

I'm Free Now: A Solo Show of My Own Design

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A thesis

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Abstract

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School of Drama

I spent a great deal of time these past three years in the University of Washington Professional Actor Training Program waiting for someone, or something, to give me permission to make choices that align with my integrity. This script explores my journey of searching desperately for safety, stability and a sense of self in all the wrong places—and in my twists and turns along the dusty road, I discover that I am the hero I was waiting for, not the institution, or a boyfriend, or a role in a play, but me.

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Freedom in Quarantine

In the face of Covid-19 derailing all of the plans my cohort and I had spent years training for, including a performance of this script, I was paralyzed by fear. Fear of how to launch into this competitive industry without the catapults of flashy Showcases in L.A and Seattle. Fear of how long it may be before I safely hug my mother. Fear for my best friend who is a nurse. Fear of the unknown followed me as I took a step back from artmaking and entered what felt like a void. A void absent of any creative desire.

Knowing that I wanted to fulfil the requirement of this thesis, but not knowing how to even start, I decided to read through all of the journals that I kept during the past three years, just in case I actually learned anything during my time here. Turns out, I did.

While reading three years' worth of quotes, games, assignments, cards from my mom, doodles, letters from old boyfriends, grocery lists and rehearsal notes, I found that my training had prepared me to meet this moment with patience, courage and dignity. I littered my walls with multicolored notecards from excerpts of my journals and steeped myself in a voice that I had yet to fully embody during my time here: my own.

There appeared to be a common thread weaving between the notes I received from all of my professors throughout the years. To name a few:

“Don't erase yourself” -Jane Nichols

“Stand tall. See and be seen. Reveal your soul” -Jeffrey Fracé

“You are shorter when you perform. It feels like you are hiding. What if you said, look at me goddamnit?” -Valerie Curtis Newton

The list goes on, but you get it. And so did I.

I thought I was pretty good at hiding, at holding a mirror up to those around me and pretending to know who I am or what I want by reflecting those around me and their innermost desires back to them. Actions in alignment with my approval seeking spirit included: smile, twirl, laugh. Rinse. Repeat. But the faculty saw through my tricks, poking enormous holes in my well-rehearsed strategies of avoiding myself, forcing me to confront the incredibly terrifying truth: I am an artist.

How on earth, you may wonder, could I possibly not have known that I am an Artist before choosing to audition for and pursue a master’s in fine arts in Acting? Fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of not being liked. Fear of failure. Fear of Success.

In this program I’ve learned how to lean into my fears and by extension, plug into my desires.

Sharing an environment with such incredible and honest professors in addition to my brave and courageous colleagues caused me to begin experimenting with converting more and more of my thought bubbles into out loud bubbles. Not always a popular choice. But as it turns out, popularity is highly overrated, and makes it pretty difficult to know who you even are, much less own it.

Part of my journey here included noticing how much easier I found it to tell the truth when I had a script in my hand. With a script in my hand, I could work to discover why and how these brave characters are going to say what they really feel and boldly go after what they want.

In my third year, Valerie Curtis-Newton cast me as Caroline Bender in *The Best of Everything* by Julie Kramer. Caroline and I have a lot in common. I watched my impending career launch combined

with my relationship with my boyfriend at the time parallel Caroline's career and her love life. Caroline compromised my ability to hide from myself behind a script, as did my challenging, grueling and very fun rehearsal process with Valerie Curtis- Newton. In my thesis, I mirror Caroline's journey of finding her voice with my own journey of being honest with myself and others about who I am and what I want.

Mark Jenkins told me my first year here, "The truth never kills you. The truth and arriving at the truth are always better than a lie." This script explores my transformation from an apologetic artist into me discovering and celebrating my strength and my agency in actualizing my identity as an Artist with a capital A.

I'm Free Now

Note on Text

Other characters can be recorded voices or played by Hailey.

Pauses and beats are indicated by the space given between lines.

A forward slash (/) indicates where the line is interrupted.

Anytime Hailey is using her phone, what she sees is projected on the screen. Text alerts are always heard unless Hailey turns her phone on silent.

Scene 1: Rehearsal room

Lights come up on Hailey, a student in the Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. She is center stage, with a script in hand, rehearsing for The Best of Everything, adapted by Julie Kramer.

HAILEY (*to audience*): I hate rehearsing this scene. I never get it right.

FEMALE VOICE: Perhaps we should have a drink together one night. You'll let me know when you're free.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: I will. Amanda?

FEMALE VOICE: Yes?

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: I'm free now.

(different read)

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: I'm free now.

(frustrated that she can't seem to unlock it, she begins satirizing with a very sensual, suggestive reading)

HAILEY: I'm Free, now? *(She winks)*.

DIRECTOR: *(Unamused)* Yeah, just like that.

HAILEY (*to audience*): Told ya. Check this out.

DIRECTOR: Hailey, embrace the larger freedom she's claiming. Not just schedule free, but spirit free. A declaration of her freedom.

HAILEY: Okay. *(Taking it seriously again. Another attempt. Still not nailing it)* I'm free now.

DIRECTOR: What do you think Caroline's arc is?

HAILEY: Um...She's. She. I don't know.

DIRECTOR: We just had a full run of the whole play, and you're telling me you don't know?

HAILEY: Well I have my ideas but that doesn't mean that /

DIRECTOR: Great. That's what I asked for. What is your point of view? As Caroline. What is your arc in this play that you just rehearsed?

HAILEY: I guess, maybe she's /

DIRECTOR: No I didn't ask for your guesses. Or your maybes. I asked for your point of view.

HAILEY: She is coming to accept that she never really wanted to have a conventional life.

DIRECTOR: Okay.

HAILEY: So, she is lying. She's lying to herself, and to everyone.

Hailey opens her mouth, about to say something

STAGE MANAGER: Alright, take 10 everyone, it is 8:36, be back at 8:46!

HAILEY: Thank you 10!

DIRECTOR: You got something to say Hailey?

HAILEY: *(smiling)* No! I'm good!

Hailey exhales. Very frustrated. She takes her phone out of her pocket. Projection of Hailey's text feed with her boyfriend, Tyler appears on the screen.

TYLER: Miss you. (sunflower emoji) 8:12pm

Hailey smiles.

HAILEY: You're just horny ;) 8:36pm

TYLER: well you're hot, can you blame me? 8:37pm

(Hailey loves this. Looks up from her phone all giddy)

HAILEY: lol. How's your night? 8:37pm

TYLER: pretty good. Biked, just settling in with my book on the couch. It's cozy. 8:37pm

HAILEY: aaaaaw. Cuuuuute. 8:37pm

TYLER: Wish you were here. 8:38pm

HAILEY: me too bb. 8:38pm

TYLER: How's rehearsal? 8:39pm

HAILEY: So fucked up. Can't seem to figure this character out. I suck :(8:41pm

TYLER: Ugh. Sorry babe. You'll be done with that shit soon. 8:41pm

HAILEY: Thank god. 8:42pm

TYLER. Try to have fun tonight babe. Love you. 8:43pm

HAILEY: (heart eye emoji) I'll call you after rehearsal. 8:44pm

TYLER: Okie.

Hailey smiles, puts her phone in her pocket. Grabs her script.

STAGE MANAGER: Actually, we've decided to call it a night everyone. I'll send out the call later this evening. See you tomorrow!

HAILEY: Thank you "next Friday."

HAILEY: (to cast member) Wanna get stoned?

Scene 2: Let's get high.

Lights shift. Hailey mimes inhaling a joint. She blows the smoke in a fun pattern in front of her and enjoys looking at it. She inhales again, exhaling the smoke by vocalizing with silly sounds, begins coughing, bursts into laughter. Notices CAST MEMBER is not sharing in laughter.

HAILEY: What's up?

CAST MEMBER: It's Sarah. I can't go to her best friend's wedding because we have this show. And I feel bad because I keep doing this shit, but like. You know. There is also nowhere I'd rather be than in rehearsal. I just. I feel like I'm always disappointing someone...

(Text alert)

HAILEY: Sorry.

Hailey checks her phone, sees that it is a text from Tyler. Puts her phone on silent and back into her pocket

HAILEY: Aaaaw, it's just a cute picture from my mom. Sorry. On silent. Okay, continue.

CAST MEMBER: It's just hard - because she says "you never choose me, and now I get to dance alone at the wedding." And she's right.

HAILEY: Yeah. She has to explain your absence to everyone, that really sucks for her. But, does she get it? The life of an artist?

CAST MEMBER: Well, that's the other thing, she really doesn't get how hard we work.

HAILEY: Nope. Absolutely not. It drives me crazy when people think that just anyone can do this shit.

CAST MEMBER: Try and tell me you've never had that happen to you.

HAILEY: Not with anyone I was gonna actually be with. Like. Dude. I could never be with someone who didn't support my art, or understand how hard we work.

CAST MEMBER: Yeah. But, ya know, I love her.

HAILEY: I get it.

CAST MEMBER: Well, thanks for listening. Things are good with Tyler?

HAILEY: So good. Yeah. We've been together almost A YEAR. Can you believe that?

CAST MEMBER: Holy shit, how did that happen?

HAILEY: I know. Time flies. He's...*(at a loss for words, so smitten)* yeah. He's a good one.

CAST MEMBER: Good. You deserve the best.

HAILEY: Well, so do YOU!

CAST MEMBER: Thank you. You want a ride home?

HAILEY: No thanks.

CAST MEMBER: Get home safe.

HAILEY: I will, you too.

Hailey grabs her phone. Scrolls through each message from Tyler. Guilt increasing with each text. This should effect her breathing.

TYLER: Yoooooo. You still planning to call after rehearsal? 10:40pm

TYLER: Miss you babe. 10:44pm

TYLER: ...? 10:47pm

TYLER: (zzz emoji) Gettin Snoozy. 10:55pm

TYLER: Did you walk home? I'm worried about you. 11:01pm

TYLER: Cooked this for dinner, wish you would have been here. 11:03pm

TYLER: *(image of veggie quesadilla with a beer)* 11:08pm

TYLER: Okay, maybe we can talk tomorrow. Goin to bed. Hope rehearsal is good. My hard workin girlfriend. 11:13pm

She texts aloud while typing.

HAILEY: Gah! Just got home! 11:13pm

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Well, I basically live here.

HAILEY: Rehearsal went super late. 11:14pm

HAILEY (*to audience*): Got out early.

HAILEY: Just got out. 11:14pm

HAILEY: So sorry baby. It won't always be like this. I am sorry. It's just school. I am stuck. Rehearsals, ruining my life. Ugh. 11:14pm

Sound effect of door opening.

DIRECTOR: What are you still doing here?

HAILEY: (*startled*) Oh! Hey. Just wanted to rehearse a little longer. (*mocking*) I love rehearsing. (*lets out an uncomfortable laugh*)

HAILEY (*to audience*): I do love rehearsing and it's my job and she is my director so why did I just mock that?

HAILEY: (*returns to uncomfortable laugh*)

DIRECTOR: (*Unamused*) Okay.

HAILEY: (*beat*) I do love rehearsing.

DIRECTOR: That's good. Since you're an actor.

HAILEY: Yeah. I'm an actor.

DIRECTOR: Goodnight.

HAILEY: Night.

Hailey turns her attention back to her phone.

HAILEY: Sorry baby. I love you. 11:17pm

HAILEY: Awake? 11:17pm

TYLER: Wish I was holdin you right now. Wish I was wakin up with you in the morning. 11:17pm

Hailey is overjoyed to see that he responded.

HAILEY: Do you want to spend Christmas with my family? 11:17pm

TYLER: Babe. I'd love to. 11:17pm

TYLER: (sunflower emoji) 11:17pm

Hailey smiles. Deep breath. Fade to black.

SCENE 3: Christmas.

Lights up. "There's No Place like Home For the Holidays" by Perry Como is playing. Hailey takes a candy cane out of her pocket, unwraps it, and sucks it. Enjoying the cozy Christmas vibes until the first line changes the temperature of the room. Music stops. This scene should feel like Hailey is watching a tennis match between Mom and Tyler. Hailey should finish the entire candy cane during the course of this scene, stress sucking and crunching it down.

TYLER: Babe, you should work as a tour guide at Seaworld.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Oh god.

HAILEY: *(giggles, attempting to defuse)* Nooo, baaaaaabe!

TYLER: Why not? What's wrong with being a tour guide?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Oh god.

HAILEY: Nothing is wrong with it, it's just not something I want to do.

MOM: Yeah, I just don't see that in her future.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Oh god.

TYLER: I dunno I think you would be really good at it. Have you ever been? Those guys have to be, like, really good at talkin to big groups of people. And improvising, I dunno I think you'd like it.

MOM: Why? Why would she like it? When she has trained for three years to become a professional actor?

TYLER: Well, you really think she's gonna get a job in acting?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: This is going well. Home for the holidays.

TYLER: I mean, I'll bet a lotta those tour guides wanna be actors too.

MOM: No. Not the same thing.

TYLER: I dunno, I don't think there is anything wrong with Seaworld.

HAILEY: There isn't. Please can we drop this? It's Christmas.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Doesn't matter that it's Christmas. I can see it in my mother's eyes. She has already thought of several ways to murder him. The fuse is lit.

But she really loves me. And she knows I really love Tyler, so she tries.

Thanks mom.

She walks outside to have a cig, hoping that the nicotine will diffuse her rage, but unfortunately for all of us, the nicotine has the opposite effect, and she slams that sliding glass door and she is ready to rumble.

(sound effect of sliding glass door closing)

MOM (*to Tyler*): No. Listen to me. I didn't say there was anything wrong with Seaworld. But what I am saying is that to even suggest "Seaworld" demonstrates complete ignorance to what she is doing. She has worked so hard. This is such a hard program to get into, they only admit 6 people out of over 1,000 every year.

HAILEY: Mom, please.

MOM: Let me finish, Hailey. (*back to Tyler*) and you're not listening to her. She said she doesn't want to work at Seaworld.

HAILEY: Mom, please don't.

TYLER: Whoa, I didn't know her program was three years.

HAILEY: (*to Tyler*) Sure you did, I told you.

HAILEY (*to audience*): Oops. I'm proving my mother right. Time to double down.

HAILEY: MOM. He's only known me for ONE year, it's not that big of a deal. I don't really talk about what I do. So, it's MY fault. I don't really know how to describe being "an artist," so I don't really try. It's a weird career and when I clock out, I don't want to think about work. I want to ride bikes, and smoke weed, and cook a meal and unwind. I don't understand his work world either, and it doesn't matter! You met dad at the same job, so you can't possibly understand this.

It's Christmas! Let's just enjoy!

Blackout.

Christmas music fades out as the sounds of a frying pan sizzling come up.

SCENE 4: Home with Tyler

Lights up.

HAILEY (*to audience*): I know you're all siding with my mom right now. But stay with me here. Check this out.

Hailey sits in her chair comfortably, lounging. She looks at her script. Inhales something yummy coming from the kitchen.

HAILEY: Something smells good!

TYLER: I'm making curry!

HAILEY: Yay!

TYLER: You want a beer?

HAILEY: Yes please!

TYLER: Want help running your lines?

HAILEY (*to audience*): SEE!

HAILEY: I'd love that. Thanks babe.

(*Tyler reads for Eddie*)

TYLER AS EDDIE: Hello, Caroline.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Eddie? What are you doing here?

TYLER AS EDDIE: You're dreaming.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Oh! (*HAILEY searches for the line, can't find it*)

HAILEY: line?

TYLER: You should know this one, it's basically you... "But I'm at work..."

HAILEY: Hey! I am not always at work! Where am I right now?

TYLER: It's cool babe. Alright, where were we...

HAILEY: But I'm at work, but I'm at work, but I'm at work.

TYLER: You got this.

HAILEY: Can we start at the top of the page?

TYLER: Sure... "You're dreaming."

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Oh! But I'm at work.

TYLER AS EDDIE: You're always at work.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: I'd throw it away in a minute for a life as your wife.

TYLER AS EDDIE: You wouldn't have to. I'm proud of you. I'd like you to work if that's what you want.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Yes! Yes, I'd like to have both.

TYLER: (*puts script down*) What's this one about?

HAILEY: The play?

]

TYLER: Yeah.

HAILEY: Oh, um.

This woman who wants to be with this guy.

But like, also is realizing she really loves her work, and that she is good at her job.

So this scene is, we are supposed to feel like, we're crawling into her dream.

TYLER: That's fucked up that she has to choose.

HAILEY (*to audience*): See? I love him. Christmas was a fluke.

(*Tyler returns to the script.*)

TYLER AS EDDIE: I love you, Caroline. I always have.

HAILEY: (*seductively puts the script away*) I don't wanna run lines anymore.

TYLER: Oh yeah? What do you wanna do?

HAILEY: I want to teach you a physical improv.

Hailey turns to the audience and releases a long exhale, suggesting she has just finished orgasming.

TYLER: You are everything.

HAILEY: You are.

TYLER: Sweet dreams baby.

HAILEY: You too.

Hailey tousles his hair, smells him. Very tender.

HAILEY: (*whispers, very intimate*) I am so in love with you.

Hailey smiles at him. Goopy.

HAILEY (*to audience*): (*bragging*) He gave me keys to his house today.

I told him he did not need to feel obligated to do that. But he cut me off, and said he just wanted to make sure I had a safe place to stay.

His place is so cute, and clean and warm and I feel so...safe? Is that a weird word? I don't know. Just. Cozy. Can you believe I found this guy in a dive bar?

Scene 5: Flashback to the Monkey Pub

Lights change. Monkey Pub. Bad karaoke performance of Jonie Mitchell's Coyote playing in the background.

HAILEY: We met at the Monkey Pub, down on Roosevelt and 52nd. I used to live over there, so I'd go to the Monkey Pub every once in a...

On weekends.

ALRIGHT. Most nights.

Pretty much every night, actually.

It was kind of like a safe haven for me. The one place where I got to feel kind of invisible. Nobody tracking my every move or watching me or touching me or...

I LOVE dive bars. Especially KARAOKE dive bars. They feel so...small town. Reminds me of home. The grungier the better. The Monkey Pub is the perfect kind of unclean. It's maybe been wiped down once...20 years ago. My favorite feature of the...aesthetic, of the Monkey Pub?

The bathroom.

It's the kind of bathroom that is somehow too small for one stall, and the one stall of course has no lock, so you kind of have to (*Hailey physicalizes this in her seat, as if she is now on a toilet*) finagle a way to wipe with one hand while reaching your other hand underneath the door to keep it closed. While I appreciate that challenge in balance and aim, what I really love about the bathroom is the graffiti on the bathroom stalls. GREAT material there. (*still miming her hand keeping the door closed, reading*) There's this truly compelling feud going on between (*reading and referencing the door*) "Kitty" and "RJ." Kitty claims that Anthony, (the bartender) has a larger dick than Pete, the other bartender. While "RJ" claims that Pete's is bigger. (*sound effect of knocking, these knocks should compromise Hailey's ability to keep the door closed*) Guess someone else needs to use the one single stall. Really? But I'm at a cliff hanger here! Alright, (*reading from door*) RJ, Kitty, I'll be back later to settle this argument.

HAILEY mimes wiping, flushing and putting her pants back on all while keeping the door shut, she backs up straddling the toilet in order to open the door, walking out of the stall, brushes her hands on her jeans instead of washing them, and walks out of the bathroom

Heeeey. Who is that standing by the pool table? Why hello there. (*Hailey abruptly turns around*) Oh god, we made eye contact. Why did I turn around? What am I doing? (*laughs*).

TYLER: Hey.

(Hailey turns back around very abruptly, borderline violently)

HAILEY: HI!!!

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Casual.

TYLER: What's up?

HAILEY: Oh, ya know. Haha. What's up with you?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: What am I doing?

TYLER: I saw you come in a little while ago, and I wanted to say hi.

HAILEY: I'm glad you did.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: *(satisfied with herself)* Recovering quickly.

TYLER: Look, this is crazy, but I'm about to leave with my friends, and I was wondering if maybe I could have your number?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Straight to the point. I like it. Cuts the fat.

HAILEY: I think that could be arranged.

TYLER: Oh yeah?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: So hot.

TYLER: I don't have my phone on me.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: So hot.

HAILEY: I don't have mine on me either.

TYLER: So hot.

HAILEY *(audience)*: What's happening?

HAILEY: *(blushing)* Hahahahaa.

TYLER: Well, here. What if I write your number on this box of matches?

HAILEY: How old fashioned.

TYLER: Yeah. I'll keep the matches for when we get married.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Someone's confident.

HAILEY: Yeah. I'm SO sure.

TYLER: You never know.

(Hailey mimes writing her phone number, hardly looking down to write, eyes locked on Tyler. Coy smile. Mimes handing him the box)

TYLER: I'll call you.

HAILEY: I'll answer.

(Lights shift and music stops to take us out of the bar for a moment)

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Ow ow! Okay, I was a little dorky there at the intro, but like I really warmed into my performance there at the end. *(Reenacting handing the matches. Melodramatic)* "I'll answer."

He calls. We meet at the Monkey Pub again.

(Lights shift. Bad karaoke performance of Twisted by Joni Mitchell plays in the background)

TYLER: What do you do for a living?

HAILEY: I'm in school.

TYLER: Oh cool. Whatcha studying?

HAILEY: Oh. Um. Acting.

TYLER: Really?

HAILEY: Yep.

TYLER: Whoa. Gonna get famous?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: Nice. Every actor's favorite question!

HAILEY: Probably.

TYLER: Haha. That's cool. I've never met an actor.

HAILEY: It's not that big of a deal. Anyone can do it.

TYLER: It seems like it would be fun. I was in a play in third grade.

HAILEY: Cool.

TYLER: Yeah. You at the U?

HAILEY: Yeah.

TYLER: How long you got left?

HAILEY: Oh, it's a three year program. I'm in my second year.

TYLER: Only three years?

HAILEY: Yeah. It's a masters program.

TYLER: Whoa. Ambitious.

HAILEY: It's not that big of a deal.

TYLER: So what's the plan after school?

HAILEY: Oh, I don't know. (*self-effacing*) Go get a real job.

TYLER: Haha. Yeah.

HAILEY: I'll probably just marry rich.

TYLER: Good plan. Haha. I like that. I mean, it's good not to work too much.

HAILEY: (*impersonating Jack Nicholson*) All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

TYLER: Ha. Yeah.

HAILEY (*to audience*): Too weird?

HAILEY: Yeah. I like just chillin.

TYLER: Me too.

Phone rings

HAILEY (*to audience*): Then his phone goes off.

And just when I am about to give him the big eye roll, like, okay dude, you were so cute with the matches before and now you're going to take a call on our first date?

He does the weirdest thing.

He answers the call on speakerphone. And he says "Hey, I'm with Hailey, that girl I told you about..." I "meet" his best friend Tommie over the phone, we laugh at the awkwardness of it all.

We hang up.

And I don't know why, but that just really struck me. Like. Tyler is so open, and so fully himself. He wants to invite me into his whole life. He's not hiding anything. He's so honest. It's so sexy.

TYLER: Sorry about that.

HAILEY: Don't be sorry. I liked "meeting" your best friend.

TYLER: I look forward to introducing you to him in person.

HAILEY: Same.

TYLER: You should come over to my place sometime. I could make you dinner.

HAILEY: I'd love that.

TYLER: You're cute.

HAILEY (*to audience*): He still has the matches.

He sleeps with the matches by his bed. So cute. Those little moments that nobody else can possibly understand. We love each other. So what if Christmas was kinda whatever, that is a tiny glimpse into a tiny moment in time. And if people held me accountable for each and every little slip of the tongue I wouldn't have any friends. God, I hope Tyler can forgive my mother. She can be so intense, I hate it. But also, I mean. I love her. She's like, my best friend, and I really want Tyler to love her and for her to love him. But. Tyler and I are the only two people who actually know what our relationship is like. My mom gets that. It'll blow over.

TYLER: Babe, I'm gonna call my mom real quick.

HAILEY: Okay cool.

TYLER: Hey mom! Christmas was so awesome.

Scene 6: Mom's email.

Hailey checks her phone to see an email from Mom.

TYLER: Such good biking trails. Her parents are so cool. But yeah, she has to go back to school next week and it's so lame. She's stuck in school right now, but soon we can be together all the time. She's gonna move in with me and it's gonna be awesome.

Sound of Taylor fades down as Voiceover of Mom reading her email fades up.

Hailey is in silhouette reading the email.

December 27, 2019

I like Tyler.

I am concerned that he just doesn't get what you do or what your goals are. And I'm not sure he hears you when you articulate those goals. That may seem unimportant to you right now. You may be happy with him saying, sincerely, that he supports you. But if he doesn't have an inkling of what you do, what you want to achieve or where you want to go with your career, it's support that lands in thin air.

The Sea World idea exemplifies this. To me, it was appalling. Like suggesting that a Veterinarian would be a great dog walker. Yes, she would be, but she is a Veterinarian and it would be totally inappropriate given her goals and level of expertise. Same deal with you.

I love you Doodlebug.

A lot.

Mom

Lights up. Hailey is reading the email. It remains projected on the screen. Hailey is still glued to her phone, reading the email, looking troubled.

TYLER (*to Hailey*): Babe, what's up? Whatcha readin'?

Hailey snaps out of it and quickly puts her phone away. The email disappears from the screen.

HAILEY: Oh, nothing. Just got another stupid e-mail from the director about our rehearsal schedule. So stupid. Sorry. I'm back.

TYLER: God, I'm sorry babe. You're almost done with that shit. I feel bad for you.

HAILEY: Well, actually it's not "that shit."

I worked my ass off to get into this program, and I worked even harder to choose to stay in the face of... and I wouldn't trade being an actor for anything.

HAILEY (*to audience*): WHOA WHAT A RUSH!

(HAILEY checks back with Tyler, sees this was not actually a victory and that she has hurt his feelings.)

HAILEY (*to audience*): Oops.

HAILEY: I'm sorry, I'm just stressed.

HAILEY (*to audience*): I'm not sorry.

HAILEY: I love you baby, I am sorry

HAILEY (*to audience*): I am not sorry. I am not sorry.

HAILEY: I'm not sorry.

TYLER: Don't be sorry.

HAILEY: *(Some kind of breath to signify her shock that she said that out loud to Tyler)*

TYLER: If you wanna be an actor, be an actor babe. I didn't realize this job meant so much to you.

HAILEY: Neither did I.

TYLER: But I don't know how to be with you in that way. I want to wake up with you every morning. I want to fall asleep with you every night. I'm a simple guy. I want to share a life with you.

I don't wanna just watch your life happen.

HAILEY opens her mouth in an effort to convince him he is wrong, that they can make this work. She can't find the words. Exhales.

HAILEY (to audience): And I didn't want to just watch mine happen. So. Yeah. He broke up with me. (beat) But I begged for him to change his mind.

HAILEY: Do not break up with me, we can make this work. I love you.

TYLER: I love you too, and I hate this. But. Babe. I can't be with an actor. I'm sorry. I feel bad for you.

HAILEY: Don't feel bad for me. Be with me. Support me. I need you.

TYLER: No you don't. I'm not even a priority in your life. I'm sorry.

HAILEY (to audience): (exhales, speechless).

You know how after a breakup everyone starts coming out of the woodwork sharing their *real* opinions?

I love that part. I LOVE just *burying* my exes. Digging into every single flaw that I can possibly remember.

So I sound the alarms immediately (*Hailey grabs phone, texts "Tyler dumped me" to several friends. Almost instantly, we see various responses (oh my god I am so sorry, good riddance, he had too many tattoos anyway, you're a goddess) Hailey should react in increasing joy at each text she receives.*)

I know, I have GREAT friends. Out of nowhere I don't have to pay for any food, alcohol, weed...Leslie usually sends me some kind of plant. I'm horrible with plants. They've all died. She noticed that last time she visited. So now I have this big cactus in my living room with a note from Leslie that says "This is called desert strong, and that's you." Ha. SO STRONG.

I've had enough breakups by now that I think she got kinda bored with that theme. She's moved on to the sex toys chapter of Hailey's breakup gifts. And let me tell you, I'm having a much... easier... experience...taking care of the vibrators, than I did the plants.

What color does that mean my thumbs are?

Sylvia gets my text, and URGENTLY comes over with thai food and wine, ready to talk some mad shit. She's another actor in my program.

She is...very fierce. And very loyal. And she knows how to Speak. Her. Mind.

But, sometimes that means that people don't like you, so, NOT WORTH IT!

I watch the way she carries herself in a rehearsal. And articulates herself in the room...I envy her. I wish I could do that.

Anyway. We are BALLS DEEP in thai food, and she tells me this hilarious story about when Tyler came to opening night of Midsummer. It opened on Halloween, so he thought it would be funny to wear a giraffe mask during the play.

(Silent look to audience to signify "I know")

I tried to explain that the GIRAFFE look would NOT be funny. That we've all worked very hard for this production, and it would be really inconsiderate for him to...

Jesus.

He really couldn't hear me, could he?

She tells me that her mother (who was visiting for the show) and her husband ran into him before Opening at Cafe Solstice, the coffee shop across from the theater. She tells me that Tyler shared his brilliant Giraffe plan with them. Which. His audience was...unamused by. And that after he left, her mom turned to her husband and said "he's safe." *(Hailey bursts into laughter).*

SAFE?!

(still laughing)

I don't even really know why. Maybe it is Sylvia's delivery of the punchline. But I just think that is so FUNNY! What does that even mean? SAFE?!

(laughter drops)

He feels safe.

Hailey freezes. Lights shift. Her eyes fixated on one spot, as if she is experiencing a flashback. Voiceovers of different voices play the following lines, a different voice for each end in punctuation: Safe Campus can help you. I'm going to refer you to Safe Campus, the University's violence-prevention and response program. You need to choose whether or not you're going to file with Title 9. It's your choice. Your safety is the most important thing. Do you want to file a protection order? You deserve a safe learning environment. As long as you project that everything is okay, you will be safe.

Hailey's voiceover: I'll ask that this situation be handled delicately as I am scared that by speaking out I may be positioning myself to be targeted if or when he discovers that I am the one who spoke out. Lights shift.

SYLVIA: Hailey, what's up? You okay?

HAILEY: What? Sorry. I was spacing out for a sec *(laughs)*.

SYLVIA: Don't be sorry. It's okay.

HAILEY: That's pretty wild about your mom meeting Tyler. Why didn't you tell me that story sooner?

HAILEY *(to audience)*: I watch Sylvia choose to change the subject.

I wonder why.

SYLVIA: You just pour yourself into this play, Hailey. Pour yourself into the work, into the art, and into you.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: We get REALLY drunk. We laugh. We both impersonate Tyler. By the end of the night *(slurring her words)* I am 100% sure he is not the guy for me. That he will NEVER understand the life of an artist and that we are entirely INCOMPATIBLE. Seeing that her work here is done, Sylvia leaves.

(Lights shift)

Alone again. Missing him. Hating myself. Hate myself for talking shit on someone who let me live with him when I had no safe place to...

I feel so pissed at everyone for talking shit on this guy that I love.

Was everyone that loves me just silently cringing, waiting for me to figure it out?

Why do I care? Who cares what other people think.

Scene 7: Rehearsal

Lights shift to the rehearsal room.

DIRECTOR: How are you?

HAILEY: *(Sitting up a bit. High pitched. Forces a smile)* Fine!

DIRECTOR: You don't look fine.

HAILEY: *(slinking back into her chair)* I'm not.

DIRECTOR: Okay. Want to talk about it?

HAILEY: My boyfriend broke up with me. *(beat)* For being an *(mocking)* "ambitious" actor.

DIRECTOR: Should we get him a front row seat for this show?

HAILEY: *(real smile)* I don't even want him to see it.

DIRECTOR: Make that clear. Make your boundaries clear.

HAILEY: Not easy for me.

DIRECTOR: Nobody else is gonna do it for you.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: And it hits me. Something someone tells Caroline at the very beginning of the play.

HAILEY: "I suggest you decide which kind of a girl you want to be, otherwise someone else will do it for you."

DIRECTOR: Yep. If you take yourself seriously, everyone else will.

HAILEY: *(To the director. It sinks in)* What a fuckin concept.

STAGE MANAGER: We're back!

HAILEY: Thank you back!

STAGE MANAGER: Alright taking it from Eddie's line, I love you Caroline. I love you. Let's run away.

CAST MEMBER AS EDDIE: I love you, Caroline. I love you. Let's run away.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Where?

CAST MEMBER AS EDDIE: Back to two years ago. Do you think we can do that? Make everything else disappear?

HAILEY breaks character and bursts into laughter.

CAST MEMBER: What?

HAILEY: Nothing, sorry. I'm back.

(HAILEY turns to go back to the scene and bursts into laughter again, turns back to the scene again, collecting herself.)

HAILEY: I'm a professional. I can do this.

CAST MEMBER AS EDDIE: Do you think we can do that? Make everything else disappear?

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Yes.

CAST MEMBER AS EDDIE: You're just exactly the same.

HAILEY AS CAROLINE: Yes! Yes, I am. Exactly the same.

HAILEY breaks character again and bursts into laughter.

DIRECTOR: What's so funny?

HAILEY: This scene is ridiculous. *(mocking)* "I am exactly the same, let's just pretend that the past two years never happened" How can she take this joker back? I know I know I know "don't judge your characters, figure out why they do what they do" but this woman is so stupid.

(reining it in) Okay, okay...I guess she might be trying to convince herself that she hasn't changed, because then...maybe he'll still love her, like if she fakes it then she would be worthy of love?

That's so sad. Because she is so smart and so powerful. And she has accomplished SO MUCH without that joker by her side. She is this badass EDITOR now, and as if, he would have given her leeway to do that. Her biggest aspirations could be babies and wifing around and there's nothing wrong with that but it is so clear that is not what she wants.

But how could he know that? She never told him that. Because she never actually SAYS anything she is thinking OUT LOUD. Nope. Read between the lines, this woman is a compulsive LIAR. She is lying to EVERYONE. Mostly herself.

It's like she feels like she's this big sloppy pool of artist liquid and that Tyler just keeps her in this nice safe container. But like, what is wrong with her not having a container? What if she just spilled all over the place and she trusted her wit and her strength and her goddamn RESILIENCE and her sensitivity and her capacity to do absolutely anything she puts her mind to because LOOK HOW FAR SHE HAS COME!

DIRECTOR: ...Who's "Tyler?"

HAILEY: *(beat)* What? I mean, Eddie.

DIRECTOR: We still talking about Caroline?

HAILEY: No.

DIRECTOR: Someone finally has a point of view.

HAILEY *(to audience)*: I blacked out. What happened?

DIRECTOR: You know, I cast you in this part because she reminds me of you.

HAILEY: Yeah. I know.

Scene 8: Covid-19

Lights change. Soundbite of Covid 19 mandatory mask wearing. A stagehand walks onto the stage, takes Hailey's script out of her hands and replaces it with hand sanitizer. A single roll of toilet paper rolls across the stage in front of Hailey. Pop culture references from this time pop up on the screen (Love is blind memes, Tiger King memes, Quarantine memes) paired with alternating scientific articles, news headlines and a rising death count that continues to grow the entire time even while juxtaposed with the dark humor that the memes offer. Soundbites transition to: Broadway closing, The University closing, Graduation ceremonies going virtual, questions of whether Theatre will ever return. Hailey attempts to

take all of this in, very disoriented by whether to look at the screen, the disappearing and reappearing props or to listen to the soundbites. The volume builds into a loud cacophony of Covid until the lights shift to a single spotlight on Hailey. Hailey is inhaling, about to tell the audience what is going on when a stagehand walks onto the stage and puts a medical mask onto her face. Blackout. Hailey exits.

Lights up.

Hailey is gone.

The projection screen lights up. Hailey on a zoom call.

HAILEY: Hey! Oh my god this whole thing is so WEIRD. Show me your room! So CUTE! I'm good! I've been just like, exercising, and reading, and organizing my roooooom and like, you know. I mean, I'm healthy, and I have a lot to be grateful for, so like, I am actually doing really well. Oh! One sec! I'm just gonna grab some water.

Hailey turns her video off on zoom and reenters the space wearing a formal button up shirt, underpants, and tube socks filled with cans of beer. She has a fresh beer in hand, cracks it open, chugs it, smashes the can with her hands, and throws it onto the stage. She belches loudly. She takes her phone out and turns the video back on.

HAILEY: Hey, sorry! I actually just remembered that I have a ZOOM ZUMBA class starting here in a sec so I gotta go! Yay! Okay, love you!

Hailey turns her video off.

Slinks into her chair.

In silence Hailey drinks a beer. Lights shift from day, to evening, to night.

Empty beer cans on the floor. Hailey is scrolling on her phone. She clicks. It is NPR. An article exploring the challenges for a single person in quarantine. "My Friend the Forest" by Nils Frahm fades up.

During this song, Hailey performs a physical score where she attempts to hug and heal herself through physical touch, but each time she touches herself she resists. This should feel like a tug of war.

A text from Tyler. The song stops. Hailey freezes. It should feel as if the text from Tyler quiets the noise in her body and mind.

TYLER: Babe, I miss you. 10:01pm

Hailey stands in stillness for a breath.

She collapses.

She cracks a beer.

Cries.

Violent.

Screaming.

HAILEY (to audience): After we broke up I asked him specifically to STOP texting me or calling me so I can move on! “Make your boundaries clear, Hailey. Nobody else is gonna do it for you!” I’m NOT texting him back.

TYLER: *(insert old photo of the two of them biking together)* Remember dis? 10:03pm

Hailey smiles. Laughing at the memory.

HAILEY: I was just thinking about you. 10:04pm

HAILEY (to audience): I know, but like. Whatever.

TYLER: With all this coronavirus shit, what’s your plan now? Like, you can’t really do acting anymore. 10:06pm

HAILEY (to audience): Fuck you dude.

TYLER: That must really suck. I’m sorry, babe. 10:07pm

HAILEY (to audience): Okay. Maybe I’m being a bitch.

TYLER: Just come hang out with me for a little while. 10:07pm

HAILEY: I don’t know... 10:08pm

TYLER: I miss you. I miss your body... ;) 10:08pm

Hailey loves this. Life reentering her body. An avalanche of text messages between Tyler and Hailey fills the screen. Lights shift during this avalanche to signify that several days pass.

TYLER: I wish I hadn’t broken up with you. 8:13am

HAILEY: Really? 8:13am

TYLER: Yes. 8:14am

HAILEY: Baaaaabe. 8:14am

TYLER: Move in with me. 8:14am

HAILEY: Let me check my schedule... 8:16am

TYLER: lol. 8:16am

HAILEY: I’m free now! 8:18am

Voiceover of Hailey saying Caroline’s line on repeat: I’m free now, I’m free now, I’m free now.

HAILEY: I'm free now... God. What is that from?

Hailey stands. Puts her medical mask back on. The room is flooded with a projection of Opening Night from the production of "The Best of Everything." This is the first time we see the actual show, full costume, hair, set, lights, a culmination of many rehearsals, full of knowledge, yet simultaneously very nerve racking, and very unknown. Hailey watches and responds to the scene.

CAROLINE: I'm free now. I'm free now. I'm free now.

HAILEY: God. LEAVE ME ALONE Caroline!

CAROLINE: I'm free, now.

HAILEY: Good for you! The rest of us are in quarantine!

EDDIE: *(continued)*: I was never good enough for you.

HAILEY: No, you weren't. So why am I going back to you?
(Hailey takes her medical mask off and collapses to the ground)

CAROLINE: You were.

HAILEY: Caroline, come on. Stop lying to yourself. And to everyone around you. It's exhausting.

EDDIE: You wanted so much, always pushing me to be interesting and ambitious. But you're happy living the way you are.

HAILEY: Happy?

CAROLINE: Happy?

HAILEY: What is happy? I don't know.

Wouldn't a tiny little piece of you wonder what it would be like to quarantine with Eddie? To feel safe and cozy and cuddly?

EDDIE: You're the one who's ambitious. Life is simple, Caroline.

HAILEY: Life is kind of simple right now, isn't it?

EDDIE: You just have to make a choice.

HAILEY: I choose me.

AMANDA: I didn't realize this job meant so much to you.

HAILEY and CAROLINE (together): Neither did I.

AMANDA: Perhaps we should have a drink together one night. You'll let me know when you're free.

HAILEY: I'm free now! Someone please, anyone, please have a drink with me. God. I miss bars. I am so sick of drinking alone in my bedroom.

CAROLINE: I will. Amanda?

AMANDA: Yes?

HAILEY: Don't say it. Don't say it. Please don't.../

CAROLINE: **I'm free now.**

*Screen from the best of everything shuts off. Ghost light of the theatre turns on.
Hailey screams, wails, these words pierce her to her core.*

HAILEY: I'm free, now? Really? I am free NOW? I'm fucking free now, and I'm in quarantine.

Fade to black, spotlight on Hailey. Alone with the ghost light of the theatre.

Hailey stares into the abyss, wondering what will happen next.

She starts singing the song acapella, very slowly and very softly. It should feel like a ritual she does to heal or calm herself. As she hears herself singing these lyrics, the power of hearing her real voice slowly brings her up to standing.

"How Good It Feels" by Lake Street Dive.

HAILEY:

"I'm having so much fun on my own

I wanna tell somebody

I'm having so my fun all alone

I wanna let somebody know

How good it feels to be alone

How good it feels to be alone

I'm having so much fun by myself

I want the whole world to know

That I don't need anybody else

To row my boat

And how good it feels to have no body to make conversations with

And how good it feels to have no body to keep up relations with

How good it feels to be alone

How good it feels to be alone

Up on her feet now, in this clever twist of the lyrics, Hailey allows these words to freely pour out of her. Music slowly starts to swell underneath her. She sings and dances with abandon, celebrating her performance.

OH but I get so afraid when it's late at night
I stare up at the sky looking for life
And then the cold comes over me and I know that this aint right
I remember nobody should be living alone
How good it feels to have somebody to make conversations with
How good it feels to have somebody to keep up relations with
How good it feels to have a friend be together again
How good it feels to have you
How good it feels”

End of Play