

Handled

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Scene 1. The living room of a modest home in suburban America. A door to the outside, a doorway to the kitchen and a doorway to the rest of the house. At rise, MELANIE, with only a purse, and PENNY, with a full duffel bag, stand just inside the door. PENNY doesn't feel completely at home here. Somewhere in the room is a bookshelf. Throughout the course of the play, books move from one shelf (the unread) to another (read).

MELANIE

Does it feel weird to be home?

PENNY

Of course.

MELANIE

Penny, you're not supposed to say that!

PENNY

Then don't ask.

MELANIE

I want you to be happy here. It's weird if it's weird.

PENNY

It's just new.

MELANIE

You live here.

PENNY

Hardly.

MELANIE

Being there . . . that was the weird part.

PENNY

At first. The beginning of everything is always weird.

MELANIE

I love beginnings.

PENNY

I love middles.

MELANIE

Besides, this doesn't even count as a beginning! It's a return. Your homecoming!

PENNY

This isn't my home. And I'm leaving here as soon as I graduate.

MELANIE

Penny, we've talked about that. I do not support that. You're not—

PENNY

I don't have to stay here just because you say so. After I graduate, I'm going far away. I'll hitchhike. I'll waitress at places until I get to—

MELANIE

Oh, for Christ's sake, Penny! Get a grip! You couldn't handle a job scooping ice cream!

PENNY

Those people were horrible.

MELANIE

They really weren't. (*changing the course of the ship*) What do you think of the color?

PENNY

The color of what?

MELANIE

The room? The walls?

PENNY

Is it different?

MELANIE

Really?!? It was like a pale blue before.

PENNY

(*looking around, it is a pale blue now, color and line may be altered to best accommodate production*) I guess I don't remember.

MELANIE

Huh. This is so much more saturated. I went a little crazy. You know what did it? I watched a movie about a Mexican artist, a lady, with some serious eyebrows.

PENNY

Frida Kahlo?

MELANIE

Hmm, that doesn't sound right. Anyway, the colors she used, and the colors in the movie, were just super intense, and I kind of got carried away. I hope you don't feel like we moved to Puerto Rico!

Penny
Puerto Rico isn't Mexico.

Melanie
What?

Penny
It's fine.

Melanie
I'll probably change it back in a month. You know me!

Penny
Yep. Is my room . . . ?

Melanie
It's just like you left it. Sorry. Not just like. I mean, I vacuumed. I didn't want you to cut your feet.

Penny
That's funny.

Melanie
I wasn't joking.

Penny moves to exit to her room.

Um, Laura? From my new work? My friend Laura is coming over. She's bringing Chinese.

Penny
I don't feel like company.

Melanie
Good thing she doesn't count as company!

Penny
I'll just stay in my room.

Melanie
No. It'll be fine. Besides, do you feel like cooking? I don't!

Penny
I don't feel like cooking, or talking. I just feel like sitting, and breathing.

MELANIE

Well, that's fine. You don't have to put on a show for Laura.

PENNY

Can't you just order food?

MELANIE

She's already on her way.

PENNY

Are you afraid to be alone with me?

MELANIE

Am I—? I thought we were supposed to be less confrontational. Isn't that what Dr. Mary said?

PENNY shrugs, heads to her room with her bag.

Don't be long. Laura's pulling up.

A moment of MELANIE alone, she breathes, listens to nothing, approaches an emotional edge and pulls herself back. LAURA knocks and enters tentatively, politely, carrying bags of takeout. She takes a quick moment to register that MELANIE is alone before speaking.

LAURA

Going good?

MELANIE

(recovering) It is!

LAURA

Where is she?

MELANIE

Unpacking. She's just settling in, in her room.

LAURA

I feel like maybe I shouldn't be here yet. I mean, don't you two just want some time? Get used to looking at each other again?

MELANIE

What do you mean? This is totally fine. It's perfect.

LAURA

Did you show it to her yet?

MELANIE

What? No. I think I might not.

LAURA

Okay.

MELANIE

But maybe I should, but I don't want to spring anything on her. She doesn't like that.

LAURA

Then don't.

MELANIE

It kind of seems embarrassing now.

LAURA

Yeah?

MELANIE

But I did it out of love. I'm getting her back on track! And I missed her.

LAURA

You did.

MELANIE

I think she thinks I didn't miss her.

LAURA

Did you tell her you missed her?

MELANIE

I did, but she didn't believe me. I sounded fake when I said it. "I missed you!" (*a disapproving noise from LAURA*) Yeah.

LAURA

So show it to her, have a laugh about it. And let it go. It will prove you missed her when she was gone.

MELANIE

Maybe.

PENNY returns.

PENNY

Where's my computer?

MELANIE
What computer?

PENNY
Didn't you get it fixed?

LAURA
(*extending her hand*) Hi, honey. I'm Laura. I work with your mom.

PENNY
(*shaking it?*) Hi. Pleases don't call me honey. Just my name. Or nothing.

LAURA
Right. Sorry.

MELANIE
After my second day at work, I friended Laura on Facebook and found out we went to the same high school!

LAURA
A few years apart.

MELANIE
But lots of the same teachers.

LAURA
Mrs. Lang, Mr. Slattery—

MELANIE
With the hair!

PENNY
Crazy.

LAURA
Sorry. You don't care about that.

PENNY
I do not.

MELANIE
Penny, come on.

PENNY
What? I was agreeing with her!

LAURA

Big day for you. Congratulations on coming home.

PENNY

Is this a “congratulations” occasion?

LAURA

I don’t really know.

PENNY

Me either. First time I’ve done it. (*to MELANIE*) You didn’t fix my computer.

MELANIE

It was beyond repair. It was . . . smashed.

PENNY

Where is it?

MELANIE

By now, it’s probably been recycled into I-don’t-know-what.

PENNY

What? What about my phone?

MELANIE

Same. It’s gone. All that stuff is gone.

PENNY

I have stuff I wanna read! This is bullshit!

MELANIE

Penny!

LAURA

Hey! Kids and their tech, right? You’re gonna get her new stuff, Mel?

MELANIE

Yes.

PENNY

When?

MELANIE

When you are ready.

Who decides?
PENNY

We do. You and I.
MELANIE

I have a say?
PENNY

Of course.
MELANIE

Great. I'm ready now.
PENNY

My God, Penny. Give it a day.
MELANIE

Back-to-school sales on all that stuff will probably start pretty soon. You will be able to score yourselves a good deal.
LAURA

Perfect.
MELANIE

Should we eat?
LAURA

I'm good.
PENNY

PENNY exits.

Oh. Wow. You probably won't be at happy hour on Thursday, huh?
LAURA

What? Yes, I will. I have to take care of me to take care of her.
MELANIE

She might need—
LAURA

She's going to be happy here.
MELANIE

Scene 2. After midnight. PENNY enters from kitchen, in pajamas, Chinese food carton in one hand, a copy of David Mitchell's "Cloud Atlas" in the other. She finds MELANIE's laptop, gets the book open to a specific spot, and fires up the computer, intending to find discussion groups about the book, look at its wikipedia page, seek out literary criticism. She's startled by what she sees on MELANIE's homepage. She clicks a time or two, and has a deeply felt reaction. She scrolls down, absorbing random tweets in reverse order, ie as they would appear in a twitter profile, most-recent first.

A bright light on SHINY PENNY. She is the Seventeen magazine version of PENNY.

SHINY PENNY

#SOBBING

Think I've only got less than a week. #NotDealing

Can't wait to see my mom.

Things I miss: Netflix, good wifi, shopping, my mom, not-dry skin and my mom.

Mom's brother's ranch damaged in storm. Off to the west for 6 weeks to help. #later #LoveHorses #AndCowboys #FamilyFirst

(slower) Mom's brother's ranch damaged in storm. Off to the west for 6 weeks to help. #later #LoveHorses #AndCowboys #FamilyFirst

(very slow, almost one word at a time) Mom's brother's ranch damaged in storm. Off to the west for 6 weeks—

PENNY

(overlapping) What did you do? What did you do? WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO?!?! MELANIE!!

MELANIE

(entering, in bed clothes, alarmed) What? Jesus, Penny! What— *(she sees open laptop)* Oh. That's mine?

PENNY

Who else's?

MELANIE

Mine. Obviously mine. Sit down.

PENNY

I can't.

MELANIE

Okay. We can talk about this. I know we can.

PENNY

I can't, because I don't know what the fuck this is.

MELANIE

Give me a minute. Can you calmly listen? Can you give me a chance?

PENNY

If you can somehow prove to me that you're not a crazy fucking bitch, I will listen.

MELANIE

Penny.

PENNY

Talk.

MELANIE

(no idea how or where to begin.) Okay.

PENNY

Talk now!

MELANIE

I made this—for you.

PENNY

You piled up a bunch of shit on twitter, pretending to be me?

MELANIE

Stop. No.

PENNY

You're, like, catfishing . . .?!?

MELANIE

Don't dismiss it like that. It's—

PENNY

I will dismiss it. It's shit.

MELANIE

No!

PENNY

A way to pretend that your daughter didn't have a—

MELANIE

It was supposed to be a fresh start.

PENNY

For whom?

MELANIE

For you.

PENNY

Are you sure?

MELANIE

Yes.

PENNY

I thought we moved to give me a fresh start.

MELANIE

That was the first thing, the first try. But it didn't fix it. We got here and things got worse. You left and I . . . made her up. Shiny underscore Penny underscore nineteen ninety-nine.

PENNY

What?

MELANIE

That's your handle. Did you notice?

PENNY

No.

MELANIE

It's cute. It's punny.

PENNY

It's terrible.

MELANIE

I kept working on her. I was lonely. And I started to think she might be a good place for you to begin.

PENNY

Here I am. I'm beginning here.

MELANIE

And I'm here with you. And of course, we have to be here, in the world, living in it—that's the hardest thing, right? I went back and forth about showing you—ask Laura! I was just gonna quit and leave it. But now I don't know. It gives you, maybe, something to stand on. Do you want to walk into a new school on the first day and be the new senior who nobody knows? My guess is no. But . . . a few kids at Cable already know you, because of Shiny Penny, because of this.

PENNY

It's gross.

MELANIE

It's just twitter.

PENNY

It's phony.

MELANIE

No. It's deliberate. It's groundwork for your new start at your new school.

PENNY

But you're running it.

MELANIE

I did a good job, Pen. And it was a lot of work. When you start at Cable in the fall, you're already going to be known as this great, funny, sweet, adventurous girl.

PENNY

Who is she?

MELANIE

She's you.

PENNY

I'm me. I'm not that.

MELANIE

She's a bridge, a path, to a Penny that engages with her peers and lets people know what she thinks and what she likes.

PENNY

That's not how I am.

MELANIE

Being “you” doesn’t mean you shut yourself off from interaction with people, isolate yourself. You did that once already. And I stood by and let you. It went badly, Pen. It was an absolute disaster. I take responsibility for some of that. And I get that being super social is, maybe, a bit of a struggle for you. But I promise you your world will be warmer with friends. (*PENNY experiences a swell of emotion that MELANIE observes.*) What is it?

PENNY

I was just thinking about being little.

MELANIE

Yeah?

PENNY

Was I happy then?

MELANIE

You were.

PENNY

I’d just go to the park and whoever was in the sandbox was my friend. You just made friends with every single kid in five seconds and I don’t know when it stopped being like that, but it did. And for me, it really did.

MELANIE

I know. I know. But here’s what’s cool, and I swear it’s true. If you manage it right, Twitter is like the sandbox of now. Everybody’s in it and most people are there to have fun and connect. For sure there are some jerks, some sand-throwers, if we’re sticking with your sandbox thing. It will be good for you if you manage it well. And I get to help, because I’m your mom.

PENNY

I have to get better by myself. You can’t get better for me.

MELANIE

You are better, Pen. You did it. This is an introduction to you, for these new kids, this new community. Think of it like a book. You’re the main character in this little story, and you actually have a really cool life.

PENNY

Where’s the conflict?

MELANIE

What conflict?

PENNY

The conflict that drives the story.

MELANIE

People don't like conflict. And we want them to like you. (*a new tack*) I saw something on Pinterest. "Think Happy, Be Happy." Shiny Penny 1999 thinks happy. And she is happy.

PENNY

Do you think I don't want to be happy? You think I want my life to be shit?

MELANIE

No. I don't.

PENNY

Do you think I can't do it without you? Make friends? Be normal?

MELANIE

I think you can't start it without me. (*PENNY reacts*) Honey, I know how to show people things so that they like them.

PENNY

You're marketing me?

MELANIE

I'm pitching you. "Get in on the ground floor for friendship with Penny, the new senior at Cable High. You're going to want to be a part of this!"

PENNY

But they're not.

MELANIE

That's not thinking happy, Pen! It'll be so good for us to have something positive to do— together. (*a noise from PENNY that basically translates to: Fuck you.*) Listen. Do this with me. Make a sincere effort to be my partner in getting some relationships going before school starts, getting yourself kind of out there, even if it's only digitally, and I'll let you apply to out-of-state schools.

PENNY

What?

MELANIE

If you show me that you want to move toward building healthy relationships, and having some social interaction, I will let you go away to school.

PENNY
And you'll help with money?

MELANIE
Yes.

PENNY
How far?

MELANIE
I don't know.

PENNY
Eight hundred miles? That's like a 12-hour drive.

MELANIE
Too far.

PENNY
Five hundred? That's eight hours.

MELANIE
Okay.

PENNY
I do this, and I can go to college 500 miles away?

MELANIE
Yes.

PENNY
I'm in.

PENNY opens laptop. SHINY PENNY emerges. Any tweets from this point on that are repeats of tweets previously heard should be delivered lightning fast, as if PENNY knows their content and is skimming them quickly. Lines following repeated tweets may readily overlap.

SHINY PENNY
Mom's brother's ranch damaged in storm. Off to the west for 6 weeks to help! Later!
#LoveHorses #AndCowboys #FamilyFirst

PENNY
Your brother?

MELANIE

You needed somewhere to go.

PENNY

You're an only child.

MELANIE

Not anymore!

PENNY

A ranch?

MELANIE

I went to a ranch camp for a week when I was twelve. Did I ever tell you that? It's one of my favorite memories.

SHINY PENNY

News flash: you can finish a year of high school doing #IndependentStudy #TheMoreYouKnow #CableHigh

PENNY

Is that true?

MELANIE

Yes!

PENNY

Lies work best if they've got a little bit of truth in them.

MELANIE

Not lies.

PENNY

Am I doing independent study?

MELANIE

I've actually got a stack of schoolwork you need to get through before August, but—whenever. I'm not going to put any pressure on you.

SHINY PENNY

Here <24 hours and already in love with Mr. Moonlight. #MyLittlePony #NotSoLittle

A picture is projected of a beautiful horse.

PENNY

Where did that come from?

MELANIE

People at my office have access to stock photography databases. There's tons of horses. Laura found that one.

PENNY

Other people know about this?

MELANIE

Just Laura.

iwantCANDY

OMG! You're living my 6th grade fantasy!

PENNY

Who is that? Who is iwantCANDY? (*perhaps iwantCANDY's profile pic is projected*)

MELANIE

She goes to your new school. Candace Abernathy? Aberkorn? Something like that.

PENNY

She doesn't look like someone who would be friends with me.

MELANIE

What does a friend of yours look like?

PENNY

Not like that!

MELANIE

Wow. Judgey much?

PENNY

I just mean—

MELANIE

I get it. But look—you follow each other on twitter. If she thought you were weird, or annoying, she'd have unfollowed you by now.

PENNY

How did she even find you on here?

MELANIE

I—you—followed her first. I found mentions of Cable High and cross referenced with the school's online yearbook.

PENNY

So is she like, a cheerleader, or dance team person? She looks like she would try to beat other people at dancing.

MELANIE

I don't know. Maybe she is. Find out.

PENNY

No. She's not my friend. I've never said one word to her.

MELANIE

So what? It's just twitter. Ask her if she's on cheer.

PENNY

No! Then she'll think I want to be on cheer.

MELANIE

So?

PENNY

Oh my God. I would never.

MELANIE

All right! It was just a thought!

PENNY

Why does she even follow me?

MELANIE

Because you have an interesting life and a positive attitude.

PENNY

I've been walking around in flannel pants and eating off trays for six weeks trying to fix my head.

MELANIE

That's not the story she knows.

PENNY

But she's mean. Look at what she said.

MELANIE

She didn't mean it like:

iwantCANDY

OMG! You're living my sixth grade fantasy!

MELANIE

She meant it like:

iwantCANDY

OMG! You're living my sixth grade fantasy!

PENNY

No, she didn't. She's making fun of me.

MELANIE

No, she isn't. Look at the emojis!

iwantCANDY

Pony, Heart, Trophy, Slightly-Sad-But-Not-Crying Face

SHINY PENNY

Thought this would be #lame, but it's #amazing.

iwantCANDY

So jelly. Gave up riding for lacrosse in junior high. #SadTimes

PENNY

Why didn't you write anything else?

MELANIE

Me?

PENNY

Shiny Penny.

MELANIE

Like what?

PENNY

Ask her why she chose lacrosse? Ask her if she ever owned her own horse?

MELANIE

It's just an exchange, not a heart-to-heart.

PENNY

What's this picture of me? (*projected*) Where did it come from?

MELANIE

My friend Laura did that too. It was a picture of you from last summer, reading on the old porch. Laura photoshopped out the book and put in an album. Vinyl is super trendy. It's

Taylor Swift. She'd be a great role model for you. And look--Laura put some red in your hair, too. Do you like it?

PENNY

I don't look like me.

MELANIE

Yes, you do. Just brighter.

PENNY

No.

MELANIE

It's good for twitter. Go to your profile. Start from the bottom. Read it all, and give it some time to sink in. Then we'll talk about it. I love you.

PENNY

Okay. Five hundred miles?

MELANIE

Yes.

PENNY

Okay.

Scene 3. A history of SHINY PENNY. As PENNY “reads” this series of tweets, she may respond audibly to some of them—non-verbal noises, single word comments are encouraged.

SHINY PENNY

Mom’s brother’s ranch damaged in storm. Off to the west for 6 weeks to help! #later #LoveHorses #AndCowboys #FamilyFirst

News flash: you can finish a year of high school doing #IndependentStudy #TheMoreYouKnow #CableHigh

Here <24 hours and already in love with Mr. Moonlight. #MyLittlePony #NotSoLittle

Guess I’m going to be kind of a nanny? They let me drive the pick-up to get Jakey from school.

Thought this would be #lame, but it’s #amazing.

Helping my 7 yr old cousin with spelling homework. #TakeMeBackToSecondGrade

Major storm hitting us in three hours. #SortaScared

Power back on! Phone charged! Did you miss me?

Got to ride today. First time ever. Didn’t know I’d hurt this much. #MrMoonlight

OMG! Muscles aching that I didn’t even know I had!

Back riding today. #MindOverMatter #MoPainMoGain #CowboyUp

Babysitting the pipsqueak today while Al and Jane drive to get stuff we need to fix outbuildings. *(picture projected of an adorable 7 year-old boy)*

Pipsqueak to me: You’re the prettiest girl in our town.

Pipsqueak to me: You should stay here really long.

Literally never had cornbread before today. In love.

I miss my mom. Like, worse than I thought. #embarrassing

Ginger cowboy kid at hardware store today. Um, I love you?

Horseback riding counts as a total body workout.

Glutes, hammies, quads—they all want to kill me.

Al and Jane let Pipsqueak have “hobo dinner” which is him eating hot canned food straight from the can. #RaisingHimWrong

Things I don't miss: gym class, traffic, noise, math, being exhausted.

Things I miss: netflix, good wifi, shopping, my mom, not-dry skin, and my mom.

Pipsqueak knows way more than me about horses. #SkinnyLegend #IStanJakey

Ginger cowboy kid sighting in town. OMG he drives a vintage pick-up. Smiled at him.

Horses actually eat sugar cubes right out of your hand. It's the best. *(picture projected of a palm with a sugar cube in it)*

Pipsqueak to me: Don't you have horses at your ranch?

If you've never been friends with a horse, you're living your life entirely wrong.

Materials delivered today for the rest of the repairs. #TheEndIsNear

Mom officially registered me at #CableHigh #NewKid

Everything is almost fixed. Pipsqueak cried. He knows I'm leaving soon.

Saw the ginger cowboy kid again. Say hi to me dammit.

Think I've only got less than a week. #NotDealing

OMGOMG took pipsqueak for ice cream and ginger cowboy kid was in there. Said hi. Asked who I was. #baller

Of course. Because I'm leaving in five days. #Unfair #LifeSucks

Pipsqueak was a great wingman. #JakeIsTheRealMVP

T-minus 4 days. #Sobbing

But #CableHigh awaits! #Seniors

Can't wait to see my mom.

Next time I see pipsqueak he'll probably be in high school. #SkinnyLegend *(picture projected of same 7 year-old)*

Last ride on Mr. Moonlight. Supposed to rain for next three days. #SOBBING

Read seven books to the pipsqueak before bed. #MakingMemories #IStanGoDogGo
(picture projected of a stack of children's books)

OMG Ginger Cowboy Kid showed up at the ranch today. His name is Jeff.

We went out. Back to the ice cream place. #MintChocChip

We walked home and left his truck there, even though it took over an hour, even though it was raining. *(picture projected of a vintage pick up truck sitting in the rain)*

Kissing but not telling. #YallBetterShipThis #ISayYallNow

Two days. Can't wait to see my mom, but #SOBBING.

Betting I won't get sunsets at Cable High like I do here every night. *(picture projected of a beautiful, stereotypical "western" sunset)*

Jeff the ginger cowboy kid came over tonight and we just went for a walk. Leaving tomorrow. No details for you. #ShipThis

The worst.

So glad when mom pulled up. Just to see her face.

Good by AJ ranch. Never found out if the J is for Jane or Jakey, my pipsqueak and a true #SkinnyLegend.

#SOBBING.

PENNY

(perhaps concurrently) Hashtag sobbing.

Scene 4. MELANIE and LAURA at happy hour, after work.

MELANIE

So, all told, he was not what he had made himself out to be.

LAURA

Yes. That's unfortunate. *(trying not to laugh and failing)*

MELANIE

Stop! It was bad. His profile pic was from at least ten years and 50 pounds ago. *(possibly projected)*

LAURA

Oh my. Lesson learned?

MELANIE

Yes. But I'm still talking to that Steve guy, and this new guy Matt.

LAURA

Lesson not learned.

MELANIE

Don't be mean! You're my friend!

LAURA

Speaking of profile management, how's it going? It got better, right? Are you back to normal?

MELANIE

With Penny?

LAURA

Yeah.

MELANIE

Huge breakthrough the first night. After you left, obviously. And, while I wish she hadn't needed to know everything, all at once, in the middle of the night, it was kind of nice to wake up the next day with the air, like, really clear.

LAURA

I bet. You guys can just get right back in the swing of things.

MELANIE

Well, let's hope not!

LAURA

Right. Without the smashing and the crying and the self-harm.

MELANIE

And law enforcement.

LAURA

That too. It's so weird that she was just cruising along, and then, "POW!" out of nowhere, this huge meltdown.

MELANIE

Well, when I look back, now, I can maybe see some signs, but . . . hindsight, right?

LAURA

What kind of signs? I thought she was all right before the meltdown.

MELANIE

I did too! Then I signed her up for that stupid river cleanup thing. The next thing I know, they're calling me to come get her. She "assaulted" some boy, scratched his face. I get her home, she goes ballistic. Was there stuff before that? I try to think back, and I start second guessing myself.

LAURA

What's done is done.

MELANIE

I know! We are here now, right? We can't be anywhere but where we are. So I'm not going to dwell. And she's doing good.

LAURA

Is she home alone right now?

MELANIE

Of course. She doesn't need a babysitter. She's better. My God, she's on meds.

LAURA

You're not nervous?

MELANIE

If I want a relationship with her, I have to trust her.

LAURA

I thought it would be—rough. But I'm not good at transitions.

MELANIE

You're not a parent!

LAURA

Thank the Good Lord.

MELANIE

And I don't need to "transition" into anything with Penny. She's my daughter. We always have that. And, I wasn't going to tell you this, I mean, it's her business, but she's in therapy still. They said she has to do it, on an outpatient level, for a while. It's required.

LAURA

That'll be good for her. Maybe **she** needs help with the transition. (*MELANIE objects, there is no transition happening.*) I'm just saying that if I had a roommate that moved out for six weeks and then came back, there would definitely be bumps in the road. On top of the fact that you had barely moved into the house when she left. Just negotiating bathroom space would be a nightmare.

MELANIE

(*with laughter*) A child is not a roommate! I'm always connected to Penny, and it killed me when she had to go—you know that. You were there, propping me up at my desk! Thank God for Laura! Now we're together again and it's on to the next phase!

LAURA

Which is what?

MELANIE

A healthy relationship with my healthy daughter.

LAURA

That's good. That's really good.

MELANIE

It is.

LAURA

So . . . what did she have to say about her shiny, happy self?

MELANIE

(*after the tiniest moment*) I mean, she was kind of freaked out at first, like, "What is this?"

LAURA

Right.

MELANIE

But after she really spent some time with it, after we talked it through and saw how I kind of grew it, she thought it was pretty cool. I think it took a lot of pressure off her, you know?

LAURA

You don't think it put a different kind of pressure on her? I was thinking it might—

MELANIE

What? No. She's totally on board. She's becoming a likable, popular teen! But can I tell you something horrible?

LAURA

Yes, please.

MELANIE

I'm used to getting approval for my work, you know? Like, a client chooses my design and we go with it and people see it and yay Melanie. But this is so behind-the-scenes. It's stupid, but I'm sort of missing the feeling of getting to take credit. Ah, that's so bitchy!

LAURA

You know, all any of us can do for other people is use whatever talents we have to help them.

MELANIE

All I want is a happy Penny.

LAURA

Just tough to be so proud of it, and yet your name can't be on it.

MELANIE

That's exactly it. I did a really good job, a great job, actually. I am proud of it, and I'd like a little love.

LAURA

(golf clap) Here you go.

MELANIE

Thank you, thank you.

LAURA

Hey, did the Jeff pic get any likes?

MELANIE

(mini-scream) I forgot to post it! *(she grabs her phone, taps, swipes)* Oh no! Oh no! No. No. No. Nonononono.

LAURA

What's wrong?

MELANIE

Nothing I can't fix.

LAURA

I thought you said you had to trust her.

MELANIE

And I thought she understood what we were doing. She's---she's messing it up.

We transition briefly to the twitterverse.

iwantCANDY

ME: Mom, I need new lacrosse shoes.

MOM:

ME: New lacrosse shoes?

MOM:

ME: Lacrosse shoes?

MOM: Look at my new Tory Burch bag!

ME: [head explodes]

SHINY PENNY

The guy who said he would walk 500 miles? What's the farthest you think he actually ever walked? #LongDistanceRelationship

iwantCANDY

The fact that a google image search for Cole Sprouse's wife does not show pictures of me is devastating. #Riverdale

SHINY PENNY

Long distance romance = setting your phone across from you at Applebee's and facetimeing your person while you eat chicken strips, alone.

Scene 5. PENNY reading a paper copy of Jane Austen's "Emma." MELANIE enters, having come straight from being out with LAURA.

MELANIE

Hey.

PENNY

Hey. I thought you were going out with Laura.

MELANIE

I was out with Laura, but I had to come home.

PENNY

Why?

MELANIE

Penny!

PENNY

What?

MELANIE

Why did you break up with Jeff?

PENNY

Dr. Mary says one way to combat rising anger is to be assertive and express myself clearly. So I expressed myself. *(a noise from MELANIE, "you don't get it")* You wanted me in on it, I thought. Isn't that the deal? I thought we were doing it together.

MELANIE

But this wasn't together.

PENNY

Neither was any of the stuff you did without me.

MELANIE

Of course not, Penny, because you weren't here. But now you are and I'm glad you want to work with Shiny Penny and use her for what she's supposed to be, but I don't think you should be making major decisions like this without me. This is a delicate thing.

PENNY

What is?

MELANIE

Your relationship with Jeff!

PENNY

He's imaginary. I'm sure his feelings weren't hurt.

MELANIE

Penny.

PENNY

Mom.

MELANIE

I'm not sure you understand the purpose of this whole thing.

PENNY

No, I—

MELANIE

It's June. You have two full months to connect with people and build the kind of social life for yourself that will carry you through your senior year. This should be one of the most fun years of your life—

PENNY

It's not going to be.

MELANIE

Because you have such a poor attitude! You refuse to try to make it good.

PENNY

I don't want an imaginary boyfriend.

MELANIE

What do you want?

PENNY

To go away to school.

MELANIE

Do this and you'll get that. What else?

PENNY

To see if Emma realizes that she's in love with Mr. Knightley. (*MELANIE looks confused, exasperated. PENNY holds up her book.*) Today, they spent so long planning a fancy dress ball and I thought she might realize it at the ball, but then the ball got postponed, indefinitely.

MELANIE

The story was them planning a dance that never happened?

PENNY

Yep. They talked all about how to arrange the furniture, but Emma's dad was worried about how Frank was making it too drafty for the ladies. It was really funny.

MELANIE

We can do better than that.

PENNY

Better than Jane Austen?

MELANIE

Shiny Penny is supposed to give you a cool little backstory to launch you into your last year of high school.

PENNY

Instead of reality?

MELANIE

Instead of your sadness.

PENNY

Pretending "Shiny Penny Goes West" is real doesn't erase what really is real.

MELANIE

Obviously. I know that. But people edit what they tell people about themselves. I don't go around telling people that I wrecked a car in high school and put two people in the hospital. That happened, but it isn't what I lead with! It isn't what defines me!

PENNY

You did what?

MELANIE

See, you didn't even know that! You're allowed to put forward the image of yourself that you want people to see. That's an okay thing to do. Women wear makeup, we dye our hair. It's not lying. We get to cover up the darker parts of ourselves, or the weaker ones.

PENNY

My depression doesn't make me weak.

MELANIE

No, it doesn't. But it gives people a point to focus on that, maybe, is not where you want them to put their focus.

PENNY

It's like all this hurts you worse than it hurts me.

MELANIE

I think, if you were capable of caring, you would.

PENNY

Don't do that.

MELANIE

I'm not trying to be hurtful.

PENNY

It's just . . . me. I care as much as I can.

MELANIE

When you have a child someday, you will know what it feels like to want to fix something as badly as I want to fix you. Your sadness.

PENNY

There's no fix.

MELANIE

Of course there is. That's what you went away to figure out.

PENNY

And what I learned is that I can manage its presence, but I can't count on it to just go away. If I do that—every time it shows up I'm going to feel like a failure.

MELANIE

You have to believe you can beat it.

PENNY

I have to acknowledge that I won't.

MELANIE

You're not even taking any steps!

PENNY

Like this (*indicating laptop*)?

MELANIE

(*she gets it!*) Yes! Baby steps! (*beat*) Do you know how I started this whole thing? I wrote down what I think are your very best characteristics. (*PENNY looks incredulous*) You love animals. You're great with little kids. You love to read. You're generous and kind and feel good when you help people.

PENNY

Penny's greatest hits.

MELANIE

Do you think I don't know you? Penny, I love you. I've studied you since the day you were born.

PENNY

That's terrifying.

MELANIE

It's not. It's what a mom does. You've been the best thing in my life for more than 17 years. Please believe that I know you.

PENNY

Whatever.

MELANIE

I didn't come up with this story out of nowhere. I designed it to reflect the very best things about you.

PENNY

Thank you. (*this is a moving moment for MELANIE*)

MELANIE

You're welcome.

PENNY

It's just—

MELANIE

Any connections you make through Shiny Penny, any friendships that come out of this, those people will not be surprised by who you really are. They will get a girl that is everything that this story—this little, short, goofy, western-adventure story—suggested she would be.

PENNY

I get it.

MELANIE

Can I show you something?

PENNY

Sure.

MELANIE

(*shows PENNY a picture on her phone, we may see it projected*) Look how gorgeous!

PENNY

Wow.

MELANIE

Do you know how long it took me to find a picture of a good-looking red-headed teenage boy?!? Even Laura the Photoshop Queen couldn't put one together that didn't look like he was from a Pixar movie! My God! Why did I even make him a red-head in the first place? I would've undone it, but by the time you first saw him you had over a hundred followers. And that first post got retweeted! Twice!

PENNY

He's cute.

MELANIE

So imagine how I felt when I'm sitting with Laura after work and I opened Twitter and saw:

SHINY PENNY

Think it's over with Jeff. Time of death—right now.

iwantCANDY

Oh no! Sorry! #BoysAreBitches

MELANIE

I mean, literally the exact same day I found this. I was so excited to post it. With a “thiskid” hashtag. *(a moment of intense internal struggle)* I have to. *(she posts the picture, it is projected)*

iwantCANDY

Holy shit he looks like KJ Apa #Riverdale

SHINY PENNY

I'll live. #singleAF *(pronounce the letter “A” and the letter “F”)*

MELANIE

What is “AF?”

PENNY

As fuck.

MELANIE

(attention on a device) Oh my God.

PENNY

Jeez. Sorry.

Oh, I don't care about that. MELANIE

Then what? PENNY

Did you see this? MELANIE

I don't know what you're looking at. PENNY

I need deets. DM me your number. iwantCANDY

What? PENNY

She wants your phone number. She wants to text you. Or call you. Oh my God. She asked for it publicly, Penny. This is huge. MELANIE

I don't have a phone. PENNY

You did. MELANIE

I smashed it. PENNY

I remember. MELANIE

So that's that. PENNY

Let's go. MELANIE

What? PENNY

Look. It's working. I thought you breaking up with Jeff the Ginger was a wrong move, but it's about to yield a friendship with iwantCANDY. That was kind of my endgame. I MELANIE

was working toward you getting a personal relationship with somebody nice and popular and I honestly didn't think it would happen before August, but here we are. Let's go.

PENNY

Where?

MELANIE

You need a phone! (*as they rush out the door, she hands PENNY her phone*) Google KJ Apa. I need to know who that is.

Scene 6. A bar. MELANIE and LAURA. An empty glass and a full drink in front of MELANIE. LAURA has only the drink in her hand. MELANIE is, to put it kindly, “over the falls.”

MELANIE

So then we just sat there. Waiting for a call? A text? I mean, something.

LAURA

How was Penny?

MELANIE

Fine.

LAURA

She wasn't disappointed?

MELANIE

I admit, I was more invested in it than she was. But that's because it was about to be the culmination of my entire effort, you know?

LAURA

Sure. Sure. Of course. How could you not feel like that?

MELANIE

I mean, it's embarrassing, honestly, how much I wanted it. For her. For Penny.

LAURA

Don't be embarrassed. You love your kid. How are you getting home?

MELANIE

I ubered.

LAURA

Fantastic. *(she signals to an unseen server to bring another round)* So you ran out and got her a phone.

MELANIE

Yes. No discounted upgrade, either. Full price!

LAURA

Of course. Never when you need it!

MELANIE

Right. And it took a long time, you know, to get it set up. She wanted to keep her old number. I thought that was a bad idea—Fresh start, right?

LAURA

Right.

MELANIE

I like, read a numerology book, an article, well, a buzzfeed thing, you know? And her old number—it was just a series of bad luck combinations! I mean, I'm not saying her phone number was the reason she's depressed, or whatever, but a few lucky numbers couldn't hurt. *(LAURA laughs)* I'm doing everything I can for this kid. And since I was paying for it, I decided. On a new number. The guy went through about fifteen numbers before I picked one. So, it wasn't like a huge fight or whatever, but I won.

LAURA

I get it. If you're doing a fresh start, let it be completely new.

MELANIE

Exactly. I should've brought you with us. Voice of reason!

LAURA

So you got home . . .

MELANIE

Yes. And I DM'd Candy with Penny's new number and then we waited.

LAURA

You just sat there?

MELANIE

I was a wreck. She read a book. I paced, I ate, I tried to watch tv.

LAURA

But, nothing.

MELANIE

Nope. Candy never reached out. Not even a response to the message! And no tweets—which might suggest that her wifi was down or something, which would actually be good—even then, she's got a phone! I mean, who doesn't have data? So now I'm going back to freaking out thinking that Penny never should have broken up with Jeff. My initial reaction was that it was, just, the wrong move. But then I thought it was going to yield this great result. Now we don't have Candy, and we don't have Jeff.

LAURA

You can get Jeff back, though, right? I mean, he doesn't really get a say!

MELANIE

Maybe.

LAURA

Why not?

MELANIE

Will people believe that?

LAURA

Will people believe that a high school couple broke up and got back together a day later? Yes, they will.

MELANIE

What if Penny doesn't understand? What if she gets mad or . . . breaks something?

LAURA

I thought she was better.

MELANIE

She is. But, I don't know. She's not really . . . (*into it.*) She reads a lot . . . like all day.

LAURA

Yeah?

MELANIE

So what? Is she gonna tweet what page she's on? Then, an hour later, what page she's on now?

LAURA

Did she get involved before? Like at her old school?

MELANIE

She's never been a "joiner." She wrote a poem for the literary magazine. But she submitted under a different name. She was on a soccer team once, 8 and under.

LAURA

But you signed her up for that.

MELANIE

Nine years ago. The next thing I signed her up for was the river cleanup thing. Learned my lesson there. Shiny Penny had momentum right before Penny got home. She was hitting her stride and now I feel like she's losing some steam.

LAURA

Do you want to shut her down?

MELANIE

Oh no! I just want Penny to believe in it, in the possibility. I had so much fun imagining the way this next year might go. Penny and me, together. But it was . . .

LAURA

What?

MELANIE

Nothing.

LAURA

What were you going to say? I won't hold you to it.

MELANIE

It was easier when she wasn't here.

LAURA

Whoa.

MELANIE

(nearing the brink) It's really, really, really hard. I know I said it wasn't, but—

LAURA

Now we're getting somewhere.

MELANIE

What? No, we're not.

LAURA

When's your therapy session with Penny and her doctor?

MELANIE

(a noise, "I can't even think about that," then pushing her half-full drink towards LAURA) Take this from me.

LAURA

C'mon. Easier when she wasn't here?

MELANIE

I didn't say better. Easier doesn't mean better.

LAURA

Hey, we're all works in progress.

MELANIE

Thank God I have you. (*LAURA demurs, maybe says, "Stop."*) I'd be falling off the deep end, too, if you weren't my friend.

LAURA

Listen, you knew it wouldn't all be smooth sailing. Have things improved at all? Be honest.

MELANIE

(*fully recovered*) Improved from when she ran me out of the house and went on a destructive rampage that put me out well into the thousands of dollars? Yes, they have. (*pulls her drink back to her side of the table*) Give me that back.

LAURA

You haven't had to call the police on her. (*raises glass*)

MELANIE

Not yet! (*clink*) I've got that in the plus column.

LAURA

So bring back the redhead kid, write her a new chapter.

MELANIE

If I just get her on my team, she'll be invested in it. She'll love it. Like when you let a little kid put together a salad. It tastes better to them because they made it themselves.

LAURA

Exactly.

We transition to the twitterverse.

SHINY PENNY

I thought I missed him when he was 1200 miles away. Doesn't even compare to not having him at all.

iwantCANDY

#PoorBaby Crying face, baby face, broken heart

SHINY PENNY

One time I called him Utah's Ron Weasley and he got mad. #HePrefersKJ Apa

iwantCANDY

That makes you Hermione! Or Veronica. Or Betty.

SHINY PENNY

I wish.

Scene 7. MELANIE working at the table.

MELANIE

Penny! Penny! Come on. Let's get to work on this!

PENNY

(entering, carrying a copy of "The Book Thief" by Marcus Zusak. She has been crying)
What are we doing?

MELANIE

What's wrong?

PENNY

(indicating the book) The end of this. It's too much.

MELANIE

I wish you wouldn't immerse yourself in sad things.

PENNY

It feels good.

MELANIE

We need to get your eyes out of books and up looking around. The real world is beautiful.

PENNY

So is this.

MELANIE

Beautiful things don't make people cry.

PENNY

Of course they do.

MELANIE

Are you taking your meds?

PENNY

Yes.

MELANIE

Aren't they helping?

PENNY

I don't really know how I'd feel if I wasn't taking them.

MELANIE
You'd feel like you did before.

PENNY
Maybe.

MELANIE
Talk to Dr. Mary about it?

PENNY
Maybe.

MELANIE
So, I'm doing something fun. I'm working on bringing Jeff back!

PENNY
Oh.

MELANIE
The ginger cowboy kid.

PENNY
I know who he is.

MELANIE
I think it's necessary.

PENNY
Then do it.

MELANIE
I want you to help me.

PENNY
Mom.

MELANIE
Penny, come on. I just bought you a brand new phone.

PENNY
I didn't know you would be exacting recompense.

MELANIE
That's not what this is. Well, maybe it is. That's how relationships work, Pen. People do things for each other.

PENNY

Thank you. Guilt feels awesome.

MELANIE

C'mon. Just try it this time. It's fun. It's silly. You're going to get a good response if we get you guys back together. Everyone loves a reunion!

PENNY

(looking at "The Book Thief") Maybe.

MELANIE

People see you're desirable to one person, that makes you more appealing to everyone.

PENNY

Can you not describe me as desirable, please?

MELANIE

How can I say it better? If people see that someone, you, in this case, is worth pursuing, even from across state lines, from far away, it heightens their level of interest in you. It makes them wonder what you've got to offer.

PENNY

What happens when they find out I have nothing to offer?

MELANIE

(laughing) First thing you have to offer is that—you're hilarious. What else is good about you, seriously?

PENNY

Don't make me talk about this.

MELANIE

Come on. Just for a minute.

PENNY

Oh, God.

MELANIE

Tell me two other good things about you. Then we don't have to talk about it anymore.

PENNY

Promise?

MELANIE

Yes.

PENNY

I've read more books than anyone I know.

MELANIE

We can't emphasize that too much. We've already got you reading to your little cousin. That's enough with the books.

PENNY

'murica.

MELANIE

Stop. I just think that's something that will intimidate most of your peers.

PENNY

Why do I want them for friends if they're scared of books?

MELANIE

Books can come back around later. Think of some good things about you that appeal to everyone.

PENNY

I can eat an entire box of mashed potatoes.

MELANIE

Again— hilarious.

PENNY

I have an extensive collection of headbands.

MELANIE

Penny, please be serious!

PENNY

Okay, okay. I'm good at school—generally—not just hyper-literate. Like, if people need someone's math homework to copy, they copy mine.

MELANIE

Huh. And that's why you tutored little Jakey! (*a look*) What else?

PENNY

I don't know.

MELANIE

Sure you do.

I can shoplift.

PENNY

Penny!

MELANIE

Seriously, I've never gotten caught.

PENNY

I don't want to know these things.

MELANIE

I thought you wanted in.

PENNY

I do, but—

MELANIE

Kids think that's cool.

PENNY

But you shouldn't advertise it.

MELANIE

If you want to be popular you should.

PENNY

MELANIE

Let's focus on the other thing. How can being smart, and being a good teacher/tutor type person, how can that get you back in touch with Jeff?

PENNY

What do you mean?

MELANIE

If I'm going to pull off getting you two back together, I might as well use it to highlight something about you—some talent or whatever.

PENNY

Just put "back together with Jeff #bae."

MELANIE

I can't just . . . it's dumb if it just happens out of the blue.

PENNY

Jeff called. We worked it out. #misunderstanding #bae

MELANIE

Quit.

PENNY

What? I have a bae to hashtag. I want to hashtag my bae.

MELANIE

That's fine, but it's got to play out somehow. Shiny Penny shares. She invites people into her life as she lives it. She's not about surprise pronouncements.

PENNY

So you're saying he should reach out to me, about help with school? And I make that public information. Why? That's so stupid.

MELANIE

No, it's not! Confident girls share everything! What if we imagine you started helping him with a science project while you were there and now he's stuck. And he calls you.

PENNY

To like, ask for help with his solar system model? That's terrible.

MELANIE

Then with a paper or something!

PENNY

Jeff needs help with his Emily Dickinson paper? #BecauseICouldNotStopForJeff

MELANIE

What?!?

PENNY

It was a joke, an Emily Dickinson joke.

MELANIE

Right. Because everyone will get that.

PENNY

Why would he even be in school? It's summer.

MELANIE

Oh, good catch. Maybe he goes to a year-round school.

PENNY

My God, Mom, puke.

Then what, smarty pants? MELANIE

(a moment) His college apps. PENNY

What? MELANIE

Did you ever say how old he was? PENNY

No. I just imagined him the same age as you. MELANIE

Cool. Then, he needs help with his college apps. PENNY

It's June. MELANIE

He's getting a head start? PENNY

That makes him way too nerdy. MELANIE

Maybe we'll go to the same college. Is he as smart as I am? I'm not going to limit my choices based on where he can get in. PENNY

No one's as smart as you are. MELANIE

(receives the compliment well, and then) A scholarship app! PENNY

There you go. MELANIE

And he has to write an essay . . . PENNY

This is fun. MELANIE

PENNY

About a person, or an encounter, that changed the course of his life.

MELANIE

Right.

PENNY

And he says he wants me to proof read it, because I'm a good writer and I read a lot.

MELANIE

Yes! See how good you are at this, Penny?

PENNY

But the essay is actually about me.

MELANIE

Whoa. Penny!

PENNY

And maybe it's not even for a real scholarship, or whatever. He just used that to make me listen to him, because he knew I wouldn't say no to him asking for help.

MELANIE

I like that. Then we're not married to a timeline, or to finding out later whether he gets the scholarship or not.

PENNY

He just wanted to make me hear him.

MELANIE

Because?

PENNY

He loves me.

MELANIE

Isn't this so fun?

PENNY

And he wants me back.

MELANIE

Ahh!

PENNY

Just like I was.

Scene 8. The twitterverse.

SHINY PENNY

So this happened. (*image projected of an iphone text message screenshot, text from GINGER KID: I know u r mad. But I need like half hour of help. With an essay. Please?*)

And then this: (*image projected of an iphone text message screenshot, text from GINGER KID: It's for a scholarship. You're the best writer I know. Please?*)

iwantCANDY

OMG. @shiny_PENNY_1999 Answer him!

SHINY PENNY

OMG @iwant CANDY—where have u been?

iwantCANDY

Later. Just answer.

SHINY PENNY

WTF am I supposed to say, @iwantCANDY?

iwantCANDY

Say yes! You guys are so cute! #baes

SHINY PENNY

He's not trying to get back together. Or is he?

Done. (*image projected of an iphone text message screen, text from PENNY to GINGER KID: Email it to my gmail*)

iwantCANDY

AHHHH! Holy shit! Holy Shit! HOLY SHIIIIIT!

SHINY PENNY

Chill. It's not a marriage proposal. #WhereforeArtThouGinger

(*significant pause*)

OMG.

iwantCANDY

What? What?

SHINY PENNY

OMG

Stop it. iwantCANDY

Can't put it here. Text me. SHINY PENNY

Can't. Parents took phone and laptop til Friday. They are out. #OnMomsDesktop
#Hello1990 #bullshit iwantCANDY

I. Can't. Even. SHINY PENNY

I'm dying. iwantCANDY

This happened! *(image projected of a screen shot of the first page of an essay, titled: Reasons I Love Penny and Ways We Can Make Long Distance Work.)* SHINY PENNY

Favorite. iwantCANDY

Read it. #SOBBING SHINY PENNY

Better than Mr. Darcy's letter.

Last line: Parents will send me there for Thanksgiving. If it's cool. The sun hasn't risen here since you left.

OMG. He fucking LOVES you. iwantCANDY

I guess. #WhatNow SHINY PENNY

Turkey with the #bae! iwantCANDY

You bet. #blessed SHINY PENNY

Scene 9. MELANIE opening takeout, PENNY enters with plates, napkins.

PENNY

Why is there dog food in the pantry?

MELANIE

Oh, didn't I tell you? I got a dog while you were gone.

PENNY

What? Why isn't it here?

MELANIE

I had to return it. I don't know what I was thinking. I wasn't ever here to take care of it!

PENNY

But now I'm home. Maybe we can get one.

MELANIE

Maybe.

PENNY

So I was thinking about the Jeff thing?

MELANIE

You were? Do you have an idea?

PENNY

Not really. I'm just not sure the Thanksgiving thing makes sense.

MELANIE

Why not?

PENNY

Isn't it the plan that I have actual friends by then? Like, physically real friends, in this town?

MELANIE

Well, yes.

PENNY

So they're going to want to meet him. My currently-imagined, but physically-extant future-friends are going to expect to meet my truly imaginary, non-corporeal red-headed boyfriend. In November. When he comes here.

MELANIE

We can work around it. The important thing is, you're closer to Candy now.

PENNY

Twitter Candy.

MELANIE

This is one way for a relationship to be built in the modern world. Like me and this Matt guy. We've been chatting and when we do finally meet, we'll already be friends.

PENNY

Yeah. But Jeff and I met the regular way. In life. In a fictional life.

MELANIE

So then maybe he does come for Thanksgiving and you drop off the face of the earth and just hole up with him at our house. Like you don't want to share him or whatever.

PENNY

People will expect pictures of us together, like selfies. *(a noise from MELANIE, vaguely translating to, "That's a problem.")* Maybe there's a snowstorm, where he lives. Bad weather keeps him from getting here.

MELANIE

Oh, that's tragic.

PENNY

No, it's stupid. Maybe we just break up before Thanksgiving. But we make it bigger. Like, get more out of it. For the story, more plot points or whatever. Show everyone how resilient I am.

MELANIE

But for now, you're back together.

PENNY

It's sort of fun.

MELANIE

I know, isn't it? It helped me. When I missed you.

PENNY

I might want friends.

MELANIE

Really?

PENNY

I didn't think I did, but imagining them feels nice.

A text noise.

MELANIE

Not me.

PENNY

No one else texts me besides you.

The noise again.

MELANIE

Where's your phone? *(she spots it and picks it up, swipes)* Oh, no way! It's Candy.

PENNY

No way.

MELANIE

It is. Do you want it?

PENNY

I'm scared. You do it.

MELANIE

"It's Candy. Finally got phone back. Parents=assholes. Where are you?" *(types)* Home.

PENNY

Don't let her come here.

MELANIE

Penny! This is what's supposed to happen.

PENNY

No. I can't . . . hang out with her. In life. Don't make me.

MELANIE

Penny. This is your chance. 500 miles.

PENNY

That's not part of it. You said I just had to do the twitter thing.

MELANIE

(text noise) "Do you have a car?" Pen? You can take mine.

PENNY

No. Don't. Tell her no.

MELANIE

Penny, seriously?!?

PENNY

Mom, get off me! Shut the fucking phone off.

MELANIE

(text noise) “I’m working at 9th street boutique. Come visit me?”

PENNY

No way.

MELANIE

You could be in and out in five minutes.

PENNY

Mom!

MELANIE

You just have to go in there and say hi to her.

PENNY

No! *(a movement that might be construed as a physical threat, but might also be a self-protective gesture.)*

MELANIE

Jesus, Penny! Don’t!

PENNY

I’m not going there! Do you hear me?!?

MELANIE

Fine. Stop. *(typing)* “Can’t get out now. Mom’s being a bitch.” How’s that?

We transition to the twitterverse.

SHINY PENNY

@iwantCANDY Glad you got your stuff back.

iwantCANDY

@shiny_penny_1999 They are still being dicks though.

SHINY PENNY

@iawntCANDY Give them a minute. They want what’s best for you.

iwantCANDY

@shiny_penny_1999 You clearly don’t know my parents.

Scene 10. PENNY on the couch, on a device. Scrolling, tapping, not really feeling it. A copy of Kate Chopin's "The Awakening" lies nearby. A \$20 bill sits somewhere the audience can see it. MELANIE enters.

MELANIE

Hey.

PENNY

Hi.

MELANIE

(referencing the \$20) You didn't use this? I left this so you could get lunch after Dr Mary.

PENNY

I had toast and grapes.

MELANIE

Toast and grapes. Hey, has Candy texted again?

PENNY

Yeah. I didn't respond.

MELANIE

My God. It is literally just typing. *(MELANIE types.)*

SHINY PENNY

Phone screwed up. Hit me here if you need me. #BadApple

MELANIE

(in appreciation of her own hashtag) Bad apple, that's a good one. *(noting the book)* Are you done with this?

PENNY

Yes. *(MELANIE takes it toward the bookshelf.)* No. Put it on the other shelf. That one is for books I haven't read yet.

MELANIE

(after a gentle eye roll) How was Dr. Mary?

PENNY

She wanted to know why you weren't there. Again.

MELANIE

I told you. I had a deadline at work that I absolutely could not push back. I have to make money, Penny. (*maybe no response, maybe something audible*) Have you said anything to her about our twitter thing?

PENNY

I don't have to tell you what I talk about there.

MELANIE

I know.

PENNY

But I haven't. I'm waiting til you come. The three of us can cover it together.

MELANIE

Great! Hopefully, by then, you will have really given it a chance.

PENNY

I definitely will have, because I'm ready to take her over. Shiny Penny. One coping skill for depression is to write in a journal and I was thinking it could kind—(*of be like that, maybe.*)

MELANIE

I'm so excited. (*No, she isn't.*) You're going to do a great job! (*No, she isn't.*) Penny, this makes me so—

PENNY

I'm going to start mixing in the truth.

MELANIE

What? Not yet.

PENNY

Yes. Now.

MELANIE

I said no.

PENNY

I'll change the password.

MELANIE

Then you won't go away to school.

PENNY

Listen! I don't want to keep this up, keep pretending, too much longer. I think I freaked out the other day—when Candy texted— because I'm afraid to try to carry that into the world. How am I supposed to walk into Candy's work and talk about horses? Or ranches? If this is going to be successful, we have to make it so I don't feel like I'm lying when I'm standing in front of people. So, I'm going to tell little bits of the truth, start the transition.

MELANIE

Let's think about the timeline. Let's set quantifiable goals.

PENNY

Good. That's another coping skill—structure.

MELANIE

Let's say on the first day of school, we start to figure out how to transition. And we shoot for you going to Homecoming with a group of at least ten.

PENNY

I need to be real by the first day of school.

MELANIE

You want to carry in the best, most-polished impression you possibly can.

PENNY

I can't face 800 kids and be like, "Want to see a picture of a horse I know? I love my ginger boyfriend! He looks like AJ Kappa!"

MELANIE

KJ Apa.

PENNY

I can start making it real now. In little bits and pieces. Not abruptly.

MELANIE

Give me a for instance.

PENNY

Well, to start with, I was thinking: Wellbutrin helps. #TalkAboutMentalIllness

MELANIE

Whoa. No way. You can't say "mental illness."

PENNY

Yes, I can. You can't.

MELANIE

Of course I can! But we're not saying it about you! You had . . . a crisis, a bad day.

PENNY

I had an acute episode related to my conduct disorder and moderate depression.

MELANIE

Penny, come on.

PENNY

I'm living with it, Mom.

MELANIE

I'm living with it, too. I'm living with what happened.

PENNY

It's still happening. It's ongoing.

MELANIE

(after a moment) You're not talking about your prescriptions. You're not rating medicine, telling people you're on meds. That isn't public information.

PENNY

"Wellbutrin helps?" It kind of is, totally, public information.

MELANIE

Your experience with it is not.

PENNY

That's sort of the point of the "Talk About Mental Illness" thing.

MELANIE

Please believe me when I say that leaving the troubles of the past in the past is the best way to go.

PENNY

Please believe me when I say the troubles of the past are also the troubles of the present.

MELANIE

My God, stop! Look at you, Penny! Look at how good you're doing. We eat dinner together almost every night and it's fine. We have conversations, sometimes long ones, where neither of us is screaming. Do you not see how much better you are?

PENNY

I see how much better I seem.

MELANIE

If you're struggling, you need to tell me.

PENNY

No, I don't. It's not your business.

MELANIE

It absolutely is.

PENNY

So you want details, but I'm not allowed to say anything to anyone else?

MELANIE

I just don't think you want to hit potential friends over the head with the fact that you're mentally ill.

PENNY

You said it.

MELANIE

I just don't think twitter is the place to say it.

PENNY

Do you actually read other people's tweets? Do you know how much shit people spill here? And it's there and it's gone, in like, a minute.

MELANIE

But—

PENNY

People don't retain what they read here.

MELANIE

Then why post that stuff?

PENNY

Why post anything?

MELANIE

To make people laugh? To show how sweet you are? To convey your positive self-image.

PENNY

Anti-depressants contribute to my positive self-image. They're basically the reason I have any self-image at all.

MELANIE

That's not true.

PENNY

It's truer than me riding a goddam four-wheeler around a horse ranch!

MELANIE

Listen—I'm not going to judge you for anything! But I want you to really consider what you share with random people.

PENNY

Why?

MELANIE

Because there will be repercussions. Shiny Penny is warm and bright. One misstep and there's a black spot in that sunshine. Information is power, Pen. You need to be careful who you empower.

PENNY

Whom.

MELANIE

I don't care about grammar. I care about how you are perceived, and I'm telling you, you don't want to be seen as the girl on meds. It will break you.

PENNY

I'm already broken.

MELANIE

Can you trust me on this? Just for this week? For today?

PENNY

Fine. But we talk about this again before the end of the week. And I have a list of schools. I've cut it from 22 to 10.

MELANIE

Okay, Ms. Organization! Look at you!

PENNY

Tell me what to type.

MELANIE

What did you do today?

PENNY

Sat here. Finished "The Awakening," started "Infinite Jest."

MELANIE

Ooooh! That sounds like a funny one!

PENNY

A laugh riot.

MELANIE

What about a Harry Potter? The really challenging one—the one they had to break into two movies? I think it might serve you better, right now, just to like something that’s popular.

PENNY

I finished “The Awakening,” started “Infinite Jest,” and I listened to Chopin’s Prelude in E Minor.

MELANIE

Shiny Penny read a Nicholas Sparks book, sobbed, and watched her DVR of Taylor Swift on the VMAs.

PENNY

(bitingly) OMG.

MELANIE

Yep.

Penny types.

I’m going to have a glass of wine. Do you want anything?

PENNY

A glass of wine.

MELANIE

You can’t have alcohol. If you mix alcohol with your meds the likelihood of suicidal thoughts increases.

PENNY

Oh God, Mom, I’m not going to kill myself.

MELANIE

Super. Then I’ll get you a Coke.

MELANIE exits, PENNY types. We transition into the twitterverse.

SHINY PENNY

Getting more excited about the bf coming east for Turkey Day! #GobbleGobbleBaeBae

Kinda wondering what all we will do here. No horses, no pick-ups.

Freaking out that he's going to be bored when he's here. #ResearchMode

Read Glamour, am now armed with 5 dirty tricks that will have him on his knees.
#SoTheresThat

Scene 11. MELANIE enters from outside. Upon hearing the door open, PENNY charges out from her room.

MELANIE
My God! What's the matter?

PENNY
What did you do?

MELANIE
Sit down. Let's have a conversation.

PENNY
What did you do? Lock me out?

MELANIE
I changed the password.

PENNY
What the hell for?

MELANIE
Settle down. Do we have to have an explosion?

PENNY
I'm very angry.

MELANIE
I see that. I see that you are angry.

PENNY
I'm not supposed to squish my feelings down. I'm supposed to feel them when they are happening. *(an angry noise, part growl, part sigh)* This is my thing. You said it was. You said I would take it over.

MELANIE
(Taking out her phone) It's like you're pulling the rug out from under it. *(shows screen to PENNY)*

SHINY PENNY
Just not feeling it today.

PENNY
I wasn't.

MELANIE

And that's fine.

SHINY PENNY

My mouth feels like it's full of dry tampons. #SideEffects #RatherBeSad

MELANIE

You couldn't have said "cotton balls?"

PENNY

No, because it didn't feel like cotton balls.

SHINY PENNY

Thinking of not going back to school in the fall. #CanIQuit?

MELANIE

Not if you want to go to college.

PENNY

Shut up.

SHINY PENNY

I'd prefer to be remembered as a smiling face/not this fucking wreck that's taken its place.

MELANIE

Is that Emily Dickinson?

PENNY

Yeah, she's big with the F-bomb.

MELANIE

You can't do this, Penny. Almost two days and not one nice thing. Nothing about Jeff.

PENNY

I didn't say anything about mental illness.

MELANIE

You didn't say anything good.

PENNY

Well then, fuck it!

MELANIE

Penny!

PENNY

Fuck it. Fuck you. Let me back in. Or not. I'm done.

MELANIE

We were supposed to do this together. What about college?

PENNY

I'll run away.

MELANIE

Jesus, Penny, come on. Didn't we have fun with the Jeff reunion?

PENNY

That was like writing a terrible tv show. It was a joke. I can't do that every day. I have bigger thoughts.

MELANIE

Twitter is for little thoughts.

PENNY

I know how to thread.

MELANIE

I respect you, where you want to go with it. Let me run it for a few days, until you cycle out of your really low feelings, and then I'll get you back on.

PENNY

(after a weighted pause) Yeah. Okay. You might be right.

MELANIE

Really?

PENNY

I'm not in a good headspace for that right now. I can acknowledge that.

MELANIE

That's all I was trying to say.

PENNY

I mean, I keep talking about being in touch with my truth—knowing what I can expect of myself, and what I can ask of myself, every day.

MELANIE

You're the boss of you.

PENNY

Right. But, if I'm honest, I have to admit that you are better at being Shiny Penny than I am.

MELANIE

You're getting there!

PENNY

Maybe, but I'm not there now. Not precisely today.

MELANIE

Okay.

PENNY

So yeah, you keep it up. When I'm in a more social, positive frame of mind, I'll let you know. Okay?

MELANIE

Absolutely! Absolutely okay!

We transition into the twitterverse.

SHINY PENNY

Felt so funky the last day or two. Surprise! I have strep. #FeverDreams

So weird to read tweets from only a day or two ago and can barely remember feeling so miserable. #WhoWasThat?

iwantCANDY

Favorite.

SHINY PENNY

Finally feeling 100% again.

iwantCANDY

Favorite.

Welcome back, @shiny_penny_1999.

BAD PENNY

Hi Twitter. My life is a dumpster fire and my heart's a poison apple. Let's be friends.

(if an intermission is being taken, this is a good spot for it)

Scene 12. MELANIE discovers BAD PENNY. Several days later. PENNY considers the bookshelf.

MELANIE

(on a device) What is this? Who is this?

PENNY

What's wrong?

MELANIE

Someone is harassing Shiny Penny. Like really mean.

An image projected of BAD PENNY's avatar. It is not a picture of the real PENNY, of course, and maybe it's not even a person.

BAD PENNY

Go shovel shit @shiny_PENNY_1999 .

MELANIE

She's incredibly rude.

PENNY

How do you know it's a she?

BAD PENNY

Suck a horse dick, @shiny_penny_1999.

MELANIE

That's disgusting.

PENNY

Who is it?

MELANIE

Bad underscore Penny underscore 69. Oh, that's gross.

PENNY

Maybe it's just—

MELANIE

I'm reporting this to twitter.

PENNY

I'm sure they'll care.

MELANIE

This person seems to have created an account strictly to attack you.

PENNY

Shiny Penny.

MELANIE

Yes, you, Shiny Penny. *(pause)* Oh, Jeez.

PENNY

What?

BAD PENNY

Ever fuck a #Bronie, @shiny_penny_1999?

MELANIE

What in the name of Christ is a Bronie?

PENNY

It's a boy, a guy, who is into "My Little Pony."

MELANIE

That's not a thing.

PENNY

Google image it.

MELANIE

(a moment on her device, picture projected of top hit) Oh, Jesus.

PENNY

Told you.

MELANIE

Why would this person even ask you that?

PENNY

You used that hashtag, My Little Pony, on one of the first posts. Nothing dies on the internet.

MELANIE

But stuff gets lost! I mean, you'd have to seek out that first tweet. She'd have to be deliberately looking for material to throw in your face.

PENNY

Not my face.

MELANIE

Well, Shiny Penny's.

PENNY

It's like two clicks and a scroll.

MELANIE

She seems to want to engage you in some kind of . . . one-on-one . . . back-and-forth . . . thing.

PENNY

Girls are bitches.

MELANIE

No, they're not. You're not. I'm fighting this.

PENNY

How?

MELANIE

With positivity. Shiny Penny is not following Bad Penny.

PENNY

That'll really show her!

MELANIE

I'm not stooping to her level. I'm getting you out of this.

PENNY

Good luck. Not everyone wants to be happy. (*grabs a book from the "unread" section*)

MELANIE

Well, Bad Penny clearly doesn't. Who could she be? Maybe it's a boy? Maybe it's a Bronie! Who would want to attack you like this?

PENNY

I have no idea.

MELANIE

I bet it's someone from your old school.

PENNY

Seriously, nobody there gave a shit about me.

MELANIE

You don't have any enemies?

PENNY

I don't even have any friends.

MELANIE

Well, you've got 400 followers.

Scene 13. Penny's alter ego and happy persona on twitter together. The following week.

BAD PENNY

I fucking hate my mother. #StayOut

SHINY PENNY

Finding Nemoland #MovieMashUps

BAD PENNY

Alone #MyFavoritePlace

SHINY PENNY

My uncle's ranch #MyFavoritePlace

BAD PENNY

Last May, I smashed a bunch of shit with a mallet and cut my feet on the pieces.
#BravestThingIEverDid

SHINY PENNY

Carried my baby cousin from the barn to the house during a really bad thunderstorm
#BravestThingIEver Did

This was just the best day #blessed

BAD PENNY

Girls are bitches #SayAnything #TrueStory

iwantCANDY

Love my BFFs

SHINY PENNY

#same

BAD PENNY

#NoOneWantsCandy @ iwantCANDY

iwantCANDY

@bad_penny_69 #FuckYou #GoToHell

BAD PENNY

My mom wishes I wasn't hers. #NotOkay

SHINY PENNY

Just creped homecoming pics from last year, @iwantCANDY. #hawt

iwantCANDY

Awwww, thanks. @shiny_penny_1999

BAD PENNY

My mom has gone on three dates this week, with three different guys. Will @match pay for my therapy?

SHINY PENNY

NicolasCageTheElephant #ActorBandMashups

BAD PENNY

#ThatAwkwardMoment when you realize your mom's a slut.

SHINY PENNY

Today was the best day. #blessed

Scene 14. MELANIE and PENNY come home, carrying, but not overloaded with, shopping bags from clothing stores. LAURA is already there, decked out for kitchen work, having put a lasagna in the oven and prepared the rest of the meal. PENNY enters first. LAURA, hearing the door, enters from kitchen and frightens her.

PENNY

(screams briefly) Oh my God!

LAURA

Sorry, sorry! *(rushes to help her with bags)* Didn't your mom say I'd be here? Sorry!

PENNY

No. She did not. Mom?

MELANIE

(having entered) Didn't I? I thought I did, while we were getting fro-yo!

PENNY

What's she doing here?

MELANIE

Penny, she's right there!

PENNY

Sorry. *(to LAURA)* What are you doing here?

MELANIE

Oh my God. She is my friend.

PENNY

Does she not know I don't like—*(when she's here?)*

LAURA

I made dinner for you and your mom. And me. Lasagna for three!

MELANIE

Penny, Laura's been out of town for the last four days, and I haven't seen her, so I thought we'd do a girls night!

LAURA

It'll be fun!

PENNY

It'll be a fucking nightmare.

PENNY exits.

LAURA

Oh boy.

MELANIE

See? That's exactly it. Right there. She'll say she's just being honest, but she's being horrible. Surely there is a balance between not holding your feelings pent up inside you and being an incredible bitch.

LAURA

There is. She hasn't found it. Have you done a counseling session together yet?

MELANIE

No. I had to cancel the one I was supposed to go to—work deadline. We're rescheduled for next week.

LAURA

You have to go.

MELANIE

I know! I will!

LAURA

Wine?

MELANIE

Yes, immediately. (*LAURA begins to exit, MELANIE speaks and stops her*) Remember when we used to say "fake it til you make it?"

LAURA

Yeah.

MELANIE

Remember what that meant? Go out in to the world, and act confident, act popular, act like you knew what you were doing! That was so hard, but those of us who succeeded did it. We put on a brave face and created ourselves, whatever way we wanted to be. And we did it live—in front of people.

LAURA

Yep.

MELANIE

All Penny has to do is "fake it" from her own house, from her own phone, even! And she refuses to even try!

LAURA

I'm sorry. Is this a "kids today" rant?

MELANIE

(laughing) It is! I'm the old lady, shaking my cane because kids today don't know how easy they have it.

LAURA

You tell 'em. *(some kind of kitchen timer noise)* Be back in a sec.

MELANIE

Want help?

LAURA

Nope.

MELANIE

God bless you. I'm gonna put my feet up for a minute.

MELANIE sits, breathes deeply, takes out her phone.

Oooh! Message from match.com Matt!

LAURA

What's he say?

MELANIE

Just checking in. Wished me luck with the shopping.

MELANIE types.

SHINY PENNY

Whole day of shopping with mom and now dinner with her and her BFF!
#LasagnaGoodness

LAURA

So, you want me to . . . what exactly? What's my next step?

MELANIE

God, I don't know. Just try to get her talking, I guess--calmly.

LAURA

Okay. I might open up a can of worms. Are you ready for that?

MELANIE

At this point, worms would be an improvement.

LAURA

Gotcha.

LAURA retreats to kitchen. MELANIE scrolls. PENNY returns.

PENNY

Clean hands.

MELANIE

Wonderful.

PENNY

I'm going out.

MELANIE

After dinner, though, right?

PENNY

Sure.

MELANIE

Wait. With Candy?

PENNY

What?

MELANIE

iwantCANDY? Is that who you're going out with?

PENNY

God, Mom. No. And it's "whom."

MELANIE

Give me a break. Has she texted?

PENNY

Of course not.

MELANIE

Then **whom** are you going out with? What are you doing?

PENNY

Mr. McKnight asked me if I could walk Frankenstein.

MELANIE

Well, God, Penny. Don't get me all excited thinking you're being social when you're going to walk the neighbor's dog.

PENNY

I didn't have to tell you at all.

MELANIE

I think she brought dessert. This isn't going to be a short dinner.

PENNY

Why do I even have to eat with you guys?

MELANIE

If you're not going to be social with YOUR peers, you're going to be social with mine.

PENNY

I don't want to.

MELANIE

See, that's just the thing. I think you do want to. I think you do want to be a person, Penny, who can enjoy the company of others.

PENNY

What can I do to disabuse you of that notion?

MELANIE

My God. I just spent over \$300 on your closet! Can you give me an hour?!?

PENNY

It's constant repayment with you, you owe me this, you owe me that. I didn't ask for any—

MELANIE

(significantly overriding) I don't think you know what to ask for! I am trying to give you what you need. And frankly, you need practice talking to people who aren't me. So this is what we're doing.

LAURA enters, bearing a hot pan of lasagna.

LAURA

Dinner is served! Penny, would you mind going to grab the salad?

PENNY

I will get the salad, Laura, who apparently has a key to my home and knows her way around my kitchen. *(to MELANIE)* How's that? Am I doing okay?

PENNY exits to the kitchen.

MELANIE

My God, this is so hard.

LAURA

You couldn't pay me to be 17 again.

MELANIE

Oh, boo hoo! Walk into your house beat from shopping, carrying a whole new wardrobe, purchased by your mother, and find that a multi-course meal has been prepared for you? Please, let's cancel the pity party, okay?

PENNY enters with salad bowl.

LAURA

Here we go!

PENNY

Yes. The salad comes forthwith. *(to MELANIE)* How's that? Will I be evaluated on both tone and word choice?

MELANIE

Will you quit?

PENNY

I'm practicing. Laura, I'd appreciate a written critique from you by Monday.

PENNY sets the bowl down and everyone moves to where they will sit to eat. Not necessarily around a table, or even together.

LAURA

Whaddja get? At the mall?

PENNY

Ask Melanie. She picked it all out.

LAURA

Your mom has an amazing eye.

PENNY

Doesn't she, though? Am I a fall or a summer?

LAURA

Well . . . I would put you as—

PENNY

Surprise! It actually doesn't matter what we think, because my mother will decide what is best and she will buy it or make it up and put it on me. And that's what I will be.

MELANIE

Stop.

A moment of quiet eating.

LAURA

Shiny Penny was quiet today.

MELANIE

The connectivity inside the mall is terrible. I stopped trying.

PENNY

And I've been banished (*possibly pronounced with three syllables*) from the account. I am both too literate and too depressed.

MELANIE

We agreed—

PENNY

I capitulated.

LAURA

(*overriding*) Well, Bad Penny had some zingers—

MELANIE grabs her phone. PENNY glares at LAURA.

MELANIE

You follow her?

LAURA

She's . . . funny?

SHINY PENNY

Huge breakfast. #LoveCarbs

MELANIE

I tweeted that yesterday morning. She's replying now?

LAURA looks on.

BAD PENNY

@shiny_penny_1999 meet you in the bathroom in ten to help you puke. #BulemiaIsSo87

LAURA

(an appreciative laugh) Heathers!

BAD PENNY

@shiny_PENNY_1999 Do you put ketchup on your tampons or eat them plain?

MELANIE

She's replying to stuff from over a week ago. That's not fair. That's not the point of twitter. Penny, what do you have to say about this?

PENNY

She's walking through doors that you're leaving open.

MELANIE

Why doesn't this upset you?

PENNY

What does it even have to do with me?

LAURA

Are you . . .? I'm sorry, Mel, but—

MELANIE

(to PENNY) It's your thing!

PENNY

Then let me back in.

MELANIE

Hold on. *(tap, swipe, tap)* Ha! She only has 48 followers. Okay, I guess I can relax. Who cares, right?

LAURA

Right. Who cares?

MELANIE

I'm sweating. I need more wine. And flannel pants.

MELANIE refills her glass, takes it and her phone with her as she exits to change.

LAURA

She hasn't figured it out?

PENNY

Oh, uh, yeah no. I guess not. She doesn't think like that. She processes what's in front of her, she doesn't push through it.

LAURA

Do you hate yourself that much?

PENNY

Look at you, cutting right to the chase.

MELANIE

(OS) Don't talk about anything important without me!

PENNY

I'm tearing down what she put up. I don't want to be that.

MELANIE

(OS) Where are my pink flannel pants, with the cats?

PENNY

(sotto voce) Oh my God. *(calling to MELANIE)* You said you hated them! You gave them to Goodwill!

MELANIE

(OS) Did I? Dammit!

LAURA

What if we get her to put you back on the account and convince her to let you do you?

PENNY

We?

LAURA

I think I can—

PENNY

Please shut up. You know, like, zero about any of this.

LAURA reaches into her purse and, sets three prescription bottles on the table.

What?

LAURA

Those are the meds I'm on.

PENNY
For?

LAURA
Anxiety and mild obsessive compulsive disorder.

PENNY
Does she know?

LAURA
No.

PENNY
See, that's the fucking bullshit part of it. You telling her is what would help me! But you don't have the balls to deal with her knowing. You wanna be on my team? Find yourself some BDE and put on the uniform.

LAURA
I know. I should. Honestly, just telling you feels like a release of pressure.

PENNY
That's exactly what Bad Penny is for me. A way to release pressure. Your pressure is keeping a secret, and mine is having her try to make me do things that aren't—

LAURA
But what if you got just a little bit brave, and you did hang out with Candy, in real life, and you were just you, and she liked you?

PENNY
What if I took my glasses off and took my hair out of this ponytail and the quarterback fell in love with me?

LAURA
I see you.

MELANIE
(OS) Give me two more seconds! I had to pee!

LAURA
What do you want from your mom?

PENNY
Oh my God, I might as well go back to group. Can you stop?

LAURA
I just mean . . . She's trying to help you.

PENNY

Well, she's doing it wrong.

LAURA

I know you think I hover. I do. But I knew before you came home that your mom wasn't going to navigate this very well. I thought I could be a buffer. A facilitator, I don't know. She loves you.

MELANIE

(entering) It's you.

PENNY

What is?

MELANIE

You're doing that. You're doing Bad Penny.

PENNY

Ding ding! A little bit late to the party, Mel.

MELANIE

I just scrolled through her whole profile. Your whole profile.

BAD PENNY

Last May, I smashed a bunch of shit with a mallet and cut my feet on the pieces.

MELANIE

That was the bravest thing you ever did?

PENNY

So what?

MELANIE

(to LAURA) Do you believe this?

LAURA

I knew. I thought you already knew. Sorry.

MELANIE

How would I know?

LAURA

I . . . I don't know. I thought it was obvious.

MELANIE

Maybe to someone who follows her. Not to me. Why are your meds on the table? I have an empty Altoids box if you want to put them in there instead of in the prescription bottles.

LAURA

(interrupting late in the line, off a look from PENNY) Those are mine.

MELANIE

Yours?

LAURA

I take those. I have anxiety and OCD.

MELANIE

Are you serious?

LAURA

Yeah.

MELANIE

I mean, my God, do I know anyone who is not mentally ill?!?

PENNY

See what I mean?

MELANIE

What? Were you talking about me?

PENNY

I told Laura you don't think things through til the finish. You get all caught up immediately in how stuff is affecting you.

MELANIE

Well, I'll tell you how it affects me when people keep secrets from me! Laura's on medication! Penny is Bad Penny! That hurts me! I feel bad about myself, and like people don't trust me. Is that what you were after?

PENNY

It's too bad that reality hurts your feelings.

MELANIE

Don't be horrible right now. Or do. Do be horrible, because apparently that's what you are.

PENNY

Why can't I just have a normal teenage rebel thing?

MELANIE

I think you could, if it wasn't for last time. It went way beyond normal last time.

PENNY

(to LAURA) I'm sure she told you all about it.

LAURA

She needed a place to put her feelings.

PENNY

That's what I need. I have anger and some darkness and I need a place to put it.

MELANIE

You're attacking me. Why can't you stop attacking me?

PENNY

Can you imagine that one thing in the world is not about you?

MELANIE

You put me at the center of this. You're attacking me, and you.

PENNY

My God. I just want to be normal. The way I am normal. Penny normal. Not the way you want me to be or imagine that I truly am inside, if only you help me uncover it.

LAURA

Melanie, listen to her.

PENNY

It's like there's a snowball inside of me, pressing on my heart, and the stuff you do makes it bigger.

MELANIE

Penny!

LAURA

Mel, relax.

MELANIE

I will not! She is sabotaging me!

LAURA

She is telling you her truth.

PENNY

You are driving me back to how I was before. You're boxing me into a place that I don't fit. You're not leaving any room for me.

MELANIE

So you're going to explode? Laura, you weren't around when she went . . . when she did her thing before. The bravest thing she ever did?!? She was terrifying.

PENNY

That's nice.

MELANIE

Forgive me for signing you up for something, trying to get you to leave the house, do something!

PENNY

(nearing the edge) I didn't want to go to that.

MELANIE

And you showed me, Penny! You really let me have it! Why do you think I called 911? Do you think I would have done that if I thought I could get you settled down? The throwing and screaming, the breaking of . . . everything? You were bleeding, Penny!

PENNY

You made me go to that stupid thing! And you know what? Right off the bat, some girl talked to me and it was okay for just a second. I thought, "Maybe this won't be just another horrible day." And they gave us those pokey sticks to pick up trash, you know? And we all sort of wandered around and I was feeling okay and I got excited, because I found something and I just, without even thinking, I just said, "Hey, look! Baby bunnies!" And they were, like in a hole in the ground, like kind of tucked in. And these three fucking assholes came over with their sticks and just started jabbing at the nest! They were just killing these bunnies and it was so disgusting and so sickening and so, so mean. And they were laughing. And inside my head, I thought, "This is it. The world is total shit. And you knew it, Penny. Why did you open your goddam mouth?!? The world is shit and people are shit and things will not get better." And then I scratched that kid's face. Hard. Because he deserved it.

MELANIE

Why didn't you tell me that?!? Oh my God, come here! *(arms open)*

PENNY

No! Because it isn't that! It isn't one thing on one day. That's how the world is to me. That's everyday. If you can't—I can't show you any better—

MELANIE

But there was a reason. That was not you—the explosion, the breakdown.

PENNY

It was. It is. Why can't you believe that?

MELANIE

Something broke in you. That was not you. That was the result of something breaking because of—

PENNY

It was a very distilled, very concentrated part of me. I'm that, and I'm more than that. But it's always in me, so look out.

MELANIE

I don't quite know how to deal with that, if that is the truth.

PENNY

Why would I lie?

LAURA

You wouldn't.

PENNY

I'm going to walk Frankenstein. (*exits*)

MELANIE

Oh, Christ. I'm sorry I said that before, about you being mentally ill. You just threw me for a—

LAURA

Right.

MELANIE

You know, she would lie to keep me out.

LAURA

What?

MELANIE

She asked me why she would lie. I'm telling you, she would lie because it hurts her to be close to people, even me. And she's keeping me at arm's length by insisting on being this angry, mean, aggressive person. She just doesn't want to let anybody in, show how hurt she is.

LAURA

I'm gonna tough love you a little bit right now. Are you ready?

MELANIE

You're my best friend. Say whatever you need to say. I mean, you just saw her almost explode again! Was that because of me? Did I say something to set her off? Am I supposed to—

LAURA

Shut the hell up. Your daughter told you what she needs. You're going to give her some room.

MELANIE

Why? So she can go find more horrible in the world and freak out again?

LAURA

So she can find her way.

MELANIE

But I can see the best way. I know it will make her happy.

LAURA

You know it would make you happy.

MELANIE

And I love her, so what will make me happy is seeing her happy.

LAURA

You cannot steer her anymore. I've been through it. You have not. It won't work unless she decides how to move forward.

MELANIE

She won't be able to.

LAURA

You don't think?

MELANIE

She's not good at life. I don't know why, but she's not good at life.

LAURA

Then she'll fail. But you have to get out of her way so she can try.

MELANIE

I . . . don't know.

LAURA

The "shiny" might have been a bit of a stretch, huh?

MELANIE

Yeah, I guess.

LAURA

That's okay. High gloss is off-trend anyway. (*picks up her phone*)

BAD PENNY

Out for a walk with #Frankenstein (*silly, close-up picture of a dog's face projected*)
Looking for a community of peasants to infiltrate.

LAURA

See? (*probably shows MELANIE her phone*) That's cute!

MELANIE

I don't even get that. I mean, what community of peasants? Is she saying something about our neighborhood?

LAURA

I think it's probably a reference to something that happens in Frankenstein, the book.

MELANIE

She insists on putting herself in this, I don't know, literary elite! It drives me up a wall.

LAURA

Do you think she's the only kid that's ever read Frankenstein?

MELANIE

I kind of do.

LAURA

It already got three favorites.

MELANIE

What?

LAURA

And a reply.

MELANIE

No way.

VOICE IN REPLY

Don't let him see his reflection! (*tweet may be projected*)

MELANIE

I don't get that either.

BAD PENNY

No way! Don't want to hurt his doggie self-esteem!

MELANIE

She replied?

LAURA

Yep.

MELANIE

She's, like, engaging with someone?

LAURA

Seems like it.

MELANIE

About Frankenstein, the book?

LAURA

And the dog.

BAD PENNY

You know a dog loves you when it licks away your crying-snot. 10/10 would recommend.

MELANIE

Oh, my God. That's gross.

LAURA

I think it's cute.

MELANIE

But, wait. She's crying? Where is she? Scroll back up to the picture.

LAURA

(playing keep away with phone) No.

MELANIE

(getting her own phone) Don't tell me no! That's my daughter, and she's crying. I'm going to find her and help her.

LAURA

You're going to let her cry.

MELANIE

I didn't even do that when she was a baby. I always held her.

LAURA

Oh, Mel.

MELANIE

It looks like she's at Waverly Park, with the roll-y slide.

LAURA

Don't go.

MELANIE

I have to.

LAURA

God, Melanie, give the girl a minute. Have you never just needed to cry for a while?

MELANIE

Of course I have, and I do it in the shower.

LAURA

You've never cried in front of Penny?

MELANIE

No. Then she would feel like I didn't know what I was doing.

LAURA

So what? You're not going. Here, look at this. *(phone)*

BAD PENNY

Kids at splash pad + dog + tears = soul recovery.

Projection of a filtered photo of a park scene at sunset.

LAURA

That's kind of beautiful.

MELANIE picks up her phone and begins working it.

SHINY PENNY

@bad_PENNY_69 Looks like you got what you needed.

BAD PENNY

Getting there, I think. Thanks.

SHINY PENNY

Favorite.

BAD PENNY

Forced my mom to see me. #BravestThingIEverDid

SHINY PENNY

Favorite.

iwantCANDY

Wait! You bitches are friends now?

Scene 15. We transition forward in time and completely into the twitterverse. BAD PENNY finds her footing. VOICES IN REPLY may be accompanied by projections, an overlapping collage of image and sound.

BAD PENNY

When Emily D spent most of her life sitting in her room and thinking about death, she got called a genius. When I did that I got a diagnosis. *(picture projected of Emily Dickinson)*

VOICES IN REPLY

Favorite.

Favorite.

Alone isn't lonely.

I had Algebra with Emily D. She's a bitch.

The world is too big.

BAD PENNY

Feeling a little salty about GoT's superlong hiatus.

VOICES IN REPLY

With you.

I miss Daenerys.

Retweet.

Tyrion would be the best Homecoming date.

Vote Ed Sheeran for King of the North.

SHINY PENNY

@bad_penny_69 keeps turning up #turndownforwhat

BAD PENNY

(maybe with an eyeroll) Favorite.

Anyone want to pay me to do their summer reading for them?

VOICES IN REPLY

That's what sparknotes are for, idiot.

Summer reading's a joke. They never test us on it. #FuckMyPermanentRecord

BAD PENNY

I honestly think I could homeschool myself.

iwantCANDY

Then you'd miss out on all the important socialization that comes in high school.
#SarcasmFont

SHINY PENNY

@iwantCANDY @bad_penny_69 Like cheer and dance team.

iwantCANDY

Those girls are colossal bitches.

SHINY PENNY

I bet they're good once you get to know them.

iwantCANDY

Run for your life @bad_penny_69

SHINY PENNY

Three weeks til I start at my new school. @CableHighSchool

VOICES IN REPLY

You'll hate it.

Welcome, future Coyote.

SHINY PENNY

Follow.

Follow.

iwantCANDY

Did you get your schedule @shiny_penny_1999?

SHINY PENNY

No. Are they out?

BAD PENNY

@iwantCANDY @shiny_penny_1999 I got mine. #CableHigh #NewKid

iwantCANDY

Cable?!? What lunch?

BAD PENNY

Fourth.

#same #screaming

iwantCANDY

SHINY PENNY

Wait, what? When did you get them?

BAD PENNY

It came in the mail. The mail comes at 2:30, when I am home. Alone.

SHINY PENNY

Post a pic.

BAD PENNY

No.

iwantCANDY

Here's mine! (*picture of a high school schedule projected*)

BAD PENNY

Same second, fourth and eighth. #WhyDoYouTakeLatin

iwantCANDY

My dad's a doctor and he made me. You take Spanish?

BAD PENNY

French. I want to go to Le Cordon Bleu in France and be a chef.

SHINY PENNY

Really?

BAD PENNY

And live like Anais Nin.

iwantCANDY

So, as the third wheel in a married couple's sex life?

BAD PENNY

Haha. You've read it?

iwantCANDY

Saw the movie.

BAD PENNY

That might be enough.

SHINY PENNY

What movie? What's it about?

A prolonged silence.

BAD PENNY

Two weeks til the first day of school got me like (*image projected of a stock shot of a group of mental health meds*)

VOICES IN REPLY

Retweet.

Me too.

Is there a word for dread+curiosity, when you know the curiosity will go away and just dread will be left? #TheWordIsSchool

Retweet.

I take two of those. No lie.

Follow.

Unfollow.

Favorite.

Favorite.

Favorite.

SHINY PENNY

Haha. Hugs not drugs!

BAD PENNY

@shiny_penny_1999 I say hugs AND drugs.

VOICES IN REPLY

Retweet.

Favorite.

Follow.

Follow.

Unfollow.

Favorite.

iwant CANDY

The pink ones fix me.

BAD PENNY

You, @iwantCANDY?

iwantCANDY

Uh, yeah.

SHINY PENNY

Are those claritins?

VOICES IN REPLY

Go away, @shiny_penny_1999

Leave this to the big kids.

My mental illness >>>>>>> your sinus headache. (*should be read as "is greater than, greater than, greater than, greater than . . ."*)

iwant CANDY

#ProzacProud since sophomore year!

BAD PENNY

Wellbutrin helps. #TalkAboutMentalIllness

iwantCANDY

I'm so here for this. #TalkAboutMentalIllness #TalkAboutMentalHealth

BAD PENNY

New profile pic.

A picture projected of PENNY. It is not doctored or even filtered. Something about it is inherently "Penny." There is probably something darkly humorous about it, maybe she is "kilroy-ing" over a book, or her eyes are closed and a pill rests on each eyelid.

iwantCANDY

#scute. Are you and @shiny_PENNY_1999 sisters? You totally look like her.

BAD PENNY

No. It's weird.

iwantCANDY

Tell me at lunch. First day. It will give me something to look forward to.

BAD PENNY

To which I can look forward.

iwantCANDY

What? Weirdo.

BAD PENNY

Yeah. Sorry.

iwantCANDY

New profile pic.

Picture projected of iwantCANDY, plainer and somehow more real than what we have seen of her until now.

BAD PENNY

I like it.

SHINY PENNY

Are you okay? You look kinda sick.

A prolonged silence.

BAD PENNY

T minus 6 days til @cablehigh.

VOICES IN REPLY

I hate that I'm excited bc I know the disappointment that's around the corner.

I will pass pre-calc this year #ThirdTimesTheCharm #NoIWon't

Love the first day. Hate the second day. And every day after that.

iwantCANDY

Are you driving? To school?

BAD PENNY

No.

iwantCANDY

I can pick you up.

BAD PENNY

(after consideration) Okay. That would be cool. #CallMe

iwantCANDY

I need your number.

BAD PENNY

You already have it.

iwantCANDY

#confused

BAD PENNY

Answer your phone in five seconds.

PENNY swipes her phone, taps to make a call.

PENNY

Hi. It's Penny. I mean Bad Penny. Both Pennys actually. Um, all the Pennys.

iwantCANDY should exit now, as PENNY has made contact with the real CANDY.

Scene 16. SHINY PENNY's twittercide. MELANIE and PENNY, both in clothes that could be construed as funeral clothes, but nothing too over-the-top.

MELANIE
So this is it?

PENNY
Yes.

MELANIE
And you're okay with it?

PENNY
I'm great.

MELANIE
I'm worried.

PENNY
I'm worried for you.

MELANIE
I'll be fine. Dr. Mary said I can call her if I need to.

PENNY
Me too. Is Laura coming?

MELANIE
I didn't invite her.

PENNY
Oh. Thanks.

MELANIE
Just me and you.

PENNY
And Shiny Penny.

MELANIE
Not for long.

PENNY
She's twitterciding.

What?

MELANIE

PENNY

That's a thing, the word you use when you're going to delete your whole twitter existence, "twittercide."

MELANIE

I don't like it.

PENNY

I think it's funny.

MELANIE opens a device and navigates to SHINY PENNY's profile.

MELANIE

Should I say one last thing?

PENNY

Goodbye, cruel world?

MELANIE

That's from/Hocus Pocus!

PENNY

Victorian England! It doesn't matter. Once you delete her, it's all gone anyway.

MELANIE

Wait, the whole history goes? Everything?

PENNY

Yeah.

MELANIE

I didn't know that.

PENNY

What did you think would happen?

MELANIE

I just thought, I thought, she'd be like, inactivated, or something. I didn't think she'd be erased.

PENNY

Oh, sorry.

MELANIE

The ranch, and Jeff, and the shopping with mom and the love my bffs?

PENNY

Yeah.

MELANIE

What's going to come up, like if we look where someone retweeted her?

PENNY

It's just that gray box. It says the tweet is no longer available.

MELANIE

That's sad.

PENNY

She wasn't ever real.

MELANIE

I know.

PENNY

So what's so terrible?

MELANIE

She was how I imagined you would want to be.

PENNY

And you're sad because I don't want to be like that?

MELANIE

I'm sad because I didn't know you well enough to know that you wouldn't.

PENNY

You know me better now.

MELANIE

Do I?

PENNY

I think so.

MELANIE

So maybe she did her job.

PENNY

And now her work here is finished.

MELANIE

Yep.

PENNY

Hold on.

PENNY takes the device from MELANIE and types.

SHINY PENNY

Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani? (*EEE-loy, EEE-loy, LEMma, sah-bak-TAH-nee*)

PENNY puts down the device, grabs her own and navigates.

MELANIE

What the hell is that?

PENNY

It means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It’s what Jesus said on the cross right before he died. A kid in the hospital yelled it all the time.

MELANIE

But no one’s going to see it.

PENNY

It’s just for us.

BAD PENNY

Favorite.

MELANIE

Nice.

PENNY

Ready?

MELANIE

As I’ll ever be.

MELANIE navigates, takes a big breath, hands phone to PENNY who clicks, and SHINY PENNY dies.

PENNY

She’s gone.

And you're still here. MELANIE

Yep. Are you okay? PENNY

Yes. I want the real Penny. MELANIE

You've got her. PENNY

How about you? Are you okay? MELANIE

PENNY's phone rings.

I'm totally fine. It's Candy. PENNY

Take it. That's great. Take it. MELANIE

PENNY answers her phone. Real CANDY emerges.

Hey. PENNY

Hey. Done? CANDY

Yep. PENNY

Did you tell her she has 30 days to reactivate? CANDY

Nope. PENNY

Are you still good to go out? CANDY

Yeah. PENNY

CANDY

I'll be there in 10.

END OF PLAY

NOTES:

Dialogue can be altered to accommodate available projections, i.e. “Waverly park with the roll-y slide” can become “Waverly park with the spinny thing.”

I have used capital letters in hashtags for ease of reading. In the event that they are projected (as well as spoken), my capitalization pattern needn't be followed.

Every time one character tags another in a tweet, the spoken words need not be the complete “at bad underscore penny underscore 69” (for example). I fear the word “underscore” may get tedious. The handles are written as they would appear on twitter but the spoken communication of them can be played with. I have also toyed with occasionally dropping the handles as they would appear on twitter—if it is unclear to whom a tweet is being “@-ed” they may be put in.

Be wary of doing this play in the round. The use of tech on stage can undercut believability if the audience can see dark screens on laptops, screens of phones that aren't actually functioning, etc.

It is important that the production works to be sure that the audience understand who is controlling Shiny Penny at various points in the script—mostly Melanie, sometimes Penny. The twitter personas should never appear to control themselves—they should not be holding phones, typing or taking photos. They are virtual puppets, representations of our characters in a non-corporeal world. To that end, anytime real people are involved in the action and the audience is hearing a tweet that is being read or typed, we need to see that real character typing or reading from a device.

Once the twitter characters appear, they should remain on stage. It is absolutely vital that they be visible whenever we are in the home. In the restaurant scenes, they can leave, but the house needs to feel more and more crowded as the play progresses.

The VOICES IN REPLY can be recorded or read aloud by stage crew, off stage characters, etc.