

Adult Alison

FUN HOME

73

*and I'm a man I don't know
Who am I now? Where do I go?
I can't go back
I can't find my way through
I might still break a heart or two
But when the sunlight hits the parlor wall
at certain times of day
I see how fine this house could be
I see it so damn clear
Oh my God!
Why am I standing here?*

*Glare of headlights. Unbearable, deafening sound
of a blaring car horn.*

And then he's gone.

*Alison, shattered, reflexively returns to her
drawing table, to her work.*

ALISON. Caption.

Caption.

Caption.

Caption. Caption.

She realizes the obvious.

I'm the only one here.

*She drops her pen. She picks up a stack of useless
drawings.*

This is what I have of you:

(Paging through them.)

You ordering me to sweep and dust the parlor.

You steaming off the wallpaper.

You in front of a classroom of bored students.

Digging up a dogwood tree.

You working on the house, smelling like sawdust
and sweat and designer cologne.

You calling me at college to tell me how I'm
supposed to feel about Faulkner or Hemingway.

FUN HOME

The next one blindsides her.

ALISON. (cont.) You...standing on the shoulder of Route 150
bracing yourself against the pulse of the
trucks rushing past.

*And the next one...is of the one thing she's ever
really wanted from him.*

You...succumbing to a rare moment of physical
contact with me.

She grabs her pen and draws:

Daddy (comma) hey Daddy
come here okay (question mark)
I need // you

Small Alison appears.

SMALL ALISON.

Daddy, hey, Daddy, come here, okay, I need you.

Medium Alison appears.

MEDIUM ALISON.

At the light
at the light
at the light
at the light

ALISON.

What are you doing (question mark)
I said come here
You need //to do what I tell you to do

SMALL ALISON.

What are you doing?
I said come here!
You need to do what I tell you to do.

SMALL ALISON.

Listen to me. Daddy!
Come here, hey right here,
right now, you're making me
mad.

MEDIUM ALISON.

At the light

Bruce - dad

35

FUN HOME

MEDIUM ALISON. It is.

Joan considers kissing her. Medium Alison wonders whether she's about to be kissed.

JOAN. So. I should probably go.

MEDIUM ALISON. 'kay.

JOAN. So... Will I see you at the Union meeting tomorrow afternoon?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah I'll be, uh, yeah, I will come to the meeting. I'll bring these posters. Finish 'em up.

JOAN. Cool. I'll see you then. Bye, Alison.

MEDIUM ALISON. Bye, Joan.

Joan exits. Medium Alison collapses, face-down, onto the bed. Alison crumples as well.

SHIFT to Bruce, dressed in a suit, holding a pair of patent-leather Mary Janes as Small Alison, tears around in an awkwardly fitting party dress she's covered up with a boy's t-shirt and sneakers.

BRUCE. Oh no you don't. T-shirt off.

Small Alison grudgingly takes off the t-shirt. Bruce re-ties the sash.

Look, you've messed this up already. Where's your barrette?

Small Alison hands it over. He puts it in her hair.

SMALL ALISON. Ow!

BRUCE. Sneakers.

SMALL ALISON. Why??

BRUCE. Because you're going to a party.

(Holding out the Mary Janes.)

Here.

SMALL ALISON. I don't want to wear those.

BRUCE. Tough titty.

SMALL ALISON.

I despise this dress.

What's the matter with boy's shirts and pants?

BRUCE. You're a girl.

SMALL ALISON.

This dress makes me feel like a clown.

I hate it!

BRUCE. That's enough. We're late.

SMALL ALISON. You're wearing a girl color.

An eye-blink of rage which he channels into ultra-calm rationality.

BRUCE. Every other girl at this party is going to be wearing her prettiest dress and you want to put on... What? What? Your jean jacket? Trousers? S'alright with me. You understand you'll be the *only* girl there not wearing a dress, right? Is that what you want? You want everyone talking about you behind your back. S'alright with me, change your clothes. Well? Go ahead. You gonna change?

SMALL ALISON.

Maybe not right now.

Maybe not right now.

MEDIUM ALISON. Dear Mom and Dad—

BRUCE. (*Exiting.*) Good.

MEDIUM ALISON.

— I'm trying to tell you something and I'm having a hard time because it's kind of a big deal. It's not that big of a deal! It might be a big deal! I don't know!

I want— I want— I want— I—

— am a lesbian!

Dear Mom and Dad, I am a lesbian.

Joan enters.

JOAN. Hey.

SMALL ALISON.

La la la la...

Christian and John

FUN HOME

21

CHRISTIAN. When you break your neck is it just like *crack* you're instantly dead?

JOHN. Probably his head was hanging from his neck and then he couldn't see, and he couldn't eat or anything and then he died from not eating and running into things.

CHRISTIAN. That's not right.

SMALL ALISON. You guys, we gotta practice the commercial.

She fetches the tape recorder.

JOHN. Yeah, we messed it up before.

The kids all try to grab the tape recorder.

SMALL ALISON. Give it to me.

JOHN. I want it.

CHRISTIAN. My turn!

SMALL ALISON. (*Seeing her dad.*) Shhh!

Bruce crosses through, now wearing a gown and a surgical mask. The kids try to look innocent. He notices and shoots them a look but keeps moving through. When they're sure he's gone they return to their game.

CHRISTIAN. Should we start at the top?

SMALL ALISON. Yeah.

CHRISTIAN. Hold on, should we say Fun Home? We only call it that in the family?

JOHN. Yeah, that's right.

SMALL ALISON. It's our commercial. We can do what we want.

JOHN. That's right too.

CHRISTIAN. I guess.

SMALL ALISON. Come on!

CHRISTIAN. Okay, okay!

JOHN. (*Into a fake megaphone.*) Places everybody!

They take their places. Small Alison turns on the tape recorder.

Medium Alison and Helen

FUN HOME

MEDIUM ALISON. Sure.

He leaves.

So.

HELEN. My goodness, it's lunchtime. Are you girls hungry?

JOAN. I'm okay.

(To Medium Alison.)

You?

MEDIUM ALISON. We're fine.

HELEN. Sure?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah, we stopped at a diner on the way.
But you should go ahead and eat.

HELEN. No, I'm fine. I might have a glass of wine though.
Would either of you like a glass of wine?

MEDIUM ALISON.

JOAN.

Uh...

Oh, no thanks, Mrs.
Bechdel. *(Beat.)* Maybe
you guys would like some
time to talk.

HELEN.

Huh?

Oh.

JOAN. Cuz I actually wouldn't mind laying down a little bit.
I'm still pretty wiped out from last week.

MEDIUM ALISON. Okay. Uh-

(To Helen.)

I thought I'd put her in the lilac room?

HELEN. Sure.

MEDIUM ALISON. Upstairs, first room on the right.

JOAN. Great. Come get me whenever.

Joan exits.

HELEN. *(Pouring two glasses of wine.)* You must be tired too.

MEDIUM ALISON. I'm okay.

They sit. A beat.

So.

How've things been here?

HELEN. He bought that old shell of a house out on Route 150. Did he tell you that?

MEDIUM ALISON. Oh yeah, I think he mentioned it in one of his letters. I've been getting two, three, sometimes four letters a week. They're kind of // manic-

HELEN. Years ago he talked about buying it and he looked it over and said it wasn't worth it, it was too far gone and that was back then so I don't know why now that it's even more broken down he's decided he can fix it up. I'm sure he can.

MEDIUM ALISON. Probably.

HELEN. He's out there day and night, like a maniac, not eating, I don't think he's sleeping. Sometimes I walk into a room and he's standing there, not moving, frozen, like a statue.

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah, I don't know. He's-

HELEN. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of cooking for him and I'm sick of cleaning this museum.

MEDIUM ALISON. It's too much. You've done too much.

HELEN. You know, shortly after we were married we took a drive from Germany where we were living to Paris. He wanted me to meet an Army buddy of his. We had a beautiful drive. And then, just outside of Paris, he just went crazy. Just started screaming at me. Why couldn't I read a simple fucking map? I was a stupid, worthless bitch. I was dumbfounded. I was terrified- it came out of nowhere as far as I knew. Of course, I learned later that this man had been your father's lover.

MEDIUM ALISON. I don't know how you've done it.

HELEN.

Welcome to our house on Maple Avenue

See how we polish and we shine

We rearrange and realign

Everything is balanced and...and...

Days and days and days, that's how it happens

Days and days and days

made of lunches and car rides and shirts and socks

Helen and Medium Alison

BRUCE. Well, she's watching something on TV.

MEDIUM ALISON. Would you ask her, please, if she'll talk to me?

BRUCE. Sure.

Shift to Helen.

HELEN. Hello?

MEDIUM ALISON. Hi, Mom.

HELEN. How are you? How's your school work?

MEDIUM ALISON. It's...fine.

Are you ever going to talk to me about my letter?

(Small beat.)

HELEN.

I'm- I'm really at odds here. I feel responsible-

I do feel children should be allowed to make their own mistakes.

You know that and you know that I don't like parents who meddle, but in this case I'm uniquely qualified to warn you against romanticizing this path. Alison, you probably don't know that on more than one occasion catastrophe has been narrowly averted and it is difficult for me to-

HELEN. Alison, your father has had affairs with men.

(A beat.)

MEDIUM ALISON. What?

HELEN. I don't know how he hasn't been caught or exposed. There was the thing with Roy.

MEDIUM ALISON.

Mom, you didn't cause this- That's not the way it works

Oh please!

Catastrophe? Could you be a little more overdramatic?

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Dumbfounded.*) Our yard guy? Our babysitter???

HELEN. What do you think he was doing when he went out in the middle of the night, or taking his “trips”? One time he came back with body lice. It’s been going on for years. For our whole marriage, actually.

MEDIUM ALISON. Why are you telling me this and not Dad?

HELEN. Your father? Tell the truth? Please.

SHIFT to:

JOAN. No. What? Your *dad*???. Oh my god. Are you okay?

MEDIUM ALISON. I’m fine.

JOAN. Are you sure? Do you need to talk about it?

MEDIUM ALISON. No. No, I don’t want to talk about it, I don’t want to think about it. I want to— I don’t know. Let’s go see what’s happening at the Gay Union.

JOAN. (*Holding up a joint.*) Wanna go to my room? Smoke a joint?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yes I do.

ALISON. Caption: My newfound queerness was— No. Unable to process this tsunami-like revelation from my father—Tsunami-like???. No.

Bruce smashes down his tool bag in frustration.

Caption: I leapt into my new life with both feet— and I blocked out everything that was happening at home.

Helen is preparing to leave the house for school.

Bruce searches through the bag for a tool.

BRUCE. Where the hell are John and Christian???

HELEN. John’s at Cosgrove’s probably.

BRUCE. Why?

HELEN. (*Taken aback.*) Because... He works there.

ALISON. I should have been paying attention *Caption!* I should have been paying attention.

BRUCE. Since when?

HELEN. He’s been working there almost a month.

BRUCE. Oh.

Bruce and Helen, adult Alison

FUN HOME

ALISON. And I— *Caption!* I was, I guess I was *mad* at you, Dad.

BRUCE. Well, where's Christian?

HELEN. At Doug's probably. What do you need?

BRUCE. Nothing. Nothing. I'll do it myself.

ALISON. My life had just started to open.

BRUCE. (*Muttering to himself, still searching for the missing tool.*)
Dammit! Goddammit!

ALISON. I didn't know, Dad, I had no way of knowing that my beginning would be your end!

Helen sees a broken painting.

HELEN. Oh my god. The Brinley. Oh my god, what happened? Did it fall?

He keeps banging around the tool bag, but doesn't answer.

Bruce, the painting. What happened?

BRUCE. I threw it down the fucking stairs.

HELEN. Why??

BRUCE. I don't // know why!

HELEN. Bruce I don't know // what's—

BRUCE. Because no one fucking helps me around here!
Because I can't stand the sound of your hectoring, // shrewish voice, your histrionics, your—

HELEN. You *stop*. You're blaming *me*? After what you've put me through? // I'm on edge every minute. You're so—

BRUCE. Every single person in this town knows what kind of a man I am! *You're* the one with the problem!

HELEN. I have to go to school. I'll be at meetings until late.

Helen exits.

ALISON. I'm drawing. I'm drawing. I'm just drawing. I'm remembering something, that's *all*.

SHIFT to Medium Alison and Joan, in their winter coats, with backpacks and a duffle bag, approaching the house.

Medium Alison and Joan

FUN HOME

83

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Sketching.*) Right, okay, so something like maybe...

JOAN. Oh, that's funny.

(*Leaning in to look.*)

That's really good.

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Confident of her ability, but flustered by Joan's nearness.*) This? No. This is just quick and stupid.

Medium Alison continues to sketch. Joan looks around her room.

JOAN. Who's this in the photo?

MEDIUM ALISON. My dad.

JOAN. That's your *dad*?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah.

JOAN. He looks cool. Did he teach you how to draw cartoons?

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Scoffs.*) Definitely not.

JOAN. Why's that funny?

MEDIUM ALISON. It's not funny, it's just, he's more... I don't know.

(*Dismissive eyeroll.*)

Refined.

JOAN. What does he do?

MEDIUM ALISON. A bunch of things, actually. He's a house restoration, historical society kind of guy, he's a high-school English teacher, he runs the // local-

JOAN. (*Making a joke.*) Did you get to be in his class?

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Earnest.*) I was, yeah.

JOAN. Really?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah.

JOAN. I was joking.

MEDIUM ALISON. Oh. Oh. Yes. What I was going to say is that, everyone in Beech Creek at some point is in my dad's English class, and he's known as a great teacher, so...

JOAN. Oh. Cool.

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah. He sends me books. We talk about them.

JOAN. He sends you books to read on top of your schoolwork?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah.

JOAN. That's a little weird.

ALISON. (*Realizing.*) Is that weird? That's really weird.

MEDIUM ALISON. Why?

JOAN. I don't know. Like, what books?

MEDIUM ALISON. Like...

JOAN. Colette??

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah.

She hands her a book.

JOAN. Your father sent you *Colette*?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah. Why?

JOAN. I don't know. It's just... He's like the opposite of my dad. He's just like sending you lesbian books?

MEDIUM ALISON. No! I mean, yes, I guess Colette was a lesbian but-

JOAN. Oh, she was.

MEDIUM ALISON. Okay, but he sent it to me because he thought I'd be interested in the whole Paris... Arts... Bohemian... Scene.

JOAN. Yeah but he didn't send you a book about Toulouse-Latrec, he sent you Colette. I think it's amazing that he's cool with you being a dyke.

MEDIUM ALISON. What? I don't think so.

JOAN. Oh, he's not?

MEDIUM ALISON. No. I don't know. Can we talk about something else?

JOAN. Sure. Why?

MEDIUM ALISON. Because- I have no idea how my parents feel about- I just figured it out myself.

JOAN. Oh.

MEDIUM ALISON. About two weeks ago.

JOAN. Huh. With who?

MEDIUM ALISON. With who what?

ALISON. (*A wave of retroactive humiliation.*) Oh god.

JOAN. Who were you with?

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Clueless, then getting it.*) Nobody. *Nobody!*
Oh my god, I'm so embarrassed.

ALISON. (*Fresh wave of retroactive humiliation.*) Oh god.

MEDIUM ALISON. I was in a bookstore.

JOAN. In a bookstore? Nice.

MEDIUM ALISON. (*Clueless, then getting it.*) What? *NO!* Two weeks ago I was downtown and I wandered into the bookstore, I was just browsing around and I picked up this book—

JOAN. Ah, *Word is Out*.

MEDIUM ALISON. And I was like, Oh, interviews. This looks interesting. And then I was like, These people are all—

(*Suddenly worried she doesn't know the right word.*)

Uh...

JOAN. Gay?

MEDIUM ALISON. Gay. Yes. And *then* I was like, "Oh my god! I'm

MEDIUM ALISON.
a lesb—

JOAN.
a dyke

MEDIUM ALISON. Yes. A dyke. Yes. And I totally flipped out and shoved the book back onto the shelf and I left. And then I came back the next day and bought the book. And then I came back the next day bought all the other books in that section. And then I made myself go to the meeting at the Gay Union. And then, and then, it's now. Hi.

JOAN. Hello.

(*A beat. Then, re: Word is Out.*)

That's a powerful book.

MEDIUM ALISON. It is.

Joan considers kissing her. Medium Alison wonders whether she's about to be kissed.

JOAN. So. I should probably go.

MEDIUM ALISON. 'kay.

JOAN. So... Will I see you at the Union meeting tomorrow afternoon?

MEDIUM ALISON. Yeah I'll be, uh, yeah, I will come to the meeting. I'll bring these posters. Finish 'em up.

JOAN. Cool. I'll see you then. Bye, Alison.

MEDIUM ALISON. Bye, Joan.

Joan exits. Medium Alison collapses, face-down, onto the bed. Alison crumples as well.

SHIFT to Bruce, dressed in a suit, holding a pair of patent-leather Mary Janes as Small Alison, tears around in an awkwardly fitting party dress she's covered up with a boy's t-shirt and sneakers.

BRUCE. Oh no you don't. T-shirt off.

Small Alison grudgingly takes off the t-shirt. Bruce re-ties the sash.

Look, you've messed this up already. Where's your barrette?

Small Alison hands it over. He puts it in her hair.

SMALL ALISON. Ow!

BRUCE. Sneakers.

SMALL ALISON. Why??

BRUCE. Because you're going to a party.

(Holding out the Mary Janes.)

Here.

SMALL ALISON. I don't want to wear those.

BRUCE. Tough titty.

Roy and Bruce

FUN HOME

29

BRUCE. Chrissakes! I know him. He was my student a few years back. Okay? What, do you think I'm bringing some bum around? Is that the bug up your ass? Christ.

The chattering group returns.

JOHN. You know something else about the movie that's funny? It's that the car is called the love bug. // It's a car, but they call it a bug. Even though it's a car.

BRUCE. (*Monster-charging the kids.*) Raaahr!

The kids laugh and scream.

Okay, that's enough. Come on, Roy, let's go inside. I'll show you that wallpaper.

JOHN. CHRISTIAN. SMALL ALISON.
Aw! No, come on! But dad!

BRUCE. Enough!

(To Roy.)

Bunch of little monsters.

Bruce and Roy leave. Helen watches them go.

CHRISTIAN. Mom, can we watch TV?

HELEN. Sure.

*SHIFT to Roy and Bruce entering the library.
Helen at her piano. The kids watch TV.*

ALISON.

*I want to know what's true,
dig deep into who
and what and why and when,
until now gives way to then...*

ROY. Whoa. Nice room.

BRUCE. So this is the wallpaper. William Morris. The real deal. God, it's gorgeous.

ROY. You read all these books?

BRUCE. Working on it.

ROY. That is not something I can imagine.

BRUCE. Yes, I remember from class you're not much of a reader.

ROY. Nope. Read some good books in your class, though.

BRUCE. My job is to make it interesting.

Helen begins practicing an étude.

ALISON. (*Re: Bruce and Roy.*) It's like a 1950s lesbian pulp novel. "Their tawdry love could only flourish in the shadows."

Small Alison wanders away from the TV to talk to her mom.

SMALL ALISON. I like Roy. He's funny.

Alison's attention shifts to these two.

HELEN. Alison find something to do. I'm practicing.

SMALL ALISON. (*Peering at Helen's sheet music.*) Did Chop-In write Chop Sticks?

HELEN. It's Sho-PAHN. Alison stop bothering me.

Small Alison rejoins her brothers at the TV.

BRUCE. Sit down. Take a load off.

Alison's attention shifts back to her dad and Roy.

ROY. I've been working, I'm disgusting. Don't wanna sweat all over your nice stuff.

BRUCE. What are you talking about, it's *furniture* for chrissakes. Go ahead. Stretch out if you want.

Roy stretches out on the chaise.

ROY. This place is like a museum.

(Noticing a carafe.)

What's that stuff?

BRUCE. Sherry. Want some?

ROY. Is it good?

BRUCE. Yeah.

ROY. Okay, sure.

Bruce pours them both a glass.

I remember this house before you moved in. We used to ride our bikes over here when we were kids. You've done a shit-load of work.

BRUCE. I did. By myself, most of it.

ROY. You must be in good shape, old man.

BRUCE.

*Not too bad if I say so myself
I might still break a heart or two
You'd be surprised at what a guy my age knows how to do*

He brings the sherry to Roy.

Want it?

ROY. Yeah.

BRUCE. *(Holding the sherry back.)* Unbutton your shirt.

ROY. Is that your wife playing the piano?

BRUCE. Don't worry about her.

Roy considers, decides, why the hell not, and unbuttons his shirt. Bruce gives him the sherry.

HELEN. *(At the piano.)*

La la la la...

Helen stops playing. She stands. Then sits, and resumes playing.

Maybe not right now

Maybe not right now

HELEN.

La la la...

BRUCE.

I want, I want, I want-

I-

I-

ROY.

I know this type

this type of married guy

I could just give him the slip but why

It's not a big deal

I know he wants me