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PREVIEW

hackerspace



by george halitzka

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HACKERSPACE
A play for young audiences
By George Halitzka

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

VOICES *of students and other denizens of the interwebs (at least two)*

USERS *of technology (nonspeaking, at least one)*

HACKER, *a thief by any other name*

LIZZIE MIRALDI, *a high school sophomore with crazy coding skills and Social Anxiety Disorder*

ELAINE MIRALDI, *Lizzie's mother, the school janitor*

EVAN BARNUM, *a digital genius*

REAGAN BIRKHEAD, *who thinks her excrement is odor-free*

LESTER BIRKHEAD, *Reagan's father, the headmaster of Louisville Preparatory Academy*

THE TIME

Tomorrow morning

THE PLACE

Louisville Preparatory Academy

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HACKERSPACE

(Ominous digital music that forebodes dark doings online. Cold backlight finds a HACKER. His face is shrouded in shadow as he types on a laptop at a large desk. His actions indicate that he is sending each email as they're read aloud by the VOICES. The VOICES, hoodie-wearing students with their own laptops, sit at classroom-style desks nearby. They are pupils of the HACKER. On another part of the stage, USERS walk through a pinspot one by one, showing with their actions that they are deleting the message at each buzz.)

VOICE 1

Congratulations! You've won five million euros –

(A buzzer sounds as a USER deletes the message.)

VOICE 2

Attached, find past due invoice –

(Another buzz.)

VOICE 1

Dearest friend, my wallet was stolen in Brazil –

(Yet another buzz.)

VOICE 2

We've detected suspicious activity on your account. Click here to verify.

(The USER pauses in the light and clicks on the link while taking out her debit card. The music changes and becomes more urgent.)

Welcome to North Central Bank. Card number?

(The USER types.)

PIN?

(The USER types.)

Thank you. Your card is confirmed.

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(The light suddenly goes out on the USER.)

HACKER

Balance eight hundred and fifty bones. Daddy needs a new iPhone!

(The HACKER laughs as he quickly punches some keys. Then he steps forward to lecture the VOICES. They raise their heads from their own laptops and listen to him intently.)

In seventh grade, the shoes make the man, and everybody at school's wearing Nike or Adidas—except me. I've got Walmart specials with one sole flapping in the breeze.

I'm a prime specimen of Dorkius Maximus. Shoes won't fix a tenth of my image problem. But I'm young and stupid, so I convince myself that walking into school with Nikes will make everything better. I won't sit alone at lunch. Darius Landry will stop calling me Shoeless Joe. Stella Hernandez will notice I'm cute.

And why *shouldn't* I have the shoes? Why does Darius get Adidas just because his mom's a teacher and mine's a professional drunk? When did the world decide that things outside your control should ruin your life?

One Saturday in October, I walk into the shoe store—just to try things on. I can't help it if the store's packed and the clerks are stressed. I can't help it if I make Nikes look good. I can't help it if I've got a crummy memory: I forget to put the old shoes back on before I head for the door.

I've never shoplifted before, so I'm petrified . . . but if I can make it out with Nikes, maybe the kids'll forget that my mom smells like a distillery with BO when she drives me to school.

It looks like I'm home free as I cruise past the cash register. But two feet from freedom, the antitheft sensor goes off. A security guard's on top of me like laces on Converse. "Lemme see a receipt," he snarls . . . and I know it's over. Have you ever home ridden in the back of a cop car?

So that's the moral of the story, right? "Don't shoplift, kiddies"? Nah, just do it right. You're way harder to catch when you work online. And why shouldn't you go on a one-man crime spree? You deserve *at least* what Darius Landry has. Maybe more, if you're not a varsity douchebucket. So go hack yourself an iPhone.

Or . . . tell yourself how much better you are than me because I'm a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad hacker. But get over yourself— who got hurt? Not the customer with

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the money; the bank covers bogus charges. Not the bank; \$850 is chump change. Not me; cops are too stupid to solve computer crime. They think the Dark Web is what spiders build at night.

I can't help it that my mom's a certified drunk while some people have diamond-studded Teslas. But I can level up. And if you think I'm a scumrag . . . I think you're just jealous.

(Blackout. On another part of the stage, a warm spot finds LIZZIE, who's nervously beginning a presentation to her class.)

LIZZIE

Good morn – um, afternoon. I'm Elizabeth Miraldi . . . my app's about food waste.

(Her phone chirps.)

Sorry, I forgot . . . it's off now.

Um . . . I made this spreadsheet, right? My Mom says kids at Louisville Prep throw away 65 pounds in the lunchroom. Trash per kid. Y'know, for the whole year, not, like . . . well, we have 550 kids – or maybe a little more, Dr. Birkhead didn't answer my email . . .

(LIZZIE'S phone vibrates. Again, she presses a button to silence it, embarrassed.)

Sorry. I left it on vibrate, but it won't . . . sorry, Ms. Kerrigan. I . . . I forgot where . . .

(Awkward silence as she looks down at her notes.)

550 kids. That's like 18 tons of garbage. What my app does . . . there's pictures of stuff you might eat for lunch. And if you click, it says how much garbage you made, and how you could cut down. So when you tap the sandwich in a baggie . . .

(LIZZIE'S phone vibrates yet again.)

Ms. Kerrigan, I'm *really* sorry. I *swear* I turned . . .

(LIZZIE looks down at her phone. Her jaw drops as she reads the screen.)

I, I hafta . . . restroom.

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(LIZZIE runs from the classroom into the hallway. We hear many STUDENTS' voices overlapping in their messages. REAGAN'S voice is prominent among the messaging students.)

REAGAN

OMG . . . Lizzie Miraldi did her project on TRASH.

VOICE 1

She only knows how heavy garbage is 'cause her Mom carries it all day.

VOICE 2

She can't even talk right. Probably breathed her Mom's cleaning fumes.

REAGAN

Lizzie Miraldi LOOOVES garbage. Hail the Hashtag TrashQueen!

VOICE 1

Trash Queen can't put two sentences together. She got her Mom's Dumb Gene.

REAGAN

Make it trending! Hashtag TrashQueen!

VOICE 2

TrashQueen!

VOICE 1

TrashQueen!

REAGAN

TrashQueen!

(LIZZIE has walked from the classroom back to her living quarters. As the daughter of a staff member, she lives in a small, bare apartment on the school grounds. She collapses into a chair, reading her phone screen in disbelief. Angrily, she begins to type.)

LIZZIE

"You scumsucking snobs are just jealous 'cause you're too dumb to write code—"

ELAINE

(entering behind LIZZIE)

Lizzie . . . are you sick?

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LIZZIE
(quickly concealing her phone screen)
What?

ELAINE
What were you looking at?

LIZZIE
Nothing.

ELAINE
(holding out her hand)
Then can I see —

LIZZIE
(rolling her eyes)
Nothing from Dad.

ELAINE
I didn't say . . .
(Short pause.)

Why aren't you in class?

LIZZIE
. . . I'll go back.

ELAINE
Please tell me I'm not getting another email from Ms. Kerrigan.

EVAN
(entering)
Ms. Miraldi, you wanna finish . . . hey, Lizzie.

LIZZIE
(flustered by his sudden appearance.)
Oh, hey . . . hey back . . . Evan.

ELAINE
(to EVAN)
I'm good. Your cheat sheet helped a lot.

EVAN

I'll get packed up.

(EVAN exits.)

LIZZIE

Why's Evan here?

ELAINE

Helping with the new HVAC. Controls are online.

LIZZIE

You didn't ask anything dumb, did you? Like how to use the mouse?

ELAINE

(pretending puzzlement and as she picks up the mouse and turns it upside down)

You mean this thing?

(LIZZIE takes the mouse from her hand and firmly puts it down on the desk.)

What happened in class?

LIZZIE

Mom!

(A staring contest. ELAINE finally lets it drop – for now.)

ELAINE

I want the details. Before dinner.

(LIZZIE rolls her eyes as ELAINE exits. The end-of-the-day bell rings. EVAN returns, carrying a stylish laptop sleeve and looking at his phone.)

EVAN

Wow . . . Reagan Birkhead doesn't know when to quit.

LIZZIE

(quickly)

Trash Queen's a joke.

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EVAN

Did you code the app by yourself?

LIZZIE

I'm not great with Java –

EVAN

Coding's easy once you get the hang of it. But your UX . . . this is good design. Like, *really* good.

(LIZZIE studies the ground.)

Don't listen to Reagan Dickhead.¹

LIZZIE

Everybody's calling me Trash Queen.

EVAN

You don't hafta let 'em.

(LIZZIE doesn't know what he means. He motions to LIZZIE to sit next to him.)

C'mon. Reagan's password is probably dumb. Let's try . . . no . . . okay, her birthday's on her profile. Maybe . . . yeah. Real smart, birthday password. Now, we can grab her picture . . . aaand put it in a face-morph app . . .

LIZZIE

Give her zits.

EVAN

Bigger?

LIZZIE

(nodding)

And buckteeth. She *hates* her teeth.

(EVAN makes an adjustment. LIZZIE and EVAN laugh.)

EVAN

Green hair? Purple?

¹ Feel free to substitute "Reagan Jerkhead" if Dickhead isn't appropriate in your setting.

LIZZIE

Too much. You hafta know when to stop.

EVAN

Post it?

(He holds out the phone to LIZZIE so she can push the button to post the picture. She doesn't press it.)

LIZZIE

She'll know it was me.

EVAN

Can she prove it?

(LIZZIE considers it for a moment, then pushes the button. Evan holds out his fist. LIZZIE looks at him, confused.)

Fist bump.

(LIZZIE shakes her head – she doesn't know what that means.)

Clench your hand.

(LIZZIE awkwardly holds out her fist, and EVAN bumps it.)

It's like a high five . . . guess I spent too much time in public school.

LIZZIE

(rolling her eyes)

I wish.

(EVAN looks at her quizzically.)

Public school. I wish.

EVAN

Really? Then why'd your mom put you here?

LIZZIE

My dad, actually.

PREVIEW

EVAN

Isn't he—

(LIZZIE shoots him a fearful look.)

Sorry. I mean . . . you don't have to tell me.

(A beat while LIZZIE studies the floor.)

I'm at Lou Prep because typing. At my old school, pretty much everything we "learned" was reviewing last year. I was climbing the walls.

LIZZIE

Well, when you're a genius—

EVAN

(laughing off the compliment)

Not nearly. Then I got *sooo* excited in sixth grade: we could take "Intro to Technology"! Know what "Technology" meant?

(LIZZIE shrugs.)

Typing. I learned when I was six. Anyway, I was building a website at home, so I started sneaking class time in WordPress. The teacher blocked it when she found out . . . *but* she kept the firewall password on a post-it.

LIZZIE

Is that when your parents put you here?

EVAN

My parents don't really . . .

(stopping himself and changing the subject)

Don't love all the people. Love Lou Prep.

(A short pause.)

I told you mine . . . why're you here?

(LIZZIE shakes her head.)

Who would I tell? You want me to pinkie swear?

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

Basically . . . in fifth grade, I couldn't read.

EVAN

Lizzie, a lotta kids—

LIZZIE

Dr. Seuss was hard.

EVAN

Then how—?

LIZZIE

Dad heard that Lou Prep has Von Nimitz.

EVAN

Is that Ms. McFadden's class?

(LIZZIE nods.)

But you read all the time, even at lunch—

LIZZIE

'Cause I'm a dork with no social life. And they're easy books—

EVAN

Give yourself credit! You go to Reading for—

(EVAN catches himself.)

LIZZIE

—“Rejects.” Kids mostly don't know . . . *please* don't say anything?

EVAN

'Course.

(EVAN holds out his fist again. This time, LIZZIE laughs awkwardly and holds out hers too. They bump.)

LIZZIE

Couldn't Lou Prep just have . . . *nice* people?

EVAN

Dickheads are everywhere.

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LIZZIE

There's only one Reagan.

EVAN

(pulling out his phone and motioning for LIZZIE to look over his shoulder)

Wanna see if she found the picture?

(LIZZIE nods and joins EVAN. REAGAN enters and sees them together. Clearly, she is not pleased.)

REAGAN

Lizzie? Ms. Kerrigan was mad you didn't come back to class. Does she know about your panic attacks?

LIZZIE

It's, um, Social Anxiety Disorder –

REAGAN

Sorry, wrong kind of crazy. Evan, Darla said you came down here . . . are you still in trouble with my Dad?

EVAN

Working on Ms. Miraldi's computer.

REAGAN

Cleaning ladies use those? I thought it was mops and dumpsters.

EVAN

Oh . . . I said I'd help with your app, huh?

REAGAN

I got stuck. But since you're, like, a genius . . .

EVAN

Should be fun.

REAGAN

And Dad said invite you to dinner. Steaks on the grill.

EVAN

(standing up to go)

PREVIEW

Delicious.

REAGAN

He said ask your folks first.

(EVAN nods, then steps away from LIZZIE and REAGAN to send a text. REAGAN glances over at LIZZIE with a superior smile, then takes out her phone to pass the time. When she sees the new profile picture, she freezes.)

REAGAN

How'd you do it, Trash Queen?

LIZZIE

What?

REAGAN

It's called *cyberbullying*?

(REAGAN holds out her phone with the altered picture on the screen.)

LIZZIE

Looks just like you.

REAGAN

Real mature. When I tell Dad –

LIZZIE

– He'll say you can't prove anything.

EVAN

(stepping forward to rejoin REAGAN and LIZZIE)

Mom said okay.

REAGAN

Amazing. I know I'll learn a lot.

(to LIZZIE)

Take care of the picture, 'kay? 'Fore I hafta tell Dad?

LIZZIE

When you take care of Trash Queen.

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REAGAN

There's no rule against the truth.

(taking EVAN'S arm)

My app's about fashion, right? Like, what clothes look good on you?

EVAN

How much have you coded?

REAGAN

I know how it *works*. I took pictures of me modeling stuff, so *that's* done . . .

(They exit. ELAINE reenters.)

ELAINE

Did I hear Reagan's voice? Reagan *Birkhead*?

(LIZZIE nods.)

What was *she* doing here?

LIZZIE

Looking for Evan.

ELAINE

Evan? Why?

(LIZZIE shrugs. Pause.)

LIZZIE

Mom, what do you do when . . . when there's somebody, like at a distance . . .

(ELAINE looks at her quizzically. LIZZIE tries again.)

. . . You remember Triceratops Café?

(ELAINE doesn't follow the abrupt subject change. She shakes her head.)

It was *Treetops*, but I was obsessed with dinosaurs—

ELAINE

Oh . . . and when Dad said Treetops—

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LIZZIE

They made grilled cheese with three kinds of cheese.

ELAINE

I remember. Why – ?

LIZZIE

It was the only place I'd go. Remember?

ELAINE

(smiling)

He *begged* you to change. "Can you pick somewhere less greasy, Baby Girl? *Anywhere* else?"

LIZZIE

But they had grilled cheese. *And* Triceratops!

(ELAINE chuckles.)

He always asked first. "Lizzie, you wanna go on a date?"

ELAINE

He did one thing right.

(LIZZIE glares at her.)

... *And* other things.

LIZZIE

But what if ... somebody doesn't *ask*, but ... from a distance? You think maybe ...

ELAINE

... Are we talking about a boy?

(LIZZIE nods nervously.)

Is he worth caring about?

LIZZIE

He's smart. Like, crazy-smart. He helps people –

ELAINE

PREVIEW

You remember Harrison . . . I'm not saying it's the same. But Harrison strung you along and told everybody –

LIZZIE

(reciting dully)

I was “a brain-dead dogface freak.” This guy, he might not like me back. But he wouldn't . . .

ELAINE

Then . . . you think he's *worth* caring about?

LIZZIE

How'd it work with Dad?

ELAINE

Lizzie –

LIZZIE

How'd you *know*?

(A short pause. ELAINE sighs.)

ELAINE

He kept running into me on campus. Like, it wasn't *always* an accident. He helped me with Stats homework, and asked Kim my favorite flowers . . . I didn't *know*-know.

LIZZIE

He asked you out –

ELAINE

I asked *him*. So I ruined my own life.

LIZZIE

You said – you *said* you still care –

ELAINE

I had some wine, Lizzie –

LIZZIE

You can't hate him *and* –

ELAINE

Oh, yes you can. Sometimes on the same day.

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(LIZZIE shakes her head – she doesn't get it.)

Doesn't make sense, right? Hope it never does.

LIZZIE

So . . . someday . . . ?

ELAINE

Not in a million years. Not even when he gets paroled – which could be longer.

LIZZIE

Mom, he did it to *help* me! That's why –

ELAINE

And if you're helping your daughter, grand theft's an honest mistake.

LIZZIE

Who'd he hurt?

ELAINE

We're not having this discussion –

LIZZIE

(under her breath)

'Cause you know I'm right.

ELAINE

Are you *trying* to lose your phone?

(Sullen silence.)

. . . So? Ms. Kerrigan's class?

(Any tender moment that LIZZIE and ELAINE may have shared is gone. LIZZIE rolls her eyes.)

You know what Becky says in your sessions: "Secrets are not allowed."

LIZZIE

It was *fine*.

ELAINE

PREVIEW

You gave the presentation?

LIZZIE

I'll take the F.

ELAINE

You worked too hard—

LIZZIE

So?

ELAINE

Okay. Okay, maybe coding's . . . stressful. If it triggered you, we'll switch your class—

LIZZIE

And you wonder why I write to Dad.

ELAINE

Elizabeth, I never said—

LIZZIE

I *like* coding. I'm *good* at coding. Dad gets that—

ELAINE

(under her breath)

Of course he does.

LIZZIE

"Dad is evil and he wrote code. Therefore, coding is—"

ELAINE

So it *was* from him. The thing on your phone.

LIZZIE

No! It's from . . . stupid people.

ELAINE

You get a second chance on presentations, Lizzie; it's in your accommodations.

LIZZIE

Isn't coding evil?

ELAINE

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You're the one who said – code away; I was trying to help!

(Silence. Finally, LIZZIE sighs.)

LIZZIE

We got to have our phones out in class, okay? So we could try each others' apps? And before I did, like, *two minutes* . . .

(LIZZIE shoves her phone at ELAINE. ELAINE looks down at the screen.)

ELAINE

Elizabeth Renee, did you write this? "You scumsucking snobs . . ."?

LIZZIE

That's not – I didn't *send* it!

(flipping to another app on her phone)

Read *that*.

(ELAINE'S mouth sets in a grim line.)

ELAINE

Is it from Reagan?

LIZZIE

I'll take the F.

ELAINE

I'm talking to Dr. Birkhead.

LIZZIE

Don't you dare.

ELAINE

It's his *daughter* –

LIZZIE

–So he won't do *anything* –

ELAINE

I wasn't *asking*, Elizabeth –

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

You think he'll listen to the cleaning lady?

ELAINE

I took the job so you could stay at Lou Prep –

LIZZIE

I don't *want* to stay at Lou Prep –

ELAINE

You think I *like* mopping puke?

LIZZIE

I know; you're doing it for me. So was Dad.

ELAINE

Elizabeth Renee –

LIZZIE

Just . . . *don't*, Mom. *Please* don't talk to Birkhead. If nobody says anything, kids'll forget Trash Queen in a few days.

(Pause.)

ELAINE

Are you – okay?

LIZZIE

Fine.

ELAINE

"Secrets are not –"

LIZZIE

– Furious and unloved. Happy? Because the whole school decided to scrape me off their shoes.

(BIRKHEAD enters.)

BIRKHEAD

Elaine? Elizabeth? Am I interrupting?

ELAINE

Dr. Birkhead . . . come in.

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(Turning to LIZZIE, she motions for her daughter to leave.)

Lizzie . . . ?

LIZZIE

Please, Mom. I'm begging you.

ELAINE

I'll be in for dinner.

(LIZZIE leaves the room with trepidation.)

Dr. Birkhead, if this is about the thermostats, Evan Barnum showed me—

BIRKHEAD

Have you seen what Elizabeth posted online today?

ELAINE

I'm glad you brought that up—

BIRKHEAD

(holding out his phone)

She mutilated Reagan's photograph.

ELAINE

(disappointed in her daughter)

I hadn't seen that.

BIRKHEAD

I would hope not. Staff members are mandatory reporters for bullying.

ELAINE

You're sure it was Lizzie?

BIRKHEAD

I've never known Reagan to be a liar. Lizzie will be suspended tomorrow, and I expect an apology letter.

ELAINE

Suspended?

BIRKHEAD

And if it's repeated, I'm sure the board will support an expulsion.

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ELAINE

Actually . . . I *do* need to report. Have you seen this?

(ELAINE shows him LIZZIE'S phone. BIRKHEAD seems unimpressed.)

BIRKHEAD

Reagan mentioned this. It's a peer critique of Elizabeth's presentation.

ELAINE

A . . . ?

BIRKHEAD

Peer critique. You're familiar with the term?

ELAINE

If that's a critique, what Lizzie posted is a Rembrandt.

BIRKHEAD

Excuse me?

ELAINE

A *Rembrandt*. You're familiar with the term?

BIRKHEAD

You're implying the girls' actions are equivalent?

ELAINE

No, I'm implying Lizzie finished what Reagan started.

BIRKHEAD

(with a forced chuckle)

This is not a discussion, Elaine. I'm *informing* you that Elizabeth's been suspended. If you don't like it, I suggest public school.

ELAINE

Excuse me? If anyone else did what Reagan—

BIRKHEAD

I treat every student with the same—

ELAINE

—Except one—

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BIRKHEAD

Don't say something you'll regret in the unemployment line.

(Pause. ELAINE reluctantly bites her tongue. BIRKHEAD hands her a paper.)

And the bursar informs me that Lizzie's textbook payment, which is *not* covered by your employee tuition waiver, is overdue. 750 dollars.

ELAINE

I'm sure we paid—

BIRKHEAD

Our scholarship families are *always* sure they paid. Due Monday, or it becomes grounds for expulsion.

(a nod)

Elaine.

(BIRKHEAD exits. ELAINE calls offstage.)

ELAINE

Elizabeth!

LIZZIE

Mom, *please* tell me you didn't—

(ELAINE holds out the phone in front of LIZZIE. A short pause.)

Was this you?

LIZZIE

So I hafta let her bully me?

ELAINE

No, you hafta *tell* someone. But when I dragged the story out of you, you left this part out.

LIZZIE

I *knew* you'd stick up for her! I didn't start—

ELAINE

Dr. Birkhead suspended you tomorrow.

PREVIEW

LIZZIE
What about Reagan?

ELAINE
... You're going to write an apology –

LIZZIE
As soon as she does.

ELAINE
No, *you're* going to be the mature one –

LIZZIE
You and Reagan can kiss my –

ELAINE
Excuse me?

(LIZZIE starts to exit.)

Elizabeth! Dr. Birkhead brought a bill: seven-fifty for books. He can expel you for that.

(LIZZIE stops walking, but doesn't turn around.)

Don't give him another reason.

LIZZIE
I hope he does. I *hate* this school.

ELAINE
You didn't mind when your father was paying.

LIZZIE
No, when people weren't scumsucking snobs.

ELAINE
It's girl drama, Lizzie. When you got here –

LIZZIE
Everybody was *great* till they found out I couldn't read.

ELAINE

PREVIEW

That's why your father and I put you here!

LIZZIE

Guess what: I read now! Why can't we –

ELAINE

And Lou Prep got away from bullying!

(LIZZIE gives her a look.)

No more Harrison. Nobody pinching you so hard they leave marks –

LIZZIE

Except in group chats.

ELAINE

I don't understand Reagan; she was *nice* –

LIZZIE

Goodie Two-Shoes let the other shoe drop.

ELAINE

But she invited you to her birthday, and . . . what happened?

(LIZZIE looks away. ELAINE waits her out. Finally, LIZZIE sighs heavily.)

LIZZIE

In seventh grade . . . all the girls are growing boobs, right? Reagan asks if she can put stuff in my PE locker because her lock broke. Of course! She's the bestest friend ever. I don't even watch what she's doing. It takes me extra time to change because – y'know, I won't let people see my undies. You said I was a "late bloomer" . . .

ELAINE

But what – ?

LIZZIE

When I walk out to the gym, everybody's staring at the top of the bleachers. Laughing. My, um, training bra's hanging there: "Lizzie Miraldi, Size Zero." Then I get in trouble for climbing to get it, and Reagan gets nothing because Mr. Shoulders said it could've been anybody. Anybody I let use my locker.

ELAINE

PREVIEW

Why didn't you *tell* me? I could've talked to—

LIZZIE

Regan's Daddy?

ELAINE

Dr. Birkhead was *different* before—

LIZZIE

And from then on, Regan treated me like I crawled out of a dumpster.

ELAINE

But why—?

LIZZIE

'Cause the other girls already hated me? 'Cause it was Tuesday? Who knows?

ELAINE

Lizzie, she showed you around at first! She told kids to leave you alone—

LIZZIE

Mom, I *read* now. I'll be fine in public school. You don't hafta keep mopping puke.

ELAINE

Mrs. McFadden says you still need twice a week—

LIZZIE

She doesn't wanna lose a customer.

ELAINE

What about your accommodations? The battles I fought at Hawthorne—

LIZZIE

I'm getting a zero for my project anyway—

ELAINE

That conversation's not over. You didn't mind this place when—

LIZZIE

—You weren't wiping toilets?

ELAINE

And what'll happen if I *can't* wipe those toilets?

PREVIEW

(A beat.)

Put it together, Elizabeth. What's it mean if your mother's out of work?

(LIZZIE shakes her head – what does Mom mean? ELAINE sighs in frustration.)

We're in school housing, Lizzie. And until this job, I didn't work since you were a baby. You know the "recession" thing? You won't just be in public school. We could land in a shelter.

LIZZIE

If Dad was here –

ELAINE

(holding up her hand)

Don't. Just . . . don't. Hate it all you want. Hate *me* all you want. But you need to apologize to Reagan.

LIZZIE

I'm not gonna –

ELAINE

Consider the alternative, Elizabeth.

(ELAINE exits. LIZZIE sighs and reluctantly sits down with her phone to tap out a message.)

LIZZIE

"Dear Reagan . . . I'm sorry I put zits and buckteeth on your picture. Just because you HAVE zits and buckteeth." . . .

(LIZZIE deletes her last sentence. She stares at the screen.)

"It was wrong to make your picture . . . accurate"?

(REAGAN enters.)

REAGAN

You ruined my project, Trash Queen. Now Evan thinks I should know how to code!

LIZZIE

Reagan . . . ?

PREVIEW

REAGAN

We start on my project, and he's like, "How much have you written so far?" Well, *obviously* I haven't started; that's why I need help!

LIZZIE

Coding's all we *do* in that class—

REAGAN

So he's gonna leave. "*Lizzie* knows how to code, and she's really good at it."

LIZZIE

... He said that?

REAGAN

I'm like, "Of *course* she does; *Lizzie's* a nerdnugget with no life!" Dad walks in and asks what's going on, and Evan *tells* him. Now I'm in trouble for getting Evan to do my homework, *and* he thinks I'm brain-dead because you programmed garbage!

LIZZIE

Evan said —?

REAGAN

Trying to impress your folks? "Mommy empties trashcans, and Daddy collects garbage in the chain gang. But I'm in the family business, too—I do trash with the *computer!*"

LIZZIE

Shut. Up.

REAGAN

If *my* Dad was a jailbird—

LIZZIE

Didn't he ever make a mistake? Besides you?

REAGAN

Not robbing banks—

LIZZIE

Leave. Nobody invited you—

REAGAN

I can go anywhere I want, Trash Queen. Dad lets me use his keys—

PREVIEW

LIZZIE

If you don't—I swear, Reagan—

REAGAN

(with mock surprise)

Nerdnugget Trash Queen is *threatening* me?

(REAGAN gets in LIZZIE'S face and indicates her own face, daring LIZZIE to punch her.)

Go ahead—you can share a cell with Daddy.

(LIZZIE turns away. REAGAN comes around and gets in her face again.)

I guess Coward run in the family. It takes a *real* man to rob little old ladies.

LIZZIE

(through clenched teeth)

Keep him out of it.

REAGAN

(pointing to her face, daring LIZZIE to hit her)

Go ahead, Trash Queen. Your Daddy's a big pile of chicken.

(BIRKHEAD and EVAN enter silently. They instinctively stop at the edge of the room when they see the confrontation in progress.)

LIZZIE

Get out. Of my. Face.

(REAGAN doesn't move.)

How would you like it if I talked about your Mom? The one who's *dead*?

(Suddenly, REAGAN shoves LIZZIE.)

REAGAN

Apologize. *Now*.

BIRKHEAD

Reagan?

PREVIEW

(LIZZIE pushes her back, but REAGAN grabs for LIZZIE'S hair. LIZZIE squirms away.)

LIZZIE

You little *troll* . . .

(LIZZIE grabs REAGAN'S hair and holds on. REAGAN screams.)

BIRKHEAD

Elizabeth, what are you – ? Reagan! *Girls!*

(LIZZIE still has REAGAN by the hair. REAGAN screams again. Together, BIRKHEAD and EVAN pry them apart. BIRKHEAD holds REAGAN while EVAN keeps a hand on LIZZIE.)

ELAINE

(from offstage)

Lizzie? Are you okay? I heard . . .

(She comes onstage and instantly sees there's been a fight. She speaks in a horrified whisper.)

. . . Elizabeth Renee, what did you do?

LIZZIE

She pushed me first!

(The following dialogue overlaps. To EVAN –)

You saw it, right?

REAGAN

She talked about Mom! She deserved –

LIZZIE

She was in my face; I couldn't *let* her –

REAGAN

You saw it, Dad! She's an unstable *nutjob!*

BIRKHEAD

STOP!

PREVIEW

(Silence.)

Ladies, you will be suspended from class tomorrow –

LIZZIE

(overlapping with the next line)

She pushed me –

REAGAN

I *swear* I didn't start –

BIRKHEAD

GIRLS!

(Silence again.)

– And you can *both* expect further discipline.

(He makes a peremptory gesture to REAGAN.)

REAGAN

Dad! Lizzie's the one . . .

(REAGAN goes silent under his gaze. She sullenly exits.
BIRKHEAD follows with EVAN bringing up the rear. EVAN gives
LIZZIE a sympathetic look on his way out. Silence.)

ELAINE

Elizabeth . . . do you realize what you *did*? *The Headmaster's daughter!* You signed your
expulsion papers!

(LIZZIE starts to exit.)

Don't walk away from me.

(LIZZIE is gone.)

Elizabeth! Get back here and . . . *Elizabeth!*

(Blackout. The same ominous electronic music from the beginning
of the play. Lights rise again on the HACKER and VOICES.)

VOICE 1

PREVIEW

I am pretty Russian lady looking for sexy man –

(A buzz as a USER deletes the message.)

VOICE 2

Courier unable to deliver package. Click here to reschedule –

(Another buzz.)

VOICE 1

Your checking account is overdrawn. Log in to avoid additional charges.

(The USER pauses in the light and clicks on the link.)

Lorain Community Bank. User ID?

(The USER types.)

Password?

(The USER types.)

Sorry, your account is currently unavailable.

(The light suddenly goes out on the USER.)

HACKER

And you just got hacked.

(The HACKER laughs as he quickly punches some keys. Then he steps forward to lecture the VOICES again.)

November, freshman year. I'm enjoying the ennui that only algebra provides, finding out if you can really be bored to death. Come on, we covered multiple variables in eighth grade. Doesn't anybody remember but me?

But disaster strikes when the bell sets me free, because I walk straight into a fight in the hallway. I can't see the brawlers, but the mob is making its own war, screaming and plowing me into lockers. My heart runs wind sprints and my lungs wanna explode.

I spot a busted desk by a classroom and dive underneath, balling up hedgehog-style. Then suddenly, a piercing scream overwhelms everything. The war stops; the mob goes

PREVIEW

quiet. Everybody looks around for the source. I only realize it's me when the shriek halts because I gulp for air.

Dorkius Maximus finally has Nikes, but they won't help with the social suicide I just committed. Especially when I hear the nasty sniggers. Whoops – while I hedgehogged under the desk, I also peed my pants.

That was me in the fall of freshman year – a worthless panic-attacked reject. Still, I kept the misery to myself; I wasn't robbing from morons to give to the smart. "Then I don't get it," you say. "How'd you turn to a life of crime? Why'd the sad wittle dork become a hacker?"

Let's figure out who to blame, shall we? There's no shortage of suspects. My parents gave me genes for social anxiety disorder and not much else. Darius Landry spent his school career convincing me I was worthless. Stella Hernandez laughed when I asked her to the Christmas dance. Let's blame 'em all for why I need hacking to feel something besides suicidal.

Like I said, misery is where I lived in the fall of freshman year. But new life came with spring . . . because coding.

I'd been an outcast since birth. But when I started Software Development, I was *somebody*. I don't know why programming comes naturally. I'm a freak of nature; Teenage Mutant Nerdy Coder. But in March that year, I developed this stupid app for the student newspaper. Mrs. Colón entered it in a statewide thing without telling me, and it took second place. The next year, I took first and went to nationals. After that . . . I wasn't a case study in misery anymore.

Everybody has to beat depression somehow. Mom self-medicates with the worst hooch money can buy. Some people meditate; some people kill themselves. Me? I code. It makes this worthless kid special.

But winning contests isn't enough. Designing newspaper apps gets old and white hat work is worse than algebra. The stuff I do under the cover of darkwebness, though . . . every time I land another sucker, it's like . . . I take a hit. Except the high's deeper and stronger than Mommy's bottle, and I'd do anything to get it again, and all it takes is another mark.

So who should we blame for my wicked ways? I'm not sure – but definitely not me. I'm benefitting society by treating anxiety without a shrink. Getting self-esteem without therapy. Would you rather I check into the psych ward or kill myself? Nah, hacking is my happy pill. Don't I have the bestest coping skills?

(Blackout. Lights rise slowly on Elaine's office. Once again, we hear VOICES exchanging messages. LIZZIE is slumped in a chair reading her phone screen.)

VOICE 2

Reagan, is it true? You got in a fight with Lizzie Miraldi?

REAGAN

Hashtag TrashQueen started it. She's gonna get expelled.

VOICE 2

Evan Barnum says you pushed her first.

REAGAN

Um, NO. Trash Queen was talking about my Mom.

VOICE 1

Your Mom? OMG, I'm so sorry! Scholarship kids don't know how to act.

REAGAN

And she pulled my hair. Dad had to break it up or she would've killed me.

VOICE 1

She should *totally* get expelled.

REAGAN

And her mom should get fired. The whole Trash Queen family.

(LIZZIE begins to compose a reply to Reagan's messages as EVAN enters behind her.)

LIZZIE

"Reagan, we both messed up. I'm sorry. It wasn't right to talk about your Mom. I feel really bad, and . . ."

EVAN

Lizzie?

LIZZIE

Evan . . .

EVAN

I know it's early. Thought I'd see . . .

PREVIEW

EVAN

(nodding)

I thought everybody . . . if my GPA drops I'm done. But Dr. Birkhead said he'd pay for tutoring if I work around the school.

LIZZIE

Like Mom and the computer thermostat?

EVAN

(nodding)

And that was cool, because if you were here . . .

(LIZZIE shakes her head – she doesn't understand.)

But when Reagan asked about her app, I couldn't say no.

LIZZIE

So you and Reagan . . .

EVAN

She's . . . Reagan's really . . .

LIZZIE

Really *Reagan*? Sorry, Evan.

(EVAN looks at her quizzically.)

You're in the middle. For trying to keep your scholarship.

EVAN

I'm sorry I can't do anything.

LIZZIE

Never should've signed up for Ms. Kerrigan's class.

(EVAN looks at her – "Why not"?)

It's my only one with Reagan.

EVAN

But you wouldn't learn to code.

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

I kinda knew. There's some new stuff, but—

EVAN

How'd you learn?

(LIZZIE hesitates before mentioning her father, but decides to take the plunge.)

LIZZIE

... Dad.

EVAN

Lucky. I had to teach myself.

LIZZIE

(smiling at the memory)

He promised me a phone in fourth grade when *nobody* had one. I'd be the coolest human ever . . . if I earned it writing apps.

EVAN

(smirking)

Bait and switch?

LIZZIE

No! I was Daddy's girl, and . . . grilled cheese used to be our thing. Now it was Java.

EVAN

What was your first project?

LIZZIE

I wrote this dumb app for Mom. It was supposed to say "I love you" on the lock screen? Crashed her phone.

EVAN

Mine was a cheesy little game. But when it worked . . .

(EVAN can't put his feeling into words. He looks at LIZZIE and sees she understands.)

LIZZIE

Yeah, like . . . Queen of the World!

EVAN

PREVIEW

(laughing and nodding)

Master of All Computers! I would hide under the blanket to finish apps at bedtime.

LIZZIE

I'd tell Dad I was almost done and get to stay up – *if* it was true. He checked.

EVAN

I wish my folks . . .

(He shakes his head to dismiss the thought.)

But I never quit. You?

LIZZIE

I . . . took a break.

(EVAN looks at her inquiringly.)

After Dad . . . I tried, and . . . I cried. Ms. Kerrigan's class kinda brought me back.

EVAN

Good. You're too good to quit.

(LIZZIE shakes her head and sighs. The thoughts about Dad have brought her crashing down to earth.)

LIZZIE

Doesn't matter. I'm going back to public school.

EVAN

Lizzie, Birkhead won't –

LIZZIE

I can't pay for books.

EVAN

It's only seven-fifty, right?

(LIZZIE shrugs hopelessly.)

Lizzie . . . I have money. I'm on scholarship, but I've got a savings account.

(It takes her a moment to realize what he means.)

PREVIEW

That's crazy. You can't—

LIZZIE

I *want* to, Lizzie. I said I can't do anything, but—

EVAN

It's not right—

LIZZIE

Why? If Dr. Birkhead kicks you out, give it back.

EVAN

(LIZZIE shakes her head. EVAN tries to explain.)

You know how Reagan . . . Lizzie, *she's not worth liking back.*

LIZZIE

You shouldn't say—

EVAN

—But there's some people who . . .
(firmly)
I wanna pay for your books.

LIZZIE

Evan, you can't—

(She stops abruptly when ELAINE enters. Short pause.)

EVAN

I mean it, Lizzie.

(He gives her a long look as he starts to exit.)

See you later?

LIZZIE

(glumly)
If I'm still here.

EVAN

Bye, Ms. Miraldi.

(He's gone. ELAINE smiles mischievously.)

PREVIEW

ELAINE

So. This boy you like at a distance . . .

LIZZIE

Mom . . .

(short pause)

I guess . . . he's not so distant.

ELAINE

I was thinking. Dr. Birkhead *saw* Reagan push you, right?

(LIZZIE nods.)

If he kicks you out, she'd have to go too. But the book money, that'll be his reason. So . . . where do we get 750 bucks?

LIZZIE

. . . We kinda have it.

(ELAINE isn't sure what this means.)

Evan offered me money.

ELAINE

Are you sure you understood?

LIZZIE

I didn't *ask* him—

ELAINE

All of it?

LIZZIE

(rolling her eyes)

Not everybody's as broke as us.

ELAINE

We're not emptying that boy's bank account.

LIZZIE

I *told* him that, Mom. And he said . . . some people are *worth caring about*.

(short pause)

PREVIEW

He's not Harrison.

ELAINE
(choosing her words carefully)

Well. I'm very happy —

LIZZIE
Evan's keeping us from being homeless!

ELAINE
. . . Does he have a job?

LIZZIE
You said I couldn't get kicked out —

ELAINE
Elizabeth, we shouldn't *need* his money. You know how to handle bullies, but when Reagan —

LIZZIE
She was talking about Dad!

ELAINE
Was it true?

(LIZZIE looks away.)

It takes two to tango. What did you say?

LIZZIE
I told you — Dad!

ELAINE
And you said . . . ?

LIZZIE
. . . Same as her.

(ELAINE is puzzled for a moment, then realizes what LIZZIE means.)

ELAINE
Her mother *died*, Elizabeth Renee!

PREVIEW

And Dad's a jailbird!

LIZZIE

That's when the pushing started?

ELAINE

(LIZZIE shrugs.)

You gave her exactly what she wanted! Dr. Birkhead was *different* when his wife was alive, Lizzie, but now —

Reagan's poop don't stink.

LIZZIE

If you give Birkhead a reason —

ELAINE

But he *can't*, Mom, because we have the money!

LIZZIE

We're not taking —

ELAINE

Do you wanna be homeless?

LIZZIE

We barely *know* Evan!

ELAINE

He *cares* about me —

LIZZIE

Which is *wonderful* —

ELAINE

If he wants to give me money, why . . . ?

LIZZIE

(ELAINE is about to speak, but LIZZIE interrupts.)

Never mind. Thanks for destroying my *existence*.

PREVIEW

ELAINE

Elizabeth Renee, listen to me. When Dad wanted to put you in school here –

LIZZIE

Which is my fault ‘cause he stole for tuition –

ELAINE

I’ve *never* said . . . Dad hacked for our whole marriage! But you understand, right? Why we can’t take Evan’s money?

(LIZZIE suddenly realizes where ELAINE is going with this.)

LIZZIE

Um . . . *what?*

ELAINE

It’s *possible* – I’m not saying – it’s just *possible*, when we don’t know Evan –

LIZZIE

Oh, I know whose fault Dad’s hacking was.

ELAINE

Good. Because when you write to him, I wonder –

LIZZIE

Not him; he was trying to help me read.

ELAINE

Please don’t blame yourself –

LIZZIE

I *don’t*. Who wouldn’t go back to work after I was born?

ELAINE

What? . . . With a special needs daughter –

LIZZIE

Who told Dad she wanted a house, when she *knew* his anxiety –

ELAINE

What? . . . Elizabeth Renee, you need to check yourself –

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

So Dad came up with the Lou Prep money . . . *how?* Nobody walks into the boss's office and comes out with a twenty-thousand-dollar raise.

ELAINE

How would I know? I worked *coffeeshops* in college!

LIZZIE

You loved it, Mom. You *loved* the cash, so you never asked –

ELAINE

I never *suspected* –

LIZZIE

Because you didn't want to! Not when Dad could've stopped, or *fixed* things –

ELAINE

Is this what he writes to you? I'll go to the judge if he's –

LIZZIE

IT WASN'T DAD! I HAVE A BRAIN!

(Pause.)

You could've stopped it, Mom. Maybe he never would've *started*. But now Evan's *protecting* me, and he's not even my boyfriend, and you won't . . . is it because he can't buy you a house like Dad?

(LIZZIE starts to exit.)

ELAINE

Elizabeth Renee, you are not . . . where are you going?

LIZZIE

To find Evan.

ELAINE

We're not taking that boy's money!

(LIZZIE exits. ELAINE calls after her.)

Elizabeth Renee, I'm still your mother!

PREVIEW

(She angrily follows LIZZIE from the room. Once she's gone, BIRKHEAD enters. He's followed by EVAN and a sullen, heel-dragging REAGAN.)

EVAN

Dr. Birkhead, you *saw* it!

(BIRKHEAD ignores him.)

I mean – sorry, Reagan – she pushed Lizzie first!

REAGAN

(furiously)

Trash Queen talked about *Mom!*

BIRKHEAD

Don't call her that.

REAGAN

Don't you love Mom?

BIRKHEAD

Young lady, love has nothing –

REAGAN

And *I'm* suspended? When Trash Queen said –

BIRKHEAD

Don't call her that!

REAGAN

She's *unstable!* She pulled my hair by the *roots* –

BIRKHEAD

Do you need to see Dr. Lantham again?

(REAGAN reluctantly goes silent.)

Won't your little friends be impressed if you return to therapy?

(Sullenly, REAGAN turns away. EVAN seizes the opportunity to make his case.)

PREVIEW

EVAN

Dr. Birkhead, since Lizzie didn't start—

BIRKHEAD

(snapping at him)

Don't remind me, Mr. Barnum.

(to REAGAN)

Yesterday I found, in *clear* violation of the Honor Code, that my daughter expected you to do her homework. I also discovered she has *no* self-control—

REAGAN

I *told* you—

BIRKHEAD

I don't care *what* the girl said—

REAGAN

She *pushed* me!

BIRKHEAD

Which was richly deserved—

EVAN

I'm just saying, if you expel Lizzie—

BIRKHEAD

Are you Elizabeth Miraldi's parent or guardian?

EVAN

Sorry. Sorry, Dr. Birkhead.

(He starts to exit, but then turns back.)

Um . . . about helping with computer stuff . . . ?

BIRKHEAD

I'm grateful for your service to Ms. Miraldi . . . and my daughter. Your debt is satisfied.

EVAN

Thanks. Okay . . . sorry, I mean . . . sorry.

(EVAN exits hastily.)

BIRKHEAD

(calling offstage)

PREVIEW

Elizabeth? Elaine? Are you here?

(He waits for a response.)

REAGAN

They're gone. Tragic.

BIRKHEAD

You'll have to write a note.

(REAGAN doesn't turn around.)

I checked your group chat. After you heaped abuse on her –

REAGAN

(turning back to him)

You were *spying*?

BIRKHEAD

–She *apologized*. Does the “Trash Queen” have more decency than my daughter?

REAGAN

She's trying not to get expelled!

BIRKHEAD

That's irrelevant.

REAGAN

What would *you* do if somebody insulted Mom? Is it “irrelevant”?

BIRKHEAD

Wake up, young lady!

(He looks at REAGAN, willing her to understand. She looks back – she has no idea what he's driving at.)

Since your mother left us, I've been . . . indulgent. It's time for a reality check. Suppose a certain student's felonious father has been a fixture on local newscasts. The reports cite his daughter's private school tuition as the reason for his crimes. Then the headmaster's daughter, driven by jealousy over a boy –

REAGAN

What? I don't like *Evan* –

PREVIEW

BIRKHEAD

—Gets in a fight with this student—

REAGAN

But she said—

BIRKHEAD

The school board, which, behind closed doors has expressed . . . opinions . . . hears about the fight. The problem student has apologized. The headmaster's daughter has done nothing. Do you see the problem?

(REAGAN reluctantly nods.)

You're going to write Elizabeth a letter as soon as we get home. And I'm going to read it when you're finished.

(BIRKHEAD'S phone chimes.)

VOICE 1

Dr. Birkhead, there was an envelope under my door this morning marked for Elizabeth Miraldi's book fees. Paid in full. Thought you'd want to know.

REAGAN

(reading over his shoulder)

So I don't hafta write—?

BIRKHEAD

I said no such thing.

(BIRKHEAD firmly points offstage. REAGAN exits as BIRKHEAD follows, typing on his phone. The beginning-of-the-day bell rings. Once they're gone, LIZZIE and ELAINE enter.)

ELAINE

Sit. We're going to talk. If I thought for *one minute* your father was stealing—

LIZZIE

—But you didn't, so Evan must be just like him.

ELAINE

You will *not* talk to me like—

PREVIEW

LIZZIE

You don't *get* it! You don't get *any* of it!

ELAINE

Try me.

LIZZIE

I'm getting blamed for *everything!* Reagan's bullying me, okay? And I did stuff too, but the only one in trouble . . . I get it; our family makes Lou Prep look bad. But how's that on me? Dickhead wants me gone—

ELAINE

Don't call him that—

LIZZIE

— Because everything Dad did, and everything Reagan did's *my* fault, so I'm getting expelled!

ELAINE

You don't know that—

LIZZIE

Then how's it end? Me and Reagan hug it out, and her Daddy forgets my Daddy, and you pick \$750 off the Money Tree because you won't let Evan pay? How is this *fair*?

ELAINE

It's *not*, Lizzie. Sometimes life *sucks*—

LIZZIE

You don't *know*, Mom! How it feels when *Everything's. Your. Fault!*

(pause)

You wanna talk. So . . . tell me how I ruined everything before I pack.

ELAINE

. . . I understand.

LIZZIE

Understand *what*?

ELAINE

When it's all your fault. Everybody wants to blame me for Dad, too.

(LIZZIE realizes she was one of the people who piled it on.)

PREVIEW

LIZZIE

No . . . No, Mom, I didn't mean—

(ELAINE'S phone pings.)

VOICE 2

Toilet overflowing in the middle school girls' room.

ELAINE

(standing to go)

Duty calls.

LIZZIE

Honestly. I didn't mean—

ELAINE

I know. I know, Lizzie. I'm just saying . . . I understand.

(She starts to exit. As she's leaving, EVAN enters.)

Why aren't you in class?

EVAN

Hey, Ms. Miraldi. We have a sub, so I asked if I could help with the computer again.

ELAINE

(giving him a look)

We finished.

EVAN

Please? It's not like I'm vandalizing lockers . . .

ELAINE

You better go to class. And Lizzie has something she needs to tell you . . . right, Elizabeth?

(LIZZIE looks guilty. ELAINE exits.)

EVAN

What are you supposed to say?

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

. . . Tell you later.

EVAN

Then . . . can I tell *you* something?

(LIZZIE shrugs – of course.)

. . . I paid your book fees.

LIZZIE

You . . . when?

EVAN

Before first period. I thought your Mom –

LIZZIE

She won't take the money.

EVAN

What she doesn't know won't hurt her.

(LIZZIE stares at him.)

Is that okay?

LIZZIE

Yeah, it's totally . . . thank you. *Thank you.*

(LIZZIE gives him an awkward hug.)

I can't pay you back.

EVAN

You won't leave, right?

(LIZZIE nods. Short pause.)

LIZZIE

. . . I don't understand. You couldn't pay for tutoring, right? You had to help Dr. Birkhead with computer stuff?

(EVAN nods.)

PREVIEW

Then how do you have money for my books?

(EVAN is visibly deflated.)

EVAN

Lizzie . . . this is really bad. I didn't get tutoring.

(LIZZIE shakes her head in confusion.)

Okay. Okay, last semester, I'm about to flunk U.S. History. And the midterm's in two days. Well . . . I'm hanging out after school, and Mr. Latimer's room is unlocked, and I walk in because . . . anyway, the midterm's on his desk.

LIZZIE

Like . . . answers?

EVAN

But I didn't look! I get home, and I think, *he'll put the test away before school in the morning. Of course he will.* But if it's still there . . . it's like a sign, right?

I take a picture of the test the next day because *it's still there!* I get the only perfect score. But kids start complaining they were marked off for stuff that's *correct*. So Mr. Latimer regrades everybody's paper . . . guess whose score went down?

LIZZIE

Evan . . .

EVAN

Dr. Birkhead calls me in. Yeah, I should get kicked out. But sometimes, if it's a kid's first mistake, they can do community service—

LIZZIE

—Like computers for Mom?

EVAN

And installing software in the office, and helping Reagan with her project . . . it was pretty annoying.

LIZZIE

Know what else is annoying?

EVAN

“The Honor Code”?

PREVIEW

(LIZZIE shrugs her agreement. EVAN sighs.)

I guess . . . okay. Okay. If your mom asks . . . I went back to class.

(He starts to exit.)

LIZZIE

Evan . . . ?

(EVAN turns.)

You don't learn when the answers —

EVAN

(sarcastically)

Thanks, Birkhead.

LIZZIE

No! I mean . . . it was your own test, right?

(EVAN nods.)

Nobody else got hurt, right? And you finished community service?

(EVAN nods again.)

LIZZIE

Just . . . *tell* me things. Please? "Secrets are not allowed."

(EVAN nods once more. Short pause.)

EVAN

. . . See you in class?

LIZZIE

. . . Don't.

(EVAN looks at her quizzically.)

Can I see you *now*?

PREVIEW

(EVAN is finally assured that she isn't going to hold this against him. He sighs and laughs in relief.)

EVAN

I . . . like to be seen.

LIZZIE

Please don't keep secrets. Okay?

(EVAN nods.)

There's one more. Your notebook? "Snave Terces Rial"?

EVAN

It's my handle on Stack Exchange. Like, where people post code —

LIZZIE

I *know* what Stack Exchange is. What's it mean?

EVAN

Read it backwards.

LIZZIE

"Evan's . . . Secret . . . Lair."

EVAN

Me and my brother used to talk backwards — see if the other one could figure it out. Also to annoy our parents. Now you know my *second*-worst secret.

(sitting down at Elaine's desk computer)

Wanna see the Terces Rial?

(LIZZIE looks at him cautiously. EVAN hastens to explain.)

The server space where I save projects.

LIZZIE

Di Evol Ot.

EVAN

"I'd love to." Very good.

(They both laugh . . . then find themselves awkwardly looking into each others' eyes. EVAN breaks away first.)

PREVIEW

EVAN

You wanna learn more Java? We could work on your garbage app.

LIZZIE

(with a wry smile)

Don't tell Reagan. Can we add a recycling feature?

EVAN

Easy. The code's almost like what you have, just different lookups.

(EVAN puts an arm around LIZZIE'S chair. She stiffens for a moment, but then relaxes and leans into his arms.)

LIZZIE

Maybe . . . work in a minute?

(EVAN nods. He kisses her on the head.)

Because . . . I Ekil Uoy.

(EVAN wraps her more tightly in his arms.)

EVAN

I like you, too.

(Slow blackout.)

- OPTIONAL INTERMISSION -

(The same ominous electronic music from the beginning of the play. Lights rise again on the HACKER.)

VOICE 1

Save on prescription drugs, all one hundred percent legal—

(A buzz as a USER deletes the message.)

VOICE 2

We number one America web developer, bring you new sales—

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PREVIEW

(Another buzz.)

VOICE 1

Don't spend another day without love. Beautiful naked ladies are waiting for you.

(The USER pauses in the light and clicks on the link.)

Enter credit card to verify you're 18.

(The USER types.)

Sorry, the beautiful ladies have clothes on. Try again later.

(The light suddenly goes out on the USER.)

HACKER

This is for Baby Girl's college fund!

(The HACKER laughs as he punches some keys. Then he steps forward to lecture the VOICES.)

Sophomore year of college. I'm just another socially-incompetent dork in the dorm. But at the computer science building, I score straight As and I'm barely trying. I finally feel . . . I'm not sure, but I think it's called "normal."

One day I ask a girl to dinner – eat your heart out, Stella Hernandez. She says yes. Elaine doesn't notice I'm a living train wreck. Meanwhile, I live to code. Yeah, I'm one of those dorks who spends all night at my PC with a Red Bull and forgets to shower. But the panic attacks are *gone*; feeling worthless is *gone*. I get to swim in Java instead of dealing with the moronic clones from high school.

The fun lasts until senior year. But then I make a horrible discovery: every internship, every job interview requires meeting with *people*. And you know what triggers my panic attacks more reliably than hallway fights? That's right, Sherlock – *people*.

Things go from scary to terrifying when two months before graduation, Elaine tells me she's pregnant. I need a job in the worst way, but guess what? Anxiety is demolishing my life. No matter what kind of code you can write, no manager's gonna hire you when you throw up on their desk during the interview. Yeah, that happened.

Eight months pass while I bomb interviews, living on credit cards as my girlfriend plans the world's cheapest wedding and works as a barista. Baby Girl arrives. Eventually I land a tech support job teaching morons with double my salary and half

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PREVIEW

my IQ how to use a mouse. But I'm melting down every day because . . . because *people*. My manager's like, "You keep stuttering on the phones, I'll hafta let you go."

My bride can't work because our kid inherited my anxiety; Baby Girl cried eight hours a day during her only week of day care. I'm trying to support this child who's got my genes, and I'm constantly on the edge of getting fired.

One day at work I'm on the phone with a guy who can't find the F1 key. I tell him he should be asking people if they want fries with that. Turns out he's a VP in sales. Have you ever been escorted out of a building by security?

I keep "leaving for work" every morning because I'm ashamed to tell my wife I got canned. Then a week later, I get an email: my health insurance is ending. No more doctors for Baby Girl. But . . . what if I could change my termination date and keep the insurance? How hard can it be to hack an HR portal? Turns out a fifth grader could do it.

It didn't take long to realize fifth graders could do other things, too. Mom used to talk about the money tree we didn't have in the backyard, but I grew one. Paid for Baby Girl's therapy. Then our bills. Credit cards. We bought a house . . .

"Didn't you feel guilty?" you ask. Of course! But not because I was robbing and pillaging. Because Baby Girl had my genes, and no matter what I bought for her, I couldn't make it better. My mistake was getting careless when she needed private school. But it's okay. Elaine found a way to keep her at Lou Prep. And yeah, I've got three more years in here . . .

(The lights rise on Elaine's office enough for us to see LIZZIE is reading an email from her phone.)

Sure, I hack for money and for warm fuzzies. But mostly . . . I do it for *you*, Lizzie. Never feel sorry for your old man; I gave you what you deserve. I've wanted the best for you since the day you were born. If prison's what it takes . . . hard time's just the cost of doing business. The cost of loving my Baby Girl. Love, Daddy.

(The HACKER exits. Dim lights return to the custodial office. LIZZIE tucks the letter into her pocket and tries to sneak out without being noticed, but LIZZIE doesn't realize that ELAINE is sitting by the computer. ELAINE takes on a teasing tone.)

ELAINE

So . . .?

PREVIEW

(LIZZIE looks at her quizzically.)

You and Evan . . . ?

LIZZIE

(rolling her eyes)

We wrote code, Mom.

(ELAINE smirks and turns a blank screen towards LIZZIE.)

ELAINE

This code?

LIZZIE

We were — going to.

ELAINE

Did you get a kiss?

LIZZIE

Mom!

(LIZZIE rolls her eyes, but then takes a deep breath and decides to 'fess up.)

Not on the lips. Here.

(pointing to the top of her head and grinning shyly)

I didn't wash my hair.

ELAINE

My first kiss? I didn't brush my teeth for two days.

(Pause.)

LIZZIE

Remember my first project — coding? The "LoveMommy" app?

ELAINE

(with mock fear)

Is that a threat?

LIZZIE

Mom! Dad was teaching me Java, and I thought if it was a surprise —

PREVIEW

ELAINE

That it was.

LIZZIE

I didn't know about infinite loops! But coding was my thing with Dad, and I could tell you wanted *us* to have a thing—

ELAINE

“Love-you-Mommy, love-you-Mommy, love-you-Mommy” — it wouldn't stop!

LIZZIE

—I *tried!* I wrote something for you, 'cause even when we don't get each other—

ELAINE

Your father had to factory reset my phone!

LIZZIE

—I thought, “Maybe it'll help. Maybe me and Mom will . . . bond.”

ELAINE

And you were trying to get out of trouble for not loading the dishwasher—

LIZZIE

(grinning slightly)

Did it work?

ELAINE

It was a beautiful thought, Lizzie. I loved your app.

(LIZZIE looks at her incredulously.)

As soon as it was off my phone.

LIZZIE

(smiling ruefully)

Anyway . . . I'm sorry. About before. About . . . Dad.

ELAINE

No. You were right. I was a big girl. I should've seen what he was doing. I didn't know, but . . . I knew. I *knew*.

(ELAINE looks at LIZZIE to see if she understands.)

PREVIEW

It was never your fault, Lizzie. It was Dad, and . . . I was a big girl.

(Silence.)

LIZZIE

I wanna stay at Lou Prep. If I can.

ELAINE

(with a smirk)

For obvious reasons?

LIZZIE

No. For . . . *less* obvious reasons.

ELAINE

If you need to leave –

LIZZIE

I'm not running away.

ELAINE

When you have an *anxiety disorder* –

LIZZIE

(putting up a hand to stop ELAINE)

Mom, we don't *get* each other.

ELAINE

You're Daddy's girl; it's okay –

LIZZIE

But we're *good*, Mom. Even when we argue . . . we're *good*.

(ELAINE nods. She's not sure where this is going.)

Yesterday I get suspended. I've *never* been suspended. But Evan comes over . . .

ELAINE

. . . Elizabeth?

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

—And I'm thinking, *What'll Dr. Birkhead do? What if I can't stay at Lou Prep? Then . . . I think: It's okay to be scared. Mom and Evan are here.*

ELAINE

I never knew what to do with a daughter.

LIZZIE

You figured it out.

(LIZZIE reaches out impulsively to hug her mom. ELAINE hugs back. Pause. BIRKHEAD enters.)

ELAINE

. . . Dr. Birkhead?

BIRKHEAD

(handing LIZZIE a sealed envelope)

Reagan wanted you to have this. Before school starts for the day. You'll want to read it too, Elaine.

ELAINE

Lizzie . . . ?

(She motions to LIZZIE — is it okay to read over your shoulder? LIZZIE nods.)

REAGAN

(voiceover)

"Lizzie, I'm sorry I pushed you and tried to pull your hair. And that I called your mother and father names. It won't happen again. Sincerely, Reagan Birkhead."

ELAINE

That's . . . very nice. Will you thank Reagan for us?

BIRKHEAD

Elizabeth will see her in Computer Science.

ELAINE

Lizzie . . . ?

(LIZZIE nods warily.)

BIRKHEAD

PREVIEW

I'm afraid I have . . . other news. As you know, Elizabeth has been attending Louisville Prep on an employee tuition waiver. The school board, not I, made a decision yesterday —

LIZZIE

(sarcastically, to ELAINE)

Bet they upped my scholarship.

(ELAINE shoots her a warning look.)

BIRKHEAD

In light of the recent . . . incident, the board revoked Elizabeth and Reagan's tuition waivers. When the semester ends, Elizabeth will be unable to continue her studies unless —

ELAINE

Of course, since the Birkheads can pay —

BIRKHEAD

That's irrelevant.

ELAINE

It's *completely* relevant. You're tossing out my daughter —

BIRKHEAD

The board, Elaine. Perhaps if you had a savings account —

ELAINE

You know what I earn —

BIRKHEAD

If your husband had tried *honest* work —

ELAINE

Excuse me?

BIRKHEAD

—Or if you hadn't looked away?

ELAINE

I knew *nothing* about my husband's —

BIRKHEAD

PREVIEW

How convenient for you –

ELAINE

What are you implying?

BIRKHEAD

I'm not sure. Willful complicity . . . or imbecilic stupidity?

(ELAINE suddenly stands and advances towards BIRKHEAD.)

LIZZIE

(yanking her back)

Mom! Mom, don't . . . the end of the semester! He could kick us out now –

BIRKHEAD

Listen to her, Elaine. Elizabeth may remain three more weeks . . . unless I'm forced to fire her mother.

(tossing an envelope on ELAINE'S desk)

Your tuition invoice.

(BIRKHEAD exits. ELAINE sits down and takes deep breaths. The school bell rings.)

LIZZIE

Mom?

(No answer.)

Mom, are you – ?

ELAINE

Go to class.

LIZZIE

But if you're –

ELAINE

Go to class. I need to job hunt. I'm not working for Dickhead one day longer than I have to.

(With a wary look at ELAINE, LIZZIE exits. ELAINE sits down at the computer and begins to type grimly. EVAN enters.)

PREVIEW

EVAN

Ms. Miraldi?

ELAINE

Evan . . . didn't we have this conversation yesterday?

EVAN

(with a sheepish smile – he's busted)

We have a sub again; I thought . . .

ELAINE

Lizzie went to class.

EVAN

Good.

ELAINE

No kisses on the head. You better get back.

(EVAN blushes and turns to go, then comes back.)

EVAN

It's good, right? If Lizzie's in class?

ELAINE

(with a sigh)

Evan, I know you and Lizzie . . .

(ELAINE tosses him the envelope left by Dr. Birkhead and motions for him to open it. EVAN shakes his head.)

I know what it says.

EVAN

She's expelled?

(ELAINE motions to the envelope. EVAN finally opens it and scans the letter.)

EVAN

This doesn't say . . . oh . . . oh.

(He tosses the letter back on her desk.)

PREVIEW

ELAINE

The Birkheads pay Reagan's tuition for one semester and she stays in school. Lizzie goes out with the trash.

EVAN

That's not fair. Don't you have savings or — ?

ELAINE

She'd be gone over book money anyway.

(EVAN looks puzzled.)

I guess Lizzie didn't tell you: we can't take your savings. I bless you for it, but . . .

EVAN

So you and Lizzie . . .

ELAINE

We'll go back to Akron. Family.

(EVAN nods.)

You've made Lizzie happy. More than anything since . . . I hope your parents are very proud of you.

(ELAINE loses her voice for a moment.)

We're here through the end of the semester. Maybe you should think . . . you and Lizzie. Will it hurt more now, or in three weeks?

(EVAN nods slowly. ELAINE turns and exits. REAGAN enters. She sees EVAN and freezes.)

EVAN

. . . Reagan?

REAGAN

Where's Ms. Miraldi?

EVAN

I swear, Reagan, if you came down for —

PREVIEW

REAGAN

Where's Ms. Miraldi? Do you *live* here now?

EVAN

Protecting her from you.

REAGAN

The ceiling's leaking in Mr. G's room. Are *you* gonna fix it?

EVAN

I'll tell her.

REAGAN

Mr. G told *me* –

EVAN

I'll *tell* her. Or do you wanna twist the knife?

REAGAN

Lizzie's not expelled.

EVAN

She can't pay. Same thing.

REAGAN

Sorry about your girlfriend. Now will you –

EVAN

I'll *tell* Ms. Miraldi.

(A brief staring contest.)

REAGAN

If Ms. Miraldi doesn't come up, I'll tell Dad. *And* I'll tell him how you're acting. He says we spend too much on scholarships.

(REAGAN exits. EVAN takes a deep breath and steps over to the hacker space. Lights immediately change, and we hear the same music as before. He takes out his own laptop and types on the computer for a moment.)

VOICE 2

Louisville Preparatory Academy: please log in.

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PREVIEW

Reagan-dot-Birkhead. EVAN

Password? VOICE 2

Oh-seven-sixteen. EVAN
(Buzz.)
July16.

Reagan Birkhead: network access granted. VOICE 2

Login dot Louisville Bank dot com. EVAN

(The music changes and becomes more intense, more ominous.)

Louisville National Bank, where customers come first. User name? VOICE 1

LouPrep. EVAN

Password? VOICE 1

H-dash-master 27. EVAN

Welcome, Louisville Preparatory Academy. Balance one million, six hundred thousand, fifty-two dollars. VOICE 1

Wire transfer. EVAN

(alert sound)
WARNING: Never wire money to anyone you do not know well. Do you wish to continue? VOICE 1

PREVIEW

(EVAN allows himself a smile as he firmly clicks the mouse. Blackout. When the lights return, LIZZIE is entering the apartment after school with EVAN. ELAINE is sitting at her computer as LIZZIE shows EVAN something on her phone.)

LIZZIE

. . . Did you *see* it? Her so-called app? Static webpage. All you can do is scroll through pictures of Reagan modeling outfits.

EVAN

That's *it*? Well, she looks good in . . .

(catching a look from LIZZIE)

. . . But you'd look better.

ELAINE

(smirking from behind the computer)

Nice save.

LIZZIE

Didn't hear "Trash Queen" all day.

ELAINE

Are you gonna redo your presentation?

LIZZIE

Ms. Kerrigan said I don't have to. When she saw the apps people turned in—

EVAN

I *told* you it was good.

LIZZIE

A-minus.

ELAINE

I'm proud of you, girlie!

(She stands up and gives LIZZIE a hug. To EVAN—)

Speaking of Reagan . . . Evan, you didn't tell me.

EVAN

Tell you what?

PREVIEW

(He remembers.)
... The leak. Sorry, Ms. Miraldi—

ELAINE

It's like I tell Lizzie: *write it down*.

EVAN

Totally. I'm so sorry ...

ELAINE

Lizzie ...? Did you—?

LIZZIE

Did I ...?

(It dawns on her.)

Oh ... Evan, you wanna have dinner with us?

ELAINE

Do teenagers write *anything* down?

EVAN

I put stuff in my phone.

(ELAINE gives him a look.)

Usually.

ELAINE

(shaking her head and standing up to head for the kitchen)

Evan, you okay with fried chicken?

LIZZIE

From a box?

EVAN

Just like Mom makes.

ELAINE

I'll be in the kitchen. Evan ... you remember what we talked about? Three weeks?

(EVAN nods reluctantly. ELAINE exits. EVAN watches her go, then immediately pulls LIZZIE aside and thrusts a large envelope into her hands.)

PREVIEW

Here. EVAN

What's . . . ? LIZZIE

(She opens the envelope. It's full of hundred-dollar bills.)

Evan . . . how — ?

Tuition money. We'll figure out a story for your Mom. EVAN

Evan, I can't — LIZZIE

I *care* about you. EVAN

I know; of course I . . . is this *all* of it? LIZZIE

(She starts counting the money.)

Swear you won't tell where it came from. Not even your Mom. EVAN

Not even — ? LIZZIE

— Swear. EVAN

From your savings account? LIZZIE

— *Swear*. EVAN

. . . I swear. LIZZIE

(She pulls EVAN into a bear hug.)

Thank you . . . thank you . . .

EVAN

(holding her and stroking her hair)

Don't go anywhere, okay?

LIZZIE

Yes . . . of course, yes . . .

(Pause. LIZZIE pulls back from the hug.)

. . . Where did you get this?

EVAN

. . . I told you.

LIZZIE

Because . . . my Mom, when you tried to give us book money . . .

(LIZZIE loses her nerve to continue. She just shakes her head.)

EVAN

People pay me to code.

LIZZIE

You should text your folks. About dinner.

EVAN

Yeah.

(EVAN steps away to write a text on his phone. BIRKHEAD enters. He seems distracted and his usual arrogance is missing. LIZZIE sees him.)

LIZZIE

Dr. Birkhead?

(BIRKHEAD is uncharacteristically silent.)

. . . Do you need my Mom?

PREVIEW

(BIRKHEAD shakes his head.)

Am I in trouble?

BIRKHEAD

No . . . no, Elizabeth . . .

(handing her an envelope)

Would you give this to your mother?

(LIZZIE nods.)

She submitted her resignation. She may wish to reconsider.

LIZZIE

Dr. Birkhead, if I'm not in school—

BIRKHEAD

But with a new Head—

LIZZIE

A what?

BIRKHEAD

I've had cause to rethink some things, Elizabeth.

(BIRKHEAD stares into space without speaking. LIZZIE looks at him with concern.)

LIZZIE

Let me get Mom.

BIRKHEAD

No. No, I'm perfectly fine.

(a deep breath)

Elizabeth? Reagan would never say . . . well. We're sorry. Both of us.

LIZZIE

. . . About . . . ?

BIRKHEAD

I daresay by tomorrow . . .

(LIZZIE'S phone pings.)

PREVIEW

Or today. You have a bright future, Elizabeth. We need more young women in computer science.

(LIZZIE nods, confused. BIRKHEAD exits slowly. LIZZIE looks down at her phone.)

VOICE 1

Did you hear? Reagan stole ten thousand dollars from OUR SCHOOL!

VOICE 2

Reagan BIRKHEAD?

VOICE 1

My Dad's on the school board, and he's voting to fire her dad.

VOICE 2

Dr. Birkhead? Why?

VOICE 1

She got the bank password somewhere.

VOICE 2

That's *crazy!* How'd she get caught?

VOICE 1

Don't you LISTEN in Ms. Kerrigan's class? Server logs.

VOICE 2

Reagan Birkhead is hashtag CrimeQueen!

VOICE 1

Picture CrimeQueen in Juvie . . . they'll kill her.

VOICE 2

She deserves it. Dad says tuition's too high, and she's stealing money. Hashtag CrimeQueen!

(LIZZIE sets down her phone. She looks at EVAN fearfully.)

EVAN

Everything okay? With Dr. Birkhead?

PREVIEW

(LIZZIE stares at him.)

Mom said I can stay . . . Lizzie?

(Pause. LIZZIE finally finds the courage to ask a question.)

LIZZIE

Evan . . . how's phishing work?

EVAN

. . . What?

LIZZIE

I . . . I saw something online.

EVAN

Don't you know?

(LIZZIE shakes her head.)

Okay . . . um, with the HVAC system? When I was helping your mom? I asked what password she wanted.

(a small smile)

Your middle name.

LIZZIE

That was dumb.

EVAN

She doesn't get it. Anyway, if I know your mom, I can guess the password.

LIZZIE

That's phishing?

EVAN

(shaking his head)

Guessing. Phishing is . . . okay, say I *don't* know your Mom. I email like I'm from Stengler Heating and say she has to verify the password. Only the link goes to my site.

LIZZIE

So you get her password and use it for . . .

(EVAN shrugs – that's all there is to it.)

PREVIEW

... You could do that with money, right? Get a password using a fake Louisville Bank site?

EVAN

... I guess?

LIZZIE

Because I saw ... in Terces Rial. Louisville Bank dot com. Spelled with two Ks.

EVAN

... What?

LIZZIE

Reagan just got *expelled*.

EVAN

... What?

LIZZIE

She stole 10,000 dollars from Lou Prep.

(She hands EVAN her phone.)

EVAN

Reagan *Birkhead*?

LIZZIE

You know why my Dad's in jail? He wanted me in this school. He hacked people's accounts —

EVAN

Ten thousand dollars?

LIZZIE

— And when you offered the book money, Mom said — she *warned* me —

EVAN

No wonder Dr. Birkhead's acting weird!

LIZZIE

STOP!

PREVIEW

(He stares at her.)

Swear you'll tell the truth.

EVAN

Of course —

LIZZIE

Secrets are not allowed. Not if — not if you care about —

EVAN

Lizzie, do you really —

LIZZIE

What's Reagan's network password, Evan? Is it her birthday?

EVAN

Lizzie —

LIZZIE

Never mind. Did you take the book money?

(EVAN starts to speak, but LIZZIE holds up a hand to stop him.)

Swear. Did you take it?

EVAN

(evasively)

... Some of it.

LIZZIE

(holding up the envelope he gave her for tuition)

And this. Lou Prep's bank account, right?

EVAN

How could I *care* if I let you get thrown out?

(LIZZIE glares.)

Lizzie ... okay. Okay, what if I liked Reagan?

(LIZZIE looks at him: Does he?)

PREVIEW

Think about it. Me and Reagan are together, and she's pissed –

LIZZIE

Do you? Like Reagan?

EVAN

Think about it. “I’ll get Lizzie kicked out,” I tell her. “Make it look like she stole from school.” Then I log in as you . . . it’s the *same thing*, Lizzie. And do you think, you *really* think she’d say no?

(He pulls up something on his phone and tries to shows it to LIZZIE.)

Lizzie . . . look at this.

(LIZZIE shakes her head and looks away.)

Just *look!* . . . Please. It’s where I texted my folks.

LIZZIE

(puzzled)

It’s blank.

(EVAN nods.)

So . . . when you said you could stay . . .

EVAN

It’s after school, so Mom’s drunk by now.

LIZZIE

Doesn’t she care where you are?

EVAN

Not unless she needs booze.

LIZZIE

I didn’t know . . .

EVAN

I don’t *tell* people. I needed to feel . . . special.

LIZZIE

PREVIEW

You mean—

EVAN

That's *why*, Lizzie; why I took . . . your mom *loves* you; you don't know!

(EVAN'S phone pings. He puts it into his pocket.)

Is it *bad* to feel special?

LIZZIE

What was that?

EVAN

. . . What?

LIZZIE

(holding out her hand)

Let me see.

EVAN

Why?

LIZZIE

If you *care*. Show me.

(A long silence. Finally, EVAN hands LIZZIE his phone, then turns away in defeat. She reads the text and nods to herself.)

Good news, Evan. Your mom doesn't sound drunk. She says you can have dinner with us, and she loves you.

EVAN

(still trying to cover his lie)

She's . . . she's having a good day.

(LIZZIE firmly hands EVAN'S phone back to him.)

LIZZIE

Tell me it's not true.

EVAN

. . . What?

PREVIEW

LIZZIE

Say the money wasn't tuition. Not for *me*.

EVAN

Lizzie, it *was*! It was totally you; you're the only reason –

LIZZIE

Don't . . . don't you *dare*. This wasn't the first time you hacked, was it?

EVAN

Lizzie, I *love* you! I love you –

LIZZIE

(shaking her head firmly)

No. You don't.

EVAN

How – ?

LIZZIE

Because you're blaming *me*.

(An eternal silence. EVAN makes a movement towards offstage.)

EVAN

I guess . . . see you in class?

(Nothing.)

Tell your mom I went home for dinner.

(EVAN turns and slowly exits; LIZZIE watches him go. EVAN looks back from the edge of the stage, but LIZZIE turns her back on him. He finally leaves. ELAINE reenters.)

ELAINE

Hey guys, the chicken's in . . . Lizzie? Where's Evan?

(No answer.)

Did he hafta go home?

(Still nothing.)

PREVIEW



END OF FREE PREVIEW

The ending of the play has been omitted from this preview. Purchase a full copy of the script and license performance rights at dramabygeorge.com/store.

PREVIEW