

“Pick it up before each tournament and try to read it again ‘for the first time.’ You’ll be surprised at what you find.”

— Dr. James M. Brandon

“We sometimes switch roles. We often alter blocking. Sometimes we add vocal music in the intro. We do many dramatic exercises to help discover the characters and make them fuller during the season.”

— David Scheidecker

“Experiment casting each scene as a different movie genre: mystery, sci-fi, farce, musical, and so forth. Finding new hidden meaning will reveal a wealth of new life to a piece.”

— Michael Graupmann

“We try to expand their thinking—think outside the box; try new things with delivery and blocking.”

—Jaye Morrison

“Never settle into your performance so much that it doesn’t change—even if you’re winning! Often judges will see you more than once in a season. We love to find that even the best scenes have progressed and improved. Look for new moments each time you rehearse or perform. Watch for what your scene partner is giving you and ensure that you are returning the favor!”

— Dan Foss

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We would like to thank those who kindly offered their helpful advice. In the pages that follow, we hope you find a scene that sets your soul ablaze—that you simply **MUST** do. Be sure to check out the other books in our Forensics Series. Good luck in all competitions and remember—have FUN!

Barbara Lhota and Janet B. Milstein

ACCEPTANCE LETTER

Tina, 38 years old, arrives home from a long evening at the bowling alley. She is eager to plan Charlie’s big birthday/graduation party. Charlie, 18 years old, is not at all enthused. He sits in a chair with his head buried in a book when Tina enters.

TINA: (*Sing-songy.*) Heeellooo! I’m home. (*Seeing him.*) Hey, kid. Get your filthy sneakers off the chair. How ya doin’?

CHARLIE: (*Shrugs.*) I don’t know.

TINA: Well, how was your day?

CHARLIE: I don’t know.

TINA: Twelve years. Twelve years of teachers goin’ on about my son’s academic aptitude. He’s bright, he’s gifted, he’s absolutely brilliant and yet, every time I ask him a question, it’s “I don’t know.”

CHARLIE: (*Getting up.*) Anyway . . .

TINA: I’m kidding. Now, don’t walk away from me. Guess what I did tonight? Guess.

CHARLIE: Why don’t *you* guess what I did?

TINA: Okay, but you go first. I’ll give you a hint. It has to do with your birthday.

CHARLIE: Oh great.

TINA: Don’t “oh great” me. It’s good news. I got party favors. It’s a whole Hawaiian theme.

CHARLIE: I’m going to be eighteen years old, Mom, not eight!

TINA: Oh boy, eighteen, Charlie! That’s ancient.

CHARLIE: I’m just saying I don’t want a theme party.

TINA: Oh come on, we’re not talkin’ Mickey Mouse. It’s Hawaiian. It’s fun. It’s festive. We’ll even do (*Sing-songy.*) *liquor* provided we have some designated drivers.

CHARLIE: I really don’t want a party anymore.

TINA: What? Don’t be ridiculous. I stopped at the bakery. The cake’s amazing. It’s a hoola girl doll-thingy. The grass skirt’s

a vanilla cake with loads of frosting. The doll's wearing a coconut bra. Very sexy. Your friends will love it.

CHARLIE: I don't have any friends to invite.

TINA: Come on now, you're just being silly. Everyone from the bowling alley's planning on coming. They're your friends.

CHARLIE: No, they're *your* friends, Mom. And I don't want anything to do with them. I have nothing in common with them.

TINA: Oh, well, below your standards, huh? I suppose the gang will get over it. But Mel and Lorraine will be hurt. I guess you have lots of kids from school you'd rather have come.

CHARLIE: No. I wouldn't know who to invite. I don't have any friends at school.

TINA: Jerry and (*Sing-songy.*) Lisa to start.

CHARLIE: I don't have a thing for her. How many times do I have to tell you that?

TINA: Okay, okay. I just think she's adorable. Anyway, small groups are fun. Four's definitely a party. And you can definitely do four, Charlie.

CHARLIE: May I be excused now?

TINA: Wait. I thought you were going to help me unload the car. I got all kinds of crap in there. My feet are killin' me! It's warm for March, huh?

CHARLIE: Do you want me to unload or not?

TINA: Not. I want you to sit. Come here.
(*Charlie moves closer to her.*)

TINA: Sit. (*He does.*) Whatcha been doin'?

CHARLIE: (*Gesturing to his book.*) Oh, parachute jumping, skydiving, what's it look like?

TINA: Like you're rereading your trigonometry book for the fiftieth time, practically in the dark.

CHARLIE: *Was* reading. *Was* is operative.

TINA: You're going to ruin your eyes.

CHARLIE: And why do you say *the fiftieth time* as if that were a bad thing to do?

TINA: I didn't say it was bad. I just don't understand, Charlie, why you don't loosen up.

CHARLIE: Most parents would be thrilled. They'd love it if their kid were reading about math or physics. You act like it's some sort of downfall.

TINA: I just want you to enjoy life. I don't understand why you aren't out with a girlfriend or hanging with some friends.

CHARLIE: Why aren't you?

TINA: Because I worked for nine hours at the bowling alley and then I went shopping for a party I thought you were excited about.

CHARLIE: Emphasis on *thought*.

TINA: Yes. Fine. I don't know what's the matter with you, but apparently you're angry with me for some unknown reason. And I seem to be put in the position of guessing why.

CHARLIE: I never said I was angry with you.

TINA: You don't have to say it. You exude it from every pore.

CHARLIE: So did I get any *mail* in the last few days?

TINA: Oh my God! Is that what this is all about? I should have known.
(*Charlie looks down.*)

TINA: Charlie, I know you're nervous about these school applications, but you did apply to the two most difficult universities in the United States.

CHARLIE: So . . . so?

TINA: So . . . there's, uh, well, a lot of bureaucracy. They're big. It's easy to get lost in the shuffle.

CHARLIE: Oh. So you're saying my application got lost in the shuffle?

TINA: It could happen. I don't know. I'm simply saying that I honestly think you ought to reconsider staying home the first year. Maybe going to the community college in Alpena.

CHARLIE: Oh my God, why? Why would I do that, Mom?! We've been over this. All my teachers understand. Why don't you? You do realize I'm in the top 1 percent in the

state? I'm not trying to brag, I'm not! But I just don't belong in Black River and you know it.

TINA: I know you'll go to a much better school eventually. I just think you could use another year under your belt. I mean, you're young for your age. That's good. I think you'll mature in a year. You'll know what you really want.

CHARLIE: I know what I want now! The only problem is that it's not what *you* want.

TINA: What I want has nothing to do with it. MIT and Harvard are too expensive.

CHARLIE: So it's the money? That's why you got rid of it?

TINA: Got rid of what? *(Pause.)* Charlie?

CHARLIE: *(Beat.)* My acceptance letter. My acceptance to MIT.

TINA: What are you talking about?

CHARLIE: See you never guessed what I did today. So I'll tell you. I got a phone call. Guess who? *(Beat.)* Don't you want to guess, Mom?

TINA: No. Tell me.

CHARLIE: Oh, you can do better than that. You already had a hint. It was the head of the math department at MIT. He asked why I hadn't responded to a letter sent out almost two weeks ago. I guess I played it off . . . said we had rotten luck with our mail lately. The only reason he even called me, since he never does that, is that Mr. Franklin, my math teacher, is a personal friend of his. Mr. Franklin wondered why I wasn't notified either way. *(Beat.)* The thing is I think I *was* notified . . . only I never saw it.

TINA: I was going to give it to you, Charlie.

CHARLIE: When? After it was too late to accept? After you convince me that I would just be a number there, lost in the shuffle?

TINA: I never intended on holding onto it. I just couldn't let go of it. I was going to give it to you soon. And nothing—I swear *nothing* has come from Harvard yet.

CHARLIE: Yeah, well, forgive me if I call tomorrow because I don't trust you anymore.

TINA: I was proud of you when I read it.

CHARLIE: Could have fooled me! It was mine!

TINA: I know. I'm sorry. I just . . . I didn't think I could afford it by myself. I was trying to figure. I thought Grandpa would have had more money to leave behind. I thought—

CHARLIE: Who cares. I'll get financial aid. I'll get scholarships. Maybe not a full one, but I can take out loans.

TINA: Oh, Charlie, I don't want you to start your life in debt. Grandpa always used to say it was a terrible way to—

CHARLIE: Grandpa was wrong! He was wrong to make you quit school because he didn't want to take out loans. You were really smart. It was so dumb!

TINA: No, don't blame Grandpa for my quitting. Getting pregnant didn't help. Not that I have ever regretted that.

CHARLIE: Anyway, the point is you could have done so much more. We could have lived better.

TINA: It's not so bad . . . what I've done. Who I am. How we've lived, is it?

CHARLIE: Mom, be honest, you work in a run-down bowling alley in a nothing town.

TINA: It's not a nothing town. It may not be as intellectual or cultured as you'd like, but there are nice people here. They're good people, and they have been very, very good to us. I had nothing but a bunch of bruises and a shattered ego when I arrived here. I got a job, and I made good friends and I built a bowling league at the bowling alley that's alive, and active. It's a good . . . it's a nice life.

CHARLIE: And you'd like me to stay here? Go to school at Alpena Community College?

TINA: Just a year. It's not that bad. I'll work part-time at Walgreen's to make extra cash. Then you'll go away next year, and you won't have to take out as much in student loans.

CHARLIE: One year? Maybe, maybe I could do it. Work at the paper mill. They need engineers. That's a challenging job. And engineers make a pretty good salary.

TINA: Yeah. Yes, exactly! Meanwhile you enjoy the lake and waterskiing. You work at the forest preserves for extra cash. We'll throw three major kickbutt cookouts a summer.

CHARLIE: And I give up hope of ever being on the Genome project, or designing rockets that orbit Saturn, or creating technologies that defy the very laws of gravity! I know I'm weird. But I love trig! I love physics, and chemistry, and Latin! And Mom, I will invent something. I don't know what yet, but it'll be big, or part of something big. I have big expectations—huge, and yet, your expectations for me are so small. That's what I don't get. You say you love me, but you act as if you hardly know me. Because if you did, you would know I could survive a four-year university. It's all I ever prepared for and dreamed of.

TINA: I don't have small expectations for you, Charlie. I know you're special. I've always known. Don't you get it? I don't want you to leave.

CHARLIE: But you can leave with me! We could get a place together.

TINA: No. No. Where would I work?

CHARLIE: There are jobs in bowling alleys in Cambridge. There're probably tons.

TINA: But I don't know anyone there in Cambridge.

CHARLIE: You'll know me.

TINA: Your head will be swirling about with vectors and, god willing someday, women. There won't be time for me. And that's as it should be.

CHARLIE: All these years you've had me fooled. You always pretended to be such a wild free-spirit. Margarita parties at Christmas.

TINA: That was a hit last year, huh?

CHARLIE: Yeah. The party girl who would do anything, go anywhere if only she had more money and less kid. The truth is that you're afraid of anything outside of here, aren't you?

TINA: I wouldn't say afraid exactly. But I suppose I wouldn't be considered all that wild. Too much competition.

CHARLIE: I remember when that guy, that cousin guy from New York . . . Mel's cousin . . .

TINA: Dan.

CHARLIE: Yeah. Dan Walters. Exactly. When he visited last year.

TINA: What about him?

CHARLIE: He liked you. He tried to kiss you in the kitchen last Christmas.

TINA: No he didn't. Not exactly.

CHARLIE: Yes he did. I saw it. And you wouldn't let him do it.

TINA: Maybe I didn't like him, smartie pants.

CHARLIE: Oh you *liked* him all right. You did that giggle thing all night. You were just afraid you'd like him too much and have to go off to New York, which would be scary.

TINA: I don't know. Maybe. I do like this little town, Charlie. I like our little house and the lake. It's nice, almost perfect. I wish we could play crazy eights and hang out forever.

CHARLIE: I wish we could too. But I need so badly to meet people more like me. I can't stay here with you just because you want me to. Can't you see that? It'll destroy me.

TINA: And leaving here would destroy me. So what's a desperate mother to do? Let him go, though you know his leaving will hurt more than anything else you've ever experienced? Or resort to stealing letters out of the mail? I chose stealing a letter. Foolish. Selfish.

(Charlie nods gently.)

TINA: I know you think my life was wasted, Charlie, but I am so proud of what I've done.

CHARLIE: I know. "The bowling alley has more than a hundred active league members."

TINA: Darn tootin'! And it was dead before I started managing it, but that's not what I meant.

CHARLIE: I know we have a great house.

TINA: No, that's not what I was going to say either.

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.