

The Inner Circle

By Patricia Loughrey

An HIV Prevention Drama for Teens

**The New Conservatory Theatre Center
YouthAware Educational Theatre
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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. If more set is desired, a unit set can be divided between the two major locations: The Watertower 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 answer machine, school bell etc.

The Inner Circle - Changing Times was originally produced in 1998 at the New Conservatory Theatre Center of San Francisco, California. Artistic Director, Ed Decker.

The Original Cast:

SARAH - Melvina Jones

DANNY - Bill Allen

KAT - Staci Nardizzi

MARK - Feodore Chin

Directed by Patricia Miller.

Opening: Dark stage. Sound of phone machine.

BEEP

SARAH'S VOICE

Kat, it's Sarah. Can you and Danny come to the Water Tower tonight? About 8-00. Call me.

BEEP

SARAH'S VOICE

Mark, it's Sarah. We're going to meet at the Water Tower tonight at 8-00. 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.

(music)

Scene One: Top of the Water Tower. Danny, Sarah, Mark and Kat run through the audience and climb up to the Water Tower.

SARAH

Come on you guys, all the way up.

MARK

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

SARAH

Our stuff is still on 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

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 the sunburn.

KAT

Hey, 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 were 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 - Hey Mark, remember Water Tower man?

MARK

Water Tower Man! Faster than a flushing toilet!

DANNY

More powerful than a backed up sewer!

MARK

The world is safe because the man of slime -

DANNY

Flows by night -

MARK & DANNY

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 and 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 kind of school buses, 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 every day. Then she said, "You are the children of God. And don't ever forget it." 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 drivers side.

DANNY

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

KAT

Sarah, what was the surprise you brought us up here for? I'm getting cold.

DANNY

I'll warm you up.

SARAH

Oh yeah. 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's made us such good friends, and I want to us to celebrate being friends, and so I brought us "Happy Meals" (*Disappointed cheer from Mark, Kat and Danny*) and Champagne! (*Big cheer*) (*She takes out Happy Meals and Champagne from her backpack*)

MARK

(*To audience*) All this was classic Sarah. She could do the corniest thing, but she was so sincere, you just 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 cold MacDonalds 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 Mark was just hella shy.

SARAH

Here, this is Danny's. Kat, I made yours vegetarian. And Mark this one is for you.
(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 toy 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 that you bake in the oven.

KAT

(Walking up to Danny) Sarah, these are so hella cool. I love the little goggles.
(Danny picks Kat up and they go 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 have gone 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 hesitate, then exit).

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 and come back here every year on this night, March third, and see each other. I mean if we can.

MARK

I'm down.

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 have 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?

No thanks. SARAH

Chips? KAT

No. SARAH

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

Gummi what? SARAH

(She throws her a Gummi Ninja)
KAT
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.

Ya. SARAH

So what happened? KAT

I had to go somewhere. SARAH

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

(turning off the music)
SARAH
I hate this C.D.

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

Ya. SARAH

Three. Nothing. I hate these things. KAT

When's he coming over? SARAH

KAT

The only people who ever win are janitors and WalMart employees. I'll do yours. One, Two...

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

Look whatever, let's go shopping, maybe buy some 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 so 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.

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 exits)*

KAT

(To audience) 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: 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 that 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 were 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. And girl, 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.

KAT

Ya? What a dog.

SARAH

Well, he did call one more time. To tell me that 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. I don't have these words in my life. But as soon as I tell my parents and I go to the doctors, then it's going to be my life. I really can't believe it. That's called denial, they talk about that in the pamphlets. I'm just a regular ordinary teenager who just found out that she's going to be HIV positive for the rest of her life. However long that will be. Morbid humor, they talk about that too. It's a coping skill. They know all about how I'm going to react. They just don't know how to get rid of the damned virus that's in me.

KAT

Won't the drugs sort of help?

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, and my dad-he can't handle 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 different when you're actually there and about to do it and there's this great guy 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 even 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: School Hall

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 mom 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: Water Tower the next day.

SARAH

(Reading from an AIDS pamphlet) Okay. "AIDS is a serious condition that destroys the body's natural defenses against disease and infection. People with AIDS 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 like 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 AIDS" No, worse than that, I'm a "Teen With AIDS." 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 did you do, go to medical school since yesterday?

KAT

I called the AIDS hotline, 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 the 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 knew 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 hands 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 this for?

MARK

What trouble?

DANNY

What are you doing with all this AIDS stuff?

Danny- SARAH

What AIDS stuff? MARK

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

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

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

Yes, I do. SARAH

You do what? What's going on? MARK

Mark, don't make her say it. KAT

Say what? MARK

Sarah, you have AIDS? DANNY

No way. MARK

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

Yes. SARAH

You're HIV positive? MARK

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

Kat, please. Just stop. MARK

KAT

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, when did you get it? Or do you even know?

SARAH

Danny, you don't have it, okay?

(pause)

KAT

Well, son of a bitch.

(Everyone is silent)

MARK

(Doesn't get it, then does and bursts out) What? No way. You slept with him? Did you? You didn't,

SARAH

This is bad.

KAT

(furious) A simple yes or no will do, Sarah,

DANNY

Yes, it happened, okay?

KAT

"It" happened? "It"? You mean "you". You two. You happened.

SARAH

No, not all the way. We were drunk. We just...

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 AIDS, too?

DANNY

Kat-

KAT

Don't Danny. Say nothing.

SARAH

I didn't sleep with Danny,

DANNY

Ya but maybe you can get it, you know, other ways.

KAT

I really don't want to here the details,

SARAH

I didn't have it then Danny. Besides, you don't get it that way.

KAT

(to Danny) You better get yourself tested. This girl's word doesn't mean much 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 we were 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'd 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 had-

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 do it? We had that whole conversation and you kept saying, "Okay, okay, let's just not keep 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 mom crying on the kitchen floor at three 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 really nice, but she calls me "dear." If you really exist, God and 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... what ever you guys did... with my best friends 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 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

Can 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 her 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 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 disease 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.

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 \$20,000 a year but there's some program that pays for the medication if a person 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. 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: 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 just look at her and I'd 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 really aren't talking about the main thing that's going on.

Scene Ten: Classroom

KAT

(to audience) We had this AIDS lecture 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 couldn't believe it. 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 "normal" 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

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, "Oh AIDS, it's not such a big deal anymore, they have medication for it now." But the medication doesn't cure you, it just helps your body try to fight it. I take about 600 pills a month, that's about 20 a day. Like this *(holds up a pill bottle)* I have to take this 3 times a day, 2 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. *(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. You couldn't hear traffic on the street or people outside, it was like Sarah had taken her heart out and laid it on the table.

SARAH

(holding her chart and pointing to medication) This is called gancyclovir.

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

This is a protease inhibitor.

KAT

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

SARAH

This is called a neucleoside analogue reverse transcriptase inhibitor.

MARK

(to audience) Don't tell them how those "miracle" drugs don't work for everybody.

SARAH

This is another transcriptase inhibitor. They work together.

DANNY

(to audience) Don't tell them how all this medication is damaging your liver-

SARAH

And this is hydroxyurea.

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 just going to look concerned for five minutes and then talk about you behind your back, and then they'll leave. The same way I left. Maybe for a different reason, but it comes to the same thing. 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 AIDS 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 that said "People who get AIDS deserve it"; well, while she's talking, he slowly started pushing his chair back and sits down about as far as he could get from Sarah. She looks at him, and down at those pill bottles and for a second I thought she might faint. Or I might faint. The whole thing was just 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 and 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 try not to. Mostly I feel pretty good. And if it keeps working... well, I'm planning to apply to college, maybe get a part time job. I had to quit track. I got sick for a while and missed too much but... anyway... I guess that's all.

KAT

(to audience) 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

(to audience) 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.

(bell rings)

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, music underscores) Well, for a while, things were better. *(Kat and Mark help Sarah gather her things up)*. Kat's never really 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 maybe five or ten years, she's going to get very, very sick, and there's nothing we can do, or medicine can do, to stop it. *(Danny exits)*

Scene Eleven: Sarah sits alone in the Water Tower. Sound of phone machine.

(At first she looks excited, then as she hears the messages she realises that the others aren't coming.)

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 paper 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 meant. Say hi to Kat and Mark for me will you? Is Kat still seeing that jerk?

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 getting so close- *(click)* I've got another call. How are you feeling? Call me.

BEEP

MARK'S VOICE

Sarah, this is Mark. I hope you're getting stronger on the new meds. I have to work all weekend 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. I'm think about you.
(blackout and music)

THE END.