

# PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

*a partnership of Seattle Children's Theatre and Children's Theatre Company-Minneapolis*

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## *Snapshot Silhouette*

A Play by

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## Characters

- NAJMA
- The IMAM
- The PEOPLE
- ENGLISH TEACHER
- TAY C
- Middle School STUDENTS
- LAINE
- ESL TEACHER
- MUHAMED
- MANUEL
- ALICIA
- BAO
- ZEINAB
- QALIN
- CAM
- DAMAC
- ABDI

There are three main characters: NAJMA, TAY C and LAINE. A company may double for the rest. The white ESL teacher may be played by a Latina or light black actress. The stage directions (characters ascending and descending stairs, etc.) imply a two-storey house – first floor: kitchen with door to the outside and living room; upper floor: the girls’ bedroom – but this layout is flexible. A piano. Bedroom: twin beds. On Tay C’s side there may be posters, a bulletin board, regular middle school stuff. On Najma’s side a prayer mat hangs; the remainder of the walls is bare except for a kaman (Somali lute) which rests against a wall. Najma dresses like any other middle school girl – top, jeans, sneakers – and a casual vei

## ACT 1

### Scene 1

NAJMA in light holding a notebook, darkness behind.

**NAJMA:** Chapter 1: Home.

Lights up behind: The PEOPLE bowed in prayer, facing upstage, foreheads touching the ground.  
The IMAM stands before the PEOPLE, facing stage left.

**IMAM:** Allah hu akbar.

**PEOPLE:** Allah hu akbar.

**IMAM:** Allah hu akbar.

**PEOPLE:** Allah hu akbar.

**IMAM:** Ashahadu an la allah il Allah.

**PEOPLE:** Ashahadu an al Allah il Allah.

Continuing under NAJMA, the IMAM calls and the PEOPLE repeat:

Ashahadu Muhammad el rasool Allah.

Allah hu akbar.

La Allah il allah.

La Allah il Allah.

Now the IMAM will turn completely around to face stage right. HE will repeat lines, just once this time, with the PEOPLE echoing HIM. If time permits, HE will then face downstage for all the lines, and finally upstage.

**NAJMA:** Everyone got religion with the wars but my family *always* practiced my mother told me, our family women wore their veils even before, answering the call of the Imam five times a day: Dawn. Noon. Mid-afternoon. Sunset. Nightfall. Muslims all one. Between prayers people conducted business, went to the market. Bustling. Foreign visitors. Refugees, Somali-Ethiopians from the war, we had plenty, take care of them *and* us. Ours is yours. Then: drought. Famine. The clans attacked the president, then the president came back. Hard. Then the clans attacked each other. And us.

*Gunfire: The PEOPLE panic, scream, scatter.*

**NAJMA:** Then America came. Then America left. Then nothing: no Somali government.

*The PEOPLE all gone. The ENGLISH TEACHER now visible at HER desk. A few other STUDENTS, including TAY C.*

**NAJMA:** But before: pancakes for breakfast! Supper we have fish, rice with milk and ghee, beans, my mother told me –

**TAY C:** Her mother dumped her.

*Some of the OTHER students giggle.*

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Tay C!

Silence.

Go on, Najma.

An uncomfortable pause. Then NAJMA looks at HER paper for the first time. Flips a few pages.

**NAJMA:** Can I skip to Chapter 5? I skip around when I write, last night I wrote Chapter 1 and Chapter 5.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** *Two chapters?! Very good! Go on.*

**NAJMA:** (Reads:) Chapter 5: America. My big brother Abdi and I and my aunt and her kids came to America. Texas. I was ten, Abdi sixteen. My aunt and my cousins and Abdi stayed in Texas but it was crowded, I had to come here, stay with my cousin Damac. Damac's close to us and happy to send money back home to my mom so she can come but in the interim Damac has two kids her own and a shoebox apartment, too crowded again. Then we moved to a bigger place and bigger was better but not ideal, still too crowded, two years too crowded. Then Tay C's mom invited me to come stay with them, so last week I pack again –

**TAY C:** *Scuze me* but her story's forever we ain't gettin' to mine she keep readin' and you said on accounta my not doin' the other papers I get a F I don't read today so I just wantchu to know –

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** We'll get to it tomorrow, Tay C.

**TAY C:** Tomorrow? I was up half the night –

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** We'll get to yours tomorrow.

**TAY C:** How come she gets to – ?

**NAJMA:** It's okay. I was mostly finished.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** No, Tay C needs to learn to wait her turn.

**TAY C:** (Slams book (not too hard), mutters:) I was up half the night –

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Do I have to see you in detention? again?

The bell rings. TAY C and the other STUDENTS exit. NAJMA stays.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Excellent, Najma.

**NAJMA:** Thank you.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** I'm glad I asked everyone to start their autobiographies with "home." Very astute to incorporate so many of your mother's memories alongside your own.

NAJMA smiles politely. As the ENGLISH TEACHER shuffles papers, NAJMA puts on coat, hat, etc. Now NAJMA stares at the ENGLISH TEACHER, HER homework still in HER (now mittened) hand. The ENGLISH TEACHER starts gathering HER things, now notices NAJMA hasn't left.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Don't you have lunch now?

**NAJMA:** Field trip, Science museum. We packed our lunches.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Science museum?

*NAJMA nods*

I love the science museum! Write a report, ten extra.

**NAJMA:** Okay.

*THEY stare at each other. Finally:*

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Don't you have to catch the bus for the trip?

**NAJMA:** Quarter after.

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Oh.

*Glances at clock or watch*

Well. I have to get my lunch.

**NAJMA:** You mind I stay a second? Practice next part of my speech?

**ENGLISH TEACHER:** Don't miss your bus.

*Exits*

**NAJMA:** (*Turns to audience.*) Chapter 2: Climate. Mogadishu, on the coast, could burn one thirteen easy during Jiiláal, while December in hottest season. But once we went to the mountains: temperature must have dropped to forty! I'd never heard of a place so cold.

*NAJMA puts on HER hood and exits through the outside door, into the treacherous winds and subzero*

## SCENE 2

*In the bedroom, NAJMA doing HER prayers. TAY C in the kitchen eating cereal. LAINE enters, just finished jogging. TAY C never looks up at LAINE who busily clears table, washes dishes, etc., while speaking. In the background, morning radio chatter at a very low volume.*

**LAINE:** Five miles! And I'm early so I'll have time to stop by the church and pick up those cases of food NAJMA YOU WANT OATMEAL? I CAN TURN ON THE KETTLE oh she's probably doing her prayers. I can get those boxes and cans to the shelter and organize them before I serve the breakfast shift. Then work at nine of course except twelve to one when I'll be at the gym: step aerobics. No, this is Wednesday. Is this Wednesday? Power Yoga. Five to six the library, number's on the fridge, ask for the literacy program. Mrs. Hallman is seventy-two, three months ago her signature was "X," now she's reading second grade! NAJMA! Oh forgot! her prayers. Six to seven I'll stay at the library, help arrange books for tomorrow's book sale. Tomorrow's Thursday, right? Make sure Najma gets her oatmeal she never eats enough, hear?

No immediate answer.

Hear?

TAY C vaguely nods

I want you to be good to her. Okay? I want you to be nice, think of what she's been through. Lost her father her little sister, her brother in Texas, mother in Somalia, hasn't heard her mother's voice in years you know what that's like?

**TAY C:** No.

**LAINÉ:** Not good! You think I'm a nag well just be thankful you've got a mom close enough to nag, Najma sure misses hers. You don't even know the meaning of the word, if I didn't have my obligations I'd show you the definition of "nag," sit right here march you to school, one more tardy and you're grounded, only leave the house to walk to and from school no bike. Though it's a vast improvement from the truancy in the fall, finally resolved that thank God, now if I could just get you there on time. Speaking of the bike, saw you flying by yesterday I know the cold broke but you know it fluctuates, pneumonia weather, keep your coat on *and* scarf and hat, if you get too hot you can open the coat –

*Around "you know it fluctuates" TAY C had picked up the remote control beside HER and zipped up the radio volume until LAINÉ was completely drowned out, then casually back to eating cereal. LAINÉ walks over and turns the radio off.*

**LAINÉ:** You're not the only one's suffered.

*Grabs HER coat.*

Finish the dishes before you leave.

*LAINÉ exits. A few moments later NAJMA enters, drops HER backpack on a chair. Pours a tiny serving of cold cereal, milk. TAY C continues eating. Silence. Then TAY C puts down spoon: done.*

**TAY C:** 'Dju do your English?

*NAJMA, chewing, looks at TAY C, doesn't answer.*

**TAY C:** Oh that's right Somalis can't eat and talk at the same time. Well I didn't do it I hate that autobiography stuff I don't know what to write. She can flunk me all she wants, think I care? 'Cept then I'm grounded. Or worse.

*NAJMA takes HER bowl and spoon to the sink to wash. SHE also washes other dishes in the sink. During NAJMA's monologue TAY C will put HER own dishes in the sink, then sit, tear out a piece of notebook paper and quickly, expertly, cut out a shape.*

**NAJMA:** I wrote about changing schools. I wrote about when I first came here two years ago, I was ten, I went to the regular mainstream public school and they said first I had to take ESL there and I said "Wáa maxay, ESL?" and they said English as a Second Language so I took ESL in the mainstream school, and then we moved and I was near the alternative public school with the Ecuadoran kids and Ethiopian kids and Mexican kids and Somali kids and teachers from the same places and I went there and I learned a lot, it was harder than mainstream school, the work was harder the teachers were tougher, I liked it. Then I came to stay with you and now I'm back in easy peasy mainstream school.

**TAY C:** See? I always been to the same dumb school. I mean now I'm in middle which is different but so's everybody else, nothin' to write about.

**NAJMA:** There's that picture in the living room of you at the waterpark on the slide you could write about that. There's your mother's flower pots and how she talks to her plants and how you water her plants sometimes. That's good.

*NAJMA has referred to the cutout. It is good: a girl on a bike.*

**TAY C:** (*Starts another cutout.*): Art. Always count on that A, but don't it feel lonely among the Cs and Ds and F science, why isn't iron "I"?

**NAJMA :** F-E. A-G.

**TAY C:** Why F me when the scientist made up the chart can't spell?

**NAJMA:** How about that day you were first to climb top of the ropes before start of gym? Everyone cheered. You could write about that.

**TAY C:** Matthews gave me a detention for usin' the equipment without a teacher around and threatened to give my science F a twin now how'm I s'posed to autobiographicize that? Self-incriminate.

*TAY C holds up HER new cutout: Manhattan skyline, including the Twin Towers. NAJMA is impressed.*

**NAJMA:** New York.

*TAY C tears away the Twin Towers one at a time, making booming or crashing sounds.*

**NAJMA:** Write about how you're good at art. You know everything about art.

**TAY C:** "Write what you know" "Write what you know" tell you what. I oughta essay on detention, there's my expertise.

**NAJMA:** Why not? Interesting to me I don't know what it's like. I'm not washing your bowl.

NAJMA leaves the kitchen to get HER coat and wraps from the closet.

**TAY C:** 'Course you don't know what it's like, perfect behavior. Ms. Conduct.

TAY C washes HER bowl. NAJMA, drawn to the piano, sets HER coat down and walks over, lifting the wooden covering over the keys.

**TAY C:** Here's my other expertise: washin' dishes. Then the next excitin' chapter: dryin' 'em.

NAJMA clinks a couple piano keys. A few more. SHE can't play but enjoys the feel, starts hitting the keys bolder, bolder. Quite carried away when TAY C finally enters the living room and slams shut the covering, almost catching NAJMA's fingers. TAY C goes back to the dishes. Until indicated late in the scene TAY C will not look up from the bowl SHE's washing. When NAJMA recovers from the scare, SHE quietly enters the kitchen. Speaks cautiously.

**NAJMA:** (Trying to lighten:) Only had a bowl and spoon, how long's it take to wash that?

NAJMA chuckles. Silence. Then NAJMA pulls out HER autobiography notebook, flips to a page.

**NAJMA:** She said to explain why I came to live with you.

Reads:

"Then Tay C's mom invited me to come stay with them. Damac's Tay C's mom's friend. Tay C's mom said, 'Hey. We have an extra bed, a too-quiet house.' So last week I pack again."

Looks at TAY C:

You think your mom mind I write that? Our business?

**TAY C:** (Shrugs.) She don't care what you do, go to school naked all she care long's you bring home the As. With me she don't aim so high. Just do her prayer mantra I pass the seventh grade.

**NAJMA:** You mind?

TAY C shrugs.

Cuz I won't do it if you –

**TAY C:** I said I don't care.

NAJMA goes to get HER coat.

**TAY C:** How come your brother never writes?

NAJMA looks at HER.

Practically every day a letter from your mother, Somalia. Nothin' from your brother and your brother right here. America.

**NAJMA:** I dunno. When we first came, Texas, him working all the time, studying all the time, playing catch-up for the years without school he still wanted to graduate eighteen. Save money. And did. Saved and graduated early, December. He won't be eighteen 'til next week.

**TAY C:** Savin' for what?

**NAJMA:** I dunno. Car. [

Beat.

Why you have a piano?

No answer.

Your mother ever play it?

Silence.

**TAY C:** She played it.

NAJMA confused a moment. Then:

**NAJMA:** Your sister?

No answer.

You could write about your sister. You could write what she liked to play, music *and* games. You could write did you look alike, what you did together. You could write about your sister –

**TAY C:** (Glares at NAJMA.) You could write about yours.

NAJMA, startled, stares at TAY C a few more seconds, then exits through the outside door.  
TAY C goes back to washing the bowl

### SCENE 3

**NAJMA:** Chapter 7 – E F L : English as a Fourth Language.

Classroom: The ESL TEACHER and six CHILDREN including NAJMA. On the walls: maps of Africa, Latin America, the World; ESL-related posters. Chaos. CHILDREN chattering. Throughout the scene ALICIA and MUHAMED are particularly hyper, hitting each other, tickling each other, not hurting each other: BOTH always giggling, squealing in delight.

**ESL TEACHER:** Okay!

CHILDREN quieter.

I want Alicia here, Bao here, no you stay there, and Najma.

Other table:

Manuel here, Zeinab there. Yes. Quiet please. Yes, Muhammed, and Marta you're there. Quiet. Okay. We have a new student. This is Zeinab and she's from Somalia. Who else is from Somalia?

**MUHAMED, MANUEL, ALICIA and BAO:** Najma.

**ESL TEACHER:** Najma, very good. And they have something else in common. They're both ten years old.

**NAJMA:** Two years ago. I was ten.

Now Najma moves into the scene, taking her assigned seat.

**MUHAMED:** I'm ten!

**MANUEL:** I'm seven!

**ALICIA:** I'm six!

**ESL TEACHER:** Sh!

**MANUEL:** And they have something *else* in common.

**ESL TEACHER:** What's that, Manuel? and please raise your hand.

**MANUEL:** They're new.

**ESL TEACHER:** Najma is *pretty* new, isn't she. Najma *recently* moved to this country, she's been with us a month. Okay let's introduce ourselves to *Muhammed stop hitting Alicia with the ruler!* Let's tell Zeinab who we are. Bao. Why don't you start?

Bao shakes HER head no.

Bao, you know how to introduce yourself.

[Bao shakes HER head no.

**ALICIA:** (Loud whisper:) I am Bao and I am from Laos.

**ESL TEACHER:** I'm speaking to Bao, Alicia.

**BAO:** I am Bao and I am from Laos.

**ESL TEACHER:** "He"?

Bao confused.

Alicia is a girl, Bao. Do we say "he" for a girl?

Several hands shoot up.

**MUHAMED:** (Hand not up.) She. She.

**ESL TEACHER:** We raise our hands when we want to answer, Muhammed.

**MUHAMED:** (Hand not up.) She.

**ESL TEACHER:** (A look to MUHAMED.) Najma?

**NAJMA:** She is Alicia and she is from Mexico.

**ESL TEACHER:** Very good. Bao?

**BAO:** She is Alicia and she is from Mexico.

**ESL TEACHER:** Good. Alicia?

**ALICIA:** I am Alicia and I am from Mexico. She is Najma and she is from Somalia.

**ESL TEACHER:** And what can we say about Najma *and* Zeinab? Najma.

**ALICIA:** They are Najma and Zeinab and they are from Somalia.

**ESL TEACHER:** Excellent, Najma and Zeinab *are* from Somalia. Najma?

**NAJMA:** I am Najma and I am from Somalia. He is Manuel and he is from Ecuador.

**MANUEL:** I am Manuel and I am from Ecuador. He is Muhammed and he is from Algeria.

**MUHAMED:** I am Muhammed and I am from Algeria. She is Zeinab and she is from Somalia.

**ESL TEACHER:** Very good. Now I have something for Zeinab.

Goes to HER desk to get it.

**MANUEL:** ¿Y ella no tiene que contestar?

**ESL TEACHER:** Can you say that in English, Manuel?

**ALICIA:** He said She don't have to do it?

**ESL TEACHER:** I know what he said, Alicia, I was asking *Manuel* to say it in *English*.

**ALICIA:** *(Loud whisper to MANUEL:)* She don't –

**ESL TEACHER:** Alicia!

**MANUEL:** She don't have to do it?

**ESL TEACHER:** *Doesn't* she have to do it?

**MANUEL:** Doesn't she have to do it?

**ESL TEACHER:** No, not today. Zeinab cannot introduce herself because Zeinab doesn't know any English yet.

Coloring picture

Do you want the tree or the fish?

ZEINAB points. The ESL TEACHER gives ZEINAB colored pencils and shows HER how to hold them.

**BAO:** Kuv yuav ntses.

**ESL TEACHER:** Bao, nobody else understands Hmong, you'll have to say it in English.

**BAO:** Fish!

**MANUEL:** Why can't *we* color?

ALICIA bonks MUHAMED on the head with HER book. HE giggles.

**ESL TEACHER:** Alicia!

Snatches book out of ALICIA's hand.

**MANUEL:** I wanna draw!

**BAO:** Pourquoi je'n peux pas avoir le poisson?

**MUHAMMED:** Elle laisse seulement les nouveaux dessins.

**ESL TEACHER:** Bao! Muhammed! No French! Zeinab is using the colored pencils because Zeinab needs to learn how to hold a pencil.

**ALICIA:** How come she can't hold a pencil?

**ESL TEACHER:** Zeinab's family lived in the desert. Her family rode camels, they didn't need pencils.

*ALICIA and MANUEL gasp.*

**MANUEL:** You rode a camel?

*ZEINAB stares at HIM, blank.*

**ALICIA:** *(To NAJMA:)* You rode a camel?

**ESL TEACHER:** No, Najma's family is from Mogadishu, the city.

**MUHAMMED:** Could you hold a pencil?

**ESL TEACHER:** Of course, Najma went to school.

*Beat. Unsure:*

Didn't you?

*NAJMA nods.*

**ZEINAB:** Ule juya Kiingereza kabla ya kuja hapa?

**ESL TEACHER:** Najma, could you please tell Zeinab that we only speak English in this class?

*NAJMA starts to*

that until she can speak it she should just listen quietly. We need a common language to communicate, no one else understands Somali.

**NAJMA:** *Cuts Herself off:* That wasn't Somali.

**ESL TEACHER:** What?

**NAJMA:** She said “Ule juya Kiingereza kabla ya kuja hapa” that wasn’t Somali.

**ESL TEACHER:** Well no one else understands Arabic.

**NAJMA:** That was Swahili. Aferit Ingleze kebel Inta Inat? *That* was Arabic.

**MUHAMED:** Nam. Shaweya.

**NAJMA:** Muzboot. Inta min el jazeera.

**ESL TEACHER:** Okay! first of all Zeinab and Muhammed should not be having private conferences with Najma during class time, and second

*to ALL:*

what do we speak in this class?

**CHILDREN:** English only.

**ESL TEACHER:** English only. If you have something to say please share it with *everyone* in *English*.

**MUHAMMED:** She asked her, You know English before you came here?

**NAJMA:** (*Shaking HER head no.*) Only Somali. Only Swahili. Only Arabic.

**BAO:** (*To MUHAMMED:*) Qu’est ce qu’elle a dit?

**ESL TEACHER:** No French! *Alright* today we have a short class. Does anyone know why?

**ALICIA:** Half-day.

**ESL TEACHER:** We have a half-day *please* raise your hand Alicia and why do we have a half-day?

**CHILDREN:**  
Thanksgiving.

**ALICIA:**  
Thanksgiving is tomorrow.

**NAJMA:** What's Thanksgiving?

**ALICIA:** When the white people stopped killing the Indians and ate them.

**ESL TEACHER:** When the *Pilgrims* sat down to eat *with* the Indians.

**ALICIA:** (*Puzzled.*) They wasn't white?

**ESL TEACHER:** Yes, but – Manuel! Is that gum? Give me that gum!

**ALICIA:** Yo creia que ellos eran blancos.

**ESL TEACHER:** Sh! Thanksgiving is tomorrow and we only have a half-day today so let's review the one hundred words. If we know these one hundred words, what do we know?

*Hands shoot up.*

Muhammed?

**MUHAMMED:** Half of English.

**ESL TEACHER:** Half of all American spoken English.

**ZEINAB:** Soomaaliya miyaad ka timi?

**NAJMAZ:** Haa. Lokerkayga waxa ku jira gooryaan?

**ESL TEACHER:** Zeinab. Najma, no one else can speak Somali so what are you being when you speak Somali privately with Zeinab?

**NAJMA:** Rude.

**ESL TEACHER:** Rude.

To ALL:

You read, I'll repeat.

Slowly, as TEACHER shows cards:

CHILDREN: A. [Uh.]

ESL TEACHER: A.

CHILDREN: The.

ESL TEACHER: The.

CHILDREN: And.

ESL TEACHER: And.

CHILDREN: Feend.

ESL TEACHER: Find. Long i.

CHILDREN: Find. Stop.

ESL TEACHER: (Correcting:) Stop. The Hispanic students want to put an *e* at the beginning, the Somali students want to put an *e* at the end. Stop.

CHILDREN: Stop.

ESL TEACHER: Very good.

CHILDREN: People.

ESL TEACHER: People. Excellent.

CHILDREN: As.

MANUEL: ¡Quiero dibujar! Me gusta dibujar ¿por qué no podemos dibujar?

ALICIA: Porque nosotros sabemos leer.

**MANUEL:**

¡Yo no quiero leer! yo quiero dibujar.

**ESL TEACHER:**

Manuel! Alicia! ¡Estan interrumpiendo la clase! Ustedes no están permitidos hablar entre sí durante las lecciones. ¿Me entienden? ¡Y cuantas veces les tengo que repetir que en esta clase sólo hablamos inglés! ¿Cómo piensan que Muhamed y Najma y Marta y Bao y Marta y Zeinab se sienten al ser excluidos? Ellos no hablan español *Muhammed stop pulling her hair!* En esta clase aprendemos inglés escuchando y hablando unos con los otros y si ustedes insisten en hablar español, no sólo están excluyendo a Najma y Zeinab y Bao y Muhammed, sino que también están malgastando el tiempo de todos. ¿Creén que eso es justo? No, no es justo y ¿saben que les pasa a los niños como ustedes? ¿Saben? Les damos un *time-out*. ¿Eso es lo que ustedes quieren? [MANUEL and ALICIA shake heads a vehement no.] Ya me imaginaba que no, así que yo les sugiero que dejen de interrumpir y pongan atención y recuerden que en esta clase hablamos *English only!*

Bell. The CHILDREN exit, walking in twos.

**ZEINAB:**

Ma arki karaa  
gooryannka?

**MANUEL:**

Voy a dibujar en la  
próxima clase.

**MUHAMED:**

Tu veux venir chez moi  
après l'école?

**NAJMA:**

Miyaad ka baqdaa  
gooryaanka?

**ALICIA:**

Yo también.

**BAO:**

Je dois demander  
à Maman.

**ZEINAB:**

Maya.

**MANUEL:**

Tu vas a dibujar

**MUHAMED:**

<b>NAJMA:</b> Waan hubaa inaad ka baqdo.	después del almuerzo.	On peut jouer avec ma Play Station.*
<b>ZEINAB:</b> Waxba kama baqo waxaan ahay Power Puff Girl†!	<b>ALICIA:</b> Yo voy a dibujar las <i>Power Puff Girls</i> . †	<b>BAO:</b> On peut regarder <i>Power Puff Girls</i> . †
<b>NAJMA:</b> Waa slimy.	<b>MANUEL:</b> Después del almuerzo.	<b>MUHAMED:</b> Okay.
<b>ZEINAB:</b> Dadka way cunaan.	<b>ALICIA:</b> ¡Ahora!	<b>BAO :</b> Maman me fera finir mes devoirs d’abord. Je peux venir chez toi après mes devoirs.
<b>NAJMA:</b> Ma cunaan.	<b>MANUEL:</b> Yo voy a dibujar ahora.	
<b>ZEINAB:</b> Fransiisku way cunaan. . . .	<b>ALICIA:</b> Yo también.	
	<b>MANUEL:</b> ¡Qué no! . . .	<b>MUHAMED:</b> Okay. . . .

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\*May be replaced with any popular children’s game.

†May be replaced with any popular children’s show.

#### SCENE 4

Cemetery. TAY C studying a tombstone, HER bike parked against another. NAJMA enters.

**TAY C:** Whadju follow me for?

NAJMA just stares at TAY C. TAY C rolls HER eyes. Quiet awhile, TAY C back to studying the stone.

**NAJMA:** That your sister?

**TAY C:** Look how old these gravestones are. My sister died two years ago this grave place no vacancy since 1941.

Beat.

How'dju follow me? You don't got a bike.

**NAJMA:** Walked. You stopped, looked at the building they gutted, stopped, looked at the pond, ice melted, stopped, go in the store, candy bar.

**TAY C:** That's just why I need a rear-view mirror. I asked her for it, my birthday, need to know what's behind me.

Silence.

**NAJMA:** This your quiet place? Secret place?

**TAY C:** Was.

Pause.

**TAY C:** I like to figure it out. It's okay to add to it. Like this one, "Loving mother, born December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1900, died October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921," and with hers "Emily Elaine, born October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921, died October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921." Childbirth that's easy. But try this: Timmy, 1932-1939 that's 7, Jessica 5, Landis 2. At first I thought TB or somethin' but all took the same date: May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1939.

Pause.

NAJMA: Tornado!

TAY C: Right! Somethin' sudden, accident or act of nature. I say drowned. Took the rowboat out, unfortunately downriver it gets choppy. Too little they knew no better.

Beat.

You ever see so many dead people?

NAJMA: War. When my mother left Hargeisa she said dead everywhere.

TAY C: Thought you were from Mogadishu.

NAJMA: Am. But my mother born Hargeisa. Too many dead, they just stayed there. Not buried.

TAY C: Did not.

NAMJA: Did.

Pause.

NAJMA: My father. Shot dead.

TAY C: They just leave *his* body? In the open?

NAJMA: That was Hargeisa, he died later, my home. Mogadishu.

TAY C: Oh.

Pause.

Where he get it? The back?

NAJMA: Belly.

TAY C: Was there like blood? Like sticky red all over him?

NAJMA: Uh huh.

**TAY C:** Was there like guts? Like meat his liver or muscle or kidney pokin' through?

**NAJMA:** Uh huh.

**TAY C:** Was his body like - ?

**NAJMA:** Uh huh.

Pause.

**TAY C:** Use to play here. Ghosts in the Graveyard. Hide and Seek, the flashlights.

**NAJMA:** Flashlight? *Night?*

**TAY C:** 'Course.

**NAJMA:** Uh uh.

**TAY C:** Yep.

Beat.

**NAJMA:** My sister died in childbirth.

**TAY C:** Your sister was five.

**NAJMA:** My little sister Qalin five years old, her belly balloon up, stick arms skinny skinny, I saw to my aunt "she having a baby? That a baby in there?"

NAJMA giggles. Then stops.

**NAJMA:** No baby. Just hungry.

**TAY C: (Song:)** [Song:] "There was an old woman all skin and bones. Oo oo oo oo. She lived down by the old graveyard. Oo oo oo oo."

**NAJMA:** Came with my aunt to the refugee camp, they only took six, no room for my mother.

**TAY C:** One day  
she thought  
she'd go  
for a walk.  
Oo oo oo oo.

**NAJMA:** One day we're packing, I'm crying  
"I don't want another refugee camp!"  
But my aunt said "We're going to  
America. In America it'll be different.

**TAY C:** She saw the bones all layin' around. Oo oo oo oo.

**NAJMA:** "In America eat and eat and eat and eat!"

**TAY C:** She went to the closet to get a broom. Oo oo oo oo.

**NAJMA:** "America: The more you eat, the smaller your tummy."

**TAY C:** She opened the door and BOO!

TAY C grabs NAJMA. NAJMA screams. TAY C and NAJMA both laughing hard. When it subsides:

**TAY C:** They didn't just leave the dead bodies there. Layin' on the ground.

**NAJMA:** Did.

**TAY C:** "She opened the door and BOO!"

TAY C grabs NAJMA again. BOTH squealing.

## SCENE 5

Bedroom. NAJMA practicing her kaman (Somali lute); SHE's a relative beginner. Trying to sing a Somali song with HER playing. TAY C walks in. Obnoxiously blasts rap music. NAJMA gradually gets up and expertly raps with the rapper. TAY C, surprised, cracks up.

LAINE enters the house, races up to the bedroom. SHE screams but THEY can't hear. TAY C finally turns down the music.

**TAY C:** Huh?

**LAINE:** I SAID YOU CAN HEAR THAT ALL THE WAY DOWN  
THE STREET TURN IT OFF!

TAY C turns it off. Starts giggling again.

**TAY C:** I never pegged you for it. Rap head, spit back every syllable perfect.

**NAJMA:** Just memorization, easy. Somali never written 'til the '70s, doesn't mean history wasn't recorded. Poetry.

THEY stare at HER, confused.

**NAJMA:** (Still standing.) Baraar habarti loog ka ma furto gawrac kama baajo  
Bil saddex ihi galabtii hadday beelo kaa bixiso  
Beladkaad u jeeddiyo iftiin beelo ku ma geysa  
In kastoo la baabuuniyoo baayac lagu doono  
Bisinkiyo karaamada haddii loo burannburiyo hear the buh buh  
buh? That's how Somalis do it. You rhyme. We alliterate.

**LAINE:** What's it mean?

**NAJMA:** An old poet speaking to a young poet in a poetry duel. I don't know all the words all the words we don't say anymore. It's a million years old it's Beowulf. Everyone's a poet. Politicians out-poeting each other for office.

Beat: LAINE staring at NAJMA.

**LAINE:** Wait.

LAINE goes downstairs to the living room. Pulls out of a drawer a few photo albums, flips through, searching. Meanwhile TAY C takes a piece of notebook paper, making a cutout as SHE speaks.

TAY C: You were cryin' in your sleep last night.

NAJMA: Wasn't.

TAY C: You were talkin' in your sleep, cryin' "Hooyo! Hooyo!" That means "Mommy," right?

NAJMA: I wasn't talking in my sleep.

TAY C: You don't really think she's comin' for ya, do ya.

NAJMA: She's coming.

TAY C: How your cousin gonna pay for it? Lotta money, bring your hooyo here. Look.

*TAY C shows the cutout: NAJMA's kaman. NAJMA stares.*

TAY C: It's your guitar.

NAJMA: Kaman.

TAY C: You can put it on your wall if you want, I got some tape.

*TAY C tapes the cutout to NAJMA's wall.*

TAY C: Like it?

*NAJMA nods. LAINE enters with an album.*

LAINE: Found the one I was looking for.

*LAINE opens it.*

NAJMA:(Reads:) "Poetry Slam Finals."

TAY C: Here we go.

NAJMA: I see you!

Meaning LAINE.

Blue dress.

**TAY C:** This should go on all night I'm ridin' my bike.

Exits.

**LAINE:** She just doesn't want you to see how cute she was little.

**NAJMA:** What's a poetry slam?

**LAINE:** What you said about your politicians. One poet stands, tries to out-do the others. Get the most votes. Or loudest applause.

**NAJMA:** (Photo:) You won that trophy?

LAINE nods.

Where is it?

**LAINE:** (Shrugs.) Attic. Somewhere.

**NAJMA:** You were good.

**LAINE:** Well. Tell the truth, inherent flaw in the system is sometimes style outweighs the words. Why I finally got out of it. Year I took the championship, second place went to someone whose poem was better. I know better when I hear it. Just shy, he couldn't woo the crowd. Wooing's my forté.

**NAJMA:** Can I hear?

**LAINE:** Don't know I even remember any.

Turns page.

See him? Red tie, third from the left?

NAJMA nods.

Cam and Tay C's daddy. See how the fingertips barely meet the drum? I had the words, he the perfect accompaniment touch.

**NAJMA:** Is that Cam?

**LAINE:** No, she was too little to come to the slams then. But look.

*Turns a few pages.*

**NAJMA:** (*Reads:*) "Mother and Daughter Night."

**LAINE:** Sponsor it every Mother's Day.

**NAJMA:** She's cute!

*(LAINE smiles.)*

Where's Tay C?

**LAINE:** Tay C never took an interest, always chose apple pie at Grandma's over slam nights. Cammy loved the piano, so poetry just an extension of the music I guess.

**NAJMA:** (*Turns the page.*) She's so little!

**LAINE:** First recital. Just turned eight. Started her lessons at five.

**NAJMA:** (*Turns page.*) Cam again?

**LAINE:** Mm hm. This bed. And who's that?

*LAINE points. NAJMA looks closer, stunned.*

**NAJMA:** Tay C?

*LAINE nods.*

That little girl? giggle girl? [

*Beat.*

I've never seen Tay C smile like that! Let someone hold her like that!

*Beat.*

The room looks different.

**LAINE:** Cam's piano posters. Chopin. Scott Joplin. Stevie Wonder.

**NAJMA:** Where are they?

**LAINE:** Attic I guess. Like everything else.

**NAJMA:** You didn't have to take them down cuz I moved in.

**LAINE:** Tay C took 'em down. Long before you moved in.

*Turns the page.*

**NAJMA:** *(Laughing.)* What a mess!

**LAINE:** We always let 'em dive into their cake and ice cream. That was Tay C's birthday, second, but look at Cam: strawberry face!

**NAJMA:** Cam loved ice cream, right? Sometimes Tay C dreams I hear her mumble. Only words I can make out: "Cam." "Ice cream."

*Pause.*

**LAINE:** She died like that. Gang wars Cam and Tay C heard the ice cream truck, Cam ran out to get it. Stray gunfire.

*Pause. Then LAINE suddenly stands.*

**LAINE:** Played with her goat  
Jump with her sister  
Sister saw the boat  
Then turned and kissed her.

Ship on the coast  
Man on the ship

White as a ghost  
With chain and whip

It goes on like that I don't remember what came next but  
you can pretty much guess the rest.

**NAJMA:** It's good!  
Beat.

Sometimes I write in English. Somali poem in English.  
American words, Somali alliteration, Somali scansion. *Hard!*  
Harder than rhyme. *I think.*

**LAINE:** Let's hear.

**NAJMA:** (Stands.) Sister says let's play the game where sticks swing  
I say let's play the game of stepping stones  
Our stomachs so round suggests something new  
"Stomach jump!" says she

Hear it? the sss sss sss?

Pause.

**LAINE:** You were hungry.

**NAJMA:** My sister sleeps long My sister stays sleep  
Her starving is past Suffering is past  
Some place in the sun Some place happiness.

Pause.

**NAJMA:** It's a happy poem.

**LAINE:** I know. It's okay to be sad too.

**NAJMA:** I'm not. Wanna hear another?

LAINE nods.

Well. It's not really a poem, more like a poem thing, like a  
help for me, learn my capitals. Test Friday.

LAINE: Slam me.

NAJMA: Ida Ho gets coysy  
Whenever she sees a Boise.

LAINE: *(Laughs)* Very good!

*Thinks.*

Turned up the tune on the stereo  
And two little girls stroll in and go

*Dancing:*

Go go gogo Go go gogo

*LAINE stops. NAJMA waits.*

LAINE: That's it.

*NAJMA giggles. Dances:*

NAJMA: *Go go gogo Go go gogo*

LAINE: I wrote that when Cam and Tay C were little. We used to  
dance to it, your turn!

NAJMA: Where I stay I'd say's quite nice  
If you love the snow and ice  
I'll be happy when I call ya  
From the airport in Somalia.

LAINE: *(Sings.)* Oh beautiful for spacious skies  
For chocolate shakes and jumbo fries  
For study hall, lunch, recess

NAJMA: And a blizzard the night before the test.

LAINE: We used to say "And being the teacher's number one pest."

**NAJMA:** I just made it up.

**LAINE:** Really?

NAJMA nods.

Good rhyme! Here's a game we played in school:

Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on her tuffet  
Eating her curds and whey

NAJMA stares.

Finish it.

**NAJMA:** What's "whey"?

**LAINE:** Nobody knows.

**NAJMA:** Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on her . . . tuffet?

LAINE shrugs.

Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on her tuffet  
Eating her curds and whey

Slower, as SHE makes it up:

The curds made her sick  
The whey didn't stick . . .

No!  
Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on her tuffet  
Eating her curds and stuff  
She knew things weren't sound  
When the meal going down  
Tasted better when it came back up.

THEY giggle. TAY C appears in the doorway, looking in on THEM, observing THEIR camaraderie. SHE does not smile. THEY don't notice HER.

NAJMA: What was that one, “go go”?

LAINE: Turned up the tune on the stereo  
And two big girls stroll in and go

LAINE and NAJMA: Go go gogo Go go gogo

LAINE: And two big girls stroll in and go

LAINE and NAJMA: Go go gogo Go go gogo

Laughing, touching. Somewhere during NAJMA’s next poem, TAY C exits unnoticed.

NAJMA: Hey!

Little Miss Muffet  
Sat on her tuffet  
Eating her curds and whey  
The curds gave her gas  
She let it all pass . . .

Pause.

LAINE: Which is why she’s still “Miss” to this day.

Giggle giggle: time of THEIR lives.

## SCENE 6

TAY C on the couch, relaxed, remote control in hand, staring blank at the blasting TV. NAJMA enters from school. Goes to the table where the mail has been put. SHE finds a letter and is happy, a second, a third. SHE opens one, sits and reads it. Then puts it down, starting HER homework, writing in HER notebook. TAY C glances at HER.

TAY C back to staring at the TV; NAJMA working. Eventually TAY C looks at NAJMA again. Remotes off the TV. Strolls over to stand at the table, staring at NAJMA. Finally NAJMA looks up.

NAJMA: What?

**TAY C:** You just leave the letter open, I could read it if I was nosy.

**NAJMA:** Read it.

**TAY C:** I know Somali! think I don't?

TAY C stares at the letter.

Haye Najma: Dear Najma.

**NAJMA:** It means "hello."

**TAY C:** Same thing.

**NAJMA:** (Corrects Pronunciation:) Haye.

**TAY C:** (Better:) Haye.

NAJMA goes back to writing. Muttering to Herself:

Haye haye haye.

Beat.

How come you only open one letter at a time?

**NAJMA:** (Shrugs, not looking up.) Save 'em.

**TAY C:** Why?

**NAJMA:** Enjoy a little now, enjoy a little later.

**TAY C:** What if it's important?

**NAJMA:** It is. But not urgent.

**TAY C:** Why she gotta write you three letters same day?

**NAJMA:** I dunno. She thinks of other stuff to say.

**TAY C:** If I went away and my mother wrote three letters the same day I'd tell her Are you crazy? I'd probably be like you, save 'em 'til later, *if* I got to 'em at all. She won't get in 'til 7:30, doin' the AIDS hotline.

**NAJMA:** Your mom's a saint.

TAY C stares at HER.

My cousin Damac says. AIDS hotline, literacy program, homeless shelter.

**TAY C:** She used to be normal, only became Betsy Busy Bee after my sister died. She calls, tell her I'm on my bike, back before dark.

TAY C grabs HER backpack and heads for the door. NAJMA doesn't look up. At the door TAY C turns to NAJMA.

**TAY C:** I know where your cousin lives. I bike by there every day. You ever see *Mary Tyler Moore*? old show? Mary Tyler Moore lived in an apartment in a house with Rhoda and Phyllis but then, halfway through the show, Mary moves to a high-rise. You can see the outside of it when the show comes on. She musta moved out when the show got cancelled though cuz she's not there anymore, your cousin is. All your country people, Mary moved out and the Somalis moved in.

TAY C exits. NAJMA walks to the stereo, blasts a rap cd, sits back down and writes in HER notebook a few moments. LAINE enters. NAJMA quickly runs to turn the music off.

**NAJMA:** Sorry, Laine!

**LAINE: (Cheery.)** You almost gave me a heart attack. When I heard the music I mistook you for Tay C – *studying!* The shock surely'd killed me.

**NAJMA:** I thought you were doing the AIDS hotline.

**LAINE:** First time this happened: more volunteers than phones. So came home to grab the grocery list, check that chore off now instead of Sunday, I got a better idea for Sunday. Wanna do the Mother's Day slam?

NAJMA startled.

**TAY C:** Of course you're not my daughter but I'm your guardian, right? For now? I think they'll let it pass. They still do it! I called, I just got this inspiration, they said, "Yes, the annual All Ladies Brawl," you've such natural poetic instincts, it just came to me, Why waste our co-talent?

*Pause.*

**NAJMA:** I have a local history test on Monday –

**LAINE:** *(Grabs grocery list taped to fridge.)*

Well! If not this Sunday next, we've got time. Or how about Thursday after I get back from the peace rally? You have a spare hour between homework and bed, right? Mother's Day not 'til May and it's barely February, write, read, rehearse, we'll get there.

*LAINE gone. NAJMA stares after HER a few seconds, then turns back to HER notebook. Finishes what SHE's writing, then stands to read to the audience, as if SHE is standing before the class.*

**NAJMA:** Chapter 4. When things got bad bad, we left. My aunt claimed us with her kids, our mother didn't make the lottery. Walking miles and miles, then the long hard bus ride. We were at the refugee camp in Kenya for fourteen months. It was hot, it smelled. We played games.

*Simultaneous: NAJMA makes a few gestures; eg, taps HER head, snaps HER fingers, does several criss-cross hops as QALIN enters and walks to NAJMA. Just as NAJMA finishes the routine QALIN will make the same exact gestures. NAJMA does it again, this time a little more elaborate. QALIN does the same. Now NAJMA does a hugely complicated series and QALIN follows, almost gets it right.*

**NAJMA:** You only tapped your foot twice. I did three.

**QALIN:** You did two.

**NAJMA:** Three.

**QALIN:** Why you always leader?!

**NAJMA:** Cuz you're five and I'm eight.

**QALIN:** I'm telling Abdi! Where is he?

**NAJMA:** Trying to find us a new tent. The old one got ripped, remember?

**QALIN:** Why he gotta do it?

**NAJMA:** We need a tent! And he's our big brother he's the grown-up. Fourteen.

**QALIN:** I'm telling Hooyo. I want Hooyo!

**NAJMA:** Mommy'll come, meet us. Sometime.

**QALIN:** *When?*

No answer.

I want Hooyo! I want Hooyo!

NAJMA gets on HER hands and knees and humps HER back

**NAJMA:** Camel!

QALIN happily jumps on NAJMA's back. NAJMA gives QALIN a ride, moving HER back up and down. QALIN squeals, thrilled. Then suddenly QALIN falls silent, despite NAJMA's continued entertaining bumpy ride. Eventually:

**QALIN:** I'm hungry.

In one fell swoop NAJMA jumps up (QALIN jumping or falling off) and reads from HER paper to the audience.

**NAJMA:** Sometimes there was school in the camp and sometimes there wasn't. Either way Qalin had to keep up her studies.

Turns to QALIN.

Write "Qalin."

QALIN finger-writes on the ground.

NAJMA: What's seven plus eight?

Rapidly, expertly, QALIN adds with HER fingers hidden behind HER back.

QALIN: Fifteen.

NAJMA: What's the capital of Ethiopia?

QALIN: Addis Ababa.

NAJMA: What makes up matter?

QALIN: Solid liquid gas.

NAJMA: How are you? Answer in Swahili.

QALIN: Sijambo.

NAJMA: When did Somalia gain independence?

QALIN: Old old days Somalia traded with Egypt with Phoenicia with Persia with Greece with Rome, then the Suez Canal opens and in fly the Europes. But July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960 Somalia's declared independent, we give the Brits and Italians the boot. It wasn't easy but it wasn't awful either. 'Til the drought.

NAJMA: What's three times six?

QALIN: (Rapidly finger-adding behind HER back.) Eighteen.

NAJMA: Say it in Arabic.

QALIN: Thamâniya<sup>ç</sup>ashra.

NAJMA: When was Mohammed born?

QALIN: The Year of the Elephant.

NAJMA: What color's the rainbow?

QALIN: Red orange yellow green blue indigo violet.

NAJMA: Hold out your hands.

*QALIN, puzzled, does. NAJMA snatches them.*

NAJMA: What's eleven minus three?

*QALIN, panicked, tries adding in HER head.*

QALIN: Seven . . . Eight!

NAJMA: Conjugate "dhis."

QALIN: Dhísayaa dhísaysaa dhísayaa dhísaysaa dhísaynaa  
dhísaysaan dhísayaan.

NAJMA: Conjugate "keen."

QALIN: Keénayaa keénaysaa keénayaa keénaysaa keénaynaa  
keénaysaan keénayaan.

NAJMA: Conjugate "akhri."

QALIN: Cúnayaa cúnaysaa –

NAJMA: I said "akhri"!

QALIN: I don't wanna read I wanna eat I wanna conjugate "eat"!

NAJMA: Read!

QALIN: Eat!

NAJMA: Read!

**QALIN:** Eat!  
Eat! Eat! Eat! Eat! Eat!

QALIN jumping around the room and yelling. Then NAJMA starts jumping right behind HER, also yelling "Eat!" QALIN starts giggling, NAJMA giggling. Suddenly NAJMA and QALIN turn to something THEY see off.

**NAJMA and QALIN:** Dinner! Dinner! Dinner!

THEY stand in line, QALIN before NAJMA. Silence. After awhile THEY take a step forward. Silence.

**NAJMA:** (As if reading from HER paper.)

When mealtime finally came, we could be in line for hours.

Finally THEY are at the front and happily, eagerly take THEIR imaginary plates, sit on the ground. Now THEY both stare at THEIR own plates, disappointed. Then NAJMA looks at the audience.

**NAJMA:** It isn't much. It very very very isn't much.

Now NAJMA looks at QALIN's plate. QALIN has not looked up from it.

**NAJMA:** But it's more than Qalin got.

QALIN looks at NAJMA's plate, then up at NAJMA. NAJMA suddenly starts scarfing down HER food, not looking at QALIN who continues to stare at HER. Eventually QALIN stands, picks up the notebook and pencil, places it in front of NAJMA.

**QALIN:** Write it.

NAJMA stops eating but without looking at QALIN slowly shakes HER head no. QALIN continues staring at NAJMA. NAJMA looks at QALIN. NAJMA writes. Stands. Reads.

**NAJMA:** I always got more than Qalin. I was bigger and always always always got more. Then Qalin died.

NAJMA turns back to QALIN. THEY stare at each other. Then NAJMA suddenly, violently, erases what SHE just wrote, and scrawls new text in its place. Then reads.

**NAJMA:** Food Food Food!

NAJMA opens a nearby cabinet. It is stuffed with all manner of junk food: chips and Oreos and cheese puffs and Twinkies. SHE grabs the stuff by the armload and puts it in front of QALIN, who digs in. NAJMA keeps going back for more, piling the junk in front of QALIN. As SHE does:

**NAJMA:** Plenty. Meat and cheese, vegetables and every dessert, gallons of water we waited and waited, and it was provided!

NAJMA sits, gazes contented at gorging QALIN.

**NAJMA:** I didn't have anything myself. Who needs it I got fat just watching my baby sister eat.

NAJMA laughs heartily, grabbing handfuls of cheese puffs and tossing them high in the air, letting them rain down. QALIN laughs as SHE continues eating everything in sight.

## SCENE 7

TAY C and NAJMA asleep. TAY C wakes: beautiful, sophisticated jazz piano music. TAY C races downstairs. CAM at the piano.

**TAY C:** You were never that good.

**CAM:** 'F I'd lasted, I woulda been.

TAY C listens awhile. Then:

**TAY C:** Chopsticks!

TAY C plays "Chopsticks" while CAM accompanies with HER brilliant stuff: masterpiece. TAY C laughs. When CAM speaks SHE may periodically turn to TAY C, HER hands still flawlessly beating out the notes.

**TAY C:** Can we go to the park after school tomorrow?

**CAM:** (Shrugs.) Mom says so.

**TAY C:** Can we feed the ducks?

**CAM:** If Mom says we can go.

**TAY C:** Mom don't get home 'til 5:30 she won't know.

*CAM plays music, ignores TAY C.*

**TAY C: (Mutters:)** I'll go if I want you're not my boss.

*CAM gives HER a look.*

Okay.

**CAM:** I'm twelve you're ten, think I am.

**TAY C:** *Okay!*

*CAM switches to another piece.*

Cam.

*CAM ignores HER, still playing.*

**TAY C:** Cam. [

*Ignored.*

I'm not ten anymore. Twelve. Twelve like you.

**CAM: (Still not looking up from piano.)**

I know that. Dontcha think I know that? I know this is your dream.

**TAY C:** Don't worry. This is it, I'm not havin' my next birthday. Next birthday make me pass you, thirteen, forget it. Weird enough we're the same age.

*CAM keeps playing.*

**TAY C:** She ain't that wild about me anymore. She liked me enough when you were alive, when there was both of us, but now she volunteers every second she got away from me.

CAM: She liked me.

TAY C: Which I figure I use to my advantage. If I don't advertise my birthday, she'll forget. If my own mother forgets, no one'll know. If no one knows, I'll stay twelve.

CAM: She liked me.

*Ding ding.*

CAM: Yes!

TAY C: I'm goin'.

CAM: I'm goin'. You want a vanilla cone dipped in that red crap, right?

TAY C: Cherry.

CAM: Counting change. Grrr-ross, looks like blood.

TAY C  
So? what's chocolate dip look like? Poop!

CAM  
Yeah, right.

TAY C  
Right.

CAM  
So mature.

TAY C  
Right. I'll get it.

CAM

No, she calls and neither of us answers the phone she'll think we snuck off without askin'.

TAY C

How come you always – ?

CAM

*Argue?* Keep it up we'll stand around miss it altogether!

TAY C

So I'm stuck here. Waitin'.

CAM

Back in a flash. [Exits.]

TAY C

[Sulk.] I'm stuck here. Waitin'.

[TAY C waits.]

**END OF ACT ONE**