

AGING OUT: A MUSICAL

A Stage Musical by Jody Johnson

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Cast of Characters

The cast is listed in order of appearance. Those with singing parts are italicized, and major characters are bolded.

<u>KEITH DALEY:</u>	34 years old, a court services officer.
<u>LIZ FRIEDRICK:</u>	32 years old, Misty Hardwell's social worker.
<u>COMPANY:</u>	Numerous court and high school personnel and students and regular citizens.
<u>A.D.A. MINNICK:</u>	38 years old, assistant district attorney, female.
<u>JUDGE SEALY:</u>	42 years old, a family court judge, male.
<u>MISTY HARDWELL:</u>	17 years old, a high school student in foster care.
<u>CAROLYN MUNJAK:</u>	54 years old, Misty's Court Appointed Special Advocate
<u>KRISTIN AGIS:</u>	17 years old, a child in foster care placed with Misty at the Rathmores.
<u>TONYA FELTLESS:</u>	15 years old, a child in foster care placed with Misty at the Rathmores.
<u>MRS. RATHMORE:</u>	60 years old, Misty's placement briefly in the beginning.
<u>REGINA PATTON:</u>	44 years old, Misty's foster mother, spouse of Rick.
<u>RICK PATTON:</u>	45 years old, Misty's foster father, spouse of Regina.
<u>FOSTER PARENTS #1-5:</u>	40-60 years old, a mix of male/female, some of Misty's previous foster parents
<u>MR. SHELTON:</u>	52 years old, high school guidance counselor
<u>MRS. DIEBOLD:</u>	58 years old, high school guidance administrative assistant
<u>JAKE KRAMER:</u>	17 years old, a high school student.
<u>KAYE KRAMER:</u>	48 years old, Jake Kramer's mother.
<u>JENNY PIERCE:</u>	17 years old, a high school student.

<u>MARLA MYERS:</u>	17 years old, a high school student.
<u>MACY KINCAID:</u>	17 years old, a high school student.
<u>MRS. KOHLER:</u>	32 years old, a former Lawrence teacher now at another school.
<u>WAITER:</u>	21 years old, a restaurant waiter, male.
<u>CHILD #1, #2:</u>	Late elementary or middle school, one boy, one girl
<u>ELDERLY SHOPPER:</u>	74 years old, female.
<u>CAROLERS:</u>	Multiple ages, dressed as in “A Christmas Carol”
<u>DESTITUTE MOTHER:</u>	22 years old, mother of two young children
<u>HOMELESS MAN:</u>	41 years old, male.

Place

Various locations in Lawrence, Kansas

Time

August 2019 through May 2020

ACT I
Scene 1

Setting: Courtroom/Child and Family Services. The courtroom is front and center.
Back right is Liz' social worker office (not in the same building).

At rise: Keith Daley is readying the empty courtroom for a session of court. Liz is loading her briefcase and preparing for court and her workday.

(Song: "IN COURT")

KEITH

BUSY DAY, THE DOCKET'S FULL,
WHOM WILL WE SEE TODAY?
HERE IN THIS COURT, IN THE CHILD'S BEST INTEREST,
ABSOLUTES COLLIDE, LOVE LIVES NEXT TO ANGUISH.
AND HERE IN MY HEART, SOMETIMES THERE IS DOUBT.
WHEN THERE IS ONE MORE FAMILY TORN APART,
INDEED, WHERE DO WE START? ARE WE THE ANSWER?
THERE IS NO LAW THAT CAN MAKE LOVE RETURN,
NO GUARANTEE THAT WHAT WE DISCERN
WILL EVER BRING IT TO AN END,
WILL SEND THE CHILD HOME AGAIN,

LIZ

BUSY DAY, MY SCHEDULE'S FULL,
HOME VISITS AND IN COURT.
ALL THROUGH MY DAY, I MAKE MY DECISIONS,
JUDGE AS BEST I CAN, AS THE MOMENT HAPPENS.
AND HERE IN MY HEART, HOPE PUSHES ON!
WHEN THERE IS ONE MORE CHILD IN NEED OF CARE,
INDEED, WE WILL BE THERE, LISTENING, CARING.
WITHIN THE LAW AND OUR MINDS WE DECIDE;
FORTUNATE DAYS WHEN LAW AND HEARTS CONFIDE,
WHEN WHAT IS RIGHT IS WHAT IS GOOD,
WHEN EVERY HEART IS UNDERSTOOD . . .

COMPANY

HERE AGAIN WE GATHER.
HOPE WE HEAR WHAT MATTERS!
ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?
SHE'S EXPECTING NO LESS!
HERE WE ARE IN COURT AGAIN, WORKIN' THE LAW TO LET LOVE IN.
WE'RE GETTING THE FACTS SINCE THE LAST TIME WE MET,

ROLLING OUT A SOCIAL SAFETY NET.
HERE AGAIN WE GATHER
HOPE WE HEAR WHAT MATTERS--WHAT MATTERS!
WHEN THERE IS ONE MORE CHILD IN NEED OF CARE,
INDEED, WILL WE BE THERE? LISTENING, CARING?
THERE IS NO LAW THAT CAN MAKE LOVE RETURN,
NO GUARANTEE THAT WHAT WE DISCERN
WILL EVER BRING IT TO AN END,
WILL SEND THE CHILD HOME AGAIN

KEITH
BUSY DAY, THE DOCKET'S FULL,
COMPANY
ALL RISE.

(This scene begins with the hearing already progressed, with LIZ on the witness stand next to the judge. ADA MINNICK questions her. KEITH observes along with others.)

A.D.A. MINNICK
It appears Misty will be moving to a different town *and* a different school rather quickly.

LIZ
Unfortunately, yes, but she'll be moving to the home of Rick and Regina Patton, long-time foster parents.

A.D.A. MINNICK
No placements available in the current school district?

LIZ
Unfortunately, none are appropriate options. At this point the only suitable placement we have is with Rick and Regina, in the next school district over, but it's not available until November. We'll keep watching for something else to open up.

A.D.A. MINNICK
Okay, let's talk about independent living training for Misty. It seems the agency is making sound efforts, and the report mentioned Misty has a new job.

LIZ
Unfortunately, Misty is not in that position any longer. She quit after a couple weeks, just after I submitted the report you have.

JUDGE SEALY

Excuse me, but I would like to address Misty.

A.D.A. MINNICK

Certainly, your honor.

JUDGE SEALY

(He speaks to her from the bench to where she is seated.)

Misty, why did you quit the job?

MISTY

(timidly)

I just didn't really get along with my boss very well.

JUDGE SEALY

Do you have any other work you're considering?

MISTY

No, we're fillin' out job applications again.

JUDGE SEALY

What do you plan to do after high school?

MISTY

I don't know for sure, (beat) maybe go to college, or get trained to do something, but that's almost a year away.

JUDGE SEALY

Misty, according to the reports for today's hearing, you've been talking a lot about getting out of custody when you turn 18 next year.

MISTY

(showing obvious indignation)

I've been getting talked to—a lot.

JUDGE SEALY

(A tiny head nod acknowledges the impertinent statement, but he moves on.)

Do you have an idea what "getting out" really means?

MISTY

My CASA, Carolyn, and my worker, Liz, says I'll have to get a job to pay for a place to live and stuff.

JUDGE SEALY

You do need to think about life after high school, and how you'll manage your responsibilities, and you need to give some consideration as to how you want your life to be. You need to think about the direction you want your life to go and who you want to become.

MISTY

(a bit embarrassed)

Yes, sir.

(The court scene dissolves with the focus on the court observers as they sing directly to the audience. The setting will shift from that of the courtroom to outside the courtroom in the hall. The COMPANY starts a capella rising from their seats.)

(Song: "IN COURT SHORT REPRISE" reprise)

COMPANY

HERE AGAIN WE GATHERED,
DID WE HEAR WHAT MATTERS!
HAVE WE MADE SOME PROGRESS?
SHE'S EXPECTING NO LESS!
HERE WE ARE IN COURT AGAIN,
WORKIN' THE LAW TO LET LOVE IN.
WE'RE HEARING THE FACTS SINCE THE LAST TIME WE MET,
ROLLING OUT A SOCIAL SAFETY NET.
HERE AGAIN WE GATHERED.
HOPE WE HEARD WHAT MATTERS.
NOW THERE IS *THIS* CHILD, A CHILD IN NEED OF CARE,
INDEED, HAVE WE BEEN THERE? LISTENING, CARING?
THERE IS NO LAW THAT CAN MAKE LOVE RETURN,
NO GUARANTEE THAT WHAT WE DISCERN
WILL EVER BRING IT TO AN END.

(The COMPANY dissolves and exits back of stage.)

KEITH

(to himself, as he closes the court doors and exits off stage)

THIS CHILD IS NOT GOING HOME . . .

(MISTY, CAROLYN, and LIZ visit after the hearing in the courtroom. KEITH occasionally comes by as he is going in and out of the courtroom preparing for another hearing. MISTY is a bit despondent in the ensuing conversation with LIZ and CAROLYN.)

LIZ

That seemed pretty straight-forward. What do you think about what the judge said?

MISTY

Well, guess I gotta work harder to find a job . . . (distracted, thinking)

CAROLYN

What is it, Misty?

MISTY

Just thinkin' 'bout what he said, about gettin' out.

LIZ

You mean about your independent living skills?

MISTY

Well, I guess (exasperated quick sigh). No, I mean . . . (beat) Mostly I'm just thinkin' about it just bein' a year till I age out.

LIZ

What about that—aging out?

MISTY

Long time ago, when I figured out that I'd get outa of the system when I was 18, that someday nobody could tell me what to do anymore, ever since then I've been waitin' for midnight on my eighteenth birthday.

CAROLYN

Say more.

MISTY

(with a bit of frustration)

I think I want to get out of the system, but I'm not sure how I'll *be* when I do get out. I want some freedom—but God!—Bein' free of it all seems so big now.

CAROLYN

Misty, you keep using the words “getting out.” Try using some other words to say what that means.

MISTY

I don't know. (beat) I want to decide for myself about things. But when I get out, like the judge said, I'm gonna have to live.

LIZ

Well, that's why we're working on your independent living skills.

MISTY

(insistently)

No. I don't mean that. I know I have to get a job and stuff, but I have to *live*, I have to make somethin' out of my messed-up life. (beat) I'm not sure I can do that.

LIZ

You've done a lot of work in the last six years to get where you are, Misty. Keep working at things, and you'll get to the right place.

MISTY

(with increasing anxiety)

But I don't know what I'll *be*.

CAROLYN

You mean whether or not you'll be strong enough to make it on your own?

MISTY

Maybe. I'm scared. Maybe I'm not ready to be out of the system. (beat) God, I can't believe I'm really *even* sayin' that!

LIZ

You *are* going to age out of the system, and that's scary—but don't forget how far you've come. You can do this.

MISTY

I just don't know if I'll ever get away from everything.

(Song: "AGIN' OUT")

MISTY

SINCE I WAS 12, THIS IS ALL I'VE KNOWN—
SURROUNDED BY THE SYSTEM, SOMEHOW ALONE.
I USED TO WONDER WHEN IT WOULD END.
WOULD I EVER HAVE A FAMILY OR A FRIEND?
FINALLY, I KNEW, MOM WOULD NEVER COME BACK.
IT WAS TIME TO MOVE ON, THEN I JUST WANTED OUT.
OUT OF THE SYSTEM, SOMEHOW TO BE FREE,
JUST WANTED MY LIFE, TO BE ABOUT ME!

At the end of the excerpt above, Misty continues to explore musically her desire to be out of the foster care system. Following that she has a conversation with the other girls in her foster placement about the woes of the system and their desire to age out. Misty then transitions to yet another foster home while reflecting on past placements. Misty enrolls in her new school where she meets Jake, the other main character, a fun-loving but caring guy who will become her friend and advocate.

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ACT I
SCENE 4

Setting: High school guidance counselor's office area.

At rise: RICK, MISTY, and MR. SHELTON are coming out of MR. SHELTON'S office into the area where MRS. DIEBOLD has her desk.

RICK

Thanks, Mr. Shelton. I'm taking off now, Misty. Good luck today.

MISTY

(a bit worried with his quick departure)

O-Okay . . .

(RICK exits passing JAKE who is on his way in.)

MR. SHELTON

Mrs. Diebold, this is Misty Hardwell, joining us new today. We've got her enrolled. We need to find her a locker and get her to second-hour class. (handing her a paper) Here's her schedule.

MRS. DIEBOLD

(Turns to see JAKE coming to the counter; quizzing him with a faux seriousness.)

Sure thing. And Mr. Kramer, why are you just showing up?

JAKE

(playfully)

Need a pass. Had to get my teeth cleaned.

(Grins to show his teeth.)

My mom should have called.

MRS. DIEBOLD

(grinning)

Yep, she did.

(Hands him a pass.)

JAKE

Hey, you already knew!

MRS. DIEBOLD

Just testing you. Why don't you show Misty here to her locker and class. Jake Kramer, meet Misty Hardwell. She's new today.

JAKE

Okay, I can do that. (hand on heart with confidence) Anything for you Mrs. Diebold. Hello Misty Hardwell. I'm gonna show you around!

MIST
(timidly)

Show me 'round what?

(JAKE starts to take off.)

JAKE

Come on!

MRS. DIEBOLD

Wait! Her locker is close to Mrs. Bergen's classroom . . .

JAKE
(to Misty)

Ugh! English.

(drops his chin on his chest in a made-up despair)

MRS. DIEBOLD
(giving Jake a reproving look)

. . . and you both have second hour with her. I've already talked to Bergen. You can show her up there and make introductions. Think you can handle that, Mr. Kramer?

JAKE

I'm the *king* of handling!

MRS. DIEBOLD
(Chuckles at Jake then, speaking to MISTY)

Here's your locker combination, Misty. (hands her a note) Jake can help you out—and hopefully not get you in trouble.

JAKE

I'm on it!

(The bell rings to change periods. JAKE takes off with MISTY and as they travel the halls, the student body and teachers they meet (COMPANY) join in, the COMPANY growing, for a rousing tour of the school that ends with second hour in session.)

(Song: "WORTH IT IN THE END")

JAKE

(to MISTY)

FOUR MINUTES TO GO BEFORE THE BELL WILL RING;
JUST ENOUGH TIME TO SHOW YOU EVERYTHING!

COME ON LET'S GO, WE'LL FIND YOUR LOCKER,
SHOW YOU AROUND UNTIL YOU GET IT DOWN, COME AROUND.
WE'LL MEET THE TEACHERS WHO TEACH YOUR CLASSES,
DAILY IMPARTING WISDOM TO THE MASSES.

JAKE AND COMPANY

HISTORY'S NO MYSTERY WITH MR. LYAL;
HE BRINGS THE DEAD BACK TO LIFE!
ENGLISH LIT WILL TEST YOUR WITS WHEN MRS. BERGEN
MAKES YOU READ, READ, WRITE, AND WRITE.
SHAKESPEARE AND TWAIN, DICKENS, FAULKNER,
HAND IS CRAMPING! MUST KEEP WRITING!

TELL ME IT WILL ALL BE WORTH IT WHEN I'M DONE.
BECAUSE MY SENIOR YEAR IS DRAGGING SLOW;
IT'S GETTING HARDER JUST TO GO;
I NEED TO KNOW IT'S WORTH IT IN THE END.
GOTTA' KEEP IT UP, COLLEGE IS COMING
GOTTA' GET MY As AND Bs,
STAY AWAY FROM Cs AND Ds.

JAKE

READY OR NOT WE WILL GRADUATE
ON SOME ARBITRARY MAY DATE
CLEAN OUT OUR LOCKERS AND TURN IN OUR BOOKS
READY OR NOT WE WILL LAUNCH!

JAKE and COMPANY

FURTHER DOWN THIS HALL YOU'LL FIND THE CAFETERIA.
IT'S BEEN KNOWN TO CAUSE A MILD HYSTERIA.
ON THE OTHER SIDE IS THE FOOTBALL STADIUM
WHERE EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT WE BREAK COLLAR BONES AND CRANIUMS!

CHEMISTRY WILL BLOW YOUR MIND WHEN MRS. FOSTER
SHOWS HOW IONS ENERGIZE.
MATHEMATICS WAITS FOR YOU WITH MR. BOWER--
TORTURE IN DISGUISE!
X AND Y HAUNT THESE HALLWAYS.
WILL I EVER NEED MY ALGEBRA?

TELL ME IT WILL ALL BE WORTH IT WHEN I'M DONE.
BECAUSE MY SENIOR YEAR IS DRAGGING SLOW;
IT'S GETTING HARDER JUST TO GO;
I NEED TO KNOW IT'S WORTH IT IN THE END.
GOTTA' KEEP IT UP, COLLEGE IS COMING
GOTTA' GET MY As AND Bs,
STAY AWAY FROM Cs AND Ds

JAKE

READY OR NOT WE WILL GRADUATE
ON SOME ARBITRARY MAY DATE
CLEAN OUT OUR LOCKERS AND TURN IN OUR BOOKS
READY OR NOT WE WILL LAUNCH!

JAKE and COMPANY

RUNNING DOWN THE HALL STRAIGHT INTO ADULTHOOD,
GOTTA GROW UP, BE WHAT SOMEONE SAYS THAT WE SHOULD.
TRADE OUR TEENAGE ANGST FOR SMUG ADULT PROPRIETY,
WONDER IF WE'LL BE BETTER LEADERS OF SOCIETY.

THEY SAY WE'RE JUST KIDS,
THAT OUR FRONTAL CORTEX IS NOT FULLY FORMED.
FILLED WITH ANGST, EMOTIONS BURSTING
A POST-PUBESCENT STORM.
HOW DO OUR MINDS POSSIBLY FUNCTION?
THE WAY THEY TALK ABOUT US
WE SOUND LIKE FRANKENSTEIN!

TELL ME IT WILL ALL BE WORTH IT WHEN I'M DONE.
BECAUSE MY SENIOR YEAR IS DRAGGING SLOW.
IT'S GETTING HARDER JUST TO GO,
I NEED TO KNOW I'M GOING PLACES,
THAT THESE YEARS HAVE NOT BEEN WASTED,
TELL ME IT'S WORTH IT IN THE END.

(The bell rings. The scene ends with classes in session and MRS. DIEBOLD walking in the hall toward her office as KAYE approaches carrying a small lunch bag. They move together toward the office. A student, JENNY, is out of class retrieving something from her locker down the hall. Unnoticed by KAYE and MRS. DIEBOLD, JENNY eavesdrops on their conversation.)

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In the excerpt below Misty is having a visit with her social worker which they have chosen to do at restaurant near Misty's placement. The conversation is already in progress where Misty has indicated she's getting razzed by some girls at school and Liz has offered to intervene, but Misty declines. They go on to talk about aging out, and Liz is caught off guard when Misty goes to a dark place.

(Warning: The following section has allusions to abuse.)

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LIZ

Well, let me know if you change your mind. (beat) Have you been thinking more about next fall?

MISTY

Whatever. It's gonna happen one way or another. I don't really have much choice how things'll be.

LIZ

(with a slight lecture tone)

But you *do* have a choice. You always told me one of the things you hated about the system was that you didn't have enough freedom.

MISTY

But that was about other stuff—like where I had to *live* and how I had to *act* and where I went to school.

LIZ

That's true, but freedom goes beyond that. You can become the person you want to be, choose the friends you have and what you go after in life. That all comes from the inside.

MISTY

That's what scares me, Liz. (getting upset) No matter where I go, my past will always follow me! I'll always be the foster kid whose mom couldn't pull herself together enough to take care of her own kid.

LIZ

Misty, those were *her* choices, horrible choices, and you're not to blame for what she did and didn't do.

MISTY

Yeah, and I've heard it from a million shrinks; sometimes I've even persuaded myself it's true. But sometimes I think if I'd just been different Momma would 'a made it, that there's just somethin' wrong with me.

LIZ

(adamantly)

But there's so much that proves it's was *not* you! There's a goodness you have--I've seen it. You just have to live what's right in front of you and not worry so much.

MISTY

(Misty's anger subsides a bit.)

Right in front me. You always say that.

LIZ

Yes, and I believe it. (beat) You don't worry about who you were or who you might be. You just have to live this day.

MISTY

I wanna believe you, (beat) but then I think about my momma . . .

LIZ

(adamantly, a little frustrated with MISTY)

You've *got* to stop thinking that you and your mom are the same person!

(MISTY's temper flares again.)

MISTY

Yeah, Liz? That's easy for you to say—what was your momma like? Did she let some creep get to you?

LIZ

Misty, don't . . .

MISTY

. . . did she shoot up and pass out on the couch when *you* were 11, leave you wonderin' if she was alive, leave you to figure out if she was still breathin'? I bet your life was a lot different than mine.

LIZ

(regaining composure)

You're right. My past *is* very different than yours. But I still had to grow up, I still had to figure out who I would be . . .

MISTY

(getting angry again)

And don't you remember a damn thing about it? How hard it is? And you didn't even have my sorry life. I bet your senior year was a lot different than what I see every day in my head. You'd better remember I'm one of your cases, Liz. My life's a *lot* different from yours.

LIZ

I know, but . . .

(MISTY'S anger continues to escalate in the following conversation.)

MISTY

But what? Other girls aren't out on their own—they have someone to cover their tracks when they screw up. I don't have that!

LIZ

You have the Pattons, (beat) and Carolyn. Look, I know it's been hard. When I was growing up . . .

MISTY

(yelling)

Damn it! You keep sayin' that! Don't pretend for a minute you and me are the same. You can barely remember what it was like to be a girl growin' up, much less one that's been through my hell! My life changes (emphasizing each word, gritting teeth) *every time I breathe.*

LIZ

Just calm down! . . .

(CAROLYN enters the restaurant, backstage left, seeing the blow up.)

MISTY

(getting up)

I can't calm down—you don't know what it's like. You don't have my life and I don't have yours. You can't change me bein' what I am.

(MISTY tears away from the table.)

LIZ

Misty, wait!

(MISTY runs out of the restaurant past CAROLYN. LIZ starts after her.)

CAROLYN

(speaking from the restaurant entrance, putting up a hand)

I'll go. Just stay here.

(CAROLYN exits to follow MISTY. LIZ drops back down at the table, exasperated, where she begins singing.)

(Song: "FEELING THE WAY SHE DOES")

LIZ

I CAN'T STOP MISTY
FEELING THE WAY SHE DOES.
WHAT IF I HAD HER LIFE, SHE HAD MINE?
WOULD I HEAR WHAT I SAY?
WOULD I JUST WALK AWAY?
ISN'T SHE JUST A GIRL LIKE ME,
A GIRL WHO WANTS TO BE FREE?
OH, IF ONLY I COULD HELP HER SEE?

SHE CAN HAVE HER FREEDOM,
A LIFE OF HER OWN,
ONE THAT'S REALLY FULL AND NOT LIVED ALONE.
FREEDOM—IT'S NOT SO EASY TO FIND
WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG AND LIFE'S UNCERTAIN.
WHAT CAN I SAY TO HER FEARS?
WHAT WORDS WILL TAKE US FROM HERE?
I NEED TO REMEMBER BACK THEN.
CAN I REMEMBER WHEN . . .

. . . I WAS JUST A YOUNG GIRL?
TRYING TO FIND MY OWN WAY, WHO I WOULD BECOME.
ALL OF THE CONFUSION ALL OF THE WORRY— I REMEMBER.

LIZ

(Lights go down on LIZ as an intense piano interlude begins. MISTY is seen walking fast and running back stage left to right with a determined angry look until she enters her foster home stage right, back, slamming the door. CAROLYN has followed her and sees from a distance that she is home and turns back to the restaurant. She exits.)

(MISTY stops in the foyer and begins sobbing. REGINA comes to console her, but MISTY pulls away and runs up to her room.)

(Lights come up on LIZ in the restaurant as she finishes the song.)

THERE'S NO MOTHER, THERE'S NO FATHER,
SHE IS ALL ALONE, JUST A GIRL ON HER OWN,
TRYING TO FIGURE OUT LIFE
I CAN'T BE HER, ONLY SEE HER
THROUGH THIS SCARY TIME, REMEMBER IT'S NOT MINE.

CAN'T LIVE HER LIFE FOR HER; JUST GOT TO GIVE HER TIME,
TIME TO FIND THE NEXT STEP, THE NEXT CHOICE.

SHE'S GOT THE STRENGTH INSIDE,
WILL IT COME OUT OR HIDE?
GOT TO LEAVE IT UP TO HER, SHE'S GOT TO FIND HER WAY.
CHOOSE THE PERSON SHE WILL BE SOMEDAY.

SHE CAN HAVE HER FREEDOM, A LIFE OF HER OWN,
ONE THAT'S REALLY FULL AND NOT LIVED ALONE.
FREEDOM—IT LIVES WAY DEEP DOWN INSIDE
WITH WHO YOU ARE, WHO YOU ARE MEANT TO BE—
WHO YOU CAN BECOME.
OH, FREEDOM!

(Lights go down on the restaurant. LIZ exits. Lights go up on
MISTY'S room front stage right with REGINA at the door.
She knocks.)

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Since the previous excerpt, Misty has processed her argument with Liz with her foster mother, Regina. After that conversation, Misty sings aching for her mother's love, reflecting on the day she was removed from her mother's home and how angry her mother was that day. Later Jake comes upon her at school, deciding to be a prankster, not knowing her state of mind from her recent reflections.

(Warning: The following section has allusions to abuse.)

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Act I
Scene 6

Setting: The school hallway with lockers.
At rise: Misty is in a stare by the lockers, like she is somewhere else. Jake comes around the corner, sees her, grins, and creeps up on her.)

JAKE

(JAKE gets right behind MISTY and grabs her shoulders from behind, yelling in a low, gruff voice.)

Gotcha!

(MISTY screams and goes into a panic, hysterically turning and pushing blindly at JAKE as though fighting someone she can't see. She backs up against the lockers trying to get her breath as Jake reaches out trying to calm her.)

JAKE

(MISTY is still flailing as JAKE tries again to reach out to her.)

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare you so much!

(MISTY is still reacting, but less.)

Misty! Misty! It's just me! Misty, (loudly, almost yelling) it's Jake!

(MISTY leans back against the lockers weeping, letting out heavy breaths, wiping her eyes. JAKE watches, incredulous to her reaction.)

JAKE
(still mortified)

Are you okay? I was just playing around. I'm *so* sorry.

MISTY
You don't know me like you think you do.

JAKE
(confused)

Wait. (beat) I . . . I don't get it. Does that have something to do with what just happened?

MISTY

My life's not like yours, Jake. It's a whole different world—a complicated world.

JAKE

I'm *so* confused. What are you talkin' about, Misty?

MISTY

(looking up, rubbing her eyes with both hands)

Sometimes I think I really might be gettin' past it, that I could have a different life, and then it hits hard.

JAKE

Wait. (beat) Does this have something to do with the Patton's?

MISTY

Regina's not my real mom. She's my foster mom.

JAKE

I know. That's why I asked.

MISTY

(puzzled)

How'd you know?

JAKE

Cause the Patton's have had foster kids at this school ever since I moved here. Did something happen to your mom?

MISTY

When I was a kid . . .

(long pause)

JAKE

Will you tell me?

MISTY

(almost like it's a bad thing)

Oh, she's still alive . . .

JAKE

Then why are you at the Patton's?

MISTY

She and her boyfriend were drug users, all messed up on meth. When I was little she let bad things happen.

(Jake is stunned and silent.)

JAKE

Is she in jail?

MISTY

Not as far as I know. I went into the system the day the police arrested Momma and her boyfriend. They were in handcuffs, screamin' that it was all my fault they got caught, sayin' I'd spend the rest of my life in foster care. Mom got out of jail and tried gettin' clean, but she gave up. Then she stopped comin' to see me. Her boyfriend went to jail because of what he'd done t . . .

(MISTY stops her sentence abruptly with a fleeting glance into the distance. The silence causes JAKE to look up at her. Misty glances at JAKE who has a look on his face that subtly implies he understands, and that he won't ask.)

. . . because of things he did. Last I knew she moved out of state with some other guy.

(JAKE stares at MISTY. Some silence passes.)

MISTY

What? More than you bargained for, huh?

JAKE

Uh, no, I just haven't known anyone before with so much . . . It just caught me off guard.

MISTY

Yeah, it's a lot. Believe me—I know.

(There is a bit of silence. MISTY lets out a heavy sigh and starts to walk away.)

JAKE

(quickly calling after her)

Misty, you know I'm your friend.

MISTY

(turning)

Look, I know we're pals, Jake, and we hang out some, but . . .

JAKE
(insistent)

. . . I can be more.

MISTY

Jake, I've not always been the kind of person someone wants to be friends with, especially someone like you. Look—I'll just be straight—I've been in lots of trouble before, and because of that accused of other things, too, though last time I really was just in Walmart at the wrong place at the wrong time with another foster kid.

(Through the coming dialog JAKE is surprised and a bit confused at first, then serious, then he returns to his playful self.)

JAKE
(not getting it)

You mean—

MISTY

(a tiny bit annoyed he's not getting what she means)

Locked up. Juvy hall, the whole bit, get it?

JAKE
(still with some surprise)

Okay. Okay. (beat) But you don't seem like that now.

MISTY
(flippant)

Like what, Jake?

JAKE

Well, like a gangster or something.

MISTY

A gangster? (chuckles) Let's just say I think I'm different now.

JAKE

(bumbling through quick speech) Well, you seem different. I mean, not that I knew you before, I mean, it's not like you hid things from me

(MISTY'S eyes shoot him a look of dismay at this suggestion, but she lets JAKE stumble on.)

cause you never told me, and I didn't ask, not that I would ask anyone about, well. Arg! I mean, you just seem normal to me.

MISTY

(sarcastic chuckle)

Really, Jake? Normal? You sure you're not just sayin' that cause you feel sorry for me now that you know about my mom? Usually when somebody like you comes along, it's because they pity me or they're rebellin' against somethin'. All that gets me is trouble.

JAKE

Well, I like to have fun and shake things up a bit, but I'm not much of a rebel. Look, Misty. Maybe I did feel sorry for you at first 'cause I figured there was something up with your parents and I know what it's like to be without one. I don't talk about this much, but my dad died when I was young.

MISTY

(puzzled)

What?

JAKE

He died in a car wreck when I was four. I remember just enough to feel what it was like to lose him, and that makes me feel alone sometimes. Anyway, you were just there that day in the office, and I was my normal self and you laughed and I didn't think anything more about you being a foster kid. Look, what I'm trying to tell you is that I can be your friend, for real.

MISTY

Your mama might not like that. Most parents don't like me hanging out with their kids.

JAKE

My mom? Okaaay—whatever, but my mom usually trusts me. She knows she raised me to do the right thing.

(MISTY smirks.)

MISTY

Oh, so now I'm your project, huh, some type of volunteer work to put on your college application?

JAKE

Geez! You make things so complicated. No! Nothing like that. You're looking for some complex reason for how I'm acting, (getting a touch goofy again) and I'm just doing what my heart says to do.

MISTY

(toying with him)

Oh, your heart, now. Jake Kramer, ownin' up to his feelings. So you're going to be my protector, are you now?

JAKE

(turning confident)

Yes! (looking around for a prop) Yeah! That's right. I'll be your knight in shining armor!

(JAKE swings his backpack around with one arm like a shield, and grabs a short broom with the other from a nearby janitor's cart, wielding it like a sword, being melodramatic and joking around at various places in the song.)

(Song: "KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR")

JAKE

GONNA DO THE RIGHT THING,

MISTY

Oh, here he goes now.

JAKE

CAUSE I HEARD MY HEART SPEAK UP.

MISTY

(mockingly)

Your heart! Ha!

JAKE

GONNA DO THE RIGHT THING, OH, YES I WILL.

MISTY

(starting to laugh)

What's the right thing, Jake? What's it gonna be?

JAKE

DO THE RIGHT THING.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT WILL BE,
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WILL DO,
ALL I KNOW IS I CAN BE A FRIEND TO YOU.
CAN YOU LET DOWN YOUR GUARD?
I KNOW THAT LIFE IS HARD.
GIVE ME A SMILE . . .

MISTY
(defiantly)

THAT'S BULLSHIT!
IS THAT THE BEST THAT YOU CAN DO?
LOOK, I'M TRYIN' HARD TO LET GO
OF THIS UGLY PAST THAT I KNOW.

JAKE
I DON'T DENY IT'S A HARD ROAD.

MISTY

So what?

NOW YOU'RE GONNA BE MY STRONG PROTECTOR NOW?
MY KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR
ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THAT VOW?

JAKE
I AM!

(JAKE picks up the "sword" and "shield" again and mimics fighting the dragon, stepping protectively in front of MISTY. She is amused by him and plays along.)

GIVE ME MY SWORD AND SHIELD,
ON TO THE BATTLEFIELD!
WE'LL LAY SIEGE WHERE
THAT DRAGON IS HIDING.
FIGHT THOSE MONSTER WOES!
DODGE THOSE FIERY BLOWS!

(JAKE does a 180-degree hop, then twirls the broom like a baton, planting it as he gestures to MISTY.)

WHAT'D YA SAY, MY LADY,

SHOULD WE TRY IT?

MISTY

I WISH IT WAS MAKE BELIEVE,
SOME STORY THAT I COULD DREAM UP,
SOME OTHER LIFE TO BE LIVING.

JAKE

SO YOU GO WITH WHAT YOU GOT.
MAYBE YOU CAN CHANGE THE PLOT GOING FORWARD—
WRITE A NEW LINE,
SET A NEW STAGE,
WRITE A STORY WORTH LIVING!

(Music continues in background.)

MISTY

I think you're crazy. I don't think I have any control about what's gonna happen.

JAKE

(frustrated)

This is *just* what I mean!

MISTY

What?

JAKE

About letting down your guard. You are *so* convinced that life will go wrong. (beat)
And I get it, you have good reason to think that, but nothin' will change until you let
yourself think, for just a second, that life can be different.

MISTY

(heavy sigh)

Jake, it's just *so* hard.

(JAKE lowers his brow in a silent scold. MISTY does an eye
roll, shaking her head.)

Okay, okay. (beat) Maybe you're right.

JAKE

(in his fun-loving way)

Of course, I'm right!

(At this point, JAKE and MISTY are standing five feet apart.
JAKE resumes the song at slower tempo.)

JAKE

JUST TAKE ONE STEP

(Music pauses. JAKE looks at MISTY, hands on his hips,
until she, rolling her eyes, finally takes a step toward him.)

(nods head directing her to take another step)

THEN TWO,

(MISTY takes another step.)

I'M HERE BESIDE YOU
I'LL DO WHAT I CAN
TO KEEP YOUR HEAD HIGH, YOUR HEART FREE.
I'M JUST A GUY WHO CARES,
SIMPLE YET SOMEWHAT AWARE,
I'LL BE AROUND

(JAKE extends his hand to MISTY which she takes hesitantly
for a moment.)

WHEN YOU NEED SOMEBODY.

MISTY
(heavy sigh)

MAYBE (closing her eyes) . . .
MAYBE I CAN,
JUST TAKE THAT ONE STEP.

(JAKE walks over to her, starting to resume normal tempo,
and puts his hand on her shoulder.)

JAKE

IT WON'T BE A PIECE OF CAKE BUT I KNOW YOU'LL BE FINE.

(MISTY gives a half-hearted laugh, shaking her head, almost
rolling her eyes. Tempo speeds up.)

MISTY
SO YOU'LL PICK ME UP IF I FALL DOWN
IN A SOBBING HEAP, A FOOL UPON THE GROUND?

(Motioning to where she had her meltdown at the lockers.)

CAN YOU HANDLE THAT?

JAKE
(music back to full tempo)

I CAN!

SO, WE'LL GO WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT!
THIS IS THE TIME TO CHANGE THE PLOT
GOING FORWARD. LET'S GO!
WRITE A NEW LINE,

MISTY
Okay, okay I get it! Just please stop singing.

JAKE
SET A NEW STAGE.

Sing it with me now!

WRITE A STORY WORTH LIVING.

MISTY
(both laughing and annoyed)
Will you stop already!

JAKE
(dancing to his own rhythm, singing in a loud falsetto as
though he's imitating some famous singer)

WE'RE (beat) GONNA (beat) WRITE . . . A NEW LINE

MISTY
(shaking her head, rolling eyes, a bit annoyed)
Oh, God! You're so bad..

JAKE

(keeping a somewhat serious look; turns to exit stage left)

OH, YES, . . .

(beckons MISTY to follow)

MISTY

(She lets out a heavy sigh but starts to follow.)

You are wearin' me out.

JAKE

(singing into a fake mic with cheesy gusto)

WE WILL.
WRITE A NEW LINE.

MISTY

Just stop!

JAKE

SET A NEW STAGE!

MISTY

(resigned and following him off stage)

I know. I know. Write a story . . .

JAKE

WRITE A STORY WITH LIVING.

(MISTY shakes her head, rolls her eyes, but can't stop a smile and starts to follow him off stage. JAKE continues to riff on the last line of music until it fades once they are off stage.)

COME ON, COME ON WE'RE GONNA WRITE A STORY WORTH
LIVING . . .

CURTAIN

After the activity in the excerpt above, Jake has a post-Thanksgiving conversation with his mother, Kaye, where she questions him about Misty. (In a scene not in the excerpts above but earlier in the musical, Kaye has become aware that Misty has “a bit of past,” and though she wants Jake to be kind, she’s worried about his relationship with Misty.) In the holiday shopping scene following Jake’s conversation with his mother, Misty is framed for shoplifting by one of the girls who has been giving her trouble at school. She is arrested as ACT I ends.

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Act I
Scene 7

Setting: The Kramer's living room just after Thanksgiving, set in front of the curtain.

At rise: Jake and his mother are putting up their Christmas tree. Jake is on a ladder by the tree striving to untangle a string of lights. His mother is out of view in the kitchen at first. A strand of lights plugged in is laid across the sofa.

KAYE

(She calls from the kitchen off stage. They talk loudly back and forth. Jake continues to light the tree as he converses.)

Jake, you hungry?

JAKE

Shouldn't be after Grandma's turkey yesterday.

KAYE

Is that a "no"?

JAKE

I said "shouldn't be." Of course, I'm hungry!

KAYE

Jake, I've heard you talk about a new girl lately.

JAKE

Who?

(KAYE enters the living room, leaning in the doorway.)

KAYE

She's one of the Patton's foster kids?

JAKE

Oh, yeah, Misty Hardwell. She *is* my friend. (beat) She's had a tough life.

KAYE

How do *you* know?

JAKE

(Continues untangling lights and wrapping the tree as he speaks.)

I've been meaning to tell you about it. It's kinda strange what happened. Just before Thanksgiving I saw her in the hall, staring into space. I sneaked up behind her just goofing off and grabbed her. She *freaked* and started crying and hyperventilating like I was an attacker or something.

KAYE

What'd you mean?

JAKE

(Jake continues intently stringing the lights without looking at KAYE as he rattles on matter-of-factly about MISTY's background. KAYE's face shows growing concern.)

I mean she totally freaked out! Once she calmed down she started telling me stuff, like how her mom was addicted to meth, and after she went into foster care, her mom moved out of state with some guy, and Misty doesn't even know where she is now. And from what I gathered one of her mom's previous boyfriends did some really bad stuff to her. I didn't ask about that, but I think he ended up in jail for it. Anyway, I ended up telling her about not having a dad, and, I don't know, we talked, and it just kind of changed things.

KAYE

Changed things?

JAKE

(still stringing lights)

I just realized how much she needs a friend, and I'm gonna try to be there for her. Why?

KAYE

Oh, I've just heard you mention her a few times. Mrs. Diebold had said something about her background, and . . .

(When Mrs. Diebold is mentioned JAKE pauses putting on the lights, looking up to think as he figures out KAYE's questions belie a deeper concern.)

JAKE

Oh, wait a minute! . . . Sargeant Diebold said something about an incident at Walmart, didn't she? You're doing the "worried mom" thing. Really, Mom.

(playfully smirking, frowning at her)

Misty was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. She told me about it.

KAYE

Well, Mrs. Kohler said something, too.

JAKE

Wait . . . what? When did you see Mrs. Kohler?

KAYE

She was at the school for a debate workshop when I brought your lunch that day . . .

JAKE

(speaking quickly and matter-of-factly with a hint of sarcasm)

. . . and she said something too because Misty had been at her school before transferring to Lawrence. Geez, Mom, give Misty a break!

KAYE

It's just odd. I mean, she's a *girl*.

JAKE

(goes back to working on the lights)

So what? Look, Mom, it's not like she hustled me or something. We just hit it off the day she started. I saw Mr. Patton, so I knew she was a foster kid and probably didn't have any friends. I'm not doing anything except what you've taught me to do—to be a friend, go the extra mile when someone needs some help. Remember all that, Mom?

KAYE

Oh, I know, Jake.

JAKE

Then trust me, will ya? Quit worrying—and stay away from Sargeant Diebold's gossip. Now hand me that other strand of lights.

(Lights go down on the living room scene. A broadening instrumental introduction plays as the curtain rises and reveals a frozen downtown holiday street tableau. It's a little cheesy-looking with everyone's appropriate expression held in place. All movement quickly starts with the first word of the song. Then the tableau bustles with shoppers, business people, and carolers dressed in Dickens-era costumes. There are a few homeless people with signs asking for donations who at times stop to sing as they move about. There are various solos including ones by MISTY and KAYE and an ensemble of carolers that, although not the narrators, have a role like one. The movement of shoppers and others continues as solos or ensembles sing. To help with the simulation of movement, some cast exit and return as the street scenes unfold. At a point MISTY enters and after singing her solo, makes her way to a holiday store where JENNY slips earrings into MISTY's pocket and then tells the shop keeper she saw MISTY steal something. The shop scene is acted out without dialog according to the sequence below.)

(Song: "HOLIDAYS!")

COMPANY

HOLIDAYS!
HOLIDAYS!
THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING!
THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING!

HOW WILL I EVER GET MY SHOPPING DONE?
SO MUCH TO DO, ALREADY ON THE RUN. GIFTS TO BUY, PARTIES
TO PLAN!
FAMILY'S COMING INTO TOWN, GOT TO GET READY!

(MISTY enters stage left, notices the excited children and starts to window shop. She watches wistfully as a family goes by with a tree.)

CHILD #1

(Front and center, excited, to audience)

WE'RE GONNA HAVE ANOTHER SNOW-WHITE CHRISTMAS!

CHILD #2

(rushing up to CHILD #1)

WITH LOTS OF PRESENTS AND OUR STOCKINGS FULL!

ELDERLY SHOPPER

(wistful and sad)

NO ONE'S COMING HERE TO SHARE IT.
I DON'T THINK THAT I CAN BEAR IT.

CAROLERS

(to the audience)

NOT EVERYONE HAS A CELEBRATION;
MEMORIES CAN BE HARD.

MISTY

(pulling way, sad, reflecting to the audience)

I MISS MY MOMMA MOST AT THE HOLIDAYS,
WHEN I SEE OTHER FAMILIES BUY THEIR TREE.
IT'S SOMETHING SHE AND I DID EVERY CHRISTMAS TIME.
NOW THERE'S NO ONE LEFT BUT ME.

COMPANY

HOLIDAYS!
HOLIDAYS!
THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING!
THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING!

TIME TO GO OUT AND GET A CHRISTMAS TREE,
LIGHT A ROARING FIRE, GATHER FAMILY.
POP SOME CORN, CRACK SOME NUTS,
DECK ALL THE HALLS WITH GREEN AND LIGHT!
CHRISTMAS IS COMING!

CHILD #2

(front and center)

I'M SURE WE'RE GONNA HAVE A SNOW-WHITE CHRISTMAS!

CHILD #1

(playfully to CHILD #2)

AND DRINK HOT CHOCOLATE EVERY DAY FOR A MONTH!

DESTITUTE MOTHER

THEY CUT MY HEAT OFF NOW MY KIDS ARE FREEZING. ONE'S
GOT A FEVER AND THE OTHER ONE'S WHEEZING!

CAROLERS

NOT EVERYONE HAS A CELEBRATION;
SOMETIMES LIFE IS HARD.

KAYE

(pulling away from the crowd, reflecting to audience)

I LOST MY HUSBAND JUST BEFORE THE HOLIDAY.
AN OFFICER CAME TO THE DOOR.
SHE SAID, "I'M SORRY M'AM THERE'S BEEN AN ACCIDENT
WHILE MY SON PLAYED WITH LEGOS ON THE FLOOR

I FORCED MYSELF TO LIVE, TO GO ON BREATHING,
I HAD A SON TO RAISE THOUGH I WAS GRIEVING!

(KAYE turns and walks away, reflecting as a young
couple walks by.)

MALE CAROLERS

(watching KAYE as she returns to window shopping)

SHE RAISED HIM UP AS BEST SHE COULD TO BE A PROPER GENT.
NOW SHE PRAYS EVERY DAY HER EFFORTS WERE WELL SPENT!

CAROLERS

(MISTY enters a holiday shop, browsing. JENNY and
MARLA are in the shop as is MACY. MARLA nods
to JENNY, pointing out MISTY. JENNY shows a
scheming grin as MACY watches. As the
CAROLERS sing, JENNY pulls some earrings from
the shelf, and sneaks them into MISTY'S pocket
without her knowing. MARLA sniggers. MACY
observes and seems troubled by what they are doing
but does nothing.)

CHRISTMAS IS COMING THE GOOSE IS GETTING FAT,
PLEASE PUT A PENNY IN THE OLD MAN'S HAT.
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A PENNY THEN A HALF-PENNY WILL DO.
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A HALF-PENNY THEN GOD BLESS YOU.

DESTITUTE MOTHER

PLEASE SHARE A LITTLE, JUST FOR THIS CHRISTMAS.
I'VE GOT TWO CHILDREN, THERE'S NOTHING TO EAT.

KAYE

(Takes a few bills from her purse and gives to the HOMELESS MAN.)

LIFE CAN CHANGE QUICKLY, SO JUST GIVE A LITTLE.

HOMELESS MAN

I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD LIVE ON THE STREET!

CAROLERS AND COMPANY

(JENNY goes to the shop keeper, indicating that MISTY has stolen something. He confronts MISTY and she tries to convince him it was not her.)

CHRISTMAS IS COMING THE GOOSE IS GETTING FAT,
PLEASE PUT A PENNY IN THE OLD MAN'S HAT.

FULL CAST

IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A PENNY THEN A HALF-PENNY WILL DO. IF
YOU HAVEN'T GOT A HALF-PENNY THEN GOD BLESS YOU.

(As the song transitions to the final verse, MARLA and JENNY exit the store laughing, and MACY leaves with them but looks ashamed. A policeman enters the shop as they exit and MISTY'S actions show her unsuccessfully pleading her case. MISTY is ushered out then off-stage by the policeman as the COMPANY sings "here comes the snowfall" and MACY watches from a distance.)

GATHER ROUND A TABLE FOR A FAMILY FEAST,
LOTS OF SAVORY BLESSINGS AND A ROASTED BEAST.
WIDE-EYED KIDS, SENTIMENTAL MOMS,
PROUD DADDIES GIVING OUT LOTS OF GIFTS,
HERE COMES THE SNOWFALL!

I KNOW WE'LL HAVE ANOTHER SNOW-WHITE CHRISTMAS
WITH JOYS AND WISHES FOR THE COMING YEAR.
THE HOLIDAYS ARE NEARLY NOW UPON US.
THE HOLIDAYS ARE COMING!
THE HOLIDAYS ARE HERE!

CURTAIN
END OF ACT I

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This is the end of the excerpts from ACT I. In ACT II there is a court hearing, and by that time Jake has gone from being a pal to Misty to more of an advocate. His and his mother's perspectives collide as Jake takes increasingly defiant stands to protect Misty. ("HOW DID KINDNESS BECOME A CAUSE?" the chorus sings.) Misty witnesses this play out vehemently in a public setting and thinks her deep friendship with Jake will be shattered and that her past will always haunt her. Her perspective changes in a conversation with unexpected wisdom from a character who helps her see that her social worker, her CASA, and Jake are all willing to walk with her as she seeks freedom.

For information on obtaining the full book for reading, please contact Jody Johnson use the Contact tab at the top of the website.

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