't work that way. You can't prevent my meltdown. Maybe I won't even have one. Ever think of that?

CLOVER: I know. I hope you don't. But that doesn't stop me from wanting to protect you.

RIVER: You can't! *(Beat.)* You want to know what my novel's about?

CLOVER: Yeah, I got it—a teenager who makes pipe bombs in his basement.

RIVER: No, his sister's the main character actually. They have a mental case mom who's a lot of fun, but loses it frequently. His sister is always trying so hard to keep the family together. She tries so hard to hold onto the control of the situation, that she misses her own life. She doesn't even know what she wants.

CLOVER: What do you want me to say? I get it. It's supposed to be about me I guess.

RIVER: Haven't you ever thought about that, Clover? What you want?

CLOVER: Sure I have! Is this supposed to be more research?

RIVER: No! *(Beat.)* Well, what do you want then?

CLOVER: I don't know. To graduate, and get a job working

as a store manager or something. To make decent money. To be normal. Totally normal. Just that.

RIVER: You say that, but what does that mean? Does that mean you'll get married? What kind of guy would you like?

A sensitive type, or a real tough guy? Where would you live if you could choose anywhere to live? What's your normal?

CLOVER: I don't know! I haven't thought about it.

RIVER: That's my point. You've never had a chance to think about it because you're always thinking about me. In my novel, she has to discover her own life—what she really wants or she'll die. Each person in the family has to move on by themselves or they'll die.

CLOVER: Is this story about me or you?

RIVER: Both. *(Beat.)* Have you ever had sex, Clover?

CLOVER: What?! I'm not talking about this with you!

RIVER: Me either. Don't you think that's odd? And neither of us have a best friend. I think we should move out. Both of us to different places. Start somewhere fresh. Maybe I'll want to do more social things if you aren't nagging at me to do them. And maybe you'll get out more if you stop worrying about me for a second. What do you think?

CLOVER: Who am I talking to? Who are you?

RIVER: I won't fall apart if you're not looking out for me. I promise.

CLOVER: I'd feel as if I were letting her down.

RIVER: Why? Mimi always wanted us to be our own people, remember? She "longed" for us to be our own people, even if that means you'll be all irritatingly normal.

CLOVER: But I promised her that I would take care of you.

RIVER: You have been. But I guess if you really want to take care of me now, you have to let me grow up. On my own.

CLOVER: *(Beat.)* So . . . how does the novel end?

RIVER: *(Beat.)* I don't know yet. It's unpredictable I guess.

## THE UNFORTUNATE GIFT

*Nicolas, 15, and Jennifer, 14, are waiting at a city bus stop. They both attend high school at Marymount High. Nicolas is a sophomore, and Jennifer is a diligent freshman. Jennifer got a late start this morning because she was up until midnight last night studying for her biology class. Nicolas is late because he decided not to take the last bus. He had a strange feeling about it. Nicolas is known at school as an eccentric. For his biology project last year, he deprived himself of sleep for several days and recorded his thoughts and answers to short quizzes. The project was a hit with his teacher, but most of the kids just thought he was weird. Fellow students try to keep their distance from him. Jennifer doesn't know him at all, but she has observed his slightly strange behavior in the hall heading to class. Nicolas looks down the street in search of a bus. Jennifer, who just ran a block to try to catch the last bus, leans against the bench trying to catch her breath.*

NICOLAS: *(Looking down the street.)* You sound tired.

JENNIFER: *(Panting.)* I ran the whole block. I thought that was the 71 bus.

NICOLAS: It was the 71 bus.

JENNIFER: Oh. *(Beat.)* That was the 71 bus?

NICOLAS: That one that just left a second ago? Just now?

JENNIFER: Yeah.

NICOLAS: That was the 71.

JENNIFER: It was? *(He nods.)* Shoot! God . . . blessed! I'm so late. I slowed down at the end of the block there because I thought . . .

NICOLAS: You thought it wasn't the 71 because I didn't take it?