

Sophia

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Dramatis Personae

Sophia

Mr. Browne

Mom

Dad

Emilia

SCENE ONE

SETTING

In the present day in Florida. *The Stagton school is located in a disused barn where sheep and cows and other farm animals were once kept. But now, there is no trace of any farming tool. The building is brick built. The playground is located at the northwestern corner of it. With a few slides and swing set. The wooden stairs without a railing lead upstairs where the head master's room is located. The room is dusty but functional. The head master's desk and chair are located in the CS [center stage]. The double-hung round-shaped windows are made of steel. The sound of children playing can still be heard through the window Mr. Browne is in the room. Sophia enters. Sophia is wearing a man's cap and a grimy skirt. She sits uncomfortably on a chair in front of Mr. Browne; her head is down. Mr. Browne is standing beside his desk. He is flabby and fat. He might be forty or fifty. He looks pale and intense. He is sizing her up.*

MR. BROWNE: (shouting in an angry way) "Sophia, for the last time, tell me who started it!"

SOPHIA: "I've told you. I didn't do it!"

MR. BROWNE: "Mark said you did..."

SOPHIA: "Mark lied."

MR. BROWNE: "I'm sick of telling you over and over again not to do things. I know what this is. The I-am-completely-innocent-you're lying look. (looks at Sophia with anger.) This is the last time; parents are complaining. School is not a place for protests or fights".

SOPHIA: (innocently) "But nobody..."

MR. BROWNE: (interrupts)... "No...enough is enough!" (He reaches to his desk and

takes a sheet of printed paper and hands it to Sophia.)

SOPHIA: "What is this, Mr. Browne?" (She reads it.)

MR. BROWNE: "You are suspended until your parents sign this and bring it to school . Taking part in any activity that is prohibited in this school will end in your immediate expulsion!

Now off you go".

(Sophia finds herself incapable of talking, she opens her mouth to speak but then no words come out. She takes the paper and folds it and walks out with anger.

Mr.Browne sits back and takes a look at his arm watch and then takes out his lunch box from his leather bag and takes a big bite of his sandwich in peace.

No sound can be heard from the outside.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

SETTING

A rainy morning, around 10 o'clock. Sophia is having breakfast with her mom, Michelle. Michelle is on the phone. The table is square shaped, located stage right. Sophia is sitting on the left, her mom is standing on the right, facing Sophia. A loaf of bread, butter, cheese, sweetened milk, a cup of coffee, a boiled egg and two dishes can be seen on the table. Sophia's bedroom is located behind the kitchen, about 8 feet up. Michelle's bedroom is next to it. Leading down from the stairs to the kitchen, there are three chairs. Sophia's room is small, her bed is right next to the door [stage right] on the bed are two pillows and a red blanket.

Above the bed hangs a big clock. Beside the bed, there is a table with a small clock, a lamp, a hair brush and a book. On the opposite side of the bed, there is a window with pink curtains. Under the window stands a desk and a chair.

SOPHIA: "Mom can you pass me the milk?"

MOM: "No, no, wait a second...you mean, everything? Okay, I'm not going to be a part of this anymore..." SOPHIA: "Mom! Can you please pass me the milk!?"

(Mom continues talking over the phone.)

MOM: "No, you listen...What?! Yeah, right... you don't complain...then what is this? Why don't you tell our daughter about it? Oh, fine then, but I'm not going to take another day off. Man-up and sort this mess out – d'you hear me? Hello?... Hello?"

MOM:(Putting the phone down and turning towards Sophia) "Your father thinks this is something to be proud of!"

SOPHIA: "Well, I'm certainly not ashamed of being honest!"

MOM: (aggressive tone) "Do you hear yourself!? How can you be so rude and impudent! I'm not going to the school this time. I can't take any day off. I need to

go. I'm running late. Lunch is in the fridge. Warm it up before you eat it. Bye."

(Sophia picks up the phone and dials a number after her mom starts up the engine.)

SOPHIA: "Hi... dad...can...can you pick me up today? No...mom's gone to work...Yes, I'm fine. No... Can we go to school? It's been a week, dad! I need to go back to school...Can you make it at 1? Yes, I promise...Okay, dad! Please... I will be ready then. Bye."

(Sophia hangs up the phone and runs upstairs and leaves her breakfast unfinished. She walks into her room and lies down on her bed and looks at the ceiling.)

SOPHIA:(To herself) "There's nothing nicer than the sound of the rain on the roof" (After a minute, Sophia goes to the mirror and lingers there for a while. First, she brushes her hair and then, pretends that she is being interviewed. she uses her hairbrush as a microphone.)

SOPHIA: (with a strong American accent) “I do...! that’s why I was taken away by the police yesterday, along with hundreds of others who did the same (a short pause) I mean those involved in the protests...I’m really sad that to this point, after thirty years of scientists warning us, we haven’t done enough to save the planet. We still see...”

(Suddenly, the doorbell rings, Sophia runs downstairs and sees her father at the doorstep through the peephole. She opens the door for him.)

SOPHIA: “Dad! Hi! You’re early!” (She greets him with a big smile.)

DAD: “Hi darling... Why don’t you go and get ready?” (He looks at her with surprise.)

SOPHIA: “Just give me a minute!”

DAD: “I’ll wait in the car.”

SOPHIA: “I will be back in a sec.”

(She runs upstairs. She folds a letter, puts it in her backpack, sticks her strawberry gum under her bed, and leaves.)

SCENE THREE

SETTING

Sophia is inside the car [CS] her father is driving. Louis Armstrong's "What a wonderful world" is played in the background. The rain has stopped. The sound of cars honking can be heard from the outside. Dad is dressed in grey trousers with a white shirt and a bright coloured tie.

SOPHIA: "Why were you arguing with mom today?"

DAD: "Mom told you we were arguing?"

SOPHIA: "No, I heard it myself..."

DAD: "...We were discussing the problem of your..."

SOPHIA: (turning the music down) "...Dad...can we stop at the post office?"

DAD: "Post office? One of those letters again? You don't give up, do you?"

What is it about this time? Why do people throw away their food while children are starving in Africa? Or “Why do people destroy rainforests while we need oxygen?”

SOPHIA: “Pointed canes designed for vision-impaired people to collect rubbish while walking.”

DAD: (Impressed) “That’s actually a superb idea, Sophy! I wonder why they never answer you back!”

SOPHIA: (Her voice goes down gradually) “Well, I hope the town council finds it interesting this time! Interesting enough to take some action! I’m tired of always being the odd one out while everyone else is considered normal!”

DAD: “You are normal, sweetie! You’re just...”

SOPHIA: “...Oh, dad! Last week I picked 134 cigarette butts on my way home from school!”

DAD: “Oh really! How did you do that? Did you wash your hands afterwards?”

Were you with...what was her name...Emelina?”

SOPHIA: "Emilia"

DAD: "Yeah...and tell me about school...What happened the other day?"

Why did you get suspended? Your mom thinks it's all my fault."

SOPHIA: "Nothing! We were protesting against school children throwing waste on the ground. I got into a fight with some stupid boy when he deliberately tossed his bread on the ground."

DAD: "We? Who's we? Have you joined a group of...?"

SOPHIA: "...Dad! I told you! I did nothing wrong! He started it anyway!"

DAD: "Who is he?"

SOPHIA: "Mark. His dad is an advisor to the city council. I heard him making jokes about my hair the other day...He teased me in front of others."

DAD: (With a convincing voice) "Sophy...you need to understand that you are not some kind of magical cream that can smooth the ugly wrinkles of the world!

We're almost there... We'll go to the post office later. Is that okay?"

(Sophia nods and remains quiet while looking out the window

and tries to count the people who recklessly throw their cigarettes or coke cans or banana skin on the sidewalk.)

SCENE FOUR

SETTING

Later the same day, Sophia is holding her father's hand as they walk from the parking lot [stage left] towards the school gate [Center stage]. She takes a piece of gum out of her pocket and puts it in her mouth. It works as a stress relief for her.

SOPHIA: "26!"

DAD: "What?"

SOPHIA: "I've counted! There were 26 of them! Throwing their waste on the ground!"

DAD: (Disturbed)“Oh, Sophie! Is this all you can think about?”

SOPHIA: “No, I also think about forest trees disappearing to leave room for towns, then towns transforming to big cities with big factories, humans taming wildlife, animals dying and nature crying. We’ve polluted our air, our land, our seas. Cars and airplanes are blackening the air with dirty exhaust and killing birds and animals. All that life has gone now. Bombs dropped from the planes only to destroy and ruin our once lovely planet... smoke, exhaust, smog...”

DAD:(Interrupts) “No! Don’t you see how worried we are about you? Don’t you see how much your mother is worried? Can’t you be like any other thirteen-year-old who watches her favorite cartoon while eating vanilla ice-cream or who bikes carelessly around the city with her friends? You had a fight with your school-mate, you got suspended, you walked out of your teacher's class only because she did not know that Bubal Hartebeests are in the danger of extinction! You rarely talk to anyone; you don’t have any friends except Emilia. Your mom says you have problems sleeping during the night; you have lost your

appetite!”

SOPHIA: (Innocently) “Dad?”

DAD: “Yes, Sophie.”

SOPHIA: “Will you ever move in with us?”

DAD:(Stops walking and gently kneels beside her in a calm manner.)

“Listen! What happened between me and your mom has nothing to do with you.

We both love you and do whatever it takes to see you happy...Now let’s go... Mr.

Browne must be waiting for us.”

(As they approach the school, the bell rings and a bunch of children joyfully run

towards the playground. Suddenly, Sophia notices Emilia sitting on the

swing with a book in her hands.)

SOPHIA: “Dad is it okay if I wait outside?”

DAD: “Mr. Browne said he wants to see you too”

SOPHIA: “Can I come in later?”

DAD: “Okay, but don’t come too late.”

SOPHIA: "Only fifteen minutes."

DAD: "And Sophia...please behave."

(Sophia walks towards her friend, counting her steps and feeling excited. Her father exits the stage.)

SOPHIA: "Emilia!"

EMILIA:(Looks up and around) "Sophia!"

SOPHIA: " Long time no see!"

EMILIA: "You didn't call. I was worried about you..."

SOPHIA: "What's that? A new book?"

EMILIA: (Looks at the book) "No it's not. Tell me...will you come back to school?"

SOPHIA:(Sits on the swing next to Emilia and looks down at her shoes.) "Dad's probably talking to Mr. Browne now. He was hospitalized for 5 days. I heard mom talking to his doctor. He had an asthma attack. Mom cries every night. I hear her crying behind the walls...Mom was in no condition to deal with the school staff...Dad might not have been the best husband for her...I mean...mom and dad

always argued...But he was always nice to me... I still remember him holding my hand when we were walking...I don't know why they got divorced...But I prefer dad over that bald guy with tattoos, whom mama dates...I pretend that I don't care, that I don't know, but I do...(Pause) Do you think dad will leave us forever?"

EMILIA: (Looks confused but tries to sound reasoning) "Sophia, I'm sorry to hear that but I'm sure your dad will be just fine. What about the doctors? What did they say?"

Sophia: (Dries her cheeks with her sleeve and then stands up, her back towards

Emilia) "I don't know. No one has talked to me about it. Everyone is covering it up.

I need to go now. I'm probably late. Dad's waiting for me."

(Emilia remains quiet and seated, her eyes fixed on the cover of her comic book.

The sun shines directly on the back of her head. She hears the school bell ring-

suddenly and sharply. She stands up to leave for her next class. Her legs feel

heavy.)

SCENE FIVE

SETTING

The parking lot is located at the left side of the entrance of the school. A few cars are parked there. Mr. Browne is at his office. He is seated comfortably on a rather big brown leathered chair; he is lounging at ease on his chair, he is dressed in dark grey suit, his work desk is in front of him [Centre Stage], covered with papers, clips, pens, a family photo, a few envelopes, an antique lamp and a clock which is showing half past one. It seems that the room has been recently cleaned and everything is carefully placed where it should be. Dad is sitting on one of the chairs which is located in front of MR. Browne's desk.

DAD: "...Yes, the matter worries me. I want Sophia to go to school, read books, pass the courses and get a degree. That's all. It has nothing to do with her opinions. And I know it's troubling you and I'm terribly sorry for that..."

MR. BROWNE: "Mr.Musyoka, Sophia hit her school mate in the eye! What if she does something worse?"

DAD: (Briskly) "No, I reassure you that nothing like that will ever happen again. You have my word."

MR. BROWNE: (Watching the man carefully as he takes off his glasses) "Well... If you are that positive...there is nothing left for me to say. But this will be the last time."

(Dad coughs heavily)

MR. BROWNE: (Immediately suspicious) “Mr. Musyoka, what did your doctor say?”

(They are interrupted by a sudden sound. Dad turns his head around. He sees Sophia’s presence at the door gap peeping inside. Sophia enters.)

DAD: (Quickly and nervously) “Come on now, sweetie. How long have you been standing there? I saw you talking to Emilia. How is she?”

(Sophia comes inside the room. Mr. Browne looks her over with a smile.)

MR. BROWNE: (Drumming his fingers) “Hello Sophia! Hope you’re doing well.”

(In deep silence Sophia looks at her dad, and Mr. Browne looks at Melville.)

SOPHIA: (Collecting herself) “Thank you, Mr. Browne. Can I come back to school?”

MR. BROWNE: (With artificial patience) “Well, I’m still waiting for you to say something!”

DAD: (With encouraging tone, looks at Sophia) “Maybe you would like to apologize to Mr. Browne for the trouble you caused”.

SOPHIA: (With a slow voice, lifting her head slowly, avoiding eye contact) “Sorry

Mr. Browne”.

DAD:(Relieved, he stands up and holds out his hand towards Mr. Browne)

“Thank you, sir,”

MR. BROWNE:(Grabs his coat as he stands up) “It was a pleasure meeting you,

Mr. Musyoka” (turning to Sophia) “See you tomorrow, little girl.”

(Sophia gives Mr. Browne a final desperate look. Then she walks out of the room.

Melville follows her out. Holding her hands tight, Mr. Browne returns to his

desk, takes out a pile of paper from a folder and tosses it into a trash can.)

(Meanwhile, Dad and Sophia are walking down the stairs and towards the

parking lot where they left the car.[stage left])

MELVILLE: “So, where would you like to go next?” (Turns to Sophia with a smile)

SOPHIA: “You promised to take me to the Post Office dad.” (Looks back at

Melville)

MELVILLE: “How about going to the park after that?”

SOPHIA: “(Sounds excited) Great! It’s been a while since we went somewhere

together! We can pick up some waste in the park today.”

MELVILLE:(Takes out his phone.) “So I will send your mom a text that you will be going home later than five.”

SOPHIA: (Speaks louder)“Dad, can you read to me tonight before bedtime? and tuck me in bed?”

MELVILLE:(Sounds confused, short pause) “ I don’t know if...”

SOPHIA: “ ...I...I will talk to mom. Please, dad!”

MELVILLE:(Encouraged)“Sophia, there’s something I need to tell you. I wasn’t going to tell you, but I feel I have to. I think you are old enough to understand. I haven't been feeling well lately.”

SOPHIA: “(With feeling) I know.”

MELVILLE: (Surprised) “What? When? I made your mom promise not to let you know anything!”

SOPHIA: (Going on as if she hadn’t heard) “Can we talk about it during dinner? with mom? together? and you can drive me to school tomorrow”

MELVILLE: (Scratches his head) "Well, if that's what you want..."

SOPHIA:(Naively) "...I love you, dad"

MELVILLE:(With a smile) "I love you too, sweetie. Now let's go before it gets dark."

(Melville and Sophia walk hand to hand with their back towards the audience, as the curtain goes down.)

