

## “Cupcake”

feature script treatment by Jan Wilson

Colorful balloons and birthday streamers fill a cheerful dining room. Presents and wrapping paper are strewn everywhere. A large group of giggly 12 year-olds sit around the table finishing their pink frosted cupcakes, presided over by the attentive Birthday Mom. She encourages them to change into their bathing suits so they can go swimming in the backyard pool. They all squeal with delight and scurry off...all except one.

A chubby girl, Jenny Rossetti, in garish homemade bead earrings lingers at the table. The swimming pool glistens in the sun through the sliding glass door. She eyes it with reluctance. The Birthday Mom understands Jenny's reluctance to get into a bathing suit and tells her she doesn't have to join the other girls if she doesn't want. Jenny is relieved. She finishes her cupcake. Birthday Mom tells her, "Have as many as you want, sweetie."

The Birthday Mom gathers some used paper plates and cups and whisks them away. Jenny grabs several cupcakes, quickly unwraps them and shoves them into her mouth.

Several blocks away Tony Rossetti, 50s, Italian-American, sits on his bed putting his shirt on. A sumptuous tanned blonde, Kim, a fit 40, lays beside him tangled in sheets. She has a post-coital glow. Tony pulls on some old well-worn jeans and a sloppy shirt. She gazes around the room. It's a bit shabby. Not very well decorated. Tony fits in. She doesn't. She sits on the side of the bed. Slips into her designer clothes. Tony flops on the bed. Tries to nuzzle her, but she's shifted gears. "You wanna go get something to eat?" he asks. She bristles a bit and leans away from him. She explains that she can't, she's busy. She tells him this was fun, but she doesn't see them 'hanging out' together. Tony half-jokingly says it's kind of like walking on eggshells with her. Kim takes a long, loathing look at the room before saying "The correct term is 'eggs,' Tony. 'Walking on eggs.' Not eggshells." Then she's gone.

Back at the birthday house Jenny approaches the pool, still in regular clothes. All the other little girls are swimming. A small group of girls whisper and laugh while looking in Jenny's direction. A pretty blonde girl, Tamara, jokes, "She probably can't fit into a suit." The snickering group all look at Jenny. A solitary lump with smudges of pink frosting on her face. Jenny points to the water. "Chlorine causes cancer, ya know." The little girls look at each other, alarmed.

The Birthday Mom clears the shredded wrapping paper from the floor around the table. She glances at the table, shocked. *A dozen discarded cupcake wrappers* sit on Jenny's plate.

Tony's bakery is in a nice area of Old Town, Pasadena. The bakery is old, but now surrounded by hip shops and boutiques. The bakery is bustling. Several bakery employees wait on constant streams of customers taking home baked goods and hot drinks. Some sit-down customers take their espressos and pastries to the light-filled seating area. The glass case is full of luscious goodies and breads.

Tony is behind the counter putting some finishing touches on his latest masterpiece, a large tray of glazed pear tarts with pecan sauce. Gorgeous. Kim sits with her group of upscale housewives sipping lattes and fiddling with their iPhones. Her group steal carnivorous glances and sly smiles at Tony as he wields his baking tools. Tony does his best to ignore them, but the turning heads of the women distract him. His normally steady hand slips. This pear's cream piping isn't so perfect.

Kim is holding her empty latte cup up and waving it at Tony. There's no table service in this little bakery, and she knows it. But Tony treks to her table, takes the empty cup she holds out for a refill. "Can I get another one please? Thanks so much." Tony stands rooted to the spot. After no further introductions happen he returns to behind the counter.

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A little while later Tony bursts out of the front door, a white paper bag in hand. Walks to his car.

At the birthday house Tony goes inside to pick Jenny up from the party. He hands the Birthday Mom the bag filled with gorgeous pastries. He says he's sorry he didn't have time to do something fancier than cupcakes for the party and these are to make up for it. She oohs and aahs over them. After hearing that he's giving her the entire batch she insists he takes back a few for his own family. He says he's got plenty of other things at the bakery, but she's already slipped a few back into the bag and handed it to him. He graciously accepts it. She becomes suddenly secretive and leans in close, drawing him in closer. "Could I just mention something?"

In the adjoining room, Jenny gets her prize bag and favors. She pops another cupcake into her mouth. When she hears the Birthday Mom speaking in hushed tones, she hangs back and stays hidden. Listens.

In the kitchen Birthday Mom tells Tony, "Now I know at birthday parties the kids tend to overdo things a bit. I'm certainly guilty of having way too much ice cream and cake and candies here today...but..." She leans closer to speak. Tony leans closer to hear. "Not that I normally count such things, but I noticed that Jenny ate about 15 cupcakes." Tony lets this sink in, dazed.

Overhearing this from the next room, Jenny fumes silently. But before the adults can continue, Jenny forces a cheerful appearance in the doorway.

Outside, Jenny hops into their car. Tony walks around to the driver's side, but stops before he opens his door. He closes the paper bag and rolls the top down. He rolls it down so far, so hard his knuckles turn white. Cream and rich raspberry mush seep through the paper bag. As he gets into the car he surreptitiously shoves the mangled mess into the side pocket of the door.

As they drive home Tony tries to bring the cupcake subject up as casually as he can. "Mrs. Adams said you liked my cupcakes." She rolls her eyes. "Smooth, Dad. Yes, I ate some cupcakes." Tony uses the lightest tone of voice he can to mention that she had quite a few cupcakes. Jenny says to herself, "She lied." Tony hears, and replies, "Now why would she lie to me?" Jenny clarifies. "Not to you. To *me*. Said I could have as many as I wanted, then snitched on me for it."

The next day Tony is hard at work kneading dough when the perfect distraction appears: Tony's cousin Felix, late 30s, saunters in through the back door. Flak jacket and greasy hair, Felix looks like he hasn't slept all night. Tony teases him, "Hey. Run out of shampoo?" "No time for that. I'm a busy man. Out making connections, finding leads..." "Tasting beer, bothering women..." Felix tells Tony about his latest endeavor, a friend of a friend runs a plumbing company and would hire Felix as a plumber and he'd make great money. Tony points out the teensy problem: Felix isn't a plumber. Felix says he's enthused to go to trade school so he can pass his plumber's license exam and embark on this fabulous new career. Tony's leery, Felix's attention doesn't usually stay on one thing for too long, but he tries to be supportive of this, Felix's millionth "plan."

Jenny comes in from school, claiming it's super boring diagramming sentences all day. Tony and Felix both laugh and sympathize with her, Tony blurting out, "They still teach that stupid stuff? When on earth does anyone use that?" Jenny then informs Tony that Jenny's teacher, Ms. McIntyre wants to see him. He frowns hearing this news.

A few days later Tony waits to see Ms. McIntyre in Jenny's empty classroom. He inspects a student's hand-drawn book report covers that's been tacked to the wall. He's all alone. He scans the empty room. Loads of classic literature, some students' work is still on the blackboard. He

notices a large educational poster about *Alice in Wonderland*. It shows Alice talking to the Cheshire Cat. Tony shivers and is creeped out. "Eecccchh."

Gina McIntyre, 40s, a bundle of explosive energy, bursts into the room already mid-sentence. Tony snaps to attention like the ex-Catholic schoolboy that he is. "...these damn staff meetings always run late. And why? Because we are discussing invigorating and exciting new curriculum?" Tony is stunned silent. Is he expected to answer? She continues on, "Or effective ways of bringing down the absences? Or techniques for keeping the students interested? No. Because we started so late due to an extensive discussion regarding whether or not to use yellow chalk or white chalk. Apparently we can save eight cents if we use yellow only. Like who cares, right?"

They get off on the wrong foot. Tony is annoyed that she seems to be taking out her frustration on him. And she busts him by mentioning that Jenny said that her dad called sentence diagramming "stupid." Gina makes a reference about a mouse drowning in tears that he doesn't understand, he feels embarrassed that she has to explain. "Sorry again. I've got *Alice in Wonderland* on the brain. We're putting the play on and so I've re-immersed myself in it. Alice nearly drowns the animals in her tears...never mind." Tony shivers, "I hated that story. Gave me the creeps. I'm so glad I never have to deal with *Alice in Wonderland* again."

After some mutual jabs they get to the business at hand. Gina begins, "As I'm sure you know, as well as teaching English I'm in charge of the headphone rental in study hall. The kids can listen to books on CDs for a small fee. We find it helps to hear it spoken for some of the kids who have trouble reading." Tony still isn't following. "Each child gets a turn taking the money and assigning a walkman and a CD to the student. I have no concrete proof, but I have very strong suspicions..." Tony leans forward...waiting. She continues, "Jenny seems to be stealing money when it's her turn." He's relaxed now. He laughs. He assures her there's no way she'd do that. No reason for her to. Gina presses on, suggesting that it's actually quite clever the way Jenny gets the money."

#### FLASHBACK TO JENNY IN THE ACT

Jenny waits until it's her turn to man the cash box. Jenny sits with a petty cash lock-box, reading while she waits. A student approaches. She lets a few transactions go by normally. The kid gives her two bucks. She writes it on a ledger and stamps his hand. He goes to his seat and listens to his CD. Gina narrates, "She needs some money in the cash box, otherwise it'd look suspicious. A few more kids come over, pay her the fee." She writes it down and puts the money in the box. Gina adds, "But then every other transaction or so...she takes their money..." A kid hands her his fee. She takes it and puts it aside. "But she doesn't write it up." Jenny tells the kid, "We're all out of receipts. Here, let me just stamp your hand..." She stamps his hand. He takes his CDs. "But the kid doesn't care. He's getting the service he paid for. And she gets two bucks." She takes the money, and surreptitiously slips it in her pocket. "And no one's the wiser since there's no way to inventory things. END FLASHBACK

Tony covers his face with his hands. "Oh my God." Gina tries to soothe him. "Quite clever actually. I'm not sure if I should be worried...or impressed." He's mortified. She continues, "Um...but there's a bit more."

Gina hops off her desk and walks to a small student's desk. Tony swivels to watch her. She crouches down. "I think I know what she spends the money on." She reaches into the desk's storage space. She pulls out a huge wad of very crinkly, noisy papers. He squints. What is it?

A huge pile of EMPTY CANDY AND SWEET TREAT WRAPPERS. He stares, wide-eyed.

#### FLASHBACK

Echoey flashback of a much younger Tony walking into the bakery's storage room. The sound of CRINKLY TREAT WRAPPERS turns into GLASS BOTTLES CLINKING. A pretty young woman is

frantic. She piles several half-empty vodka bottles into her arms from a hidey hole. Tony freezes. She turns to him, her eyes full of tears. Her voice is distant, echoey, full of hurt. "How many other hiding places are there?"

Gina's voice snaps him back to the present. END FLASHBACK. "These wrappers are just from the past few days," she says. A knife into his heart.

Jenny's voice echoes in his head. "We're all out of receipts. Here, let me just stamp your hand..."  
GLASS BOTTLES CLINK LOUDLY, NEVER ENDING, SO LOUD UNTIL –

Tony is back in his bakery. It's late at night. Quiet and still. The bakery is closed. Tony is working feverishly, drenched in sweat, but not slowing down. The bread display case is filled to the brim. An extra display basket on the counter is also overflowing with loaves. And there are more loaves stacked on the work tables.

Tony pulls more loaves out of the ovens, one after another. Bread is piling up everywhere. The back door SLAMS. Felix appears in the baking area. He takes in the scene, the overabundance of loaves. Felix says, "Ut oh. What happened? The baking fiend is back!" Felix snatches a fresh loaf. "Careful, they're hot," Tony warns. Felix rips the bread open and digs out a chunk. He yelps in pain from the hot bread. Tony says, "Did I mention it was hot?" Tony catches his breath while Felix devours the fresh bread.

As Tony continues his baking therapy he asks Felix if he thinks that Tony is the first addict in the family. Even though Tony's had his drinking problem under control for years now he wonders if addiction is inherited. But then he mentions that neither of their parents are addicts. Felix jumps on this comment. "You mother isn't an addict? Oh, you mean the mother upstairs with more lions and warhogs in her room than on the entire African continent?" Tony says he doesn't think that counts, it's just a delayed childhood thing since she had a rough childhood in Italy. Felix says he still thinks it's an addiction.

Upstairs a spry, tiny figure, Mrs. Rossetti, stands over an exquisite hand-carved antique dresser that dominates one corner of her bedroom. "This one is rare. See the crown? Hard to find." The massive dresser would look elegant and old world, except for the fact that it is absolutely covered with hundreds of tiny plastic Lion King figures. All neatly categorized, all of the Simbas are together, all of the Rafikis, all of the Scars. A huge landscape of the Lion King world. She proudly dusts her collection. Jenny lays on the bed, a polite hostage. "I know, I know, Grandma, you almost never find a Simba with a crown." Mrs. Rossetti chastises Jenny for 'being lazy' and wallowing in the bed. But then Jenny perks up when Mrs. Rossetti suggests they go to their favorite haunt, the thrift store.

Jenny skips through the bakery with Mrs. Rossetti in tow. There is still way too much bread. As they pass Tony, Jenny simply shouts her destination at him. "Thrift store!" Tony waves goodbye. As Mrs. Rossetti shuts the door behind her the handmade sign in the window shifts. "BUY ONE LOAF, GET THREE FREE!"

Gobs of tiny toys have been sorted and put into clear plastic bags. Mrs. Rossetti holds a bag up, shakes it so she can get a good look at everything. She spots something of interest. "Ooo. Is that a Simba?" She sees the price tag is \$2, but it's for the entire bag. She tosses it back onto the pile, upset. "Why don't they just sell these separately?"

Outside on a busy Pasadena street Tony waits his turn to buy a newspaper from a newsstand. As he waits he scans the magazines in front of him. One women's magazine catches his eye. Tony sits inside his usual haunt, Duke's Café. As he finishes his lunch he zeroes in on his new women's magazine article entitled "Why We Overeat: Filling the Void." As his Chubby Redheaded

Waitress, 50s, approaches he hides the magazine in the folds of his newspaper. He makes small talk with this happy, chirpy woman. She offers him dessert, he declines. She jokes about the fact that she's always pushing pie on him even though he never orders any dessert. After she leaves he continues reading his article.

At dinner that night over generous helpings of food dished out by Mrs. Rossetti Tony tries to engage Jenny into a conversation about finding some sort of club or group at school to help her "fill the void." When pressed to explain what type of void Tony offers that perhaps because Jenny's mother left the family while she was young she's had some type of hole in her life. Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti laugh at this notion and dismiss it. Tony persists and urges her to join some type of group like a creative writing club or something. Jenny mentions that she overheard Ms. McIntyre talking about Tony. He cringes, thinking it's something derogatory after their rocky meeting. "I went up to turn my test in, and I heard her say to Mrs. Kearny 'Oh I met Jenny's dad the other night.' Miss Kearny says 'What's he like?'" Tony cringes. He suddenly finds his potatoes fascinating. Jenny continues, "And Ms. McIntyre said 'He was so cute I just wanted to nibble on him.'" Tony seems a bit excited to hear this. He's all smiles, then covers it with feigned indifference.

After dinner Jenny sits in her room at her dressing table looking in the mirror. She takes a bite of a chocolate eclair. She talks to her reflection. "When did you realize that you had a gift?" A glob of Bavarian cream squishes out of the eclair as she takes a few more bites. With her mouth full, she answers, "Well, I was very young when it was brought to my family's attention that I had gifts in many areas." Her eclair is gone. She puts on her homemade earrings. "Without bragging I can say I was the envy of the school." She leaves the mirror and goes to her closet. "I starred in all of the plays." From the deep recesses of her closet she pulls out a white paper bag. "And I started my own line of jewelry while still a teenager." Back to her interview mirror. She pulls out another eclair from the bag. "I wrote my first novel when I was 18 -" A quick KNOCK on her door. She freezes. Tony pops his head in. "Time for bed." He points to her eclair. "Just the one, kiddo." She smiles sweetly. "Yeah, Dad. Just the one."

In the morning Tony goes to see Gina McIntyre again at school. As the kids spill out of class he says he has an idea he needs to discuss with her. "Ut oh...are we going down the rabbit hole?" He tries to catch her meaning, but nothing comes. "Rabbit hole?" She's surprised he doesn't get the reference, "*Alice in Wonderland*. C'mon Mouse, I figured you'd get that one!" "Oh, I'm a mouse now?" She gathers her things, and they head out. "Not a mouse, but *Mouse*. That's his name. You seemed a bit skittish the other day. When Alice first meets Mouse, he's skittish and she scares him off." He nods, not quite getting it. She continues, "In *Alice and Wonderland*. I know how you *love* that book." Her smirk is a little too cocky, prompting him to add, "Yeah, I DO actually. I love Mouse. He's so cute I just want to nibble on him." This stops her dead in her tracks. Busted. He grins. She smiles sheepishly. Okay, they're even now.

Gina and Tony sit in a coffee shop booth, coffee in front of them. Tony explains to her that he married a younger woman, she wanted kids so here he is in his 50s with a middle-schooler. And his wife left the family when Jenny was two, Jenny doesn't even remember her. Tony is worried that that left a void in Jenny's life that she is unconsciously trying to fill with food. And coupled with that is the fact that Tony used to be a raging alcoholic, but he's been sober and in AA for nine years now. He feels guilty that perhaps Jenny inherited his addictive tendencies from him. Gina isn't so sure it works like that, no one really knows the cause of addiction. But as well as being a recovering alcoholic he's also a recovering Catholic, so he's always filled with guilt of some sort.

Gina does agree with Tony though that it couldn't hurt to try and steer Jenny toward a school club like DECA to teach her business skills. "I'll try and steer her that way. I'll help her learn whatever topic she's interested in. 'Ambition, distraction, uglification and derision.'" He looks sideways at her. "Is that another Alice quote?" Now *she* looks sideways at *him*, "I thought you said you read it.

Here I am constantly quoting it to creep you out and you don't seem to..." He can barely meet her eye. "I did. But...I meant the kid's picture book. You know, from the Disney movie." He admits that he never read the original book. Again he feels like an uneducated, working-class schlub again. She tries to let him off the hook. "You know, Tony, I bet hardly anyone's read the actual book. I'm just a literature geek." He finally smiles. "Yeah, you are a bit geeky." They are okay again. Then it sinks in. "Wait. You were *trying* to creep me out on purpose?"

Jenny, alone as usual, strolls down the hall. A wall of flyers catches her attention. A large red DECA notice tries to entice members. She goes toward it. But it is the flier below it that she is aiming for. TRYOUTS FOR ALICE IN WONDERLAND, FRIDAY THE 25TH, 3:30. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER. Jenny smiles, "Let's go down the rabbit hole."

Later that day as the class leaves, snotty little Tamara and her two sidekicks end up shuffling down the same hall as Jenny. The other three girls wear the same type of delicate necklace. Jenny notices. Gina notices that Tamara and her cronies exchange disdainful looks at Jenny's homemade earrings then leave her behind. Jenny approaches Gina at the desk to turn in her paper. Gina says, "Hey, I really like your earrings." Gina says she's impressed that Jenny makes them herself from bits and pieces of jewelry from the thrift stores. "I notice you wear lots of cool earrings. You must really like them." Jenny shrugs. "Sometimes the necklaces and bracelets are too small for me. But earrings always fit."

Back in the storage room of the bakery Tony and Felix play poker with two other working class guys, one of which is Tony's AA sponsor. Felix is trying to convince everyone that him becoming a plumber is a great idea that will make him lots of money. Everyone agrees that plumbers can make great money, but they just don't see him following through and getting licensed. It just doesn't seem like his thing. It's a dirty, stinky profession and that doesn't seem Felix's cup of tea. The Grease Monkey who is Tony's sponsor asks why he's missed the past two meetings. Tony says he had a parent-teacher meeting, and then had to stay late for a delivery. All true, but not what his sponsor wants to hear. He mentions that Tony's been in "Step Nine" for quite a while now. Felix is the big winner of the night, he scoops his pile of chips toward him with a gleeful whoop. Tony reminds him they are only worth a nickel each. Still, Felix is desperate for money, so he's still happy. The other two guys ask if there's any day-olds. Tony directs them to a box by the back door filled with day old donuts headed for the dumpster. They rifle through until they find a few chocolate ones. "Alright, score! Chocolate rules!" They take their treasures and leave.

After they leave Tony says "Shit. He's right." Felix nods. "Yeah, I do appreciate a bit of chocolate now and then. Did you know chocolate wasn't introduced into the western world until - " "No! I mean, I skipped my last two AA meetings!" Tony assures Felix that he hasn't had any slips, but he could be doing better. "Which step are you on?" Felix asks. "Nine." "Weren't you on...?" "Yeah, yeah! I was on step nine two years ago! Take your huge winnings and leave." Felix asks, "Which one is step nine?" Tony can recite it by heart. "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." "Oh, the amends. Well, that list can't be that long. You hurt your wife by drinking, but she's long gone. You hurt that one guy at the party after you thought he was sitting on your coat." "No, no, no. You don't just apologize for anything you've done wrong due to your drinking. You have to make amends to everyone you've ever wronged...ever." "Oh shit. You can't mean *everyone*." Tony nods. Felix asks, "Even if your 'wrong' had nothing to do with drinking?" Tony nods. Tony says he's been working on the list for a long time, has done most of them, but has three big ones left to tackle."

Tony then asks Felix if he thinks addictive behavior is inherited or learned. Felix says he's not really sure, but he can see that it could be learned. "You see your parents dealing with problems by drinking or gambling, maybe it's a learned behavior. On the other hand, there are families with no addictions and then a kid'll end up severely addicted to heroin or pills or anything he can get his

hands on, so who knows? Maybe genetics AND environment? It's complex. Millions of variables involved. This about Jenny?" Tony admits that Jenny's sugar fixation might be a bit more than just the average kid craving sweets. "And now I make her live in a bakery." "Above a bakery. Pull back a bit on that guilt, Catholic Boy."

Tony admits that he's been going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings for nine years, but has been hiding it from Jenny because Mrs. Rossetti didn't think Jenny should be subjected to "that sort of thing." Tony's been covering it by saying he was going to weekly poker games with his buddies. Felix finds this perplexing. "You don't want Jenny to know you're an alcoholic, so you cover it by pretending to be a gambling addict?" Felix thinks Tony should cut the cord with his mama and do what he wants. If he thinks openly showing Jenny that 12 step groups work then he should tell her that. Tony doesn't think taking a self-conscious 12 year-old girl to Overeaters Anonymous would be a good idea. So he decides finishing his last three amends would be a good example to Jenny.

Tony delicately asks his mother to start helping choose more healthy foods for dinner. She says of course she will do whatever she can to help Jenny learn to eat better.

Tony and Jenny cruise through the produce section of a grocery store. She sips soda through a straw as Tony tries to make the gorgeous vegetables and fruit seem more appealing. She's pretty disinterested, but goes along with it. As Tony continues his praise of the idea of having fresh fruit for dessert Jenny gets to the bottom of her soda, loudly sucking up the last drops of soda. She continues to make the God-awful "bottom of the cup" sound. Tony grabs her empty soda cup, tosses it in the cart. Tony steers the conversation to the snack bar at school and gets her to admit that she eats there quite often. "But I don't give you money for that. Where do you - " Just as Tony tap-dances nearer to the heart of the thieving matter, she changes gears. "Oh! That reminds me! Guess what I'm going to do at school!" After a short round of the guessing game Tony is confused to hear her answer. "I'm going to play Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*. I'm going to star in the play!" He tries to be excited, but his confusion is stronger. He smiles through it. "Uh, what? What do you mean? You... already tried out?" His excitement builds. She won the part already? "No, but I will. I'm trying out this week. I'm going to be Alice! I'm going to star in the play!" She hops up and down, grinning ear to ear. He tries not to let his sheer terror show through. "Great!"

Tony makes another desperate visit to Gina at school where he explains to her that Jenny has her heart set on winning the Alice role, and Gina is hesitant at first to offer much encouragement. But the more she thinks about it, the more she thinks there's no reason why Jenny wouldn't be able to win the role. The drama teacher is a fair man. Tony adds, "We can rehearse her audition scene until she's got it down perfect." "Which scene does she have to do?" Tony isn't sure, but thinks it has something to do with the Queen of Hearts." Gina nods, "Ah yes, the Queen of Hearts. The biggest bitch in literary history." In order to continue their conversation Tony suggests the coffee shop again, but fiery Gina has a better idea.

A huge clatter as a bowling ball smashes the pins down. The bowling alley is alive with music, noise and cheers. With daylight blocked out, the lanes are in near darkness. The pins and balls are illuminated in bright day-glo colors. Gina is having fun despite the fact that she clearly has no earthly idea what she is doing on the bowling lane. Tony laughs at her excitement over her horrible throw. "Have you even been IN a bowling alley before?" Tony however is in his element when it's his turn. Tony hops up and readies his bowling ball. She sits, and marvels at his focus. "Wow, ladies and gentleman. Look at that form. Look at that focus." He's just about to go. "This is the famed Rossetti concentration that has garnered Tony legions of fans." Tony replies, ready to throw, "Shut up." Gina whispers, "Tempers flare as the tension builds." He throws a strike and she offers sincere praise, marveling at good he is. He nods, "Of course. This is the blue collar man's sport of choice." Pride or self-deprecation? Hard to tell. This parent-teacher meeting has morphed into a date of sorts.

Gina and Tony sit on barstools at the bowling alley snack bar studying the menu. Tony sees something he likes. "Buffalo wings! Yes! This is my kind of place!" Gina still scans her menu. "Hm. I don't suppose such an establishment would have a 1969 Dom Perignon?" Tony shifts uncomfortably in his seat. Suddenly aware of the cheesy decor and greasy menu items. She adds, "Or a 1991 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon?" "Um...they just have beer." She frowns slightly. He finally is able to meet her eye. "Do you want to go somewhere else?" Her frown morphs into a big goofy grin. "I'm just kidding, you dork! We're in a bowling alley, of course I want a beer." He is finally able to relax.

Gina seems to relish the idea of Jenny winning the role of Alice. "It sure would show those snotty little bitchy girls?" Gina says she cares about all of her students, but..."Let's face it. Those little girls are self-esteem butchers." Gina is getting steamed just thinking about it. "Why shouldn't Jenny get the part? Why should the pretty little rich girls always get everything?" "Have we stumbled onto a raw nerve here? An old memory? You were the shy bookworm who never got asked to the dance?" "Oh please. There's girls like this in every single little girl's past. It's inescapable." Gina is now fully on board with the idea and thinks that the auditions are in a week or so. She digs in her satchel, pulling out thick manuscripts and file folders. "I've got a school schedule in here somewhere." Tony spies the manuscript entitled *Moscow Stories by Gina McIntyre*. She tries to pass it off as a grammar book she is writing, but he doesn't buy it. She finally lets him see it. He reads a random bit of it out loud. "I had walked holes straight through my own shoes, and was relieved to see that there were many new shoe stores in Moscow at this time. Unfortunately no one was actually allowed to go into them." He finishes reading a few paragraphs before offering his thoughts. She bites her lip in dread. "Wow. That was great." She feels like a cliché, an English teacher that really wants to be the next great American novelist. Then she shocks Tony by asking him to read it because she values his opinion. "Me?" "Yeah. Oh, unless you don't want to. Or don't have time. I understand. It's a lot of reading, and I'm not even sure it doesn't totally suck and you might not even want -" "No. I'd be honored." And he's not lying.

Before they end their evening Gina says all Tony can do is support Jenny's desire to try out for *Alice in Wonderland*. "That's all she needs. The support of her dad. Life sucks and it's hard. Funny thing is, one of the main themes of *Alice in Wonderland* is the perils of childhood and how hard it is growing up. So ironically she really IS suited for the role." He's taken by surprise when she suddenly kisses him on the cheek. By the time he says, "Goodnight," ...she is already at her car and unlocking the door. She hesitates before she gets in. "You know what, Tony? I wish my dad had been more like you." She hits him with one last sincere smile before she gets in and heads off into the night. He's visibly relieved. Maybe he can do this parenting stuff after all.

Tony rushes into dinner, late because of his impromptu bowling date with Gina, but the family barely notices. Felix is there again, reading a book as he eats. Tony jokes that he's practically living here now, but Felix just waves him off. Jenny shares with Mrs. Rossetti and Felix that she's trying out for the lead role, and after Tony surreptitiously nods his approval Felix offers her encouragement. Mrs. Rossetti doesn't need to fake it, she truly believes Jenny can succeed. Jenny says she has the pages for the scene she'll be doing at the audition. Jenny beams with delight when Tony says that he will help her prepare for her audition.

Felix asks Jenny to quiz him, he still studying for his plumber's class. Jenny takes Felix's book and quizzes him. "In residential structures what is the minimum amount of wall space required to install a toilet?" "Wait, I know this one." "No you don't. You get it wrong every time." "No, I got it this time. In residential buildings it's 36 inches." "Nope. Thirty inches. It's 36 inches for commercial buildings. Uncle Felix, you are so screwed." Mrs. Rossetti gasps, "Jenny, don't say the S word." "Grandma, the S word is shit."

Dinner is interrupted by an unexpected visitor downstairs. Kim saunters through the kitchen area of the bakery as Tony stands watching. Kim says her husband took the kids to a movie so she's free for a few hours. But this time Tony doesn't seem interested. She takes this as a challenge. He cringes when she thinks the storeroom is his "den" where he hangs out. Mops, wooden pallets, card table for poker games. What must she think of him if she assumes this is where he hangs out? She uses her very considering feminine charms to seduce him. He can only resist for so long. At least until she tosses his white baker's smock to him and urges him to put it on. He's in the throes of passion, so he tosses it aside. But she is insistent. She won't continue until he puts on his blue collar uniform. He stops cold. He looks at what they're doing. Where they are. He backs away from her. She coos, "Come on. It's fun. It's role play." "And I always play the same role." She laughs. It's no revelation to her. "Oh, baby, come on. Did you think it was some great romance?" She confidently continues her seduction. "You thought I came to your bakery and seduced you because I appreciate your vast knowledge of the different types of French pastries? You can't tell me you don't get a secret thrill screwing the wife of the man who owns every office building on this block." He nods. He finally gets it. "I'm your dirty little secret." He tosses her her expensive blouse. She puts it on and heads for the front door. "Wait," he says. She smiles, until he adds, "I'll let you out the back door."

Jenny uses the floor space in her room as a stage. She has added some more jewelry for her practice audition. Tony is stretched out on Jenny's bed. He reads the Queen of Hearts' lines. "No, no! Sentence first, verdict afterward." Jenny already has her lines memorized, "Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the sentence first!" "Hold your tongue!" he says. "I won't!" she shouts. Tony continues, "Off with her head!" Jenny puts full emotion into her lines, "Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!" She stops. "Dad, what does that mean? I don't get it." Although Jenny has it word-perfect she's not sure what her lines mean and she wants to know. Tony shifts his position, stalling for time. "Well. Let's see." He quickly scans ahead in the script, looking for clues. Finds none. "You know what? It's, uh, complex. So why don't we save it for tomorrow and I'll explain it to you? We can go out to Duke's Cafe." "Just you and me? Cool."

Tony sits alone at his regular table in Duke's Café with the *Alice in Wonderland* book, and the school script. He's looking at the Cliff Notes for Alice in Wonderland. "What the hell? This guy was nuts." Tony switches from Cliff Notes to the book, and back again. The Chubby Redheaded Waitress approaches him with a coffeepot offering a refill, which he graciously accepts. She sees what he's reading and jokes, "Got a midterm coming up?" "Ha ha. I wish. Wouldn't it be great to be back in school again?" She frowns. "Uh, no. Not really."

Tony puts the finishing touches on a sheet cake in the bakery. Though the cake looks marvelous, his very last curlicue isn't absolutely perfect. He takes a small spatula and expertly extracts it. He does the curlicue again. Perfect. "There we go." Felix saunters through the bakery. He stops to admire Tony's cake. Felix spots a tempting swirl of icing and his finger gets dangerously close. "You want to lose that finger?" "Sorry, Martha." Felix snatches a free muffin and asks how Tony's last three amends are coming. Tony says all the little ones are already done, he only has three last ones to do. "So you mean just three amends left to make and then you're totally done with step nine? After all these years?" "Yup." "Good God, man, just do it! Just find the person and say "look, sit down, there's something I need to say to you." Tony dries his hands on a towel. Tony obliges, "Look, sit down, there's something I need to say to you." "Exactly. Great muffin by the way." Tony throws the towel aside and pulls out a chair for Felix. "No. I mean, Felix, there's something I need to say to you. Have a seat." Felix stares at the offered chair. With a mouth full of muffin he says... "Ut oh."

Tony goes on to explain to Felix that back before Tony's dad (Felix's uncle) retired he and his wife sat Tony down and said that they planned on leaving the bakery business to both Tony and Felix together. But Tony talked them out of it, persuaded them to leave the entire business to Tony

alone. Felix listens calmly, but looks out into the bustling dining area of this successful bakery. Could've been half his! Felix for once is struck speechless.

Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti walk together down the street after leaving a thrift store. They pass a McDonald's. Mrs. Rossetti asks, "Don't French fries sound good?" Jenny is surprised. "Now? Before dinner? Really?" Mrs. Rossetti shrugs, "Why not?" Jenny nods vigorously. They turn and head into McDonald's. Mrs. Rossetti adds, "I have an idea. How about we make this our little secret tradition? French fries after the thrift store. Let's not even tell your father." The most grandmotherly act of passive aggressive undermining.

Back in the bakery Felix is no longer speechless. "So you're saying that after a decade of me struggling and floundering that I should have been co-owner of this thriving, lucrative business?!" Tony tries to downplay it, claiming that it's successful but they aren't exactly swimming in money, and Felix would've only had half of that. Felix is furious, claiming that his entire life could've been so much better! "You've got this old business that just happens to now be smack dab in the middle of yuppieville now. Oh, and it just happens to have a free house above it! I'm in a tiny studio apartment paying \$950 a month!" "So you're saying that you would have wanted to live here in this apartment with your cousin, his daughter and his mother?! Where? In the back closet? The pantry?" "I don't know. But it would have been nice to have the option! I could have sold my half to you." Felix wants Tony to admit that he didn't want to share half the business because Tony thinks Felix is an irresponsible fuck-up. Tony points out that he's already on his fifth career and none of the others stuck with him.

Felix strides into the front of the bakery, takes in the whole scene. The bakery is full of customers. They sit eating their tasty treats and sipping their expensive espressos and lattes. They carry out boxes of goods. He looks at the staff. The expensive gleaming stainless steel baking equipment. The large clean kitchen. The pretty plant-filled dining area. He sighs. Then charges out the front door without a word to Tony. Tony lets him go. Through the windows Tony can see Felix run into Mrs. Rossetti and Jenny. A brief awkward exchange and then Felix rushes off. Jenny and Mrs. Rossetti come in. Jenny asks, "Jeez. What's his problem?" Mrs. Rossetti reassures her, "He's been studying very hard."

Felix strides down the street, still pissed off. He sees a bar and goes in.

Later, Jenny is helping out in the bakery, grinding nuts in a large mortar and pestle. Tony watches her having fun smashing them to bits. A harried mom with a cranky toddler gets Tony's attention. The staff is pretty busy, so Tony waits on her. Her arms are full of packages. The toddler clambers for her attention. The mom says she needs a dozen mini raspberry tarts. Tony does a quick count and says that's fine, he's got 15 left. But her toddler is mid-tantrum so she takes him outside to her car for a juice box to soothe his toddler rage.

Tony heads to his storage room and dials a number, gets voicemail. "Hi, it's Tony. I just wanted to tell ya that I made the amends to Felix. He flipped out and left. Man, I thought amends were supposed to make you feel better. I feel like shit. This just felt like something I should tell my sponsor so...there you go. No need to call me back. Bye."

Tony comes out of the storage room as the harried mom returns, this time hands-free and with her toddler quietly sucking on a juice box. Tony puts on a happy face for his customer. She's ready for her dozen tarts now. As he puts them into a box, he stops to recount. Counts what's in the box, what's left in the display case. Tony asks his employee, "You just sell some of these?" "No. Not since this morning." With dread he looks over to the stairs that lead upstairs. Tony tells the mom, "Sorry. I miscounted. Eleven enough?"

Jenny sits in her closet, scarfing down the four raspberry tarts. She freezes when she thinks she hears a noise from the hallway. She hides the remaining tarts. Nope, just a noise from downstairs. She retrieves her loot. Bites into another one.

Tony trudges down the hallway. He slows and stops in front of Jenny's door. He listens for a moment, but it's quiet inside her room. He turns and leaves.

A few days later Tony and Jenny head for his car parked on the street. "Before we go to Duke's I want to show you something."

Tony takes Jenny to a local community center. They enter a room with about ten people milling around. Tony's sponsor, the Grease Monkey is there, and when he sees Jenny with Tony his eyes get big. Tony nods, a "yep, she's actually here" gesture.

Later, everyone is seated in a circle. Jenny is still quietly shocked at where she is. A jovial guy starts the meeting "Hi, I'm Jim, I'm an alcoholic." "Hi, Jim!" "Thanks for letting me share. This week I did real good. Next week I'll get my six month chip." A smattering of applause. "Thanks. Maybe because it's just a turning point for me, such a big deal that it started messing with my mind a bit. Like some self-destructive part of me was saying 'you'll never make it Jim, you might as well have a shot of whiskey now and get it over with.' Well, I'm happy to say, I didn't listen to that little voice." Jenny rolls her eyes, but everyone else applauds.

A little while later, it's Grease Monkey's turn. Jenny is confused to see someone she knows admit that he's an alcoholic. "First of all, I'd like to say I'm happy to see my sponsee back in the fold." Tony subtly nods his acknowledgment. Jenny catches this interaction and steals a curious sideways glance at her dad. "As most of you know, I've been trying to get a job. Well, I guess some of you are newer and haven't heard me speak. Three years ago I had a great job and for various reasons, mostly my own fault, I lost my job." Everyone gives him their complete attention. Except Jenny. She notices there are light refreshments nearby. Cookies and coffee and tea. But the Grease Monkey continues, "I had a job interview this week, but because of the nature of my line of work, without a glowing recommendation from my previous boss, which of course I haven't got, I can't get work. I lost my house last year. Living in a little one bedroom apartment now. Unemployment's long gone. Savings gone. I just can't seem to get back on my feet. I had a great job and I fucked it up." The woman next to him sympathetically pats his back. Jenny leans over and whispers to Tony. "Are those cookies for anyone?"

Eventually Sad Sack Susan stands. Jovial Jim hands her a plastic chip, kisses her on the cheek, and they all clap. Jenny half-heartedly applauds too. "Oh my gosh, I'm so incredibly happy. A one year chip, my goodness. I can't believe I did it." She lovingly caresses her plastic chip. "This is such a great day. And my only regret is that it took me so long to get to this place. And me being a nurse, I feel like I should have known better. I know the damage I've done to my liver."

When Jovial Jim asks if anyone else wants to share Jenny is startled when Tony's hand go up. "Yeah, I'll go. Hi, I'm Tony and I'm an alcoholic." Jenny's eyes go a bit wide. Everyone says "Hi, Tony!" "I brought my daughter Jenny as a guest today for the first time. I've never really shared the fact that I go to AA with Jenny until today. But I wanted her support in dealing with my addiction and I'm glad I could share this with her. That's all I wanted to say. Just glad she's here with me." They all applaud. Jenny is stunned into silence.

Outside in the parking lot walking to the car Jenny flatly tells Tony, "You shouldn't hang around with them. What a bunch of losers." Tony stops in his tracks, but Jenny keeps walking. "Jenny. I'm one of them." Jenny shakes her head, "No, you're not." Tony sternly tells her he IS a recovering alcoholic, just like the others. She almost starts to cry. "Nooo." He catches up to her, kneels down. Wipes her tear away. "Yes. I've got an addiction. But it's okay, I've had it under control for

nine years. I don't drink anymore. But it's okay to admit to having a problem with something." He explains that even though he doesn't drink anymore an addiction is something you always need to keep under control. She struggles to take it all in. He adds, "But people have different kinds of addictions. It's perfectly okay to ask for help dealing with them."

That night Tony lies in bed reading Gina's manuscript. He chuckles. Then gives an interested "Hmm." He's enthralled. At one point he reaches for a dictionary on his bedside table to look up a word. Then he goes back to the manuscript. The phone rings, he quickly answers it. It's Kelly, one of Kim's cohort-in-slumming-with-blue-collar-workers who periodically visits the bakery with Kim. He's immediately uncomfortable, intimidated. She coos, "I was remembering that time you catered the dessert reception for our Book Club. Remember what we did in the back room?" Tony winces at the memory. She laughs seductively. Tony winces and suggests that probably wasn't the right thing to do. She says it was fine, she was divorced at that time. He counters, "Yeah, and as I recall I asked you out on a date a few days later and you wouldn't go out with me." "Well no. But we had fun again when you catered the desserts for my gallery's open house, didn't we?" "Oh I see. You'll screw the help, but you won't date them." She's still in seduction mode, "Sounds like a good deal for both of us." "Wrong," he says and hangs up.

Tony picks the phone back up immediately. He dials. Gina answers and right away asks if Jenny is okay. He realizes that only seems to contact her when he's in crisis mode. He says he would like to ask her out on an official date. No talk of Jenny, no crises. He suggests a nice dinner, maybe a movie. She counters his offer...

The next night Tony screams his throat raw as he and Gina hurtle 100 miles an hour on a steep roller coaster. She's next to him, laughing on the extreme ride in the middle of Magic Mountain.

That same night at a thrift store Mrs. Rossetti rifles through the clear plastic bags full of tiny toys. With eagle eyes, she slowly turns the bags, shakes them a bit, looking for precious Lion King treasure. Over in the jewelry section Jenny sorts through strands of old necklaces. Suddenly there it is, a delicate necklace just like her schoolmates were all wearing.

Gina and Tony are wobbly and giggly as they leave the roller coaster ride. A good excuse to have his arm around her -- for balance, of course.

Back in the thrift store Mrs. Rossetti gasps when she spies the holiest of Lion King figurines in one of the bags. It's swimming in amongst dozens of other small unwanted toys. After a surreptitious look around, Mrs. Rossetti pokes her gnarled old lady finger into the plastic until there's a soft POP. She fishes out the tiny figurine, pockets it, and carefully places the bag back into the pile. Jenny suddenly appears and asks what she found. "Jenny, you scared the life out of me. Nothing. I'm not buying a whole bag for one little thing." Jenny jokes that her grandma is addicted to Lion King figurines. Mrs. Rossetti doesn't find it funny and is horrified when Jenny says, "Dad says a lot of people have addictions and it's okay to get help. That's why he goes to his AA meetings."

At Magic Mountain Gina and Tony walk away from a vendor's cart with hot dogs. "Well, I did promise you a classy dinner." "This is fantastic." "I think I need some frozen yogurt to soothe my throat. I screamed so much on that last ride." "That was fantastic too!" Gina laughs heartily, genuinely enjoying herself.

Tony and Gina sit on a bench eating frozen yogurt and of course the conversation turns to Jenny. Tony says at first he thought he was making progress with her, but now knows that she's not getting better, she's just getting sneakier. I'd sell the bakery and find a new career if I thought it'd help." Gina leans in closer, whispers almost, "You are the sweetest man. I could just nibble on you." This almost makes him laugh, but he's still in worry mode. She takes his mind off it with a

sweet, gentle kiss. Nothing 'slumming' in her actions at all. She licks her lips after kissing him. "Mm, mint chocolate chip." Now he's cheered up. He kisses her back.

Back at home Jenny stands next to the box of day old donuts by the dumpster. She picks a few up and tosses them over the fence. In the yard next door is an old, overweight dog. As each donut drops, he wolfs it down. Jenny keeps feeding him.

The next morning Jenny is putting her books into her locker. She wears her new necklace, which is of course a bit tighter on Jenny than on the other girls. Tamara is suddenly in Jenny's face. "Why are you trying out for Alice? Everyone knows I'm going to get the part." Jenny keeps her cool, keeps her attention on her locker. The girls make fun of Jenny for thinking she could possibly win the part, but Jenny's sure that the drama teacher will pick the best one, not just the most popular girl. Tamara jabs that even if Jenny won the part she wouldn't fit into the costume.

One of the girls offers her brilliant comment, "You could play Tweedle Dum." Tamara laughs and adds, "She could play Tweedle Dee AND Tweedle Dum!" Jenny counters, saying that her dad said that in the book Alice doesn't even have blonde hair, she has brown hair. Tamara says that her mom said that Jenny's dad is only good for one thing, and it's not reading!

Jenny slams her locker doors and whirls around to face the two little bitches. Jenny looks like she's about to say something back, but instead she suddenly belts Tamara in the face. Tamara is caught off-guard, nearly knocked off balance. She nurses her wounded nose. The other kids in the hall gather around, including a few of the little bitches' click. Tamara screams, "You're going to be in so much trouble!" Tamara runs off. The remaining girls stare at Jenny. One snotty little girl says, "By the way..." She points to Jenny's too-tight necklace, "...that's supposed to be a necklace, not a choker." Jenny tries to hold the tears back in front of the other kids.

Tony fumes as he makes a beeline to his car in the school parking lot. Jenny follows. "Very nice. Getting kicked out of school for fighting. She reasons, "Just for the rest of the day." He yanks the door open and jumps in the car.

In the car Tony has a death grip on the steering wheel. Stares straight. "What the hell were you thinking? Hitting a little girl? This is what I've taught you? You gave her a bloody nose!" Jenny isn't reacting to Tony's angry intensity. She oh-so-causally puts on her seatbelt and gives her explanation. "She deserved it." Tony stares at her, amazed. With the air of being so put upon by her naive dad, she explains. "She was being an asshole, so I hit her." It's hard to argue with that logic. He suppresses his laugh, feigns angry again and turns to her. "That's no excuse." "She said something very mean about my dad. So I smacked her." He doesn't know what to say to that. Proud or upset?

Tony and Jenny sit in Duke's Café. Jenny sips chocolate milk through a straw as Tony goes over the script. "So it's not symbolism. The Queen of Hearts is literally a playing card." Jenny lays her head down on her arm, her eyes are heavy. "Hey, come on, sit up. Her whole court, the King, the Knaves...they are all playing cards, you see?" She drags herself upright again and struggles to pay attention. He tries to explain that the story deals with the size changes that kids have to go through, and that she's still small so she's still afraid of the Queen of Hearts. Jenny sucks on her straw, drains the last of the chocolate milk. "But she starts to grow big again, up to her original size. And she looks down at the Queen and her court and realizes that they are just a pack of cards. Nothing to be afraid of. And that's when Alice wakes up from her dream." Jenny's attention is gone, she's sleepy. Tony gets frustrated when she's too tired to pay attention and can't remember her line "You're nothing but a pack of cards." Tony's frustrated tutoring session is interrupted by the Chubby Redheaded Waitress. Jenny tries to order another chocolate milk. Tony says no, and she protests that even though she just finished a large glass she still wants

another one. When he tries to return to the work at hand he catches her with her head on the table, eyes closed. He's at his wit's end and stops the study session. She insists she wants to study her lines, but he scoops up their things, ready to leave and says, "You obviously don't."

Tony trudges into the bakery from the back area. He watches Jenny saunter up ahead of him. As she passes the display case on the way to the stairs she expertly snatches two donuts without even breaking her stride. He clearly sees this. He throws her script onto the table.

Upstairs Mrs. Rossetti watches Jenny go down the hall, into her room and shut her door. As soon as the door clicks shut, Mrs. Rossetti darts over to Tony as he plops on the couch. She chastises him for "exposing" Jenny to his "drinking group." Tony is finally tired of walking on eggshells. Or eggs. When Mrs. Rossetti says under her breath, "She develops a drinking problem now, we'll know why." Tony hears this, is off the couch in an instant and faces his mother. "Yes, actually, if she develops a drinking problem, or any other type of addiction, we WILL know why! Because I was stupid enough to listen to you all these years!" Mrs. Rossetti tries to back away, grasping at any nearby magazine that is askew and in need of her tidying attention. But Tony doesn't let her out of his line of fire. "I kept my AA meetings a secret from her. All that taught her was that addictions are shameful things to keep secret. And now that she's got an eating problem, we can only hope that she's not going to be filled with shame and guilt and secrecy." She is finally forced to face his rage. "Because I gotta tell ya, living with people who instill that in you is hell!"

Across town, Felix sits at his cluttered kitchen table. His study guide is open in front of him, but his attention is on a cereal box. "Mr. Kellogg, known as King of the Corn Flakes, used his vast fortune to set up foundations to promote child welfare, health and education and raised Arabian horses as a hobby.' Hmm. Interesting." He forces himself to tip the box over, out of his reading range. He reads from his study guide. "Okay, I'm ready to study. 'When threading gas pipe, 12 threads are required on each end to ensure a solid seal.'" His head slowly lowers and he repeatedly bangs his head on the table in futility and frustration. He leaves his head down. After a moment he perks back up again, takes a deep breath and tries again. "Okay. I can do this. It's quite interesting. 'The decline rate for sewage lines must be a quarter inch per each foot in...'" He can't even make it to the end of the sentence before reaching his breaking point. He screams in frustration. "ARRG!"

After this catharsis, he is calm again. He realigns his focus, closes his eyes and chants a mantra. "Three hundred dollars a day. Three hundred dollars a day. Three hundred glorious dollars a day." He opens his eyes and returns to his study guide. He reads very slowly and deliberately with great emotion, as if to force his interest in the subject. "The decline rate for sewage lines must be a quarter inch per foot..."

Over at the bakery Tony asks the Grease Monkey, his sponsor, to come over. He waits outside the back door, sitting on a stack of old pallets, taking a break from the noise of the busy bakery. Grease Monkey strides through the back gate to the bakery. Tony thanks him for coming over and he says it's good to get out of the house, he's really getting under his wife's feet since he's lost his job. Tony reminds him that he's finally tackling his last three amends, and the Grease Monkey is so proud of him.

Tony hops down from the stack of pallets. Straightens up and 'formalizes' his stance. "I need to make amends to you." Grease Monkey is stunned. "To me?" "I want to make a sincere apology to you for something I did three years ago." Grease Monkey chuckles. "Three years ago? Well that's quite a while ago." Tony nods, watches Grease Monkey...waiting for it to sink in. "Yes, three years ago." It clicks. "Three years....?" Tony nods, "I didn't feel right knowing that other people's lives could have potentially been endangered by - " "You're the one who snitched on me?!" "I sincerely apologize that my comments to your boss led to you being dismissed from your duties - " "Led to my being dismissed?!" You fuckin' told on me and I got fired. Do you have any idea how

hard it's gonna be for me to get that kind of work again?!" Grease Monkey's sponsor composure is gone. Tony tries to retain his cool while Grease Monkey lets his fury out -- he kicks the fence repeatedly. Tony watches, lets him vent, even though it's destroying his fence. Grease Monkey claims that Tony ruined his life. Tony counters that no, it was Grease Monkey who ruined his own life. Grease Monkey takes a few more furious flying kicks at the fence. He steps up to Tony -- too close. Threateningly close. Grease Monkey says, "You are a loser." He storms off without another glance back.

Tony is alone in the bakery. Loaves of bread are everywhere. He's kneading dough with a violent intensity. Slams the dough onto the table, kneads it, picks it up, slams it down again. A timer buzzes. He uses a wooden paddle to retrieve even more loaves from the oven. More loaves are ready to go in.

Hours later, the lights are off. Baskets of fresh bread are everywhere. He heads upstairs, now physically exhausted.

Up in his room Tony finishes the last page of Gina's manuscript with a satisfied smile. He picks up the phone. Almost dials. Then puts it back on the nightstand.

Tony goes to Jenny's room, knocks. She opens the door for Tony. He hands her the manuscript.

The next day in class Jenny hands Gina the manuscript. "My dad said to give you this." Gina is almost a bit let down. She covers her disappointment and thanks Jenny. Gina glances at the note paperclipped to it. "*Wonderful work! You should be very proud of yourself.*" That's all?

Later that day Gina ventures into the busy bakery. Tony spots Gina in line. A few minutes later he refuses to let her pay, and brings her lemon mousse around and takes it to a table where they both sit. He unconsciously tugs at his smock. Tries to brush off the crumbs and goo. She's all smiles. "I got your note. Thanks." "Note?" "Yeah, about my book." "Oh right. Yeah, it was great. Much better than a grammar manual." She takes a bite of her lemon mousse confection and is blown away by how scrumptious it is. She says he's really found his calling. He nods, "Yeah, I know. My lot in life." "Lot? You make it sound like a bad thing. Don't you enjoy baking?" He considers this question seriously. "Yeah, I do actually." A bit of a revelation for him. Maybe he's got it better than he realized. She says, "You're lucky. Most people never end up doing something they love for a living." "You should be a writer. You ARE a writer." She shrugs and says she hopes. He tells her how talented she is. "That book was smart, literate, cultured, funny. Clever. You could really make it in the literary world. I'll stick to making pies." She stops mid-bite. "Tony? What's wrong with making pies?" "Nothing. Somebody needs to make the pies. Bake the bread. Ice the cupcakes. Others write great literature. We all have our station in life." He seems a bit distant. She gets nowhere trying to ask him what's wrong. She says she expected a bit more from him than just a short note, especially considering their fun date several days ago. What has changed? He cuts her visit short. "I'm working, Gina. I've got a store full of customers." She looks around. The staff have things well under control. Tony's back behind the counter in a heartbeat, then disappears into the back. Gina sits, stunned, with her lemon mousse.

That night Tony watches Jenny rehearse her scene. She's pretty good. "Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the verdict first!" She stops when the phone rings and Tony answers it. "What? Are you in jail?!" He glances at Jenny. She nods and mouths the word "Felix?"

Half an hour later Tony wearily appears in the doorway of the grimy back office of a thrift store. "I'm here to pick up the master criminal." Mrs. Rossetti sits on a hardback chair, eyes down. The overworked thrift store manager looks up from his paperwork. "Ah, Mr. Rossetti. You'll vouch for Mrs. Rossetti here?" Tony glares at his mother. She states flatly, "It's wrong to have to buy a whole bag." The manager explains to Tony that Mrs. Rossetti was observed opening bags of

merchandise, picking out what she wanted and placing it in her purse. He points to a tiny Lion King figurine on his desk. Mrs. Rossetti pleads her case. "For one tiny little figure they make you buy the whole bag!" She explains that they refused to sell her the piece individually, but they wouldn't do it. The manager explains that they can't sell them like that, you buy the whole bag for two dollars, they can't sell the tiny toys individually. Tony's tired and worn down. He slaps two dollars on the desk. "Ma, say you're sorry and let's go." She gives a very insincere "Sorry" and Tony ushers her out. The manager calls after them, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to ban Mrs. Rossetti from the store." She gasps in horror. Tony is fed up with the drama and reminds her that there's five other thrift stores in walking distance of home. The manager shouts as they leave, "A lifetime ban!" This sends Mrs. Rossetti into a fit of despair.

Mrs. Rossetti stops in her tracks just outside the office. "Wait! You just paid him for it, that Simba is mine! He was rare!" She turns to reenter the office, but Tony pulls her away. "And you say I'm a bad influence on Jenny taking her to AA?" Her mind is still on the lost Simba. "He had tiny jewels on the crown. I've never seen one like that! Finding one with a crown is rare, but the jewels are usually painted on. This one had real tiny crystals!" "What's Jenny going to think about you being banned for stealing?" "It was a once in a lifetime find," she laments. Then she realizes what he just said. "Oh, no, Tony. Please don't tell Jenny."

In the car moments later Mrs. Rossetti won't look at Tony, she keeps her gaze on the view outside her window. He hasn't even turned the engine on yet. Tony says, "I'm trying to set a good example for Jenny." Nothing from Mrs. Rossetti. He continues, "It would help if you wouldn't be teaching her to steal!" A light bulb goes off over his head. "Has she seen you do that before? Is that where she got it?" "Got what?" "Ma, does Jenny know you steal?!" "Of course not! I don't steal. I tried to buy a single piece but they don't let me. Ridiculous." Tony tries to explain to her that he's taking Jenny to his AA meetings so that she can learn that addictions are something that can be dealt with. She is confused, she says that Jenny doesn't drink. "Addictions come in all forms, Ma." But she doesn't get it. She looks into his eyes, then pleads. "It had tiny crystals, Tony!" "Jesus!" he huffs as he hops out and slams the door.

The Weary Manager still sits at his desk. Tony marches in. He snatches the tiny Lion King figurine off the desk. "I paid for this!" He storms out. The Weary Manager is past caring.

Jenny performs her scene one last time in the Rossetti living room. She doesn't even need the script anymore, it's pretty much memorized. She's pretty damned good. Tony and Mrs. Rossetti watch, amazed. They burst into applause when she finishes. Jenny takes a deep bow. Mrs. Rossetti is ecstatic. "You'll win, Jenny! You'll be the best." Mrs. Rossetti kisses Jenny on the cheek and shuffles to the kitchen. Tony tells her how good she is, but then has a quick heart-to-heart with her. "I want you to know, you're really, really good. You ARE Alice. But life is funny, you never know what's gonna happen. So if Mr. Mensch ends up giving the part to someone else, I want you to know that you are an excellent Alice. I'm proud of you, no matter what happens." She rolls her eyes. "Cornball." "Yeah, I know it's corny. But it's true. You're a brave girl for going after what you want. Not everyone does that." "Now you wanna hug, right?" He laughs and makes a lunge for her, wraps her in a great big bear hug that makes her giggle. Jenny says she's going to go to Felix's to help him study since he doesn't seem to come around much anymore. Tony says he'll drop her off because he also has somewhere to go.

Tony's car is parked outside of Duke's Cafe, but he doesn't get out. He takes some deep breaths. "Last one, Tony. Last one."

Back at Felix's all of his study guides are open on the table. But Felix and Jenny are not at the table. They are over at the computer on a small desk. "See? This is Lewis Carroll. He wrote this story for three little girls that he knew. In fact it was a little girl named Alice Liddell that encouraged

him to write down the stories he told them.” Jenny eventually asks why he hasn’t been coming around much anymore. Felix tells her that he’s a bit mad at her dad, and tries to distract her with the new interesting bit of information he’s unearthed. “It’s a long story. Okay, listen, this is interesting. ‘In the Victorian times when Alice in Wonderland was written...’” She stops him and tells him that he should be studying for his big plumbing licensing test. He tells her he’ll be fine and continues his history lesson about the Mad Hatter character, “In the Victorian times many hatters went mad from the exposure to mercury that was used in shaping felt hats.” “Oh, is that why he’s called a Mad Hatter?” “Yup. Plenty of Mad Hatters running around England back then I guess. Interesting time in history, so many changes.” “Felix? How come you don’t want to study history instead of plumbing? You really like it and you’re good at it.” “What the hell would I do with a history degree?” She counters, “What the hell would a history expert do with a plumbing license?”

Tony is at his usual table at Duke’s Cafe. The Chubby Redheaded Waitress appears with his usual coffee order. He asks her, “I was wondering. Do I look familiar to you?” She laughs, “Of course! You’re always in here. Monte Crisco sandwich with fries. And you never get dessert.” “No, I mean from before.” “Before what?” He asks to speak with her once she has a break.

Felix is still completely engrossed in his historical *Alice in Wonderland* venture. Jenny drains the last of her large soda. “So when the Victorians realized this, they began to...” “Can I have another one?” He eyes the huge empty glass she just sucked down. “Uh, sure, Cupcake.”

Tony and the Chubby Redheaded Waitress sit alone in a tiny little break room. She is looking at a school photo of Jenny from Tony’s wallet. She nods, “Yeah, she’s just precious. I remember her from the other night.” Tony looks at pictures of her cats and hears their names and their cutest character traits. When he hands the cat photos back she says, “So you were in Mrs. Eagen’s class? That’s probably why I don’t remember. I was in Mr. Chapman’s class. That was what, third grade?” She asks why he never said anything before. He explains that he’s in AA and doing his amends. She’s confused now. He says he needs to apologize for something he did in the past to her. She chuckles, “Oh my goodness, that was so long ago. What could you possibly have done? We were just kids. I don’t even remember. You’re forgiven, sweets.” “No, I need to do this formally.” She giggles and pats his hand. “Oh alright. Whatever you need, darling.” “I want to apologize to you, Renee. One day at recess I was on the swings with my friend Tom.” She still doesn’t recall, but she allows him to continue. “You were there too, and you were waiting your turn.” She’s concentrating, trying to remember. He goes on, “And you were wearing a pink dress...” She’s horror-struck. “Pink dress. That was you?” “Yeah. Me and my friends were pretending we were drunk. For some reason we thought that was fun. Or funny.” Her bubbly demeanor is gone. She’s stock still. He goes on, “You were just standing there, waiting your turn.” “I wasn’t bothering anyone. Just waiting my turn on the swings.” “I know. And you remember what I said?” “Yes. But I never knew who said it.” “It was me.” “Right in front of everyone.” Tony cringes, “I know. I’m so sorry.” Tears well up in her eyes as she mimics what he said, “Wow, I must really be drunk! Look, there’s a pink elephant!” A tear rolls down her face. “Pinky! Pinky! Look, it’s a pink elephant! I was afraid to ever wear pink again.” Tony is mortified, ready to crawl under the table. He again apologizes and says he can’t imagine how much emotional damage that must have done to a ten year-old girl. She is steely now. “No. You can’t.” She gets up abruptly. “But you know what? That -” she points to Jenny’s photo, “- that is justice. Serves you right.” Perfect bull’s eye - a dagger in his heart.

Jenny’s backstage at her audition. Gina approaches and wishes her luck, but Jenny doesn’t seem to hear, despite the fact that Gina’s right in front of her. Gina finally snaps her out of it and says “Break a leg!” to lackluster Jenny. Gina mistakes Jenny’s tiredness and confusion for nerves.

Kids mill around backstage and in the audience waiting their turn. The drama teacher, Mr. Mensch, a kindly old ex-actor sits in the audience taking notes on the last performer. “Jenny

Rossetti. Your turn, love.” Gina perks up, nervous. Watches from the audience. Jenny strides confidently onstage. There are girlish giggles in the audience. Gina glares at the gigglers. Mr. Mensch tells her, “Whenever you’re ready, Jenny.” Snotty Tamara whispers, “Nice earrings.” More giggles. Jenny doesn’t react to their comments. She stares straight ahead. For a long moment. Mr. Mensch prompts her again. “Okay, start when you want.” She finally gets her bearings. She has her script, but doesn’t need to look at it. “If any one of them can explain it I’ll give him a sixpence.” She hesitates. She’s said this line a million times. She’s quiet. A bit dazed. Mr. Mensch prompts her line, “I don’t believe there’s...” She seems to jolt out of her fog. “Oh, yeah. Right...” Gina cringes.

In Duke’s parking lot Tony sits in his car. Unable to drive. On the verge of tears.

Back in the audition Mr. Mensch reads the other character’s part, but Jenny’s fading fast. The girls giggle. Gina is in agony. Mr. Mensch repeats his line with more urgency, “That must be what they did with the tarts, you know.” Jenny swallows hard. A dry throat. Everyone waits. Finally Mr. Mensch has had enough. “Jenny, if you’re not prepared to audition, you’ll have to leave the stage.” Everyone waits. Jenny stands, dazed. “Jenny, please leave so someone else can audition. Maybe you can help with props or something.” Jenny faints, hits the floor hard.

Tony, Mrs. Rossetti and Gina are planted in the hospital waiting room. Gina puts a soothing hand on Tony’s hand. “Diabetes isn’t a death sentence, you know. You can deal with this.” “I know. But I feel horrible. The signs were there. Always thirsty, tired. And I yelled at her for it.”

Later, Felix has joined them and they visit with Jenny who is in her hospital bed. Tony sits at the foot of the bed. Felix tries to say something encouraging. “Well kiddo, you’re lucky. You’ve got the kind that doesn’t need shots. You can control it with diet. If you eat right, it’s no problem.” Too much for Tony to bear hearing.

After a while, Tony walks Gina to the elevator. Tony is exhausted and worn down. Gina tells him to call if he needs anything. He nods, but he still plays it cool. Distant. She won’t have any of it. She forces a hug, awkward at first, but then he melts into it. The elevator doors open. She eventually kisses him on the cheek and gets into the elevator. He stands there, numb.

Back in Jenny’s hospital room Felix sits with Tony. Jenny is asleep. Felix says that he was still really pissed off with Tony, but the other day while he was upset he went out, got drunk, picked a fight in a bar and went home banged up. The next morning he realized, “When I get upset, I get drunk, stumble home. When you get upset, you bake bread. I think the right cousin is running the bakery.” They finally look each other in the eye. Their nod and smile is all the apologies needed. Felix assures Tony, “No need to walk on eggshells around me.” Tony chuckles. “What?” “It’s ‘walk on eggs,’ not ‘eggshells.’” This is news to Felix. “Is it?” Tony nods, “Apparently.”

Felix staggers into his apartment, exhausted. Checks the clock. 2:24 am. He opens his studying materials. He’s in hell.

Mrs. Rossetti trails through the bakery with Jenny in tow, mid-debate. Jenny says, “But that thrift store has the best jewelry. Let’s just go real quick.” “No, Jenny. I don’t like that store.” “Don’t like it? Since when?” Mrs. Rossetti refused to explain any further. “Since now. We’ll try the one on Lake Street tomorrow.”

Tony’s in the bakery back room taking a break. He’s still reading *Alice in Wonderland*. Jenny saunters in. “Why you still reading that?” “Once I started reading it I got interested. Now I wanna finish it.” Jenny adds an interesting comment, “They say the guy who wrote it was a child molester.” “Who told you that?” “Felix.” Of course. When asked Jenny says she doesn’t even know who ended up with the role of Alice for the play. She didn’t bother to look. Tony takes this

time to discuss her diabetes, reminding her that she doesn't need shots, but it's crucial that she takes this seriously and is careful about what she eats, particularly with sugar. She nods, "Yeah, I know, Dad. I looked it up on the internet. 'Controllable with diet.'" He's satisfied that he has instilled in her the importance of her curbing her sugar intake. She trots back through the bakery area. Tony watches her go. He leans over in his chair, almost tips over to keep his eagle eye on her as she passes the display case. She doesn't sneak any food. He whispers, "Good girl."

Gina approaches Jenny after class. "Hey kiddo. I heard you got a part in the play!" "Yeah. The Dodo. Mr. Mensch heard about why I passed out. I guess he felt sorry for me, so he gave me a part." "Hey, the Dodo is an important role." "I only have five lines." "There are no small roles, only small actors." "I'm certainly not a small actor." Gina can't help but laugh at her mature humor. Gina broaches the diabetes topic. "So that hospital thing, that was kinda scary, huh?" Jenny shrugs. Gina presses on, "The type of diabetes you have, it's controllable - " "With diet, I know." "If you need to be sipping on some water or something during class, that's okay. I know you're thirsty a lot." Jenny's mind is elsewhere. "Okay. Oh hey, I have this thing..." She digs in her backpack, pulls out a paper. Jenny says she needs three teacher's signature to join the business club DECA and asks if Gina would recommend her. Gina is relieved and thrilled to help.

Tony looks at the caller ID as the phone rings in the living room. He doesn't pick up, and finally his machine answers. "Hi Tony, it's Gina. Good news. Jenny just asked me to recommend her for DECA, so of course I did. I tried to talk to her about the diabetes thing. She seems fine about it. Strong little girl." Tony listens, but doesn't move to pick up. "Anyway, I know you've got a lot happening right now, but...I hope you can find some time for me."

Downstairs Jenny is helping in the bakery, sneaking licks and bites of sweets from the bowls. "Jenny, for the tenth time, stop it! You can't do that anymore!" She says it was just a lick. He's getting frustrated. "Yeah, and lick after lick after lick adds up! Did you not hear the doctor? You've got diabetes, and it can get very serious if you don't control it!" She reminds him she had diabetes last week and he let her lick the bowl then. Nothing's changed. Why the big drama? He's reached his limit. He drops what he's doing and goes into the back room.

Tony marches to the back room, rifles through some paperwork, finds a list, picks up the phone and dials. Waits. "Hi, it's Tony. From the Wednesday night group. Yeah, great, thanks. Actually, I was wondering if you could help me."

Jenny is heading toward the stairs. "Get your coat, Cupcake. Come with me." "No, I can't, Grandma's taking me to a new thrift store." "Tough! You're coming with me." His stern expression makes her stop and follow him.

Sad Sack Susan from Tony's AA meeting opens her office door in the VA Hospital with a smile. Jenny cautiously enters, looks around the office. Tony hangs back, staying in the doorway. Posters and charts of diabetes fill the walls. Her specialty. Tony pulls Sad Sack Susan aside and whispers in her ear, "Scare the hell out of her." Sad Sack Susan tries to replace her cheerful smile with a serious scowl. With a deliberately ominous tone Sad Sack Susan says, "So Jenny. I've got some things to show you." The door shuts with Jenny and Sad Sack Susan inside.

Felix talks to himself as he fries himself an egg in his apartment. "Minimum measurement of wall space for installing a toilet? In residential structure, 30 inches. In commercial structure, 36 inches." He expertly flips the egg onto a plate, proud of his egg, proud of his knowledge. "Water lines must be buried 12 inches below the frost line." He looks at his fried egg. "Walk on eggshells..." He thinks about it. Tries again. "Walk on eggs...?"

Tony flips through a magazine in the VA Hospital hallway. Finally the office door opens. A dazed Jenny emerges followed by Sad Sack Susan. "Now for the tour. Care to join us, Tony?"

As they make the rounds of the floor Sad Sack Susan whispers to Tony. "I managed to round up most of my diabetes patients and get them all in one room." Tony nods his approval, "Nice set up." Jenny takes in the awful scene. Amputees and old blind men. "Jenny, this is Len. He was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 23." He is obviously blind and both feet are missing. "You loved your sweets, didn't you, Len?" "Yes, ma'am. I still do." Jenny is mortified at his condition. Tony is very uneasy. Jenny tries not to cry.

In the car Jenny still snuffles, obviously been crying, scared as they sit in the car. Tony is putting on a stern face, but clearly upset that he has to upset her. "If you don't get things under control, you're going to be in bad, bad shape. Did you see those men in there?" She nods. "Is this getting through to you?" She nods. "You could end up in a coma, Jenny!" She starts to cry, seriously scared. He holds it together, needing to be stern.

Tony and Jenny pass through the back of the bakery, both silent. Jenny is still teary. She goes straight upstairs. Tony almost follows, then turns back. He takes his coat off, puts on his baker's smock. He pulls out a huge ball of dough from the refrigerator and slams it onto the kneading surface. He stares at his therapeutic ball of dough. Not good enough this time. He whips off the smock, puts his coat back on and flies out the back door.

Gina opens her front door to find Tony, almost in tears. "I'm an excellent father!" She sits with him on the front porch and lets him vent about scaring his daughter until she was in tears. He tells her about the VA Hospital and having his AA friend help scare Jenny into taking her diabetes seriously. After hearing his worries about whether or not he "taught" her addictive behavior or if she inherited it Gina puts her two cents in. "Bottom line? It's not about you, Tony. It doesn't matter if you inadvertently taught her this behavior or not. It is what it is. Now you just need to think about how to put her onto the right path. And that's what you did today." She helps calm him down and he eventually thinks about it and remembers that Jenny's aunt on her mother's side had diabetes, as did another relative on that side of the family. So at least she inherited the diabetes from her mom's side, not Tony. Gina sighs, "Thank God. If Jenny got the diabetes from your side of the family I'd be talking you in off a ledge right now." He laughs and realizes he's being kind of pathetic and sad right now. She disagrees. She thinks he's unbelievably sweet - - no pun intended - - and such a good father. He admits that he's been keeping his distance from Gina for a while because he didn't really feel like he deserved someone of her intellect and social stature. She kisses him and reassures him that she was thinking that she probably might not deserve such a caring and wonderful guy. Two idiots who almost talked themselves out of a great relationship. They share a deep, passionate kiss before she stands up, pulling him with her. He doesn't resist when she leads him inside.

The next morning Tony bounces up the stairs right into the middle of a normal breakfast scene. Mrs. Rossetti cuts a banana into Jenny's cereal, stopping only when Tony appears. "Good morning, Tony," his mother says. Felix has his mouth full, he waves hello. Jenny gives Tony's abrupt entrance only the slightest notice. "Hey, Dad." He takes in the scene. All is well. No drama. Everyone's fine. A pleasant surprise. He tries to cover his early entrance by saying he got up early to run an errand, but Jenny is too savvy to believe him. "Yeah, right, Dad. We're that naive." Felix simply adds, "Go change your clothes." Tony cringes. He slinks away. Mrs. Rossetti, who IS that naïve asks, "He didn't get up early?" Jenny stops Tony, smiles and nods her approval. "I really like Ms. McIntyre." Relief washes over him.

Felix finishes his breakfast, takes the dishes to the sink, though Mrs. Rossetti intercepts. That's *her* job. Felix says, "Okay, wish me luck! I'm off to take my licensing exam!" Mrs. Rossetti complies, "Good luck, Felix! You'll do great! You'll make a wonderful plumber." Jenny sings her answer, "*Booor-ing!* You're gonna hate it."

Felix sits in a sea of soon-to-be plumbers in the community college test room. Some are taking last minute looks at their notes. Others are talking amongst themselves. Felix listens to the small talk which all about plumbing talk, new plumbing tools and innovations. "You use that that fitting called The Shark Bite yet? You can use it on any material, any size pipe diameter. It's expensive, but it's way faster than soldering, so you save money in the end. And it's a really tight seal." The other plumbers marvel at this, but Felix looks bored out of his skull.

Jenny sits in DECA orientation. A mousy DECA teacher drones on about the oh-so-fun world of business. She points to the banks of computers lined up against the wall. "...and the school has given us this room and five computer stations so that kids can come here and use the computers. We have wireless now, too." Jenny listens, nothing too difficult. "Your job will be to facilitate this process. In addition to selling computer time, students can also purchase items..." She picks up a cute novelty pen on the counter as an example.

Meanwhile in the bakery, Tony is icing a cake, but stops mid-frost when he hears a familiar cackle. Kim sits sipping espresso with her gaggle of snotty moMs. He tries to pay her no mind. He refills the display case. He busies himself. Eventually he walks past her close enough that they must acknowledge each other. They nod coolly. Kim politely asks if Jenny is okay, she heard what happened at the audition. Tony says yes. Tony says he heard that her daughter Tamara won the part of Alice. He smiles and nods his congratulations. They got through the exchange pleasantly enough, but she just can't leave well enough alone. As Tony leaves he hears from behind him... "Of course she is. Was there ever any doubt?" The other moms coo their approval. But Tony turns to face her. A big warm smile. "Actually there WAS some doubt. Sometimes people want more substance than just pretty blonde hair can deliver." Kim's politeness is short-lived. "Say, listen, why don't you go back behind your little counter and do your little baking. That's what you do best. Leave the literary endeavors to those of us who can read and write." Tony has no reply for that. He heads back, slightly beaten. Kim addresses her fawning underling moMs. "You know, it's too bad Jenny didn't get the part of Tweedle Dee or Tweedle Dum. Tony could have really helped her out with that part. Given her some real life experiences as a dimwit."

Tony stops in his tracks. The group titters with delight. He smiles. Turns and makes a slow, delicious beeline for Kim. His confident smile unnerves her. "You never read the book." Kim huffs, "What? Of course I did. It's a literary classic." He shakes his head. "No. You didn't. Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee?" Kim nods condescendingly. "Yes, genius. They are the dimwitted twins that Alice runs into before going to see the Queen of Hearts." The gaggle of moms all nod their heads in snotty agreement. Tony says, "Yes, I know who they are. And unlike you I also know that they are NOT in *Alice in Wonderland*." The women exchange looks. Is he nuts? He explains, "Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dum are not in *Alice in Wonderland*. They are in the sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*." Blank looks from the women. "They ARE however, in the Disney animated version of the 'literary classic.'" He bursts out laughing before adding, "Your complete oh-so educated knowledge of this 'literary classic' comes entirely from watching the kids' movie with your daughter!"

Kim can't breathe. The others look at her for direction. She has none. Tony laughs again, backs up and takes a long hard look at the group of beautiful women now gawking at him. "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" He doesn't waste another second on this deflated group.

Felix is in the middle of taking the test. He reads the first question: *What is the minimum amount of wall space required for installation of a toilet in a residential structure?* He scans the room. Everyone is scribbling answers. He stares at the test in front of him. He knows this. Finally he begins to write.

Jenny sits behind the counter in the DECA room. The mousy DECA teacher watches her handle a transaction. "Nicely done. You're a natural at this." Jenny smiles and nods. Kids sit at the computers. A geeky young girl inspects a jar of cute pencils on the counter, looking for the prettiest one.

Felix hands in his test in the exam room. He is beaming as he leaves the room. The proctor glances at his test. He squints in confusion as he reads Felix's test. *What is the minimum amount of wall space required for installation of a toilet in a residential structure?* Under this question Felix wrote: *although the exact place and date of the invention of plumbing is unknown, it is largely believed that Jerusalem was the first city to use the aqueduct.* He flips through the entire test. It's full of Felix's historical ramblings. *In 97 AD Frontinus was elected Superintendent of the Roman Water Works and built nine aqueducts in Rome and is considered the Father of Modern Plumbing.*

Out in the lobby Felix strides to the counter and asks a studious-looking employee, "Quick question. How would I go about transferring some of my credits to a degree program?" "What discipline are you going into?" Felix beams. "History. I'm going to get my degree in history."

Tony puts on his jacket and tells his employee as he passes, "I'll be back later." Tony passes Kim. He only pauses long enough to toss something onto her table: his Cliff Notes for *Alice In Wonderland*. "Here. You'll probably need this."

Jenny's holding down the fort brilliantly in the DECA room. She is in her element. She's got full access and control over the computer usage fees and the inventory behind the counter. She's really good at this, she's found her place.

But a SLOW REVEAL eventually shows that in addition to the few other things that are for sale on the counter are, behind her, boxes and boxes and boxes of candy.

A nerdy kid approaches the counter and gives her a few dollars. He says, "Hi, I wanna use the internet for an hour." Jenny unleashes her old routine, "Okay. We're all out of receipts though. Here, let me just stamp your hand..."

Echo of GLASS BOTTLES CLINK LOUDLY, never ending, so loud until –

Black.

Credits roll.