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SCENARIO NO. 1
FAMILY PICNIC

Your character is attending an extended-family picnic. This may be the first time you meet any of your character's relatives, so give yourself adequate time to populate the picnic. Think through what sort of mother and father "made" your character, whether or not your character has siblings, and what the sibling order might be. Are there children, grandparents, important aunts and uncles, and/or important cousins, nephews and nieces? Take your time and begin to understand your character's extended family.

With your book in mind, dream up the right family picnic for your character to attend, one that will help you learn what you need to know. If you discover that your character's parents are deceased, will you place the picnic in the past or act as if they are still alive? Will you include the in-laws, if your character is married? Will you narrow the cast down to just your character's immediate family or will you include distant cousins? Take your time and develop your cast of characters and setting for your picnic.



1. What is the first thing your character does upon receiving an invitation to this extended family picnic?

- A) Think about how she can get out of it?
- B) Hope that a certain family member won't be there?
- C) Look forward to seeing a certain family member?
- D) Feel unaccountably depressed?
- E) Call a family member to get the latest gossip?

.....

A) Wanting to get out of the picnic is consistent with a character who is part of an extended family with real tensions present and who has decided that avoidance is the better part of valor.

B) Hoping that a certain family member isn't in attendance directs us to a specific dynamic between your character and another family member and sets the stage for an explosive or muted picnic conflict.

C) Looking forward to seeing a certain family member is consistent with a character who has the capacity to feel love and affection and who is likely in a successful long-term relationship.

D) Feeling unaccountably depressed alerts us to the possibility that your character sees herself as an outsider even in her own family.

E) Calling a family member to get the latest gossip brings to mind a chatty, enmeshed family where everybody knows—and is into—everybody else's business.

How does your character react upon receiving an invitation to an extended family picnic?



2. On the day of the picnic, does your character:

- A) Dress carefully?
- B) Dress eccentrically?
- C) Wear comfortable clothes?
- D) Dress sexily?
- E) Dress shabbily?

.....

A) Dressing carefully is consistent with a character who expects to be scrutinized and is feeling anxious and under pressure to perform.

B) Dressing eccentrically is consistent with a character who has developed into a free spirit and feels free of her family and their dynamics—or at least would like to believe that about herself.

C) Wearing comfortable clothes is consistent with a character who may really be free of family dynamics and doesn't perceive the picnic as a trial.

D) Dressing sexily is consistent with a character who is generally inappropriate, manifests addictive behaviors, and is likely on the grandiose, narcissistic—and depressed—side.

E) Dressing shabbily is consistent with a character who may be making a statement about her unworthiness or, alternatively, defiantly showing contempt and animosity for her family.

What will your character wear to the picnic?



3. How does your character greet her mother?

- A) With false love and enthusiasm?
- B) With genuine love and enthusiasm?
- C) Coolly?
- D) Carefully?
- E) Perfunctorily?

A) In many rule-bound families, it is the custom to put on a display of love and good cheer with the family matriarch, so such a display suggests a hidden nest of family rules and secrets.

B) Genuine love and enthusiasm are consistent with a strong, mentally healthy character who has received love in childhood.

C) Greeting her mother coolly suggests a significant level of hostility and unexpressed issues between mother and child.

D) Greeting her mother carefully is consistent with a defensive posture caused by receiving regular and repeated criticism and insults.

E) Greeting her mother perfunctorily is consistent with a distant relationship characterized by a lack of interest as much as a lack of love.

How does your character greet her mother?



4. How does your character greet her father?

- A) Gruffly?
- B) Coldly?
- C) Hotly?
- D) Defensively?
- E) Indifferently?

A) A gruff greeting, especially between son and father but also between daughter and father, is consistent with a family dynamic of machismo, conventional gender roles, and working-class ethos.

B) A cold greeting suggests significant hostility and long-held grudges between child and parent.

C) A hot greeting, especially between daughter and father, suggests sexual dynamics and sexual secrets.

D) A defensive greeting suggests a history of criticism, rejection, bullying, and perhaps the severest forms of abuse.

E) An indifferent greeting suggests emotional distancing and a relationship that rises only to the level of civility.

How does your character greet her father?



5. How does your character spend her time at the picnic?

- A) Watching?
- B) Catching up?
- C) Getting high?
- D) Conversing with one other family member?
- E) Fulfilling a role?

A) If your character watches, that is consistent with a character who has an intense inner life and who may be a rebel, thinker, and/or artist.

- B) If she spends time catching up with family members, that is consistent with a character who possesses social graces and who knows how to act in social situations—irrespective of what she is actually feeling or thinking.
- C) If your character gets high, that is consistent with a character who is uncomfortable in social situations and may also point to a substance abuse problem.
- D) If your character spends most of her time with one other family member, that suggests that these two characters are confidantes, intimates, or like-minded.
- E) If your character fulfills a role—as hostess, peacekeeper, troublemaker, etc.—that suggests she has trouble with autonomy and independent action.

How does your character spend her time at the picnic?



6. How would you describe the picnic?

- A) Cordial?
- B) Intense?
- C) Boring?
- D) Loving?
- E) Simmering?



- A) A cordial picnic suggests the family at least knows how to look like it gets along, whether or not family members really love or like each other.
- B) An intense picnic suggests high drama between at least two family members, perhaps a visiting son and his father or a pregnant daughter and her mother.
- C) A boring picnic suggests a certain kind of family history from which your character may be escaping, for example, a history of conventionality, superficiality, and low aspirations.
- D) A loving picnic suggests a warm, tolerant, good-humored extended family whose ups and down, difficulties, and disagreements do not prevent them from remaining close-knit.
- E) A simmering picnic suggests enduring and shifting family conflicts and high drama in the lives of the family members.

How would you describe your picnic?