

Frances Makes History

A high school dramedy about the James Garfield assassination
by Alexander Utz

Characters: (1M, 6W; or 2NB)

FRANCES HOWE	A high school student. (W/NB, teens-early 20s)
DIANA HOWE	Her mom. (W, 40s)
ADAM GARFIELD	Her history teacher, "Mr. G." (M, 40s)
BRIA BELL	Her best friend. (W, teens-early 20s)
SAM ELDRIDGE	Another friend. (W/NB, teens-early 20s)
EMILY VASQUEZ	Her guidance counselor. (W, 30s)
CHERYL NOYES	The school's principal. (W, 40s-50s)

Time: The present.

Place: Various, including: the Howe family room, Moreland High School hallways, Mr. G's history classroom, Mrs. Vasquez's office, Principal Noyes' office.

Notes on the text:

- This play must be cast with diversity in mind.
- Scene locations should be suggested minimally through the use of chairs, props, etc. Title cards for each scene might be fun too. Feel free to play with it.
- If necessary, Diana and Principal Noyes may be played by the same actor.

One

Lights up. FRANCES, dressed in a Charles Guiteau costume, is in the office of EMILY VASQUEZ, her high school guidance counselor.

EMILY

So, Frances. How do you think you got here?

FRANCES

What kind of question is that?

EMILY

I just think it's valuable to take a look at our actions, and the consequences of those actions.

FRANCES

You're saying I'm a problem child.

EMILY

Not a problem child. But you're an interesting case. What you did was very brave, in a way, and — very unusual.

FRANCES

Even better.

EMILY

So what do you think led you to this, here and now?

FRANCES

I don't know.

EMILY

You're a smart girl, Frances, you must have some idea of —

FRANCES

Don't say that.

EMILY

What?

FRANCES

I don't like when people tell me I'm smart.

EMILY

Why not?

FRANCES

I just don't.

EMILY

Okay. Then let's talk about Charles Guiteau. Do you think you relate to him? Maybe not the criminal elements of him, but other parts of his personality?

FRANCES

I don't know much about him, honestly.

EMILY

— But you're dressed as him.

FRANCES

I get why I'm here, okay, that's not a mystery to me. But why are you acting like you're my psychologist? You're a guidance counselor.

EMILY

I'm just trying to help you, Frances.

FRANCES

I don't need help.

EMILY

My job is to get you on the best path possible.

FRANCES

I'm not already on it?

EMILY

— You're dressed as a presidential assassin.

FRANCES

So? People dress like historical figures all the time. Mr. G dresses up as President Garfield. Literally the most boring president.

EMILY

Yes, Mr. G. Maybe that's a good place to start.
I understand he and your mother have a bit of a history.

FRANCES

So?

EMILY

So perhaps that's where some of this behavior comes from. The column, the costume, all of it.

FRANCES

Wow, you're so astute. How'd you figure that one out?

EMILY

Do you want to tell me if there was anything that happened, to make you want to do this?

FRANCES

The clothes are cozy. The beard too. It's all about comfort.

EMILY

Okay. Great. You don't have to tell me, Frances.

FRANCES

You're right. I don't.

EMILY

We can just sit here in silence every day, if that's what you prefer.

FRANCES

I do. I'm missing my free period for this.

EMILY

I'm not the one at fault for that.

FRANCES

— Okay, I get it, I get it.

EMILY

What?

FRANCES

You're going to manipulate me into talking to you.

EMILY

Not at all. If you don't want to talk, that's okay too. I'm just here to help you.

FRANCES

Why do you think I need help?

EMILY

That's not necessarily my personal opinion, it's the school's.

FRANCES

What's your opinion?

EMILY

I can make my own opinion after hearing your side of things.

FRANCES

Ha. Great.

EMILY

Do you want to tell me? Your side of things?

FRANCES

Fine. I'll tell you. Whatever. You happy?

EMILY

It doesn't matter if I'm happy. What do you want out of this, Frances?

FRANCES

To not be here.

EMILY

In my office, or do you mean "here" in a larger sense?

FRANCES

Jesus Christ.

EMILY

Well —

FRANCES

How about this. I'll tell you what happened, then you can tell me where I should be. Sound good?

EMILY

If that's what you want.

FRANCES

Great. Excellent. It is.

EMILY

Start at the beginning.

FRANCES

Cool. The beginning. So, I don't remember what night exactly it was, but I was doing homework. And my mom came home from a date with Mr. G.

Transition.

Two

A living room. FRANCES is reading a history textbook. DIANA enters.

DIANA

Oh, hi honey, I didn't realize you'd be up.

FRANCES

I'm up.

DIANA

You're reading history again.

FRANCES

It's for homework.

DIANA

Do you like history? Maybe it's something you'd want to get your degree in?

FRANCES

How was your date, Mom?

DIANA

It was okay.

It was — well, okay, it wasn't great.

FRANCES

Mr. G didn't try anything funny on you, did he? I told him he'd better be careful.

DIANA

Just a bit of a misunderstanding. I don't think we're going to see each other again.

I'm sorry if any of this has made you feel —

FRANCES

I know. Yeah. It's cool. I'm cool. Sorry it didn't work out.

Should I boycott his class for you?

DIANA

Frances. No.

FRANCES

What happened?

DIANA

I'd rather not talk about it right now. Maybe another time.

For now, I'm going to get a glass of wine, and I'm going to bed.

FRANCES

Same here.

DIANA

You're too young to drink. Tell me you're not drinking yet.

FRANCES

Mom, it was a joke.

DIANA

Because if you are, that's alright, just be smart about it.
And you can always talk to me if —

FRANCES

Yes, I know, I can talk to you about whatever. Thanks. Cool. It was a joke.
I'm going to finish my homework.

DIANA

You're such a good daughter.

FRANCES

Why aren't you seeing him anymore? What did he do?

DIANA

Have you looked at any of those schools yet? There were a couple I thought might be a good fit for you.

FRANCES

If he was a jerk, I can blackmail him so I don't have to do my history work.

DIANA

Frances, please.

FRANCES

Fine, fine.
Goodnight, Mom. Enjoy your wine.

DIANA

Don't stay up too late. School tomorrow.

FRANCES

Yeah, school, I know, Mom. I'm literally going to be studying. Night.

DIANA exits. FRANCES sits and reads. After a moment, there's a knock at the door. FRANCES opens the door to ADAM GARFIELD, her history teacher. He is dressed as President James Garfield.

ADAM

Oh — Frances. Hello. I didn't expect you to be up still.
You've, um — done tomorrow's reading, I hope?

FRANCES

What are you doing here, Mr. G?
And why are you dressed as Santa in a three-piece suit?

ADAM

Is your mom home?

FRANCES

No.

ADAM

Oh. Where is she?

FRANCES

Of course she's home, but I don't think she wants to see you.

ADAM

We just need to talk about some things.

DIANA *off*

Frances, are you talking to someone?

FRANCES

Just myself, Mom!

ADAM

I'm not going to cause a scene —

FRANCES

You already are —

ADAM

Please just let me in.
And it's James Garfield, by the way.

FRANCES

Who?

ADAM

The Gilded Age president — you haven't done the reading, have you?

FRANCES *shouting*

Mom, it's Mr. G! He wants to see you!

DIANA *off*

Tell him to go away!

FRANCES

You heard the woman.

ADAM *shouting*

Diana, can we talk for just a minute!

FRANCES

How much would it take to get you to dress up like this for class tomorrow?
I have ten dollars.

DIANA enters.

DIANA

Frances, go to bed.

FRANCES

But Mom —

DIANA

Go to bed.

FRANCES

Fine.

FRANCES exits.

DIANA

What do you want, Adam?
And are you —

ADAM

James Garfield.

DIANA

Oh my god.

ADAM

Your favorite president.

DIANA

I was kidding.

ADAM

I know. I thought it'd make you smile.

DIANA *leading him out the door*

Alright. Outside.

ADAM
Wait, wait —

DIANA
No, we're talking outside.
I don't want Frances listening. She's going to try.

ADAM
Okay. okay.

*DIANA and ADAM exit. After a moment, FRANCES enters cautiously to try to listen.
Shift. DIANA and ADAM are outside.*

DIANA
I specifically told you not to come to the house like this.

ADAM
I wanted to see you and explain —

DIANA
Because I don't want Frances getting affected by this any more than she has been, okay?

ADAM
I know.

DIANA
It doesn't seem like you do.

ADAM
I do. Trust me.

DIANA
Ha. Trust you. Why should I, Adam?

ADAM
Listen —

DIANA
It's her senior year and I think she and I need to be focusing on what she's going to be doing. This is just getting in the way of that. It's irresponsible.

ADAM
I understand that, but I don't think it's —

DIANA
And I feel like I'm just repeating myself to you, Adam.
Have you listened to me at all?

ADAM

It's not irresponsible. I like what we have here, I think we're good together.

DIANA

Ha. Okay. Frances has to be my number one priority right now.

ADAM

And I get that. But can we at least try?

DIANA

Adam —

ADAM

If I had known who your actual favorite president was, would this be going better?

DIANA

I don't have one. And no, probably not.

ADAM

I sincerely thought it was James Garfield.

DIANA

You only thought that because you have the same name.

ADAM

Wait — you don't have a favorite? Not even Lincoln? FDR?

DIANA

I haven't given it much thought, I'm not a history teacher.

ADAM

Is there anything I can do to convince you?

DIANA

To pick a favorite president?

ADAM

To keep this going.

DIANA

After tonight? I don't think so, Adam.

ADAM

Anything. Please.

DIANA

— How is Frances doing in your class right now?

ADAM

— She's doing fine.

DIANA

Honestly.

ADAM

There's still a lot of time —

DIANA

Adam.

ADAM

Okay, okay, it's around a C minus right now.

DIANA

C minus? Really? I thought she liked history.
At least, as much as Frances can like something.

ADAM

She does the readings, but it's like nothing sticks.
I get the sense that she likes it, but she's bored, or —

DIANA

Is there anything more you can do?

ADAM

I'm trying. It is my job, you know.

DIANA

Well. If you can get her up to an A, then —

ADAM

We can start this up again?

DIANA

I will start to consider it.

ADAM

Done.

DIANA

Consider. That is not a guarantee.

ADAM

I know. But I can work with that.
I'll leave you alone now.

DIANA

And next time you dress up, please pick a better-looking president.

ADAM

There aren't any!

*ADAM exits. DIANA sighs and goes back into the house.
Shift. DIANA enters to find FRANCES.*

DIANA

I thought I told you to go to bed.

FRANCES

I forgot something.

DIANA

What did you forget? To not eavesdrop?
How much did you hear?

FRANCES

Nothing.

DIANA

I don't believe you.

FRANCES

Why aren't you seeing him anymore? What did he do?

DIANA

Do you know what your history grade is?

FRANCES

Is that what you guys talked about? Ugh, you are so boring.
No, I don't know.

DIANA

Alright. Fine. It's not good.

FRANCES

I know it's not great, but I'm doing all the work! I just don't always get it right away.
But that doesn't matter — why was he dressed as that president guy? Wait — do I not want to know the answer to that?

DIANA

Goodnight, Frances.

FRANCES

I'll think of more questions for you tomorrow.

DIANA

Can't wait.

DIANA exits. FRANCES picks up her history book and flips through it.

FRANCES

President Garfield, President Garfield —

Transition.

Three

The next day. History class. ADAM is teaching FRANCES, BRIA, and SAM.

ADAM

So, once again, what did Thomas Nast's political cartoons say about the politics of Boss Tweed, Tammany Hall, and by extension the Gilded Age as a whole?

FRANCES raises her hand.

Frances?

FRANCES

Um — can you tell us about President Garfield?

ADAM

Not right now.

FRANCES

Wasn't he president back then?

ADAM

Well, Garfield was a little later than Boss Tweed.

BRIA

Garfield was elected in 1880.

ADAM

That's right, Bria. But —

BRIA

But he was assassinated pretty early on, right?

ADAM

Yes. But back to the cartoons —

SAM

Really? Woah, I thought Lincoln was the only one.
Oh, and Kennedy.

BRIA

Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Kennedy.
There were attempts on Teddy Roosevelt and Reagan, too.

SAM

That's crazy.

ADAM

— How do you know all of that?

BRIA

I like Stephen Sondheim.

SAM

Who?

BRIA

He writes musicals. He wrote one called *Assassins* about — well, assassins.

ADAM

Right. But we're off track.

FRANCES

You know who killed President Garfield?

BRIA

Charles Guiteau.

ADAM

We can talk more about that, maybe later this week. Let's get back to Boss Tweed.

SAM

How did he kill him?

BRIA

Shot him.

SAM

Where?

BRIA

Um — a train station.

SAM

No, like in the head, or — ?

BRIA

Oh! In the back.

ADAM

Yes, very good, Bria. But —

FRANCES

Are you related, Mr. G?

ADAM

Am I —?

FRANCES

To President Garfield.

ADAM

Ha. No. I don't think so. I'm sure if I were, someone would've told me by now. Garfield's a pretty common last name.

FRANCES

Do you wish you were?

ADAM

— No.

SAM

What happened to the killer?

BRIA

Charles Guiteau.

SAM

Right, what happened to him?

ADAM

As I was saying, though, Thomas Nast's cartoons of Boss Tweed emphasized the severe corruption going on in New York City politics at that time.

SAM

But what happened to — what was his name again?

BRIA

Guiteau.

ADAM

Okay, fine. I'll tell you, but then we're getting back to the lesson.

FRANCES

Mr. G?

ADAM

What, Frances?

FRANCES

Three —

ADAM

What?

FRANCES

Two —

ADAM

What are you counting?

FRANCES

What do you think?

The bell rings. FRANCES, SAM, and BRIA stand to leave.

SAM

You're going to tell us tomorrow! Promise!

ADAM

You should look it up if you're so interested, Sam.

SAM

That sounds like a lot of work.

BRIA

Bye, Mr. G.

ADAM

Frances, can I talk to you for a moment?

SAM

Oooh!

FRANCES

Shut up.

I'll catch up with you, Bria.

SAM and BRIA exit.

ADAM

So, Frances —

FRANCES

What did you do to my mom?

ADAM

That's not what I wanted to talk to you about.

FRANCES

What did you do?

And why the costume?

ADAM

Frances, we need to talk about your grade in this class.

FRANCES

Here we go.

ADAM

You're not doing well.

FRANCES

I'm doing fine. C's get degrees, right?

ADAM

Frances.

FRANCES

Why do you even have that costume?

ADAM

I think you and I should come up with a plan to get your grade up, okay?

FRANCES

Why do you have the costume, Mr. G?

ADAM

You're not going to cooperate until I answer, is that what's going on here?

FRANCES

I'm curious.

ADAM

— I do occasional presidential impersonations. Like, speeches. At libraries, for history groups, that sort of thing. On weekends. Very occasionally.

FRANCES

When's your next one?

ADAM

I'm not telling you that.
Anyway, let's figure out a plan to help your grades —

FRANCES

What did you do to my mom? Why doesn't she want to see you anymore?

ADAM

— That's between me and her.

FRANCES

Cool. I'm going to go, okay? I'm late.

ADAM

I thought you had a free period after this.

FRANCES

Yeah, and I'm late for it.

ADAM

Don't you want to improve your grades?

FRANCES

— I'll start to consider it.

ADAM

What do you — oh.

How much did you hear last night?

FRANCES

Nothing, why?

See you, Mr. G.

*FRANCES exits the classroom.
Shift. FRANCES approaches BRIA.*

BRIA

What did he want to see you about?

FRANCES

Apparently I have really good grades in history, and he wanted me to be more like a normal person so I could stop humiliating all the rest of you.

BRIA

Ha. Really, what did he say?

FRANCES

That's really truly it. Sorry, Bria, looks like you've got to step it up.

BRIA

Was it about him and your mom?

FRANCES

I don't want to talk about it.

BRIA

Why, did something happen?

FRANCES

I don't know. She doesn't want to see him anymore.

SAM *off*

Maybe he cheated on her!

SAM enters.

FRANCES

Sam, shut up, I don't want people knowing about this.

SAM

Sorry, Fran, but people *know* about it.
If they get married, will you have to change your name to Garfield?

BRIA

Go away, Sam.

SAM

What? I'm just messing around.

BRIA

Yeah, you're being an ass.

SAM

Now how can we find out if he cheated? Steal his phone?

FRANCES

I know you think you're some sort of investigative reporter or something, but you're honestly terrible at it.
And stop talking about my mom, please.

SAM

I wouldn't cheat on your mom, Frances.

FRANCES

Great.

BRIA

We don't even know if he did, anyway.

FRANCES

Can we talk about something else?

SAM

I would treat your mom *right*.

BRIA

You should come to the Gazette meeting after school.

FRANCES

No thanks, sounds boring.

BRIA

Come on, it would be fun to have you there.

FRANCES

I know you're all about extracurriculars and everything, but that's not for me, sorry.
Plus, Sam will be there, right?

SAM

You know it.

FRANCES

So definitely not.

SAM

What did I do?

BRIA

I'm saying, you should come to the Gazette because Mr. G will be there.

FRANCES

So?

SAM

Oh! You can totally screw with him! For cheating on your mom!

FRANCES

Bria, is that what you were going to say?

BRIA

— I'm ashamed to admit it, but yes.

SAM

You don't have to be ashamed, Bria, being bad for a moment won't kill your chances at Cornell, or whatever. It's good to be bad.
I'd be happy to prove my point to you.

BRIA

Sam, gross.

FRANCES

I like that.

SAM

I thought you might.

FRANCES

Not that, perv.

I like the idea of messing with Mr. G, somehow. Yeah, I'll be there.

SAM

Yes! Watch out Mr. G, you don't mess with Frances' mom!

BRIA

What are you going to do to him?

I'm nervous. This is going to be good.

Bad, but good.

FRANCES

I have some ideas.

Transition.

Four

FRANCES is on the phone with DIANA.

DIANA

— Okay, sure. That's fine.

FRANCES

Bria thought it would be fun if we started going together.

DIANA

Well, I think it's good that you're doing this. It'll look good on your applications.

FRANCES

Yeah, that too.

DIANA

That's great, honey. We should start looking at schools with journalism programs, if that's something you're interested in.

FRANCES

— Sure.

DIANA

Do you need me to pick you up? What time will you be done? I should make dinner later, right?

FRANCES

Geez, Mom, one at a time.

Um, Bria can probably drop me off. I'll call you later.

DIANA

Okay. Love you, hon.

FRANCES

Bye.

Shift. ADAM is wrapping up the Gazette meeting. FRANCES, BRIA, and SAM are there.

ADAM

Great meeting. This is going to be a good issue, everyone.

SAM

Do I really have to write a story about the musical?

ADAM

Yes.

SAM

Gross.

To BRIA.

Want to switch?

ADAM

And you can't switch with Bria this time.

BRIA

Nice try.

SAM

Come on! I thought you liked nerdy stuff like that!

ADAM

Alright. End of discussion. Meeting over. Have a good night, everyone. See you next week.

BRIA and SAM start to pack up. FRANCES approaches ADAM.

FRANCES

Excuse me, Mr. G?

ADAM

Hey Frances, thanks for joining us today. I'm excited to have you aboard.

BRIA quietly, to SAM

It's happening, it's happening.

FRANCES

Yeah, no worries. Hey, I wanted to ask you a question?

SAM to BRIA

What's she going to do?

ADAM

Shoot.

FRANCES

I was thinking, maybe I could write an opinion column for the next issue? I think I'd be really good at that sort of thing and I want to try it out.

ADAM

Oh, we don't do columns. We do editorials, though! That way it isn't an individual student's opinion, it's the view of the whole paper.

FRANCES

But —

ADAM

Anyway, that's why I put you on the editorial with Bria. Since it's your first issue, working on that will help get you used to the way we do things around here.
Sound good?

SAM

I think Frances would write a great column.

FRANCES

Thanks, Sam. But it's okay. I was really only asking because my mom wants me to find more ways to express myself, or something.
I'll just tell her that Mr. G wanted me to make my beliefs conform with the greater student body.

ADAM

What?

FRANCES

She'll be disappointed, but I think she'll be able to get over it eventually.

ADAM

I didn't say I wanted you to do that.

SAM

That's what I heard.

ADAM

Okay, I see what's going on here.
Frances, can I talk to you alone?

BRIA

Sounds like that's our cue.

BRIA and SAM exit hurriedly.

ADAM

Frances. You can't use your mother as a way to make me let you do whatever you want.

FRANCES

Here's the thing. I really do want to do this column. I think I'll really like writing it.
I mean, as much as I can like doing something.

ADAM

— How much of our conversation did you hear?

FRANCES

I don't know what you're talking about.

ADAM

What would you even write about? A column needs to be an opinion about something.

FRANCES

I have some ideas.

ADAM

Great, what are they? It would need to be approved by me.

FRANCES

Would it, though?

ADAM

Frances, you're treading on very thin ice right now.

FRANCES

To my knowledge, Mr. G, so are you.

ADAM

Listen, I —

FRANCES

What are you going to do? Complain to my mom?

ADAM

Fine. You know what? I'll make you a deal.

FRANCES

I don't want to make a deal.

ADAM

I think you might.

Write the column about history, write it *well*, and I'll count it as extra credit in my class. It'll bump your grade up by a letter.

FRANCES

So, what, I'll be at a B minus?

ADAM

That's right.

FRANCES

Make it a B plus.

ADAM

I can't do that. That's too much.

FRANCES

Well, we're aiming for A, right? Why not get as close as we can?

ADAM

— Let's compromise. How about B.

FRANCES

I'll take it.

They shake hands.

ADAM

This is a terrible idea.

FRANCES

You're doing great, Mr. G. You're doing a really good job.

FRANCES exits.

ADAM

This is a terrible idea.

ADAM pulls out his phone and dials. He waits, then leaves a message.

Hi, Diana? I know I shouldn't be bothering you, and I'm sorry, but we need to talk. It's about Frances. Everything is all good, all fine, great actually. So great. But we should talk.

Okay, I've rambled on long enough. Hope you've been well. Talk soon. Call me back when you get this message. Or text. Email. Whatever you prefer.

Alright, that's all. Thank you.

Okay. Bye.

Shift. FRANCES catches up with BRIA.

BRIA

How did it go? What did you say? What did he say?

FRANCES

I got the column.

BRIA

Oh my god.

FRANCES

I know!! I was all like, "I'm going to do this column," and he was like, "No you aren't," and I was like, "You don't want to upset my mom," and he gave in! He's letting me write about whatever I want, it just has to be about history.

BRIA

I can't believe you got away with it. What are you going to write about?

FRANCES

I'll figure something out. I honestly didn't expect to get this far.

BRIA

So what is your endgame here? Just to mess with Mr. G?

FRANCES

Did you really just use the word endgame?

BRIA

What? What's wrong with it?

FRANCES

Nothing, just, damn, you are so smart all the time. Like it doesn't stop.

BRIA

— Thanks?

FRANCES

I want to get Mr. G to stop dating my mom.

BRIA

Why don't you ask him?

FRANCES

But that's the thing. Why would he listen to me? When she asked him, he didn't listen. He's still trying to get back with her.

BRIA

Oh. Yeah. Good point.

FRANCES

So I've got to do something drastic. To get through to his dumb history teacher brain.

BRIA

Just don't go too far. You might get in trouble.

FRANCES *sarcastic*

Oh no! Not trouble!

BRIA

All I'm saying is you don't want to mess with your chances at getting into schools.

FRANCES

Bria. I'll be okay. It's not like I'm applying anywhere crazy like you. You've got to trust me.

BRIA

— Alright. Okay. Do you have a plan?

FRANCES

Not yet. But I'll figure it out. Play it by ear.
It's more fun that way, right?

BRIA

— No. But I believe in you.

FRANCES

You're too good a friend to me, Bria.
Oh! Can I get a ride home?

Transition.

Five

FRANCES comes home. DIANA is waiting.

DIANA

So, can you tell me why I got a voicemail from Mr. G today, saying we need to talk about you?

FRANCES

You what? I don't know. Did you talk to him?

DIANA

I didn't call him back. But what was that about?

FRANCES

I don't know. Maybe I'm just really smart and he wanted to tell you. "Good job, Frances!" Thanks, Mom!

DIANA

It didn't sound like that was the case. Did you cause trouble at that newspaper meeting today?

FRANCES

No.

DIANA

Don't lie to me, Frances.

FRANCES

I'm not lying, geez.

DIANA

Because he sounded very serious.

FRANCES

Okay, that's his problem then.

DIANA

Like I said, you can tell me if you're uncomfortable with any of what's been going on between him and me.

You said it was okay when we started seeing each other, but if that's changed, then —

FRANCES

No, it hasn't, it's fine.

Plus you aren't seeing each other anymore, so whatever.

DIANA

Okay. I just want you to know that you're my top priority right now.

FRANCES

Yeah, okay. Thanks.

DIANA

And that you can talk to me if there's anything weird between you and Mr. G.

FRANCES

Nothing weird. He actually gave me my own column, so —

DIANA

Really? A column?

FRANCES

Yeah.

DIANA

That's, um, that's great.

FRANCES

See, there we go. That's how this conversation should have been going.

DIANA

So you really like this writing thing. That's good, that could be a career.

FRANCES

Alright.

FRANCES tries to leave.

DIANA

What are you going to write about?

FRANCES

I don't know yet. History, I guess. He's giving me extra credit.
Can I go? I have homework.

DIANA

Hold on. He's giving you extra credit for it?

FRANCES

Yeah, my history grade isn't great, remember? He made me a deal. And maybe this extra credit will get you off my case.

DIANA

I'm only trying to help you, Frances.

FRANCES

Great.

DIANA

I can't wait to read your column. I'm proud of you.

FRANCES

Okay. Thanks. Homework time.

FRANCES exits. DIANA takes out her phone and calls ADAM.

DIANA

Hi, Adam. I got your message.

Right.

Yes, we can meet.

Shift. The next day. BRIA and SAM are in their free period. BRIA is doing homework.

SAM

But, like, what am I going to do when you leave?

BRIA

You'll survive.

SAM

I won't. It'll be so boring. I need you, Bria.

BRIA

You know I hate when you do that.

SAM *mock innocent*

Do what?

BRIA

You know. That weird flirting thing.

SAM

I'm just kidding around.

BRIA

Yeah, but it doesn't feel like kidding sometimes.

SAM

That's what makes it funny.

BRIA

It's not funny.

SAM

See? This is what I'll miss. Our playful banter.

BRIA

You're the only one who thinks it's banter.

SAM

Who else will I banter with, when you're gone?

BRIA

You don't *have* to stay here for college.

SAM

I do, though.

BRIA

Tell your parents off. Do what you want.

SAM

I wish. But they have a point, I guess. Community college is cheaper. I can stay at home.

BRIA

Other places have scholarships.

SAM

Yeah, but I'm not someone they'll want to give money to.
Maybe if I pretend to be you.

BRIA

Ha.

SAM

I mean, Frances will probably stay here. Right? So I won't be completely alone.

BRIA

I don't know. Maybe.

SAM

It's not like she has any big plans or anything.

BRIA

Hey.

SAM

What? I'm being honest.

BRIA

You don't have to be a jerk.

SAM

I'm not.

FRANCES

You were.

SAM

Like, joining the Gazette now? It's a Hail Mary. Get some extracurricular points for her application, or whatever.

BRIA

The Gazette doesn't belong to you, Sam.

SAM

She's probably just trying to get back at Mr. G. Which I'm fine with.

BRIA

Why do you even care?

SAM

He gave me the musical assignment! I don't want to do that!

BRIA

If you really want to be a reporter, I'm sure you'll have to write about a lot of stuff you don't like.

SAM

Plus he screwed me on my last essay.

BRIA

Okay. Whatever. You know he did actually end up giving Frances that column?

SAM

— What? Really?

BRIA

Yeah. Her own column in the next issue. She can write about anything she wants.

SAM

Wow. That's bullshit. I thought he was going to tell her no. I've been working on the Gazette all four years! And she just steps in and immediately gets a column?

BRIA

Well.

SAM

You know what? I bet it's because he was dating her mom.

BRIA

They're not seeing each other anymore.

SAM

Yeah, I know. I'm not an idiot. But he's probably trying to get her back, through Frances.

BRIA
Yeah. Maybe.

SAM
You're just telling me this to make me mad.

BRIA
Because you're being ridiculous.

SAM
No way. It's not fair to give her a column when she just started! If anyone, it should be me. Or you. I need to talk to Frances.

FRANCES enters.

FRANCES
Need to talk to me about what?

SAM
So Mr. G gave you that column?

FRANCES
Yep. I'm writing it about history, for extra credit.

SAM
Oh, you're getting extra credit for it too? That's convenient.

BRIA
Sam's being a jerk today.

FRANCES
What else is new?

SAM
He's trying to get your mom back, isn't he? Is that why you're getting preferential treatment?

FRANCES
Yeah, but I won't be for long. This column's going to show him not to mess with my mom. Or me.

BRIA
How can you do that when it's about history?

FRANCES
I have my ways.
I spent all night working on it. Here, check it out.

FRANCES shows SAM and BRIA the column, printed on office paper.

SAM

Oh, man.

BRIA

Frances, you can't print this. There's no way.

FRANCES

What's the problem? It's about history.

BRIA

"Charles Guiteau Is The Kind Of Hero America Needs"?
Are you defending an assassin?

FRANCES

You got it.

BRIA

This isn't good. I knew it wouldn't be good. But this is worse than I expected.

SAM

I think I love it.

FRANCES

Thank you.

BRIA

So much worse than I expected.
Why is Guiteau the hero America needs?

FRANCES

Because he didn't care what anyone thought of him, he just did his own thing!

BRIA

Yeah, but he shot a president! That's a *bad* thing.

SAM

It's a hot take.
Frances, I forgive you for benefitting from blatant favoritism, I'm on your side.

FRANCES

Um, thanks?

SAM

You're very welcome.

BRIA

No, Sam, you can't take her side on this.

SAM

Why not?

BRIA

Because this is going to get her in trouble.

FRANCES

It's about history, like he wanted.

BRIA

This will never run.

SAM

We'll see about that.

BRIA

What does that mean? Why did you say it all conspiratorially like that?

SAM

I do the Gazette's layouts!
This is our next front page, baby!

FRANCES

Yes!

BRIA

No, no, no. Mr. G won't allow it.

SAM

Mr. G doesn't have to know.

FRANCES

— Don't tell him, Bria.

SAM

You know what snitches get.
— Stitches. They get stitches.

BRIA

Fine. You know what? Do what you need to do.
But when you get in trouble for this, Frances, I can't defend you.

FRANCES

— Why not?

SAM

Because it will look bad to Cornell, probably. Live a little, Bri.

FRANCES

It's okay, Sam. We'll print it and see what happens.
Sorry you don't want to be a part of history, Bria.

BRIA

Is that what you think this will be?

FRANCES

If it isn't, I haven't done my job.
This next issue can't come soon enough! This school will never be the same again!

Transition.

Six

DIANA and ADAM meet.

ADAM

Thanks for meeting with me.

DIANA

No problem. Thanks for calling.
Frances told me you gave her a column in the Gazette, that's great.

ADAM

Well, that's the thing —

DIANA

And extra credit? You're really serious about this.

ADAM

Yes. Absolutely. But I wanted to talk to you because, well, she kind of manipulated me into doing that for her.

DIANA

What? Manipulated?

ADAM

Well, okay. How do I put this.
So — the Gazette doesn't do columns, typically, because they express one individual's opinion. We do an editorial instead, in order to reflect the opinion of the entire paper. But Frances asked for a column.

DIANA

So she's showing initiative.

ADAM

Sure. That's one way you could look at it.
But it's the way she went about asking. I'm pretty sure she started saying things to me that sounded like what we said to each other, the other night.

DIANA

You think she heard us.

ADAM

I can't think of what else it could be.

DIANA

Damn it. I thought I noticed her doing the same thing.

ADAM

I think she's using us, and what she heard of our conversation, to get what she wants.

DIANA

So she wants extra work? That doesn't sound like Frances.

ADAM

She also kind of got me to agree to a higher history grade.

DIANA

I take it she heard that too.

ADAM

I guess so, I don't know for sure. I originally offered a full letter grade, up to a B minus, as extra credit. But she made me agree to a B.

DIANA

— If she heard us, does that mean she's trying to get us back together? It sounds like she wants to get that A in your class.

ADAM

Maybe she's rooting for us.

DIANA

Okay, don't jump to conclusions there. I'm just trying to figure out what is going on.

ADAM

Although maybe she isn't rooting for us. She's been pretty mischievous in class. And the way she made me give her the column — maybe she has ulterior motives.

DIANA

You're making it sound like my daughter is a criminal mastermind.

ADAM

Sorry. That's not what I mean.

I just wanted to make you aware, so you can keep an eye out for anything unusual.

DIANA

Like if she leaves plans for a international heist on the coffee table.

ADAM

Okay, I see what you're doing.

DIANA

Maybe I'll find her stash of gadgets! A bracelet that is also an underwater breathing device!

ADAM

I'm sorry I implied anything criminal about Frances. I didn't mean to.

DIANA

I mean, what do you want me to say, Adam?

ADAM

I just wanted to make sure you knew what I was seeing at school.

DIANA

Fine. I'll talk to her, okay?

ADAM

Thank you.

DIANA

When you left me that voicemail, I thought something really awful had happened. Ha.

ADAM

Sorry.

DIANA

Just send me a text next time. Alright?

ADAM

Hey, do you want to get some dinner?

DIANA

What do you think?

ADAM

Thought I'd ask.

DIANA

Bye, Adam.

Shift. FRANCES is doing homework when DIANA comes home.

FRANCES

You're home late.

DIANA

Sorry, I should've texted. I had a meeting.

FRANCES

— You never have meetings.

DIANA

I did today.

FRANCES

Okay.

Pause. FRANCES resumes her homework.

DIANA

How's your column coming?

FRANCES

I finished it.

DIANA

What did you end up writing about?

FRANCES

Charles Guiteau.

DIANA

I don't know who that is.

FRANCES

He was an assassin.

DIANA

Oh.

It's nice Mr. G is giving you this extra credit.

FRANCES

Yeah.

DIANA

What will that bring your grade to?

FRANCES

B.

DIANA

Nice. That's good.

FRANCES

— Everything okay?

DIANA

Oh, yeah. Me? Yeah.

FRANCES

You're acting really weird.

DIANA

No.

FRANCES

— Okay.

DIANA

So, you like Mr. G, right? Like, as a teacher.

FRANCES

He's fine. What's going on?

DIANA

I'm just asking.

FRANCES

Is he going to show up in a costume again?

FRANCES opens the door to look.

DIANA

Can't I talk to you about school? Like a normal mother and daughter?

FRANCES

Have you met us? What makes you think we're normal?

DIANA

I just want to have a conversation with you.

FRANCES

Great. Fine. Maybe stop being so shady about it, then.

DIANA

Wow. Sorry I showed some interest in your life. That's more than some kids get from their parents, Frances. But I get it. I'll leave you alone.

FRANCES

Thanks. See you.

DIANA

Wait. No, hold on. I should ask you what's going on.

FRANCES

— Homework is going on.

DIANA

Why did you join the Gazette? Why are you making deal with Mr. G for extra credit? What's with the interest in this assassin, all of a sudden?

FRANCES

What, am I not allowed to be interested in things? Or do extracurriculars? I thought you'd be happy about me getting more involved. You know, what am I going to do with my life, and all that.

DIANA

Yes. That's great. It's just different.
I don't know, it's almost like you're planning something secret.

FRANCES

Ooh, a secret! What am I planning, Mom?

DIANA

I didn't mean —

FRANCES

No, you found me out. You caught me.
I was going to steal the Declaration of Independence.

DIANA

Okay, Frances —

FRANCES

Right? *National Treasure*? Remember *National Treasure*?

DIANA

Yes, I know what *National Treasure* is.

FRANCES

"I'm going to steal the Declaration of Independence."
Ha. You're right, Mom, I'm Nicholas Cage.

DIANA

I shouldn't have said anything.

FRANCES

This conversation has been weird, but you just made my day.

DIANA

So you're not planning anything.

FRANCES

Just my future, Mom. Exactly like you want me to do.

DIANA

Well then, speaking of your future, have you made any decisions yet?

FRANCES

I've decided that right now, "Frances has to be my number one priority." Yeah?

FRANCES smiles. DIANA hesitates.
Transition.