

THE INNER CIRCLE: CHANGING TIMES

CHARACTERS

SARAH

MARK

KAT

DANNY

All four are in their late teens.

TIME

Present

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The action of the play occurs primarily as memory. The staging should allow the characters to move back and forth in time quickly and fluidly. To support the rapid shifts in location and time, the set can be as simple as blocks and handprops. Frequent blackouts and separate sets are unnecessary and may work against the dynamics of the action. If more set is desired, a unit set can be divided between the two major locations: the water tower and the school. The other locations can be achieved in a number of ways such as: lighting to isolate stage areas, props such as school books, a beanbag chair for Kat's bedroom scene, and sound cues such as the telephone answering machine, school bell, etc.

Scene One

(The stage is dark. Sound of a phone answering machine. Beep.)

SARAH'S VOICE. Kat, it's Sarah. Can you and Danny come to the water tower tonight?
(Beep.) Mark, it's Sarah. We're going to meet at the water tower tonight at eight o'clock. I have a surprise. I hope you can come. I mean you have to. Okay. See you.
(Beep.)

DANNY'S VOICE. Hi Sarah, this is Danny. Kat says to tell you we'll be there. Do you think they might have fixed the fence? I'll bring the wire cutters.

(Top of a water tower. Danny Sarah, Mark and Kat climb the circular staircase that wraps around the tower to the roof)

SARAH. Come on you guys, all the way up.

MARK. I'm surprised they haven't torn it down.

SARAH. Our stuff is still in the landing. I don't think anybody comes here.

KAT. I can't see the edge.

DANNY. If you take one more step, you'll find it. (Gives her a fake shove.)

KAT. Danny, don't do that

SARAH. (*Sits.*) Okay, here. It's the best view.

MARK. Remember in sixth grade, we cut class and sat up here all day?

KAT. And got caught because of our sunburns. You guys were so red.

SARAH. Ooh, I forgot about that sunburn.

KAT. If there was a moon we could get a moon-tan.

MARK. There's no such thing.

SARAH. Yes there is. There's a vibration in moon rays and it affects people. (*Mark howls like a wolf*)

DANNY. (*To audience.*) The water tower was this, you know, water tower. A couple of stories high, completely rusted, surrounded by a barbed wire fence. When we were younger, we'd go there all the time. It was on a little hill, and from the top, you could see the whole city. We cut through the fence and rigged it so you couldn't tell. There was a staircase that curved up the side. Halfway up was this little landing, a room really. We put a cot in there, some shelves. Mark made up this super hero — (*To Mark.*) Hey Mark, remember Water Tower Man?

MARK. Water Tower Man! Faster than a flushing toilet!

DANNY. More powerful than a backed up sewer!

SARAH. The world is safe because the man of slime—

DANNY. Flows by night-

MARK AND KAT. To dissolve all crimes!

KAT. It's kind of gross really. A super hero who travels through your sewer pipes.

SARAH. I love Water Tower Man.

DANNY. Sarah, you love everybody.

KAT. Look at all the stars. (*They all look up, they see a shooting star.*)

SARAH. Oh, make a wish.

MARK. That doesn't work.

KAT. Maybe it does.

DANNY. When I was seven I wished on a falling star for a nintendo for my birthday and I got it.

MARK *(Sarcastic.)* It's a miracle.

SARAH. I had a miracle once. In third grade. We had those old kinds of school busses, and my seat had this big "x" of green tape over a rip and I used to pick at it all the time. One day we were coming home and we were by this empty lot and there was nobody around and the bus driver pulled the bus over by the side of the lot. She was this old lady. She made us get off the bus and walk out onto the dirt. She put us in a big circle and told us to hold hands, which was weird. Then she told us to close our eyes. And we did. I mean everybody just did it like as if we did it everyday. Then she said, "You are the children of God. Don't ever forget that." And we got back on the bus and went home.

MARK. That's not a miracle. That's a bus driver who's going to get arrested.

SARAH. No, the weird part was when I got back on the bus, the tape was gone from my seat and there was no more rip.

MARK. Are you from the moon, or what?

SARAH. I don't care if you don't believe me because I know it happened. I always sat in the third seat back, on the driver's side.

DANNY. I believe it. Only in Sarah's life would there be a god who heals school busses.

KAT. Sarah, what's the big surprise you brought us up here for. I'm getting cold.

SARAH. Oh, ya. You guys don't remember but it's five years ago today that we first came to the water tower. And it's coming here that made us such good friends, and I want us to celebrate being friends and so I brought us Happy Meals. *(She takes out Happy Meals from her backpack.)*

MARK. *(To audience.)* All this was classic Sarah. She could do the corniest thing, but she was so sincere, you had to go along. And you wanted to. It felt good being around her. She wasn't a leader type person, but it was her who sort of kept us together.

KAT. Happy Meals? Like in cold McDonalds french fries?

SARAH. No, I made them myself.

MARK. Custom Happy Meals. Cool. What about the toys?

DANNY. *(To audience.)* Mark liked Sarah a lot. Although he would never tell her, or ask her out. And it was obvious she liked him. But he was just about the shyest man who ever lived.

SARAH. Here. This one's yours. And this is Danny's. Kat, I made yours vegetarian. *(Mark and Danny open their Happy Meal boxes. The boxes are from MacDonaldis but Sarah has tailored the picnic. Inside are sandwiches, chips etc. and a toy.)*

KAT. *(To audience.)* I probably wouldn't have made friends with Sarah because she was different from most of my friends. Kind of naive. But after I got to know her I basically had to love her, in spite of myself. She was like that.

MARK. *(Taking a tidy out of his Happy Meal box.)* It's Water Tower Man! Where did you get this?

DANNY *(He has one too.)* It looks just like we drew him. Did you make these?

SARAH. Ya. It's that plastic clay you bake in the oven.

KAT. Sarah, these are darling. I love the little goggles *(Danny and Kat more off to the side together.)*

MARK. They were more fun before they got together.

SARAH. At least they don't have to worry about getting a date.

MARK. What's to worry? If you want to go out, just ask somebody!

SARAH. What if he said "no"?

MARK. Who would say no to you?

SARAH. Are you kidding? Last night my dog wouldn't go for a walk with me.

MARK. You know, you're funny.

SARAH. No I'm not. It's just that I talk before I think.

DANNY. Hey, you guys, we should get going.

MARK. If I was your dog, I'd go for a walk with you.

SARAH. Is that a compliment? *(They look at each other, attracted, but awkward.)*

MARK. Well, I guess we should go. *(They rejoin Danny and Kat.)*

SARAH. O.K. Here's the thing. I know when we graduate next year we'll probably all go our different directions. Unless maybe you guys *(To Kat and Danny.)* get married. But I think we should try to come back here every year on this night, March third, and see each other. I mean if we can.

MARK. I'm in favor.

DANNY. Sure.

KAT. What if we get in some major fight and end up hating each other?

MARK. Nothing could be that bad.

KAT. You can't predict the future.

SARAH. I'm only saying we'll try.

MARK. *(To audience.)* Kat was right of course. Nobody could've predicted what was coming.

Scene Two

(Kat's house. A month later. Music plays.)

KAT. My parents won't be home 'til ten. Did you call Mark?

SARAH. I forgot

KAT. You want a soda?

SARAH. No thanks.

KAT. Chips?

SARAH. No.

KAT. Fruit?... Cheese?... Gummi Ninja?

SARAH. Gummi what?

KAT. *(She throws her a Gummi Ninja.)* Ninja. My little brothers'. *(Sarah catches it, stretches it until it breaks, doesn't eat it.)* Today was your third missed practice in two weeks. Coach says you can't run on Friday.

SARAH. Ya.

KAT. So what happened?

SARAH. I had to go somewhere.

KAT. The relay's going to suck if he replaces you.

SARAH. *(Turning off music.)* I hate this CD.

KAT. I got us lottery tickets. Danny says it's stupid, but somebody has to win. One, two -

SARAH. Ya.

KAT. Three. Nothing. I hate these things.

SARAH. When's he coming over?

KAT. The only people who ever win are janitors and WalMart employees.

SARAH. 'Cuz I might just take off.

KAT. Three, oh my god, it's a hundred bucks. I won a hundred bucks. I knew it, I had a feeling.

SARAH. Really?

KAT. Look. It's a hundred: this one, this one, and this one. I've never seen three hundreds match before. I wasn't sure they really let you win. This one was really yours, you know. I scratched it off, but really it's yours. Maybe you're on a lucky streak. Maybe we should buy a hundred more tickets.

SARAH. I wouldn't say I'm on a lucky streak.

KAT. Okay. I'll get the cash and we'll split it, fifty-fifty. I mean, don't you think that's fair? I did buy the ticket.

SARAH. Kat, I have to tell you something.

KAT. Okay. Why don't we go shopping? Maybe get shoes.

SARAH. Kat, really. I have to tell you something. Something kind of important.

KAT. Mark finally asked you out.

SARAH. No, this is not about Mark. I missed practice two weeks ago because I had to get a test.

KAT. What kind of test?

SARAH. It's called the HIV antibody test. I got the results back yesterday. I tested positive.

KAT. HIV? Are you saying you have AIDS?

SARAH. No, would you listen. I'm not sick. I'm what they call HIV positive.

KAT. Oh, Sarah —

SARAH. It means I have the virus. It means I can't get rid of the virus. It means I — It means I'm... Oh man this is weird.

KAT. Sarah, I'm so sorry. This is unbelievable. Are you sure? Are they sure? I mean they could make a mistake, right?

SARAH. I got tested twice, to be sure. It's right.

KAT. How did you get it? Who did you get it from?

SARAH. I just got it, okay?

KAT. Ya, but how? It's not something you just get, like a cold or the flu. You have to have sex or shoot up drugs, both of which you haven't done, have you?

SARAH. Is it all that important? I have it. I'm HIV positive. Man, I was hoping for more than just sick curiosity from you. I'm talking about my life and you want to know who I slept with, or if I'm a junkie. That's it, isn't it Kat: am I a Slut or a junkie? Well screw you. Do me a favor and don't say anything to anybody, if you can. (Sarah e

KAT. I It's just that I was surprised. I mean it was a shock. And if she had it, she got it somewhere. It was easier to focus on the whole thing about where she got it than on the part about her having it. Standing there with AIDS or HIV, however you say it. We had talked about sex, and we both agreed, made a pact even, that we wouldn't do it. We were like moral support to each other. She was the one who convinced me to talk to Danny about it before we were in the actual situation. It was too unbelievable. She didn't come to school for a week. I finally found her at the water tower.

Scene Three

(The water tower landing. Sarah has been camping out. She sits on the cot reading from a stack of medical journals and pamphlets.)

KAT. *(Enters.)* Well, here you are.

SARAH. Kat.

KAT. Can I come in? (*Sarah shrugs*) Your mom told me you were at some two week long track meet.

SARAH. What did you tell her?

KAT. That I wish I had gotten to go. It's amazing she bought that story.

SARAH. She has no reason to doubt me. I'm a good girl, remember?

KAT. (*Holds up a pile of empty wrappers.*) Are you getting sick of protein bars?

SARAH. I go down to the 7-11 at night and get burritos and stuff. I'm not that hungry.

KAT. It's true isn't it?

SARAH. (*Nods.*) I don't know what to do. I don't want to tell my parents yet. I've been reading about it, trying to see just how bad it's going to be.

KAT. Oh Sarah. (*She goes and hugs her.*) Anything you want me to do, I'll do it.

SARAH. I sort of... Can I tell you what happened? I mean I haven't talked to anybody about it.

KAT. Of course.

SARAH. It was this guy I met last summer while you were at your aunt's. I would have told you but it was over by the time you got back. By then I wasn't "in love" anymore, just embarrassed.

KAT. Where did you meet him?

SARAH. At a gas station of all places. He was cute, older. You know, out of school, had a job, his own apartment. He was an excellent dancer.

KAT. You went dancing?

SARAH. Ya... He gave me a lot of attention. I thought he liked me, and waiting for Mark was getting pretty old. Anyway, we dated a while, and ... I slept with him. Once. Then I got scared and wanted to slow the whole thing down. He slowed it down all right. Never called me again.

KAT. What a dog.

SARAH. Well, he did call one more time. To tell me I better get tested for HIV.

KAT. I can't believe it. One time

SARAH. I know, I'm like the sad faced girl in those stupid pamphlets in sex ed. "But I only did it once." If it wasn't such a nightmare it would almost be humorous.

KAT. How long are you going to stay here?

SARAH. I don't know, I just need some time to let it sink in. They have a lot of new drugs and stuff so I might not get sick for years. Except the drugs make you sick. So you get these other drugs to help you handle the first drugs... I don't know.

KAT. That sounds bad.

SARAH. I guess. But I'm reading this stuff about t-cell count and viral load, and I'm thinking, this isn't me. This isn't my life. But as soon as I tell my parents and I go to the doctor, then it's going to be.

KAT. Won't the drugs sort of get rid of it?

SARAH. No, I don't think so. I mean I haven't read all of this yet but it seems like you're going to get sick, the drugs just make it happen slower. I don't know.

KAT. Well, you have my support And your parents will be —

SARAH. My mom's going to freak, my dad... he can't take anything that involves me having a body. He still turns red when I mention my period. This is going to trip them out. *(Pause.)* You know I thought about our agreement, Kat. About not sleeping with anyone. You're lucky you and Danny've talked about it and he knows you don't want to.

KAT. Then why did you do it?

SARAH. It's a whole different thing when you're actually there and about to do it and this great guy is saying, "trust me," and "I love you," and you're thinking, "Isn't he going to use a condom?" I knew I was going against what we said, I knew it was risky. It's not like I forgot. I kept thinking, I'll say it now. I could hear it in my head, "I think we should use a condom." Okay, I'm going to say it. And I didn't. He even had some next to the bed. I just didn't say it. I just didn't say it. That one day, forget day, that one moment, and I wrecked the entire rest of my life. I wonder why I can't cry. *(Kat is crying.)*

Scene Four

(The school hall A week later.)

MARK. Kat, wait up.

KAT. Hey Mark, what's up?

MARK. I've got to talk to you.

KAT. I have to get to class. If Mrs. Carter gives me another tardy I can't compete this weekend.

MARK. Kat, where is she?

KAT. Carter? Room 209.

MARK. No, Sarah.

KAT. Sarah? I think she has history this period.

MARK. Come on Kat. She's been gone over a week. Her morn thinks she's at some track camp. Where is she? I'm concerned.

KAT. Too bad you didn't show this concern sooner.

MARK. What's that supposed to mean? *(Bell rings.)*

KAT. Damn, I'm late.

Scene Five

(The water tower landing. The next day.)

SARAH. *(Reading from an AIDS pamphlet.)* Okay. "HIV is a serious condition that destroys the body's natural defenses against disease and infection. People with HIV are more likely to develop serious illnesses which they would not get if their immune systems were healthy." Well, this sounds bad. *(Turns the page.)* "Most people don't get their first symptoms until ten years after they've been infected. Most, if not all people with a positive HIV antibody test," that's me, "will eventually develop AIDS or an illness related to HIV infection." It's like I'm a time bomb. "There is no known cure for HIV infection. Some medications have been successful in prolonging the lives of people who are infected." Prolonging the life. I'm seventeen, You're not supposed to prolong my life. I'm supposed to get a life. God... Hello...? Why couldn't it have been one of those regular things. Herpes, or gonorrhea. They're gross, I still would have been humiliated, if that's the point. *(Looking at pamphlet.)* I'm not even myself anymore. Now I'm "A Person With HIV." No, worse than that, I'm a "Teen With HIV." This is a freakin nightmare. All I did was like him, God. And I know this sounds pathetic, but the attention he paid, it made me feel good. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. *(Sarah curls up on the floor.)*

KAT. *(Enters with HIV pamphlets.)* Sarah? Are you here? Oh my god, are you okay?

SARAH. Ya, I guess. I was just giving up for a minute.

KAT. Well don't. It's really important that you get into the hospital soon. The sooner you get on the medication, the better the chances that you won't get AIDS. I mean, you're going to be HIV positive, they can't make it disappear completely, but they can keep you from getting sick for a long time.

SARAH. What'd you do, go to medical school since yesterday?

KAT. I called the AIDS hot line, and they told me what it means, that you're HIV positive. For example, having unprotected sex is definitely out. You could infect someone even though you don't look sick.

SARAH. That's not exactly news Kat, remember? That's how I got it.

KAT. Right. Of course. You know that. Well, then I went to the testing place: I didn't tell them your name, or anything, I just said my friend tested positive and they told me all what you need to do and I got all this information; a lot of stuff about treatment. Including, the sooner you start, the better. So come on, we should take you to the doctor. What? What's funny?

SARAH. Nothing. It's just, well you. You're like some counselor for "Camp AIDS" or something.

KAT. I'm sorry. I don't sound sad. I am sad though, but doing something, getting this information... it seemed like a good thing... so I could help.

SARAH. You're right. It is good. I guess I'm just surprised you'd do all that.

KAT. Are you kidding? Of course I would. I'm going to help with everything. So do you want to go?

SARAH. Ya, okay, I guess you're right.

DANNY. (*Offstage.*) Yo, Kat

MARK. (*Offstage.*) Hello girls, you're busted, we know you're here.

SARAH. You brought them?

KAT. No, I don't know— (*Danny and Mark enter.*)

MARK. Sarah, you're here, I knew it.

DANNY. I knew it. It was my idea.

MARK. (*To Kat.*) We followed you.

KAT. Obviously.

DANNY. Sarah, what are you doing? Are you living here or something?

MARK. She's shacking up with Water Tower Man. Joke. (*Waves hand in front of Sarah's face.*) Hello? Anybody home?

KAT. Mark—

SARAH. It's okay. I mean, maybe I should tell them.

MARK. Ya, tell us. Tell us what?

DANNY. Sarah, are you all right?

SARAH. Yes. Well, no. The thing is... God, there is no easy way to say this—

MARK. You're dumping me.

KAT. How can she leave you, when you never made any kind of commitment to her. Commitment, hell, you never even asked her out.

MARK. Whoa, down girl. I don't hear anything there that's any of your business.

SARAH. Kat—

KAT. Don't you take a tone with me, Mark. You're always ready for the good time, with no responsibility to anyone. But what about when trouble comes?

DANNY. (*Picks up a pamphlet.*) What's all this for?

MARK. What trouble?

DANNY. What are you doing with all this AIDS stuff?

SARAH. Danny—

MARK. What AIDS stuff?

KAT. Don't Sarah. You don't have to tell them.

DANNY. You're not, I mean you don't have...

KAT. Danny, you guys aren't even supposed to be here.

SARAH. Yes, I do.

MARX. You do what? What's going on?

KAT. Mark, don't make her say it.

MARK. Say what?

DANNY. Sarah, you have AIDS?

MARK. No way.

KAT. It's not AIDS, it's called HIV positive.

SARAH. Yes.

MARK. You're HIV positive?

KAT. (*Sarcastic.*) No Mark, she's been hiding here for a week, reading everything she can about treatment for AIDS because she's going to do a big book report.

MARK. Kat, please. Just stop.

SARAH. I'm sure. I got tested twice. I tested positive both times. I have it.

MARK. Wow, I don't know what to say.

DANNY. Sarah, how long have you, I mean—

MARK. (*Tenderly.*) I'm so sorry.

DANNY. When did you get it?

SARAH. Danny, it's okay.

DANNY. No, really, when. How long have you had it?

KAT. Danny, when she got it or where she got it isn't important.

DANNY. Yes it is. She could have given it to somebody else.

KAT. What do you mean? It's not like she's—

DANNY. (*Harshly.*) Come on Sarah, did you have it when we--?

SARAH. Danny-- (*Pause.*)

KAT. When you what? (*Pause.*)

MARK. Sarah, wait a minute. Sarah, you and Danny?... No way.

SARAH. This is bad.

MARK. You slept with Danny?

SARAH. No. I mean yes. I mean. We were drunk. We didn't go all the way.

KAT. Well, son of a bitch!

MARK. You were drunk? Where was I?

SARAH. Kat, I'm so sorry. I felt horrible but I didn't think telling you would do any good.

KAT. And you let me stand here apologizing, begging to help you. What a piece of work you are. Did you give him HIV, too?

DANNY. Kat -

KAT. Don't Danny. Say nothing.

MARK. *(to Danny)* I guess you didn't think about telling me either.

SARAH. Mark, I didn't... it just happened.

KAT. *(To Danny.)* You better get yourself tested.

SARAH. Kat, I didn't have it then.

KAT. Ya, and your word is really worth a lot right now.

DANNY. Tested? What do you mean? How do I do that?

KAT. I don't know. Maybe you can get drunk and it'll "just happen."

SARAH. Kat, please—

KAT. Sarah, I'm leaving. You can keep the pamphlets. There's nothing in there I need to know. You're on your own. But a girl with your resources is bound to find somebody to help her. *(Kat exits.)*

DANNY. Kat, please. You don't understand... *(Danny exits.)*

MARK. I'm sorry, Sarah. I... I'm sorry. *(Mark exits. Sarah sits alone, surrounded by her AIDS information.)*

Scene Six

(Danny's house. A few weeks later. Danny is alone, Kat enters.)

DANNY. *(Startled.)* Hi, I'm glad you—

KAT. Don't start. I'm still mad and we are not talking. I heard from Mark that you went to get tested and I wanted to find out if you have it because I still care about you, even though what you did was completely—

DANNY. Kat, it was when we were in that big fight last fall, technically were we broken up, remember?

KAT. Don't you even talk "technically" to me. I said I still care about you; but right now I hate you, so just tell me about the test because if you have it I might not be able to hate you as much.

DANNY. I don't have it.

KAT. (*Sincerely.*) Thank God.

DANNY. They said from what we did I couldn't have gotten it, even if she had it then.
But I got tested anyway, just to be sure.

KAT. Well, you don't have to sound so proud of yourself, like some damn Boy Scout.
We wouldn't even be having this conversation if you hadn't—

DANNY. I know Kat. I make mistakes sometimes. And this was one of those times.

KAT. Are you not getting this Danny? This is not a “mistake.” A mistake is: “I forgot we had a test in History today.” A mistake is: we got to the movie at 8:30 and it started at 8:15. Why do you think I told you I didn't want to sleep together? We had that whole conversation and you kept saying, “Okay, okay, let's just stop talking about it.”

DANNY. Okay, okay.

KAT. Not funny.

DANNY. Well, I know you don't like it, but that's how I see it. It was a mistake. I wish I hadn't done it, but it's not the end of the world.

KAT. Oh really? You're lucky then. Sarah made the same “mistake” and it pretty much is the end of the world for her.

Scene Seven

(*Sarah's house.*)

SARAH. Okay God. I've lost all my friends. My parents are freaked out. I found my mother crying on the kitchen floor at three o'clock in the morning last night. Today I start my medication which, if I'm lucky, will make me really sick for a month and only a little sick from then on. If I'm not lucky, I'll never get used to it. And if it works, who knows what that means, since it's not really a cure, and my phone doesn't ring, and my dad won't look at me, and I have nobody to talk to except my doctor who is very nice but she calls me “dear.” If you really exist, God, and if you're not out of miracles, would you use one on me? I don't think I can handle this. (*Knock at the door. She opens it. Kat and Danny enter.*)

KAT. Here's the thing. If it was me, and I was you, and I had... whatever you guys did... with my best friend's boyfriend — (*Looks at Danny.*) ex-boyfriend —

SARAH. Kat, I'm so sorry, it was stupid, I never meant—

DANNY. Kat, we just—

KAT. I told you, I don't want the details. So if that was me, and then I had this huge terrible thing happen, I would still want my friends to be my friends.

SARAH. Well, I do.

KAT. Knowing that what I had done had betrayed the friendship. Still, I would hope—

DANNY. Would you cut the drama, Kat?

KAT. I'm the wronged one, Danny. I get to make the speech. Still, I would hope my friends would be there for me. Okay. That's the speech.

SARAH. So... are you?

KAT. Yes.

Scene Eight

(Mark is waiting for a bus after school Danny approaches.)

DANNY. You going home? Want a ride?

MARK. Sure.

DANNY. I just have to stop at Sarah's and give her her homework. You can't believe how much extra work they give just because she's home.

MARK. I guess I'll take the bus.

DANNY. What is it Mark? It's not leprosy. You're not going to catch it just by seeing her.

MARK. No, I'd have to sleep with her, like you.

DANNY. I didn't sleep with her.

MARK. Whatever.

DANNY. Okay. But if this is between you and me, why aren't you talking to her?

MARK. It's not that.

DANNY. Well, what?

MARK. This won't make sense to you, but... I like her. I really like her.

DANNY. Oh, you like her. That's a good reason to ignore her.

MARK. Forget it.

DANNY. Come on, don't get so serious. I know what you mean. If you didn't care, it would be easier.

MARK. Right. And when I think about her, you know, like how she's kind of a goof but it works for her, or if I think about how she laughs, or looks at me, I can't stand it. I can't stand that there's nothing I can do. She has this incurable virus and I can't do a thing about it.

DANNY. Poor Mark, he doesn't have super-powers.

MARK. Come on, Danny. There's no cure, it just stays in her, eating away at her immune system until finally she's going to get some horrible disease and—

DANNY. Too bad you're not Water Tower Man. You could just liquefy, get injected into her bloodstream, kill all the virus cells, then come back out and be completely adored by her.

MARK. What's your point?

DANNY. My point is, this is not about you and how sad you are. It's about Sarah, and how bad she needs her friends, and how much it would mean to her if you would just call.

MARK. I can't. I think about her all the time. I'm doing all this reading about HIV, but I can't pick up the phone. It's stupid, I know. That's my bus. *(Mark exits.)*

KAT. *(To audience.)* The hospital was great. Considering. The drugs alone cost about \$15,000 dollars a year but there are programs that help people who can't afford it. So after filling out about eight hundred forms, she started getting treated. The people were nice. Nobody was weird or judgmental. It might have been interesting if it wasn't Sarah, and AIDS, and basically incurable.

DANNY. *(To audience.)* When she first started on her medication, she got really sick: throwing up a lot, fevers, insomnia. The stuff they give is so strong it makes people sick at first. She missed a lot of school, and when she came back, I mean she wasn't exactly sick, but she never seemed to feel quite right.

Scene Nine

(The school hall. Mark runs into Sarah.)

MARK. Sarah. Hi, uh, how are you?

SARAH. I'm okay. I was sick for a while.

MARK. Ya, I know. I'm glad to see you. I mean, I'm glad you're feeling better.

SARAH. Thanks.

MARK. So, you're feeling better?

SARAH. Yes... I mean—

MARK. Good, that's good.

SARAH. Ya—

MARK. Well, I guess I'll see you. *(Mark exits. Sarah is left standing alone.)*

KAT. *(To audience.)* It was weird seeing her at school, going to class, putting her books in her locker, and the whole time, she's got HIV. Sometimes I'd look at her and I'd just start crying.

DANNY. *(To audience.)* What bothered me, I mean besides that Sarah had the virus, was that the four of us had been so close; really good friends. And now it was all tense and silent, around Mark anyway. There was one class, social studies, we all had

together. I could hardly concentrate in there. Here's all my best friends, more like a family than my family, and we aren't talking about the main thing that's going on.

Scene Ten

(A classroom.)

KAT. *(To audience.)* We had this lecture about HIV and AIDS in social studies. It's required. Once a year, for an hour, we talk about STD's, AIDS, how not to have sex, how to communicate with your partner if you are going to have sex. All that stuff. So this jerk yells out, and he's sitting right next to Sarah, "People who get AIDS deserve it. Especially gays." I wanted to pick up my desk and club him with it. The teacher says, "If AIDS is a punishment for being gay, why do so few lesbians get it?" That shut the guy up, it shut everybody up for a minute, to hear the teacher say "lesbian." Those lectures are so weird. For one hour it's like everybody has to hurry up and say all the stuff you can't say during the rest of the year: condom, intercourse, oral sex, body fluids, they still don't like to say what that is.

DANNY. *(To audience.)* The guy can't let it go. He starts up again about how when you get sick it's because of something that you did to cause it. Basically he's blaming anybody who isn't perfect like him. And suddenly Sarah just stands up and says —

SARAH. I have the AIDS virus.

DANNY. *(To audience.)* The guy goes, "right." And she says, "I do."

SARAH. I do. I have AIDS. Well, HIV positive is what they call it, because I have the virus but I'm not sick. Don't worry, you can't catch it from me. I mean... not unless.. well, you know.

KAT. *(To audience.)* Then she opens her purse, and brings out her whole pill thing, which is very complicated, and her timer. And like she was giving an oral report in speech class, she just lays it all out.

SARAH. I'm in a treatment that, basically tries to strengthen my immune system and at the same time, weaken the virus. A lot of people think HIV is not such a big deal anymore, they have medication for it now." But the medicine doesn't cure you, it just helps your body try to fight it. I take about 240 pills a month, that's about eight each day. Like this. *(Holds up a pill bottle.)* I have to take this three times a day, two pills, an hour before I eat. If I forget, then I have to wait to eat, but I have to eat when I take these three *(Holds up three bottles.)* so they'll get digested right. And these I take after eating but not anywhere near this other one. I know it sounds impossible, and it is pretty hard. But I have it written down. *(She holds up a complicated color-coded chart.)*

DANNY. *(To audience.)* That classroom was the quietest place in the world. The silence went beyond the classroom. It was like Sarah had taken her heart out and laid it on the table.

SARAH. (*Holding her chart, pointing to medications.*) This is called Combivir.

MARK. (*To audience.*) There she was, just as nice and helpful as always, telling the world her most personal thing. I wanted to yell, “Stop it. Don’t tell them. Don’t show them your life.”

SARAH. Combivir is actually two drugs: AZT and lamivudine.

KAT. (*To audience.*) Don’t tell them, Sarah, about how sick you got for a month when you started taking these, and how tired you got, and nauseous. That it reacted with your hay fever meds and you almost died.

SARAH. This is Kaletra.

MARK. (*To audience.*) Don’t tell them how those “miracle drugs” don’t work for everybody.

SARAH. Kaletra is a protease inhibitor.

DANNY. (*To audience.*) Don’t tell them how all this medication is damaging your liver—

SARAH. They belong to a class of drugs called "anti-retrovirals" or ARV.

KAT. (*To audience.*) —and how your father told you not to talk about it around him.

SARAH. I should be this smart in biology, right?

MARK. (*To audience.*) Don’t open up to these people Sarah, they aren’t going to care, they’re going to about you behind your back, and then leave, the same way I left. They aren’t going to be there for you.

SARAH. One of the hardest things about having it is that it will never stop. It’s not like going through a really bad time but you know it will end. Like the flu, or finals. It’s really not like anything I can describe. Everyday when I wake up, just for a second, I forget. I wake up normal. Then, my timer goes off, telling me to take a pill, and the whole way I look at life changes. Every minute of every day, for the rest of my life, I’m going to have the HIV virus. The other hardest thing about it is I really wanted to have kids someday, have a family. And this, well it makes the whole thing a lot more complicated because there’s a chance you’ll give it to your baby. Plus, how long are you— How long am I going to live, to be able to be that child’s mother.

KAT. (*To audience.*) The guy sitting next to Sarah, you remember, the one who said, “People who get it deserve it.” Well, while she’s talking, he pushes his chair back and walks all the way across the room and sits. Sarah looks at him, and down at these pill bottles and for a second I thought she might faint. Or I might faint. The whole thing was way too hard. But she kept going.

SARAH. Once or twice a week I go to the doctor. There are doctors who work only with people who have HIV and they’re very good. They do blood tests to count my t-cells and what they call my viral load. That’s how much of the virus is in me. It goes up sometimes, especially if I miss taking my pills at the right time. I really have to stick to the schedule. If I screw it up, like miss a pill, or take one late, I could become what they call "drug resistant." It basically means the drugs don't work anymore. So I'd

have to try new ones, and there really aren't that many... But, it's working right now. I feel pretty good. And if it keeps working... well, I'm planning to go to college, maybe get a part time job. I had to quit track. I got sick for awhile and missed too much but... anyway... I guess that's all. *(She sits.)*

KAT. I wanted something to happen, then. Like in a movie where everyone slowly stands up and applauds, or the teacher says some really great speech that makes everybody love each other for five seconds. But everybody just sat.

DANNY. I'm Finally something happened. It wasn't a great heroic thing, but for Mark it was a big deal. He got up and walked over and hugged Sarah, this really long hug, with everybody watching, and then he sat next to her... in the chair where the jerk had been sitting. Then the bell rang. *(The bell tings.)*

KAT. *(To audience.)* The bell rang and people just got their stuff together and left.

MARK. *(To audience.)* Even the teacher left.

DANNY. *(To audience.)* Then it was just us.

MARK. *(To audience.)* And Sarah. With all those pills, and then her damned beeper went off *(It does.)* and she had to take something. I was just standing there looking at her and I felt this big wave of some kind of feeling, like, I didn't want to go away again. Maybe she'll get really sick, maybe she won't, but I just... didn't want to leave.

SARAH. Well, at least now we don't have to worry about keeping it a secret.

DANNY. *(To audience.)* For awhile things were better. *(Kat and Mark help Sarah gather up her things.)* Kat's never trusted me again. I don't blame her. *(Kat exits.)* Mark hung tight with Sarah until his new job took him on the road. *(Mark exits.)* Then things got tough. Six months later, Sarah's medication stopped working and she had to go on harsher drugs. College was out. She was way too weak. You know, we can wonder about our futures. Sarah's isn't a mystery. There's no cure for HIV. Eventually, in a year, maybe five years, who knows, she's going to get very sick. And maybe that time all the pills and all the doctors won't help. Maybe that time, the virus will win. *(Danny exits.)*

Scene Eleven

(Sarah sits alone in water tower landing. Sound of phone answering machine. Beep.)

KAT'S VOICE. Sarah, hi. I am so sorry, but I'm not going to make it for the little reunion thing at the water tower this year. Jay got concert tickets for that night and didn't tell me. We're really getting close— *(Click.)* I've got another call. How are you feeling? Call me. *(Beep.)*

DANNY'S VOICE. Hi Sarah, are you there? Okay, well, I hope you got over your pneumonia. Turns out I have this huge twenty page report due Monday and all I've

done so far is buy the paper. Typical. You're lucky you're not in college. Damn, that's not what I mean. Say hi to Kat and Mark for me will you? (Beep.)

MARK'S VOICE. Sarah, this is Mark. How are you feeling? I hope you're getting stronger on the new medication. I have to leave town tomorrow so I can't come to the thing on Saturday. Think of me slaving away while you guys party. Call me next week and let me know how it went. (*Lights fade to black*)