

PENNY SWEETS

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Cast of Characters

EM: *Female, 15*

PENNY: *Female, 15*

POP: *Male, 40s*

A summer morning in Pop's convenience store. Behind the register counter is a curtain, separating the store from Pop's apartment. On the opposite end of the store is the front door, with a bell. The store is a typical convenience store with a refrigerated section. Em is leaning back in a stool behind the register, feet kicked up on the counter, reading The Catcher in the Rye. After a moment, Pop enters from the curtain.

POP

Don't burn the place down 'til I get back.

EM

Aye aye, cap'n.

POP

And don't sell cigarettes to someone without checking their ID. It's like alcohol.

EM

Pop, yes, I know, I forgot once and you've reminded me every time since; it won't happen again. And keep the jewelry case locked even though everything in there is worth less than 10 bucks.

POP

Exactly. Have fun.

EM

I will not, thank you.

Pop exits. Em goes back to the book. A moment of near-silence passes, Em. After a moment, Penny enters. Em doesn't look up. Penny browses the store, glancing occasionally at Em.

After a moment, Penny approaches the counter with snacks to purchase. Em only looks up when she speaks.)

PENNY

(Fingering a bowl of penny sweets on the counter)

So, uh, how much are the candies?

EM
The... penny sweets?
(Penny *nods.*)
Take a wild guess.

PENNY
Oh, right.
(*Beat. Penny gestures to the book.*)
You have to read it for school, too?

EM
Hm?
(*She checks the cover.*)
Oh. No, I'm just a fan. This is my... third time around, I think?

PENNY
I'm endlessly concerned by how much I relate to Holden.

EM
Yeah, I pride myself on being the kind of person that Salinger would hate.

PENNY
I mean, Holden is basically just Salinger's self insert character.

EM
Exactly.
(*The two laugh.*)
Pretty sure he'd hate the idea of anybody being remotely similar to him. Makes him less special.

PENNY
That and the self-loathing.

EM
Yeah, that too.
(*Silence as Em rings up Penny's order.*)
That's, uh... \$7.78.

PENNY

Goddamn. Life is expensive. Existence is a prison. *(She takes 8 dollars from her wallet and hands it over)*

EM

(Checks the register for change. There isn't any.)

Shit. I'm so sorry, we don't have change. Can I just..? I think I have some change in my wallet upstairs if I can - Oh, you know what, just take the rest of the penny sweets that should be... something. Sorry.

PENNY

Well, I can imagine the look on my mother's face if I showed up home from my "walk" with pockets full of candy. I actually... had something else in mind?

EM

Oh yeah?

PENNY

Yeah, I mean the sweets sound wonderful and all but I was thinking that, in order to make up for your utter lack of preparedness, I could... have your number instead?

EM

Oh.

(A beat.)

So lemme get this straight.

PENNY

Okay.

EM

You want to buy my phone number?

PENNY

Well-

EM

So not only are you pimping me out-

PENNY

I mean, I wouldn't say *that*-

EM

You're pimping me out for *twenty-two cents*?

PENNY

Well, I mean I didn't mean *that* but... I guess I am.

EM

Oh.

I... did not expect you to give in to that so quickly. Well, you see, I only give my number to those who are worthy.

PENNY

Oh, well I'm definitely worthy so you don't have to worry about that.

EM

And I'm supposed to just take your word for it? Everyone thinks they're worthy but so few truly are. I... am a prize. You were not that far off in objectifying me, but you so drastically miscalculated my worth. I am worth far much more than twenty-two cents. I have to be won.

PENNY

Okay, O Great and Powerful One, ask and you shall receive, how can I prove myself worthy of the prize that is your number?

EM

Yes! Thank you for referring to me by my proper title! Well- what should I call you?

PENNY

Sir Pennington the Brave.

EM

Well, Sir Pennington the Brave, in order to prove yourself worthy you must complete these trials three. Do you accept this lofty and dangerous quest?

PENNY

Of course I do. What's up first?

EM

(Has not thought this far ahead. Scanning the store for ideas.)

Uhh...

PENNY

You have not done this before, have you?

EM

Shut up, peasant.

(A moment of silence and smiling)

Oh, okay! Here.

Em runs to the other side of the store to change the open sign to closed. She runs upstage to the refrigerated section and grabs an armful of sodas, Penny following awkwardly.

EM

Help me set these up.

PENNY

For... what?

EM

Soda bowling. Sowlng, if you will.

PENNY

I will not.

EM

Just shut up and set these up with me.

(Penny and Em set up the sodas like bowling pins. They stand and admire their handiwork.)

Now go and knock this shit over. Win my affection. Dance, monkey, dance.

PENNY
With what?

EM
Hm?

PENNY
What do I bowl with?

EM
Shit.

(She picks up a soda from the corner of the triangle and tosses it to Penny.)
Use this.

PENNY
Aha! An advantage!

EM
Sure.

PENNY
How many do I have to get?

EM
Hm... strike or a spare. You get two shots.

Penny lines her shot up and rolls the soda to knock over around half of their makeshift pins. Em grabs the soda and tosses it back to Penny. Penny takes her second shot and knocks over all but one pin. Both stare at the last pin. Em hastily kicks and knocks over the pin.)

EM
Victory! The first trial has been conquered! Now come help me put this shit away so we can do the second trial.

They each grab half of the knocked over sodas and put them back where Em got them from.

PENNY

Can you still sell these? Like, legally?

EM

Eh.

(Beat.)

Okay. I actually know what I'm doing with this second trial-

PENNY

Wait, you didn't before?

EM

Shut it. For the second trial, you will have to find the weirdest, most "why the fuck does this exist," item in the store. The catch? I will be competing, too. And to win, your item has to be weirder than mine.

PENNY

What! That is so not fair. You work here, you should know this store like the back of your hand!

EM

That I do. Still think you're worthy?

PENNY

Hell yeah, I do. When do we start?

EM

Now.

(The two split off and search the store.)

Haha! Got it! Meet me by the register when you're done.

PENNY

Already there, baby!

EM

(At the counter)

And which register would you be at?

PENNY

Oh, that was completely metaphorical I am nowhere near finished.

(A moment as she finds her item and goes to the counter)

Show me what you got.

EM

Okay, I found these. Bacon scented bandaids.

PENNY

What?!

EM

Bacon scented bandaids.

PENNY

Why the fuck does that exist?!

EM

For very practical reasons.

PENNY

Mhmm.

EM

I don't know, man, I really love... sniffing my wounds? These would make that experience just so much more enjoyable.

PENNY

Oh, absolutely that makes so much sense, you're right.

EM

As I always am. What did you get?

PENNY

Oh. I found this. Birthday cake flavoured Fanta.

EM

I'm sorry what flavoured Fanta?

PENNY

Birthday cake.

EM

My God. When did we buy that? Why would we buy that? Why would they make that?
When will they stop?

PENNY

Not until they have a Fanta for every flavour out there.

EM

Including bacon?

PENNY

Especially bacon.

EM

Oh dear God.

Ok ok, screw whatever the last trial was gonna be. You win this one, your next trial is to
drink that.

PENNY

Noooo.

EM

(Mocking Penny)

Yessss.

PENNY

Well, this has been fun. What a way to go. Goodbye, cruel world.

(She goes to pop the tab but Em stops her.)

EM

Wait.

(She snatches the can from Penny's hand and grabs a pair of scissors from behind the counter)

You have to shotgun it. Drink your birthday cake Fanta like a real man. *(She hands both to Penny.)*

PENNY

No! Are you serious?

EM

Hey man, you wanna win the prize you gotta commit.

PENNY

Oh, I can commit.

Penny stabs the can and quickly puts it to her mouth. She drinks all she can and lets some spill down her chin. The drink is blue. After a moment, Em starts banging her fists on the counter and chanting 'chug chug chug' until Penny is finished and slams the can down on the counter.

EM

Triumph!

PENNY

It's fucking blue, dude! Why is it blue?

EM

No great prize can be won without drinking a little Windex.

PENNY

It's nothing I can't handle.

EM

Clearly.

(Loudly)

The trials have been conquered by...

PENNY

Sir Pennington the Brave.

EM

The trials have been conquered by Sir Pennington the Brave! A God amongst men! The worthiest of all that have ever been worthy, which is oh so few. A legend now and forever!

PENNY

Woo!

So do I get your number now or...

EM

Oh, shoot, yeah one sec.

(She grabs Penny's receipt and writes on the bottom of it. She quickly stuffs Penny's purchase and the receipt into a plastic bag and hands it to Penny.)

Congratulations on completing this noble quest.

PENNY

Thanks.

(A beat.)

So I guess I'll just... call you? Text you? I don't know.

EM

Alright.

PENNY

Goodbye...

(She never learned her name.)

EM

Em.

PENNY

Penny.

EM
Goodbye, Penny.

PENNY
Goodbye, Em.

Penny exits. Em smiles before she returning to her book. After a moment, Pop enters, angry.

EM
Hey, Pop.

POP
Anyone stop by while I was out?

EM
Yeah, one or two people.

POP
How rude of them.
(Em doesn't understand)
Well, it's rude to shop at a store that's closed.

EM
Shit.

POP
Shit is right, Em. You can't just close the store whenever you don't feel like working; that's not how the real world works. Did we even make any money or did we just lose more because you can't seem to listen when I tell you not to take from the store without paying? *(Motioning to the empty soda can on the counter.)* This shit is unacceptable, Emmeline. We need every penny that you lost by doing that and the customer loyalty that is built by consistent store hours which we won't have if you keep closing the store on a whim.

EM

I'm so sorry, pop. It won't happen again, I promise.

POP

How many times are you gonna have to say that to me before you stop screwing up?

Beat.

EM

I take it things didn't go great at the bank.

POP

They did not. I have another meeting in like a week. We need to be making money right now, Em.

EM

I know, I'm sorry, I was just-

POP

Save it. Can you manage the store for another ten minutes or is that asking too much of you? I need a beer.

Pop storms off through the curtain, leaving Em standing alone on stage. After a moment, the lights fade.

The lights come back up on two bedrooms, right next to each other despite being miles apart. Em and Penny are each on their respective bed,s holding phones to their ears. The lights fade up on the two already talking.

PENNY

No, I kid you not, half the class was out *cold* by the end of it. I swear to God, I have never seen so many people asleep at once. It's like he was some sort of wizard. A hypnosis wizard.

EM

That's incredible. I mean, I go to public school and I don't know if I've ever seen more than three people asleep at once.

PENNY

Yeah, it was definitely a surreal experience. I didn't think anyone could ruin *Romeo and Juliet*, and yet here we are.

EM

Did you manage to stay awake through all of it?

PENNY

Excruciatingly, yeah. I'm a diligent note-taker, couldn't let my reputation slip.

EM

Oh, are you a straight-A student?

PENNY

Yeah. Are you not?

EM

God no.

PENNY

Really? You're smarter than at least half of the idiots at my school.

EM

Oh, that many?

PENNY

You read *Catcher in the Rye* for fun!

EM

Yeah, but I don't give a shit. Plus I suck at math. Multiplication fears me.

PENNY

That sounds kinda nice.

EM

What?

PENNY

I mean, having good grades is cool but... I don't know. I wish I could be more relaxed at school. Feels like I might have a better time.

EM

Why can't you?

PENNY

My dad is so up my ass about my grades. I mean, I know it's important to keep my scholarship or whatever but I just can't catch a break. Like, I swear he read *The Catcher in the Rye* too just so he could critique my papers on it.

EM

Woah, I didn't know there was a *Catcher in the Rye Two*. I didn't even think there was room for a sequel. It any good?

PENNY

Shut up I hate you.

EM

Yeah, I know.

(Beat.)

That sounds like it sucks, though. I'm sorry.

PENNY

Eh, it is what it is. What about you? Your parents not unhealthily obsessed with how you're doing in school?

EM

Nah, not really. My mom's not around and my dad's only up my ass about the store.

PENNY

So I'm guessing he wouldn't approve of sacrificing half your soda stock to make sure a girl is worthy of your phone number?

EM

Oh, definitely not. And he will never know.

PENNY

Your secret is safe with me.

EM

Thank you, thank you.

(Beat.)

So, speaking of my dad, he's got a meeting at the bank tomorrow.

PENNY

(oblivious)

Oh yeah?

EM

Yeah. So... he'll be out of the house for a while.

PENNY

(picking up on things now)

Oh yeah?

EM

I figure if I actually ask if I can close the store for a bit I should be good to... spend some time in my room.

PENNY

Oh yeah?

EM

If you say that one more time you're not invited tomorrow.

PENNY

Removed from vocabulary.

EM

Thank you.

A long, silent moment passes.

PENNY
So... am I invited tomorrow?

EM
Oh, yes.

PENNY
Cool. So... what time?

EM
As soon as possible.

PENNY
Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

EM
Bye.

PENNY
Bye.

EM
See you tomorrow.

PENNY
Yeah.

The lights fade out.

Lights up on Em's bedroom. A door is across the room from the bed. There's a bedside table next to the bed and a desk across from it. Em opens the door for Penny who walks in first. Penny slowly surveys the room. Em slowly surveys Penny.

EM
So, this is it. The... Thunderdome.

They're quiet a moment as Penny investigates the room, picking up and analysing random objects on Em's desk.

PENNY

I like your room.

(She picks up a photo frame)

This you?

EM

(Slams the photo frame upside down on her desk.)

No.

(It is)

PENNY

(Not convinced.)

'Kay.

...

You were cute.

EM

Shut up. Sit down with me.

(She grabs Penny's hand and leads her to the bed. They don't think to let go of each others' hands.)

PENNY

So...

EM

So...

(They both suddenly become hyper-aware of their hands touching and pull them back)

PENNY

So, I finished *Catcher in the Rye*.

EM

Oh yeah? Did you like it? Most people don't like it but they're actually wrong.

PENNY

I loved it. Think it's one of my favourite books that I've had to read for school.

EM

You have good taste.

...

How are things? Ya know, at your big, fancy private school.

PENNY

Things are okay. I mean, the classes are good but... I don't know, it kinda sucks. Everyone's a rich, bigoted asshole. I'm surprised they even let us read *Catcher in the Rye*; it seems a little on the "blasphemous" side for my school. There's this one guy, Tristan, who found something anti-Christian enough to complain about in literally every book we read last year. Every single one. If he's in my English class again this year I might just have to kill God.

EM

Wait, so can both boys and girls go to your school?

PENNY

Yeah. St. Mary's is your classic co-ed, private, mildly homophobic Catholic school. Honestly, I'm not sure my parents would want me at an all girl's school.

EM

Oh.

...

So, wait, so your parents... know about you, then?

PENNY

Yeah, I came out in 7th grade. They probably knew before I did, honestly. But I'm not really out to anyone else. Not until I graduate. What about you?

EM

No, I'm not... out to anyone. I wasn't even really out to myself before you asked for my number.

PENNY

Aw, that's sweet.

EM

Is it sweet and not just sad?

PENNY

No. There's nothing sad about that.

EM

Okay.

(A sweet, tender moment.)

So, can I join you in your killing of God?

PENNY

Oh absolutely.

As the conversation goes on, the two very slowly inch closer together, the tension growing.

EM

Aid you on your quest?

PENNY

There is genuinely nothing I would like more.

EM

My turn to be your knight in shining armour.

PENNY

We can be knights together.

EM

First God, then the rest of the world.

PENNY

Okay, now we just sound evil.

EM

Was that not the goal?

PENNY
It certainly can be.

EM
Good, good.

A beat. Em is caught up in the moment, Penny is carefully deciding if she actually wants to say what she wants to say. She does.

PENNY
Ya know what, I take it back.

EM
What?

PENNY
When I said there's nothing I'd like more than your aid in my quest. I take it back. There is something I'd like more.

EM
Oh yeah? And what's that?

Penny slowly leans in towards Em, cautiously and carefully moving to close the space between them. Em doesn't move to close the gap, but she closes her eyes and leans in. Right before their lips touch, the door opens and the two shoot away from each other, trying to pretend that moment didn't happen. But it did. And Pop, entering through the door, has seen it.

POP
What the Hell!

EM
Pop!

POP
Get out of my house.

EM
Penny was just-

POP
Get the Hell out of my house!

Penny looks to Em first but Em urges her to go. She rushes out the door and Pop moves to take her place facing Em.

EM
I promise, Pop, it wasn't what it looked like. I just invited Penny over and we-

POP
Save it, Em. How many times have you closed the store so you could do... that in my house?

EM
I asked you if I could close it this time.

POP
That doesn't matter. We're nearly broke, Em. I make time every day to ask God for help, for forgiveness, so we can stay afloat right now. And here you are closing the store to go against everything that he stands for. That we stand for. Buying yourself a one way ticket to Hell.

EM
Pop...

POP
Do you even know what you're doing? Have you thought about what you're doing? Or tried to stop it? Em, this is a dangerous phase to go through-

EM
What?

POP

Listen, darling, I know we need the money but I think we can close down on Sunday. Go to Church, talk to Pastor Dave and repent so we can just move forward from this. Okay?

EM

This isn't a phase. It's not something that will go away with church and a "clear head."

POP

Em...

EM

I'm serious. I promise I'll pick up slack with the store. I'll do whatever. I just... I'm...

It's not gonna just go away. No matter how hard I try.

POP

Em, I know it may seem like that but Pastor Dave has talked about this before. It's okay.

He can fix this.

EM

Fix this? Pop, I'm not fucking broken.

POP

It's okay to make mistakes, God still loves us, and I love you, but if you don't watch your tongue-

EM

Mistakes? What mistakes? Pop, I didn't do anything wrong.

POP

Em, what God loves about us is our ability to change and to grow and if you can't do that-

EM

Change? And grow? So I guess God hates you because you clearly haven't done that.

POP

Emmeline Hardam if you don't calm down-

EM
You'll what? Send me to Hell?

POP
(Progressively getting more aggressive)
Em-

EM
Well good, then. That's where I belong, right?

POP
Em.

EM
People like me. Damned since birth.

POP
Emmeline.

EM
Maybe I'll see you there! Maybe I can torture you forever by *kissing girls*.

POP
(Yelling now.)
Emmeline!

They're both silent for a moment, staring each other down.

EM
You made me this way.

Three beats in a perfect, fast-paced rhythm. First, the lights come down with a thud. Second, a thump is heard in the dark as Pop punches Em in the face. Third, a gasp is heard from Em. For a moment, the stage remains this way, pitch black and silent.

A spotlight comes up on a bench centre stage. Em is sitting on the bench hunched over with an ice pack held to her eye. She's alone on stage for a moment before Penny enters and sits down. The two are quiet for a moment.

PENNY

Are you okay?

(She gives Em a moment to answer. She doesn't.)

Can I?

(She turns Em's head to look at her and moves the ice pack down from her eye, carefully running her thumb along the bruise on her face.)

You sure you'll be okay?

EM

I don't know.

(The two embrace.)

PENNY

We'll figure this out. I promise.

EM

How? I can't... I can't go back there. Penny, I can't go back.

PENNY

Oh, I know. I know, darling. We'll figure this out. You don't... you don't have to go back.

EM

What else can I do?

PENNY

(A moment)

Come home with me.

EM

What?

PENNY

Come back home with me. Please. You can't... I just can't let you go back there.

EM
Penny...

PENNY
My parents won't mind. I promise. You can stay with me until we figure things out.
Please. Let me be here.

EM
Penny, I don't know if I can...

PENNY
What else can you do?
...
I'll be right there.

EM
Okay.

PENNY
Yeah?

EM
Yeah. Let's go home.

Penny wraps her arm around Em and the lights go down.

Lights come up on the same two bedrooms from earlier. The lights on Em's room are dimmer. In the same moment that Penny and Em enter Penny's bedroom, Pop enters Em's. In sync, Em surveys Penny's bedroom and Pop scans Em's.

EM
Are you sure it's okay if I stay here?

PENNY
Yeah. For as long as you need.

EM
So... this is your room?

PENNY
In the flesh.

EM
(Quietly)
I like it.

Penny grabs Em's hand and leads her to sit down on the floor at the end of her bed. On the other side of the stage, Pop sits down on Em's bed.

PENNY
Your eye hurt?

EM
Only a little.
(Penny makes a face.)
What?

PENNY
I just wanna make you feel better.

EM
You have.
(It's quiet for a moment as Em rests her head on Penny's shoulder.)
So, explain to me the Care Bears bed sheets?

PENNY
I *knew* you were gonna comment on that!

EM
How could I not? What are you, eight? Do you... do you want to talk about it?

PENNY
Shut up. I didn't have time to get new ones.

EM

I'm just saying I'm here if you want to talk about it.

PENNY

Shut up.

EM

Which one's your favourite?

PENNY

You're the worst.

EM

And I pride myself on that fact.

PENNY

(After a moment.)

So, you can stay in our guest room. If... if you want.

EM

Is there another option?

PENNY

What?

EM

What if I *don't* want to stay in your guest room? What if I'd rather stay, hmm, in your mom's bedroom?

PENNY

Oh my God. What have I gotten myself into?

EM

I don't know what you're talking about I was just asking a genuine question.

PENNY

I have a genuine question for you.

EM
Oh yeah?

PENNY
Do you ever shut up?

EM
Hmmm, no. That's beyond my capabilities.

PENNY
It's "beyond your capabilities"?

EM
That is what I said.

PENNY
I hate you.

EM
That makes sense

A quiet moment. Em catches a glimpse of her face in a mirror, her hand goes to the bruise.

PENNY
You okay?

EM
I've got quite the shiner, huh?

PENNY
Yeah...

EM
I just can't believe that he...

PENNY
I know...

EM
And now I'm living with a girl who drank rat poison for my number

PENNY
I- what?

EM
The Fanta.

PENNY
Oh. Yeah.

EM
It's just... weird.

PENNY
I can't even imagine.

EM
I just didn't think that this was even a possibility. It just didn't cross my mind.

PENNY
I'm really sorry that this happened. I'm just... I'm really sorry.

EM
It's alright. It's not like it was your fault.

PENNY
I don't know, I kind of feel like it was,

EM
What? Penny, you're the one who's got me out of this.

PENNY

I know, but... if I hadn't... you know... if I hadn't gone to your house he wouldn't have gotten mad.

EM

Penny, I invited you over.

PENNY

I know but I was the one who...

EM

Penny, stop. It's not your fault.

PENNY

You sure?

EM

Absolutely.

...

Plus, in a weird way, I'm kind of glad it happened. I mean, I'm not glad things... went the way they did. But I'm glad he knows. And that I know, too.

PENNY

Know what?

EM

That my dad's a piece of shit. I mean, he doesn't care about my friends or my grades but he cares that I like girls?

Pop picks up a teddy bear from Em's bed and looks at it.

PENNY

For what it's worth, I don't care that you like girls.

EM

Oh yeah? Really? Because I thought you'd care quite a bit.

PENNY

What? I'm sorry if I- look, I would never- oh you meant, like, in a good way.

EM

Yes. I meant, like, in a good way.

PENNY

Oh. Well then yes, definitely. Yes, I'm actually quite happy that you like girls.

EM

Oh yeah?

PENNY

Yeah. Yeah definitely.

Penny and Em both lean into a kiss that actually happens this time. Pop aggressively throws the teddy bear to the floor and puts his head in his hands. The lights slowly fade.

End