

# **Inside Out**

**By**

**Barry M. Putt, Jr.**

## **INSIDE OUT**

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*Dedicated to everyone searching to find a path in life . . .*

*Follow your heart.*

## **CHARACTERS:**

**BEN** - High-school senior, has let other people and society construct him. Now is the time for him to define himself. Plays flute in the band, but longs to dance.

**BEN'S MOM** - Late 30s, compassionate, yet controlling, wants the best for her son as long as it fits her ideals.

**MISSY** - High-school senior, gruff, tomboy, plays flute in the band. Competition and winning is very important to her. She wants to be the best or at least work her hardest towards it.

**VALERIE** - High-school senior, decorous with a dash of compassion, plays flute in the band.

**KAREN** - Mid 30s, fun-loving, spontaneous, insightful, compassionate, school bus driver. She and Ben only talk on the bus when she drives like a speed demon.

**BANDLEADER** - An authoritative, off-stage voice.

**EVAN** - High-school senior, attractive, artistic. He's very personable and makes friends easily everywhere he goes.

**ANNOUNCER** - An off-stage voice who MC's the band competition.

**JUDGE** - An off-stage voice who is a key decision-maker for the dance conservatory auditions.

## **CASTING OPTIONS:**

All off-stage voice roles can be doubled by members of the cast.

To make this a large-cast play, consider doing the following:

- Cast all of the off-stage roles as on-stage parts.
- Have a "chorus" that doubles as marching-band members and dance-club members.

If more roles for women are needed, the character of Ben can be changed to Betsy and Evan can be changed to Eve. Alternate dialogue related to the Betsy and Eve version of the play can be found on pages 57-60. An asterisk appears in the script whenever alternate dialogue should be used.

**TIME/SETTING:**

Present-day. A high school in a suburban town.

# INSIDE OUT

## SCENE 1

*Lights up in a bedroom as BEN (17) mild-mannered, constrained, practices the "Radetzky March" on his flute. He stumbles through a passage and stops.*

**BEN'S MOM.** Ben, honey! Why did you stop? You know I love to hear you practice. *(Ben sighs in frustration.)* Ben!

**BEN.** Yes, Mom. *(Ben stumbles in playing more of the "Radetzky March." As he stops, BEN'S MOM, late 30's, caring, driven, walks in.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** That's it. Keep going. Everyone needs practice, even Beethoven.

**BEN.** He was a genius, Mom.

**BEN'S MOM.** You could be too if you tried.

**BEN.** I'm not so sure.

**BEN'S MOM.** Negativity, Ben. What did I tell you about that?

**BEN.** I'm being—

**BEN'S MOM.** You certainly are. I'd never get anywhere at work that way.

**BEN.** I need to do more than just practice, Mom.

**BEN'S MOM.** What are you talking about? You're in the business club, the band, the school newspaper. Those are fun and more importantly, they'll look great on your college applications.

**BEN.** I know, but—

**BEN'S MOM.** Have you started working on them?

**BEN.** Not yet.

**BEN'S MOM.** Don't wait much longer and add Wharton to the list. It might be a stretch, but they've got a wonderful business program.

**BEN.** All right.

**BEN'S MOM.** The only other thing you need to do is meet people.

**BEN.** I try.

**BEN'S MOM.** I know it may not come easy to you, honey, but you need to do more than try. Any edge you can get will help when it comes to getting into a good school.

**BEN.** I understand.

**BEN'S MOM.** Good. I believe in you. Get back to practice.

**BEN.** For a few more minutes.

**BEN'S MOM.** Thirty more minutes and then you can do your homework.

**BEN.** By then it will be time for dinner.

**BEN'S MOM.** That's all right. How are you coming with topics to propose to the school newspaper for your next article?

**BEN.** I haven't had a chance to think about it yet.

**BEN'S MOM.** Don't worry. I know the perfect thing to write about.

**BEN.** What?

**BEN'S MOM.** The school's new budget proposal.

**BEN.** Why would the paper be interested in that?

**BEN'S MOM.** It's your job as a writer to make sure everyone is interested in what you write about. I'll help you draft something after we eat, then you can get to work on your applications.

**BEN.** When do I get a break?

**BEN'S MOM.** They'll be time enough for that later. You've got to play that piece for your father when he comes home from his trip.

**BEN.** He never seems to have time.

**BEN'S MOM.** He's looking forward to hearing it, so practice up.

**BEN.** All right.

**BEN'S MOM.** How does it go again?

**BEN.** You've heard me play it a dozen times.

**BEN'S MOM.** And it gets better each time. Please, play it again. (*Ben stumbles through the "Radetzky March" again.*) That's it! (*Ben's Mom*

leaves.) Keep at it! (*Ben rolls his eyes as he continues to play. Lights out.*)

## SCENE 2

*Lights up on a field as the MARCHING BAND'S FLUTE LINE gets ready for practice. Members: MISSY, a gruff, tomboy, and VALERIE, decorous with a dash of compassion, tune their flutes. Ben puts his flute together and then tunes it with them.*

**VALERIE.** You're flat, Ben. (*Ben adjusts his flute and plays a note again with Missy and Valerie.*)

**BEN.** That's better.

**MISSY.** Only if you've got a tin ear. You're still flat.

**BEN.** I'll get it. (*Ben tunes his flute some more but is distracted by CLUB MUSIC that begins to play in the distance.*)

**MISSY.** That music is so annoying. (*EVAN, attractive, self-assured, and SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE DANCE CLUB walk in the distance while listening to club music on a BOOM BOX. They stop and do some synchronized dance moves to the music.*)

**VALERIE.** Their dancing isn't bad though. (*Valerie moves to the music. Ben looks at the dancers with longing. They spot him and wave for him to join them. Ben struggles to move to the music but can't let himself go.*)

**BANDLEADER.** (*On bullhorn.*) Attention, everyone! Get in line! (*Ben looks to the dancers. They wave for him to dance with them. He hesitates and then looks towards the Flute Line unsure what to do.*)

**VALERIE.** Come on, Ben. We need to go. (*The dancers pick up their Boom Box and dance off. Ben looks on with longing.*)

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* Before we get started, I have an announcement. After many years of ineligibility, the band finally has just enough members to qualify for the Murray Hill Marching Band Competition. *(Band Members cheer.)*

**VALERIE.** That's the biggest one in the state!

**MISSY.** I'll say. Winning would be an awesome way to end our senior year.

**VALERIE.** It sure would.

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* We have a shot at first place, but it will take practice. Let's start with the drill for the "Radetzky March." *(The Bandleader blows a whistle.)* One, two, three, four. *(Missy, Valerie, and Ben mark time as the band plays the "Radetzky March." A few clunker notes are heard from the Flute Line. Missy flashes an annoyed look. The Bandleader blows a whistle. The Flute Line puts down their instruments and stops marking time.)*

**MISSY.** My God, Ben. What the hell was that?

**BEN.** What?

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* All right, everyone! Stand at attention!

**MISSY.** You played so many wrong notes, almost everyone in the band was thrown off.

**BEN.** That's not true.

**MISSY.** Do you ever practice?

**BEN.** Of course.

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* I said stand at attention!

**VALERIE.** Guys! *(They stand at attention.)*

**MISSY.** *(Whispers.)* I mean really practice not just think about it.

**BEN.** *(Whispers.)* I said, yes.

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* That was sloppy, people.

**VALERIE.** *(Whispers.)* It really wasn't good, Ben.

**BEN.** I'm trying.

**MISSY.** You need to do a helluva lot more than that.

**BEN.** What are you talking about?

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* Everyone needs to listen up. Understand?

**MISSY.** You could start by getting in step for once.

**BEN.** I know how to mark time.

**MISSY.** A one-legged mule could do better than you do.

**BEN.** You don't know what you're talking about.

**VALERIE.** Shh!

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* The only way we're going to win that competition is if we work together.

**MISSY.** Look, Ben. If you don't have the music memorized yet, then fake it. All those wrong notes were embarrassing.

**BEN.** I did pretty well.

**MISSY.** If that's really what you think, you need to put your hearing aid on blast because your playing sucked!

**VALERIE.** Will both of you cool it, already?!

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* You three over there!

**BEN.** Yes, sir.

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* I want to see you after practice!

**VALERIE.** You don't mean me, do you, Mr. C?

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* I mean all of you!

**VALERIE.** *(Whispers to Ben and Missy.)* Now look at what you've done.

**BEN.** *(Whispers.)* I'm sorry, Valerie.

**MISSY.** *(Whispers.)* That's right, Ben. You sure are.

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* If you don't quiet down right now, you're out of the band.

**MISSY.** Yes, sir.

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* Stand at attention! *(Ben, Missy, and Valerie quickly stand at attention. Lights out.)*

### SCENE 3

*\*Lights up on two chairs that double as a SCHOOL BUS. Ben sits quietly behind the euphoric bus driver, KAREN, who pounds out a hot drum beat on the steering wheel as a club song comes to an end on the radio.*

**KAREN.** Haven't seen you on my late bus in a while, Bradley. How come?

**BEN.** My name is Ben.

**KAREN.** I know that, Bahadur.

**BEN.** I said Ben.

**KAREN.** Yeppo, B'wana.

**BEN.** It's Bana. *(Smiles.)* I mean Ben.

**KAREN.** *(Laughs.)* Gotcha! How have things been, Ben?

**BEN.** They've been better.

**KAREN.** What do you mean?

**BEN.** I was put on notice today for talking during band.

**KAREN.** If you don't speak up, how are you supposed to learn anything?

**BEN.** You can ask questions, just not when the bandleader is talking.

**KAREN.** Why did you do that?

**BEN.** I was minding my own business, but some of the other flute players kept picking on me.

**KAREN.** I'm sorry to hear that.

**BEN.** The bandleader said if we don't shape up we'll be kicked out.

**KAREN.** It won't really come to that, will it?

**BEN.** I hope not. I need to be in band for four years. It's important for my college applications.

**KAREN.** Even for business majors?

**BEN.** Sure.

**KAREN.** Is that really what you want to major in?

**BEN.** Well— Yeah. My mom says it's important.

**KAREN.** What do you say?

**BEN.** I guess. I mean— You have to study something, don't you?

**KAREN.** I never did. After I finished high school, I rocketed it on out of town and lit up the world with my fabulous driving skills.

**BEN.** Where did you go?

**KAREN.** Anywhere those wheels would take me. Even the high wire once. It was hot!

**BEN.** Wow! (*Beat.*) Hey! Look out! (*They jostle around.*)

**BEN.** That was a downed tree!

**KAREN.** Cool. Huh?! Woo-hoo! There's nothing like a good drive!

**BEN.** (*Laughs.*) You should've been in the stock car races. \*

**KAREN.** I was, Benji, for over ten years.

**BEN.** Really?!

**KAREN.** Oh, yeah! It was a blast. (*Karen slams on the brakes which thrusts them forward and then deep into the backs of their seats as the bus comes to a screeching halt.*)

**BEN.** That was some ride.

**KAREN.** I know! You have a good night now, Baines.

**BEN.** Ben.

**KAREN.** Huh? (*Ben smiles as he exits the bus. Karen smiles back. Lights out.*)

#### **SCENE 4**

*Lights up, in Ben's bedroom as Ben does homework at his desk. Ben's Mom, in business attire, walks in.*

**BEN'S MOM.** I'm glad to see you doing homework without having to be told.

**BEN.** Hi Mom. I thought you were going antiquing tonight.

**BEN'S MOM.** Tomorrow. I hope I can find a chair to complete that dining room set we have of your great grandmother's. (*Ben nods.*)

**BEN'S MOM.** Did you ask your business teacher for a recommendation letter?

**BEN.** Not yet. There's been a lot going on. I— have a new article I need to research for the school paper.

**BEN'S MOM.** You mean they approved you to write about the school's new budget proposal?

**BEN.** Uh— (*Anxious smile.*) Well . . .

**BEN'S MOM.** Congratulations! Aren't you glad I helped you draft something?

**BEN.** Yeah.

**BEN'S MOM.** Colleges will really be impressed by that.

**BEN.** They will?

**BEN'S MOM.** Of course. Make sure you ask for a letter this week.

**BEN.** All right.

**BEN'S MOM.** I had lunch with ladies from the department today. We were glad to hear that the company is finally rolling out that new software. It's supposed to make our jobs a lot easier.

**BEN.** That's good.

**BEN'S MOM.** It certainly is. Mrs. Lucas told everyone that her daughter is planning to go to college for engineering.

**BEN.** Really?

**BEN'S MOM.** Ms. Sault's son is going for biology and Mrs. Beachum's for computer science.

**BEN.** Oh, yeah?

**BEN'S MOM.** I couldn't wait to tell them that you are planning to major in business and even go on to get an M.B.A.

**BEN.** An M.B.A.?

**BEN'S MOM.** Sure. You're going to do great things! (*Ben flashes a compulsory smile.*)

**BEN'S MOM.** That director I know from H.R., Mrs. Klassen, she stopped by our table and mentioned that her kids, Chris and Stephanie, are excited about a marching band party this weekend.

**BEN.** Oh, right.

**BEN'S MOM.** Why didn't you tell me about it?

**BEN.** I didn't think it was important.

**BEN'S MOM.** Of course, it is. You're going, aren't you?

**BEN.** Well—

**BEN'S MOM.** You should, Ben. *(Hands him a paper.)* Here's Mrs. Klassen's number. Give her kids a call and see if you can go with them. With a mother like they have, they can definitely help you down the line.

**BEN.** I've seen them around, but I've never really talked to them.

**BEN'S MOM.** Now's your chance. Flowers don't grow without water, honey, and neither will you if you don't get out there.

**BEN.** But—

**BEN'S MOM.** I mean it, Ben.

**BEN.** All right.

**BEN'S MOM.** *(Starting to leave.)* Good.

**BEN.** Say, Mom.

**BEN'S MOM.** What?

**BEN.** Dad was home all of last weekend, but he barely spent any time with me.

**BEN'S MOM.** He had to prepare for a big trip to inspect some manufacturing plants in Swaziland. Imagine going there.

**BEN.** That country has been in the news a lot lately.

**BEN'S MOM.** Yeah, well, even so, it's exciting to travel, isn't it?

**BEN.** I suppose.

**BEN'S MOM.** As long as you do well in school, someday, you'll get a better job than us. You won't have to work as hard as we do then. *(Ben nods.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** Make that call, then get back to the homework and flute.

**BEN.** All right. *(Ben's Mom smiles as she leaves. Ben sighs and then stares at his homework. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 5

*Lights up in the school gym as Evan leads the dance club members through a jazz-dance warm-up routine. As the warm-up comes to an end, Ben walks in with a note pad and observes from the sidelines.*

**EVAN.** All right, everyone. Let's take a break until Miss Monfice gets here. (*Dance club members chatter in agreement. Evan walks over to his gym bag, which lies on the floor near Ben, and gets a towel.*)

**BEN.** That was good.

**EVAN.** It was just the warm-up.

**BEN.** Really?

**EVAN.** Hey, I remember you. From the field the other day, right?

**BEN.** Yeah. I'm writing an article on the dance club for the school paper.

**EVAN.** Good. Maybe it will help us get some new members.

**BEN.** It might. Didn't Miss Monfice tell you I was coming?

**EVAN.** No, but she's running late.

**BEN.** Okay. I'm Ben Paulis.

**EVAN.** Evan Skylar.

**BEN.** Nice to meet you. Are you her assistant?

**EVAN.** I'm just a member. I stepped in to get things going until she gets here.

**BEN.** I see. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?

**EVAN.** Sure. Go ahead.

**BEN.** Thanks. What types of dance does the club do?

**EVAN.** Jazz mostly.

**BEN.** How long has the club been around?

**EVAN.** I think this is the second year. You'll have to ask Miss Monfice to be sure though cuz I just started here last month.

**BEN.** Are you new to the area?

**EVAN.** Yeah, my mom's an artist. We go wherever that takes her.

**BEN.** Sounds exciting.

**EVAN.** It can be.

**BEN.** Do you know what the club's plans are for the year?

**EVAN.** We hope to enter some competitions once we get our routine down. There've been a lot of interruptions though.

**BEN.** I didn't mean to pull you away from your work.

**EVAN.** It's okay. You're welcome to stay and watch if you want.

**BEN.** Uh— Sure. Thanks.

**EVAN.** *(To the others.)* Everyone, since Miss Monfice isn't here yet, let's get into two circles and practice what we know of the routine so far. *(The dance club members form two circles.)* From the top, everyone! *(Evan turns on the music and then takes his place in one of the circles. The dance club members do the beginning of their routine. Ben looks on and slowly begins to move his feet to the music until the dancers stop dancing. Evan turns the music off.)* That was good. Let's do it again.

**BEN.** Your teacher sure knows some great moves.

**EVAN.** Thanks. *(Evan resets the music.)* You ever dance?

**BEN.** Not really.

**EVAN.** You're welcome to try it if you want.

**BEN.** Well—

**EVAN.** It's all right.

**BEN.** . . . All right. *(Ben anxiously steps forward.)*

**EVAN.** No, I mean you don't have to if you don't want to.

**BEN.** I do, but I'll just follow along from over here.

**EVAN.** Okay. *(To the others.)* Everyone, let's do it again. *(Evan starts the music. The dance club members do the beginning of the dance. Ben fumbles through it with them, but it's clear that he has a knack for dance. After the routine, Evan turns the music off.)* You catch on quick.

**BEN.** Thanks. It was fun.

**EVAN.** Why don't you stand in one of the circles and we'll try it again?

**BEN.** I should get to work on the article.

**EVAN.** All right. We're here every Tuesday at three.

**BEN.** Thanks. *(Ben leaves. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 6

*Lights up in a dimly lit living room, represented by a table that has junk food and various beverages on it. Raucous, PARTY MUSIC plays as Ben sits in a chair along the wall by himself. He sips from a bottle of water as Valerie and Missy, who is quite drunk, stand in the distance.*

**VALERIE.** Can you believe someone spiked the drinks?

**MISSY.** It's great, isn't it?

**VALERIE.** They're too strong for me.

**MISSY.** Naw, I want some more. (*Missy walks over to the table and pours a beverage into her glass. Valerie notices Ben and starts over to him. Missy follows.*)

**VALERIE.** Hey, Ben. How's it going?

**BEN.** All right.

**VALERIE.** Where are Chris and Stephanie?

**BEN.** On the porch with some friends.

**MISSY.** They've been out there a long time.

**BEN.** I know.

**MISSY.** I thought you all came together.

**BEN.** We did.

**MISSY.** You have a fight or something?

**BEN.** No.

**MISSY.** Then why aren't you with them?

**BEN.** I don't know.

**MISSY.** Yes, you do. Come on, what is it?

**BEN.** Nothing.

**VALERIE.** You can tell us, Ben.

**BEN.** They'd— rather talk with those other kids, I guess.

**MISSY.** So would I. I mean, who wants to sit around all night staring at a bottle like a hermit? Talk about a boring time.

**BEN.** We were talking.

**MISSY.** Oh, yeah. About what?

**BEN.** School clubs and the teachers.

**MISSY.** That isn't talking, that's torture.

**VALERIE.** Hey, Missy.

**MISSY.** What?

**VALERIE.** Ease up.

**MISSY.** Yeah, yeah.

**BEN.** After a few minutes, they took off. I've tried to get their attention a couple of times, but they keep ignoring me.

**MISSY.** You might as well write the word loser across your forehead.

**BEN.** People like clubs.

**MISSY.** Only losers. I'm here to have a good time. Let's go, Val. I need a refill. My buzz is wearing off.

**VALERIE.** I'll be there in a minute. *(Missy walks off.)* Don't mind her.

**BEN.** *(Smiles.)* Thanks.

**VALERIE.** You should get up and talk to other people.

**BEN.** What would I say?

**VALERIE.** You can think of something.

**BEN.** All right, I'll see.

**VALERIE.** I'll talk to you later. *(Valerie walks off. Ben sits down in a chair and sips his drink alone. He looks around sadly. Lights out.)*

## **SCENE 7**

*Lights up in Ben's bedroom as Ben struggles to do his homework. He takes a break and does a dance move in his seat with a slight smile. A knock on the door. Ben looks back at his work. Ben's Mom, in business attire, walks in.*

**BEN'S MOM.** Ben, I had to walk halfway down the street to pick up the garbage can just now.

**BEN.** They hadn't come yet when I got home.

**BEN'S MOM.** Even so, you need to be more on top of your chores. You don't get an allowance for doing nothing.

**BEN.** All right.

**BEN'S MOM.** It was a fiasco at work today with the rollout. We were practically at a standstill.

**BEN.** Really?

**BEN'S MOM.** Nothing went right. There was one saving grace though. I got a lead on the dining room chair. It will be at an antique show in Hillcrest next month.

**BEN.** That's good.

**BEN'S MOM.** I can't wait to go. How are you coming with your homework?

**BEN.** Not so good.

**BEN'S MOM.** What is it?

**BEN.** (*Shows her his paper.*) This.

**BEN'S MOM.** Your business course. You like that.

**BEN.** Not this homework. I've had it. (*Ben's Mom looks over his work.*)

**BEN'S MOM.** You're just adding wrong. This five should be a six. (*Corrects his paper.*) See, now it will work.

**BEN.** Oh. Yeah.

**BEN'S MOM.** (*Prompting Ben.*) Thank you, Mom.

**BEN.** Thanks.

**BEN'S MOM.** You're doing fine. You have all the rest of the problems correct.

**BEN.** That doesn't make them any easier.

**BEN'S MOM.** Easy is a cop-out. Doing well in that class is important.

**BEN.** I know.

**BEN'S MOM.** Your dad phoned. He plans to get home early on Friday. We'll have the entire weekend to celebrate your birthday.

**BEN.** Really?!

**BEN'S MOM.** If you get your homework and chores done.

**BEN.** I will!

**BEN'S MOM.** Good. I saw Mrs. Klassen today. It sounded like Chris and Stephanie had a nice time at the party on Saturday.

**BEN.** I don't know. They barely said a word to me the whole night.

**BEN'S MOM.** The important thing is that you went. They probably just got caught up in the excitement of everything. You'll be able to connect more with them next time.

**BEN.** There won't be a next time.

**BEN'S MOM.** Of course, there will.

**BEN.** I'm not going to hang out with them anymore and I'm not going to any more of those band parties. They're no fun.

**BEN'S MOM.** You're never going to make friends or fit in unless you go.

**BEN.** I've never fit in there to begin with.

**BEN'S MOM.** You'll find a way, if you try. And, when you do, you'll be glad you did. Give it a few days and then ask them to do something else.

**BEN.** Why? They haven't talked to me since the party. The one time I did see them in the hall they both turned and walked the other way.

**BEN'S MOM.** Maybe they were embarrassed.

**BEN.** Maybe they just don't like me.

**BEN'S MOM.** You'll never know unless you make an effort.

**BEN.** Maybe I don't want to.

**BEN'S MOM.** It's not going to get any easier, Ben. Do it now. The worse they can say is no. And, if they do, there are other people you can meet.

**BEN.** Fine.

**BEN'S MOM.** I'm glad that's settled. Finish up that page and then come down for dinner.

**BEN.** All right. *(Ben's Mom leaves. Ben slams his book shut and throws it at the wall.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** Is everything all right in there?

**BEN.** Yes, Mom. I'll be down in a few minutes. (*He sighs. Lights out.*)

## SCENE 8

*Lights up in the school gym as Evan and other dance club members huddle together. Ben enters. Evan turns to face him.*

**EVAN.** Hey, uh— Ben, right? You're back!

**BEN.** I'm still working on the article, but I wanted to check-in. Is this something new you're doing at each meeting?

**EVAN.** No, I just got back from the principal's office and was telling everyone the news. The secretary said that our advisor, Miss Monfice, is still out sick.

**BEN.** What do you mean, still?

**EVAN.** She's been out ever since that meeting you came to.

**BEN.** That was a few weeks ago.

**EVAN.** I know. We were discussing what we should do.

**BEN.** Can you lead the group? From what I saw, you do a good job.

**EVAN.** Thanks. I can come up with moves for our routine, but a teacher has to be our advisor or the school won't let the club continue.

**BEN.** I see. I hope Miss Monfice comes back soon.

**EVAN.** So do I cuz they won't let us go on much longer without an advisor.

**BEN.** Who led the club before her?

**EVAN.** Mr. Hooper, but from what everyone tells me, he was just doing it for some extra money. Most of the time he sat in the bleachers playing video games on his cell phone. He had no idea about anything.

**BEN.** Oh. Well, there must be someone that can do it.

**EVAN.** We're all planning to ask around.

**BEN.** I can put something in my article if you want.

**EVAN.** That would be great.

**BEN.** How is the routine coming?

**EVAN.** Good. We just added a new section last week.

**BEN.** Can I watch?

**EVAN.** Sure. You can join in if you want.

**BEN.** Well— All right. Thanks.

**EVAN.** *(To the others.)* Hey, everyone. Let's get to work. Just the new section. *(Evan turns on the music. Everyone does the new section of the jazz dance routine. Ben and Evan's work stands out, while the others' is not up to par. As the new section of choreography comes to an end, Evan turns off the music.)* Guys. I know we just added that last week, but whoa! Ya gotta practice between meetings. Take a few minutes to go over it on your own, then we'll try it again. *(General agreement as dance club members practice on their own.)*

**BEN.** Evan, how does that move in the middle go again?

**EVAN.** Which one?

**BEN.** The one where you hit with your ribs.

**EVAN.** I'm not sure what you mean.

**BEN.** When you . . . *(Ben struggles to do the dance move.)*

**EVAN.** Oh, that part. It's like this. *(Evan does the move. Ben tries it.)* Yeah, but hit it sharper. *(Evan does the move again. Ben does the move sharper.)* That's it. You catch on quick.

**BEN.** Thanks. It's fun. *(They watch the others practice.)* There are some good dancers here.

**EVAN.** I know some great ones at a school in the city. That's the place to be if you want to make it.

**BEN.** Really?!

**EVAN.** Yeah. We better get back to work.

**BEN.** All right. Say, do you think— Could I— join the club?

**EVAN.** Sure. We'd be glad to have you.

**BEN.** Great.

**EVAN.** *(To the others.)* Okay, everyone. Let's take it from the top.  
*(Lights out.)*

## SCENE 9

*Lights up on a few rows of bleachers. Missy, Valerie, and Ben sit next to each other wearing band hats with their flutes in their laps. Ben's Mom sits a few rows behind them. Everyone except for Ben stands up and cheers.*

**MISSY.** Woo-hoo! Another touchdown! We sure are killing 'em this game.

**VALERIE.** I'll say. They don't have a chance. *(Ben nods with a smile.)*

**MISSY.** Jeez, Ben. What's with you?! You're like a zombie! Our school is winning and you just sit there!

**BEN.** I'm into the game. It's just cold out here.

**MISSY.** You wouldn't feel it if you got up and cheered.

**BANDLEADER.** Everyone! Let's play the first eight bars of "The Victors." *(The band plays "The Victors" including Ben who struggles through it.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** Great playing, Ben! Keep it up! *(Ben shifts uncomfortably in his seat as Missy and Valerie exchange incredulous looks.)*

**MISSY.** What is she tone deaf? That's the worst he's played yet.

**BEN.** It was fine.

**MISSY.** It would only be fine if we were watching you do it in a silent movie. This is real life. People can actually hear you.

**BEN.** I know. *(A bell rings off-stage.)*

**BANDLEADER.** It's the end of the third quarter, everyone. Take five.

**MISSY.** Don't you care about the band?

**BEN.** Of course.

**MISSY.** Then show it. You have as much enthusiasm as a dead fish.  
Jeez! I'm going to get some hot chocolate.

**VALERIE.** I'll join you. *(Missy and Valerie leave.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** Ben! Ben! *(Ben turns around.)*

**BEN.** Yes, Mom.

**BEN'S MOM.** You're doing great, honey. I wish your father were here!  
He'd be so proud of you! *(Ben nods and then turns around with an uncomfortable look on his face. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 10

*\*Lights up in the school bus as Ben sits behind Karen who drives.*

**KAREN.** Barnaby Jones on my late bus three weeks in a row now.  
This is a real honor.

**BEN.** It's Ben.

**KAREN.** Three weeks. That's what I said.

**BEN.** I've had a lot going on at school lately.

**KAREN.** Sure. How'd it go with that brother and sister you told me  
about? You ever talk to them again after that party?

**BEN.** No.

**KAREN.** I wouldn't worry. They didn't seem nice from what you said.

**BEN.** I'm not worried. I only talked to them because my mom wanted  
me to.

**KAREN.** Is that so?

**BEN.** Yeah. You know, I— had this crazy thought.

**KAREN.** What? You wanted to fill their lockers with rancid Cool  
Whip or something? And, when they open them— Blam! All over!

**BEN.** No.

**KAREN.** I think that would be pretty cool.

**BEN.** *(Smiles.)* You do?

**KAREN.** Yeah! So, what did you have in mind?

**BEN.** I've really enjoyed being in the dance club these past few weeks.

**KAREN.** So, your mother let you join?!

**BEN.** I haven't told her yet. Anyway, I was thinking about auditioning for this college dance conservatory in the city.

**KAREN.** Why do you think that's a crazy idea?

**BEN.** I should be focusing on other things.

**KAREN.** Why?

**BEN.** So I can get a stable job.

**KAREN.** Ya have a point. Lots of people like punching the same number day in and day out.

**BEN.** Yeah.

**KAREN.** But when all is said and done, what will you have?

**BEN.** I'll have money in the bank.

**KAREN.** Dancers get paid, don't they?

**BEN.** Yeah, but who knows how much.

**KAREN.** You're right. Maybe it's too adventurous.

**BEN.** This isn't the way home.

**KAREN.** Since when do I take the same way twice?

**BEN.** Oh, I never realized that.

**KAREN.** Most people don't. As long as I get them where they need to go, that's all that matters. That's fine if it works for them. What works for you?

**BEN.** I— don't know.

**KAREN.** What use do business majors have with dance anyway?

**BEN.** None, I suppose. But it would be exciting.

**KAREN.** Writing up business plans can be exciting, can't it?

**BEN.** I guess.

**KAREN.** So, there you go. Focus on business and you'll be all set. You don't need dance.

**BEN.** There's something about dance though that's— just great.

**KAREN.** Better than business plans?

**BEN.** Yeah. I can't explain it, but— it's wonderful.

**KAREN.** Maybe I was wrong. Maybe you should audition.

**BEN.** I don't have a routine.

**KAREN.** Can you find someone to think one up for you?

**BEN.** Well—

**KAREN.** Well, what?

**BEN.** There's Evan. He's great.

**KAREN.** Ask him.

**BEN.** I can't.

**KAREN.** Why not?

**BEN.** I—

**KAREN.** What?

**BEN.** He's real popular.

**KAREN.** So?

**BEN.** What if he says no?

**KAREN.** What if he says yes?

**BEN.** I don't know what I'd do if he said no.

**KAREN.** If he does, bring him to me and I'll work him over.

**BEN.** I couldn't do that.

**KAREN.** You need to ask him now and worry later.

**BEN.** . . . All right.

**KAREN.** That's more like it.

**BEN.** Hey, watch out! You're about to— (*Ben ducks as a huge splash is heard. Karen slams on the gas as tires squeal, then speeds on.*) Are you crazy?! You just drove through Laredo Creek! It's over four feet deep!

**KAREN.** It was a creek. Now it's a mud puddle. (*Karen laughs. Ben looks at her and then laughs too. Lights out.*)

## SCENE 11

*Lights up in Ben's bedroom as Ben struggles through practicing the flute. Ben's Mom walks in with a shopping bag. Ben stops playing.*

**BEN.** Hi, Mom. When's Dad going to be home?! I've been looking forward to it all day. *(Ben's Mom hesitates.)* He's not, is he?

**BEN'S MOM.** There were some major issues at the plant he inspected this week. He had to extend his trip to make sure they were addressed.

**BEN.** Why does he make promises he can't keep?

**BEN'S MOM.** He tries his best. It couldn't be helped.

**BEN.** It's my birthday. Don't they have other inspectors that can step in?

**BEN'S MOM.** I know you're disappointed, but he isn't home for our anniversary most of the time either, honey. We just have to hang in there.

**BEN.** Yeah. *(Ben's Mom sees a letter on the desk.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** You got the recommendation from your business teacher I see. May I read it?

**BEN.** Sure. *(Ben's Mom looks over the letter.)*

**BEN'S MOM.** It's very good. Now that you have all the letters you need, start thinking about the essays.

**BEN.** All right.

**BEN'S MOM.** How's the article on the school budget going?

**BEN.** Uh— It didn't work out.

**BEN'S MOM.** I'm sorry to hear that. Something else will come along. *(Ben nods. Ben's Mom puts the bag on the desk.)* This is for you. *(Ben takes a wrapped package out of the bag and smiles.)* Go on, open it. *(Ben unwraps the package to find a new laptop computer.)*

**BEN.** A new laptop! Whoa!

**BEN'S MOM.** It's much faster than the one you have.

**BEN.** Thanks, Mom!

**BEN'S MOM.** You're welcome. Happy Birthday! (*Ben smiles with a nod.*) Now you'll be able to get your homework and your college applications done much faster.

**BEN.** All right. (*Ben's Mom motions to his flute.*)

**BEN'S MOM.** I'm glad to see you practicing.

**BEN.** I know it's important.

**BEN'S MOM.** You should be doing it for you not because I tell you to.

**BEN.** I understand, but— I'm interested in more than that.

**BEN'S MOM.** Like what?

**BEN.** There's this one club at school—

**BEN'S MOM.** You don't have time for more clubs. You only have one chance to get into a good college. You need to excel in important things like band to impress the schools so they'll take you.

**BEN.** Sure, but there's—

**BEN'S MOM.** Aw, Ben. Don't compromise. Just do it. I know you can. (*Ben smiles at her.*) I didn't mean to interrupt. Keep at it! (*Ben resumes practicing the flute as his Mom leaves. Ben stops playing in frustration and tosses the flute on his desk. He pulls his cell phone and a crinkled paper out of his pocket and looks at them with confliction.*)

Ben, honey!

**BEN.** I know, Mom. I will. (*Ben hesitates for a moment and then impulsively dials a number on his phone. As the phone begins to ring, he tucks the crinkled paper under a pile of books on his desk. Ben talks on the phone.*) Hello, Evan . . . It's Ben . . . Yeah. Linda from dance club gave me your number. Do you have a minute? . . . (*Lights out.*)

## SCENE 12

*Lights up in a hallway in the high school. Ben waits as Evan, slightly stressed, walks over.*

**EVAN.** Hey, Ben.

**BEN.** Hi. Is everything all right?

**EVAN.** Sure.

**BEN.** Thanks for doing this. You think it's okay to practice out here in the hall?

**EVAN.** Of course. If someone doesn't like it, they can let us know.

**BEN.** Yeah, right. What did you think of the music I picked out?

**EVAN.** It's good. We won't need it right now though.

**BEN.** Okay. (*Notices paint on Evan's shirt.*) Did you know you have some green paint on your shirt?

**EVAN.** (*Looks at his shirt.*) Aw, man. I was trying to be careful too.

**BEN.** What were you doing?

**EVAN.** Helping my mom paint the alligator-shaped mailbox she made for the front of our house.

**BEN.** Sounds cool.

**EVAN.** It is. I have some ideas for the opening of your routine.

**BEN.** Great! I can't wait to see.

**EVAN.** All right. What do you think of this? (*Evan shows Ben a few dance steps.*)

**BEN.** I like it!

**EVAN.** Good. Follow me this time. (*Evan leads Ben through the first few moves of the jazz dance routine.*) That first move is tricky. It actually goes like this. (*Evan demonstrates, then Ben tries.*) That's close. Try it again. (*Ben tries the move again.*) With a little practice, you'll get it.

**BEN.** Okay.

**EVAN.** Hey, I saw your article in the paper.

**BEN.** Yeah?

**EVAN.** It was good. I think it will really help the club.

**BEN.** I hope so. I'm worried about the club. Each week there seems to be less people there.

**EVAN.** I know. I hope it picks up.

**BEN.** It better.

**EVAN.** Let me show you the next move. (*Evan shows Ben another dance move.*) Now, do it with me. (*Evan leads Ben through the move.*) Good. Let's take it from the top. (*Evan leads Ben through the beginning of the dance routine.*) You're getting it.

**BEN.** Yeah.

**EVAN.** Make sure you practice.

**BEN.** I— I will. (*Evan nods then shifts anxiously.*) What is it?

**EVAN.** That's enough for today.

**BEN.** How come?

**EVAN.** I'm too keyed up. I need to break out. (*Evan heads off.*)

**BEN.** All right. Can I come along?

**EVAN.** If you can keep up. (*Ben hurries after him. Lights out.*)

### **SCENE 13**

*Lights up as Ben follows Evan over to a cliff while the wind blows.*

**BEN.** You sure run fast.

**EVAN.** I guess. Isn't the view amazing? Just goes on and on.

**BEN.** I've heard about the cliffs in this park, but I've never actually seen them before.

**EVAN.** Why not?

**BEN.** They sounded dangerous.

**EVAN.** Nah, they're awesome.

**BEN.** Why did you want to come here?

**EVAN.** Cuz of some stuff at home.

**BEN.** What do you mean?

**EVAN.** It's great traveling around with my mom and meeting new people, but the places we go are always based on what's good for her career. I never have a say. It gets to me sometimes.

**BEN.** I can imagine.

**EVAN.** One day I wanna do something just for me. I don't know what it is yet, but if the opportunity comes, I'm gonna take it no matter what?

**BEN.** Wouldn't that be something?

**EVAN.** Yeah.

**BEN.** Things get to me sometimes too, like my dad. He's always working. Never has much time for me even when he's around.

**EVAN.** I hear ya. I never knew my dad.

**BEN.** Really?

**EVAN.** It was just a passing thing with my mom.

**BEN.** Do you ever wonder about him?

**EVAN.** Sometimes, but it usually brings me down. That's why I come here. It's the only place I can really feel free.

**BEN.** I can see why. *(Evan steps up to the edge of the cliff.)* Hey, Evan.

**EVAN.** What?

**BEN.** Come on.

**EVAN.** Relax, man. *(Evan sticks his feet halfway over the edge of the cliff and leans out. Ben anxiously looks on. A breeze holds Evan up and then gently pushes him back.)* Aw, it wasn't enough.

**BEN.** For what?

**EVAN.** To really kick in. Sometimes the wind holds me out there like I'm suspended on a cloud. It's just me and the sky. There's nothing like it.

**BEN.** Yeah?

**EVAN.** Sure. Wanna try? *(Ben flashes an apprehensive look.)* There's no pressure, man. *(Ben takes a cautious step towards the edge of the cliff.)* Cool. Now lean out. *(Evan sticks his feet halfway over the edge and leans out as Ben steps closer to the edge. A breeze blows towards them.)* Whoa! Feel that? *(Ben pulls himself back from the edge and shakes his head.)* It's all right. Give it time.

**BEN.** Sure. It's a great place though. *(Evan nods. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 14

*\*Lights up in the school bus as Ben sits behind Karen as she drives.*

**KAREN.** So, B-boy.

**BEN.** B-boy?

**KAREN.** Isn't that what they call hip-hop dancers?

**BEN.** Yeah, but I do jazz.

**KAREN.** Then, all right, Jazz-boy. How'd it go today?

**BEN.** Good. Evan helped me start to put an audition routine together.

**KAREN.** And you didn't even need me. See?

**BEN.** *(Smiles.)* Yeah. And—

**KAREN.** What?

**BEN.** I did it.

**KAREN.** Don't tell me you ate too many tacos for lunch and belched in the middle of your history presentation?!

**BEN.** No.

**KAREN.** Too bad. That would've been awesome.

**BEN.** *(Smiles.)* I mailed in my application.

**KAREN.** All right! What did your mom say?

**BEN.** It was enough just to mail it in.

**KAREN.** Of course.

**BEN.** I hope the school invites me to audition.

**KAREN.** So do I.

**BEN.** Thanks.

**KAREN.** You keep me posted, hear?

**BEN.** I will.

**KAREN.** Good. Now, hold onto your seat cuz we're homeward bound.  
*(Ben anxiously clutches the bottom of his seat. Karen laughs and drives on at a normal pace. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 15

*Lights up in Ben's bedroom as Ben practices part of his dance audition routine without music. He forgets one of the steps. As Ben starts the routine again, his Mom walks in with some papers.*

**BEN'S MOM.** What are you doing?

**BEN.** . . . Uh—

**BEN'S MOM.** What?

**BEN.** Dancing.

**BEN'S MOM.** Stop wasting time. (*Shows Ben papers.*) I looked over your college essays. They're good, but they need work. I jotted down some notes. (*Pointing to a paper.*) In this one, you should mention that you excel in math and have a real passion for business.

**BEN.** All right. I'll add it in.

**BEN'S MOM.** Let me know when you have new drafts and I'll read them over again.

**BEN.** Okay.

**BEN'S MOM.** Have you practiced your flute today?

**BEN.** I will.

**BEN'S MOM.** There's no time like the present.

**BEN.** Yeah.

**BEN'S MOM.** You've been getting home late a lot lately, especially this afternoon. What's going on?

**BEN.** I haven't been getting home any later than Dad did last weekend.

**BEN'S MOM.** His plane was delayed.

**BEN.** I didn't even see him.

**BEN'S MOM.** He was tired. He went straight to bed.

**BEN.** He could have at least stuck his head into my room and said hello before he left on his next trip.

**BEN'S MOM.** He tries his best. Where were you this afternoon?

**BEN.** I hung out for a little while.

**BEN'S MOM.** Where?

**BEN.** In the park with a friend.

**BEN'S MOM.** Who were you with?

**BEN.** A guy named Evan.

**BEN'S MOM.** You didn't go on the trails, did you? They're covered in poison ivy.

**BEN.** No.

**BEN'S MOM.** Where did you go then?

**BEN.** Just around.

**BEN'S MOM.** Is it a secret?

**BEN.** We were in the park.

**BEN'S MOM.** I'm sure you didn't go to the playground. You're too old for that. There's not much else there, except— You didn't go to that cliff, did you?

**BEN.** Well . . .

**BEN'S MOM.** I warned you about it.

**BEN.** It's not that bad.

**BEN'S MOM.** Yes, it is.

**BEN.** There's a great view from up there.

**BEN'S MOM.** Did he put you up to going?

**BEN.** He led the way, but—

**BEN'S MOM.** You don't need friends like that.

**BEN.** He's a nice guy.

**BEN'S MOM.** Encouraging you to fall to your death doesn't sound nice to me.

**BEN.** It wasn't like that.

**BEN'S MOM.** No more cliffs and no more goofing off. You need to meet people that can help you get ahead in life not end it. There must be someone in one of the clubs you're in at school that would be good.

**BEN.** There isn't.

**BEN'S MOM.** Keep looking. Have you done your homework?

**BEN.** Not yet.

**BEN'S MOM.** Get to it. I'll call you when dinner is ready.

**BEN.** Yeah. (*Ben's Mom leaves. Ben thrusts open a book. Lights out.*)

## SCENE 16

*Lights up on a field as Missy, Valerie, and Ben march in line while playing the "William Tell Overture." They finish playing.*

**BANDLEADER.** (*On bullhorn.*) The lines and angles in the drill still need work, people, so does the music. Take your places for the top. We're doing it again. (*Missy, Valerie, and Ben walk towards their starting places in the drill.*)

**VALERIE.** This is the fourth time we've done this piece today.

**MISSY.** We have to be at the top of our game if we're going to win in that big competition.

**VALERIE.** Of course. I just wish Mr. C. would decide which piece we're going to do already.

**MISSY.** I'm sure he'll choose our best.

**VALERIE.** Yeah, but all this rehearsing is becoming monotonous.

**BEN.** I'll say. Sometimes I wish I didn't have to be here.

**MISSY.** I wish you didn't have to either, Ben, but unfortunately, you can't quit or it will make us ineligible to compete.

**BEN.** I didn't mean that I wanted to quit.

**MISSY.** Then get it in gear and really practice.

**BEN.** I do. I can't be that bad, Missy. I'm only ranked two positions behind you.

**MISSY.** You may be only two positions behind me, but Hell! The quality sure goes downhill fast after me.

**VALERIE.** What's that supposed to mean?

**MISSY.** Don't take it personal, Val. You're not bad. We could all use more practice. But when it comes to Ben, he could use a boatload more than any of us.

**BEN.** Oh, yeah?!

**MISSY.** Yeah, so get to it already.

**BEN.** All right. *(A whistle blows. Missy, Valerie, and Ben scurry into their places.)*

**BANDLEADER.** *(On bullhorn.)* From the top, everyone! Mark time, march! *(Missy, Valerie, and Ben mark time. Lights out.)*

## SCENE 17

*Lights up in the high school gym as Ben enters and finds it empty. Evan walks in.*

**BEN.** Hi, Evan. Where is everyone?

**EVAN.** They're not coming.

**BEN.** Why not?

**EVAN.** They canceled the club this morning. Didn't you hear it during the announcements?

**BEN.** No, I was late. If you knew, why are you here?

**EVAN.** I wanted to tell anyone that hadn't heard yet.

**BEN.** *(Nods.)* Why'd they cancel it?

**EVAN.** Cuz we couldn't find a new advisor.

**BEN.** I thought the school gave us an extension on that. Especially since it was unclear for a while if Miss Monfice would be coming back.

**EVAN.** The extension ran out.

**BEN.** They should have given us a little longer. We could have found someone. I've been asking every teacher I know.

**EVAN.** So have I, but they all said no.

**BEN.** Even Mr. Hooper?

**EVAN.** He's advising another club now.

**BEN.** Really?! Which one?

**EVAN.** Chess club. He can play all the video games he wants to there and no one notices.

**BEN.** Oh. I was really looking forward to performing with everyone.

**EVAN.** We all were.

**BEN.** What do we do now?

**EVAN.** Move on, I guess.

**BEN.** Yeah.

**EVAN.** Since we're here, I can show you some new steps to your audition routine, if you like.

**BEN.** All right.

**EVAN.** Great! Let's get to work. (*Lights out.*)

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