

Cut Time

By Eliza Epstein

Cast of Characters (12):

LIZA

PAST LIZA

PAST TIM

JAKE

TIM

MRS. CAMPBELL

MOM

YURI

ELIZABETH

DAD

STELLA / CHARLOTTE

BRI / STAGEHAND

Character Breakdown (*in order of appearance*):

LIZA: The 12th-grade version of Liza. Loves eavesdropping in order to create good plays.

MOM: Liza's protective mom who is also an unmatched writing coach.

YURI: Mom's boyfriend, who has a Russian accent and has not yet figured out how to project his voice.

MRS. CAMPBELL: A grouchy teacher who takes pleasure in crushing kids' dreams.

PAST LIZA: The 5th-grade version of Liza. Spunky, sassy, mildly curious about the future, and allergic to romance in any form.

PAST TIM: 5th-grade version of Tim. Always needs more time for any school project.

STELLA: A middle-school girl who makes sure she's always in charge. Obsessed with boys.

BRI: A middle-school girl who struggles to win favor with those around her, despite valiant efforts.

TIM: High school version of Tim, who is much more chill than his younger self.

STAGEHAND: A quiet, apologetic techie who is just trying to get through this show.

DAD: Liza's Dad, who is ready to explode at any moment. An unpredictable and dangerous presence.

ELIZABETH: Dad's new girlfriend, who seems mousy but is extremely passive-aggressive and manipulative.

JAKE: Liza's older brother. Loves teasing Liza, but also protects her.

CHARLOTTE: Past Liza's friend who has since turned popular and intolerable.

SCENE 1

(Lights up. There are three main playing areas of the stage: LIZA's letter-reading area, PAST LIZA's letter-writing area, and a shifting scene between them. LIZA's letter-reading area and PAST-LIZA'S letter-writing area should be sparsely furnished compared to the changing area of the stage.)

(We turn our attention to PAST LIZA's letter-writing area, where PAST LIZA enters and writes on lined paper—her first of many, many sheets. MRS. CAMPBELL presides over her, an assistant teacher who has recently been promoted and will do everything she can to wield her new powers. She doesn't like kids all that much. Meanwhile, LIZA holds the letter in her hands.)

MRS. CAMPBELL

30 minutes. No more, no less. GO!

(At the sound of Mrs. Campbell's "GO!", lights illuminate a clock onstage. This clock should be visible to the audience.)

PAST LIZA

That is *not* enough time.

(She thinks for a second, then writes:)

"Dear future Eliza Epstein. Before I start this letter, I must make something very clear."

(PAST LIZA pauses for a second, thinking.)

"Here it is: YOU BETTER NOT BE CHEATING AND OPEN THIS EARLY! You hear me? Don't even THINK about opening this envelope before June of 2025. And if you think I won't know, I will. Trust me—I will *feel it in my bones.*"

(A beat.)

LIZA *(to audience)*

It's currently *May* of 2025. Don't give me that look! Listen, seniors at Lexington High get to leave school a month early—and I just couldn't wait any longer.

(Beat. PAST LIZA gives LIZA a menacing stare.)

Should I be scared?

MRS. CAMPBELL

29 MINUTE WARNING! I REPEAT: THIS IS A 29 MINUTE WARNING TO WRITE TO YOURSELVES.

PAST TIM *(following MRS. CAMPBELL)*

Excuse me? Mrs. Campbell?

(PAST LIZA looks up from her writing as PAST TIM talks to MRS. CAMPBELL.)

MRS. CAMPBELL

Yes?

PAST TIM

What if we need more time?

MRS. CAMPBELL

Someday, Tim, you're gonna go out and get a job in the real world. And in the real world, you can't just ask for extra time.

PAST LIZA *(to MRS CAMPBELL)*

Why not?!

MRS. CAMPBELL

Because I say so.

(PAST LIZA has pulled out another piece of paper, and is preparing to attach it to the rest of her letter.)

PAST TIM

I hate to contradict you, Mrs. Campbell, but saying something does not exactly provide concrete evidence for your point.

(PAST LIZA reaches for the Scotch tape.)

MRS. CAMPBELL

You lost me at "but".

PAST TIM

But—

MRS. CAMPBELL *(snatching the tape away from LIZA)*
Liza, hands off the Scotch tape. You don't need more paper right now.

PAST LIZA

But—

MRS. CAMPBELL

Enough!

(MRS. CAMPBELL moves the minute hand of the clock slightly and exits with the tape. PAST TIM moves to follow, thinks better of it, and looks at his paper. He looks nervously at PAST LIZA.)

PAST LIZA *(to herself)*

I need to get that tape back.

PAST TIM

Whatcha writing about, anyway?

PAST LIZA

I'd tell you, but we only have *(looks at clock)* 28 minutes. I'd better get back to it.

PAST TIM

Oh. Okay.

(PAST TIM exits, a bit sadly.)

PAST LIZA *(writing again)*

"Alright, Liza, I've got some questions. Starting with the most important one I have for you in this letter." *(Beat.)* "Do you have a boyfriend yet?"

(LIZA, in shock at the question, drops her paper.)

PAST LIZA *(aside)*

Am I really gonna turn out to be so clumsy?

LIZA *(unable to hear PAST LIZA)*

A BOYFRIEND?! She wants to know if I have a boyfriend? That can't be right.

(LIZA scrambles to pick up the paper again.)

PAST LIZA *(writing)*

"Because if so, I have two words for you. THAT'S. REVOLTING."

LIZA *(laughing)*

I should have known.

(PAST TIM reenters.)

PAST TIM

Hey Liza?

PAST LIZA

What?

PAST TIM

I—I just wanted to um, say that...well, you're such a great writer.

PAST LIZA

Oh. Thanks.

MRS. CAMPBELL (*from offstage*)

27 MINUTES!

(At the sound of MRS. CAMPBELL's voice, TIM moves the clock hand forward and runs offstage.)

PAST LIZA (*writing*):

"Right now, school can be hard. So many people are whispering in the lunchroom about who likes who and who hates who. But it'll probably get worse in middle school and high school, won't it?"

LIZA

You don't know the half of it.

SCENE 2

(LIZA folds up the letter and puts it into her pocket. During a transition, PAST LIZA watches as LIZA joins the entering middle school girls STELLA and BRI in a bedroom in STELLA's house. LIZA sits awkwardly on the floor with STELLA and BRI, not quite knowing what to do with herself. She looks at her watch.)

LIZA (*nervously*)

Maybe we should, um, fall asleep or something.

STELLA

What's gotten into you? We barely ever get to do sleepovers. We need to make use of every moment.

BRI (*quickly*)

I agree.

(STELLA looks at BRI suspiciously, and she quickly adds to her statement.)

BRI

I mean, "sleepover" may, um, have "sleep" in its name, but everyone knows there's no sleeping involved.

STELLA

Exactly.

(BRI looks excessively proud of herself.)

BRI

And "sleepover" also has the word "over" in it.

(BRI gives no more explanation.)

STELLA

So what?

BRI

Well...I'm not sure.

LIZA (*giving in*)

So what should we do, then?

(STELLA jolts up in her seat, her mouth opening in wonder, as if she has just had a stroke of genius. She poses the following question to LIZA, not as a question if they should play it, but as if the game has already started:)

STELLA

Truth or dare?

BRI

Oh, I LOVE Truth or Dare!!

STELLA *(to BRI)*

It's not your *turn* yet. *(Again, to LIZA)* Truth or dare?

LIZA

Dare.

STELLA *(with an evil smile)*

I dare you to say "truth".

(There is a tense pause.)

LIZA *(to audience)*

I should've seen that one coming.

*(LIZA sighs, knowing full well
what she's in for.)*

Truth.

STELLA *(to LIZA)*

Who do you have a crush on?

LIZA *(annoyed, to audience)*

Who do I have a crush on?

BRI *(practically clapping)*

Oh boy, now things are getting good!

LIZA *(quickly)*

Nobody.

STELLA

Come on, you can tell us!

BRI

This is a safe space!

LIZA

Nobody!

STELLA

Nothing leaves this room!

BRI

Except for when it's *really* interesting!

STELLA

Shut up, Bri!

BRI

Sorry!

STELLA (*menacingly*)

WHODOYOUHAVEACRUSHON??!!!

LIZA (*covering ears*)

Nobody, nobody, nobody...

(LIZA runs out of the room as STELLA and BRI exit with a flourish, and the scene transitions to LIZA's bedroom. As LIZA runs back into the space, she ages somewhat into her high school self.)

LIZA

Nobody, nobody, nobody, nobody NOBODY...

SCENE 3

(LIZA gets out her journal and her pen. She stops with the "nobody's", and sighs with relief. She writes:)

LIZA

Tim Goodell.

(PAST LIZA has been watching everything the whole time. Upon hearing "Tim Goodell", she can no longer contain her commentary.)

PAST LIZA

What the HECK is Tim doing inside my journal?!?!?

LIZA (*writing in journal*)

I LOVE Tim Goodell.

PAST LIZA

THIS SUCKS.

LIZA (*to herself, while shutting journal*)

Enough is enough. You have to text him. Start a conversation. Let's see...

(LIZA gets out her phone. She is getting visibly nervous. She types:)

"You should come see the fall play. Angry emoji. Smiley face."

(LIZA sends the text. Horrified, she throws her phone.)

OH GOD. That is so NEEDY. I can't watch I can't watch I can't watch—

(LIZA picks up her phone.)

NO RESPONSE!! I wonder why!

(LIZA throws her phone again.)

PAST LIZA (*watching, wide-eyed*)

The future is dark, folks.

LIZA

Okay Liza. CALM YOURSELF.

(LIZA tries to take a shaky breath in but it does not work. Her eyes flash open in panic.)

IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE SMILEY FACE! It was too much! Ohhhhh, I can't look I can't look I can't look—

(She checks the phone and practically jumps.)

HE RESPONDED!!

(TIM enters. TIM has changed since elementary school, going from a cute, excited kid to a chill, nearly popular boy. He's still

smart, but doesn't like to show it. He holds his phone in one hand and a chessboard in the other.)

TIM

"Lmao."

(TIM begins playing opening moves on the chessboard, playing for both sides.)

PAST LIZA

What does that even mean?!

LIZA

LMAO! He's "laughing his ASS off"!!!

PAST LIZA

Liza he doesn't even USE REAL WORDS!

LIZA

His ASS off?! Is that meant to be scandalous?!

(LIZA whips her phone in front of her. She is about to start typing, but stops herself.)

Hold up, Liza. Do you want to respond right away, or wait a few minutes to achieve...*nonchalance*? Yes, I should wait.

(LIZA puts her phone down on the ground for approximately 1 second.)

OH, SCREW IT! YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE!

(LIZA picks up the phone. She types:)

"Hahaha." *(Beat.)* Let's see—what should I say—um, how about..."got any weekend plans?"

(LIZA throws her phone on the ground. TIM begins moving the pieces across the board faster, taking pieces left and right.)

An INTIMATE QUESTION! I might as well have asked "so, wanna come over and watch a romantic comedy on my sofa while sharing a steaming hot chocolate?" Help help help HELP—

(LIZA checks her phone.)

NOTHING?!

(LIZA throws her phone. TIM sees his phone ding and reads the text. He shakes his head and chucks his phone face down on the ground.)

TIM

Check.

(During the following lines of dialogue, LIZA silently picks up her phone and stares at it, waiting. We shift our attention to PAST LIZA's letter-writing area, where PAST TIM pops in with a pencil.)

PAST TIM

Hey Liza! Look at how much I sharpened my pencil! Isn't it cool how "sharp" is another word for "smart"? So this is also one smart pencil.

PAST LIZA *(glancing at the pencil)*

Very cool.

(Beat. PAST TIM is nervous. PAST LIZA expects PAST TIM to leave and turns back to her writing—but when she looks up, he's still there.)

PAST TIM

Kinda, uh, reminds me of you.

(PAST TIM rushes out. PAST LIZA shakes her head. Meanwhile, LIZA stares at her phone.)

LIZA

He never responded.

TIM

Check.

PAST LIZA

Too bad for you.

(LIZA walks back towards LIZA's letter-reading area. She checks her phone again, just to be sure. When there is nothing, she shakes her head.)

LIZA

But deep down, I don't know if I even wanted him to respond.

(TIM's two black rooks trap the white king. The game is over.)

TIM

Checkmate.

(TIM exits with his chessboard and phone.)

PAST LIZA

You didn't?

LIZA *(only vaguely hearing PAST LIZA)*

I—I don't know. I was scared, I guess.

PAST LIZA

I get scared, too.

SCENE 4

(A STAGEHAND enters and begins to transition the scene to DAD'S HOUSE, with a table and fridge making up DAD's kitchen/dining

room. On the way, the STAGEHAND moves the clock's minute hand forward significantly. DAD and ELIZABETH enter. With DAD's dangerous stare and ELIZABETH's mousy, scraggly demeanor, their presence is dark. PAST LIZA does not like anything about this scene change.)

PAST LIZA (to STAGEHAND, who is moving furniture)
Hey! What's going on?!

STAGEHAND (shyly)

Uh, we're going to—

PAST LIZA

From the diaphragm!

STAGEHAND (slightly louder)

We're, um, going to scene 4?

PAST LIZA (shakily pointing at DAD and ELIZABETH, who are helping to move the set)

What are they doing here??

STAGEHAND

I don't really think I'm uh—

PAST LIZA

What?!

STAGEHAND (wanting to disappear)

—supposed to be talking right now...

PAST LIZA

We are not doing this scene.

(PAST TIM enters, and looks worriedly at the changing scene.)

LIZA (*to herself*)

You can't keep pushing this down, Liza...

PAST LIZA

Yes I can.

(*In a frenzy, PAST LIZA shoves TIM offstage.*)

STAGEHAND (*showing their notes*)

It says here that Scene 4 is in Dad's house...

PAST LIZA

WE ARE NOT GOING TO DAD'S HOUSE!

DAD (*towards PAST LIZA*)

You *will* go to Dad's house, and you will go every other weekend.

PAST LIZA

I DON'T WANT TO!

ELIZABETH (*towards PAST LIZA*)

From my research, I've learned that it is critical for children subject to parental alienation to be given the appropriate treatment.

STAGEHAND

What scene should I...uh, go to then...?

PAST LIZA

ANYTHING ELSE. We could go back to the sleepover, do a little more Truth or Dare...

(*STELLA runs in.*)

STELLA

DO YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON AIDAN? DO YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON JACKSON? DO YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON—

PAST LIZA

Actually nevermind, I hate that scene...

STELLA

Rude.

(STELLA leaves in a huff.)

PAST LIZA *(to STAGEHAND)*

Let's just go to dinner at Mom's, okay? I'm hungry!

STAGEHAND

What number scene is that...?

PAST LIZA

I DON'T KNOW just would you hurry up and take them *(points to DAD and ELIZABETH)* offstage?

STAGEHAND *(going towards DAD and ELIZABETH.)*

Sorry...I'm sorry...

DAD

You can't just ignore your own family.

ELIZABETH

We are your family, Eliza.

(PAST LIZA and LIZA cover their ears. An intimidated STAGEHAND escorts DAD and ELIZABETH offstage, and we transition to the dining room at MOM's house. This time, PAST LIZA leaves her spot in her letter-writing area and rushes into the dining room. LIZA watches as MOM, YURI, and JAKE enter to sit at a table with platefuls of delicious pesto pasta and salad. A container of extra cheese sits in the middle of the table.)

SCENE 5

(Everyone digs in. JAKE begins eating his pasta rapidly, while YURI scarfs down the salad. LIZA is still relishing the first bite of her pasta.)

PAST LIZA *(immediately)*

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM.

(As LIZA shuts her eyes and basks in food-heaven, YURI discreetly tries to put more pasta on PAST LIZA's plate. MOM catches him.)

MOM

Don't give away your dinner, Ivanov.

(YURI acts innocent.)

LIZA *(seeing the extra pasta in wonder)*
MORE PASTA?! *(arms to the sky)* HALLELUJAH!

MOM

Does anyone need extra salt?

JAKE

I'm all good.

(MOM hurries to fetch the salt. LIZA is still eating.)

PAST LIZA *(mid bite)*

THIS IS DELECTABLE.

MOM *(returning)*

I know what my baby loves!

PAST LIZA

Mommmmm! I'm not a baby!

JAKE

If you *really* weren't a baby you wouldn't have to say that..

MOM (*to PAST LIZA and JAKE*)
You're both my babies forever and for always.

YURI
What am I, chopped liver?

(MOM begins sprinkling the salt on her plate, then LIZA's, then YURI's and then JAKE's.)

MOM (*flirty*)
You're a different kind of baby, honey.

JAKE (*as MOM sprinkles salt*)
Mom! I'm good!

MOM
Oh, did you say no salt?

PAST LIZA (*laughing*)
He definitely did.

YURI (*quietly*)
I haven't even gotten to the pasta yet.

MOM
Huh?

LIZA
Speak from the diaphragm!

MOM (*returning salt to kitchen*)
It's a good thing you're training him, Liza.

YURI (*in an over-enunciated manner*)
I HAVEN'T EVEN GOTTEN TO THE PASTA YET.

LIZA
Oof. Not from your throat.

(PAST LIZA takes a generous handful of cheese and heaps it on her pasta.)

MOM *(returning)*

So how were everyone's days?

JAKE

It's good to be home.

MOM

Tell me about it. I spent all day trying to get introvert engineering students to speak into a microphone.

PAST LIZA

OOH! THAT REMINDS ME! SPEAKING OF MICROPHONES—

(JAKE and MOM burst out laughing. YURI chuckles.)

JAKE

Smooth transition, lil' sis.

PAST LIZA

What?!! I connected it to mom's thing! You said that's what I'm supposed to do!

YURI

Let's hear it, Liza.

PAST LIZA *(in one breath)*

So I've been working on a story for this English project, and it's Hansel and Gretel but from the perspective of the witch! Nobody thinks about how the witch is HUNGRY and I decided that she wants to eat Hansel and Gretel not just to fill her appetite but cause she wants to EAT THE CREATIVITY OUT OF THEIR SOULS.

MOM

Oooooh...sounds like a cool idea.

(JAKE snickers.)

PAST LIZA

Also for lunch today I had carrots and hummus and grapes and Charlotte had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on white bread.

(PAST LIZA visibly gears up for another long-winded monologue, but before she can begin MOM addresses YURI.)

MOM

And how was *your* day, Yuri?

(PAST LIZA is still itching to talk about her day, but she hasn't been directly asked yet.)

PAST LIZA *(in Russian accent)*

Fantastic.

MOM

Liza!

PAST LIZA

What?!

YURI

Fantastic.

PAST LIZA *(explaining herself)*

He says "fantastic" every night.

MOM

Anything to add, real Yuri?

YURI *(smiling slightly)*

No.

(PAST LIZA clears her throat very loudly.)

MOM (*reluctantly*)

And how was your day, Liza?

PAST LIZA

Why, THANK YOU for asking! It's hard getting a word in in this family.

(MOM and JAKE burst into laughter.)

LIZA

What?!

JAKE

Lizaganda alert!

MOM (*to YURI, jokingly*)

Yeah, Yuri. How DARE you take up so much time at this dinner?

YURI

You're right.

SCENE 6

(The STAGEHAND begins going towards the table to deconstruct the dining room of MOM's house.)

STAGEHAND (*cringing*)

Sorry...I'm sorry...

PAST LIZA

You can't be serious.

STAGEHAND

I have / uh...

PAST LIZA

A lot to learn?

STAGEHAND

Orders from the director...

PAST LIZA

I HAVEN'T EVEN FINISHED MY PESTO YET.

STAGEHAND

I'm sure we'll...

PAST LIZA

Have you ever *once* bitten into a bit of pesto pasta and felt that cheesy, herby, oily goodness tickle your tastebuds?

STAGEHAND

Come back to it...

(STAGEHAND moves a hand of the clock forward. LIZA watches, horrified.)

PAST LIZA *(looking at clock)*

THERE WON'T BE ANY TIME!

(During the following lines, the STAGEHAND—with the help of MOM, YOOG, JAKE, and LIZA—transition the scene away from MOM's dining room to DAD's kitchen/dining room. The space feels hardened and sparse. There is a table, stove, and a fridge with a small piece of paper attached to it.)

LIZA

You're strong, Liza.

MOM *(offering markers)*

Take some extra markers with you, in case you're running out.

PAST LIZA

I don't want...

JAKE

It's just for the weekend. We'll be okay.

(YURI quietly takes PAST LIZA's coat and drapes it over her shoulders.)

PAST LIZA

I can't...

MOM

I love you!

PAST LIZA

WAIT...

SCENE 7

(MOM and YURI exit and DAD and ELIZABETH storm in, joining JAKE and PAST LIZA as the transition is completed. LIZA returns to her spot in LIZA's letter-reading area. DAD is making sausage on the stove. At the sight of DAD, PAST LIZA falls silent.)

DAD

You can wait a little longer.

JAKE

It's 8:30.

ELIZABETH

Dinner takes time.

JAKE

I'm just gonna grab something from the fridge, then—

DAD

DON'T MAKE A / MESS.

JAKE

Liza, do you want anything?

PAST LIZA

No thanks.

(JAKE sees the piece of paper on the fridge. He takes it off.)

JAKE *(reading)*

"For one to love oneself, one must behave in ways one can admire."

(JAKE snickers. PAST LIZA tentatively goes up to him and reads the quote.)

DAD *(turning around, dangerously)*

Is something funny?

JAKE *(in a fake English accent)*

One could say there appear to be a lot of "one"s in that one sentence.

ELIZABETH

I stumbled upon the quote and thought it was lovely, so I put it on the fridge.

DAD *(icily)*

You need to learn some manners, Jacob.

JAKE

You mean act in "ways that one can admire"?

PAST LIZA

Jake-careful-

(A sizzling sound. DAD whips around to face the stove.)

DAD
YOU'RE MAKING ME BURN THE SAUSAGES.

JAKE
I don't see why passive-aggression should be on the / fridge...

DAD
Shit these are burnt as / shit.

ELIZABETH
I could take it down if that's how you really / see me...

DAD
ELIZABETH CAN PUT ANY QUOTE SHE LIKES ON THE FRIDGE.

(DAD puts the burnt sausages on a plate and slams it loudly on the table. Beat.)

JAKE
Can I put a quote on the fridge, then?

DAD
Just eat your fucking sausage and shut up.

PAST LIZA
I'm outta here.

(PAST LIZA leaves DAD's dining room and returns to the letter-writing area, clearly before the scene is meant to end.)

DAD (to JAKE)
Where the hell is your sister off to?

JAKE
Don't talk about Liza in that tone.

DAD
What tone?

JAKE

That tone!

ELIZABETH

I think everyone should just take one deep breath, Jacob.

LIZA

I can't breathe...

PAST LIZA

WE'RE MOVING ON.

(Stagehand enters, frazzled.)

STAGEHAND

So should I...um...set for...?

PAST LIZA

I've got a letter to write.

STAGEHAND

Right. *(moving towards center stage)* Just pretend like I'm not here...

LIZA *(to STAGEHAND)*

We all wish we could disappear...

MRS. CAMPBELL *(popping her head in)*

10 MINUTES LEFT!

(MRS. CAMPBELL moves a clock hand and exits.)

SCENE 8

PAST LIZA

10 minutes?!!

(LIZA quickly takes out her letter. She writes speedily.)

"I'd better hurry. Mrs. Campbell's got that crazed look in her eye. So in case you've forgotten, my best friends right now are Charlotte, Jade, and Ariana. I'd better have at LEAST three classes with Charlotte in 6th grade."

LIZA

Charlotte is so annoying now.

PAST LIZA (*aloud*)

You're lying.

LIZA

Ever since she joined the lacrosse team it was bound to go downhill.

(CHARLOTTE enters. She addresses LIZA, who watches her blankly.)

CHARLOTTE

Heyyy girl! Wanna hear my morning routine? First I wake up at 6:07am and check my Insta to count how many boys liked my story. This morning, I saw that 677 boys liked my bikini photos from my summer trip to Hawaii! Then I go do my skin care routine for minimum two hours. You can't start early enough! Next, I go downstairs to skip breakfast—

LIZA (*shoving CHARLOTTE offstage*)

Sorry Charlotte. No time for side characters.

PAST LIZA

CHARLOTTE IS NOT A SIDE CHARACTER.

CHARLOTTE (*while being shoved*)

Hey! I didn't get to my negative 100 calorie lunch recipe!

LIZA (*towards PAST LIZA*)

The lacrosse team was a recipe for disaster.

PAST LIZA

I'M CHOOSING TO IGNORE THAT.

(Beat. LIZA reopens her letter, and PAST LIZA begins writing:)

"ANYWAYS, has mom made any good yum lately? Tonight we're having egg noodles with creamy, buttery, mouth-watering sauce and mountains of cheese!"

LIZA

I'll have me some of that, please.

(LIZA folds up her letter and puts it in her pocket. Transition to MOM's kitchen, where MOM makes dinner. She is chopping thyme for a chicken. LIZA enters the space.)

LIZA

What's for din din?

MOM

My delicious made-up lemon chicken.

LIZA

HOLY YUMNESS.

MOM

What've you been up to?

LIZA

Just doing some writing—actually, I have a third draft that could really use some eyes—

MOM

Come here so I can give my sweet potato chicken nugget a squeeeeeze!

(MOM lunges for LIZA and squeezes her, then playfully smacks her butt.)

LIZA *(breaking free)*

Mommmmm! I'm too old for that!

MOM

I can't help it!

LIZA

Seriously-

MOM

It's not my fault you have such a cute ass! Take the hit!

(MOM resumes chopping the thyme.)

LIZA *(craftily)*

You're teaching me some valuable lessons, mom.

MOM

Wait a minute...

LIZA

I'll go to college and when a boy wants to smack my ass I'll gladly let him take advantage!

MOM

You KNOW that's different.

LIZA

"Keep going, sirrah," I'll say. "Smack it as much as you'd like!"

MOM

You're getting too smart for me.

LIZA *(smugly)*

Need any help with the rosemary?

MOM

It's not rosemary, it's

MOM

Thyme.

LIZA

Time.

(The lights flicker, and finally go out on PAST LIZA's letter-writing area and LIZA's letter reading area. Time seems to stop, and we cannot see the clock anymore. The audience should feel a weight lifted off of them, like they have some room to breathe. Transition to MOM's bedroom in the shifting scene area, where MOM and YURI lay under the covers of their bed. LIZA stands outside their room with a paper copy of a script, and knocks on their door.)

LIZA *(knocking)*

Can I come in?

MOM

It's 11:30 at night.

LIZA

It's urgent.

YURI

Is everything alright?

LIZA

What did he say?

YURI

IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT?!

LIZA *(knocking)*

I have a second draft of a script.

MOM

Your *script* is urgent?

LIZA *(knocking on door)*

I've got a deadline coming soon!

MOM

I'm naked!

LIZA *(desperate)*

Can I get you a shirt?

YURI

I'll get the shirt.

(While covering himself with a blanket, YURI exits to get a shirt.)

LIZA

Thanks Yuri!

MOM

I'm so nice.

LIZA *(knocking)*

Can I come in now?

MOM

It's been one second!

LIZA *(out loud)*

Sigh.

(YURI comes and hands MOM a shirt. He exits, still in a blanket.)

MOM *(putting on shirt)*

Hold on, hold on.

(Beat. LIZA tries to hide her impatience.)

Alright, you can come in.

LIZA

Huzzah!!

(LIZA practically dances her way into the room, setting the script in front of MOM.)

LIZA *(chanting)*

Fun, fun, family fun—

MOM *(rippling through pages)*

How long is this thing?

LIZA

Only 50 pages or so.

(MOM flips to the end of the play.)

MOM

It's 80 pages.

(MOM begins skimming the play.)

LIZA

Okay, but if you think about it the dialogue is pretty spaced out—

MOM

Shhhhhh.

(MOM skims a few pages of the play intently. LIZA doesn't quite know what to do with herself. She walks around the bedroom. She gets behind MOM and peers at the computer screen again.)

MOM

Liza you've got to give me some room.

LIZA *(to MOM)*

Sorry.

(MOM shuts her eyes.)

Mom? You good?

MOM

My big mommy brain is thinking. It just needs a second.

LIZA

Right.

(LIZA backs away from the computer, and sits on the floor. MOM's eyes are still shut. LIZA stands up. She grabs three random objects in the room and begins juggling them wildly. One of the objects drops.)

(MOM's eyes flash open at the noise, but also at her revelation.)

MOM

Oh my god!

LIZA *(quickly returning the objects)*

My bad.

MOM

I think this play is meant to be 30 minutes long.

LIZA

But this is supposed to be a full length play.

MOM

Who says so?

LIZA

I do!

MOM

Listen. You have this beautiful moment here where the teacher says "30 minutes left!" and suddenly there's this urgency taking

over all your characters. I think you should be under that same kind of pressure as the playwright.

LIZA

What if I just change the 30 minutes to 60 minutes though?

MOM

Oooh.

LIZA

What?!

MOM

You should put that line in the play.

LIZA

No I'm serious.

MOM

That one, too.

LIZA

But-but what if the "30 minutes left" scene starts at Act 2? And then Act 1 could also be 30 minutes.

MOM

That just adds up to 60 minutes.

LIZA (*pleadingly*)

45 minutes?!

MOM

No, it adds up to 60 minutes. (*Beat.*) I think. (*Visibly struggling to do math in her head*) Does it?

LIZA

No, I'm saying let's settle for 45 minutes.

MOM

I'm not going to argue about this.

LIZA

That's just not enough time!

(LIZA helps transition back from MOM's bedroom to MOM's kitchen.)

MOM

Yuri?! We can be naked again!

(Beat.)

Where'd that guy go?

SCENE 9

(MOM freezes during the following interlude. Lights go back up on PAST LIZA's letter-writing area, LIZA's letter-reading area, and-most importantly-the clock. Everything rushes back into motion.)

MRS. CAMPBELL *(entering)*

8 MINUTES LEFT OF YOUR TIME!

PAST LIZA

I should ask future Liza more questions. But what kinds of questions?

MOM *(unfreezing, to LIZA)*

Did your Dad act okay?

LIZA *(quickly)*

He was fine.

(MOM freezes again, unable to hear the following lines.)

PAST LIZA

No he wasn't.

LIZA

I can't write the dread building inside me when I saw his beat-up grey car, hurtling like a stormcloud down my street. Can't write curses that would disqualify my script from any festival. Can't write the scene where I stand frozen in the hallway as Dad strangles my screaming brother under his bedcovers. Did that even happen?

PAST LIZA

Yes it did.

(DAD enters, positioning himself so that LIZA has MOM on one side and DAD on the other.)

DAD

No it didn't.

LIZA

His web of lies and my wet eyes make the past too blurry.

PAST LIZA

It was real.

MOM *(unfreezing)*

Want to talk about it?

LIZA *(moving back to her letter-reading area)*

No.

(STAGEHAND enters and begins transitioning the scene to DAD's kitchen/dining room once again. JAKE and ELIZABETH follow.)

PAST LIZA

HEY YOU!

STAGEHAND

Um, who? Me?

PAST LIZA

We did this scene already, remember?

STAGEHAND

I'm just doing as I'm told...

(STAGEHAND nervously moves the clock's minute hand downwards. LIZA has had enough.)

PAST LIZA *(dangerously)*

Get your hands off that clock.

(DAD marches up to PAST LIZA and grabs her by the shoulder, shoving her towards DAD'S kitchen/dining room. She takes a sheet of paper with her, holding onto it for dear life.)

(During the following line, TIM'S voice joins DAD from offstage.)

DAD and TIM

Whatcha writing about, anyway?

(LIZA is silent. MOM remains fixed to her spot even as the scene changes around her, watching everything with pain in her eyes.)

STAGEHAND *(to MOM, who's still there)*

Sorry...I think you're...

MOM *(quietly)*

Excuse me?

STAGEHAND

Supposed to be offstage right now...

(MOM stays where she is. STAGEHAND begins gently tugging her offstage.)

Sorry...so so sorry...

MOM

You let a hair on her head get hurt, I'll kill you.

(MOM storms off.)

STAGEHAND

Holy shit...

SCENE 10

(A terrified STAGEHAND finishes setting up the scene, where PAST LIZA writes a letter in an area just outside of DAD'S kitchen/dining room. In the kitchen, DAD and JAKE argue while ELIZABETH watches.)

PAST LIZA

Dear mom-

DAD *(seriously)*

Don't even think about it.

JAKE

I'm taking the last fish stick. I'm hungry.

DAD

Do you think this is a joke?

PAST LIZA *(choking up)*

Dear mom-

DAD

You only get a fish stick when I choose to give you a fish stick.

(JAKE laughs scornfully, as if that could diffuse the situation. It doesn't.)

PAST LIZA (*weakly*)

Mom—

DAD

Have you considered if *Elizabeth* wants the last fish stick?

ELIZABETH

I am partial to fried fish.

DAD (*volume increasing*)

APOLOGIZE TO YOUR STEPMOTHER.

JAKE

No!

PAST LIZA

Mom, I miss you so so so much.

(*JAKE grabs the fish stick off of the stove. He takes a huge bite, relishing its greasiness.*)

DAD

YOU FUCKING IDIOT!

(*DAD marches up to JAKE, snatches the fish stick out of his hand, and smashes it in his fist.*)

PAST LIZA

I want to go home.

ELIZABETH (*quietly*)

Fish sticks are not a finger food.

PAST LIZA

I love you so much.

DAD

I CAN'T EVEN LOOK AT YOU. GET OUT OF MY SIGHT.

JAKE

I hate you.

(JAKE exits, pausing by PAST LIZA sadly before going offstage.)

PAST LIZA and LIZA

Love Eliza.

(A breath. LIZA examines the scene in DAD's kitchen/dining room.)

LIZA

But no matter how much I write it, nothing comes close to how it really was.

(DAD and ELIZABETH exit. In PAST LIZA's letter-writing area, MRS. CAMPBELL and PAST TIM enter. PAST LIZA joins them.)

PAST LIZA

I've done the same scene—

PAST TIM

I've tried to tell her—

LIZA

I've written and rewritten—

MRS. CAMPBELL

I've called out the time—

PAST LIZA, PAST TIM, LIZA, MRS. CAMPBELL
Too many times.

MRS. CAMPBELL *(moving clock hand)*
3 minutes left.

PAST TIM *(to MRS. CAMPBELL)*
If you think about it, time is a social construct.

*(PAST TIM turns to the audience.
MRS. CAMPBELL exits.)*

Sometimes I wonder...how come one minute alone passes painfully slow but one minute with another *(looks at PAST LIZA)* zooms by like lightning?

(Beat. PAST TIM sees that MRS. CAMPBELL is gone, and he turns to LIZA.)

I got you some tape.

(PAST TIM gives the tape to LIZA.)

PAST LIZA *(almost seeing his value)*

Thanks!

(PAST TIM runs off, and PAST LIZA joyfully tapes another piece of paper onto her letter.)

PAST LIZA

Finally I have some extra space...

(PAST LIZA gets out her pencil to write on the final page. Meanwhile, LIZA opens the letter once again.)

PAST LIZA *(writing)*

"You know, I just can't wrap my head around the idea that you have just finished high school. Are you auditioning for colleges now?"

LIZA *(laughing)*

Yes, after getting a callback I was cast at UMass Amherst!

PAST LIZA

"Is it weird, confusing, and sad to see your childhood end right before your eyes? Do you feel terrified to leave your family soon and face the huge world by yourself?"

LIZA

I won't be alone. I know it.

(LIZA folds up her letter.)

PAST LIZA

Well last I checked college is kind of a do-it-yourself kind of thing...

SCENE 11

(We transition to MOM's kitchen, where MOM is packing up the last of a birthday cake for LIZA to bring back with her to college. LIZA joins her as MOM cuts the remaining 3 slices carefully.)

MOM

You know, you come home from college and I see you a whole different way, nose-wise.

LIZA

Oh my god.

MOM

I'm telling you, you have a really cute nose. The boys must be fighting over you!

(LIZA chuckles nervously.)

PAST LIZA

NOT THIS AGAIN.

MOM

Any contenders these days?

(MOM begins putting parchment paper between each slice of cake.)

LIZA

Not really.

PAST LIZA

Thank god.

MOM

C'mon! There's like a gazillion people at UMass!

LIZA

Well, actually—

(PAST LIZA is horrified at this turn of events. Meanwhile MOM stops everything she's doing, nearly dropping a slice of cake.)

MOM

YES?!

LIZA

There is this one guy who I may have accidentally had dinner with—

MOM *(overjoyed)*

How are we not *opening* with this? How come I gotta ask?!

LIZA *(laughing)*

My bad.

MOM

You should give him some cake!

PAST LIZA

WHAT?! There's only THREE SLICES LEFT!

LIZA

I don't know...

PAST LIZA

Yeah! That's MY cake we're talking about here!

MOM

One taste of my fudgy icing and he'll never leave your side.

LIZA

It's not a bad idea, actually.

PAST LIZA

ARE YOU NUTS?!

MOM (*chanting*)

Do it, do it, do it, do it—

PAST LIZA

NO NO NO NO NO NO—

LIZA (*smiling, as she takes the cake tupperware*)

I'll call him.

MOM

That's my girl!

(MOM exits, and LIZA returns to her letter-reading area—still holding the cake in the tupperware. PAST LIZA is pissed. MRS. CAMPBELL enters.)

MRS. CAMPBELL

10 SECONDS!

PAST LIZA

WHY ME?!

(MRS. CAMPBELL practically dances as she inches the clock hand towards the 30 minute mark. LIZA reopens her letter. PAST LIZA hurriedly writes:)

PAST LIZA

"Well, it's been real fun talking to you, but there are books to read, dinners to eat, friends to worry about, teachers to deal with, and stories to be written. So I can't waste my time with you anymore."

LIZA (*reading*)

Waste your time?! Damn.

PAST LIZA

"Sincerely, the fifth grade Eliza Epstein."

(The clock hand arrives at its destination. A ringing noise.)

MRS. CAMPBELL

TIME'S UP! PENCILS DOWN!

PAST LIZA

Wait! I didn't even add a P.S.—

MRS CAMPBELL

No more writing.

PAST LIZA and LIZA

No more writing?!

MRS CAMPBELL

I want all letters handed to me so I can seal them up!

(As MRS CAMPBELL heads towards PAST LIZA's letter, PAST LIZA leans over to protect her paper. Time seems to melt away.)

PAST LIZA *(practically shaking)*

I didn't even say HALF of what I wanted to get to.

MRS. CAMPBELL

If it was important, you'd have already said it.

(For the first time, LIZA can hear MRS. CAMPBELL and PAST LIZA directly. She folds up her letter.)

LIZA *(to MRS. CAMPBELL)*

If it was important, it might be hard to say.

(STAGEHAND enters apologetically, silently wheeling in the fridge associated with DAD's house. It still has a note on it. PAST LIZA gives the STAGEHAND a dirty look, and the STAGEHAND runs off.)
(LIZA walks towards PAST LIZA with the cake tupperware.)

PAST LIZA

Are you really gonna give perfectly good cake away to some random college guy?

LIZA *(giving PAST LIZA a piece)*

I saved a piece for you.

MRS CAMPBELL *(snatching PAST LIZA's letter)*

No food in the classroom!

PAST LIZA *(to LIZA)*

Thank you.

(Lights go out on MRS. CAMPBELL and PAST LIZA in PAST LIZA's letter writing area. LIZA moves downstage, taking the cake tupperware with her. She dials a number and we hear the ringing tone as she waits for somebody to answer. Then, a voice:)

BOY'S VOICE

Hello?

(Lights go off on LIZA. But behind her, one light on the fridge that the STAGEHAND wheeled in stubbornly remains. It stays there for a few beats.)

(BLACKOUT.)