

ACT I SCENE 1

A stage in a school multipurpose room. Scenery and props made by ninth grade students depicting Thanksgiving themes. On the stage, from left to right, are four children in self-made costumes: MATT, a turkey; ROB, a pumpkin; BILL, a bowl of cranberries; JIMMY, on the porch of a little house. LISA, pushing ANNIE in her wheelchair, enters from the far left. LISA's hair covers one eye, and she walks awkwardly, but it could be interpreted as the result of pushing the chair. ANNIE's head and body move uncontrollably, and she does not appear to be aware of what is going on. After entering, LISA pauses and looks around with exaggerated expressions of concern. Each child's attitude reflects the tension that explodes at the end of Act I.

LISA

... Whew! ... I didn't think we'd get outta there! ... But, I'm afraid we're still lost! We need to be home before dark. Thanksgiving is almost here.

Oh! Let's ask that turkey for help.

(As ANNIE gropes at her touchtalker, LISA impatiently presses a button that yields a mechanical sound.)

Y ... eh ... ess.

(Approaching MATT.)

Mr. Turkey, can you show us how to get home?

MATT

(Dreamily; his mind is obviously focused on something else.)

Why don't you ask the pumpkin?

The girls move towards ROB.

LISA

Mr. Pumpkin, how can we get home before Thanksgiving?

ANNIE

(ANNIE makes an unintelligible sound and looks around clumsily.)

ROB *(Anxiously.)*

His eyes shift, nervously, from the audience to Bill. He is clearly self-conscious, but also afraid of Bill.)

Cranberries know everything. Ask them.

BILL (*Stage-whisper*)
Interrupting Rob's slow delivery.

Can we get this crap over with?

He then answers, impatiently, before the girls can even get to him.

Over there is home. There is nothing to be afraid of.

He glares at Jimmy.

JIMMY

(Mumbling, barely audibly.)

No, nothing, as long as you've found home.

BILL (*Stage whisper.*)

Is he dead, or what?!

JIMMY (*Between his teeth.*)

Who made you director?!

BILL

This sucks ... I'm outta here!

He stomps off the stage.

MR. GREY (*Aside to Nurse. Shaking his head sadly.*)

I guess our hopes were unrealistic.

Polite, embarrassed applause. MATT bows slightly; ROB looks concerned about getting tangled up in his costume; JIMMY, using his walker, hurries off ahead of the girls. As the spotlight follows the girls' tedious effort to exit, it catches MR. B., alert for their physical safety, but otherwise bored. As ANNIE's eyes meet his, her head stops bobbing. The spotlight isolates the two of them in a dreamy haze. Mr. B. seems to be "hearing" something that apparently has no effect on the others.

ANNIE

(Music. Words start out as mechanical sounds – not clearly a particular tone – from touch talker.)

I want to be

a part of
you.

(Her voice, now, becomes lyrical.)

I want
to be
a part
of you,
Instead
I am
apart.
But I will be
a part
of you:
I'll dance
inside
your heart.

ANNIE (Cont'd. Dreamy)

That "blessed moment" we were born
For born were she and I
The doctors rushed us from the room
We had no air to cry.

I guess they rushed her faster;
What stood to block my way?
Careening from disaster
I'm a miracle today.

I want
to be
a part
of you,
Instead
I am
apart.

But I will be
 A part
 of you:
 I'll dance
 Inside
 Your heart.

I still can smile I still can laugh,
 I've air enough for that.
 I can't control most phys'cal things,
 But that's not where I'm at.

I touch the talker's single sounds,
 They creep into your ear.
 They don't convey my inner choir,
 I wish that you could hear:

The basses sing of basic things
 That most of you ignore,
 Like how to eat and sleep and play
 And get up from the floor.

The altos answer: where the will is
 We will find a way;
 Your father's built a bathroom lift,
 Your chair is on its way.
 ANNIE (*cont'd.*)

The tenors soar above my house
 And see into my soul
 My love of sunshine, loving smiles,
 The things that make me whole.

Sopranos reach the heights of joy
 As my cocoon explodes;
 With dazzling colors, sparkling sounds,
 My character unfolds.

I want to be a part of you,
And yet, I am apart.
But I will be a part of you.
I'll dance inside your heart.

As Mr. B. chokes back a sob, the lighting suddenly changes back to normal, ANNIE's body resumes its uncontrollable movements, and LISA exits pushing ANNIE in her chair.

ACT I SCENE 2

Next morning

The sun gradually dawns, revealing a slide-projection of a suburban street which includes a one-story school-building, surrounded by a wide socio-economic range of dwellings: large houses, small bungalows, and dilapidated apartment buildings. Music softly rises with the sun. When each character begins his or her song, the seemingly opaque façade of that singer's home becomes translucent so that we can see the person preparing for the day. The children with physical handicaps are "buried" deeper within the recesses of their respective homes. Lisa lives in the largest house; Jimmy in the smallest, most run-down looking apartment. The school secretary's desk receives some indirect sunlight; the other school scenes are more and more dominated by artificial lighting, with the phone room and the nurse's office in the windowless center of the building.

Nurse's above-average, older home, very close to school.

NURSE

(introducing her musical theme)

I start out my day, in the usual way,
 By seeing my own kids all get off:
 The dawdling one, the "my hair's a mess" one,
 And the one with the permanent wet cough.

My hair I've cut short, waste of time to abort;
 My breakfast I gulp it down quickly.
 Jogging suits will do fine for a girl in my line:
 My specialty's sicker to sickly.

Music. A view into another house.

ANNIE

Mechanical sound of touch-talker.

"Mom come get me; I'll be late."
 My limbs can't lift my fragile weight.
 School's the place each day I see
 What "normal" childhood ought to be.

Jimmy's rundown apartment becomes transparent; his harried mother searches for a bag for his lunch. Jimmy, on the floor, alternately tries to adjust his leg braces and clutches his head.

JIMMY

I must be growing 'cause my brace
 Marks my legs at a new place
 I can't feel my lower part –
 It makes for a clumsy start.

Inside Bill's bungalow. On couch mother in robe with beer bottles surrounding her. Bill, seeming to ignore her, lurches around the room getting his things together.

BILL

I can't waste my life in waiting
 For her rehabilitating.
 Asthma, C.P., poverty –
 Nothing will imprison me!

One phone is ringing while the secretary is on the other phone with a parent who seems to be ambivalent about sending her child to school with a "stomach ache."

MRS. BROCK

... third day in a row, I would send her. She seems to be manipulating you. We can take care of her We have a lot worse physical problems here Okay, she can always talk to the school nurse Bye. (*Hangs up phone, write something down, answers other phone.*) Oh, sorry, I hope he feels better. (*Hangs up, writes.*)

Carrying his briefcase and books and preparing to join the crowd of students entering the school, Mr. B. works his way through the crowd to get to the main office.

MR. B.

With my office on my car seat,

And my files stuffed in my case,
I relate to kids I counsel:
We all don't have a place.

Handicapped by this condition,
We still manage to explore
Skills to help us be successful,
And what success is for.

MR. B.

So, Mrs. Brock, where do I belong today?

MRS. BROCK

That is a problem, isn't it? (*Looking over school floor plan.*) You might have to meet in your car. (*Snicker.*) W... e ... ll, you could try the phone room.

MR. B

(*Moves to the center of the stage, representing the hall between rooms. Sings.*)

Today our room's a closet
They fondly call "the pit,"
Where a wheelchair makes it doubtful
That both of us will fit.

We talk of what amounts to wounds
Of body, mind, or spirit,
A private corner's all they need
Plus a willing ear to hear it.

Moves to stage left, an area almost completely filled with bookshelves, a tall filing cabinet, and a low one on the "far" wall. A large, circular, rickety table, with a random assortment of chairs, occupies at least two-thirds of the remaining space. A phone is on the small cabinet; a woman in her mid-thirties is talking on the phone.

TEACHER (*irritated*)

You can catch up on your sleep tonight. No, I won't give you a note. ... Because ... it's your responsi ... Well, why do I keep on saying it? ... I've gotta go, my class is coming in. I'll see you after school. ... Yes, you have

to go. ... Bye.

MR. B.

It's tough working and being a parent.

TEACHER (*rushing out, exasperated*)

It's tough being a parent ... period.

MR. B.

Mumbling to himself as he tries to make space for his briefcase, and moving the tables and chairs so there is room for kids, especially those in wheelchairs, to enter and sit.

It's tough being a kid too (*pushing the table*), especially when getting yourself in here, with all your contraptions, is like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.

Spotlight shifts to school entrance. ROB enters school in his electric wheelchair just behind MATT, in his wheelchair. They almost crash into each other because ROB is constantly looking apprehensively over his shoulder, while MATT is whistling to himself and moving at a pace oblivious to the rush of the others. LISA pushes ANNIE in her wheelchair. LISA is clearly trying to keep her hair over one eye and seems to be trying to disguise that something is wrong with her leg. JIMMY tries to be as invisible as possible as he moves slowly on his crutches. A "normal" boy and girl enter separately, but both are obviously keeping their distance from, and occasionally staring at, the students with wheelchairs or crutches.

ALL THE CHILDREN

We're all kids
To school we go –
Some are fast
Some real slow.

"NORMAL" CHILDREN

School just interrupts our play.

PHYSICALLY "CHALLENGED" CHILDREN

Without school, we rarely play.

A "NORMAL" CHILD (*Offstage*)
Ignore what the "retards" say.

ALL THE CHILDREN
Wonder what's in store today.

(BILL's voice is overheard from outside, yelling something indistinguishable, except for the word "Retard," and the angry tone that eventually subsides into a raspy cough.)

ACT I SCENE 3

(MR. B. enters classroom. Children busy at work in small groups or alone. Little boy,

DANNY with an angelic face is seated at a table by the door. He lights up when MR. B. enters, and he begins to push on the table with his arms so he can raise himself up to greet him. His awkward, jerky movements belie his "normal" face and upper torso. His limbs get tangled up as his excitement at seeing MR. B., and his frustration, mount. MR. B. almost has to catch him while simultaneously redirecting him to the walker, now visible next to his work spot.)

DANNY

H ... H ... I ... i, M ... m ... mister B. I c ... an't be in g ... roup, today. I'm having surgery so I c ... an grow t ... all.

(Other children have become aware that MR. B. is in the room, and the audience simultaneously becomes aware that all those children have some kind of physical problem:

- MATT, in a stander, is doing his homework on a desk attached to it;
- one girl, wearing very thick glasses, is in a hand-operated wheelchair
- JIMMY's crutches are visibly leaning next to his chair;
- one girl lies curled up in a banana-cart;
- ROB, clearly overweight, maneuvers an electric wheelchair;
- ANNIE is also in an electric wheelchair. She is drooling, and her head bobs periodically and uncontrollably. She is trying to press buttons on her touch-talker.

MATT makes an idiosyncratic, formal gesture acknowledging MR. B., but his brief smile reflects more pleasure than his gestures suggest. The girl in the glasses is oblivious to MR. B. almost until he's left, at which point she looks around for him as if she has just awakened from a daydream.)

LISA

How did you like our play, Mr. B.?

(Overlapping mumbles from various students.)

BILL

Was he there? I didn't see him.

MATT

Kids laughed.

ROB

I almost forgot my lines.

JIMMY

We never

TEACHER

Children! Mr. B. just walked in. I'm sure he would like to tell you how much he enjoyed your show.

MR. B.

(Nods and smiles, awkwardly, to the class.)

It was a very special, moving experience. I hope to see more ... of you ... sometime soon.

TEACHER

Well, it was lovely, but I hope we don't have to do that again too soon. It was a lot of work, wasn't it class?

LISA

Yes.

MATT

Nah!

ROB

Whuh?

JIMMY

It stunk.

TEACHER

And our real work is to prepare our young minds for the future; as we always remind ourselves:

(Music.)

Multiply your mind
Divide and conquer sorrow
Add fact to fact, accrue
Interest for tomorrow.

Reading opens doors
History shows the way
We learn from others lives
To reach beyond today

Math/science set the scene,

Lit'ature the goal:
 One preserves the body
 The other serves the soul.

I teach so you will learn
 To find your grown-up place
 With skills to overcome
 Each obstacle you face.

(STUDENTS and TEACHER softly repeat the song together, although the children clearly don't understand all the words.)

MR. B.

(As the class sings, MR. B. steps towards the audience and appears to be thinking out loud, in song.)

The world of facts seems dead,
 Unless I see me in it,
 Working toward a goal
 With hope that I can win it.

Inside each child's a song
 Searching for a choir,
 A place it can belong
 In quest for something higher.

Once we sense our part
 School becomes our guide
 In how to blend our voice
 With the world we see outside.

Then hist'ry is our own
 Science/Math our guide;
 Through Art we can explore
 The self we sense inside.

CHILDREN

So multiply, unwind
 Divide and conk her sorrow
 Add fact to fat, achoo;
 Infesting for tomorrow.

TEACHER

Class! Please get out your homework so Lisa can collect it, and begin reading in your science books about tsunamis ...

(In response to many blank stares and "huhs?")

You'll know what that means if you follow my directions. Right now, I have to talk to Mr. B. for a minute.

(She gestures for MR. B. to follow her into the hall.)

Sometimes its a nightmare in there; and Bill isn't even here yet, wherever he is. And now -- that play! Do you know Annie's parents called saying she should be home-schooled instead of being subjected to such public humiliation. AND on the same day, Lisa's parents demanded an IEP meeting because they feel the play made it obvious that the kids in this class are beneath her! Can you talk to both girls' parents?

MR. B.

I would like to help Annie and Lisa to speak for themselves.

TEACHER

Idealist! Lisa right now feels like she doesn't belong anywhere -- and premature mainstreaming should confirm that impression. And Annie may ... never ... well ... you know ... Just look at her.

(She sighs and shakes her head.)

(They both turn their heads in ANNIE's direction. Her head and arms appear uncontrollable. TEACHER looks away and clears her throat. At that moment, ANNIE focuses her gaze, momentarily, on MR. B., and his attention becomes riveted onto her.)

MR. B.

There's more there than meets the eye.

TEACHER

I'm glad you feel that way. Anywhoo ... to the point ... could you talk to ... uh, with the girls and see how they feel about their parents wanting to move them out of here.

MR. B.

I usually see Rob this period ...

TEACHER

... Rob always needs to talk about some fear. ... You're welcome to get him after you see the girls.

(Before he can reply, she sticks her head into the room.)

Lisa, dear! Would you please bring Annie to Mr. B's offi ... well just follow him to wherever he is today.

("Dismissing" MR. B.)

Thanks.

(As she walks back into the classroom.)

I don't remember saying anything about talking while you read. Okay, Jimmy, what is a tsunami?

(As LISA pushes ANNIE out into the hall, TEACHER closes the door behind them.)

ACT I SCENE 4

(MR. B. rearranges the table and chairs in the phone room so that a wheelchair can have a chance of fitting in. ANNIE enters, appearing as if she is on her own, until LISA's head becomes visible behind her.)

MR. B.

Lisa, please stay outside for a minute. I need to say something to Annie first.

(LISA closes the door as she remains in the hall.)

Did I just imagine it at the play, or did you really ask me for my help?

ANNIE *(on touchtalker)*

Yes ... Yes ... Yes ...

(The touchtalker repeats because Annie pushes it so hard.)

MR. B.

Why me?

ANNIE

You ... see ... me.

MR. B.

I heard your teacher -- no time for more plays. ... She ... Mr. Grey ... we all want you to ... learn. And the Nurse is worried about you ... all of you ... being overstressed.

ANNIE

Meeeeeee ... see me. ...

(She tries to point as well as she can towards LISA in the door window.)

See ... her.

MR. B.

Do you think she also wants to be a part of us? *(under his breath)* whoever that is.

ANNIE

Not ... think ... I ... know.

MR. B.

What if you ... or she ... couldn't stay here? There are other places

where ...

ANNIE

You ... see ... us. ... we ... stay ... here

MR. B.

Well, thanks for the vote of confidence. Shall we see what Lisa has to say?

(ANNIE smiles and nods. MR. B. opens the door.)

Thanks for waiting for us ... we had some unfinished business. ... Come on in. I think we can find a place for you.

LISA

(Talking even while she is trying to get in and seated.)

... my parents don't think you or anyone else in this school can "find a place" for me ... but they don't know what it is like ... my mom doesn't want to talk about -- SHHH! *(whisper)* "you know what" ... and my dad doesn't think there is anything to whisper about ... and everybody else ... seems to first treat me like I'm ... well ... like everyone else ... and then – when they see this *(points to her wandering eye)* and this *(she exaggerates her limp)*, they suddenly become mute.

(Music.)

Blonde and Blue

Blonde and blue, I'd like to see
What you really think of me.
Amidst walkers, chairs, and crutches
"She appears the queen of such as

"Occupy this special space
Designed to school the out-of-place.
But why that lovely, blonde, blue child?
Has life not left her undefiled?

"But wait! Lured on by her face,
Do we detect the slightest trace
Of skewed eye and faulty gait--

Does she share her classmates' fate?

"Then how approach, what does one say?
 'How many hearts you broke today?'
 And just ignore the other part?
 The one that gave us such a start.

"I hope she didn't catch our shock,
 'There, there, we didn't mean to mock.
 It's just that ... well .. we never heard...'
 Perhaps we best not say a word."

And so I watch the repeated scene
 Of all who fear they might sound mean.
 And so, at most, have zilch to say,
 But pat my head and shrink away.

But how am I supposed to find
 What is really on my mind
 When conversation limps like me
 While eyes wander, fail to see

That I am both the blonde and blue
 And limp and eye, and much more too...
 And, what "more" is, I'd get a clue
 Could all of me just talk to you.

Music ends.

MR. B.

Look at this office.

(He gestures at the random clutter, left by other staff.)

We all need to carve out a place for ourselves. Sounds like both of you
 feel invisible sometimes.

LISA

Most of the time. Lost ... like we were in the play. But it doesn't take just
 five minutes, including applause, to find home ... a place where we

belong.

MR. B.

What about a play that is really about you?

LISA

Yeah! We could show people how we got lost, in the first place. Most stories, fairytales begin with that.

ANNIE

Once ... upon ... a ... time.

(As ANNIE presses the words on her touchtalker, the lights begin to fade, focus on MR. B., and then follow his gaze to the opposite end of the stage. NURSE, PHYSICAL THERAPIST, SPEECH THERAPIST, and TEACHER appear in a hazy light.)

NURSE

Once upon a time

MR. B.

No, many times upon many times

NURSE

There lived a young couple, much like any other. Their visions of the future focused on the little heart that beat inside the wife's womb.

MR. B.

When the baby was born, the couple immediately fell in love with her physical beauty and warm smile.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST

But, something was not right. She did not crawl when the book said she would.

SPEECH THERAPIST

She did not talk when the book said she would.

TEACHER

She did not learn as the book said she should.

MR. B.

And so the natural doubts of new parents gradually grew into gnawing fears. The couple sought help.

NURSE

The doctors knew this, but they didn't know that.

MR. B.

And the couple's fears grew louder and stronger.

NURSE

The doctors said this, but they didn't say that.

MR. B.

And the fears became their focus.

NURSE

And the couple's future began to vanish into the forest of ignorance and despair.

TEACHER

But there was hope ... still.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST and SPEECH

With the proper care, the child's physical functioning could be improved.

NURSE

"But, how much?" asked the couple.

MR. B.

And what about her smile?

NURSE

But, then, the system gave commands, and all smiles stopped together.

MR. B.

Love and guilt, shame and fear, and love again, had made the couple cling to their child.

NURSE

But the inevitability of physical maturation, and the demands of the system, gradually drew her from them

TEACHER/PHYSICAL THERAPIST/SPEECH

... into the hands of strangers

MR. B.

... whose positive power was unknown, unproven ... but who might, unintentionally, yield her to the forces of shame and invisibility.

ALL

And so she withdrew her smile, to keep it safe in her own inner drama.
And so she entered the dark forest of the unknown.

(NURSE, TEACHER, PHYSICAL THERAPIST, and SPEECH THERAPIST withdraw. MR. B. and spotlight refocus on ANNIE and LISA.)

ANNIE

Tell ... our ... story.

LISA *(excitedly)*

We can help!

MR. B.

Who is we? I'm afraid last night's play quickly exhausted the staff's enthusiasm for extra duty.

ANNIE

KIDS!

LISA (*Aside to Mr. B.*)

I don't know what she thinks the others can do ... especially Jimmy. I think he likes being invisible.

MR. B.

Well, I'd like to try something different. I'll see what Mr. Grey thinks about your idea, and, maybe one of you could start brainstorming in our group, today. I also have to see Rob. If it's not breaking confidentiality, I can see if he has any thoughts on the subject.

(ANNIE and LISA both show their agreement with that plan.)

ACT I SCENE 5

Office of Mr. Grey, Principal. Mr. Grey is seated at his desk, neatly organized with stacks of papers. He is listening to Mr. B., but has not offered him a seat.

MR. B.

.... what I'm trying to say is that our students with disabilities have something to tell us, besides "Happy Thanksgiving."

MR. GREY

And you know this because a girl, who can't talk, sang to you?

MR. B.

Everyone has his own, private "song," what makes that person unique. It's our job to help them sing it to the world.

MR. GREY

You sound like me, twenty years ago. That's why I advocated for special ed classrooms to be placed in a regular high school.

He gestures to indicate that he is referring to this school.

Social needs, psychological well-being, self-esteem – that was my mantra. Now I know that, whether I like it or not, what will keep this program's funding is evidenced-based best practices – and data. We can't be everything to everybody.

MR. B.

So we'll teach the dyslexic to read, quadriplegics to write, and the dying to relish becoming educated adults.

MR. GREY

Cut the melodrama! Students and their parents are our customers. They expect "no

child to be left behind” as far as education is concerned. Besides, what do you think we can do to reveal the inner voices of students who have a hard enough time conveying their basic needs to familiar adults.

MR. B.

I don't know.... But I'd like to explore the possibilities.

MR. GREY

Remember, your time – and our existence as a program -- is defined by each child's IEP. It's not called an Individualized Education Plan for nothing. The team has decided how you need to spend your time with each child. This close to my retirement I am not going to jeopardize the reputation my school has built for fulfilling its promises. If you can find a way to “explore” without violating those commitments, more power to you. (Pause: catching himself sounding uncharacteristically business-like) Why are you so set on this anyway?

MR. B.

Because she sang to me.

MR. GREY

When I bought my first home, it was tiny. I planted my first raspberry bush and prided myself on being able to pick every single raspberry that it produced. I now own a much bigger house. The raspberry bushes have taken over one side of the house. Whenever I try to pick them, some are already eaten by bugs or birds; some are still hard and white and I may not be there to find them when they are ready to be eaten; some are over ripe; and some are ready to be picked. We can only pick those who are ready when we are.

MR.B.

So you're a worldly poet -- and that's your song.

MR. GREY

Well, I suppose, in a way. It is the basis of my Vision Statment for this school: “Catch them while they're ripe.”

MR. B.

I need to find mine.

MR. GREY

We each march to our own drummer.

MR. B.

I prefer to think that we each sing our own song.

MR. GREY

Beware: marching implies progress together, singing alone can be stagnant -- and alienating.

MR. B. *Irritated*

In Antarctica, penguins rekindle their mates by recognizing each one's unique sound. Put those sounds together and you have a choir.

MR. GREY

Or cacaphony chaos. I don't want that in my school.

MR. B.

Chaos can be the precursor to creative change....or

MR. GREY

.... or not. (*Sigh*) Our budget is already threatened. I'm sorry I...we...can't take that chance.

Nurse enters while knocking at the door. She seems flurried and out of breath.

NURSE

Sorry to interrupt, but I thought you should know that I had to call the paramedics

NURSE (cont'd)

because of Bill's asthma.... He seems okay, but they need to watch him for a while.

(*Noticing Mr. B.*) Oh, I didn't see you. I was looking for you next.

As she talks, she is edging towards the door, as if she's already spent too much time away from her office.

Rob is more paranoid than usual --seems there was a robbery or something in his neighborhood --Annie's acting odd, too -- But as long as they're okay physically, I have little time to stop and ask what else is going on. (*Almost out of sight.*) I'm sure there was

something else I needed to tell somebody. Oh well, who knows, toodleloo.

MR. GREY

Think she has any spare time to help you with your idea? I think she looks like all our staff right now: overworked and running in all directions.

Well, I need to work on that budget we just talked about, and it sounds as if your students are calling you, if I heard the Nurse right.

MR. B.

I'm sure they are. Thanks for ... timebye.

Mr. B. races to catch up with Nurse.

Can I wa... jog with you? What did you mean about Annie?

NURSE

She seems ... I dunno more agita... no .. more excited..... gestures rather than gyrations.... See her ... check on Rob, too.... Matt needs a jumpstart, as alwaysa daydreamer. Have no time

As she nears her office , she seems to accumulate children, like the Pied Piper, and she becomes more distracted from her monologue to Mr. B.

Didya like their play?

MR. B.

Well, I thought they need a more

NURSE

I liked it, too should do more often, something don't know if their bodies could handle more. (I know the staffs' bodies couldn't.) As Granny used to say, "So long as we got our health, honey" Well, here I go. Nice talking to....

(Music)

NURSE'S SONG

I arrive at my room, not a moment too soon,
 (Like the scene from A Night at the Opera)
 My "groupies" all fill every inch, out they spill,
 As if to say, "Watch – I can top ya":

My headache is back

Mr. B. begins to alternate lines with her, as she shifts hats to represent OT, PT, PE, Speech, and teacher, as well as Nurse.

I've an asthma attack
 My doctor's a quack
 My first meal I lack
 I sat on a tack
 My wheelchair's off track
 I can't reach my rack
 My pill's in my sack

Oh, yakety yak
 They give me such flack
 Alas and alack
 Barely up and already they drop ya.

But I deal with it calmly, for we are their mommy
 From nine until way past three thirty
 I hug them and squeeze them and generally please them
 With band-aids and cleaning what's dirty.

What's in it for me is quite plain to see
 Though what I say is often not heeded.
 My acts, big or small, are received by them all
 With responses that show that I'm needed.

One problem there is when I'm done with this biz,
 And I get home both worn and elated.
 They've needs, too, you know, and I surely can't show
 That my need to be needed is sated.

Its quite safe to say, if I feel this way
 Our teachers all feel the same stress.
 Each kid has a plan, to learn as he can;
 The state will assess our success.

Exit, tailed by children.

MR. B. *(To himself.)*

Well, she seems to have her song, too. But, since most of their bodies defy “cure,” it sure sounds like a sad song to me.

Shakes himself back into the current reality.

I guess Matt’s not the only one who gets lost in his head.

Hums Nurse’s song as he enters special ed classroom.

ACT I SCENE 6

TEACHER

Where are you supposed to be, now, Matt?

MATT

What time is it?

TEACHER

There’s the clock.

MATT *(whining)*

I can’t turn my neck.... Is it lunchtime yet?

TEACHER *(gently scolding)*

Maaaaaatt! There’s still almost an hour and a half until lunch. Come on ... Enough stalling. Let’s get you to Physical Therapy. That’ll help your neck better than using it to pull your head into your shell.

MATT *(seeing Mr. B is there.)*

Hi! I hope we have group, today. I just had this cool dream I want the guys to hear ...

Catching himself beginning to sound excited, he slumps in his chair a little more and mumbles.

If they don't wipe me out first. *(To Rob)* Don't let them get to you, Rob. Keep low. Only move at night.

Matt is still mumbling as he wheels himself out.

TEACHER *(noticing Mr. B.)*

Oh, yes. Rob, you need to go with Mr. B., now.

MR. B.

What do you think, Rob? Can we talk now?

ROB

Looking after Matt with growing alarm.

Wh...wh...what?...

Answering Teacher distractedly.

Oh, yes...What did he mean about "them" getting me?

TEACHER

He was just teasing.

ROB

Well, what if they don't get me and there's a fire drill? How do we know it's not a real fire?

Turning to Mr. B. Speaking rapidly, his pitch rising as he works himself up.

ROB *(cont'd)*

Someone tried to break into my house. At least I think they did? I heard a noise at the door. Not like the door I invented -- lot safer. But there are scary things there too. And things can always go wrong, you know. And if they do, we only have each other - PH kids. Need a plan. Can't plan for everything. Sure can try.

Stops abruptly as if he's run out of steam.

Do you have our game?

Doesn't wait for an answer.

We' may need more paper and tape. *(To Teacher.)* We made it up all by ourselves.

MR. B.

Turning to Teacher, both grinning.

I guess the answer is, "Okay, I'd like to talk now, Mr. B." *To Rob.* Yes, I have our game. Are you ready to go?

ROB

Yes.... The scary things are...

MR. B.

Wait until we get to the privacy of our room.

ROB (*conspiratorially*)

Shhh! Whatever we say in here stays in here.

MR. B.

That's right. Glad you remember.

ACT I SCENE 7

Rob and his wheelchair are crammed into Mr. B.'s office and almost totally blockade Mr. B. into the room. Aside from the size of Rob's chair, the space is occupied by a large bag attached to the back of his chair, overstuffed with things, parts of which are visibly

beginning to spill out from the top of the bag. Rob spends a lot of time maneuvering his electric wheelchair, trying to get himself situated just right. He also periodically struggles to get things out of his bag or to stuff things back in that are hanging out.

MR. B. *(responding to all of Rob's movements)*

How can I help you get comfortable, Rob?

ROB *(half to himself)*

If the chair is close enough to the table, then I can reach the pens and paper with...Wait, I need my stick.

He tries to move his torso in the chair so he can reach his bag.

I'll get it...almost got it

Without Rob noticing, Mr. B. slides it up enough so Rob can reach it.

ROB

...got it. Good *(pants a little melodramatically.)!* Whew!

MR. B. *(Pointing to the stick)*

Is this the same invention that you told me about?

ROB

Not quite. Slight change. Improve each time. Get the chinks out, you know. Invent the light bulb.

MR. B.

What?

ROB

The light bulb. Edison tried 10,000 things. People asked him how it felt to fail 10,000 times. He said he never failed; he succeeded in finding 10,000 things that didn't work - and then, Vi-o-la, the light bulb.

MR. B.

How do you know all this?

ROB

I read. I make things. Edison's my hero. We can solve any problem, together.

Music, joyfully frantic.

ROB (*singing*)

When your head and your hand still obey your command,
While the rest of you's open to question.
The pull of despair is certainly there
Unless you accept my suggestion.

Submit to your fate, sink of your own weight
And slowly fade away.
Or seize every day in the Edison way
As my hero used to say:

Inspiration perspiration

MR.B.

That's the recipe.

ROB

Inspiration (*Points to head*)
Perspiration (*Lifts hands*)

MR. B.

Beat adversity.

ROB

So Thomas A. said, when he jumped out of bed
After barely three hours of sleeping.

MR.B. (*Pretends to be Edison.*)

"I'm wasting time here, each second is dear,
I've appointments that I must be keeping.

There's never a dearth throughout this whole earth
Of Nature's secrets worthy of delving.

There's never a mind, no matter what kind
Whose ideas are worthy of shelving.

Sight and sound may elope, but I'll find the rope
To bind them to do my own bidding.
Do ten thousand acts - Get ten thousand new facts.
"We fail?!" - you've got to be kidding!

I'll lasso the sound and spin it around
Whirling words into eternity.
I'll lengthen the day, lights under my sway,
And sweep the world into modernity.

Though my hearing grows worse, I don't feel it's a curse:
I can hear my thoughts better without it.
Whatever death is, I'll still be the Wiz,
If spirit survives, never doubt it."

ROB

From his song it is clear that, if I am to leave here,
Each morning despite my condition,
On luck I can't wait, I'll have to create
My own Rube Goldberg rendition:

On my East window hung, lenses focus the sun
(Cartoons put this into my head)
The heat burns the cords, which are holding the boards
Attached to the foot of my bed.

Those boards will descend, my legs thus will bend,
My body becoming erect.
Into my pants, legs and feet will advance,
Shoes and socks, I could add, I suspect.

My feet will then press on a pedal, I guess:
The sink, that I face, starts to fill.
The water buoys up brush, paste, and a cup

Daily living skills now I fulfill:

Crescendo and accelerando. Rob makes use of various contraptions, made out of things found in most homes, to perform the acts he describes.

MR. B. & ROB (*Alternating lines.*)

Wash your hands
 Clean your face
 Brush your teeth
 Set your place
 Eat your meal
 Clear away
 Wipe up mess
 Prepare your day
 Get your books
 Pencils, pens
 Check schoolwork
 No loose ends.
 Get your coat
 Comb your hair
 Take your meds.
 Get your chair.
 Struggle in
 Stuff overflow (*in backpack on chair*)
 Bus is here
 Off you go.

MR. B.

How about sharing your ideas with ... ?

ROB

Not yet. Too many unanswered questions. (*A little agitated*) Look at the game.

MR. B.

Somewhat by rote, as if he often needs to say this.

We both know that your game just gets you worked up. This searching for the UNKNOWN, by yourself, often freaks you out.

ROB

Begins to hyperventilate.

MR. B.

Watch your breathing ... In ... Out ... In ... Out ... Good. Even just talking about it ... All of us have fears. Maybe if we all put our heads together, we can help each other with our fears.

ROB

At least with the game I can do something. Some hope. *(Points back at the game)* There's more than one door.

MR. B.

You can't choose not to play the game, but you can choose how you play it.

ROB

Yup!

Pause.

MR. B.

What I was saying before was: how would you like to share your concerns and your ideas with more people than just me?

ROB *(warily)*

Whadya mean?

MR. B.

Well, a few of the kids were talking about writing a play that was really about them ... not about turkeys.

ROB

Well ... I dunno. People ... burglars could use my ideas. And then, who knows what ...

Teacher enters to take Rob to Occupational Therapy. The focus of Rob's verbal flow gradually shifts from Mr. B. to the Teacher.

ROB

... they say when I get older and learn older kid Math ... even Advanced Algebra ... I'll know how to find the unknown: x equals something. (*To the Teacher.*) Is that true?

TEACHER

Patting Rob's shoulder and talking to Mr. B.

Rob's good at Math -- aren't you, Rob? He likes when things add up, but we are having problems with remainders in division, aren't we?

ROB (*Appealing to Mr. B.*)

Nothing should be left over. I'm working on that...

TEACHER

Rob likes tidy solutions.

MR. B.

It's hard accepting loose ends, things that don't fit together neatly.

Becomes thoughtful for a brief instant.

Well, I'll see you later, Rob.

INTERCOM

Mr. B., to the office, please. Mr. B. to the office.

He exits in opposite direction from teacher and Rob.

ACT ONE SCENE 8

Mr. B. enters front office where Bill is pacing, in his lurching gait, in front of the secretary's area.

BILL (*To the secretary*)

I don't need anybody's help! I was "helped" enough at the emergency room! The cool air ... any air outside of this stifling school ... was all that I needed. But... nooooo. They gotta stab you, and poke you, and gag you ... and then ask you if you feel better. The hysterical woman, who came in off the street, was even more hysterical when they got through with her.

Jimmy enters office area, sees Bill, and begins to withdraw, when Mr. B. notices him.

MR. B.

Hi, Jimmy. Did you need someone?

Bill pantomimes what Jimmy says, as if he's already heard it.

JIMMY

Lookin' for the nurse. I don't feel too good. My head....

BILL

Finishing his sentence, in an exaggerated whine.
.... aches. (*resumes his own voice*) At least this time, you can't blame it on me. I think it's just life that....

JIMMY

Trying to ignore Bill. Addressing himself to Mr. B.
....sometimes, my shunt
He runs his pointer finger down his temple.
gets clogged, and I have to go to the hospi....

BILL

...that was their mistake! They really meant to take you. I see a medical malpractice case looming.

MR. B.

I know you worry. I'll see if the nurse is available. But you know she will probably say that you just need to learn to rela....

BILL

... to stand up for yourself. Stop moping, and whining... and taking their crap

Bill sings his three stanzas, then Jimmy his three, then they each repeat their last stanzas simultaneously.

BILL

You don't just sit
And sigh and moan
And wait for luck to change.
No one can hear nor do they care
Your pain just makes you strange.

I understand your view of life
My rage I must control
But then what happens to the pain
In my imprisoned soul.

You've got to fight for what you need
They just don't understand
The meek inherit there, not here
None here will lend a hand.

JIMMY

You don't just scream,
Intimidate-
Coerce us into change.
Your bellowing just turns us off
Your anger does estrange.

I understand the urge to rage
I often feel the same
Especially when I remind myself
There is no one to blame.

You've got to see that more than most
We need a helping hand
Know your limits, learn some tact
You cannot just demand.

MR. B.

There's got to be a middle ground
Which you can learn to share.
Since both extremes push folks away:
The shout or silence of despair.

MR. GREY

Angrily poking his head out of his office.

What is going on out....!?! Oh, you two are at it, again. I've half a mind to just let you fight it out! (*Notices Mr. B.*) Perhaps, you can have them "sing their songs" somewhere else. I'm with a parent right now. (*Aside to Mr. B.*)who, incidentally, does not feel

that her daughter belongs in a program that includes the likes of those two, or a few others we both know. *(Aside, sighing)* So much for trying to get them to work together.

MR. B.

I'll see that they get to where they belong. Sorry for the disruption. Okay guys, let's go.

JIMMY *(mumbles)*

Sor....

BILL

Growling to no one in particular.

Wimp!

MR. B.

With a quickly suppressed scowl at Bill.

I hear you guys. And, if you can both promise to lay off of each other for five minutes, I think I've got a plan that might help you get heard by more than just me.

Looking Bill in the eye.

Truce?

BILL

I can cool it, if he....

MR. B.

No "if," I'm asking both of you, but I asked you first: Truce?

BILL

Truce, for n....

MR. B.

Good!

Looking Jimmy in the eye.

Truce?

JIMMY

I don't need a fight... or a plan fo....

MR.B.

I thought your play didn't show the real you; what you just said in the office did. I want other people, lots of other people, to hear you, in your own play.

BILL

You mean we can get to fight on stage!

MR. B.

Not exac... well, who knows, but at least you get to show your stuff, not Thanksgiving stuffing.

BILL

Well, I sure got a lot to say...

MR. B. (*seriously*) JIMMY (*sarcastically*)

Yes, we know.

MR. B.

How about writing down some of your ideas?

JIMMY

I'm not interested in helping him make foo....

MR B.

Truce. Remember? Just think about what you would tell people, if they really listened. Okay?

Jimmy nods ambiguously.

MR. B.

Noticing the hall clock.

Whoops! We all have some place to be in a few minutes. Oh, hey! I forgot all about your headache.

JIMMY

So did I.

ACT I SCENE 9

Jimmy lags behind to walk with Mr. B., as Bill hurries awkwardly toward the classroom group.

JIMMY

.... know what I would like to do in a play about us handicap *(abruptly)* I just learned about a tsunami, and

MR. B.

A what?

JIMMY

A tidal wave Remember how you've talked in group about how it sometimes can feel like you're swimming upstream or treading water?

MR. B.

You listen to me?

JIMMY

Realizing he's let slip a connection with another person.
Only when I see it's about me. My life's made up of streams I can't control – the shunt drains my head; the catheter... the other place – and I just go with the flow – or to the hospital, if it doesn't flow.

MR. B.

And how do – what do you call them? – tsunamis fit in?

JIMMY

Well for a long time I've seen Mom as just like me – victims of a flood we couldn't control. But last time she didn't wimp out...

MR. B.

She tried to steer her own course?

JIMMY

Yeah! But I couldn't figure out why.... Tsunamis explain it, I think.

MR. B.

And what are they? How do they work?

JIMMY

The bottom of the ocean shifts creating a huge, unstoppable wave, sweeping over everything in its powerful path – for 100s of miles.

MR. B.

And that happened to mom?

JIMMY

Once.

MR. B.

And to you?

JIMMY

Not yet. But just because you can't see the ocean floor doesn't mean it's not happening. I think I felt rumblings in that fight with Bill.

MR. B.

Your own tsunami, huh?

JIMMY

I don't want to go beserk ... I want to ... to...

MR. B.

... stand up for yourself ... assert the real you ...

JIMMY

Yeah! Just like mom did!

With uncharacteristic energy.

Just listen!

Music.

Mr. B. and Jimmy slowly circle center-stage. As students pass them, they sing various lines along with Jimmy, some identifying with his situation, some contrasting with his experiences. His face and gestures indicate that he has feelings about each particular interpolation.

JIMMY'S SONG: My Mom – the Wimp

Like a reed in the wind
 Mom was easily swayed
 Whatever your game
 Was the game that she played.

JIMMY & LISA
 The storm of my birth
 Almost blew her away.
 The kindness of strangers
 Became her mainstay.

JIMMY
 Rough seas, from birth forward
 Saw strangers – and plenty

JIMMY & MATT
 The medical experts

JIMMY
 Steered mom – barely twenty.

They rushed her along
 With me in her tow.
 Each place their flood took us
 She'd passively go.

BILL (*off-stage*)
 Mom rarely would go.

My life was a symptom
 Of her life's disease.
 Spineless, we drifted
 We just aimed to please.

JIMMY
 That my mom was a wimp
 Any stranger could see.
 And her invisible victim
 Was, of course, me.

ROB
 That my parents were heroes
 Any stranger could see
 They built anything
 That could empower me.

JIMMY
 Swept up in the current
 Any block to the flow
(He moves his finger down his temple, where his shunt is)

BILL	ROB	MATT	LISA	ANNIE
To Breathing	To Growing	To Standing	To Walking	To Talking

Would set mom's alarm off:
 To the ER we'd go

MR. B. *(as intern)*
 Arrogant ignorance
 The intern commandeers:
 "I will steer through these waters
 Assuage all your fears.
 Between Scylla and Charybdis

JIMMY
 Huh?!
Jimmy shows that he does not understand this; the intern shows that he does not care to explain.

MR. B.
 Proudly blindfold to the mast
 No investment in your future

No awareness of your past.”

The pilot navigated:
“Penicillin will cure all.”

JIMMY

My mom, the wimp, whimpered
“That won’t do at all.

ALL THE CHILDREN

If you read, dear sir, the record
On my child, you’ll plainly see
What’s a miracle for others
In him the allergy...”

MR. B.

“Never fear, my little lady
I have it all in hand.
Just relax, I’m possessed of
Things you’ll never understand.”

JIMMY

She shrank (Doh! That’s nothing new!)
As I trembled in his wake:
My voice a distant murmur,
My head one awesome ache.

Tone grows suspenseful and ominous.

Now, I just heard a story
About a tsunami;
Calm waters turned to Furies
Caused by quakes beneath the sea.

While her surface tempts the sea folk,
Who count on fishing in her deeps
Underneath lurks, unsuspected,

Rageful strength that only sleeps.

Nature's justice claims its due,
 After years of pillagers,
 Raises up her awful trident,
 Drowns the seaside villagers.

When mom arose, I somehow knew
 The tide began to turn;
 Her shadow looming on the wall
 Engulfed the doomed intern:

"Lay a hand upon my son
 Your doctoring days are o'er.
 I want a doctor who can read;
You're not needed anymore.

"The head physician I demand:
 Give us what we deserve.
 Go find him and make it clear
 It's our needs he's here to serve.

Be gone, don't dally." Her voice and gestures
 Swept him out the door.
 My heart outburst my throbbing head:
 "My mom's a wimp no more!"

Jimmy's Song ends

MR. B.

You sound pretty proud of her.

JIMMY

For now... but I've already said too much. Talking gives me a
 headache....And it also comes back to haunt me

Imitates teacher's voice.

" Jimmy dear, Mr. B. tells me you're going to explode."

Momentarily back into his energetic mode.

So can I decide what I do in the play?

MR. B.

I like your new energy. But the schedule dictates that we have group right now. Let's set up a time to talk about your plan. Deal?

JIMMY

It's a deal ... I just hope the tsunami doesn't hit before then.

ACT I SCENE 10

Mr. B. and Jimmy enter the classroom. All the PH kids organize their desk chairs or their wheelchairs into a large, irregular circle. Their comments overlap.

BILL

Planting himself to Mr. B.'s right.
I'm Mr. B.'s right-hand man.

JIMMY

Mumbling as he moves to sit on Mr. B.'s left.
... keep my distance ... hope you're a good barricade ... Mr. B. ... I ...

LISA

Pushing Annie past Jimmy to sit on Mr. B.'s left.
Annie and I are your partners, now.
Speaking to Annie, as if to a doll.
Aren't we, dear?

MATT

Almost to himself.
... sit ... wherever ... by Bill is ... okay ... if that's where ...

ROB

Pushing himself between Bill and Matt.
I gotta be near the door, okay?!

MATT

Glancing at Bill with some relief.
Fine ... that's fine ... whatever is ...

BILL

Loudly and a little irritably.
Everybody be quiet! Rules!

MR. B.

A little apprehensively.
Thanks, Bill. Okay, guys, let's start by reviewing our ru...

BILL

Overlapping with Mr. B.
First we do the rules ... We want to beat our record – 20 seconds.
On your mark, get...

MR. B.

Becoming more firm.
Whoa! I'm the one with the watch. Let me make sure I'm ready...
Okay...now. Bill.

BILL

Ready, set, go.

LISA

C...c...c...onfident...

BILL

...tiality. Everything that's said here stays here.
Points to Matt.
You!

MR. B.

At the same time as Bill, with a gesture towards Bill's outstretched arm.
Okay, Matt.

MATT

One person talks at a time.

BILL

Good. Hurry! Rob.

ROB

I know a rule. It's...well...you...

MR. B.

Simultaneously with Bill. Torn between calming Rob and reining in Bill.
Relax, Rob.

BILL

Simultaneously with Mr. B.
Forget you. Annie.

ROB

...the rule...is....

ANNIE

Raise ... hand.

MR. B.

One more. Thirteen seconds.

JIMMY (*To himself.*)

It figures no one would remember this one.

BILL

C'mon wiseguy! Hurry! Say it!

ROB

It's something to do with...

JIMMY

Quietly between clenched teeth.
No put downs.

To Bill.

Okay?!

BILL (*Eagerly*)

How long, Mr. B.?

MR. B.

18 seconds.

BILL

Okay. We did it.

Turning to Rob.

No thanks to you.

ROB

Don't rush me. I know the rules. One has to do with...

BILL

We're done! Now we go around the circle to see who needs to talk. Any problems?

MR. B.

He persistently tries to curb Bill's obviously growing impatience by occasionally putting his hand on Bill's arm, and other non-verbal signs.

I would like you....us.... to put on a play that shows who you really are. Annie and Lisa came up with the idea. I think you all have something to offer, and I would like you to say what you think about the idea, as we go around the group.

BILL

I'm next. The teacher never listens to me. She's always blaming me for everything. I try to help kids! But she keeps on whining, "Do your work...where's your homework?" Who could get homework done with all the hassles at home, anyway? I also...

MR. B.

Sorry, Bill. We may have time to get back to that. Now we all need to be brief, you know. You're saying the teacher doesn't understand you, right?

BILL

Yeah. But there's more...

MR. B.

Putting a hand on the arm Bill was beginning to gesture with.

What about my idea...

BILL

I'm all for showing everybody how they make us feel.

MR. B.

Clearly relieved at averting Bill's tendency to storm.

Thanks, Bill. Since I've already said what I wanted to say, I'm done with my turn. Lisa?

LISA

My parents are nice, but they don't seem to be sure how to treat me. Kids at school don't know how to, either.

BILL

She means normal kids who...

LISA

We're "normal"! Everyone has problems; ours just happen to be more obvious. Right, Mr. B.?

MR. B.

Well said, Lisa. Your saying that people don't know how much – or how little – to expect from you. Right?

LISA

Right, Mr. B. Maybe our play will help them see.

As Mr. B. is speaking, he is backing up his chair a little toward Jimmy because he is sensing Jimmy's growing agitation. The audience has even a better view of how Jimmy seems to be struggling with conflicting

impulses: wanting to express anger towards Bill vs. wanting to isolate himself completely from the group.

JIMMY

Barely audible.

Some of us aren't normal.

Quickly glancing at Bill, who hasn't heard him.

MR. B.

Thanks, Lisa. Annie?

ANNIE

Parents ... help ... me. Excited ... for ... our ... play.

MR. B.

Thank you, Annie. Matt?

MATT (*Softly animated*)

I dreamed I was flying in my wheelchair, high over the ocean, and could see everything and...

BILL

What does that have to do with anything? This is the real world, not dreamland.

MR. B.

Sensing that the storm still threatens.

We're interrupting Matt now.

MATT

I forgot the rest.

MR. B.

Well, if this is the same dream you told me, I think it's a good example of what I'd like our play to be about. Remember, you told me, you were ... a ... daydreaming in physical therapy as the PT was urging you on to do

the exercises, that you should be doing at home, too, by the way. She was saying....

ALL THE OTHER CHILDREN

They chime in with the familiar refrain, which repeats as rhythmic background throughout the song.

Don't stop now!
To the top now!
Don't fade now!
Got it made now!

Music.

MATT'S SONG: FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Last night I dreamed my chair and I
Fell and floated out to sea
My limbs too weak, I saved myself
By means of fantasy.

Though wracked with fear, what I did need
Was very plain to me.
My mind saw clear a wheelchair boat.
Behold! it came to be.

Out of the fire, into the pan,
One hurdle overcome,
I screamed for help – no one in sight –
'Till I was almost dumb.

Where others fail – the mind leaps in
To counteract despair.
I stared on high and sprouted wings
And rose into the air.

Below my folks, in their own boat,

Were at their constant war.
As waves pushed one oar out of reach
Who would win the other oar?

Matt, after building up energy during the song, sinks into melodramatic exhaustion. Resuming his more mechanical, "absent" voice.

But...that's okay. Dreams are...dreams. And we are here...and Rob is next...and I'm done.

MR. B.

Dreams are real too. You make it up, but since you're the one who made it, it must be a part of you. Maybe a part that nobody knows. So, what about our play?

MATT

Well, I need to ask my parents and, whichever one feels it's a good idea, the other will say, "Leave him alone .. he's too tired... I'm too tired the school's always on our case ... just get them off my back...." And I try to stay invisible until one of them disappears and the other "whines" to a halt.

MR. B.

Well, let's pretend that your opinion counts. What do you think?

Annie, Lisa, and Rob express their excitement about his dream song.

MATT

I thought you'd ... they'd think my dream was just silly. I imagine it could be fun to dream out loud.... but it's Rob's turn

MR. B.

Okay, ... Rob?

ROB

What?

MR. B.

Half tolerant and half perplexed and aggravated.
Do you have any concern to share with us?

ROB

Quickly looking toward the door and whispering.
Burglars.

MR. B.

Reaching out to try to signal Bill to keep in check his noticeably growing irritation.
What about “burglars”, Rob?

JIMMY

Mumbling, glaring at Bill, and overlapping with Mr. B.
Jerk.

ROB

I was in my bed and by the door a man, you see. I couldn't see the man but I knew someone, something...it was there...couldn't do any... couldn't get away...nowhere....who could help? I don't...

BILL

Ignoring Mr. B's hand on his arm, angrily.
You're not making any sense.

JIMMY

And you do?!

BILL

Turning quickly but awkwardly toward Jimmy.
Wise guy! Finally back from the dead, huh?

ROB

Whimpering, but emphatic.
It really happened!

BILL

What did?

ROB

Struggling to contain his agitation, while Matt and Lisa begin to fidget, anxiously.

Stranger...helpless...can't move...

MR. B.

His effort at calmness has a forced edge to it.

Rob did have a scare at home and he needs to share his feelings with us although he is safe now – at home and here

Looking at Bill, and mumbling to himself.

I hope.

You know you're safe now, right Rob?

ROB

Mom and dad gave me a dog to protect me ... at home ...

MR. B.

And friends here.

Pause.

And you're going to share your inventions with them for our play, right?

ROB

Yeah!

Turning to group with growing animation.

You know I have a gazillion contraptions for every occa...

MR. B.

Looking at his watch, aware that he has to cut Rob short.

Thank you, Rob, but we still have one more group member to hear from.

Jimmy hasn't had a turn yet. Jimmy?

JIMMY

I have a headache.

BILL

Exaggeratedly mouths Jimmy's words as Jimmy says them.

You always have a headache. If you have nothing else to say, can we please start group?!

JIMMY

Group is almost over! Where have you been?!

BILL

I've been waiting for you to announce your daily headache so we can then get on to the important stuff.

JIMMY

Which seems to be whatever you think it is...

MR. B.

You guys seem especially angry with each other today. Do you know what's eating both of you?

BILL

His wise-ass whining.

JIMMY

Almost simultaneous with Bill.

He is my headache.

MR. B.

Cautiously attempting to encourage discussion of Jimmy's "tsunami" without unleashing it

But why so intense today? These complaints have always been simmering, but today they are boiling over. Why now?

JIMMY

I'm just sick...

BILL

You're always sick.

JIMMY

...and tired of his blaming everyone else for his problems.

Imitates Bill's angry self-righteousness.

The teacher's unfair...the other kids started...my mom's no good.

Turning to Bill.

Nothing's ever your fault. Nothing's ever something you could do different...

MR. B.

Maybe we're not talking about fault here. Maybe we – all of us here – are really saying that we can't always...

BILL

Ever!! Can't ever!! And all he (*pointing to Jimmy*) does is whine, whimper, fade away. You think I blame?!! You blame – your head, your stomach – and me for telling it like it is. That walker isn't your only crutch...

Getting hoarse and out of breath.

Other members start getting agitated:

- MATT starts humming bits of his song as if self-soothing
- LISA tries to assume the mediator's role as she probably does at home or with friends: "Calm down" "Fight fair" "Wait until later" "This is our group, not just yours."
- ROB begins to get frantic and edges toward the door jerkily because he can't maintain a hold on his electric switch.
- ANNIE is beginning to cry while her arms become increasingly out of control.

JIMMY

Type-casting for the new play: you could be the jerk and bully.

BILL

Gasping and grabbing his cane.

My crutch is my weapon; is yours a shield?

He begins to swing his cane around tauntingly.

I don't know how you could ever got a speaking part in our play.

MR. B.

So the play has...

BILL

It's not the play, stupid!! It's life!

MR. B.

Beginning to lose self-control.

No put-downs, Bill. You have a right to be angry with your...

JIMMY

He has no right to anything. He steps all over everyone else's rights...

MR. B.

... but you have to put down the cane

BILL

If I don't stand up for me, who will?

JIMMY

I sure won't.

BILL

I know, you wimp!

MR. B.

You guys will have to back off and calm down some before we can settle any...

BILL

Still playing the social worker, huh? You don't get it! This isn't "social"; this is war.

Swinging cane in the air, Bill almost loses his balance; he half-falls, half lunges into Mr. B.

MR. B.

Looking around at the others.

Group's over...

With the forcefulness of a person who recognizes his powerlessness.

Sit down, Bill! You need a talking to.

The group freezes in astonishment on hearing Mr. B's unfamiliar, frightening tone of voice.

ROB

In agitated frenzy.

One person talks at a time...No put downs...everything that's said in here, stays in here.

Staff come rushing in, in response to the commotion. Bill starts an asthmatic coughing jag; Jimmy holds his head and moans. While the nurse is torn between the two of them, Mr. Grey glowers at the social worker.

MR. GREY

I'm sorry, but I guess that the world isn't ready for their "songs."
I think we need to talk.

Curtain.

ACT II SCENE 1

Mr. B. sits alone outside Mr. Grey's office. Occasionally, Mr. Grey's stern, lecturing voice, interrupted by Bill's defiant voice, is heard, indistinctly, through the door to Mr. Grey's office.

Music

MR. B. (*to himself*)

What good is bright
If you only shed light
On the anger and pain
That they feel.

What good is care
When there's little trust there
'Cause they know that their
Anguish is real.

What good is kind
If they're better off blind
To the fate underlined
By your words.

What good are fine words
When all that is heard
Are the ominous thoughts
Left unsaid.

Empathy's fine
But it can't undermine
The fact that
We're really alone.

What good is warm

When to shield them from harm
 Would require more heat
 Than the sun.

Mr. B. and the music "sigh," as he gathers himself together.

I heard that Michelangelo
 Sensed the statue in the stone.
 His job – to trim the excess
 So that inner beauty shone.

I ... we ... do not create like God,
 Out of formless clay.
 We can only clear a path,
 Then get out of the way.

What good is bright? – perhaps, it shows
 Other ways to grow.
 And care admits the rock-strewn road
 While insisting that you go.

My song is all our stories,
 From helplessness to hope.
 I need not be a hero
 Just give them confidence to cope.

Bill and Jimmy exit Mr. Grey's office. Mr. Grey then summons in Mr. B.

MR. GREY

Why don't you boys have a seat right here until I think that you're ready to go back to class? You both know what I expect from each of you.

Mr. Grey and Mr. B. enter the principal's office. Jimmy sits down, apprehensively, several seats away from Bill, but Bill purposely moves close to him.

BILL

We sure showed him.

JIMMY

Huh!

BILL

Yeah! And you did good, kid ... The silent treatment really gets to them.

JIMMY

I don't like to talk

BILL

Well that suits him fine because he sure doesn't like to listen. I told him what was wrong with this school, but did he care:

Imitates Mr. Grey's voice.

"You boys need to behave like Glob (oh, pardonnez moi) Globe High School students or I'll have to send you somewhere more appropriate to your behavior."

Resumes his own voice.

Let's see behave like the other students. Sooooo, I should talk behind their backs while I ignore them in the hall and during lunch

JIMMY

.... or let them be that is, play second base. Or we could hover over them like cute puppies: "Aren't you adorable and admirable"

BILL

.... "Isn't that the latest fashion in casts and crutches? Are you just another special needs wannabe?"

Elbowing Jimmy and then approaching Mr. Grey's door.

I'll tell him we have seen the light, and we are ready to reenter society.

Knocks at Mr. Grey's door and then sticks his head in, speaking as if by rote.

We are sorry for our inappropriate behavior; we are returning to class a better person.

Exits with a wink to Jimmy, who follows nervously behind him.

ACT II SCENE 2

Inside Mr. Grey's office.

MR. GREY

Have a seat, Mr. B.

Mr. Grey remains standing, as Mr. B. sits down.

I need to have more effective discipline in my building.

MR. B.

I underst....

MR. GREY

You realize that you put me in a bind: I value your efforts to help the children express themselves, but the Board will not value outbursts, like the current incident, interfering with our primary goal, which is, of course, education.

MR. B.

I hope that self-expression will lead to self-awareness which will lead to self-motivation: learning because you want to.

MR. GREY

Right now, when you're around, they appear to be motivated to express fear or to fight. I can't have them ... you ... disrupting the other students, who are interested in learning.

MR. B.

Outwardly acknowledging your fear and anger can lead to positive change, especially with the help of a supportive group.

MR. GREY

Well, I am "outwardly acknowledging my fear and anger," and I expect it to lead to positive change in your behavior.

MR. B.

Did you notice that Bill and Jimmy, the former combatants, are becoming much friendlier since their fight? I think they're beginning to realize that they are two sides of the same coin.

MR. GREY

Or that right now they have a common enemy ... me. I don't need two Bills in my building.

MR. B.

Two of the depressed Jimmys are not likely to learn much; maybe a mixture of Bill and Jimmy can.

MR. GREY

Maybe. But can this building tolerate disruptions while we keep our fingers crossed

awaiting the results of your efforts. As it is, you know, I already have to battle regularly with the Board to fully-fund your position.

The buzz of the intercom is heard overhead. Then noises of children hurriedly leaving a classroom. The teacher's voice is heard, but her first few words are not clear.

TEACHER (*over intercom*)

... William is having one of his fits. He's blockaded himself under the table and swings a crutch at anyone who comes near him.

MR. GREY

(*To Mr. B.*)

So much for your experiment. This is your chance to prove that you can be a Globe School disciplinarian.

(*Mr. B. exits. Mr. Grey addresses the intercom.*)

Help is on the way.

ACT II SCENE 3

Mr. B. enters the classroom. No one is in the room except Bill. He is under the large table in the middle of the room and has pulled several chairs to form a kind of wall on three sides of the table. He periodically swings a crutch to "protect" the fourth, open side from "invasion."

BILL

In the middle of a diatribe to the air.
 ...don't understand! Nothing! No one! Who's the cripple anyway? *They* don't see what's right in front of them. *We* can.

MR. B.

Who's "we"?

BILL

In a sweeping gesture with the crutch, he indicates all the kids' chairs.
 All of us...
Bill assumes a nasal, squeaky voice.
 Wi...lli...am?! Where's your homework?... No excuses. Dying is no excuse ... Certainly not being an orphan – you've *never* had a dad...

MR. B.

You have had a hard life.

BILL

You sure are insightful, aren't you? What is your point? To help us fit into the system? The system doesn't want us, don't you get it? The system has a hard enough time tolerating buckteeth, glasses or zits. And besides, we don't need it – the system – anyway. Most of what we do here is pointless, irrelevant – especially when you gotta worry about walking, peeing, and breathing.

MR. B.

Is there ever a time when you're not worrying about those things?

BILL

Sure. When you adults leave me alone!... You know your world is not

mine: homework to recess, Mr. Rogers to Father Knows Best – what’s it all mean? Listen...Jimmy falls down, I pick him up – the blind *do* lead the blind. Who else will? Annie needs help with her new chair, especially since her excitement about your play-idea has made her even more spastic...who do you think she’d rather have helping her steer – the old lady or me?(*Squeaky voice.*) “If you’d get your work done, young man, you might have time to play with the other children; otherwise, no recess.” (*Resumes his own voice*) Who gives a shit about “normal” kids?

MR. B.

Have you tried meeting any kids other than ...?

BILL

You don’t get it, do you? You’re just like the others! I don’t want to try. “They” don’t want me – don’t, or won’t, understand; and I don’t want them or teachers, or school for that matter. The only advantage of school is that it brings us isolated rejects together. That sure beats sitting at home waiting for the next medical crisis – or the final one.

MR. B.

(*Softly*) What do you do now, what will you do later in life, when you don’t have school?

BILL

With a sigh, softening a little.

And what makes you think that listening to school rules, fitting into the school routine, or *even* talking to you will change the answer to that question?

Bill shakes his head vigorously as if to try to dispel a bad dream. Music rumbles in the background, as Bill struggles to regain his earlier defiant stance.

BILL’S SONG: The Fraternity of Pain

You don’t fool me – your phoney smiles,
I’ve met your kind before.
My life’s is full of incompleteness.
I don’t need anymore.

You adults all behave the same.
 You come – you sigh – you go.
 Nothing changes but your name.
 Real me you never know.

Dad died from booze, was always drunk –
 At least that's what Mom said;
 She sleeps all day in a moody funk,
 She might as well be dead.

"Bright kid," they say, when I "behave."
 Hell! Brightness sheds a light
 To glare upon my sorry state
 Where not a thing is right:

My spastic walk
 Makes people talk;
 Asthmatic breath
 Brought me near death;
 This damn disease,
 Non-stop unease;
 My parents' plight,
 The urge to fight!

Calming

I know I make my days much worse
 When anger conquers will –
 It's hard to shift into reverse
 While feeling pushed downhill.

Science blew it at my birth;
 Math helps me keep the score
 To show my side is losing ground,
 Each day a little more.

The "March of Progress" passed me by —

Just read my history;
 Reading teases me with worlds
 Which I can never see.

Points to the seats of others in the room.

It failed him, too, and the toothless geek,
 But they're too dumb to know it.
 It's love, not pity we all seek,
 But don't know how to show it.

He tripped. I helped him to his feet.
 "William, do your work."
 While helping Annie move her seat,
 I called the "teach" – "a jerk."

Their love means more than her disdain.
 "A's" don't nurture me.
 To share in one another's pain,
 It comforts them and me.

You adults all, you've come, you've gone;
 Our conditions still remain,
 To proclaim a club where we belong:
 The Fraternity of Pain.

For now you care; for now, my thanks;
 It helps when I explain.
 But you can never join the ranks:
 The Fraternity of Pain.

BILL

Betrays a range of conflicting emotions in his voice.

Sorry, Charlie! We're a pretty exclusive club, you know. You at least need to sacrifice an arm or leg to get in. You got any useless parts you'd be willing to give up for the pleasure of our company?

MR. B.

Half to himself.

I'm beginning to think that I might – that is, have some things I should turn in – that don't function as advertised.

Regaining his presence of mind.

But, you know, I think that your fraternity is what I was trying to talk about in group....

BILL

Huh! I never told you about....

MR. B.

... the idea of people pooling their resources to solve a common problem, like...

BILL

.... teachers

MR. B.

... feeling controlled by somebody, something outside of yourself ...

BILL

Like school, doctors, parents, and anger!

MR. B.

And fear. Let's show the others a "fraternity" that works, not isolated kids that point the way back to a world that somebody else created.

BILL

You're not afraid of Mr. Grey?

MR. B.

He loves you guys, but somehow he got the notion that he can't trust some of you with too much freedom. I wonder where he got that idea from.

BILL

With a sheepish grin.

Beats me!

MR. B.

You know, the system isn't against us ...

He puts a finger on Bill's lip as Bill is about to protest.

... it just sometimes needs help knowing how to be for us.

BILL (*defiantly*)

Well, I can show them how!

MR. B.

Yes, we can show them how. (*Pause.*) Here's the plan:

Mr. B. whispers in Bill's ear.

After we

BILL

Me, you, Jimmy, Annie

MR. B.

Whoever is interested ... then we will spread the word. But, remember, nobody wants to work with somebody who acts like he's out to get them.

ACT II SCENE 4

MR. GREY (*Over the PA system*)

... and remember students: we still put forth our best efforts, even though Winter Vacation is only two weeks away.

As Mr. B. writes successive numbers on the blackboard under the heading, "Days Before Winter Break," the Nurse plays, respectively, an art teacher, a PT, a Speech Therapist, a music teacher, a classroom teacher.

Day Ten

NURSE (*as art teacher*)

Okay, class. Today I would like us to....

She sees Rob clumsily waving.

Yes, Rob, I am sure you are feeling safer since your....

ROB

I think we should all work together on a project ...

He continues to talk over the teacher's verbal expressions of bemusement.

... a door... we can bring in all sorts of stuff and mount all of them.... and paint it and design it so that no one will know how to use it and then....

Day Nine

NURSE (*as PT*)

Now, Matt, I hope you are finally ready to take care of....

MATT

Interrupting while handing her a piece of paper.

I like when you sing this, okay? It'll help while I practice my lines...

NURSE

What lines ... ?

MATT

Exercise will be good for my voice, they say. I hope we have enough time. Let's get to it.

He eagerly begins to exercise and signals for the Nurse to read her part.

NURSE

She gradually gets into the rhythm of his movements.

Don't stop now

To the top now
 Don't fade now
 Got it made now.
Repeat and fade.

Day Eight

NURSE (*as Speech therapist*)

Today we are going to divide up into groups and practice friendly greet....

ALL THE STUDENTS (*simultaneously*)

I want Annie in my group

NURSE (*surprised*)

That's very nice of you, children, but Annie is just getting used to her new touch-talker, and I think she would feel more comfortable working with me.

STUDENTS

She needs to rehearse ... uh... to practice her ...uh ... "friendliness...."

ANNIE

On touch-talker, with difficulty, but tenacity, and barring any possible interruption.
 I... want... to ...be ... to talk ... everybody.

NURSE

Well, how can I say no to such unexpected enthusiasm?

Day Seven

NURSE (*as music teacher*)

.... There are many folk songs that bring the whole country together as one....

Jimmy raises his hand.

No, Jimmy, you can't go see the nurse right now....

JIMMY

No, not that. I ... have a song I'd ... we'd ... like to sing. May I pass it out? I think I can play it....

NURSE

Well. As long as it's not rated PG-13, I guess we can try it. Um, who is "we"?

Day Six

NURSE (*as classroom teacher*)

Well, I hope you are all done with your work because it's time to get ready for lunch. Put your ... Yes, Bill.

BILL

We're still busy. We don't need lunch period. We do need a ...

ROB

.... calculator, though.

Lisa gets out her calculator, and we overhear part of what Bill and Rob say to her.

ROB

Average wall mirror size

BILL

Toys about (*holds his hand up to a ruler*) so big How many....

LISA

Okay, guys, we each need to bring in about six a piece. You can leave them in the bag over there.

Turns to bewildered teacher.

We also need more paper, please.

BILL

IEP goals, yunno. None of us want to be left behind.

Day Five

NURSE (*as homeroom teacher*)

Okay class. It's time to pack up. The buses are coming. Remember to ... Why aren't you putting on your coats?

CHILDREN (*overlapping*)

We're meeting Mr. B. in the gym ...

BILL
... for group.

NURSE
Do your parents know ...?

JIMMY
... taking the late bus ...

ANNIE
Here ... our ... mom ... notes.

The bell rings. Children exit right. Nurse heads towards Mr. Grey's office.

ACT II SCENE 5

The gym. Mr. B. stands alone. Misty lighting shows that he is again envisioning the scene, which he first envisioned in Act I. As the vision progresses, the children enter quietly, behind Mr. B., and Annie is left by Lisa in the front of the stage.

MR. B.
Love and guilt, shame and fear, and love, again, had made the couple cling to their child.

NURSE
But the inevitability of physical maturation, and the demands of the system, gradually drew her from them....

TEACHER/PHYSICAL THERAPIST/SPEECH (or NURSE in different
guise)
... into the hands of strangers ...

MR.B.
...whose positive power was unknown, unproven... but who might,
unintentionally, yield her to the forces of shame and invisibility.

ALL
And so she withdrew her smile, to keep it safe in her own inner drama.
And so she entered the dark forest of the unknown.

Spotlight, on Annie in her wheelchair, is like moonlight. She is clearly struggling to get control of her limbs, her voice, and her emotions. In her struggle, she loses control of her wheelchair, and is frantic and scared. Her movements become more purposeful when she sees an ugly, deformed tree stump quivering and hears a muffled, but angry-sounding voice emanating from the trunk. At first she tries to get away from it, but then she is drawn by the voice in the trunk. As she moves toward it, the voice becomes plaintive, rather than intimidating. She gradually manages to roll against the trunk, tilting it over enough so that Bill, dressed as a genie, can pick it up and crawl out.

BILL
Limping around, wheezing, and ready for a fight.
No one can keep me down for long. I grow stronger the angrier I get....
Now come on out and face....
Bill almost trips over Annie. He stops, startled, and his face and voice soften.

BILL (cont'd.)
Why... you're one of us, aren't you? Thanks kid. I guess I grew too big
for my own hideout.

ANNIE (nervously giggling)
Ah...eeee...ay!

BILL

Huh!

Annie tries to gesture towards her chair, which is in a precarious position after knocking over the stump.

BILL

Oh! Looks like you need a better plan, too.

He gently maneuvers her and her chair back into position.

Nice highchair, but aren't you a little too big for a highchair?

ANNIE *(more like a purr, now)*

Hmmmm...ahhhh!

BILL

Cat got your tongue? *(Wiping himself off)* I guess I owe you, huh? Well, I'll tell you, I'm a genii, sortta. But I work in a kind of... team, and the first thing I think you need is a better way to get around. Sooo... expect three vistor -- just like Scrooge... or Dorothy, huh

Bill gradually grows fainter and darker, and seems to emanate a pale, fiery red glow. His voice gradually becomes hoarser and more fear-inspiring. See ya! Remember: we have nothing to fear, but fear itself!

A puff of red smoke, and he's gone. Annie settles herself into her chair as best she can. She stares into the darkness. Tentatively, fearfully, she begins humming her song. She gradually seems to take courage from the melody. A voice emanating from inside of her begins to sing the words. Each stanza's tone is less fearful and more confident sounding, but forced confidence. Music.

ANNIE

Inside my mom was dark and warm,
At least so I've been told.
But on the day when I was born
It sure was bright and cold.

Cold steel displaced the fluid warmth,
Lights glared on my dismay.

Man-made light is often cold --
This truth I learned that day.

Cold science calculates my loss,
Cold eyes all pity me,
Cold economics measures cost—
By their light who can see.

In darkness all my chains dissolve,
In warmth they melt away.
Embraced in nature's glittering womb,
I always find my way.

As Annie finishes her song, a strange, muffled, sobbing roar is vaguely audible underneath Mr. B.'s applause. The roar stops when the applause stops. Annie and Lisa, who now enters, don't seem to have been aware of it.

LISA

Yelling over her shoulder at something which the audience cannot see.
.... and besides, I'm more than just a bum leg and wandering eye.... I'm cute ... and nice... and ... and LOST ...

Bumping into Annie.

Oh! what the... who are you?

ANNIE (*tensing up*)

Ahhhh ... eee!

LISA

You're not a monster or a witch, are you?!

ANNIE

More relaxed; with an awkward, snorting giggle.

Tee hee!

LISA

You sure don't look like one. But, then again, I don't look like a "cripple," ... and then they see my eye or my leg, and my blonde hair becomes something to pat and pity. And so ... pittipat ... I snuck out... and ran into the woods ... and now I'm lost ... and there are strange creatures ... and it's

getting dark ... and ...and

ANNIE

She shakes her wheelchair, as if she were trying to move, while staring sympathetically at Lisa and leaning her head, as if it could rest on Lisa's shoulder.

Mmmmmmmmmmm...ooooo!

LISA

You can't move easily by yourself, can you? How could I be scared of you? shows you how little I see sometimes. I can push your chair if you like, and (*a little patronizingly*) I'm sure you can help me some day.

Annie smiles and purrs.

LISA

... and at least you can't make fun of me you can't even ta...

Annie looks hurt.

LISA

I'm sorry. I guess I can be just as mean as kids are to me. But I'll try to be better now that I've found a friend ... and someone who knows what it's like to be left alone and lost.... Will you be my friend?

Annie nods awkwardly.

LISA

Y' know? It's weird. Even though you can't do any... I mean... have a handi... a problem, or two, I still feel better knowing someone else is lost with me. Ya know what I mean?

Annie tries to smile.

LISA

Better than that other guy I just bumped into. He has some nerve calling me a "cripple" when I work so hard to look normal.... I am normal!! ...

(softer) and you are too, I bet! Slip me five!

Annie awkwardly tries to move her arm, and Lisa makes sure her hand touches Annie's. Dragon sound, muted, but audible to audience.

LISA

But we're still lost. Ya got any ideas?

Annie closes her eyes to show that she is thinking hard. Gradually, Matt's voice, singing, seems to come from behind and above the scene.

MATT

I stared on high and sprouted wings
And rose into the air.

Below my folks, in their own boat,
Were at their constant war.
As waves pushed one oar out of reach
Who wins the other oar?

I would have settled their dispute,
Like Solomon the wise,
Splitting the single oar in two,
Much to their surprise.

But suddenly the scene had changed--
A mountain blocked my way.
I looked clear up its rugged slope,
The top was far away.

Suddenly, Annie's entire body tenses in the direction of Matt's voice, a

few seconds after which a loud thud is heard.

LISA

What was....?! How did...? Did you make that happen?

Annie shakes her head, but her expression says that she likes Lisa thinking that she had something to do with it.

MATT

His voice precedes him as he emerges from the dark in a mangled wheelchair, which seems to have crash-landed.

.... Lucifer, there, all red and smoky, has the nerve to ask, "What happens if you run out of ideas?" And, sure enough, my imagination went into a tailspin. At least I had the sense to imagine a safe landing. Imagine if ... *(fearfully)* no, don't go there!

The dragon becomes a vague, but obvious sound, detached from the surroundings.

MATT

He sees Lisa and Annie for the first time, although they've been watching him.

Are you two making that sound? If so, please ...

He can tell from the expressions on their faces that they are hearing it for the first time, too.

It sounds like a monster roaring and crying at the same time. Oh my ... what did I say? *(self reproaching and desperate)* I don't believe in monsters! ... I don't imagine monsters ... *(to himself)* I don't believe in monsters ... I don't believe in monsters!

LISA

It sounds strange Like a lost child's cry

MATT

... when imagination's well seems to have run dry. But ... but ... but it hasn't, darn it! ... Oh, excuse me! But meeting the two of you has started my wheels turning again. *(Turning to Annie)* I imagine a choir singing in

your head, eager to emerge. I see you've found your feet (*gestures towards Lisa*), and now I imagine I see in your eyes the desire to find your voice.

ANNIE (*nodding excitedly*)

M ... eye Oy ...s

LISA

Ex ... cuse ... me! That's a very nice idea, but we are lost. Her voice may have to wait until we are not lost. Does your imagination have anything to say about that?

MATT

I see in her eyes that she agrees with you. My name is Matt, -- by the way, we should introduce ourselves if we are going to be lost together.

LISA

I'm Lisa.

ANNIE

Ahhh ... Eee!

MATT

Good. Now, if we were writing this story, what would we need right now?

LISA

A map.

MATT

Or a guide.

ANNIE

Holding up three fingers, awkwardly.

F ... rrrrr ... eeeeeeee!

LISA & MATT

Huh!

MATT

I think she said, "Free."

ANNIE

Violently shaking her head.

Noooooooooooo!

Gestures towards Lisa.

Unnnnn!

Gestures towards Matt.

Oooooooooo!

Annie repeats the above until they understand.

LISA

I'm "one"; Matt, you're "two."

ANNIE

F ... rrr ... eeeee!

MATT

(excitedly) Three! *(then puzzled)* Three what?

LISA

Well, if we're one and two, I guess she means a third person. *(To Annie)*

How do you know there'll be another person?

ANNIE

Swinging her body forward.

M ... ooooo ... vvvvvv!

MATT

She wants you to push her.

LISA Pushing Annie.

I hope you are trying to answer my question, and not just trick me into giving you a free ride, like my little sister do

Bumps into the tree trunk.

Hey! What's this?

MATT

It's a hollowed out tree trunk with red powdery stuff all around it, just like that guy had -- the guy who made me fall.

LISA

I wonder if it was the same jerk who called me crip ... a special person.

MATT

Did he have a strange looking costume, like a genii?

LISA

That's him!

ANNIE

Awkwardly clapping and bouncing with excitement.

Y ... eee ... ah!

MATT

Did he tell you there would be three of us?

Annie nods happily.

LISA

Who is he?

The dragon's roar is distant, but discernible.

MATT *(fearfully)*

Never mind that. There's a third person, or something, in this woods. Let's imagine he's wise and friendly. If you were a wise and friendly helper, where would you hang out?

LISA

Who said he's wise? Or friendly?

MATT

While his eyes dart from side to side, he says repeatedly:
Let's imagine he's wise and friendly.

LISA

Well, maybe you're right. We turned out to be good for Annie.

MATT

You gave her movement.

LISA

You helped her find her voice. Then, there could be hope for number three, as well. *(pause)* You know, this is pretty exciting! I don't even get this much excitement at big, family parties: "Oh, isn't she adorable! Pat pat, whisper, whisper -- it's too bad, you know -- pat pat, whisper whisper -- poor thing!" As if I didn't have any more ears and brains than the

LISA

Christmas goose!

Snapping out of her accelerating anger.

But, we're a team!

Dragon roar -- somewhat closer.

MATT

Thanks for the pep talk, but I think we better hope that number 3 has some answers. I remember a little side path that I saw through the trees as I was crash ... ah ... landing ... maybe

LISA

Yeah, I passed it, too, right before meeting that strange genii, or whatever he was.

MATT

Let's try that. What do you say, Annie?

ANNIE

Yee ... ah!

MATT

At least it's in the opposite direction from that awful roar, I think ... I hope

ROAR!

Let's go!!!

As soon as they all turn decisively in the direction of the path, Jimmy appears there, emerging from the darkness. His eyes take a moment to get accustomed to the light, but, when he finally sees the others, he evidences frustration and disgust, and turns back to reenter the darkness.

MATT

I see you are a wise and (*a little less confidently*) friendly person, who has come to help us enter the next chapter of our story.

JIMMY

Huh?!

MATT

I'm Matt.

JIMMY

I'm leaving!

LISA

But wait! Didn't the genii with the bright red flares send you to us?

JIMMY

I left when he approached me with his nonsense, and I intend to do the same here. Goodbye!

MATT & LISA

But, hold on, we need you to

JIMMY

What for? To give me a head ache which could kill me? To ask me to do things that I can't do? To pretend to be friends until someone without

these (*He holds up his crutches, almost losing his balance in the process.*) comes along?

LISA & MATT

We all have something like those!

JIMMY

Yeah! I guess you're right. I see we may be in the same boat. But I don't see how my coming on board would help me, or you. Too much useless cargo. Like that guy I just ran way from said, "If you didn't have those crutches, what would you be?" Nothing, defenseless, nothin

The dragon's fiery breath and fierce roar emanate from somewhere behind the tree stump, and drown out Jimmy's last words.

MATT

Frantically trying to calm himself.

I imagine it's only ... I imagine it's really ... fine ... nothing ... bark worse than bite ... where there's fire, it's really smoke

LISA (*panicky*)

Just because I'm norm ... almost normal ... doesn't mean I know what to do I'm just

Mr. Grey and Teacher appear behind Mr. B., who sits in a chair that fills the entryway. Mr. B. motions to them not to talk, and he turns back to watch the children.

As Jimmy is about to run off in anger, fear, and disgust, he is the first to notice that the dragon's terrifying entrance must have caused Annie's chair to get stuck in the mud by the path. She is frantically trying to move it. Jimmy swells with rage, and moves as if he's flying on his crutches.

JIMMY

That's it! I've had it! I'm tired of you blow-hard, ignorant bullies! You (*pointing to Lisa*) show them how normal you are ... better than normal ... WE stick together. Get her wheels out of the mud! You (*to Matt*) imagine an escape route through the darkness (*pointing away from the dragon*) to a strange cave I've often passed, but never entered. Lead them there!

He swerves to face the dragon, and then he roars:
YOU!!!

The dragon stops abruptly when he hears a roar much like his own, but without a trace of sadness or self-pity.

Put a muzzle on it!!! If angry people can lift cars, this should be a snap. I've been training on dead weight all my life!

Jimmy lunges toward the tree trunk. With his crutches, used like chopsticks, Jimmy lifts the tree trunk, and, as he falls forward, he muzzles the speechless dragon with it. He quickly gets himself up, and turns to follow the others. They have followed his directions, and, now, with astonishment and some fear, face him from the other end of the stage, where they were about to exit. As he catches up with them, all of them turn to flee. Annie, however, struggles to look back and throw the dragon a kiss.

ACT II SCENE 6

MR. GREY

What's going on here? Do you have parental perm ...?

Mr.B. hands him six forms signed by the parents.

MR. GREY (*turning to Teacher*)

And how has this ... um ... extra ... um ... activity affected their school-work?

TEACHER (*Looking at her grade book*)

Well ... whad'ya know? They've actually been handing in their homework and ...

MR. GREY

Okay, Jimmy's got his revenge. Can we stop this before Bill plots his?

MR. B. (*stage-whisper*)

This is not about revenge; it's about self-discovery.

He signals silence as the children return to the stage.

Darkness. Back curtain rises revealing a door, dimly lit initially. Lisa guiding Annie; then Matt, then Jimmy enter into that light. The light gradually intensifies, as if eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness. It reveals an odd door leading into a cave-like hole in a rock. The door looks like a Salvador Dali dreamscape made out of Rube Goldberg contraptions. From top to bottom are rows and rows of household objects and children's toys. They are lined up like the dials, switches, buttons, noise-makers, and knobs on the activity centers that parents attach to the slats of a baby's crib.

This conversation overlaps with the activities on the stage.

TEACHER (*stage-whisper*)

So that's what they were doing in Art!

MR. GREY

Are they doing their own "thing" in class or working on their goals?

TEACHER

It might take some creative IEP writing to fit ...

MR. B.

But that's what we need to do anyway – "Creative IEP writing;"
Mr. B. calls their attention back to the stage as Jimmy and Lisa say
 "Excuse me."

MR. B.

But now we have their help in being creative.

There is no door-knob or standard doorbell or knocker -- or at least none that works, as Jimmy finds out when he angrily assaults the most likely looking ones. Matt and Lisa study the interconnecting contraptions to see if any of those will simultaneously announce their presence and open the door. At the level of Annie's wheelchair is a row of various stuffed animals. She gently pets them, and when she gets to the nose of a large teddy bear, the door swings open. It is not clear, however, whether it was Annie's act, independent of or in conjunction with all the others' efforts, that opened the door.

As the door swings open, Rob, initially, recoils in terror. Then, seeing their crutches and wheelchairs, he catches himself and tries to act nonchalant. He pretends to study the door, like an old man displeased with a child's "silly" mistakes. As the scene progresses, the audience gradually develops an uneasy sense that some of his energy and apparently, positive attitude are designed to drown out his own awareness of the existence of the monster.

ROB (*mumbling to himself*)

Something's not right. Too many wires, maybe. Keep it simple, Stupid!

Starts pressing different gizmos on the door and nodding to himself.
 Good... okay... not bad ... needs oiling ... what's this?

JIMMY (*irritated*) & LISA (*polite*)

Excuse me!

ROB

Feigning surprise. He then nervously glances over their shoulders.
 Oh! Hi! Didn't see you. I was just checking the

JIMMY (*irritated*) & LISA (*polite*)

We're lost. We need help. The drago

ROB

He feigns urgency on their behalves, but the audience can see that he himself has become terrified at the first mention of the dragon.
 Oh, why didn't you say so? Come in, come in. Quickly ...! ... close the door behind ... must be cold, you know.

As Jimmy and Lisa enter, their responses overlap.

JIMMY

Now you're talking.

LISA

Thanks.

MATT

Are you a wizard, or what?

ROB

Relishing Matt's calling him a "wizard."
 Yeah! I guess you could say that. Boy, I could call myself the Wizard of Nomel Park ... Edison already took Menlo Park. Whaddya think?

JIMMY

I think you don't look "nomel" to me, not the least bit normal.

LISA

(to Jimmy) You don't have to be angry anymore. You've already saved us from the dragon.

At the mention of the dragon, Rob shudders.

MATT

Yeah! You're a hero!

JIMMY

Quieting, blushing, and trying to divert the attention away from himself, he turns to Rob.

Did you make all this stuff?

ROB

Sure did! I'm a wizard, you know.

JIMMY

Oh yeah?! What can you do for her? (*pointing to Annie*)

ROB

What's her problem? She looks okay to me.

JIMMY

Can't you see?! She's in a chair; she can't move; she can't talk! What isn't her problem?!

Teacher seems upset by Jimmy's comment and starts to intervene, but is diverted by Mr. B.

Annie angrily tries to move her chair toward the door, and seems to be dragging Lisa with her. She randomly squeezes the toys on the door until she gets one that says, "Ma," and another, "Dad." Then she keeps on alternating until it sounds like "Ma ...D."

LISA

Well, she still has feelings!

MATT

Good imagination, too.

LISA (*To Jimmy*)

I guess you taught her how to get angry. Nice job!

ROB

The Great and Powerful Wizard of Nomel Park wishes to speak!

A little befuddled by his own grandeur.

That is ... I ... think she has given me an idea. Just wait there!

Rob disappears into the darkness.

JIMMY

Oh, gee! And I was hoping to go back into the dark forest and get barbecued by a dragon.

LISA

We already know you've got more heart than you like to let people see. You don't have to play that role with us.

JIMMY

What are you talkin ...? I can't just ... Well sometimes I'd like ... I wonder where he went.

ROB

He emerges from the dark and carries a kind of touch-talker which he clearly made out of odds and ends.

Here's a start. I've been working a little on this for when I won't be able to brea ... too good ... well, I may need some ... You never know! Be prepared ... Well, anyway! Here!

He places it on Annie's lap. Annie stares at it.

MR. GREY (*Aside.*)

I didn't know that Rob knew he could become more like Annie.

ROB

Press on it.

Annie tentatively, awkwardly moves her hands to various spots on the board, making distinct but mechanical sounds.

I guess I am a wizard. See ... she can communicate with anybody, now!
In f ... a ... c ... t ... *(addressing the others)*, you ain't seen nothing yet!

He disappears into the darkness, again. By the sounds emanating from his direction, he seems to be searching through many objects, made up of many different kinds of materials. He returns with three devices.

(To Matt): Here's my handy-dandy reacher-grabber for getting into those hard to reach places, which, I'm sorry to say, are becoming more numerous.

Matt tries to use the gadget for getting things out of the backpack of his chair.

(To Jimmy): And here is my combination rolling-table-stander-walker.

(To Lisa): And here's a shoe to steady your step while putting bounce in your walk.

While Matt is demonstrating his inventions, Annie is practicing on her new touch-talker. As she hits certain emotions, the dragon's roar imitates the emotion with an over-lay of fear-induced anger. At "hope," his roar sends smoke under the door, and each of the characters loses control. Rob races around in aimless panic, Jimmy's wheels take over his motion so he no longer steers them, Matt's reacher picks up and drops things at random, and Annie loses control of what she is pressing on the touch-talker.

JIMMY

How do we get out of here?

ROB

You don't. Only one door. Through the fear.... I never tried.... built defenses, best I could....

LISA

Well, I want to go home!

ROB

Can't help you there ... sorry.

MATT

I imagine the dragon is as scared of us as we are of him.

JIMMY

He's right! Don't let fear conquer us! We'll conquer it!

Jimmy heads for the door.

LISA & ROB

NO!! Don't touch that door!!

*As the children yell, Mr. Grey and the Teacher become tense and alert.
Mr. B. puts his finger to his lips and does not move from blocking the entrance.*

MATT

I was just imagining! Don't take me seriously! Nobody ever did before – I don't think that now is the best time to be the first time!

JIMMY

No one's anger or fear, not even mine, is going to control me anymore!

Jimmy grabs one of the door handles.

TEACHER (*aside to Mr. Grey*)

Given his ... uh ... condition, is it safe for him to be so ... uh ... intense?

LISA, ROB, & MATT

NO!!

ANNIE

*Up until now, she has been quiet and watching.
Ye...ah!!!*

The door flies open. Smoke begins to fill the room. Jimmy stands bravely, defiantly in front, but to one side, of the dragon, avoiding his flames. Annie begins as loudly as possible, but more and more calmly and rhythmically, to imitate the dragon's sounds. The dragon moves through layers of emotion, as

reflected in its roar, diminished flames, decreasing size: from fury, to anger, to uncertainty. It begins to reciprocate sounds with Annie, who moves awkwardly, but gradually, closer, and is eventually aided by Jimmy. The dragon transforms into the genie (or is it Bill, in a genie costume?) wheezing asthmatically. The others stare in surprise and confusion.

BILL

What are you staring at? I'm still angry (*wheeze*) ...I'm still tough... I won't be played

Bill appears overcome by his asthma: wheezing, coughing, gasping.
I ... can't ... breathe ... do ...some ... (*Wheezes and coughs.*)

MR. GREY

Is this in your plan, too, Mr. B.?

MR. B.

Catching his breath, but maintaining his blockade.
Their plan. We'll see.

TEACHER

That wheezing sounds real. I'll get the Nurse and his inhalers.

Beginning to panic while Mr. B. stands his ground.
... the children need ...

JIMMY

Initially frantic, and overlapping with the teacher's lines.
We need a nurse; we need a doctor; I need my mom –Wimps! All wimps!

ANNIE

It gradually becomes clear to the audience that, since the genie started wheezing, Annie has been randomly poking at her touch-talker in an effort to express her sense of helplessness and panic.
... angry... fear ... No ...

BILL (*through wheezes*)
Stop ... those ... dumb ... buttons ...

ROB

Grasping at phrases as a way of calming himself.
No put-downs ...

ANNIE

... I ... want ...

ROB

Whatever's said in here, stays in here ...

LISA, JIMMY, & MATT

Who will help us?

BILL

Do ... some ... thi ...!

ANNIE

... we ... can ...

ROB

One person talks at a time ...

JIMMY (*forcefully*)

Be quiet ... Let's think ... Group ... that was the point ... two heads are better than one. We've all felt choked, stifled, in the dark, afraid before. What did we do? If things don't change, they stay the same, unless *we* do something different. When I feel suffocated, I get away ... Maybe he (*indicating the genie*) needs cool fresh air and some calmness.

MATT (*dreamily*)

Imagine a cool breeze caressing my parched throat, loosening the choking grip of the dark phantom, who thought he had me, finally, in his clutches.

BILL

What the ... is ... he ... Nuts?!

LISA

Soothingly.

No ... he's right.

Hypnotically.

Listen ... relax ... let go ...

MATT - MATT'S SONG: Part 3

I felt the urge to give it up –
The mountain was too high;
A healthy climber would concede
That he was doomed to die.

But dreamers rise where wise men sink
And see things they ignore.
“If I just reach beyond my grasp,
I'm higher than before.”

Never mind the towering peak
Or the Olympic stride.
I learned to struggle inch by inch
Each gain a source of pride.

Imagination lined my path
With sights, sensations rare
Which only one who inched his way
Would ever see were there.

I woke, I think, to a new day,
Saw dancing beams of light
Playing tag on my bedroom wall,
Outside my folks did fight.

The yelling almost broke the spell,
But not for very long.
My mind can often change my mood:
Revive my world of song.

Where light is lovely, sound is sweet
 And wanderer can see
 So long as reach exceeds his grasp
 Life's worth the agony.

The following interaction between Jimmy and Rob is predominantly pantomimed during Rob's song, as are Lisa's simultaneous efforts to talk soothingly to Bill, who gradually, visibly relaxes.

JIMMY (*to Rob*)

How do you get air in here? And get the smoke out?

ROB

Gesturing towards a large box.

If I could only find my ...

JIMMY

He patiently holds up things, one at a time, and remains unaffected by Rob's tendency to describe each item in detail.

This?

ROB

So that's where I put my

JIMMY

This?

ROB

If I do say so, myself, that is quite a nifty ...

JIMMY

This?

ROB

You can use that for all sorts of neat ...

JIMMY

This?

ROB

TA DA! May I demonstrate?!

Jimmy hands it to him and tactfully helps him to push the button. The back curtain opens to reveal an idyllic scene, and the stage is bathed in soft light. The finale music begins softly in the background, as the children slowly move together, proudly. Mr. Grey beams and puts his arm, in a fatherly way, around Mr. B.'s shoulder.

ANNIE

On an uncharacteristically human sounding touch-talker.
My chorus ... music ... harmony ... US!

Music - Finale

MATT

Each breath inspires every cell
To strive, perfect, what it does well.

JIMMY

The group succeeds whene'er its parts
Attempt to master their own arts.

LISA

While always minding that the goal
Is the thriving of the whole:

JIMMY

Wavelets form a tsunami.

ANNIE

Sounds create a harmony.

MATT

Inch by inch the height is gained.

ROB

Drop by drop the moat is drained.

ALL

That which guards us, locks us in;
Keeps under wraps the play within.

A play that once the world does see,
The world our co-star comes to be.

So share your inner music's sound,
Your sweaty inspiration's fruit,
For your seed in the common ground
There will never be a substitute.

ROB

I sing of the inventor's art.

MATT

I praise imagination's part.

JIMMY

I, character put to the test.

BILL

We'll not be treated second best.

LISA

Twixt two worlds, I sing of empathy.

ANNIE

And I conduct the symphony.

ALL

Together, let us all begin
To reveal to the world the play within.

MR.B.

Singing to Mr. Grey whose back is to the audience.

When notes in isolation
Together strike a chord
Evoking a sensation
That cannot be ignored,

Our ears, our eyes, they open
To what was always there,
Deserving our attention
Though we were unaware.

My song salutes that moment,
My "bright" directs the beam
To spotlight their resilience,
Lift the curtain on their dream:

ALL THE CHILDREN

We want
to be
a part
of you,
Instead
We are
apart.

But we will be
a part
of you:

We'll sing
inside
your heart.

THE END

