

CALL ME BY MY REAL NAME: AN HONORS PLAY

By

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Honors Project

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Abstract

The play, *Call Me By My Real Name*, found within this document was written for my Theatre Arts Honors Project. Alongside it is an introduction and description of the writing process, including inspirations and lessons learned. The end contains links to a Google Drive with pertinent emails and journal entries, as well as a recorded performance conducted on May 1, 2020. *Call Me By My Real Name* follows Missy Stone through her misadventures on many dates. While her therapist suggested recreating these dates to learn from them, Missy has other plans for her and her audience. She takes them through a wild romp of her past dates and is forced to take a deeper look at herself than she ever anticipated.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Original Plans and Evolution of Intent

To start, this project was, in fact, not a project. I started this journey in the Fall semester of 2018 and I was originally going to write a thesis on how to become a voice-over artist. I was to have Derek Gagnier as my advisor and Susan Cato-Chapman as a second reader. I wanted to write the thesis because voice acting has always been my dream and it was my focus then. My intent was to collect all this information and use it as a resource for me and others who might follow in my footsteps. Upon diving into the research though, the more daunting the idea of writing it became. I was starting to panic about how I was going to get everything done, so I started brainstorming other ideas.

At the time, I was in two pivotal classes for me in my college career. I was taking Playwriting and Capstone. We did an exercise in Capstone that required us to write about our favorite assignments and things that we had done over our time in school so far. To my surprise, many of my things included writing of some sort. At the same time, I was writing plays and tons of small exercises for Playwriting and found that I loved them. Because of this, I changed my minor to English and decided to pursue the literary track of theatre, which made me no longer interested in trying to write my voice acting thesis. I chewed over it for a while and went to Paulette Marty, the head of the theatre honors department and told her what was up. When she asked me if I had anything else in mind, I immediately told her, “I want to write a play.” She informed me that no one had ever done that before, but there was no reason I couldn’t be the first. So, we embarked on changing my honors proposal: the writing of a play commenced.

I started with a project that I had begun in Playwriting called, “I Mean, Psychologically, We’re Just Friends.” It was going to be a small piece about two college students who came from different financial backgrounds. It was based on one of my real friends and some social commentary I wanted to make. I had written a scene for it in Playwriting and intended to use it for my project, but it just didn’t feel right. I was into the idea of it, but I wasn’t interested in writing it at the time. So I moved on to another project I had brewing in the background. I had another play I was working on that didn’t have a name at the time; I simply called it, “Lonely – In Four Parts.” It was going to be a study of loneliness and how people respond to it. It was going to consist of four separate solo vignettes that would combine into a full-length play. I had one of the vignettes written already from Playwriting and I wanted to put in a component of “real voices” speaking on

the subject. My intention was to hold interviews with people from all walks of life and ask what loneliness meant to them. I was going to collect these statements and use them in my play. I was passionate about this project, as I had just come out of some lonely years myself, but the more I got into it, I again felt it was bigger than I could accomplish for my thesis.

Flash forward to the Spring of 2019. I was trying to accomplish my project on top of my existing school schedule as well as work. I was still interested in the project, but I had a tough conversation with my roommate on how I was feeling, and he helped me see there was nothing wrong with making it a “later project,” so I did. I went to my new advisor, Derek Davidson, and asked if it was all right if I changed my project. He asked if I had any ideas, and I said, “As a matter of fact, I do.” And that’s when *Call Me By My Real Name* was born.

Writing a Play – The Process of

The writing process, for me, was nothing if not unconventional. I had never tried to write something of this length before and I honestly wasn’t sure if I could. I had a conversation written down for the main character: that was it. The longest thing I had ever written at that point was a twelve-page academic paper, which is a vastly different kind of writing. I wrote a couple scenes for it, but I did not start working on it in earnest until the Fall of 2019. I had been taking Creative Writing and finally wrote something more than twelve pages long. And it wasn’t academic writing. Feeling encouraged, I turned back to my play and started working on it more. I had many meetings with Derek in between and he was always encouraging and understanding. My Fall semester was quite rough between class work and real work, so Derek and I decided that I would turn in thirty-four completed pages of my work by December 29th. We both agreed that I could work on it over break, so I did. I had never poured that much time into anything, and finally got a little taste of what a real writing schedule might be like. I gave myself a certain number of pages to write per day and I met them. While a bit of a learning exercise, it was satisfying to see the pages add up for my thesis. I wrote the first thirty-four pages and again felt encouraged that, in fact, I could write a full-length play. Spring semester of this year started, and Derek and I set more writing deadlines. Due to the coronavirus, I didn’t finish the play until April. But despite shifting schedules and the drastic changes to every-day life, I was able to complete the play.

Inspiration

I wanted to include a section on the process of writing the play and a section on the things that inspired it as well. The play itself all began with a conversation that I had with one of my coworkers. He had just graduated and had been gone from work for about a month at this point. He was asking me for updates on some of our coworkers, specifically one of our female workers. I proceeded to tell him that she had broken up with her boyfriend of several years and he was shocked. He immediately remarked he might consider reaching out to her to see if she would be interested in going on a date with him. Because of her recent break-up, I informed him his intentions would likely be poorly timed, but I also had a question. I had always been curious as to the obsession with this coworker, because it confused me. For some reason, my coworker attracted men like a magnet, and I didn't know why, so I asked him why he liked her so much and his answer was that she was like "the girl next door." That night, I went to a local restaurant by myself for dinner and wrote the first conversation that would later turn into *Call Me By My Real Name*. From there, Missy began to develop as a character: I had finally found her voice. Some of the characters I based off real people in my life, but Missy took shape on the page of her own accord and I was excited to see where she might take me. I struggled for a bit with writing too realistically to my life and trying to create something unique and fun. After rewriting several scenes, I started to learn that I could mix the real and fictitious together for far better results. For example, Kat and Matthias were based off real people, but Missy's experiences with them were her own. Tristan was a fictitious creation, but the conversation that he and Missy have was stolen from reality. I had been talking to a friend of mine in a coffee shop over Christmas and our conversation revolved around the concept that once you reach around twenty as a female, people constantly inquire as to when you will have kids. If your answer ever included the phrases, "I don't intend to..." or "Not any time soon..." the instant response was, "Oh, you'll change your mind." Tristan was one of the first scenes I wrote that mixed the fictitious and real seamlessly, which helped me with some of my other characters. For instance, Peter came shortly after Tristan in my writing and was born out of a similar mixing of fiction and reality. Rather than a conversation though, Peter became a character after I witnessed a classmate of mine eat cold soup out of the can during our lecture. That personality trait was odd, and it helped form a character in my head that later became Peter. After realizing that Peter was created from a student's odd habits, I was surprised to learn that my

inspiration was coming from everywhere. It came from some of the smallest and most unpredictable details in life and it helped me learn that nothing was too miniscule to become an inspiration. This lesson completely changed my writing process and my approach to creating scenes. It is enjoyable to look back over this piece and see how the components all fit together to make it a cohesive whole.

What Happened After

This play was intended to be finished, read and workshopped before my defense. Coronavirus, however, had other plans. Due to the many scheduling changes, I finished my first draft in April and immediately sent it out for feedback. I sent it to Derek and asked my creative writing professor, Caleb Johnson, if he would be willing to read it too. I then went about setting up a Zoom reading of it and sent out an interest form in our department's weekly newsletter. A group of six lovely people reached out and offered to read it aloud for me. I wrote a long list of notes during their reading and asked for their feedback after. They all gave extremely helpful feedback along with great revision suggestions, and I was able to apply those to my script. Since then, I have had other students reach out and read my play, submitting written feedback as well as oral. I have sent it out to as many friends and family as possible and received lots of critiques and comments to help fuel future revisions. Due to the coronavirus, we were not able to workshop the play as originally intended. Despite this setback, the creativity and willingness of my volunteers has provided a multitude of responses and comments. Although difficult and trying sometimes, the beauty of the writing process has made an impact on me. Throughout this experience, I have learned that patience and perseverance are just as important to the process as writing itself.

Now What?

What did I learn from this experience and what do I intend to do moving forward?

As far as what I learned, I feel that I came out of this experience with several things. One, I learned on the very basic level that I could, in fact, write a play. There were quite a few times when I didn't think it was going to happen and I doubted my ability to pull through. It was hard

to pace myself and remain dedicated to the task; I often thought it simply wouldn't happen. So, on the most basic level, I learned that I could do it. I also learned that it takes dedication and time to write something this long. While I understood that writing was challenging, I had never experienced the physical effort that it took. That, in and of itself, was a huge learning curve for me. I learned that it takes a lot of dedication and intentionality to write a play and see it through.

I also learned that it takes setting aside specific times to write. I've never been great at time management and have always been a wonderful procrastinator. At first, I approached this project with a similar mind set: however, I learned quickly that I couldn't do that if I intended to finish this piece. I tried setting deadlines, but I learned that I work best from page numbers. If I set myself a certain number of pages to write or a scene to accomplish, I found it easier to meet my goal. So I wrote everywhere. I wrote on my phone when I had a minute. I wrote during class even when I shouldn't have. I wrote on the bus and after class. I wrote after work and whenever I thought of it. Regardless, I set a minimum of pages each time which trained me to stick to it.

I also learned to fear revision less. I had many ideas for this play that I scrapped or rewrote many times before they made the cut. I spent many a day going through and changing scenes and lines with a freedom I had yet to feel in other works. I don't know what made me feel that this play was more malleable, but it made me more open to revision in my short stories too.

Finally, I've learned that it takes living life to write a play. You can't sit around and wait for a play to come to you. You must go out and experience things to write a play. You must put a certain level of yourself into what you write, and you must do it genuinely and sincerely if you want your play to feel real. Writing this play was an experience I learned from greatly, and one I doubt I'll readily forget.

As far as moving forward, I will be working on a revision directly after this process. I've revised it a couple of times already but have more notes and changes I would like to apply. After my next revision, and once the world returns to some kind of normal, I would still love to workshop my play. Workshopping would allow me a chance to see my play in action. By giving the actors creative freedom, I could make new discoveries and revisions to my play with a fresh set of eyes. I plan to submit it to festivals and new play workshops as another step in the writing process. As an ultimate wish, I would love to see this play produced. Whether it's performed professionally or by a group of friends, my play could teach me more if performed and experienced by an audience. My intention after school is to apply to literary internships; I would

love to use this piece as a writing sample when applicable. I'm looking forward to how this play can grow and what more I can learn from it. Although the process has been long and challenging, it has impacted my writing and my dedication to my projects. I know the lessons it has taught me will be invaluable and I'm excited to apply them to my life after I graduate.

The Play

CALL ME BY MY REAL NAME

A play by
Anna Rhodes

Call Me By My Real Name
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CAST LIST

3 females – 7 males – 6 male/female

Missy Stone – a quirky young woman with good intentions

Dave – a dick

Matthias – a young and impetuous college boy

Kyle – a real Casanova

Peter – attractive, acts cooler than he is

Tristan – just wants kids

Kat – the one that got away

Garrett – sweet and genuine

Stagehand – the type to reposition a crooked chair

Peter's Mom

Peter's Dad

Waiter 1

Waiter 2

3 other Stagehands/Technicians

SETTING

The play is set in New York, so that will affect the following:

The Stage

A fine restaurant

A hamburger joint on a college campus

A fancy restaurant

A townhouse living room

A bar

An apartment living room/bedroom

A coffee shop on a college campus

TIME

The Present

Call Me By My Real Name

(Lights up on a bare stage with a singular spotlight on our main girl, Missy. She taps a mic on her dress and squints into the light. Whenever Missy is talking to the audience in a scene, a spotlight comes up on her face and everything around her freezes. When the spotlight goes away, the scene resumes.)

MISSY

Is this thing on? Yeah? Yeah, it is?

(Keeps checking with the sound booth until she's satisfied.)

MISSY (continued)

(To the audience.)

So, um. Yeah. Hey. Hi, hello. I'm your host tonight on the, wow this is a big stage for one person. Um, ok, I got this. Um, yeah. So, my therapist said this was going to be good for me. Sharing my story and all that. And like, I'm in a really good place right now, so we're really going for it. Yes. Yes, we are. Except I'm not really doing it for her or whatever. Like, I guess I am, but really, I'm here for you guys. Someone needs to lay some knowledge on you guys, and it might as well be me, you know? So, this is for you.

Ok, so how many of you have ever dated someone? A show of hands? Yeah? Um, wow, this feels dumb, moving on. Anyway. Uh, better question. How many of you have been on too many dates? Yeeeaahhhh, there we go. Now we're getting somewhere. How many of you have been ghosted on a date? Right, it sucks, right Janet! Actually, I have no idea if your name is Janet, I just felt a connection there so... And like, why did I say Janet, right? I mean, nobody is named Janet anymore! That's from like, forever ago. Like the Jetsons? Wasn't her name Janet? Janet Jetson? Well, unless you are a Janet and then I've just royally offended you, but, yeah, you all are right, let's just move on now.

(Whispers) Sorry, Janet!

You guys want me to get to the point though, right? So, I brought you all together to watch the story of my abysmal dating life. Ok, ok, yeah, it wasn't that bad. So, what you're really here to watch is my journey of learning how to love myself. Or something like that. Those are my therapist's words. But my therapist says that's important and you don't really learn what it means until you say it in front of other people. And considering my mother didn't call me Missy for nothing, let's get on with it, shall we?

(Pause.) Some of you gave me a weird look when I said that. It's because I was sassy as a kid. Duh.

(Claps hands. During this speech, tech hands are transforming the stage into a restaurant scene. It's something like a Carrabba's, but fancier.)

MISSY (continued)

(Speaking to the stagehands.)

All right, guys! Let's get this thing going! Let's break some legs! Is that what you say? Yeah? It is? Ok, good. Let's get this show on the road then.

(Speaking to the audience now.) Here's the deal. We're going to recreate scenes of all the most important dates I've been on, so that you can learn who to avoid and what not to do. My therapist says it's so that I can find myself, but I'm thinking all of you will find this more helpful than I will. So, um. Participate, enjoy, I hope you laugh some, maybe, but uh... Here we go.

(Starts to walk to the table in the middle of the stage.)

MISSY (continued)

Oh, wait!

(Walks back to the front of the stage.)

MISSY (continued)

This first guy? His name is Dave. I wanted to start off strong with one that I look good in. You know. To set the stage or whatever. Because I'm supposed to be the heroine here. But yeah, Dave is a dick. Alright, context has been set.

(Finger guns her way back to her seat.)

MISSY

(To the audience.)

Oh, and Dave was 17 minutes late. Yes. 17. I counted.

(DAVE enters.)

DAVE

Oh, hey! I'm so sorry! I'm not late, am I?

MISSY

Oh, no! Not at all! Not really, not like, by 17 minutes or anything, but that's totally and absolutely ok, I haven't been waiting or anything, I was kinda late too, so it's fine. Really.

(The WAITER enters during this, but MISSY and DAVE don't seem to notice.)

DAVE

Hey, it's great to finally meet you though! I mean... Wow, look at you. You're gorgeous.

MISSY

Aw, thank you! That's so sweet! You, um, you look great too.

DAVE

You know, I thought so too. I thought this was a great color on me. Don't you agree?

MISSY

Oh, absolutely. I love a man who can wear such a lovely shade... of pink. Or is that salmon? I mean, I like it when... Yeah, I. It's nice. Absolutely.

DAVE

Thanks. I thought it really defined my muscles. You know, they're clearly my best feature.

(Actually flexes.)

MISSY

Wow.

DAVE

Hey, it's ok to be impressed. I mean, I know I'm a lot to take in and everything, but don't worry. You'll be able to keep up eventually and it'll be ok. You can even touch them if you want.

MISSY

...

WAITER

(Clears throat. He's been there a while.)

Water will be provided to you, but may I get you all something to accompany it?

MISSY

Actually, I'd love a coke. If you have one. That is. I don't know if you're too fancy or...

WAITER

Yes, ma'am. We have coke.

DAVE

She doesn't want coke.

MISSY

Um, actually I –

DAVE

No, really, you don't. Water is just fine for you, dear. Gotta watch your weight and all that.

MISSY

Oh. How kind of you.

DAVE

Anything for you, hon. Seriously, she'll just have water. And I will too. Thanks.

(The WAITER looks really torn but leaves to go retrieve the drinks.)

MISSY

Sooo, I take it you enjoy skinny women.

DAVE

Oh, no not particularly. I like women of all shapes and sizes. I just like to make sure you're staying healthy and taking care of your body. Image may not be everything, but it's pretty much everything.

MISSY

(Spotlight on Missy)

Ladies, if anyone ever orders water for you when you want a coke, run. Fast. And far.

(The scene resumes.)

MISSY

Well... I don't think it's everything.

(The WAITER returns with the waters.)

WAITER

Would you like to place your order?

DAVE

Yes, I'll have the filet mignon with your soup of the day.

MISSY

And I'll have –

DAVE

And the lady here will have your Caesar salad, lite on the dressing.

MISSY

I'd really prefer some of your pasta –

WAITER

Just the salad?

MISSY

No, the pasta –

DAVE

Yes, just the salad.

WAITER

Sir, are you –

DAVE
Yes! I'm sure!

MISSY
But!

DAVE
Now, off with you, good sir!

(The WAITER again looks torn and a bit offended but leaves to put in their order.
There's an awkward silence.)

MISSY
I wanted the pasta.

DAVE
But all those carbs... They'd add up and you wouldn't want to ruin that hot body of yours, would you? I'm just taking care of you.

MISSY
But what if I wanted the pasta?

DAVE
No, no, no. You want the salad. It's good for you.

MISSY
You know what else is good for you? Some carbs.

DAVE
I mean, within reason –

MISSY
Yeah, and you know what else is good for you? Some fat. Some people like some love handles. SOME people prefer a little extra to hold onto.

(MISSY picks up her water and sulks in it.)

DAVE
Seriously?

MISSY
Yeah.

DAVE
No, that's definitely wrong. Everyone likes a fit bod. A man that can sweep you off your feet and carry you over the threshold. That's what women want. Women want a man like me.

MISSY

Well, I want pasta.

DAVE

Again with the pasta?

MISSY

Yeah. Give me a man who'll eat fettuccine alfredo in their PJ's on the couch any day. One with some FAT.

DAVE

No, you've got to be kidding. I am what you want. You'll realize I'm only helping you. You'll especially realize it once we get back to my place tonight. Now drink your water, you'll want to stay hydrated.

(The WAITER returns with their food.)

WAITER

The filet mignon for you, sir. And the Caesar salad for you, miss. Is there anything else I can get you?

MISSY

Yeah, some fettuccine alfredo.

WAITER

Would you like the side or the full dish?

DAVE

She doesn't want –

(The WAITER turns their back to DAVE.)

WAITER

I'm sorry, was that the side or the full?

MISSY

I'll take the full, please.

WAITER

Very well, I'll be back with that shortly, miss.

(The WAITER leaves.)

MISSY

HA.

DAVE

That waiter just made a major mistake. Do they know what I could do to them? I could get this whole restaurant shut down if I wanted to. I could get them fired. I could –

MISSY

Or you can just shut up and eat.

(DAVE does shut up. For all of two seconds.)

DAVE

You. Have. Some. Nerve! It's no wonder no one likes you! You're dumb, and fat, and you're not pretty AT ALL, I can see why you have to wear makeup. And your nose is weird, and your teeth aren't straight, and just as far as a female... specimen... you're by far the worst one I've ever met. I mean, where did you even come from? A lab?? Look, I was just trying to help you! I was doing it for your own good! But I'll be damned if I'll help a woman who doesn't understand. You can just forget about coming home with me tonight!

MISSY

Hey, are you going to eat that?

(DAVE splutters and leaves.)

MISSY

Yup, you heard it here first, folks. Dave was a dick.

(Pulls the filet mignon over and starts to eat it.)

MISSY

You know, I didn't think was going to real food, but it's real food and it's to die for.

(Proceeds to dig into the food for a bit too long.)

MISSY

Oh! Right! I'm doing a thing.

(Gets up and comes to the audience.)

MISSY

So, since you guys are my loving and trusting audience, I should admit something to you... That date didn't go anything like that. Yeah, that was all for show. I just sat through that date and ate the salad. I didn't go home with him AND I didn't get any filet mignon. It was an awful night really. My therapist said I had to include it here, but she said nothing about me modifying it. Yeah, I lied. Sorry, mom! Oh, wait. Right. This isn't TV. Although maybe she's out there with you guys tonight. I can't really see anything. Anyway. But I was pretty cool back there, right? I could have been great. And you guys paid money for this, so you better buckle up now.

(Starts to walk off.)

MISSY

Oh! Oh, I think there's also supposed to be a moral here, right? Like something learned? And the moral is? That Dave is a dick. Am I right? I am, I know. Anyway. Let's pull out our next date, shall we? This next date happened in – Do you have a problem, Katie? Were you not happy with that moral? Your name is probably not Katie, I understand. But if you're looking for a better moral, this isn't that kind of play. Well it might be, but not for Dave. Dave deserves nothing. Ok? Ok. Way to make me feel bad, Katie. I hate justifying myself.

(To the stagehands.)

Ok, guys? Let's change the scene, ok? Let's get moving on that next scene, alright?

(Stagehands come out and start transitioning the stage into what looks like a McDonald's type restaurant.)

MISSY

Ugh, now I feel awkward. I'm sorry, Katie. And Janet too, you're probably still... upset... about that... You know, you had probably forgotten about that and I just made you remember. And my therapist keeps telling me to stop apologizing for myself so much. Although I'm not entirely sure this is what she means by that.

(MISSY falls silent and ponders this as she wanders about the stage, waiting on the next scene to be set up.)

MISSY

So, we're going to recreate the first date I ever had. And guys? Well, girls too, I mean. I just use it as a, like a general term instead of like, y'all, or like, I mean, I suppose it is kind of a gendered term and maybe it doesn't work like I think it does but...

(One of the stagehands is trying to get Missy's attention and tell her to cut the convo and move on. They're finally successful.)

MISSY

But that's right, no one cares about that. Oookkk, back to the point. The... point... Right! So, um, I didn't start dating until college because I was raised in a family that was like, "Now Missy, you know, you'll definitely find the guy of your dreams eventually and you'll know it's him because you'll just know. But like, don't date, ok sweetie?" And then whenever I was like, "Um, isn't that logic a little... flawed?" They'd say, "Oh, no. You'll just know." And I was always like, "Ok?" And then I just didn't want to upset them, so I just kind of avoided it, but like, I also never found someone I'd like to have dated, but that's also beside the point, but anyway. Ok. Focus, Missy. Ok. So, first date ever freshman year of college. I was really insecure, still am kinda insecure... But um, working on that, but... Real insecure, ok, yeah. And this guy asks me out and I was like, "Oh my gosh, someone noticed me, so I have to say yes!" And no one was there to tell me no, so I did it, but I kinda wish someone had told me no...

(Stagehand again motioning for her to quit talking.)

MISSY

Right, right. Let's just get into scene and you will all understand. Oh, and this date's name was Matthias.

(Another guy walks out and sits in the McDonald's style booth and Missy goes into the scene and joins him.)

MISSY

Hi, I'm um.

MATTHIAS

Well, hi Um, I'm Matthias. It's nice to meet you!

MISSY

Heh, that's uh... That's funny, ha, ha... Uh. I'm actually just nervous. I've never... been on a date before. And maybe that's not what you should say first on a first date, but I believe in honesty. I mean, I think I do. I'm pretty sure I do. I'm just rambling, I'm sorry. How have you been since class? This morning? Yeah.

MATTHIAS

I've been fine. I've just been waiting to see you again.

MISSY

Oh, you... You have?

MATTHIAS

Oh, absolutely. In fact, I haven't stopped thinking about you all day.

MISSY

Really?

MATTHIAS

Of course. I mean, I can't get your face out of my head. You're beautiful. And sexy.

MISSY

I am?

MATTHIAS

Yes! Are you going to ask me a question every time I compliment you? Because that might get a little old...

MISSY

Oh, no! Not at all! I'm just not used to attention.

MATTHIAS

Well, you deserve attention. You're mesmerizing.

MISSY

(Stunned. Then.)
I do have one more question though.

MATTHIAS

Fire away.

MISSY

Why the burger place? Doesn't seem super romantic for a first date...

MATTHIAS

I just wanted you to feel comfortable, that's all. I figured it would be a good place to meet on campus, you know? I just didn't want to get too fancy on the first date, just in case. You wanna go somewhere else?

MISSY

Oh. Well. That's sweet of you. And, um. It doesn't matter, we can stay here, it's ok. I just, you know, didn't think my first date was going to be in a hamburger joint.

MATTHIAS

Where do you want to go then?

MISSY

No, this is fine. It's fine, it really is. I'll just, uh, I don't know, let's just get food? And uh, do whatever it is that you do... on a date? You've... You've been on a date before, right?

MATTHIAS

Um, yeah, of course. I've been on more dates than I can count. But that doesn't matter. Come on, let's go get your burger...

(Spotlight on MISSY. She comes to the front of the stage.)

MISSY

Flash forward about a month. Matthias and I had been dating about that long at this point and this was another date we had. He really had been on a lot of dates. In fact, he was on a lot of dates while he was on dates with me. Turns out, he loved going to burger joint for a lot more reasons than me.

(MISSY goes off stage and reenters with MATTHIAS into the same booth.)

MATTHIAS

It's like I said! He's full of crap! He doesn't know what he's talking about or what he's teaching, and his entire class is a joke! You didn't want to believe me, but you finally understand.

MISSY

I know! It's like you said, I admit! I should have listened to you! I just kind of wanted to prove you wrong though... I mean, it's only a half semester class. It can't be THAT bad...

MATTHIAS

Prove me wrong! But you know I'm right. I'm always right...

MISSY

Oh, is that so?

MATTHIAS

It is so!

MISSY

Well... If that's so, you should be able to clear this up for me.

MATTHIAS

Of course, anything for you.

MISSY

So, there's this girl. Everyone is obsessed with her. I mean, everyone. They all go, "Look at her butt!" And, "Look at those boobs!" And, "Wow, I mean, she's just so well proportioned, you know?" And, "Damn, I'd love to hit that." And I'm just like, "...but why?"

MATTHIAS

Well, there has to be a reason, right? Like, she must be stunning. Or something?

MISSY

I mean, she's not unattractive or anything, don't get me wrong! Also, you're supposed to be on my side? But anyway, the thing is, she's just... Average. Like. In every way. At least, I think so. She's like, brown eyes, brown hair, fair skin... Look, I'll prove it. I'll show her to you.

(Pulls out phone and scrolls through it until she finds a picture. She turns it to MATTHIAS and lets him take it to get a good look at her. He stares for a millisecond too long until she snatches the phone back.)

MISSY

I mean, a good body, yeah, but like... Nothing exceptional. I asked one of the guys about her and he said it was because she had the "girl next door vibe." Which means... She's average. Right? So, like, I'm not wrong. So, I mean, all I'm trying to get at is that, if she's average and I'm average... You follow me here?

MATTHIAS

To be honest? No...

MISSY

Well, of course you don't, but like.

MATTHIAS

Hey!

MISSY

Ok, but what I'm trying to say is that. Why don't people also look at my ass and my boobs and tell me I'm well proportioned? Because I am. Why don't more people say they want to "hit that" about me, you know? I could be the girl next door too. I mean, I think I am.

MATTHIAS

But um, babe. You're with me. You don't want other guys doing that. Except for me.

MISSY

I mean, I'm obviously talking hypothetically here, but like, it didn't really happen when I was single and I'm just saying it could have and that I don't understand why it didn't. Doesn't. You know? And you don't really say it all that much. I mean, you used to though.

MATTHIAS

But look, what I'm trying to say is that other guys shouldn't say it. Because you're with me? Here, let me see the girl again and I'll find something bad to say about her to make you feel better. Ok?

MISSY

...Ok.

(Hands phone over to MATTHIAS and waits. For too long. Again.)

MISSY

Look, if you didn't think she looked good you would have said something already. It's fine. I'm fat and ugly, I get it.

MATTHIAS

I mean, c'mon babe, that's not it. It's just that... Well. She is kind of like the girl next door, you know? You can't bash the girl next door. Plus, she's really nice.

MISSY

She's what?

MATTHIAS

I said she was nice.

MISSY

And how would you know if she was... Nice.

MATTHIAS

Oh, well. I mean. I meant to say that she's probably nice. Like, she just looks nice, you know? I mean, her face just looks... nice.

MISSY

No, you said SHE was nice.

MATTHIAS

She might be. Nice.

MISSY

How nice is she. Matthias.

MATTHIAS

I mean, her face is nice and I'm always right, so...

MISSY

HOW. NICE. IS. SHE. MATTHIAS.

(Spotlight up on MISSY as she steps out of the scene.)

MISSY

It was a rough and heart-rendering breakup, as all freshman breakups are. Oh, don't pretend like you got hurt from one, Deborah! You know it wasn't real. Freshman love is by and far too immature and one sided and we all know it. Plus, he was cheating on me with the girl next door! Yeah, that's right! Freshman love is just googly eyes and stuffed monkeys that say, "I wuv u!" in breakable pink hearts and you'll never be the right girl next door! Alright, Deborah!?! Your name isn't Deborah, is it? It's... not. You know, I really need to stop guessing people's names as if you all crawled out of Biblical times. Let's call you... Actually, I'm going to stop digging that hole. Um. I'm sorry. I think. That seemed a little harsh. Your name is probably lovely, I'm sure. Sorry. But seriously, freshman love? Fake.

(Does the "I'm watching you" hand signal to the audience as she goes back up on stage.)

MISSY

You know, my therapist tells me I'm kind of volatile and I don't really understand what she means. I don't really think I'm volatile so much as an emotional pinball machine. I mean, volatile means that you can change rapidly and unpredictably, usually for the worse. Quote, the dictionary. But yeah, it usually means that you're a chaotic force of, typically, bad energy. And I don't really think that I'm bad. I am chaotic. I think. The biggest thing is that I'm like a pinball machine. I'm the ball and my emotions are the flippers. I just get like, pinged around, you know? Although lately, I've been wondering if I have it wrong. Lately, I've been wondering if maybe I'm the flippers and I'm pinging my emotions all over the place. You know? But that seems kinda silly, doesn't it? Or does it? I don't know. ...You guys do play pinball, don't you? You did understand that analogy I just made, right? Goodness, why do I constantly sound like I'm 80 years old...

(Starts to walk off stage. Whips around.)

MISSY

Not that it's bad! If you're 80. I'm sure it's a... great... age... I'm gonna go now. I have to like, actually... go... I'll be back.

(Scurries off stage as the stagehands come on to set the scene for a fancy candlelight restaurant. A slightly uncomfortable amount of time passes. MISSY'S voice is heard off stage.)

MISSY

I know I'm in the middle of a play, but I had to go! What do you want from me? Also, what do you think of her? ... Don't tell me you agree! Seriously? Ok, whatever. I have a ~play~ to put on. I can't believe you though...

(Appears with phone in hand, staring at it intensely.)

MISSY

I just don't... get it. I mean... Look, here, here.

(Finds someone in the audience and shows them the picture of the girl from before.)

MISSY

She's average? Right? I need someone to agree. She's just average. Right?

(If they say no.)

MISSY

You really think she's above average? You really do? So, you think she's better than the girl next door? Huh. Huh, huh, huh. Maybe I'm just looking at her wrong. Maybe if I just... turn this... upside down... Nah. Didn't help. Maybe... Let me look at a different one of her pictures... And maybe if I make a pose like her while I'm looking at it... Nope. Still didn't help. I don't think it's possible. Anyway, it's really not a big deal or important to what we're doing at all really. Obviously. Not important. It doesn't matter to me anyway.

(If they say yes.)

MISSY

Finally! Someone who can see some sense! That's right! That's what I'm talking about! Look, not that it's important, but like, if she's average then I have a chance. You get me? Because if she's just average and I'm just average, then I'll be fine. Because she gets all the men. And if we're just comparable, I'll be fine. Does any of this make sense? See, I just needed her to be average so that I had a chance. That's all. It's not that hard to tell a girl she's beautiful. It's hard to tell her she's average, but sometimes, average is all she's asking to be. And I don't ask for much. I don't ask for much at all. But that's not important really. Is it.

MISSY

But what is important is getting into this next scene! Alright, next date. I learned a few things after Matthias cheated on me, but I didn't learn enough things. I didn't learn that you should avoid men named Kyle until, well, until I learned that you should. If anyone out there is named Kyle, just pretend that you aren't tonight, and we'll move on. Or maybe you ought to try to date yourself and see what the fuss is about? I don't know, up to you. All I know is to avoid them at all costs. Like, personally of course. Like –

(Stagehand comes out from the wings and whispers in MISSY'S ear.)

MISSY

I've been informed that what I was about to say was likely unimportant information to share and to focus on my goal and I guess I do agree with that. Anyway. So, this next date with Kyle was a blind date that my best friend from college, Claire, set me up with.

(MISSY enters the scene and KYLE is already seated at the table when she enters. He stands and offers to take her coat for her.)

KYLE

You must be Missy! Claire has told me so much about you, and I must say, her stories were completely inaccurate.

MISSY

They... were?

KYLE

Oh, absolutely. They didn't even begin to touch on your beauty.

MISSY

Oh. Well, uh, thank you.

KYLE

No! Allow me.

(KYLE pulls out her chair and seats her.)

MISSY

Thank you.

(The WAITER approaches the table.)

WAITER

Water will be provided, but may I interest either of you in anything else to drink?

MISSY

Oh, no water is just fine.

KYLE

No, no! You can't just get water! We're here to have fun! A bottle of wine for us, sir. Whatever your best red is.

MISSY

Um, I don't really –

KYLE

No, I insist! It'll be fine, I'm paying anyway.

MISSY

Oh. Well... Alright then. How kind, thank you.

KYLE

Anything for you.

WAITER

So... Our best red would be –

KYLE

No, no! Surprise us!

WAITER

But, sir... It's rather –

KYLE

I insist!

WAITER

Yes, sir.

(The WAITER leaves to retrieve the water and the wine.)

KYLE

Now, Missy. Tell me. What is the most perfect date that you could think of?

MISSY

Excuse me?

KYLE

I wanted to know what you thought the most perfect date might be. I may not be able to read minds, but if you tell me what you want out of tonight, it'll feel like I can.

MISSY

Oh, uh, okay. Well. Seeing as how we're already here, I'd say... A movie after. And then a stroll downtown. And then maybe we find a cute little café for pastries and coffee once it's late and

MISSY (continued)

romantic. And then maybe we go to your place. Or mine, it doesn't really matter. And then we talk all night until the sun comes up. I think... Yeah, I think that's it.

KYLE

Done. What movie would you like to see?

MISSY

Well, it might surprise you, but I'm more of an adventure and action kind of movie girl.

KYLE

I like girls that can surprise me. The more dimension and personality a girl has, the better. I like talking to people. And, you for one, are already charming me.

MISSY

I don't know if I should take that as a compliment or not, but I think I'm going to...

KYLE

Oh, you should.

(The WAITER returns and pours them both a glass of wine. KYLE hands the WAITER a piece of paper.)

KYLE

Here's our order, sir. Thank you.

WAITER

Oh, why... Of course. I'll be back shortly to check on you.

(WAITER exits.)

MISSY

What did you order?

KYLE

Only the best for you. I hope you don't mind some excitement?

MISSY

Um, no, not at all. This is rather fun!

KYLE

That's what I strive for. I want to give you the best date you've ever had.

MISSY

Aw, thank you.

(Lights up on MISSY.)

MISSY

We just had boring and wonderful conversation after this in which he was utterly charming, and I was swept off my feet. So, we'll fast forward to the end of the date to get to the juicy bits.

(Literally it should be like they fast forward to the end. Everything speeds up and the scene plays out until the end. No sound should come from the actors themselves, perhaps a recording should be played over it? But it will go through them receiving and discarding food until we get the end of them finishing up dessert. Throughout this time, MISSY has consumed a considerable amount of wine and is tipsy.)

KYLE

You really are the most radiant and beautiful girl I've ever met... Just... Mind blowing how stunning you are.

MISSY

Oh my gosh, you're too much.

KYLE

You're perfect... Dear, I've had a considerable amount of water though. I'll be back shortly, my love.

(Gives MISSY a kiss on the cheek and gathers his coat to leave.)

MISSY

You don't need to take your coat to the restroom with you, do you? What do you expect to do with it there? Are you going to... to use it? Somehow...? Impress all the other boys? Nooooooo, that's silly. Isn't it?

KYLE

You never know, love. But I'll be right back. You'll be ok until I get back, right?

MISSY

Of course! Hoonneeeyy.

(Giggling as she sticks her finger in the honey on the plate from their dessert and licks it off.)

MISSY

I'll be here.

KYLE

Good, wouldn't want you to wander off.

(Exits.)

MISSY

I'll just be herrreee, waiting for my love to come back!

(Continues to lick honey off the plate as the WAITER approaches.)

WAITER

Ma'am, Mr. Landrum said that you would be taking care of the check tonight, so I thought I'd leave it here for you. I'll be back shortly for it, but there's no rush.

MISSY

Wait... What?

WAITER

This is your check, ma'am. Your husband said you'd handle it as he had a meeting to go to. I'll be back for it shortly. I'm sorry his meeting cut your date short. You two seemed to be having a wonderful time.

(Exits.)

MISSY

My... husband?

(Spotlight comes up on MISSY and she walks to the front of the stage.)

MISSY

Yup. He never even took me to a movie. He got me tipsy, told the waiter we were married, and made me take the bill. With the best red they had in the house. The whole bottle. Of which I drank most of it, but I was emotional, ok? And that shit was expensive! I don't know if my emotional instability was worth half of rent, but that's what happened. So, the moral of the story is that you should never trust men in suits who use too much flattery, bottles of red wine, or your own emotional well-being.

Or your "friends" for that matter. I'm still mad at Claire for that one. Did you hear that, Claire? If you're out there tonight, I still blame you! But it doesn't matter, right? That's what my therapist would say. Forgive and forget or whatever. But maybe, you should remember and repay me for that bottle of wine, Claire. I'd call that fair repercussions for a shitty date. But it's fine. It's fine. That's not what this play is about... You're off the hook, Claire! Although, between you and me, she still owes me. But we should move on.

So, I tried Tinder once. It wasn't for me. Or maybe it was. I don't know. It's just the one date I went on wasn't for me, you know? But anyway, I tried Tinder and I got this guy named Peter. Now. Peter seemed great. We had a lot of similar interests and he was very attractive. Like, a 10 out of 10. Dude checked all the boxes. We messaged each other over a few days and then he asked me on a date. So... This was that date.

(Outside of PETER'S house.)

MISSY

Hey! You must be Peter?

PETER

Yeah! And you look just like your pictures, so that's a relief.

MISSY

Um, thanks? I mean, same for you, I guess. And that's a great thing.

PETER

Uh, thanks.

(They stand awkwardly outside.)

MISSY

So. What are we going to do?

PETER

Well, I thought we'd enjoy a homemade meal and then watch a movie after?

MISSY

Oh. Well, that honestly sounds charming! Are you cooking by yourself or do I get to help? I'll have you know I'm quite the accomplished chef.

PETER

Well, um, I wanted it to be a surprise, so I'll probably do it myself.

MISSY

Oh.

PETER

But it'll be great, I promise! I'm going to treat you.

MISSY

Well, okay!

PETER

Now, I do want to warn you that my parents are in town and they're kinda cheap, so I told them they could stay at my place.

MISSY

Um. Okay?

PETER

But what I'm trying to say is that they won't bother us at all. They'll be out for the most part, and I've given them express orders to ignore us if they're around.

MISSY

Well... Uh. That's... Cool. That's fine. I'm sure your parents are cool. Yeah, that's fine. Not a problem.

PETER

Okay, sweet. Well, uh, let's go in?

(The pair enter the house.)

MISSY

So, how do you afford such a nice place on your own?

PETER

Oh, well, I work a really good paying job and my parents helped me with the down payment.

MISSY

Oh, damn. Nice. So, what are we cooking?

PETER

Oh, no, no! You're my guest! Let me treat you, I insist. Plus, it's supposed to be a surprise, remember? Come on, let's get that coat off. All right, you just sit down and make yourself comfy, okay? You can look through our – Well, I mean, you can look through my movie collection.

MISSY

Seriously though, I'm really curious about what you're going to cook.

PETER

Well, if you really want to know, I thought I'd make mini pizzas with a salad and brownie bombs for dessert. I was hoping to pair some wine with it too if you're interested?

MISSY

I'm always down for some wine.

(Aside to the audience) I never learn.

Also, mini pizzas? I do love small food. It just means you can eat more without feeling bad. But can I at least hang out in the kitchen or am I sentenced to the living room still?

PETER

Just stay here, I'll be back soon. Just check out the movies or whatever. Get comfy, okay?

MISSY

Um, okay.

(PETER exits and MISSY does start to look through the movies.)

MISSY

(Calling through the kitchen door.)

You have the entire Land Before Time series? And on VHS? What are you? A dinosaur?

PETER

Yeah, man! That shit still slaps! And ha, ha.

(The sound of a microwave is heard. MISSY looks up at the audience, through the door, back at the audience, shrugs.)

MISSY

I thought it was funny. But seriously, this stuff scarred me as a child! All those poor, helpless dino's watching their home burn up around them. And didn't one of them die or something? I don't know, man. But you do have The Princess Bride, so you have some redeeming qualities.

(Microwave dings. MISSY makes some looks again.)

MISSY

So, uh... How's dinner coming along?

PETER

It's good. Wine?

MISSY

Sure.

(PETER appears with a glass of wine, hands it to MISSY, and goes back into the kitchen.)

MISSY

Ooooookay. So. You like Harry Potter?

PETER

Uh, no. Not really. My parents do though.

MISSY

Oh. I was just going to ask what house you were... I thought you liked it though? You have a Harry Potter shirt on in one of your pictures. Not to mention the entire movie series here.

PETER

Oh, I just put that up to look cool. You can't believe everything you see online. And the movies are my parent's.

MISSY

Oh, of course not... Why are your parent's movies at your house?

PETER

Dinner's ready!

(Comes out with pizza rolls, salad obviously from a bag, and microwave brownies with hot fudge on top.)

PETER

More wine?

MISSY

Uh. Yeah. I think I might need it. Thanks.

(PETER retrieves the wine and sits on the couch beside MISSY. He hands her a plate.)

MISSY

So. What kind of... "mini pizzas" do we have here?

PETER

Oh, Supreme. The superior mini pizza.

MISSY

Ah. Well. I think pepperoni is the superior... mini pizza. Can't beat the classics.

PETER

You'd be wrong. (Digs in with gusto.)

MISSY

Mmm-hmm. (Starts eating.)

PETER

So, what do you want to watch?

MISSY

Harry Potter.

PETER

Seriously?

Yup. MISSY

Well... All right. Which one? PETER

Oh, the fourth, definitely. MISSY

You sure? You wouldn't want to watch anything else? PETER

I don't think so. MISSY

Okay. PETER

(Starts to put the movie in when the door bursts open.)

PETER'S MOM
Oh dear, you must introduce us to your new girlfriend, honey!

Mom! PETER

Peter? MISSY

PETER'S MOM
Missy? You must be Missy! Oh, what a darling girl! Oh, you'd make lovely babies.

What? MISSY

Mom! Mom, please! Just stop and, and go away! PETER

PETER'S MOM
Oh, don't worry! We'll stay out of your way. Your father and I got a hotel room for the night so you two can have AS MUCH fun as you want tonight. We're just going to be in and out. I just forgot my toothbrush.

(Sees the screen with Harry Potter) Oh, that's my favorite one, dear! You have great taste!

(Entire time PETER'S DAD has been at the door, silent, but as PETER'S MOM goes upstairs, he approaches PETER and "whispers.")

PETER'S DAD

Make me proud, son.

PETER

Dad!

(PETER'S DAD goes back to the door as PETER'S MOM comes back and they rush out the door.)

PETER'S MOM

Have fun, sweetie! It was great meeting you, Missy!

(Door shuts.)

PETER

I'm so sorry, my mom can be –

MISSY

This is your parent's house.

PETER

Uh, well. I mean, not exactly. I mean, I pay...

MISSY

For what? You "rent?"

PETER

Yes. And my phone bill and insurance, thank you.

MISSY

I can't believe it... Are you even 25 like your profile claims?

PETER

Yeah, that's true.

MISSY

God, and you were so attractive. Such a shame. Well, it's time for me to be going.

PETER

What? You don't want to finish the movie?

MISSY

Dude, I don't even want to start the movie. Thanks for the Pizza Rolls. All right, um.

PETER

We could do it on my parent's bed. It's a king size.

MISSY

Excuse me?

PETER

We could –

MISSY

No, I heard you the first time, I just had to take a moment. And you said you were 25? Geez, okay. Well, I wish you the best of luck with your bills and your parents and your... making beautiful babies... for your... What am I saying? I'm going. Thanks, for the wine too. Okay, bye.

PETER

Wait, can I take you home? We haven't even kissed yet. You don't know what you're missing.

MISSY

Oh, I do know what I'm missing. My Uber ride home. Thanks again. Have a good night.

(MISSY leaves PETER on the couch with Harry Potter music playing in the background.)

MISSY

So, that was a night and I have avoided Peter's ever since. Trust me, you do not want to get mixed up with Peter's and their crazy mother's. Not even joking, his mom sent me a card apologizing for their interference and asking me to come back. I guess they're desperate. But I guess they've kinda dug their own grave there. I just... that would be why Tinder is dead to me though. I mean, who lies about liking Harry Potter to "look cool?" Who does that? Peter's do, I guess. That's who. And as if that one wasn't bad enough, here's another one. This was one of my more recent dates along with Peter.

(While MISSY has been talking, a sports bar has been set up. MISSY sits down and begins eating messy wings while TRISTAN is eating a burger and fries.)

TRISTAN

So, how do you feel about kids?

MISSY

Well, I don't mind them so long as they aren't mine. They're cute though and I like their spunk.

TRISTAN

Huh. Well. Think you'll ever have some?

MISSY

(Has been shoving food in her face.) You know, at this point in my life, I really don't know. Maybe. But I'm not interested at the moment and I don't know if I ever will be.

TRISTAN

Oh.

(Long pause.)

TRISTAN

What if you find the right person though? What then?

MISSY

(Still shoveling in food while TRISTAN picks at his.) Well. I guess I would know then. You know? But I haven't found them yet. This chicken is really good though, want to try some?

TRISTAN

Ah, no. ...So, you're saying you'll never have kids?

MISSY

Um, no? I'm just saying not right now. Or in the foreseeable future.

TRISTAN

Oh, okay. But you could change your mind? Given the right circumstances?

MISSY

Sure, I guess. You sure you don't want to try this chicken?

TRISTAN

I guess, yeah. I'll try some.

(Chicken is exchanged.)

TRISTAN

Mmmm, that is pretty good...

MISSY

(Exclaims something completely incoherent because of the amount of chicken in her mouth.)

TRISTAN

Uhh, what did you say?

MISSY

I said... I told you so!

TRISTAN

Oh. But um. Also, don't you think you're like... Well, shouldn't you make up your mind soon? About kids?

MISSY

Mmmm, why?

TRISTAN

Well, I just thought most women had like, an internal clock, right?

MISSY

I mean, I feel like I generally know the time, sure. Don't men do that too?

(A long pause where MISSY unceremoniously licks every finger.)

TRISTAN

... Well. Yes. But I kind of meant something else?

MISSY

Mmm-hmm. (Keeps licking.)

TRISTAN

I just meant that you're in your late twenties and like... Aren't your ovaries like, drying up? Or something?

(MISSY just stares at TRISTAN for a minute, not blinking, but then, without missing a beat.)

MISSY

Oh, yeah! Absolutely! Why, the doc just told me last week that only one of my ovaries was working at full capacity. If I don't have kids soon, well, I'm just straight outta luck.

TRISTAN

And you wouldn't want to miss out on that experience, would you? I mean, isn't pregnancy magical? Or whatever?

MISSY

Well. I'm sure it can be for some women. And gee, I'm really glad you were here to remind me about what all I'm missing out on.

TRISTAN

Oh, of course! You're welcome.
(Pause.)

TRISTAN

Just saying, we would make beautiful babies.

MISSY

You poor thing.

TRISTAN

Excuse me?

MISSY

You heard me that time.

TRISTAN

But...?

MISSY

Oh, let me think. Are you confused about why I don't seem thrilled to have your babies? Let me spell it out for you. A: I just met you and I don't intend to go home with you. B: I get to say when and what I do with my body. C: How about you take a big 'ol swerve back into your own life and get out of mine. D: If that's how ovaries work, god save your dying testicles. And E: For you're completely and wholly not my type and I'm quite certain "our babies" would be ugly. Oh, and I'm quite certain if you put all those letters together, they'd spell the word "no." Good night.

(MISSY grabs one last chicken wing and leaves the scene.)

MISSY (continued)

(Between chewing.) Just a little side note, I was proud of myself for that little speech. That was all straight out of my head. God, these wings are to die for. Anyway. On a serious note though pals, is it ok to call you all pals? I don't know. Anyway, serious note, don't be afraid to tell idiots like him to shove it and let you live on your own time. There's way too much pressure in this world to move fast and never blink as it is. They say you can't take time, but like, don't ever be afraid of the time you need, you know? You know what you need. Like, don't pop out dumb babies for just anyone. You know? Thank you, for coming to my Ted Talk.

(Mimes bowing and such. Starts to move from her spot but stops.)

MISSY

Of course, not that there's anything wrong with babies. I just meant that last bit in a metaphorical, like... Smart? ... way? I just... I'm going to quit while I'm ahead here. Okay, yeah. Good call, Missy, good call. No dead baby jokes. Okkaaayyyy... Um, so. Avoid Tristan's. They're weird. Moral of the story. And eat good wings. All right, moving on!

(Claps hands.)

MISSY

I don't know why I keep doing that. It's like those lights you clap for, but I'm doing it for scene changes? I don't know. It's dumb. Anyway. Let's go to Kat. Ah, Kat. How do I describe her? You know how guys will buy you a meal and be like, "Oh, hey, uh. Should we... Leave and go... *Do the thing.*" Like they're owed it, you know? It's like they pay for the meal so that you can pay them back by doing *the thing*. It's like they think that you can't pay for your own damn meal and still give them your leftovers if you feel like it. Well, Kat was like the full package. The meal, the money and the leftovers and I didn't ask. Is this a good analogy? I'm starting to think it isn't...

(Several of the stagehands are shaking their heads no.)

MISSY

Oh. That's what I thought. Um. Well, Kat was great. She was really cool. We met at a time in my life when I think I needed her. I met her at a coffee shop. I had never tried dating a girl before, and I figured I had absolutely nothing to lose, so. Well, let's just get into it. I was there that night because of a previous botched date, well, to tell the truth, the date just didn't show up. We were supposed to meet at Olive Garden, and he... He never showed, so I started crying and then I figured the only way to make it better was to drown myself in copious amounts of sugar. She was the barista... And... I guess... This is where we start... Now.

(KAT approaches the table hesitantly with some tissues tucked discreetly in her apron.)

KAT

Hey... Hey. I brought you some tissues. I thought you could use them. I don't know what happened, but I promise it'll get better, ok?

(MISSY takes the tissues. She blows her nose ungracefully.)

KAT

Just let me know if you need anything, okay?

(Starts to leave and then turns back.)

KAT

Also, um. This might be a bit bold and poorly timed, but you're really cute and I would love to try to cheer you up when I get off. If you're interested.

(KAT leaves again and MISSY watches her go intently. Lights up and MISSY turns out towards the crowd.)

MISSY

It was poorly timed. But she was just so sweet about it and I was lonely. Sometimes, I feel like people are put in your life for a reason. Even if that reason is to let you know who to avoid for the rest of your life. But, anyway. Irrelevant. Back to the scene.

(MISSY gets up to leave.)

KAT

Hey, I really hope your night gets better, ok?

MISSY

Me too.

(MISSY keeps walking and then stops by the door.)

MISSY

Hey – I...

KAT

Yes?

MISSY

I, um. Just wanted to say thanks. For the service. And all that.

KAT

Of course. No problem. Have a good night.

MISSY

I think I will.

(Starts to leave again but stops.)

MISSY

I just think I should say that I've never been with a girl? Um, ever? In any way? And I just –

KAT

Hey, it's okay. We don't have to do anything at all if you don't want to. But I'm also open to anything.

MISSY

Agh, buh –

KAT

Face it, you're beautiful. You have a unique name and a great presence. You're attractive.

(Pause.)

KAT

Sooooo, can I try to cheer you up?

MISSY

Ummmm, you know what? Yeah! Why not? I'll go with you.

KAT

Okay. Yeah, okay. Um. I didn't think you'd agree. Well... Let's go to my place?

MISSY

Yeah, let's do it.

(Scene change to KAT'S apartment. It's clear that the two women have been talking for a while. They're comfy and MISSY is visibly happier.)

KAT

Okay, okay but, like, what do you want to do with your life?

MISSY

Oh, well, I'm a secretary at a law firm.

KAT

I didn't ask what you do. I asked what you want to do.

MISSY

Oh, well. I don't really think about it anymore.

KAT

Why not?

MISSY

Um. I mean. I just don't? Question mark? I didn't just start out with things going my way, so I just kind of... Let it go. I guess. And settled... For a paycheck. I guess. Yeah.

KAT

Huh. Are you happy though?

MISSY

Geez, I didn't know we were getting deep here.

KAT

I mean, you don't have to answer, I just –

MISSY

No, no it's fine. I guess... Um. If I'm being completely honest?

KAT

I mean, usually whole honesty is better than half honesty...

MISSY

Shut up... ANYway, as I was saying, if I'm honest... I'm not happy, no. Not completely. Like, it's ok and it does the bare minimum. But I don't feel like I'm getting the most out of life that I could. Or maybe even what I want out of life. You know?

KAT

Yeah, I can understand that feeling. What do you want to do though?

MISSY

Ahh, it's silly and unrealistic.

KAT

Hey, no holds barred. Just go for it. I mean, it can't be as crazy as a professional ferret petter.

MISSY

...Is that even a thing?

KAT

I don't know... Not my point though. What do you want to do?

MISSY

Well. I... I went to school for art. Painting, to be specific. And I always wanted my own studio. And I wanted to open a gallery for those that are underrepresented to display their art. You know, that's such a problem in the art industry. There's just so much art that never makes it out of the parent's basement or the notebook because so many people feel like there isn't a space for them and their art. But there's always space. This world is too big for there not to be space for you somewhere. You know? Does that make sense? And if no one else wants to offer up that space, I do. I want people to know that their art is unique and important, and it should belong somewhere. Sorry, I didn't mean to go on a, a rant there...

KAT

No, no! That's totally ok! Dreams aren't really dreams without passion behind them, you know? There's nothing wrong with that. But what are you going to do about it?

MISSY

Why are you pushing this so much?

KAT

Uh, I don't mean to be. I'm sorry. I'm just curious about your life. But like, I also think you should do something about this. You have to fight for the things you want. Very few things are ever handed to you.

MISSY

I mean, I know that.

KAT

Do you?

MISSY

Why are you coming at me like this?

KAT

I'm really not, I promise. I just think it's a good idea and I don't think you should waste it.

MISSY

I mean, what are you doing with your life?

KAT

Well, uh, I'm working on creating a completely sustainable and environmentally friendly way of packaging store products. I know it sounds ambitious, but do you realize how much plastic and Styrofoam we could stop from going in the landfill if we just take it out of the stores? I know there are options outside of the stores to make it happen, but people like convenience. It's so hard to change a person from what's easy. But if you bring the options to them and make it the easy option, they'll take it. It's just convincing the packaging houses that's going to be hard. But I'm currently working on what we could use that would be sustainable and reusable. It's a lot, but it's important to me. I feel like other people have thought of this you know, but someone has to get their foot in the door. And if that's me, then that's just one step forward in this process. It can be done. I believe that.

(Long pause while both women chew over their ideas.)

MISSY

But how do you believe it'll happen? I mean, how can you be sure. That's like, one of those way big, out there ideas. Like the kind that don't happen.

KAT

Well. I don't know. It's not like I have a lot of things working in my favor. But there's just a certain point that you have to believe in yourself and believe that it's possible. Because, like, if you don't... You know, it'll never happen. It sounds dumb and it sounds like some lame motivational poster, but seriously. If you don't think it can happen, it won't.

MISSY

I guess... That does... Make sense. But. How do you get going? How do you motivate yourself?

KAT

Well. Huh. I've never really thought about that. I've just always been a driven person. Um. I guess... I would say. I think... I think it has to do with knowing that what you're trying to do, or what you want, is needed. Does that make sense? It's like... It's like this. Take your gallery for instance. You want it because you want to help others with it. You want to make space for others art, and you want them to feel like they matter. So, what you want to do, it's a need. It's not just a dream. And if other people need it too, then why wouldn't you work towards making it happen. You know? At least... I think that's how I think about it. Yeah. I mean, I guess you can need it for you too, you know? Same rules apply.

MISSY

Huh. I've never really thought about it that way.

KAT

Yeah, like, your idea is so much more, right? It's not just you who needs it. And I think, well, I know, that's what motivates me. And like, it doesn't work for everyone, but it's what works for me.

MISSY

Yeah. Yeah, no. That makes sense.

(Another long pause goes between the two.)

KAT

So, I hate to bring this up, but... It's getting pretty late. I don't know what you want to do exactly, but um. Well, you're welcome to stay here. You can sleep in my bed and I can take the couch or um. Well, you can also sleep, um, with me, if you want. I mean, totally up to you.

MISSY

Well. If we're basically going to spill everything in our first meeting, might as well sleep together too, right?

(KAT stares at MISSY for a minute.)

KAT

Um. So, you do this thing that makes me not sure about what you mean. Do you want to sleep with me or... sleep with me?

MISSY

I think I want to... sleep with you. Like, sexually.

KAT

Well, damn okay. That –

MISSY

Was that clear?

KAT

Yeah, crystal.

(The two women go to KAT's room.)

MISSY

So, I've never... done this before. Ever. And I –

KAT

Hey, don't worry about it. I'll show you. We can go slow.

(KAT takes off MISSY'S shirt and guides her to the bed. She takes her own off and turns out the lights. There should be a pause in the absolute dark to imply time passing, and then the lights will come back up, but the scene is still considered to be in the dark. The level of nudity in the following scene can be chosen by the director/actors. As in, there can be exposure, or the whole thing can happen under the covers.)

KAT
So, you feel ok?

MISSY
Yeah, yeah... You?

KAT
Mmm-hmm. Want to try it then?

MISSY
Uh, yeah. Why not?

(KAT pulls out a strap from under the bed and MISSY puts it on.)

MISSY
So, how do I...?

KAT
Just like you think you would. You just... Ow! Ok, not like that!

MISSY
But I... Isn't it just... Why? How is this hard?? I have a vagina??

KAT
It's just... You're overthinking it, it's just like...

MISSY
I'm like, oh god.

KAT
Missy! Missy! Wrong, wrong spot!!

MISSY
Oh no, oh no, I didn't! I didn't mean to!

KAT
Maybe, we should –

MISSY
We should switch, yeah.

(Lights out and the scene dismantles itself. MISSY then comes back out in the lights, fully clothed.)

MISSY
And that, my friends, is when I learned that I should never wear the penis in the relationship. Either way, Kat was a good one. I think about her from time to time. I wonder how far she's

MISSY (continued)

come in her dream... You know. Some people just kinda... stick with you. They just make an impact on you and you... Anyway, it doesn't really matter. We should keep moving. Right?

(MISSY seems lost in thought for a while and then snaps back and claps for the scene change.)

MISSY

Ok, last date of the night. I bet you all are like, THANK GOD. Anyway, this last one is a guy I dated named Garrett. I met him my senior year of college and I made a point to save the worst for last. And I bet you're all wondering how it could get any worse, but you have to trust me. All you really need to know is that we were kind of on and off and he was the kind of person who ate sushi with a fork.

(Walks into a coffee shop and sits at the table. Is joined shortly by GARRETT.)

GARRETT

Hey, how have you been? How's your project coming along?

MISSY

It's terrible.

GARRETT

Terrible? I find that hard to believe. You've been working so hard on it I've barely been able to see you. You basically disappeared this past week. And I've missed you.

(Reaches across the table to hold MISSY'S hand, but she moves away. Almost leaves hand there just in case but takes it back instead.)

MISSY

It's terrible! Nothing is going right, nothing I do is making it better, and the whole thing just isn't coming together! It's a mess and I want to scrap the whole thing.

GARRETT

But you've been working on it for months now! You can't quit now! I've seen your paintings and they look beautiful. You shouldn't give up on them now.

MISSY

I appreciate you being the loyal boyfriend here, but we both know it's trash. I'm no good at anything.

GARRETT

I'm not trying to be the loyal boyfriend? I'm just trying to be a good friend? And genuinely, as your friend plus some, I don't think they're trash. I really don't. I like what you're doing, and I really think you've got something good going. I think you're great at what you do, and I think you have real potential.

(Reaches for her hand again and gets denied.)

MISSY

But you just think I have potential.

GARRETT

I mean... Yes? I think you have a lot of potential.

MISSY

But only having potential means I'm no good yet! It means I'm halfway there, but like, not good enough! You're not helping at all!

GARRETT

That's not it! That's not at all what I'm saying. I think you have... talent. Ok? Is that a better word? I think you have talent. I think you're there already and that you have more than potential. I think you're really going somewhere. Come on, Missy, don't be so hard on yourself.

(Again, reaches out for her hand and finally manages to catch it.)

MISSY

But talent isn't good enough either. Talent isn't going to carry me through this capstone. I have to be good at what I'm doing, and you haven't said that they were good paintings. Or that I'm even a good painter.

(Takes her hand away.)

GARRETT

But Missy... I did say they were good. In fact, I think I called them beautiful. And I'd be more than willing to find more words to describe how great they are if you need me to? And I think you're more than just a good painter. I think you're a fantastic painter. You need to stop being so hard on yourself though. And can I please hold your hand? I haven't seen you all week.

MISSY

You're just trying to make me feel better, but you aren't really listening to me! You just want to have sex tonight.

GARRETT

Um. Well. I mean. I'm... not... against that... But that's not the point! I want to help you. I'm trying to help you. What can I do to make you feel better? Or to help you with your project? You name it and I'll do whatever I can to help. And. Well, if sex would help, then sure. I mean, yeah, but it doesn't have to be that. At all. Really. I just want to know what I can do, ok?

MISSY

I knew you wanted to help just to get laid tonight!

GARRETT

That's... That's not what I said! I didn't say that at all! You brought it up in the first place! I just, I enjoy it when we... Look, that's not even part of this conversation. I'm just trying to help you! And hold your hand!

(Makes a grab for her hand and manages to catch it. Gives it a gentle pat.)

GARRETT

See? That's it. I just want to help.

MISSY

So, you're saying I'm not sexy anymore. Is that it?

GARRETT

Wait, what?

MISSY

You heard me. Am I just so unappealing to you that all you want to do is help me? You don't even want to have sex anymore?

GARRETT

You... Why do you keep bringing sex into this? That's not even what we're talking about here. I'm just... I don't even know if you want my help anymore. I don't know what to do for you at this point. I'm sorry, I tried.

(Let's go of MISSY'S hand.)

MISSY

Am I so unattractive that you don't even want to hold my hand anymore? Is that it?

GARRETT

You... What is with you right now? You wouldn't let me! I don't... I don't know what you want from me, Missy! My hands are tied here! I don't know what you want. I was only trying to help. I thought we were talking about your paintings, but I don't think we really were. If you want to talk about them later though, we can, ok? Otherwise, I think I'm going to go. Ok?

MISSY

So, you're breaking up with me.

GARRETT

Missy... What??

MISSY

I knew it. I knew it! I knew you brought me here tonight just to break up with me!

GARRETT

Missy! WE came here! YOU invited ME. We came to get COFFEE before going back to working on your project together! I don't know what else you want from me! Do you want me to break up with you? Because we've kind of been off and on and it's really been getting on my nerves. So, you want to make it official? Actually, call it off? What'll it be?

MISSY

What do you mean, "What'll it be?"

GARRETT

I mean exactly that. What'll it be? Are we "breaking up" right here and now, or are we not?

MISSY

Garrett. How could you even suggest that? I'm in the middle of a capstone project, I can't possibly deal with a breakup right now. How could you even suggest that??

GARRETT

...

MISSY

Garrett?

GARRETT

...

MISSY

Garrett? Say something. You're scaring me...

GARRETT

You know what, Missy? I'm going home. Ok? I'll talk to you later, alright.

(GARRETT exits.)

MISSY

Garrett! Garrett! Where are you going?? Come back! I need your help! Garrett!! ... He's not coming back.

(Spotlight comes up on MISSY.)

MISSY

And that's why Garrett's should be avoided at all costs. I told you this was the worst one yet. Garrett's are jerks and they'll break up with you right before your senior capstone project and you'll fail your project over him. Yeah, that's what happened. I failed that project and I had to go a whole extra semester to make up for it. I still hate him for that. I mean, it was clearly his fault. If he wasn't trying to have sex with me the whole time and cared about me and what I cared about, maybe things wouldn't have happened the way that they did. I mean, MAYBE, if he

MISSY (continued)

hadn't have been so selfish and self-centered and egotistical, maybe things would have worked out. You know, I could have even overlooked all those flaws if he had just shown that he cared and loved me and that it wasn't just about him all the time! Yeah, I could have even overlooked him being a jerk, but oooohhhh no, he had to be so wrapped up in himself that he couldn't even show me an ounce of kindness! Not even a tiny little bit! If he had just even said, "Hey, Missy. It's ok and I love you." That's all it would have taken! I would have let bygones be bygones at that point! I would have forgotten about the whole thing! But he couldn't even do that! Oh, no it was about the paintings, and how great the paintings look, and the painting this, and the painting that, and I guess you're a good artist or whatever, but this painting, blah, blah, blah...

(During this rant, all the stagehands come out and start to stare. They've been breaking the scene down, but they slowly stop and one by one, they're just staring at MISSY. Even the actors and the ones in the wings come out and are just staring at her. As she slowly gets to the end of her rant, she begins to notice them all. This can take as long as need be, but the stage needs to be so uncomfortable that you'd want to hide in your own skin if you could.)

MISSY

What? What are you all looking at? Aren't you supposed to be clearing the stage? Or something? (To the audience.) And what are you looking at? Do you guys find this funny? Because it's not. He ruined my life! He's part of the reason I'm in therapy! I mean, really. You guys aren't feeling bad for him. I mean, seriously. This is my story here. I'm the victim. I'm the one who's life is a wreck and the one who's trying to learn how to love themselves in. He's just a, a side character. An afterthought, really. He's not even that important. He's just part of the story, but he, he doesn't matter... He... I'm the one who matters. I matter. I do. Me. I'm the... the important one. This is... This is my story. You're... You're supposed to like me. You're supposed to like my story... Because... Because it's mine... Because I'm supposed to be someone that, that someone could find... Lovely.

(The stagehands have been slowly leaving throughout this speech until MISSY is the only one left and she notices this. She comes to a stop and sees how alone and vulnerable she is in front of these people. She is, for once, fully and utterly exposed.)

MISSY

But maybe... Maybe. That's not who I am. Maybe I am the flippers in the pinball machine. Maybe I am the one pushing the buttons. Maybe I have been doing this to myself and... Maybe I am someone who isn't... Lovely. Maybe lovely is just... Not me.

(MISSY looks around, but the stage has been completely cleared. So, she just sits down in her spotlight.)

MISSY

Well, I guess you can all go home. Show's over. We didn't really learn anything today. Sorry. I thought we were going to come out on the other side of this together and realize something, like,

MISSY (continued)

collectively or some shit. I think that's what my therapist wanted. But I don't think that's going to happen. Now. Or whatever.

(Sits alone in her spotlight. Eventually, one of the stagehands comes out and stands by her light.)

STAGEHAND

Hey, uh. Missy?

MISSY

What?

STAGEHAND

It's not over yet. The fat lady hasn't sung.

MISSY

The what?

STAGEHAND

Uh, forget it. All I'm trying to say is. You've put a lot of work into this and you can't quit now.

MISSY

Haha, very funny.

STAGEHAND

No, seriously. You have more work to do. You have paintings to paint, and spaces to open, and time to take, and improvements to make. You aren't done yet. And, uh, if I may be so bold, I uh... I think you may have learned something out of all of this.

MISSY

Yeah? Like what?

STAGEHAND

Well, um. You're strong. You're quirky and you're funny. You've done a lot of interesting things and you've learned a lot of things not to do. You uh...

MISSY

But I'm still not lovely.

STAGEHAND

I mean, I wouldn't say that, I'd –

MISSY

Say that I'm ugly?

STAGEHAND

No, no, I'd just say... Maybe you have some more work to do. You can't quit now. You know?

MISSY

Yeah. I guess. I guess I could... be better.

STAGEHAND

We can all be better.

MISSY

But like. Where do I start?

(Offers MISSY their hand.)

STAGEHAND

Well, for starters, what's your real name?

END

Appendix

The Recording

The recording of the play took place over Zoom on Friday, May 1st, 2020. It was read by Abby Brady, Riley Cullen, Sam Emmert, Cielo Murillo-gomez, Gillian Quigley, and Tim Reis. The cast list went as follows:

Abby Brady: Dave, Kyle, Peter's Dad
 Riley Cullen: Missy Stone
 Sam Emmert: Matthias, Peter
 Cielo Murillo-gomez: Waiter 1, Kat
 Gillian Quigley: Waiter 2, Peter's Mom, Stagehand
 Tim Reis: Tristan, Garrett

The recording was made and shared with the permission of the cast.

The following is a link to the full recorded performance:

https://appstate.zoom.us/rec/share/1NRkArLI1EdLTNbt5mLzZZAKOprDeaa81iUd-voFyBuK_NVzyFICGDBXgdgtu1q1

Documentation

Following is a Google Drive where the relevant documents to the creation of this play can be found. The Drive contains pictures of journal entries and emails sent during the writing process. It also includes documents of written text. These are scenes and conversations that got the play going, including first drafts and later revisions.

Pictures are organized in folders for ease of access.

Written Documents includes all first drafts and conversations written for *Call Me By My Real Name*. *Name* is the first scene I wrote that turned into *Call Me By My Real Name*. The ones called *First Dates* are the early drafts of *Call Me By My Real Name*. For your perusal, I've included the early versions of Mary Ellen and James' play (*I Mean, Psychologically, We're Just Friends*) as well as Annie's (*If We All Had Keys Would There Be A Need For Locks*) from the *Lonely – In Four Parts* project.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14DmMFIJoUmSw3S1CV8QX_8EWIOMHdYuI?usp=sharing