

Act Out a Scene
Breathing Room, Chapter 2 - Loonless Lake

ACT OUT A SCENE

from

BREATHING ROOM

Chapter 2 – Loonless Lake*

*Some changes in the text have been made to accommodate the dramatic format.

Cast:

FATHER (Mr. Hoffmeister)
EVVY (Evelyn Hoffmeister)
NURSE MARSHALL

(Scene: A father and his daughter arrive at Loon Lake Sanatorium where the daughter will be left to get treatment for tuberculosis, a disease that frequently affects the lungs. The year is 1940.)

FATHER: Well, here we are, Evvy.

EVVY: See any loons?

FATHER: No, not yet.

(FATHER gets out of the car and walks to the car door next to EVVY.)

EVVY: How about a lake?

FATHER: *(opening the car door)* Nope, but it's Minnesota, Evvy. One can't be too far away.

EVVY: Abe said they should call it Loony Lake.

FATHER: Sounds like something your brother would come up with.

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(EVVY hugs her stuffed bear Francy and steps out of the car, trying to act normal and healthy.)

EVVY: The building looks like the picture on the brochure—just bigger. Much bigger.

(FATHER steps in closer to EVVY.)

FATHER: Maybe I should carry you, Evvy.

EVVY: I'm okay, Father. Really.

(EVVY climbs the first three steps on her own, but must pause to catch her breath.)

FATHER: Hey, wait for me, Puddlejump.

(The two finish climbing the stairs, and FATHER opens the heavy door to the building.

EVVY is then seated in a wheel chair. NURSE MARSHALL appears to meet them.)

NURSE MARSHALL: The patient's name?

FATHER: *(Reaches out to shake the nurse's hand, but she is writing and ignores his gesture)* I'm her father, Daniel Hoffmeister.

NURSE MARSHALL: *(with irritation in her voice)* The patient's name?

FATHER: Evvy—Evelyn is her full name. Evelyn Hoffmeister.

NURSE MARSHALL: Her age?

FATHER: Thirteen.

NURSE MARSHALL: Date of birth?

FATHER: April 9th, 1927.

NURSE MARSHALL: History of tuberculosis in the family?

FATHER: No—none, only Evvy. I mean she is the first.

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NURSE MARSHALL: *(still writing without looking up)* I am Nurse Marshall. Dr. Keith and I will be in charge of your daughter's immediate medical care.

FATHER: Yes, I understand.

NURSE MARSHALL: You must also understand that visitors are not allowed at Loon Lake until authorized by Dr. Tollerud.

FATHER: Yes, I—we understand. Thank you.

NURSE MARSHALL: Now, let us begin our work.

FATHER: *(tugging on his hat)* Could I have a moment alone with her?

NURSE MARSHALL: *(giving him an icy stare)* Your daughter needs to rest, Mr. Hoffmeister. We will decide what is best for her.

FATHER: Well, then, thank you, Nurse Marshall.

(Looking at EVVY)

I guess it's time for us to say goodbye, Evvy.

(NURSE MARSHALL begins pushing the wheelchair away.)

Your mother will miss you.

(EVVY and NURSE MARSHALL move down the hallway.)

We all will!

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Act Out a Scene
Breathing Room, Chapter 8 – Going Home

ACT OUT A SCENE

from

BREATHING ROOM

Chapter 8 –Going Home*

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Cast:

EVVY

PEARL

DENA

BEVERLY

(Scene: The four girls all share a ward room at Loon Lake Sanatorium, a special hospital for people suffering from tuberculosis. EVVY is new to the room and uncertain of what to expect. She pretends to be asleep as the other girls return from Activity.)

PEARL: Do you think the new girl's ever going to talk? I just know she'll like me.

DENA: You don't know anything, Pearl. Let her sleep.

PEARL: Oh, be quiet, Dena. If Mr. Clark Gable himself walked in this door, you'd find something rude to say to him. You have no manners.

DENA: And you have no brains, Pearl. No movie star like Clark Gable would ever set foot in a place like this.

PEARL: He might for charity, Dena!

DENA: Oh, that'd be great, Pearl. To have famous people feeling sorry for us.

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Act Out a Scene

Breathing Room, Chapter 8 – Going Home

BEVERLY: Quiet, please, both of you. She doesn't need to hear you two squabbling with each other.

DENA: Ah, quit playing mother hen, Beverly. Look, Evvy's not even awake.

(EVVY opens her eyes on hearing someone calling her Evvy instead of Evelyn.)

Hey, look. Sleeping Beauty's awake!

PEARL: That's not my fault, Beverly. Dena woke her up, not me!

EVVY: *(pointing to the empty bed next to hers)* Is there someone assigned to that bed?

BEVERLY: You're in what used to be Shirley's bed—she aged up to the women's ward—

PEARL: *(interrupting)* I'm the next one to turn sixteen. But I should be leaving Loon Lake before then.

DENA: *(pointing to the empty bed)* Or going home like Marianne.

PEARL: You know that wouldn't have happened if Marianne had let them do a pneumo.

BEVERLY: Please, you two—

EVVY: A pneumo?

DENA: The doctors push air into your chest so your lung goes flat and can rest. It's just another stupid treatment.

PEARL: No it's not stupid! A pneumothorax can make all the difference! That's why I want one.

DENA: It's all a lot of hot air. It hasn't done anything for me.

PEARL: That's because of your attitude, Dena. If you did just one thing recommended in the *Loon Lake Booster*, you'd be discharged in no time. Look at me—why, I can even walk to the lake now!

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Act Out a Scene

Breathing Room, Chapter 8 – Going Home

DENA: Why don't you just jump in it next time, Pearl.

EVVY: So can we talk around here or not?

BEVERLY: *(with a sigh)* We really shouldn't, Evvy, but we do. Usually when the staff is busy—like right now before they bring us dinner.

EVVY: So could I ask another question?

BEVERLY: Just don't ask them all today. And if Dena points her finger at you, stop talking. She's got ears like a bat and always seems to know when someone's coming.

DENA: Especially Old Eagle Eye.

PEARL: Really, Dena, there's no need to call Nurse Marshall a name.

DENA: It's not a bad name. I could called her an old bat or something worse—

EVVY: *(speaking louder to be heard over DENA and PEARL)* Hey! Could I ask a question now?

BEVERLY: Please do.

EVVY: Okay, what do they do with our spit?

DENA: *(laughs, though not in a friendly way)* Spit's called sputum here. We cough some up into those sputum cups, and the docs look at the color and how thick it is, then check it to see if there are still TB germs swimming around in there.

PEARL: Oh, those poor little piggies!

EVVY: Huh?

DENA: You don't care about those pigs, Pearl, and you know it.

PEARL: I do too care. It's just so sad.

EVVY: They call our germs pigs?

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DENA: Nah. But every so often, the doctors stick our germs into a guinea pig. If the pig lives, you're negative for active TB. You might get to leave this place. That doesn't happen much. We like to kill guinea pigs around here.

BEVERLY: We don't kill the pigs, Dena, our disease does.

PEARL: Well, my next guinea pig will live. I'm certain of it. I can feel myself getting better every day.

BEVERLY: *(in a soothing, motherly tone)* We all are.

EVVY: A negative result would be good, but the opposite...Is that what the plus sign on my chart means? That my spi—my sputum—is still positive?

DENA: That's right. You're as sharp as a knife, Evvy.

EVVY: Would a negative sign mean I'm cured?

BEVERLY: Not exactly. That means your body has learned to fight off the TB by building walls around it.

DENA: In other words, Evvy, sick or well, you're a bug for life.

EVVY: Didn't you say that girl Marianne went home?

(No one answers immediately.)

BEVERLY: She didn't go home, not in the way you're thinking, Evvy. When people in the sanatorium say someone's going home, what they mean is—

DENA: *(in a strident voice that gets louder)* What they mean is that the person croaked—as in, sold the farm, rode the last train, swallowed the last pill, killed their last pig, breathed their last breath, dropped doorknob dead. You get it?

PEARL: Look, Dena, you made her cry.

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BEVERLY: I'm sorry, Evvy.

DENA: Lying to Evvy about Loon Lake won't do her any favors. She might as well know the truth. People die at Loon Lake all the time.

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ACT OUT A SCENE

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Chapters 12 & 13 – Blue Nothing & Blue Something *

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Cast:

DENA

PEARL

EVVY

BEVERLY

SARAH

FEMALE LETTER READER (*person who will read aloud the different letters from EVVY's mother and grandmothers in voices appropriate to the letter writer*)

MALE LETTER READER (*person who will read aloud the different letters from EVVY's father and brother in voices appropriate to the letter writer*)

VOICE FROM ACROSS THE ROOM

(Scene: The five girls all share a ward room at Loon Lake Sanatorium, a special hospital for people suffering from tuberculosis. A new girl named SARAH has recently arrived and EVVY has just earned her first privilege—receiving mail.)

DENA: Don't get too excited, Evvy. Letters are never as good as you want 'em to be.

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Act Out a Scene

Breathing Room, Chapters 12 & 13 – Blue Nothing & Blue Something

PEARL: Oh, yes they are! You're just jealous. My best friend, Muriel, writes me the longest, best letters just full of news.

DENA: Yeah, I know what her letters are full of...

PEARL: (*ignoring DENA and looking at EVVY*) Plus, Evvy, you can get magazines like *Photoplay*—oh, and the Loon Lake Booster too.

DENA: Yeah, there's something to really cheer you up. A newsletter written by a bunch of lungers. What could bring a smile to your sick face faster than some Pollyannas telling you their plucky little stories!

PEARL: Well, I like the Booster. It certainly does boost my spirits!

EVVY: I promise to take a look at it. I really just hope to hear from my brother.

BEVERLY: What's his name?

EVVY: Abe—well, really Abraham--but no one ever calls him that, except maybe my mother sometimes.

DENA: You mean like Honest Abe?

EVVY: Nope, not Abraham Lincoln. He was named after my mother's great-grandfather who played the cornet at President James Buchanan's inauguration.

SARAH: (*speaking for the first time*) Abraham's a Hebrew name from the Old Testament.

Act Out a Scene

Breathing Room, Chapters 12 & 13 – Blue Nothing & Blue Something

BEVERLY: Is your brother older than you, Evvy?

EVVY: Yeah, but just by a couple of minutes. We're twins.

PEARL: *(perking up with interest)* Identical?

EVVY: No, we can't be since he's a boy and I'm a girl. We're fraternal twins.

PEARL: *(sounding disappointed)* Oh. So do you two even look alike?

(Sarah opens her eyes and pays attention to EVVY's response.)

EVVY: People say we do, but I don't think so. Abe's got blondish hair, mine's browner. I've got green eyes. His are more hazel. He's really tall for his age. I'm not.

DENA: *(speaking through clenched teeth and signaling EVVY)* Old Eagle Eye!

(Nurse Marshall enters the room. She hands a stack of mail to BEVERLY, a new Photoplay for Pearl, no mail for DENA and none for SARAH, who doesn't yet have the mail privilege. PEARL holds up her magazine with a movie star on the cover, posing her face alongside. NURSE MARSHALL stops at EVVY's bed and gives EVVY her mail last.)

EVVY: *(whispering very softly, as if talking to herself)* From mother...

FEMALE LETTER READER: *(sounding like a worried mother)*

Dearest Evelyn,

I hope this letter finds you in improving health.

EVVY: *(still whispering softly, as if talking to herself)* Ah, from Father...

MALE LETTER READER: *(sounding like a playful father)*

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**Puddlejump, you are the sprout in my Brussels, the
snap in my beans, the kernels in my corn. Peas get well
soon.**

EVVY: *(still whispering softly, as if talking to herself)* From Grandmother Brimley...

FEMALE LETTER READER: *(sounding like a formal, stuffy grandmother)*

Your struggle weighs heavy on the hearts of many. May faith, fortitude, and
dignity guide you each and every day.

EVVY: *(still whispering softly, as if talking to herself)* From Grandma Hoffmeister...

FEMALE LETTER READER: *(sounding like a strong-willed German grandmother)*

**You are giving gray hairs on the heads of your parents. Get
well and get home!**

EVVY: *(whispering, but just a little louder)* Best and last of all from Abe...

MALE LETTER READER: *(sounding like a 13-year old boy)*

Dear Evvy,

I wish I could come see you, but Mother says that we can't yet, and I have to
write you instead. Oh, buzzards! You know how I hate to write. Does this count as a
letter? It should because it's a misstery too.

Love,

Abe

Act Out a Scene

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(Later that same evening when the lights are out for the night.)

SARAH: *(whispering)* Your brother Abe is clever.

(EVVY looking confused about who is speaking.)

SARAH: I saw the letter he wrote you—earlier today, I mean. He colored it blue!

EVVY: Yeah, it was blue.

SARAH: He did that for a reason, Evvy.

EVVY: A reason?

SARAH: I like solving puzzles. I kept wondering why he'd take the time to color a piece of paper with blue crayons. Just blue. And to scratch out the words like that. Then it hit me. He's feeling blue, Evvy. He misses you. He just colored it instead of saying it!

EVVY: Okay. He's blue and he misses me. And that's why he said the letter was a M-I-S-S-t-e-r-y!

(SARAH laughs in a friendly way.)

VOICE FROM ACROSS THE ROOM: Shhhhh!

EVVY: *(whispering)* That's pretty smart of you, Sarah, to have figured that out.

SARAH: I'm no Sherlock Holmes. I'm just jealous because I can't get mail.

EVVY: *(whispering even softer)* Beverly has a whole stack!

SARAH: *(whispering softly as well)* I know! But I bet none as clever as Abe's.

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EVVY: You'll get lots of letters from your brothers and sisters before long.

SARAH: Can't—I'm an only child.

EVVY: Well, I could loan you Abe! But, be warned, he practices his trumpet all the time. He wants to be the next Louis Armstrong.

SARAH: Do you play something, Evvy?

EVVY: Not anymore. I stunk so bad at the clarinet that Abe renamed me Evvy Badman.

SARAH: *(thinking for an instant, then laughing)* I get it. You're no Benny Goodman.

EVVY: How about you, Sarah, do you play anything?

SARAH: I played violin—for a little while—till the teacher said I'd never perform at Carnegie Hall. That's when my parents decided the lessons cost too much.

EVVY: Well, you'll get letters from friends.

SARAH: I don't really have any friends. I skipped two grades at school. Kids call me a know-it-all behind my back.

EVVY: Yeah, well, I wouldn't mind being smart. I still don't know all my state capitals and don't get why you use parenthesis in algebra. Don't they belong in language class?

(Sarah laughs.)

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SARAH: I guess—

(Sarah starts coughing in quick skitter blasts.)

VOICE FROM ACROSS THE ROOM: Cut out the chatter! Ya don't want to make Nurse Gunderson mad.

EVVY: *(sounding irritated at being corrected, whispers one final thing to Sarah)*

Tomorrow, Sarah, we'll talk more tomorrow.