

4.15.26 Rude Mechanicals

MAC IN CHEESE

by

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CHARACTERS

MAC (F,8)

LAINÉ (F, 9)

BENNY (M, 8)

TEDDY (M, 7)

FRAN (F, 9)

DEREK (M, 9)

THE PRISSY GIRLS

CLAIRE (F, 9)

EVELYN (F, 9)

AMY (F, 8)

ENSEMBLE

PLUTO, IRIS, JOEY

(additional ensemble roles may be added)

PLACE

A Very Popular Chain Children's Arcade In
Burgon, New Jersey

TIME

Now-ish

General Notes:

// indicates that the next line should start

Double dialogue (dialogue side by side) should be said at the same time

[brackets like this] imply that the word shouldn't be said directly, but implied vocally or with a gesture

A reminder that these are 3rd graders with thoughts going a mile a minute. Nothing is precious until it is.

During the kids murmuring and shouting and talking all over each other -- especially whenever there's an "etc." -- improvisation is allowed and encouraged, but don't let any bit (added or scripted) go on for too long.

*to t.s.g.
may you be a kid today*

AT RISE:

PROLOGUE

We are immediately greeted with a heavy dose of nostalgia.

We are in an all-too-familiar arcade/animatronic show/eating establishment. However, it looks a bit just a tiny bit shaken up.

On the left, there is a small jungle gym. Maybe just a platform or two. Perhaps a tunnel. Possibly some monkey bars, as well. But most definitely a large, deep ball pit.

On the right is part of the arcade. Filled with classics like Skee-ball and Basket Hoops, but also maybe some more obscure titles.

And in the middle, the performance stage, with an band full of animatronic animals, including an anthropomorphic mouse, powered-down in the back.

Sleeping, curled up bodies litter all areas of the space. Some sleep with knock-off squishmellows. Others have attempted to use jackets or aprons as blankets. The rest are used to nothing.

It is dawn.

Slowly, as the sun rises, so do they.

As these people begin to wake up themselves, and wake up each other, something becomes very clear to us --

They're children. All around 8-9 years old.

"Good Mornings" and light chatter begin. Some may pull candy out from a hiding spot and share it with one another.

At different points, a few may rush to look out at the window -- no one sees what they're looking for, and they resign to whatever they were doing before.

Eventually, they all start to settle into their friend groups including

CLAIRE, EVELYN, and AMY -- the “Prissy Girls”, who meet in the middle of the stage.

In front of CLAIRE is a cootie catcher, in front of EVELYN is a piece of paper and a pen, in front of AMY is a magic 8 ball.

They give each other a look. Ready to begin.

1.1

The noise of the rest of this world slowly dissipates, as we focus on these three girls.

They all take a deep inhale while placing their hands on top of each other’s hands.

A pause.

Then -- a sharp focus.

PRISSY GIRLS

Down by the banks with the hanky-panky
 Where the bullfrog jumps from bank to banky
 Saying eeps, ipes, opes, opps
 He missed the lilly pad and went Keeerplop!
 Teacher told us all to stay
 Or a price we have to pay
 Pay with tickets -- all we’ve got
 And worthless tokens by the lot
 Lots of sadness and despair
 Joey pooped his underwear
 Under where do we all hide
 When the evil gets inside
 Inside this place we now called home
 Evil and mischief do now rome
 Rome was not built in a day
 But it will fall in the same way
 Down by the banks with the hanky-panky
 Where the bullfrog jumps from bank to banky
 Saying eeps, ipes, opes, opps
 He missed the Lillypad and went Keeerplop!

It lands on CLAIRE who picks up the cootie catcher.

PRISSY GIRLS

Next Student of the Week

CLAIRE

Odd number.

AMY

5

CLAIRE
(doing the cootie catcher)

One, two, three, four, five.
Even number.

EVELYN

2.

CLAIRE
(doing the cootie catcher)

One, two.
Even number.

AMY

2.

CLAIRE opens up the cootie catcher in almost disbelief.

CLAIRE

Mac

EVELYN

Mac

AMY

Mac

PRISSY GIRLS

Mac.

Our focus shifts to MAC and LAINE playing in the ball pit. LAINE's got big glasses, braces, and her hair up in pigtails. MAC's got on pants and a plain t-shirt.

MAC
Ya hear that?

LAINE
What?

MAC
Prissy girls said my name.

MAC looks to them -- they all stare at her.

MAC
HEY! WHY'D YOU SAY MY NAME?

AMY
You think it'll happen -- like actually *Teacher*?

CLAIRE
Are you doubting the cootie-catcher?

AMY
No! I --

MAC
Did you say Teacher?

They all look to Mac and then giggle to each other and run off

MAC
Hey! Why did you --

LAINE
They're just bein' weirdos. You just gotta ignore 'em. They just wanna "creep under your skin".

MAC
What?

LAINE
That's what my dads say. Like, they find whatever makes you sad and they feed off your sadness like werewolves eating dead roadkill and that's how they get big for the moon.

MAC
...Totally.

BENNY pops up from under the balls -- gasping for air.

BENNY

Remember that time the prissy girls said that Laine kissed a horse french style?

LAINE

I DID NOT!

BENNY

I'm just saying what the Prissy Girls said.

BENNY dives back under the balls.

Immediately he pops back up

BENNY

And they said that I am adopted and am actually from another planet and was laid in an egg cause I couldn't be human cause of my forehead. And that they don't understand why Mac's name is Mac because her full name is Macy and Mac sounds like a boy and that she's is too poor to afford any dresses so that's why you wear pants that look like they came from the garbage.

BENNY dives back under the balls.

Annnnd pops back up.

BENNY

I don't believe those things. My mother has shown me the video of my birth to normalize "*the feminine body*" for me so I know I was not hatched out of an egg. Plus my forehead is normal. See.

He knocks on his forehead.

BENNY

Also, our moms go shopping together so I know you don't get your clothes from the garbage. They get them from Costco. So I don't trust anything they say. You're sweet as apple pie to me!

MAC

Love ya 100 times 20, Benny!

BENNY

Love ya to the moon and back, Mac! TIME ME.

BENNY plunges back under the balls.

LAINE

Right. But -- um -- if anyone ever says anything mean to your face -- the mean kids -- now I can get 'em with some sweet moves I learned in my ladies defense class that my dads signed me up for so I don't get kidnapped and murdered and become the subject of a 3 star Netflix True Crime documentary. Watch.

LAINE punches the air with all her might.

LAINE

Now imagine how much that'd hurt with car keys in my hand. Or a stiletto! Janet always says to have something sharp on you that's also a household object like a wine opener or a whittling knife for "rustic ladies".

MAC

Wow.

BENNY pops up gasping for air

BENNY

HOW LONG WAS THAT?

MAC

Umm... maybe like...

BENNY

Around 3 minutes right? Cause that would be my current record. And I'm trying to start my training to beat the world record of 24 minutes and 37 seconds, by the time I'm 12 and Budimir Šobat only trained for 3 years and this would give me 4 years of training so I could beat him by like 10 minutes or something. So if that was 3 minutes I'm perfectly on track to achieve my goal in 4 years.

MAC

I think it was about 3 minutes.

LAINE

Definitely in the range of 0 to 5 minutes.

BENNY

NICE.

DEREK and FRAN peer over a window looking outside,
TEDDY trails a little behind.

LAINE

Hey! Derek, Fran -- you see anything?

DEREK

Yeah. We just got some news about the outside.

FRAN

We're not telling the whole class yet, because we don't want to freak everyone out.

DEREK

But, we saw something really big and ugly out there. You just gotta promise to stay calm.

BENNY

Oh god, what is it?

DEREK

Okay, Teddy. Tell him.

TEDDY leans in close to BENNY's ear.

TEDDY

It's... YOUR MOM'S BUTT.

TEDDY sticks his tongue in BENNY's ear.

BENNY shrieks.

MAC

Hey! Knock it off!

MAC pushes TEDDY off of BENNY.

DEREK shoves MAC back, kinda hard.

DEREK

Don't touch my brother.

TEDDY

Yeah! And don't touch *my* brother or I'll --

TEDDY tries a karate move and then accidentally hurts himself in the process.

DEREK

C'mon.

FRAN

See ya, Fudgebutt and friends.

FRAN, DEREK, and TEDDY laugh as they leave.

BENNY and L is on the verge of tears.

BENNY

I don't wanna be here any more.

L AINE

Me either!

MAC

Hey! Hey! No! We're not going to think about any of that right now. Because that will just make us sad little cry babies. Look at what we got -- a wall full of prizes to win and candy to fill up our bellies. And, I've got my two bestest friends in the whole wide world here. Teacher just said we gotta stay inside and everything will be OK.

BENNY

But, don't you wanna go home?

Over on the stage, TEDDY stands with a 300 ticket megaphone.

TEDDY

(via megaphone)

EVERYONE, IT IS THE TIME FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM YOUR STUDENT OF THE WEEK. PLEASE MAKE YOUR WAY TO THE STAGE.

L AINE

If I was Student of the Week, none-a this woulda been happening. We'd all get to eat whatever we wanted and everyone woulda been so much happier not bein' under tyrannosaurus rule. It would be a rule to be nice to me. And to you guys.

BENNY

I don't think anyone woulda listened to you and you just woulda froke out about it and we'd still be in chaos.

L AINE

Benny!

BENNY

Just speakin' my truth.

TEDDY

CLASS I DO NOT WANT TO GIVE YOU A WARNING.

The kids slowly shuffle over to the stage area where they all sit criss-cross applesauce on the ground.

1.2

On the stage stands TEDDY, standing up a little too straight with a 150 ticket gong. Next to him stands FRAN, a bit more comfortable, wearing a plastic, 220 ticket tiara.

As the kids start settling in, TEDDY rings the gong.

DEREK, the coolest kid in 3rd grade, emerges from the curtains wearing a 300 ticket crown.

The crowd murmurs.

TEDDY
EVERYBODY SHUT UP!! WE HAVE AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!!!

Everyone starts loudly shushing one another.

Shhh!!	PLUTO	Shut up!	CLAIRE
Quiet!	JOEY	Shut up, guys!	TEDDY

AMY

Listen to Teddy // shut up!

PLUTO

You keep talking so how // are we gonna shut up

AMY

Now you're the one //talking!

PLUTO

Now *you're* the one talking!

Everyone's in a fury of trying to shut each other up -- it's louder than it was before.

DEREK and FRAN, in unison, hold out their hands in a "quiet coyote" position.

One by one, the kids raise their hands in a quiet coyote position and stop talking.

DEREK

Good morning, class.

KIDS

Good morning, Derek.

DEREK

Today I want to tell you all a story that will make you think. So, a couple weeks back I was zooming home from school on my razor scooter and picked up some hash browns from McDonalds for free cause my cousin's the manager. And I when I was at McDonalds there was this old lady choking so I did CRP on her and she threw up a nugget and after was so happy that I saved her life and told me her grandson is a WWE wrestler and got me an audition for the league that I *should* be at today, but the only reason I'm not there is because we are here. So, what did this make you think?

EVELYN

...That we should be kind to others?

DEREK

No. That I am good enough for WWE and I can wrestle you at any moment. WATCH OUT. Now, the announcements.

TEDDY reads off of something he's scribbled with crayon on a napkin.

TEDDY

There is still electricity. Good. We still have water. Good. Ticket prices have gone up.

KIDS

Boo / What? / That's so lame

TEDDY

IT IS MY TURN TO TALK WE ARE HOLDING SPACE FOR ME AND MY VOICE TALKING THANK YOU

TEDDY

And we have 47 Squishmellows. Thank you. It is now Fran's turn to talk.

FRAN

Listen up. When teacher left, // we had

JOEY

[fart noise]

FRAN

Hey // I'm --

The kids laugh and also start making fart noises. Maybe a few real farts. Maybe one kid actually poops his pants.

DEREK "quiet coyotes" -- the kids follow.

DEREK

Here's the facts. Plain and simple. Teacher left when it was dark out and said she would be back "soon". It is now light out. Which is more time than "soon".

IRIS

But what *happened* to Teacher?

KIDS

She said she'd be back / Why is she gone? / What happened? / NO RULES

FRAN.

We don't know --

TEDDY

SHE'S PROBABLY NEVER COMING
BACK, LETS BE REALISTIC HERE
PEOPLE

DEREK

TEDDY!

TEDDY

That's what Dad's always saying to us -- "Let's be realistic, she's probably never coming back."

DEREK

(embarrassed)

He's not saying that about *Teacher*.

TEDDY

...

OH.

FRAN

Because we don't know --

TEDDY

oh nooooo

FRAN

-- because we don't know what happened to Teacher and don't know when she will be back we gotta make a game plan.

PLUTO

But what's going on out there?

...

JOEY

Probably eaten by // zombies

IRIS

There are NO SUCH THING // as *ZOMBIES!!!*

AMY

The next world war's coming?

EVELYN

Maybe the air's been poisoned
and that's why we can't go outside

PLUTO

NUCLEAR BOMBS!!!

MAC

Maybe it's some sorta punishment?

CLAIRE

It's obviously
a youtube prank
JINX!!!

EVELYN

a youtube prank.
JINX!!!

BENNY

(in awe)
The second coming of the dinosaurs.
Their time has come!

IRIS

You don't think it's a shooter? Right?

PLUTO

**I KEEP TELLING YOU ALL MY UNCLE SAYS WERE ALL IN
A SIMULATION HE HAS A POPULAR PODCAST ABOUT IT
THAT'S #12 IN AMERICA FOR MEN AGED 12-24.**

TEDDY bangs the gong and DEREK gives a *very firm*
quiet coyote.

The kids still fight with each other about their theories.
Loudly.

FRAN

Pluto -- Bubble.

Pluto puffs up their cheeks -- “catching a bubble in their mouth”.

FRAN

Claire -- Bubble. Joey -- Bubble.

All the kids put bubbles in their mouths.

It’s quiet again.

FRAN.

When I made Bergen County’s Junior League Girl’s Varsity Volleyball Team, as a 3rd grader on a team made up of 5th and 6th graders, I learned 3 things.

1. Keep your thumb down and hand turned out during your draw and until you start your swing.
2. Never give Carly Myer your locker combo or your uniform will smell like fish for weeks.

And

3. Every successful team needs a clear, strong leader.

Everyone here has been eating good, playing games, and happy since Teacher left.

Because Derek has been such a good Student of the Week, I think we should make him official Substitute Teacher.

Hubbub amongst the kids.

FRAN

Until Teacher comes back. Or the high school worker who ran out of here. Or our moms and dads. Or the police. Or the fire department. Or the volunteer weekend firefighters. Or just... until we get an adult in here.

TEDDY

If you want Derek to be Substitute Teacher, raise your hands --

A few kids begin to raise their hands --

TEDDY

But if you don’t raise your hand it also means that you’re a tiny winey baby who poops their pants.

Any kids who didn’t have their hands raised, put them up (aside from MAC and LAINE).

TEDDY

Good! We here-by announce Substitute Teacher Derek! *Chuck Save the Teach!*

The kids look at each other.

TEDDY

No, I came up with that. Like the British, "God Save the --" It's a fun -- it's a fun thing to say, now you say it after me. *Chuck Save --*

DEREK

Do what my brother says.

DEREK gives TEDDY a thumbs up.

TEDDY nods and restarts.

TEDDY

CHUCK SAVE THE TEACH

KIDS

CHUCK SAVE THE TEACH

TEDDY salutes.

DEREK

And because me and Fran are boyfriend/girlfriend, she will be my Teacher's Assistant.

FRAN

Thank you.

FRAN reaches out her hand to DEREK's (as boyfriend/girlfriends do).

DEREK, looks at it and realizes he's suppose to hold it.

They proudly hold hands for a second.

Then, awkwardly, look around, both let go and wipe their hands on their shirts for fear of cooties.

DEREK

I am glad to be your Teacher. You all made the right choice. Leaders need to be strong and tough and won't back down to dumb weirdos who think they know better. We are students who are strong, cool, and normal. Not little whiny cry babies or people who poop their pants. You got it?

FRAN

Now! We will run a ship shape class. Organization is KEY. We will have chores and everyone has assigned sleeping areas so me and Teddy will check your area every day for cleanliness! Understood, class?

DEREK

And you get what you get and you don't throw a fit.

IRIS

What if we don't wanna listen to your dumb rules!?

DEREK

Well, then you go into the ticket blaster.

IRIS

So WHAT? You can't send us to Principal Bourne's office! Or tell my mommy! We don't have to follow any of your rules.

DEREK

So you won't. Rules are only for people in the class.

IRIS

Great!

DEREK

Then leave.

IRIS

... What?

DEREK

This field trip was only for students in the class who got their permission slip signed. If you don't want to be in the class anymore then you're not allowed here.

IRIS

But...

Everyone looks to the front door that's been lingering this whole time -- no lock, nothing in front of it. Just there.

IRIS

Teacher said the rule is we can't go out the door. We stay in here and wait for help. To stay safe.

DEREK shrugs.

DEREK

Rules are only for the class.

IRIS looks to the door, looks to their peers, then hangs their head and walks to the ticket blaster.

IRIS

I just wanted to say that I --

TEDDY closes the door on her. IRIS continues to talk, but we can't hear them at all.

FRAN

Here is the list of sleeping assignments and chores starting immediately.

The kids swarm to read the list. It's clear the better chores went to the more popular kids.

Murmurs throughout the crowd.

FRAN

Good hustle everyone. Meeting ad-jorned.

The kids disperse.

MAC, LAINE, and BENNY join back together.

MAC

What'd you all get?

LAINE

It said gotta shine every single ball in the ball pit and I gotta sleep in the basement?

MAC

Same here!

BENNY

I'm also sleepin' in the basement, but my job just says "toilet"

MAC

So you gotta clean the toilet?

BENNY

I hope so...

TIME PASSES

1.3

2 hours have passed. Or maybe its 4? Or just 10 minutes?
It's hard to know when you can't read a clock.

The kids are all doing their chores which involve cleaning things, restocking prizes, to simply counting tickets.

MAC and LAINE are in the ball pit, cleaning the balls one by one.

LAINE looks over at the prize wall and notices that at the top there's a 5lb bag of jellybeans and a horse head on a stick.

LAINE

Mac. MAC. You see that?

MAC

The jellybeans?

LAINE

No! The hobby horse, Mac. A beautiful, high quality hobby horse. I've been searching for one forever -- I need something more than a broom with a printed out picture of Seabiscut if I ever wanna be taken seriously at The Hoboken Hobby Horse Championships. And I've been working on my prolonged gallop for my free style dressage and I think I've got a good chance this year. And I think that horse would seal the deal.

LAINE starts to leave the ball pit.

MAC

No! I don't want you to get the ticket blaster. Plus, it's way too tall. If you climb it you're gonna make it half way up, fall over and SPLAT.

LAINE

Fine. ... I want a real horse one day. You know, horses love you no matter what. That's a scientific fact you know? They choose someone to bond with and then that's your soul horse. ... You think they'd let us have a snack if we asked?

MAC

I tried earlier. Fran says we gotta save food or else we're gonna run all the way out.

LAINE's been staring at the glowing mouse's eyes

LAINE

His eyes never stop glowing. You notice that?

MAC

Hm?

LAINE

The mouse.

MAC

Oh.

LAINE

Means someone's keeping the electricity on, right??

MAC

Or it's just runnin' till it runs out.

...

MAC and LAINE stare at the Mouse, as BENNY walks over to the ball pit -- just his head and hair have been drenched with water.

He pours half of a giant pixie stick into his mouth.

LAINE

What happened to you?

BENNY

Oh I was just cleaning the toilets and then Derek said I didn't do a good enough job and told me to look closer and then put my head in the toilet and then I said that that tactic did not work as I cannot see underwater and then he told me to shut up and dunked my head back under the water.

MAC

Where'd you find that?

BENNY

Someone dropped it half full in the bathroom! "Every threat's an opportunity!"

BENNY pours more into his mouth.

MAC and LAINE look on, horrified.

BENNY

Oh. Sorry. You want some?

LAINE

Why is everyone so mean to us always!? Derek is bullying Benny left and right. Prissy girls are always rude. We're the laughing sock of the class and it's only gotten worse since we got in this whole mess. We're miserable and Derek is keeping all the food for him and Teddy and Fran and soon -- soon we're just gonna be --

LAINE begins to cry.

MAC

No, hey -- hey! We're gonna be okay! I'm here. Benny's here. And we -- we've got someone always lookin' out for us. Right?

BENNY

Who's that?

MAC

God.

LAINE

The Mouse.

BENNY

(in awe)

... *Mouse God.*

LAINE

Huh...

MAC

Well, someone's lookin' out for us.

(a joke, for Laine)

Maybe it's Mouse God. You know what Mouse God's saying right now? It's telling me that we're gonna be okay.

LAINE

We don't know that, Big Mac. If nothing changes -- if we don't *do something* -- we're just gonna keep bein' hungry and getting bullied until...

MAC

Teacher's gonna come back. Or our moms and dads. We just // gotta --

LAINE

We have to do something. The three of us. Tonight. Give Derek a piece of our minds. Politely and using I statements. And if it doesn't work, then I'll wait quietly and patiently with zipped lips and a smile. ... So?

BENNY

mmmmmm.....

LAINE

I'll draw you a *really* good picture of a dinosaur.

BENNY

Which dinosaur?

LAINE

Which one you want?

BENNY

Camarasaurus?

LAINE

Pterodactyl.

BENNY

Ornitholestes.

LAINE

T-Rex.

BENNY

... Two T-Rexes?

LAINE

... Deal.

BENNY

SCORE.

LAINE

And Mac. I promise that I'll --

MAC

Deal.

LAINE

You didn't know what I was gonna say.

MAC

I know. It just -- you've got good ideas. And I would like to... help. With... those... ideas.

LAINE

Okay. You guys in?

LAINE puts her hand in -- she shares a smile with MAC.
BENNY slams his hand down.

BENNY

HECK TO THE YEAH.

MAC puts her hand on top of BENNY's.

TIME PASSES

1.4

It's dark outside. The kids are all fast asleep.

DEREK, TEDDY, and FRAN are the only ones who sleep on the stage -- all spread out far from each other.

LAINE, BENNY, and MAC slowly and quietly sneak onto the stage from a door leading to the basement.

Once they make it onto the stage -- BENNY pretty immediately runs back to the door and we can faintly hear him throwing up.

BENNY, ashamed, slinks back in.

BENNY

I flew up.

MAC

Go wash out your mouth and then go to sleep.

BENNY

But I wanna help! ...And I want my T-Rexes drawing.

LAINE

We can't have you throwin' up again and messin' up the plan. ... I'll still do the drawings.

BENNY

Fine...

BENNY goes back downstairs.

LAINE

The points that we rehearsed. Alright?

MAC nods.

LAINE pokes DEREK with her shoe to wake him up.

DEREK

Teddy, stop. I'll make pancakes if you give me 5 more minutes.

LAINE

Derek. Wake up.

DEREK remembers where he is.

DEREK

Dude! What the heckie? I was having a really cool and manly dream with... like... motorcycles and bears. And... other manly things.

MAC

We needed to talk to you now // because you won't --

DEREK

You can talk to Fran about that tomorrow.

LAINE

No, we need to talk to *you*. Now. So, listen up, mister!

DEREK

What do you want, Horse Kisser?

LAINE is ready to fight, but composes herself.

LAINE

We wanna stop being bullied. We want it to be fair. Food. Chores. All of it. Isn't that right, Mac?

MAC nods a bit too aggressively.

LAINE

Stop calling me Horse Kisser. And -- and Benny Fudgebutt. And Mac, Macy. You've been in charge of all the food and probably eatin' more yourself while making us do all the chores. And Mac and I don't think it's fair. It should be even stevens and it's odds bobs.

DEREK

Rules are in place to keep us safe.

LAINE

You don't care about that! I think you're just being a bully!

...

DEREK

Ticket blaster for 5 minutes.

MAC

Derek -- Teacher, she didn't mean // what she --

LAINE

I'm not gonna.

DEREK

An hour.

LAINE

No.

MAC

Laine.

DEREK

A day.

LAINE

No.

DEREK

Then I'll just wake everyone up and we'll make you go outside.

LAINE

Go ahead // then --

MAC

We'll go in! Laine, c'mon.

MAC grabs LAINE's arm, pulling her.

LAINE

Mac -- let go! I'm not // going to --

DEREK

Listen to your *dumbass* friend.

LAINE stops fighting, an idea.

LAINE

... Okay. You win. Lead the way.

DEREK walks them over to the ticket blaster and opens the door.

DEREK

I'm trying to help you guys! You know! You're both just so dumb and weird and you literally don't have to be. You can just do your chores and play games and not bother anyone and then no one would bully you. No one wants to bully you! Just stop being so weird and people will stop.

LAINE is about to step in.

LAINE

Teacher, can I say two things.

MAC

Laine // let's just --

DEREK

I wanna hear what you have to say.

LAINE

First, thank you for the advice.

DEREK

You're welcome.

LAINE

And secondly, I wanna tell you that I'm sorry.

DEREK

Sorry for what?

LAINE

For this.

LAINE takes off one of her scrunchies and flings it towards DEREK's face.

It startles DEREK, giving LAINE a chance to kick him in the chest.

He stumbles back into the ticket blaster and LAINE shuts and locks it.

He screams at them -- but it's sound proof. No one can hear him.

MAC

Laine. What did you do?

LAINE

"Ladies Defense Class Session 5: Hair Accessories are a Girl's Best Weapon."

MAC

When he gets out -- when he gets out Laine, he's gonna make us go outside. If he was gonna punish us just for being mean to him. Just imagine...

MAC in a daze, backs into the control panel of the ticket blaster -- accidentally pressing the "ON" button. Nor she or LAINE notice.

DEREK starts banging on the glass -- screaming. No one notices.

LAINE

We'll say he's lying.

MAC

Who are they going to believe, Laine? They don't like us! You said it yourself!

LAINE

Um... then... I don't know. Um... I don't // know --

MAC

3rd grade is like chess, Lainey! Everyone's out to getcha. You gotta always be thinkin' 5 steps ahead.

LAINE starts panicking and hyperventilating.

MAC

Hey, you're okay. It's going to be okay.

In the middle of yelling, a ticket flies into DEREK's esophagus -- he begins choking on it. The girls still don't notice

MAC

Just breathe with me. All you need to do is breathe. Breathe in.... And out.... In... and out. You're doing so good.

As MAC and LAINE breathe together -- DEREK tries to get their attention again. Still choking.

MAC

And we can figure this out. We can hide in the attic for a bit and just play horses and mermaids and house. And then Teacher will be back and we'll talk to her. And -- and maybe we'll get detention. *BUT* maybe we won't. And it'll be okay, you know?

DEREK slowly slides down the tube -- using the little energy he has left to try to bang on the tube.

MAC

No matter what, we got each other. You and me, Lainey. In it together! Forever and ever.

LAINE

Promise?

MAC nods and holds out her pinkie. LAINE wraps hers around.

LAINE

Kiss it to seal the deal?

MAC

Oh. Yeah. Yeah. Um...

MAC and LAINE kiss their own hands, as DEREK's head flops to the side.

They smile at each other.

And then look to the ticket blaster to finally see DEREK, slumped over, dead.

A long beat.

They look back at each other.

LAINE and MAC run.

TIME PASSES

1.5

There is a mouse-themed blanket that has been taped over the ticket blaster, concealing the body inside.

FRAN stands on the stage -- in somewhat of a daze.

TEDDY sits next to her, sipping a box of apple juice -- blank faced.

The rest of the kids sit as an audience, they all quietly chatter to each other.

MAC

I think we should say something.

LAINE

Don't say anything. I've got this Mac. We're playin' chess now. Trust me.

FRAN steps forward -- the room goes quiet on its own.

She attempts to speak, but instead cries and runs off.

JOEY

... So does anyone know what the heck happened?

IRIS

I think he just wanted to play and got stuck and fell asleep.

PLUTO

The government hacked the chip in his brain // that he got from --

BENNY

He's just taking a nap, right?

CLAIRE

The government can't hack brain chips // Pluto

AMY

He was probably just trying to get warm cause tubes are warm, you know?

PLUTO

MY UNCLE SAYS THEY'VE HAD THE TECHNOLOGY SINCE THE REGAN ADMINISTRATION

TEDDY

(matter-of-fact)

He's dead.

The room falls silent.

TEDDY

(matter-of-fact)

He is dead and his body will decompose and go back become worm food. Because that's what happens when you die.

MAC

Teddy... are you okay?

TEDDY

Yeah. There's nothing to really do. He's dead.

TEDDY shrugs, slurps his apple juice, and goes to play an arcade game.

JOEY

Okay.... but *WHY* was he in the ticket blaster?

LAINE

He coulda just wanted a quiet place to think

MAC

Or, like, originally, those were made to have a fun time in, you know?

BENNY

Derek never liked it though. That's why he used it // as punishment.

CLAIRE

Plus, you can't press the button that make the tickets go WOOSH from the inside.
Someone's gotta push it from // the outside

IRIS

SOMEONE MUST'VE SHOVED // HIM IN

AMY

Or *at least* pushed the button!!

LAINE

Maybe it went off on its own?

EVELYN

No, but in science Teacher taught us about Newton's 3rd Law of Motion.

LAINE

Do you believe that?

EVELYN

Teacher told us it was true. We spent a whole week on learning it.

LAINE

Teacher told us a lot of things, didn't she? Teacher told us that we shouldn't run or else we would hurt our knees and ankles. Teacher told us that we couldn't just eat laughy taffy for lunch or we'd turn into a laughy taffy. Teacher told us our mommies or daddies were gonna pick us up after the field trip at 2:30 not 3:00 because it was an early day. We've all been runnin' around, haven't we? Tell me, has anyone broken their knee?

Murmurs.

LAINE

We've been eating laughy taffy. Has anyone here turned into one yet?

More murmurs.

LAINE

Was anybody picked up by their mommy or daddy? ... Teacher told us she'd be back "soon" and where is she now?

EVELYN

Something probably happened to her and she didn't know // that --

LAINE

Exactly! She didn't know. Teacher doesn't know everything. Teacher has been wrong about a lotta stuff.

IRIS

Teacher would never lie to us.

LAINE

No, she wouldn't! She told us what she -- from the bottom of her heart -- thought was true. But she's wrong! People who love us can be wrong. Even if they don't know it. But that means we have to be super sleuths and figure out what is true. And what is best. We're all just in the 3rd grade, so we know a heck-of-a-lot, but we don't know as much as like 5th graders. Or 6th graders. But there's someone who does.

LAINE points up -- to the neon glowing Mouse sign

LAINE

The Mouse.

KIDS

What? / She's joking / What is horse kisser saying? / I don't get it / etc.

LAINE

A lot of our mommies and daddies tell us about someone watchin' over us. Someone who makes sure our bellies are full. Someone who makes sure we get enough sleep. Someone who makes sure we're happy and healthy. Someone who *can't* tell us a lie. Even if they wanted to. Who has been watchin' all of us while we sleep here? Who has been makin' sure the power is on? Who makes sure the water bill is paid so there's water in the sinks and toilets? The Mouse has never stopped glowing. Making sure we are all okay.

TEDDY

Then what about Derek?

LAINE

That... is a great question. The Mouse... had to take Derek, to save the rest of us.

TEDDY

So... he was kinda a hero?

LAINE

Excata mundo!

JOEY

How do you know that?

PLUTO

You can't talk to The Mouse... can you?

LAINE

No. But, The Mouse talks to Mac. Right, Mac?

All eyes on MAC.

MAC

Uh... I --

LAINE

You told me before, The Mouse said we were gonna be okay?

MAC

Um... Yeah. Yeah. That's what The Mouse said.

EVELYN

Why should we believe any of this?

IRIS

You could all be big fibbers.

LAINE

Then why else did this any of this happen? Especially to us?

The kids murmur, but no one with a strong enough opinion to say something outright.

LAINE

Why would we be stuck here, with no Teacher, no grown ups, no TV, no food, no pets, no nothin' !? Just for random? A co-winkie-dink? No rhyme or reason? Nothin means anything? Or it's The Mouse. Tryin' to teach us. I dunno about you all, but I think, the best chance we got is listening to what The Mouse has to say.

The kids murmur again -- Laine's got a point. No one takes immediate action until:

TEDDY stands, makes direct eye contact with MAC

Then he bows to the neon sign.

All the kids (except for MAC and LAINE) follow suit.

LAINE

Mac, what is The Mouse saying now?

MAC is about to stop all of this -- and then looks at LAINE who gives her a motion of "c'mon".

MAC

Um -- The Mouse says... we've got a lot of work to do.

LAINE smiles at MAC -- MAC smiles back, even bigger.

TIME PASSES

1.6

Additions are slowly being added to the area.

Most noticeably -- all the windows are now covered up with towels, wrapping paper, and tarps.

Poorly hand-drawn posters of The Mouse, as well as a couple of Mac herself are hung.

A booth of a table has somehow been dragged onto the stage to make a throne for Mac and Laine.

Food wrappers everywhere -- the kids have been, and maybe currently are, eating.

It may not be noticeable at first glance, but somehow everyone just looks more... cohesive?

Everyone is split off into groups.

Focus shifts to The PRISSY girls who are in a sewing circle.

AMY

And I heard that Joey didn't even thank The Mouse after washing his hands.

EVELYN

Well I just heard that Joey doesn't wash his hands

CLAIRE

I don't think *any* of the boys wash their hands.

PRISSY GIRLS

EWWWWWWW

Focus shifts to TEDDY who is currently leading BENNY and IRIS in an equivalent of a bible study.

TEDDY

So, we can see this not only in The Book Of Mouse, which is everything The Mouse told Mac, but also as the center point in Cheeselandia -- the "Ticket Blaster". Evil. And you unscramble those letters, you get the words "backstreet tilt". What was Derek's favorite game?

BENNY

Coin pusher?

TEDDY

No.

IRIS

Shootin' hoops.

TEDDY

No.

IRIS

But he played shootin' hoops a lot.

TEDDY

But it wasn't his favorite.

IRIS

He'd sometimes play like 5 or 6 times a day.

BENNY

Oh yeah, I remember that.

TEDDY

BUT IT WASN'T HIS FAVORITE. His favorite was the game "Tilt". And where is tilt?

BENNY

(gasp!)

On the wall!

TEDDY

On the *backstreet* of the arcade. My brother was tempted by evil. And The Mouse knew the only way to save my brother's soul, was to put him in the Ticket Blaster.

BENNY

Woah.

IRIS

That's craaaazy.

TEDDY

The Book of Mouse warns us that there is evil lurkin' around every corner. Trying to tempt all of us into not believing. So, LOOK OUT.

Focus shifts to JOEY and PLUTO who are playing an arcade.

JOEY

Hey -- stop it! You're sniping all the high point zombies!

PLUTO

Maybe you should just get to them faster.

JOEY shoves PLUTO. PLUTO shoves back.

AMY sees this and runs over.

AMY

Hey -- HEY. Both of you. What Would The Mouse do?

JOEY

(sheepishly)
...I'm sorry that I got mad
about zombies and pushing you

PLUTO

(sheepishly)
SORRY I pushed you
and stole the zombies.

AMY

Good job. Gold stars for both of you. Now, *hug*.

They do.

TEDDY bounces up to MAC.

He does a very flourish-y, royal bow to MAC.

TEDDY

Your all-great highness-ness-ness

MAC

Teddy, you don't have to --

TEDDY

"May you be a kid today"

MAC

What?

TEDDY

It's a thing I think we should start saying, as a greeting. Like kinda from the commercials. "May you be a kid today" and then you would say "And you may also be one as well".

MAC

Sure. What's going on?

TEDDY

I wanted to ask you some more questions about The Holy Texts.

MAC

Oh, Teddy, those are just the books that the people who worked here left behind. I don't // know if they're --

TEDDY

The Mouse doesn't do anything on accident! So in the Holy Text, "Employee Handbook" -- It says that violators of the hand stamp policy will be banned from the arcade, but instances can be reviewed by a case by case basis. That sometimes after reviewing a case The Mouse will let people back inside the arcade.

MAC

Uh, sure.

TEDDY

And -- and Derek. I know at school he said a lot of mean things and stole a lot of peoples toys and pushed some people sometimes. But at home, he always made us quesadillas when Dad wouldn't And got us to the bus in the morning. And knows how to lock the door from the inside. And picks the bedtime stories we read. And now a bad thing happened to Derek. So... I just wanted to make sure that The Mouse knew. Incase The Mouse didn't know and just, wanted to review the case again... maybe...

MAC

Oh. Um. I mean, the Mouse knew -- The Mouse knows everything. ... Derek was different. Cause The Mouse knew how good Derek was. And that's why he was a sacrifice. Cause Derek was so strong. And The Mouse needed to be stronger. And the only way we would all be okay was to use Derek's strength.

TEDDY

So, Derek helps The Mouse take care of us?

MAC

Uh... Yeah. Yeah.

TEDDY

Woah. ... And you can talk to The Mouse. So you can talk to Derek. Can you just tell him that -- I love him and I miss him and thank him... for helping The Mouse... and helping me.

MAC nods her head.

TEDDY

Thank you, Your Highnessness Mac.

MAC

Teddy, you can just call me Mac.

TEDDY

Thank you, Mac. I love you.

TEDDY envelopes MAC in a giant hug.

MAC

Oh, you too, Teddy.

TEDDY runs back down to his bible study group.

BENNY runs up to MAC.

BENNY

Is it my turn now?

MAC

Benny! Hi! I feel like I haven't seen you in forever.

BENNY

Yeah. After you started talkin' with The Mouse you and Laine's popularity scores have hit sky high.

MAC

Not a lot of time to play when you have to run a whole sobriety.

LAINE reenters over by the arcade -- somehow with a complete make over: Dress made out of stuffed animal faces, hair down, maybe she found some makeup at the prize counter.

FRAN notices her.

FRAN

Laine!

LAINE turns back and sees FRAN.

FRAN

I wanted to check back in on -- you said Mac would ask The Mouse about chores and I haven't heard back. Cause I can use my leadership skills to make sure everyone is doing their part. But it's starting to get pretty messy and routines are good to build in AS//AP --

LAINE

Oh, The Mouse said no to chores.

FRAN

What? We gotta have chores. That's how we stay organized. Did -- did they give a reason?

LAINE

Well, The Mouse loves their students, doesn't want them to have to do unfair chores.

Focus now splits between MAC/BENNY and
LAINE/FRAN

MAC

What've you been up to?

BENNY

So far I've been practicing in the ball pit a lot. Went to Teddy's "The Book of Mouse" book study. Starting my report early for when the police comes and we have to show them the body.

MAC

What?

FRAN

How are they unfair?

LAINE

The Mouse knows that the assignments were chosen by who's the most popular. That's not okay. So, we're just makin' sure everyone helps out with everything.

FRAN

But then no one's gonna do the not fun chores.

LAINE

I think everyone's doing a A+ gold star job already.

MAC

Benny -- you can't do that!

BENNY

That's what they do on TV. Whoever sees the body calls 911 and so Mariska Hargitay gets there and cop-i-gandas all around until they put the guy in prison.

MAC

There's not even a bad guy to arrest, Benny. It was an accident -- It was The Mouse!

BENNY

Even then, they still gotta 'vestigate. Ice Tea still has to have time to say a couple of solid one liners. But I was thinkin' about that -- cause it's not possible to lock yourself inside the ticket blaster.

FRAN

You can't give everyone a gold star, then gold stars don't mean anything anymore.

LAINE

So?

FRAN

SO. Then people won't try their best every time or give 100%. And then we can't tell who is good at things and who is bad.

LAINE

Well, Fran, The Mouse loves everyone. If you're tall or short. Big or small. Like cheese puffs or don't like cheese puffs. Even if the only thing you're good at is volleyball and being a meanie pants, The Mouse still loves you.

LAINE smirks and skips away.

MAC

Impossible things happen all the time! Benny, you just gotta relax. It's all // going to --

LAINE skips up to the two. MAC suddenly becomes transfixed with her.

LAINE

What's goin' on here?

BENNY

I was just saying // --

MAC

Woah. Laine. You -- The dress looks really *really* // amazing.

LAINE

Thanks! I think I look like Princess Annika from "Barbie and the Magic of Pegasus" which is the Barbie movie where she's an ice-skater and then gets an evil curse and everyone's frozen and she has to marry that guy // or else she --

BENNY

Is this important in the slightest, right now?

LAINE

Yes, Benny, it is. Listen, Mac and I need to prepare for an announcement.

BENNY

Oh. Okay.

BENNY just stands there, not getting the hint.

BENNY

Did you know in the video game Five Nights at Freddy's you're actually there for 7 nights and not 5.

LAINE

Benny.

BENNY

Yeah.

LAINE

Just Mac and I.

BENNY

Oh [I should go?]

LAINE nods.

BENNY gives a half-hearted two thumbs up and heads off.

MAC

You look --
Yeah! Yeah.

LAINE

You ready for the speech, Mac-a-doodle-
do?

LAINE hands MAC a piece of paper.

TEDDY takes center stage, pulls out a kazoo and kazoos.

Everyone quickly and quietly gathers around.

TEDDY

May you be a kid today!

KIDS

And you may also be one as well!

TEDDY

Announcements! There is still electricity. Good. We still have water. Good. We have 23 stuffed animals left. No more tickets are being used. Every good must equal a service. We share and care with each other. Food is for all. Sleep wherever is comfiest to you. Big thanks to The Mouse. Now, presenting, our highnessnessness, The Prophet Mac!

Everyone cheers as MAC takes the stage.

MAC

Students of The Mouse! I come to you today with a message. Firstly, The Mouse tells me that it is so very proud of you all for all the work you have done. Secondly, we will be having a special activity soon! It is a Ball-tism. We will dunk you one by one into the ball pit and this will show your commitment and love to the class and The Mouse. And afterwards, if everyone is on their bestest behavior and stays in the green zone, we get to have a pizza party!

Huge cheers from the class.

TEDDY

Let's say "Thank you Mac and Laine" on the count of 3. 1, 2, 3.

KIDS
(enthusiastically)
THANK YOU MAC AND LAINE.

MAC
That is all. Big thanks to The Mouse!

KIDS
Big thanks to The Mouse!

The kids disperse -- giddy, joyful.

LAINE
I think they really like us. Really, truly, Mac. The whole class. No one's called me Horse Kisser in forever. Just Laine or "your highnessnessness" or "pretty" -- Mac, did I tell you - - Joey and Christopher R. said I looked really pretty in the dress. And then Joey told me that I was the prettiest girl in the whole class and the whole *grade*. And Joey is #4 on the Prissy Girls list of cute boys in the class. And I think he might ask me to be boyfriend/girlfriend.

MAC
Oh.

LAINE
I'd say "no-way Jose" cause I gotta focus on all this, you know? But it'd be nice to be flattered.

MAC
Well, I think anyone would be lucky to even have a chance to be boyfriend/girlfriend with you.

LAINE
Uno reverse, switcheroo, right back to you!

MAC
Really?

LAINE
Totally! You are so smart and pretty and a bombshell at every villa! Whoever you're boyfriend/girlfriend with one day will be the luckiest duck at the carnival game.

A moment. Is there tension??

Wanna skeeball?

LAINE

Yeah -- um yes. Yeah.

MAC

TIME PASSES

1.7

Everyone is fast asleep scattered throughout the area. Resources are a bit more equal now. No one is without at least a blanket or a squishmellow.

Aside from the occasional snore and and the consistent hum from the generator in the basement, all is quiet.

MAC sits on top of the jungle gym. She looks over at a sleeping Laine for a moment.

Then, closes her eyes to talk to The Mouse.

BENNY climbs up the side of the jungle gym and joins MAC, without her noticing.

I can't sleep either.

BENNY

AH! Oh // my --

MAC

I can't sleep without my melatonin. My mommy gives me 30mg every night. And then I'm asleep. Light's out. No dreams. I just appear in the next day. It's nice... Your face looks sad. Why does your face look sad?

BENNY

I'm not sad. I'm just... um...

MAC

I'm homesick too. But just think how excited our parents are gonna be when they see us. My mommy said that I had to clean up my room when I got home from school the other day and then I never came home and I bet she will have missed me so much that she wont make me clean up my room when I get home. At least not right away.

BENNY

And the hugs -- my mommy and daddy, like, when I come home from school they're usually still busy selling plants and have adult conversations that are not for 8 year old ears. So, I just kinda do one of these [self hugs]. But when I'm away at Granny and Poppop's for a weekend, mommy comes to the door and bends down and gives me a big squeeze hug. So I can only imagine after *this*! You know?

MAC

Oh. I dunno. My dad doesn't really do that. But he doesn't do it with Chase or Lucas or Morgan either.

BENNY

I've seen your mommy give you lots of big hugs before.

MAC

Yeah, but she's still gone for awhile. And Dad says she still needs more time to get better before she can come back.

BENNY

Oh. Well, Laine's always huggin' ya. It looks nice. Having a person who loves you like that.

MAC

I don't think // Laine loves --

BENNY

Like a best friend, I mean.

MAC

... Benny, you're my best friend. We've been best friends since Mommy & Me.

BENNY

Yeah. I know. But, it's different now. Like, you being a prophet and me being a filthy peasant. We used to hang out you and me all the time and now the two of you have private meetings about The Mouse. You and Laine playing house and I tell you that I'll be the baby and then Laine says she doesn't want kids and then I offer to be the dog and then Laine says she's allergic and that doesn't even make sense cause I'm not even a real dog. ... Mac, can I share an observation?

MAC

...Sure.

BENNY

You like like Laine. And it's okay cause girls can like girls and boys can like boys and that is natural and also often found in nature like with penguins.

MAC

Um. I -- I don't know. I like being around her. I don't even know if I wanna like... *I sometimes think about kissing but i don't even know if i want to kiss her because kissing anyone is gross but if she wanted to kiss me that's fine i think but i really just kind of want to --* I just... I'd like to hold her hand. Or for her to hold my hand. With, like fingers [*intertwined*]... I'd do anything for her to just hold my hand. ... But I don't know if she -- Um... I don't know. There's a lot to do right now.

BENNY

Yeah. Maybe you can do something when Teacher comes back?

MAC

...Yeah.

...

...

...

MAC

I should probably go // back to sleep --

BENNY

I've been having nightmares, Mac. About Derek. And -- he was a bully to me and you and everyone. And I didn't like him, but he was a person. And then he was just a body.

MAC

Yeah, Benny, it's, um, it's really sad.

BENNY

It's just... why was he there at night? With no one watching? None of it makes sense. And the ticket blaster needs to lock fully before you can turn it on // so someone had --

MAC

"The Mouse, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." My mama taught me that. And -- He's okay. Derek's safe with The Mouse now.

BENNY

Derek is dead. Like forever dead. He won't ever get to go to play basketball again. Or go to the 4th grade. Or see his parents.

A beat.

BENNY

Mac. ... I'm your Best Friend. Please just say it. I don't wanna have to ask you the question.

MAC

I don't know what you're talking about.

BENNY

I know it had to be Laine and you. I've thought about all possible possibilities and it is the only one that makes a lick of sense. And I'm sure it was an accident. You wouldn't do somethin' like that. But -- we can put out heads together and figure this out. You don't become prophet anymore and you and Laine can lay low with me and we can go back to normal. Tell me and then I won't tell anyone else. I promise. Best Friend Secret Rules. Pinkie swear.

BENNY holds out his pinkie.

...

...

MAC

I'm going to sleep.

BENNY

Love ya to the moon and back, Mac.

MAC

(not looking back)

...

Love ya a hundred times twenty, Benny.

MAC climbs down the jungle gym and goes back to sleep next to LAINE.

BENNY sits and watches.

TIME PASSES

1.8

We're in the middle of the "Ball-tism".

The kids are lined up at the ball pit in a single file line.

LAINE and TEDDY watch from the side.

MAC stands in the middle of the ball pit.

Suddenly, IRIS pops up out of the ball pit.

IRIS

THE CHEESE IS WITHIN ME!

Everyone cheers as IRIS exits the ball pit.

TEDDY

This is honestly better than 5th birthday party -- and we even rented chickens for that one.

MAC

Joey?

JOEY hops in the ball pit.

MAC

Joey, is The Mouse your favorite in the whole wide world?

JOEY

Uhhh....

LAINE

(calling out)

Everyone who's in the class must have The Mouse be their favorite!

JOEY

Oh, then, yep. Yes. Yeah.

MAC

Repeat after me.

JOEY

Repeat after me.

MAC
No not yet.

JOEY
No not yet.

MAC
Never mind.

JOEY
Never mind.

MAC
I agree that I love The Mouse

JOEY
I agree that I love The Mouse

MAC
And know that The Mouse always wants what's best for us always

JOEY
And know that The Mouse always wants what's best for us always

MAC
And will always tell Mac what that is who will tell me

JOEY
And will always tell Mac what that is who will tell me

MAC
And I will listen

JOEY
And I will listen.

MAC
Good!

LAINE
(to Teddy)
Is everyone here?

TEDDY
Umm... Someone's missing. They're probably just poopin'.

MAC

Now, in the name of The Mouse, the Teacher, and all of Cheeselandia, I ball-tize you as a student of The Mouse!

MAC dunks JOEY's head under the balls and they quickly emerge back up, elated.

JOEY

LET'S GOOOOOO.

JOEY exits the ball pit.

MAC

Christopher R. it is your turn!

As CHRISTOPHER R. starts to get into the ball pit --
BENNY runs in.

MAC

Benny. Are you here to get ball-tized?

BENNY

Mac. Last chance. Just come clean.

LAINE

Benny! It is not your turn!

MAC

I don't know what you're --

BENNY

(pronouncing murdered as "moy-doyed", like 50s style)

DEREK WAS *MURDERED*.

KIDS

What? / No. / "Moy-doyed"? What's that? / He means murdered. He's just stupid. / I forgot about him / That's crazy / etc.

LAINE

The Mouse said that it was his time to go.

BENNY

So, The Mouse did it.

LAINE

Yes, that's what we've said.

BENNY

And The Mouse isn't something we can see or hear or touch.

MAC

(sotto)

Benny.

BENNY

Then how was the ticket blaster locked from the outside? Why was the button stuck? There's no way he could've done it himself. It would've been impossible.

PLUTO

Um, you're forgetting The Mouse can do anything.

BENNY

Why do you think that? When I bet we could dust for fingerprints! I learned on Mythbusters, all we gotta get is get some baby powder and a brush and clear tape --

CLAIRE

The Mouse doesn't have fingerprints.

EVELYN

Because we are all The Mouse's fingerprints.

AMY

Because we are all The Mouse's fingerprints.

BENNY

That's what I'm talkin' about! If The Mouse doesn't have finger prints and we *find* fingerprints -- Cause... The night before, me Mac, and Laine went to go and talk to Derek about how he was being a do-do head and I had to go to back to bed cause I frew up too much potty sugar. They were mad at Derek. We only started talkin' about The Mouse afterwards. And ever since then Mac has been cold and a little bit of a meany pants and tellin' me that The Mouse says *this* and The Mouse says *that* and the only person I'm hearin' say that is Laine! So... I think punishment must be served.

...

LAINE

So, you don't trust The Mouse's word?

BENNY

You, me and Mac went to go to talk to Derek. I frew up potty sugar and went back to bed. The next morning he was dead. Yes or no?

...

MAC LAINÉ
 What I -- No.

LAINÉ
 Mac and I were fast asleep that night. I do remember you waking us up because you had to go throw up from eating gross bathroom candy. But we didn't leave the basement. Isn't that right, Mac?

BENNY
 Mac?

MAC
 I don't -- um --

TEDDY
 So, you don't believe Derek was a sacrifice for The Mouse.

BENNY
 No.

TEDDY
 So, you're saying Mac and Laine made my brother dead?

BENNY
 I think // that --

TEDDY
 Mac and Laine who tuck me in at night? And read me stories? Who showed me the way of The Mouse? Who love me like a brother? ... Do you think The Mouse is even real?

BENNY
 I don't know! But, I don't think "The Mouse" killed Derek.

The kids murmur.

CLAIRE
 You don't think The Mouse does *anything*?

QUINN
 The Mouse // loves us!

FRAN
 Maybe we should listen --

EVELYN
 Fudgebutt does it again!

JOEY
The Mouse takes // care of us!

IRIS
Ungrateful!

TEDDY gasps.

TEDDY
He's been possessed. Like poison cheese in mouse traps.

BENNY
What!? No!

TEDDY
It's okay, Benny! We're gonna save you! You just need to be ball-tized.

BENNY
No! Mac, just --

BENNY reaches for MAC, but LAINE pulls her back out of the ball pit by the shoulder.

TEDDY
Everyone!

Kids come rushing to the ball pit, trying to pin BENNY down -- all grabbing onto him.

BENNY
They did it! You guys have to believe me. Mac. Mac, my Best Friend. Mac, tell everyone the truth. Please, Mac!

The kids successfully knock BENNY down into the ball pit.

TEDDY
In the name of The Mouse
The Teacher
and all of Cheeselandia,
I ball-tize you as a student

BENNY
MAC, PLEASE
TELL THEM TO STOP
TELL THE THE TRUTH

TEDDY gets a good grip on BENNY's shirt

TEDDY
OF THE MOUSE!

BENNY
MAC, JUST DO *SOMETHING*

MAC looks on in absolute horror -- she's about to say something when LAINE gently holds her hand -- fingers intertwined.

MAC looks at LAINE and smiles as BENNY's head is plunged underneath the ball pit one final time.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

DARKNESS.

The only thing illuminating the space are the glowing eyes of the animatronic mouse.

2.1

As the lights rise, we are once again greeted with a heavy dose of nostalgia -- but it's become a bit... shaken up.

The jungle gym has been graffitied on with sharpies and paint -- with the worst/funniest words they can think of (i.e. "stupid", "poop", etc.). There's some sort of barrier or sign warning people to not go into the ball pit.

The arcade looks worse for wear. Most games have been toppled over, smashed in, or gutted to make forts.

Food wrappers scattered everywhere.

Everyone is now wearing over-sized employee uniforms that were found in the back closet.

They all sit scattered throughout the space, with their eyes closed, chanting.

Their chants would be closest equated to speaking in tongues -- but we can make out words like "The Mouse", "cheese", "ticket", etc.

The chants build and build, getting louder and more intense, until MAC and LAINE steps onstage -- in full royal garb. MAC wears a robe made from the furs/skins of some of the animatronics. LAINE dons a dress of tickets all sewn together. Both wear the finest crowns tickets can buy.

It goes silent.

MAC

The Mouse says...

All ears perk up.

MAC

PIZZA PARTY!

The kids cheer!

LAINÉ

You are all making The Mouse proud! Now, prepare for the party.

They all immediately begin decorating.

Oddly organized chaos for a group of 3rd graders.

They all chatter amongst each other in different as they decorate.

CLAIRE

What toppings do you think The Mouse gets on pizza?

IRIS

Do you think The Mouse eats?

JOEY

Maybe The Mouse is fed by the love that we give from eating pizza.

EVELYN

Well Mac said that The Mouse *has* to eat and that's what The Mouse turns into electricity.

PLUTO

Woah, so we do run on love.

AMY

That's so beautiful!

Nods in agreement all around.

They continue as we shift our focus to:

FRAN, lost in thought, semi-watches as TEDDY tries to hang a banner.

TEDDY

Higher?

FRAN
Yeah.

TEDDY
Higher still?

FRAN
Yeah.

TEDDY
Just tell me when to stop.

TEDDY keeps going higher as FRAN gets distracted by looking at the covering over the ticket blaster.

TEDDY
I CANNOT REACH ANY HIGHER.

FRAN
You remember Mac and Laine that night?

TEDDY
What are you talkin' about?

FRAN
The night Derek... I saw them that night. For a little. First I thought, maybe I dreamt it, you know. But I remember hearin' like someone whisperin' mean things to him. And with what Benny said --

TEDDY
But, remember, Benny was lying, because he was possessed by evil, because he was weak. The Mouse will settle your nerves soon.

FRAN
Sure.

TEDDY
Higher?

FRAN
Eh, lower.

TEDDY
WHAT?

They continue as we shift our focus to:

JOEY is crying in a corner -- LAINE notices

LAINE

Are you okay, Joey?

JOEY

I miss my mommy.

LAINE

Aw. I'm sorry about that. But you know, crying won't solve anything. What if you go mop the bathroom? Take your mind off of it.

JOEY

I don't think that would help.

LAINE

Well, The Mouse was just telling Mac that busy bodies empty busy minds.

JOEY

Umm...

LAINE

Are you saying... Mac is wrong? That *I'm* wrong?

JOEY

No, I --

LAINE

Or that *The Mouse* is wrong?

JOEY

NO! No. I just --

LAINE

You can always tell The Mouse that it's something you don't wanna do. I don't know how The Mouse will feel about // it...

JOEY

It'll make me feel better. It will. I'll go. Thanks for the advice, Laine.

JOEY runs off to go clean the bathroom.

MAC has been staring at the ball pit, blankly this whole time.

LAINE

Mac Attack, you doin' okay?

MAC

Yeah! Yeah. Just, uh...

LAINE

He was goin' nutso bananas, Mac. They tried to save his soul.

MAC

Yeah. But still --

LAINE

We gotta be strong. You and me. Bestest of friends 'til the end of time no matter what.

Another pinkie swear, kissing their own hands.

LAINE

Are you ready?

MAC nods.

LAINE

Ah-hem!

Everyone looks to LAINE.

...

LAINE

PIZZAS!

TEDDY throws little gummy pizzas into the crowd.

The kids scatter to grab them.

After the kids grab their pizzas, they all find a seat on the long table that they've put on the stage, right in front of the mouse animatronic.

Murmurs and hubbub.

LAINE clinks her plastic cup and stands.

L A I N E

This is a pizza party is for many porpoises, but especially to celebrate our new holiday -- Cheeseaversary. To celebrate our time being The Mouse's students!

The crowd cheers.

L A I N E

We would like to thank The Mouse for all The Mouse helps us. We would like to thank you all for your Ball-tism commitment to The Mouse. And most importantly, to celebrate the prophet, Mac.

The kids cheer.

L A I N E

Mac has followed The Word of The Mouse and has made Cheeslandia an autotopia! Where would we be without her? What would we do?

K I D S

Speech! Speech! Speech! Speech!

MAC steps up to speak. It falls quiet.

M A C

It is a honor to be chosen by The Mouse to speak to you all. The Mouse tells me not about how special I am. But how special you all are. Any class could have randomly ended up here, in this conundrum. But it was us. Not on accident. But chosen. For our strength. Our kindness. And how we believe. ... And even though things may not go the way we want them to go. Or the way we think they should go. The Mouse does what is best for us and we will see that at the end. If we just listen to The Mouse... we must be okay.

The crowd cheers.

L A I N E

Now, line up to say nice things about our prophet!

A line forms.

J O E Y

Mac you are smart and pretty thank you.

AMY

I like that you can talk to The Mouse and also you are good at braiding hair.

PLUTO

Um, Mac you're really cool and nice and you wore an astronaut costume to school last halloween and I thought that was cool even though my uncle says that astronauts have never landed on the moon.

EVELYN

You are really nice to us and you once helped me // tie my shoe

BENNY (O.S.)

Mac gave me her sandwich once when mine got stolen.

MAC looks around for BENNY -- he's nowhere. It seems like no one else heard him, but MAC.

IRIS

I like that Mac doesn't // make anyone go in the ticket blaster

BENNY (O.S.)

Mac would always let me sleep in the big bed for sleepovers and she // would sleep on the trundle.

JOEY

Mac's dad always packed // really good snacks for lunch

BENNY (O.S.)

Mac really liked listening to all my cool dinosaur facts.

MAC

(to LAINE)

Who's doing that?

LAINE

Doing what?

CLAIRE

I think Mac is actually kind of cool // cause she makes us not feel bad when when we mess up

BENNY (O.S.)

The Alvarezsaurids dinosaurs all only had one *stout* claw!

MAC

That! It sounds like Benny.

LAINE

I don't hear anything.

IRIS

Mac makes sure that we all have candy and candy that we like too // not just orange or purple flavors

BENNY (O.S.)

Diplodocus's had tails that they could use like a whip // like Indiana Jones.

MAC

The -- the dinosaur facts.

PLUTO

I think Mac has very kind eyes. The eyes are "the window into the souls"// and Mac's soul is nice.

LAINE

I think you're just stressin' out. Take a big deep breath.

LAINE guides MAC through a big breath.

LAINE

Is that better?

MAC

Yeah. Yeah I'm good.

TEDDY stands.

As he does, the animatronic mouse begins to power-up.
Only MAC sees this.

TEDDY

Mac made things okay when they were very not okay. And that makes me feel really good and safe.

The animatronic opens it's mouth -- it's Benny's voice.

TEDDY

I miss Derek more than anything
but if it was what The Mouse wanted
I am glad we've got Mac

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

Did you know the brontosaurus
Isn't the original brontosaurus
Because they had the wrong head

MAC

STOP! STOP IT! I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY!!!

LAINE

Mac! Hey! It's okay.
What's going on?

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

You can tell how
old a dinosaur is

MAC

He's -- he's The Mouse

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

from rings on their bones

LAINE

What are you talking about?

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

The oldest T-Rex was 28

FRAN

Is Mac alright?

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

Scientists think --

LAINE

Mac's fine. She's fine.

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

-- the Arcaeoptyryx could fly

TEDDY

Mac, are you talking to The Mouse?
What's The Mouse saying?

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

Penguins are legally dinosaurs

LAINE

Mac tell everyone you're fine.

MAC

How can penguins be legally dinosaurs? // That makes no sense!

LAINE

RECESS. It's time for recess everyone! 15 minutes and then back to the pizza party!

KIDS

Oookay / Now I get to finish skee-ball / But I haven't finished my pizza / That was
weeeird / Awkwardddd

The kids begin to disperse. TEDDY begins to walk away
when FRAN pulls him back. They stay close by.

After everyone appears to be out of earshot

What's going on?
L A I N E

It's Benny. Benny's talking.
M A C

Benny's gone, Mac.
L A I N E

He's the mouse. Not *THE* Mouse. But the -- the robot. It was moving.
M A C

The mouse robot?
L A I N E

MAC nods her head.

Like 5 Nights at Freddys style?
L A I N E

I think -- I think it's... *Benny*. It sounds like Benny and it's saying all these cool dinosaur facts --
M A C

Mac, I don't think...
L A I N E

And maybe, you know, his soul didn't find its way up to -- or down to -- it got trapped *inside of...* it's *him*.
M A C

Mac. Focus. Okay? You gotta listen. It's gonna be okay. I didn't hear anything. Didn't even see it movin'.
L A I N E

The animatronic starts moving again.

MAC
It's moving right now! Laine!

BENNY ANIMATRONIC
I was just a body.

L A I N E
It's not doing anything!

BENNY ANIMATRONIC
I'll never get to play basketball

MAC

I didn't do anything!
You know I didn't!

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

Or see my parents again
Or go to the fourth grade

LAINE

I need you to breathe, okay?
I'm your best friend
I'd never do anything to hurt you
I'm telling you the truth. It's not moving.

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

I'm your best friend
I'd never do anything to hurt you

LAINE grabs MAC's hand -- fingers intertwined.

BENNY ANIMATRONIC

Love ya to the moon and back, Mac.

Kids are starting to look over and listen. LAINE notices this.

MAC

I'M SORRY! I LOVE YOU AND I KNOW YOU LOVED ME AND I SHOULD'VE DONE SOMETHING! IF I DID SOMETHING YOU WOULDN'T HAVE --

LAINE kisses MAC.

A very long, intense peck on the lips.

MAC is so shocked it almost startles her out of her panic.

The animatronic stops moving.

The kids all look on, in shock and awe.

After a long moment, LAINE pulls away.

A beat, as LAINE and MAC notice the entire classroom has been staring at them.

LAINE

What are you guys staring at? ... Are we hurtin' you?

KIDS

No / Nope. / Nah / Noooo / etc.

L A I N E

And are we hurtin' each other?

K I D S

No / I don't think so / Nada / etc.

L A I N E

Then, The Mouse says, "Mind your own dang beeswax!"

The kids all nod to each other -- makes sense to them -- and go back to playing.

L A I N E

Are you okay?

MAC, still in shock, nods.

L A I N E

Benny's no longer here. Not as a boy. Not as the mouse. You've just got a "active imagination".

M A C

Uh-huh.

L A I N E

It's a doggy dog world, Mac. And the doggy dogs are out to fight. We didn't event really do anything. Not with Benny. Not with Derek, even. You know? Just focus on you and I and The Mouse and it'll all be okay.

MAC looks at the animatronic -- it's powered down now.

L A I N E

... Okay?

M A C

Okay.

...

L A I N E grabs M A C's hand again and intertwines fingers.

L A I N E

You wanna go play skee-ball?

M A C

Are we --
Yeah. Yeah.

LAINE and MAC walk over to skeeball.

FRAN comes out of where she was hiding. She's not sure what it all means exactly, but she heard it all.

TIME PASSES

INTERLUDE

The environment keeps shifting.

Murals of MAC and LAINE begin to appear.

Food wrappers pile up even higher.

Stomachs quietly begin to gurgle.

TIME PASSES

2.2

MAC sits in a circle with THE PRISSY GIRLS who are very excited to have MAC in their presence.

MAC

So?

CLAIRE

We're happy to help, Mac.

EVELYN

But we don't know why you need us.

AMY

I'm sure The Mouse could tell you a lot more than we can.

MAC

I, uh, don't want to bother The Mouse with personal things, you know? And you guys haven't been wrong so far. A favor to The Mouse.

PRISSY GIRLS

Totally.

MAC

I just wanted to know... what's gonna happen next. I mean, *I* know. Just want to double check.

CLAIRE

Did you want to ask about The Mouse, boyfriend/girlfriends, family, or all 3?

MAC

Uh, I'll do all 3.

AMY

Okay. The all 3 package. I'm thinking we can do a concentration 64, then a game of MASH and then // maybe --

CLAIRE shushes AMY.

CLAIRE

Evelyn. Get out the good stuff.

EVELYN

But -- we've been saving those for --

CLAIRE

Who do you think use it for, if not for Mac?

EVELYN pulls a pencil box out of her back pack, and in it -
- 3 fortune cookies; mixing them around.

CLAIRE

Okay, now you can pick.

MAC points to one.

CLAIRE

This one is for "The Mouse".

CLAIRE opens it and reads.

CLAIRE

(reading it)

"Beware of bears"

EVELYN

Second, boyfriend/girlfriend

MAC points to another.

EVELYN

(reading it)

“We hope you enjoyed your meal from Lucky Duck Place. Please rate us 5 stars. Come back soon.”

CLAIRE

Flip it around.

EVELYN

Oh.

“A special someone will fall hard and fast for you”

AMY

And last, family. And make sure to choose carefully.

CLAIRE and EVELYN give her a look.

AMY

Cause there’s only one. ... It was funny...

MAC points to the last one.

AMY opens it up and reads it.

AMY

(reading it)

“Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom - George Washington Carver”

MAC

And what the heck do all these mean?

The PRISSY GIRLS shrug.

CLAIRE

We just got the fortunes. We dunno what they mean.

MAC

So, I just gotta figure it out?

CLAIRE

Guess so.

EVELYN

Enjoy the cookies Mac.

AMY

It's the last food we got.

The PRISSY GIRLS leave as MAC looks out onto the rest of the kids.

Our focus shifts to TEDDY and FRAN.

TEDDY, sitting in the arcade next to three teddy bears -- with his nose shoved in *The Book of Mouse*, rereading it while FRAN stands over him.

FRAN

I looked.

TEDDY

Everywhere?

FRAN

Yes. *Everywhere*, I -- what's with the stuffies?

TEDDY

I won them off the prize wall. They're my new family. We've got my dad. My mom right next to him. And then Derek's right here. And I'm me. Happy family time.

FRAN

Right... I couldn't find any. I army crawled. I climbed. Put all of my America Ninja Warrior training to the test and...

TEDDY

Did you check the back right corner of the purple tube? Joey spilled a packet of Skittles back there and I don't think he found all of them.

FRAN

I couldn't find any more food.

TEDDY

Well, we still got a whole bag of laughy taffy. And a bunch of dum dums. And a half a jar of pizza sauce in the fridge -- but the sauce is for emergencies only.

FRAN

And after that?

TEDDY

I'm sure The Mouse will tell Mac // what --

FRAN

Why do you believe her, Teddy!? This is Laine and Mac we're talkin' about. The girls who play horses at recess. And snort laugh. And are so so so annoying!

TEDDY

I'm not gonna listen if you're going to just be mean about my new friends.

FRAN

Why would they be friends with you? We weren't very nice to them.

TEDDY

The Mouse has shown them the way, like The Mouse has shown me the way.

FRAN

No, Teddy. I've been doing the math // and --

TEDDY

Oh, and you're in the tiger math group too.

FRAN

-- and I think what Benny's said. He was a lotta things, but he wasn't dumb and I don't know why Benny woulda lied. He never wanted to be popular or be Teacher. I'm not saying that The Mouse is real. Or that The Mouse isn't. I don't think that even matters right now. But -- how do we know Mac is prophet? We could be listenin' to someone who has no good reason to be leading. What *proof* do we have?

TEDDY

Well, we don't have proof. That's why Mac says trust is so important!

FRAN

Why do you trust her?

TEDDY

Because... She... If I didn't then -- why else would Derek have...

FRAN

Why did the chicken cross the road?

TEDDY

To get to the other side? Is this a joke? What?

FRAN

How do you know that?

TEDDY

That's the -- that's the joke, right?

FRAN

But why? ... I don't know. I don't think you really do either. Maybe to get somewhere. Maybe not. We don't really know ever. But it's easier for our brains to have an answer.

FRAN looks to the ticket blaster.

FRAN

Sometimes life is coo-coo bananas and there's no reason for things. And when people are confused, that's the best time to spike the ball near weaker players. That's when the team captain's gotta take charge. Lead the team to victory.

TEDDY

But...

TEDDY stares at the glowing eyes on the Mouse animatronic -- they flicker for a moment.

TIME PASSES

INTERLUDE

The space becomes messier.

Kids are quicker to anger. Pushing and shoving.

Most arcade games have been broken.

2.3

LAINE and MAC sit on top of the jungle gym -- the fortunes are spread out in front of them.

LAINE

Bears?

MAC

Black Bears are native if go camping up north. And, we dunno what's happening [out there]. Bear-pocolypse, maybe. Or maybe it's a metaphor or simile.

LAINE

Huh. Maybe. Oh, Mac-ee. You got something on your face.

JOEY

Teddy did. He's been tellin' everyone we need to find a way to get more food.

PLUTO

We were thinking if we went outside using the buddy system // then --

LAINE

Absolutely not!

PLUTO

But... *buddy system*.

LAINE

Anything could be out there. You wanna get sucked up by a tornado, or stung by a thousand bees, or run over by a truck? Stayin' in here.

JOEY

But how are we gonna get food then?

PLUTO

We can keep sustaining ourselves on the fiber in tickets. My uncle proved it during a youtube // challenge with

JOEY

No one cares about your Uncle's podcast.

PLUTO

Tell that to his 3k Patreon subscribers who pay 10 hard earned buckaroos for his exclusive content.

LAINE

We will announce news of more food soon! So no more yappin about it! Capeesh?

JOEY & PLUTO

Ca-poodle...

JOEY and PLUTO run off.

LAINE

What does Teddy think he's doing? Tellin' people? We told him -- we told him that food numbers are for our listening ears only! And he's running around tellin' everyone. And now Joey and Pluto want to go outside? That's the one thing we can't do. That's the one thing that no one wants to do and now they're asking for it? Are they trying to make us mad?

MAC

I think they're just hungry, Laine.

LAINE

Yeah, I'm hungry too. But I know the rules and out there we could -- I'm not riskin' it out there. We're safer in here. They're safer in here.

MAC

I mean, I don't wanna go. But, if we let them get food -- and *just* to get food and come right back and not have them talk to nothing or no one -- we can keep this going how it is.

LAINE

If we let them out and they come back -- they're the special ones Mac. Joey and Pluto are now the ones who can see outside. They will be the ones who bring the food and everyone will chant their names and -- and paint pictures of them and tuck them in at night and give them nick names and make them outfits and give them hugs!

MAC

Maybe? But then, we'll all have food. And we can keep hanging out and playing. We don't have to go home.

LAINE

But then no one will listen to us here anymore either.

MAC

... Okay. But, we got each other and that's all we need. Bestest of friends // 'til the end of --

LAINE

That's not all we need.

MAC

What?

LAINE

I love you lots Mac-Donalds, but you're just one person. Everyone in class loves me, now. I can't give that up.

MAC

So, would you choose the entire class being your friend or just me being your friend?

LAINE

That's sneaky, Mac. You're trying to make me feel bad.

MAC

That's not an answer.

LAINE

Maybe you're gonna make me feel bad about my answer.

MAC

I just think when you're girlfriend/girlfriend with someone -- you like hanging out with them the most. Even when there's no one else to hang out with it doesn't super matter. Because you got that person. So I don't get it.

LAINE

...We're not girlfriend/girlfriend.

MAC

Yeah ... I know... I just, I thought, um, like, as a metaphor.

LAINE

Oh. // Okay --

MAC

But we -- we've been holding hands all the time. Fingers like this [intertwined]!

LAINE

That's just holdin' hands Mac. Prissy girls all hold each others hands all the time. Doesn't mean nothing.

MAC

But -- we share secrets and there was some smudge on my face and we play house a bunch and you're the mom and I'm the dad.

LAINE

Yeah?

MAC

And you kissed me! You kissed me, Laine! Smack dab on the lips! In front of everybody! And kissing is just for girlfriends or boyfriends. So !!

LAINE

You were wiggling out and yellin' real loud and everyone was worried and I tried holdin' your hand and you kept screamin' and screamin'. I had to think of a way to shut your mouth without it lookin' all weird. It was the only thing I could think of to calm you down and it worked!

MAC

...So. You don't...

LAINE

I dunno about [like-liking people yet] -- but, Mac, you're my bestest friend in the whole class // and I --

MAC

Yeah I -- class?

LAINE

Well, yeah. Every summer my dads and I go to Lake Michigan for the summer and there's no service there and that's where Mikaela lives -- she's my summer best friend, has been since we were 4. And I hope we get put in the same class next year, but if we don't -- you know -- I'll only see you if we both get the same recess. But you'll probably be my best friend again if we're in the same class. But you're my best friend right now. ... This is a silly conversation and is just gonna make us both -- we gotta focus on making sure everyone is happy with the food we have and is on our side.

MAC

So makin' sure everyone loves you is more important than making sure I do?

LAINE

Well, I know you'll always love me.

...

MAC

Maybe I won't.

Maybe I'll realize that -- that you're kinda mean sometimes. And bossy. And that -- that you've hurt a lot of people in this // whole --

LAINE

To help us, Mac.

MAC

You never asked if I wanted that!

LAINE

And you never said you didn't! Or said anything after I did!

...

I'm gonna go talk to Teddy.

LAINE climbs down. MAC sits.

The mouse's eyes flicker.

TIME PASSES

2.4

TEDDY sits with AMY, as he scribbles things into his notebook.

TEDDY's three teddy bears have not left his side.

AMY

My mama always said this was healthier too. Less sugar. It's not as tasty, but it makes more.

TEDDY

I think this could help us a whole lot.

AMY

Really? I tried to tell Mac and Laine my idea but they said I was just bein' a silly goose.

TEDDY

I think you're a lot closer to a smarty goose.

LAINE enters.

LAINE

Quinn, I need to talk to Teddy right now.

QUINN

Oh. Um. Okay. See you later, Teddy.

QUINN scampers away.

TEDDY

Quinn was telling me if we put water in the juices it means that we can make the juices last longer.

LAINE

Why are you yapping your mouth and telling people that we're out of food?

TEDDY

Cause we almost are. And we gotta prepare ourselves.

LAINE

You coulda just talked to me and Mac about it and she woulda told The Mouse and coulda done something sooner. Everyone else coulda minded their own beeswax.

TEDDY

Will The Mouse bring us food if Mac asks?

LAINE

Yes.

TEDDY

Then go tell Mac to ask right now.

LAINE

Mac is busy and // I don't --

TEDDY

Prove that The Mouse will do what she asks.

LAINE is taken aback.

TEDDY

I want to help people. Let me help them.

Before LAINE can say anything, she notices TEDDY's stuffed animals.

LAINE

Are those *bears*?

TEDDY

Those are my stuffies.

LAINE in a calculated rage storms over to the stuffed bears.

LAINE

You're trying to stop me and Mac. You want to be prophet.

TEDDY

What are you talking about?

LAINE

The Prissy Girls said --

TEDDY

I'm just trying to be a helper.

LAINE picks up one of the teddy bears.

TEDDY

What are you doing? Laine? Wait -- no. I'm sorry. I --

LAINE rips the head off of the teddy bear.

TEDDY

NO

LAINE rips the head off of the next teddy bear as TEDDY cries.

TEDDY picks up the final bear -- LAINE grabs its head. A struggle back and forth until the bear rips apart.

Stuffing is everywhere.

FRAN hears this and runs over. TEDDY's a mess.

FRAN

LAINE! What are you doing? Stop it!

LAINE

(quiet, scary)

You're telling everyone there's no food. Actions have consequences.

FRAN

You're acting psycho, Laine.

LAINE

I am doing everything to make our sobriety the best it can be.

TEDDY

Did "The Mouse" tell Mac that you needed to destroy my stuffies to do that?

This snaps LAINE into a new fear. She looks at the stuffing, the ball pit, the ticket blaster.

Before she answers, she quickly leaves, leaving carnage in her wake.

TEDDY

Every time I try to help, something gets taken away from me. And now...

FRAN

Now there's really nothin' to loose.

TEDDY and FRAN look at each other.

The mouse's eyes flicker.

All of the lights flicker.

TIME PASSES

INTERLUDE

The air conditioner has broken.

Light bulbs have been flickering.

Real mice have chewed through the chords of some of the games.

Anything that has fallen down has not been picked back up.

TIME PASSES

2.5

Everyone is scattered about the space.

Kids in huddles chat with one another -- even though they haven't eaten too much, energy has spiked a bit.

PLUTO

So, it'll be like another Ball-tism, you think?

IRIS

Nah, it's gotta be different because we already did that.

EVELYN

Maybe it's like a wedding? To like, The Mouse?

CLAIRE

Or like a birthday party?

JOEY

My last birthday party theme was hits of the 70s and we played Abba.

LAINE walks out of the kitchen, shaky -- wearing an ill-fitting apron.

She tries making her way to her throne without talking to anyone.

IRIS

Laine! What's the next celebration gonna be?

LAINE quickly scrunches up the apron to cover her neck down.

LAINE

What?

EVELYN

Mac said there's gonna be a party soon. But didn't say why.

PLUTO

I'm tellin' you guys. It's gonna be a food dance. Like a rain dance, but for food that falls from the sky like in "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs". Based on true events by the way.

AMY

Yeah, we're all gettin' a little hungry.

LAINE

I'm sure. Of course. I -- I am too.

JOEY

But The Mouse loves us and will swoop in and save the day like always.

LAINE nods as she begins to hyperventilate.

CLAIRE

Why are you wearing an apron?

LAINE

It's um -- new style I think. I'm trying to "make it work". Something new.

CLAIRE

It doesn't really go with your // outfit --

LAINE

The Mouse told me to wear it. Are you going against The Mouse?

CLAIRE

N -- no. No.

LAINE

Everyone trying to guess the things we put together as a surprise for you all and now throwin' shade and saying my outfit looks bad when I work day and night to make sure you are all happy and safe and listening to The Mouse's word.

CLAIRE

Laine! I didn't mean it.

(to the Prissy Girls)

Tell her.

AMY

Claire always just says that she corrects fashion because it's the right thing to do

EVELYN

She just wants you to look so beautiful always and nothing else!

LAINE

We all love you so much. And you should think about how grateful you all should be to us. For how much we do. I would like apology letters from everyone to not just me and Mac, but also to The Mouse.

KIDS

We're so sorry / We didn't mean it / We'll go right now / etc.

The kids disperse into the tunnels and behind curtains.

LAINE runs over to MAC, who's sitting on her throne.

MAC

Hi. ... I still don't know if I // wanna talk --

LAINE

Can you see it?

MAC

What?

LAINE

With the apron, if I go like this. Do you see anything?

MAC

No -- what are you hiding?

LAINE looks around to make sure no one is watching.

She takes off the apron to reveal her dress underneath. It doesn't appear like she's hiding anything.

LAINE

It's everywhere, Mac. I can't get it out. The minute everyone sees it, they'll all know.

MAC

Know what?

LAINE

That I ate it, Mac. The rest of the pizza sauce, Mac. I just stared at it. And I could feel my belly rumble and I know everyone's belly has been rumbling, but I needed it, I needed it Mac. My mind zoomed in on it and I couldn't think of anything else and I just grabbed it off the fridge and gobbled the whole thing down. And it spilled all over and I can't -- I can't get it out and everyone will see.

MAC

...Lainey, there's nothing on your dress.

LAINE

Stop lyin' Mac. It's a giant splotch. They will know that I have been eating when they have been hungry and waitin' for food. They'll be angry at me, Mac. They'll get angry and won't love me anymore and they'll pick someone they love more.

MAC

Just breathe with me. In // and --

LAINE

(losing it more and more)

I can't breathe now, cause I don't know how many more breaths we all can take! If we're stuck in here the air -- but even before the air runs out. *FOOD*, Mac. We have to find food. We have to find food now. No one's starvin' now, but they're gonna be soon, Mac. *We have to get food before they see the splotch. IF WE CAN'T GET MORE FOOD AND THEY SEE THE SPLOTCH WE'RE DONE FOR.* *Maybe we look up in the rafters and in the ceiling. maybe if we go high enough The Mouse will pull us up Up UP. And will hold us and tell us we're okay **we're okay** and we didn't hurt people and we didn't do anything wrong.*

And will feed us cheese and we'll take it from him like little baby rats. *OR Maybe if we look real low and tear up the carpet -- **RIP. IT. UP.** -- until its tacks and metal and then maybeeeeeeee there might be some worms to eat. Tasty tasty -- Maybe there will be a mouse. HA!*
*HAHAHAHAHAHAHA. Can you IMAGINE that?? The Mouse sending us a mouse to eat. That would be a funny joke, Mac, wouldn't that be a funny joke? A funny funny -- And then we eat it. We eat. The Mouse. and then. **WE become The Mouse.***

LAINÉ spots the 5 lb bag of jelly beans on top of the prize wall.

MAC

You're kinda scarin' me right now.

She walks over to the wall.

MAC

Where are you going? Laine?

And begins to climb.

MAC

That's dangerous -- hey we don't need the jelly beans -- we can find food somewhere else.

MAC grabs onto LAINÉ's leg -- LAINÉ kicks her off.
 MAC falls.

LAINÉ continues climbing, slowly, deliberately.

LAINÉ

I remember my papas used to read me fairytales. And my favorite one was Cinderella. I always had them skip to the end, because that was the best part. And my papas always told me that I'd find my prince or princess one day. But that wasn't the part I liked. I liked when she stood out on the balcony and everyone clapped for her. She didn't have to do anything. She was just loved by the right person and that meant everyone loved her to. I wanted to be a princess. But that's not real life. And in real life you gotta do chores and people call you weird for liking the things you like and to be loved you gotta do things, and sometimes you aren't enough for the people you love the most so they go and adopt another baby that they can love more.

MAC

I love you. I do, Lainey. That's gotta mean somethin'. Just get down from there // and we can --

LAINÉ

(not hearing Mac)

And maybe you're doin' all of this for people who only love you cause of the things you do and not who you are.

LAINÉ is in grasp of the jelly beans.

She goes to reach for them, but then stops.

LAINÉ

So if you stopped doin' things for them. They wouldn't love you any more. So that's not real love, really.

MAC

I love you no matter what Lainé! I love when you teach me karate moves or when we play house or when you tell me about hobby horse competitions. You don't have to do nothin' and I'll still love you even if I'm not your #1 Best Friend. In it together!

LAINÉ

But horses love you no matter what.

MAC

LAINÉ STOP --

LAINÉ reaches for the horse on a stick

She grabs it and looks back at MAC to respond, but before she can -- LAINÉ loses her footing...

MAC

LAINÉ.

LAINÉ slips.

She falls to the floor, the horse on a stick and bag of jelly beans lying on top of her.

LAINÉ is dead.

TIME PASSES

INTERLUDE

The world moves around MAC -- still stuck in the moment.

Kids take the bag of jelly beans and share them with each other.

They cover LAINE's body with a curtain from the animatronic stage.

Every video game has been scrapped for parts.

New murals have been painted over old murals chronicling their history.

It has become a wasteland.

TIME PASSES

2.6

MAC has not moved.

FRAN and TEDDY surround her -- in the middle of a confrontation.

FRAN

-- And there was no other way anyone else could have hit the button. Derek would've never locked himself in there. Using physics -- which is PROVEN science by real scientists. There was no way he coulda snuck in and out of there that quickly.

TEDDY

And -- and Laine only started talking about how The Mouse was real after all this, which is a sneaky sneak move.

FRAN

And you *knew* Benny was right, so when Teddy went after him, you said nothin' to save his butt.

TEDDY

All you wanted was power power power. And that's how you did it.

FRAN

But when me and Teddy rule again. We were helping run the place just fine before you barged in and ruined it for everyone.

TEDDY

We had so many cool color coded charts.

FRAN

We need organization and rules. We need chores. Plans to find food. Fixing this place up. We can make this a true sobriety again. And if you don't let us, we'll tell everyone what you did.

TEDDY

We'll show 'em all the proof we got. We've got a bunch. Notes and science. You will finally see the consequences of actions.

MAC

(still numb)

They won't listen to you. They don't listen to proof. You saw how it worked out for Benny. Doesn't work. Won't be any better for you. They only listen to The Mouse. I could have you two gone in a snap if I wanted to. Never see you again.

TEDDY and FRAN look at each other nervously.

FRAN

Are you going to do that?

MAC

... No.

FRAN

Mac, for realsies, do you like being prophet?

MAC

I've got the love of everyone in the class. Nobody can leave. And -- and love of everyone is the best kind of love.

TEDDY

If they knew you were just usin' them for their love they wouldn't.

FRAN

If they knew what you did to Derek. Or Benny. Or Laine --

MAC

I didn't do anything to Laine. I didn't do anything to Benny either. Or Derek really. I didn't -- I didn't do anything.

FRAN

You don't really do stuff, Mac. You don't really hurt, but you don't really help. You just float on by. Laine did a lot. Teddy did some. Why don't you?

MAC

...

FRAN

You wanna do somethin'? You want people to love you for somethin' good?

MAC

...Yes.

FRAN

Then go.

FRAN points to the front door.

FRAN

Go. Find food. Or help. If you can. Or just go and never come back.

MAC

What?

FRAN

What's the game plan if you stay? We got some jellybeans and we'll eat those. And then what? We just wait? Forever? It's obvious you don't wanna go home to whatever messed up house you live in, but the rest of us want to. Do nothing somewhere else.

TEDDY

I think you should go, Mac.

MAC takes a breath.

MAC

EVERYONE!!

All the kids quickly gather around, waiting for MAC to say what's next.

KIDS

I bet this is about the new holiday / You think it's another message from The Mouse? / My tummy grumbles LOUD / etc.

MAC

I have an announcement. I am leaving. I am going through the door.

KIDS

What? / No / She's doing a joke! / I don't think that's allowed / etc.

JOEY

But Teacher *told us* --

MAC

The Mouse told me that it was okay for me to go. Just me. To find help and food. That it will protect me on my journey. In the same way it will protect all of you when I am gone. I don't know how long I will be gone. But hopefully soon. In the meanwhile, you will listen to Teddy and Fran, as The Mouse said that it thinks they will do a good job. The Mouse has told me that it is sorry. For anything -- everything that The Mouse did or didn't do that hurt you. Or made you sad. The Mouse is scared. The Mouse is just trying its best. The Mouse thinks that you are all wonderful and special in your own ways and The Mouse is very very thankful for how much you love it. The Mouse loves you all very very much.

KIDS

We love The Mouse / Thank you Mac / Mac's pretty cool / etc.

MAC

May you all be a kid today.

KIDS

And you may also be one as well!

MAC takes off her crown and hands it to TEDDY.

The lights flicker.

MAC slowly walks through the games to the door, she lingers by the door as TEDDY speaks.

TEDDY

STUDENTS. Today we enter a new eras tour! With me and Fran in charge, we will have rules, but we will have kindness. We will listen to The Mouse, but listen to it ourselves. We've got a plan for finding and making some more food. We will make a big circle and talk about our problems if we have problems. We will make sure no one is lonely.

Or scared. No one is better than anyone else. Here, we will make sure that we are all equal, we are all safe, and we are all loved.

Cheers from the kids.

MAC takes one last look at her kingdom.

The Mouse's eyes flicker and flicker -- and turn off.

She takes a breath.

Opens the door.

And the room goes silent.

Behind the door there is an adult sized silhouette.

MAC

Teacher?

Everyone freezes.

The kids look at their crowns, the murals, the carnage.

They look at each other -- a flood of reality beginning to wash over them.

A moment of silence before --

FRAN'S GRANDMA

Franny, sweetheart, are you in there?

A cacophony of voices flood in:

AMY'S MOM

Amy -- if you're there // say something

JOEY'S DAD

Joey -- // Joey buddy.

PLUTO'S UNCLE

Pluto! It's your Uncle Samson // here to get you!

LAINE'S PAPA J

Laine! Laine! //David do you hear her?

AMY'S GRANDMA

Amy, don't you worry, // we've got you.

LAINE'S PAPA D

Lainey, girl! We're here!

BENNY'S MOM

Benny! Everything's going to be alright,
we're here!

EVELYN'S DAD

Evelyn, just breathe, okay?

MAC'S MOM

Macy! Macy, honey, are you okay?

And it dawns upon them... they're kids.

They're just kids who want their parents, to be held, to be
loved.

They're just *kids*.

And as that fully starts to hit them --

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY