

exesanonymous.com
a play in two acts

DRAMATIS PERSONAE*:

MAN

WOMAN

*although using two actors is recommended for an optimal experience, the play can also be performed with five men and five women

SETTING: Online

SET: A table and two stools. All necessary props and costumes (if any) can be found on or under the table.

SYNOPSIS: The end of relationships can be a very messy business. A man and a woman visit exesanonymous.com as means to deal with their respective relationships. While they might not find the closure they seek, there is a chance that they find catharsis in the stories they find.

THE PLAY:

ACT I

[A WOMAN enters, wearing a black blazer. She is listening to someone over the phone, and is serious. A MAN enters, carrying a backpack. He is dressed like a college student. He brings out a letter from his bag, and reads it. The WOMAN ends the call and sits down on the chair. The MAN finishes reading the letter, pauses, then sets the letter aside. He sits down on the other chair. Both MAN and WOMAN mirror each other, as they scan through the contents of their smartphones. The mirroring ends with the WOMAN looking at the MAN. She brings out a placard.]

PLACARD: JULY RED CONCRETE by collegedearstirene

[As the MAN delivers his monologue, the WOMAN intensely observes him.]

MAN: I was hoping to find her here. Or, at least, that she'd find me. Online.

After everything we've done for each other, last week couldn't have been the end. She chose me despite our difference in social status. Despite her parents' obsession with "racial compatibility." I chose her despite the risks. We were low key. Just a handful knew about us. We even went so far as to write notes in a code only the two of us understood.

Last week can't be the end. Despite what her friend said. *[Gestures to the letter in hand.]* Despite what her letter said. She was forced to write it. Either that or she just wanted me to hate her. If it's the latter, I love her even more.

[Examines the letter again.] On the other hand, there was nothing in her letter that remotely resembled our code. Deep down, I dread the possibility that she has given up on us.

I know the situation is bleak. But I'm not ready to give up on us yet. I write this in case destiny leads her here.

I know I sound delusional, in denial, but I am convinced that what she said in her letter simply isn't true. No one suddenly quits school in the middle of a semester just to spite an ex. Also, I commuted all the way to where they live. No one's at home. The house on sale. We kept our relationship a secret. Rich as her family is, they wouldn't suddenly leave, just to have her spite me.

Where are they now? Where is she now? Where did they take her? My guess is somewhere where her prospects are more... Racially compatible. They can afford it after all.

Just thinking of this almost makes me hear her voice. "A regular Sherlock Holmes," she'd say. The way she said it when I first figured out that she liked me back. Back then, way back then, when my... sleuthing instincts were responsible for bringing us together.

Too bad it's useless now. Near to useless. Seeing through her charitable lie gives me hope; but is it a hope that I'm supposed to nurture? Her number is useless now. Her social networking accounts, gone. Her parents must have really bullied her into closing her accounts, into writing that letter.

I'd like to believe despite everything they've done, deep down, they love her. What am I saying? Nobody takes extreme measures such as these if not out of love. That's why I feel so compelled to do no less. That's why, no matter how bleak the situation, I am not giving up.

My guess: they'll want her to study. They'll enroll her in a school wherever they may be. I'd go so far as to guess that they'll disallow her from having a social

networking account. They will probably monitor her email account. But they have to allow her to go online. And what married couple would visit a site for exes?

If I she is as I know her to be; if her letter is indeed, as I suspect, a lie: she'll find this site. And, chances are, she'll read this.

July. Red. Concrete. Just in case you get to read this. So that you know that it's really me. So that you know I'll do everything I can to keep what we have.

I know we're both still young, our futures uncertain. It'll take some years before we graduate, before your parents no longer have a say on whom you should love, whom you should marry. By then, we can finally be together again. I'm willing to wait for that day; just give me a sign that you will too.

On the home page here they say that they'll release a new story each week. Send me a sign here. I'll constantly be on the lookout.

I'll be fighting as hard for us as I imagine you will. I'm doing everything I can, and now I'm at your mercy. If love is everything people say it is, we will prevail. We can overcome this.

I don't want to concede to my fears: that I am just a silly college student clinging on to mere nostalgia.

I will wait. If all this comes to nothing, then let this be my contribution to exesanonymous.com.

[By the time the MAN has finished his monologue, the WOMAN has gotten rid of her blazer, and looks just like a socialite. The MAN picks up a new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: WORDTWISTER by frankielemonade02

[As the WOMAN delivers her monologue, the MAN just stares at her.]

WOMAN: First off, I'm not cheating because, technically, he's not my ex. It's just that, knowing him, he'll tell you otherwise and give you a completely different story. The truth is, among many other things, I'm not the bad guy. And I'm not a victim either. I am a survivor. Wait, that didn't come out right. How can I be a survivor without being a victim first?

It was a narrow escape. Figuratively, of course. Yes, it's best to spell it out; otherwise, he'll find a way to twist my words. See? Why would I want to be with anyone so manipulative? I'm not the smartest person in the room, but please, give me some credit.

Sure, he got me to say yes. He got me to go out with him, but! That's literally just it. The only thing he got me to do was to say "yes", not accept his proposal. He got me to go out with him, multiple times, sure, but none of them were dates, if you get what I mean.

Look, when someone says, "Can we talk about something important over coffee?" is that the same as going on a date? To him, it is.

I only knew him for a month! Sure, he was eloquent. That, I admit, I found attractive... But not enough to go out with him... I mean, to date him, ew... My mistake was to be a Good Samaritan to him. He was pretty serious when he first approached me. As a friend, he would have been fine. But when he became clingy... And to top it off, I learn from someone other than him, that we were supposedly dating... The nerve!

But I thought of giving him a chance... Not dating him, but to tell me outright what he thinks is going on between us... And guess what? Not even a single "I

love you" from him, in any of those "important coffee sessions." He'll deny it, I'm sure. Actions speak louder than words, I'm sure. What. A. Poser.

Sure, let him pay for the coffee. And the snacks. And the meals. And the "thank you" movie and popcorn. All I wanted to be was to be a good friend and he uses me as a trophy whatnot. Let him pay for everything. Vengeance will come and it will be sweet.

And Vengeance did come and he was sweet. And the name of Vengeance was "Carlo". He said that he loved me. He was clear about asking me out and dating me. That's why I'm dating him still.

Now, going back to... our mutual friend. He can lament all he wants. I don't care. Right now I have nothing but Grade A contempt towards him. He can brag about his efforts, he can scream out on the rooftops how much he loves me. He can even tell other people how I, supposedly, broke his heart. How I didn't even give him the decency of a breakup. Why should I give him that decency? We were never us in the first place!

Let him turn the tables, let him turn me into the manipulative one. But the story of "us", that is simply not true. On that, I have to speak out, even if he hasn't brought it up in public yet. I just have "Carlo" in mind, and all this is so unfair to "Carlo."

So let this be a warning to anyone who reads this: if at any time in the future read a post here, in exesanonymous.com, from a guy who claims he gave everything and was left with nothing, please take it with a grain of salt.

Oh, and P.S. Good luck to the "July, Red, Concrete" I really hope you find your true love.

[By the time the WOMAN finishes her monologue, the MAN is dressed in plain black. The WOMAN picks up new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: WELCOME TO EXESANONYMOUS.COM by curatorpede

[As the MAN delivers his monologue, the WOMAN puts her black blazer back on. She stands up and takes a few steps away from the MAN, but still staring at him.]

MAN: We would like to thank everyone who contributed their stories to exesanonymous.com, where you can go very personal without jeopardizing your privacy.

The end of a relationship can be messy, embarrassing, and sometimes even too difficult to understand. But telling these tales helps us all to cope and, more importantly, to build empathy towards our former significant others. The fact that we have stories to share is proof enough that life, however it looks now, goes on. After all, we've lived to tell the tale.

Now, we've received some inquiries on how and why Shahrazad (not her real name, obviously) and I built this site. Okay, we publish other people's stories here. But what is our story? We've received varied speculations as to who we are and why we do this. Some suspect that Shahrazad and I are dealing with our own respective breakups. That Shahrazad and I are kindred spirits regarding this experience.

It's something like that. Shahrazad and I, we're the exes. We're exes, and yet we've managed to still be cordial after our relationship. It was something we did realize, given our experience: we had to be clear with how we loved each other.

We didn't start our relationship under the best of circumstances, admittedly. We were already close before we even thought of dating. So close, we accidentally

warded off people: guys that would have courted Shahrazad, girls I could have courted. When we both realized that, I told Shahrazad, "Maybe we're meant to be together, and we just didn't know it."

It was a joke, of course, and Shahrazad knew that. Still, Shahrazad thought to push the joke further. "Then let's date," she replied.

Initially, I didn't want my joke to turn on me. I told her, "We were just kidding, right?"

"Yes, we were," she said, without batting an eyelash.

"But do you think we can be serious about... You know, going out? Going steady?"

Shahrazad looked at me. "So long as we don't waste each other's time."

So we dated. And we clicked, I'd like to believe. Too well, even. My relatives were ecstatic; they hadn't seen two people so in love with each other since Grandpa Eli and Grandma Clarisse (again, not their real names).

Towards the end of our four years, it became kinda clear that being boyfriend-girlfriend was never really a relationship goal but a path. Funny. It was Shahrazad who brought it up. During one of our dates, she asked me, "So where is this going? Us?"

Of course, I was ready to propose. We had already been together for four years after all. Then Grandma Clarisse died. That's when things got messy for me, and eventually for Shahrazad.

My cousins and I took turns keeping Grandpa Eli company. It didn't take too long

to conclude: Grandpa's mind was slipping fast. He kept asking for Grandma and got upset when we tell him that she... passed away. In the end, Grandpa followed Grandma in the state he was in: spending the rest of his days in search of her.

That image of Grandpa Eli and Grandma Clarisse was, well, eye opening. And Shahrazad could clearly see through me. I was deathly scared. Would I end up like Grandpa? I don't think I can take it. And what if I kicked the bucket first? How would Shahrazad be, then?

Anyway, Shahrazad called me out on it, so I had to tell her what I was going through. She was quiet for a moment. Then she finally spoke.

"Look, what are you expecting out of a relationship? It's either we wait to see who kicks the bucket first, or we walk away from this relationship while we're still alive."

I was so ashamed. Without her saying anything, this was Shahrazad giving me a way out. But to take it was to affirm that I just wasted her time. But to push through all the way to the end... Are relationships really just a choice among a string of heartaches? If so, why does anyone get into relationships in the first place? Or are most people just like me: naive about what's waiting at the end of the road?

And that's how we ended our relationship. Just like that. As much of a jerk that I was at that moment, I wasn't going to be worse by pretending I could handle my fears. Shahrazad deserved more than what I could give her.

I was profusely apologetic. Shahrazad was very forgiving. "We sometimes need to get burned to learn," she told me.

And this is why we started exesanonymous.com. Perhaps, just perhaps, as

Shahrazad hopes, through the stories shared, I'll understand what people really look for in relationships. What makes them stay for as long as they can. What makes them decide to cut things short.

In the meantime, just keep the stories rolling. Thank you.

[By the time the MAN finishes, the WOMAN stares at him for a while. Then, as if jolted by a sense of urgency, she hurriedly puts on spectacles and corporate attire. The MAN picks up a new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: PEARLY WHITES by 82officefortress

[As the WOMAN delivers her monologue, the MAN puts on a shirt and tie, then mimes the interview and echo some lines towards the end.]

WOMAN: Dear curatorpede, first off, I really want to commend you and your team for this site. I've been following it, and it's been... quite helpful to me.

I hope you allow my story to your site:

The moment he stood up to enter my office, I knew I've heard that name before. Funny how, over time, all one remembers is the person's nickname; the full name eventually sounds as unfamiliar as the years we've spent apart. So he's finally back in the country, back in town, applying for a job in the company I work for. Talk about coincidence.

Is it coincidence? It must be. How could he even know that I work here? It's been years! He probably doesn't remember...

He smiles. He remembers me. Nobody flashes those pearly whites with such confidence at a job interview. Or maybe he's just confident. Practiced. My, you sure look the same as you did back in first year college... But you've really amped

up your charm...

He must have noticed how quiet I've been. I stall a bit, browsing through his resume. Yea, it's definitely him. I should have noticed. Same high school. Same college as mine. I look at him and smile. Best to pretend not to know him... Even if he broke my heart years ago. I've moved on. I've had three other boyfriends after him, in case anyone's wondering. And, currently, I'm happily single. I'm strong, independent. And technically, he shouldn't count. I mean, come on, we were just freshmen when we...

He's applying for a job, that's all. I'm just going to see if he's qualified. That's all. His crisp, well-ironed, white long sleeves and plain black tie has nothing to do with our history. Our history? Perhaps just mine. As I stare at him, there's no hint that he recognizes me.

"Tell me a little about yourself."

Good start. He tells me having had to study abroad for college. That, I already know. In fact, I remember it too well. Or not. It's strange how the harsh realities of life sounded a lot more... devastating back then. We did try maintaining a long distance relationship after all. Then the snail mail turned to email, then the correspondence eventually stopped. Who sent the last message? Me or him? Probably me. He broke my heart after all. Without even the decency of breaking up with me. After four months of not hearing from him, I moved on.

He's done. I just realized... I don't remember anything he said. Did he notice I spaced out? Does he recognize me now, if he hasn't already? I suddenly remember, I haven't introduced myself to him earlier and just jumped straight to the interview. He might suspect, but he'll never be sure until I affirm his suspicions. If he suspects. By this time, he's probably wondering why I've been so quiet. There he goes with his pearly whites again. The corners of his lips stifle a tiny tremble. Am I making him nervous? Good.

"How did you hear of this position?"

"What do you know of the company?"

"Why do you want this job?"

I'm back on track. Just doing my job to see if he's fit for the company. So far, he is. Very fit. And by fit, I'm not referring to the obvious fact that he does work out. He's just what the company needs right now. He'll be a real asset. He'll rise up the ranks, for sure.

The tremble at the corner of his lips has subsided. He's leaning forward now, his fingers interlocked... There's no ring on his finger. Wait. What? No ring? So what if there's no ring on his finger? This has nothing to do with what he's applying for. So why am I bothered?

This man is so different from the boy I dated in my early college days. There's still that boyish charm in him, but other than that, what else do I know? As a potential employee, he seems a lot more reliable now than how I remember him. What happened to him when he was abroad? Why am I suddenly so curious? Why should I care about this now?

"So why should we hire you?" I manage to blurt out. Many years ago, I asked him a question of a similar vein, a lot less professional but... The stakes, back then, meant the world to me.

"What do you see yourself doing five years from now?" Give or take, a decade ago, this is the question we should have asked each other. But we're in the now. There's no point looking back anymore. Right?

The interview's almost done. From a professional standpoint, I think he did well. Good for him.

"Do you have any questions?" I finally ask. Again I catch that tremble at the corner of his lips. It must be such an effort to keep flashing those pearly whites for... How long has it been? My mind has been running back and forth between past and present.

But this time, it's he who hesitates. He catches his breath, as if to ask something... Of course. How did he do? I'm honest with him. His resume helped. He's well endorsed. His answers were everything we needed to hear. Of course, I don't say anything about how awkward everything has been. Don't bring it up, I won't either. We'll keep things professional. We'll keep things buried.

I lead him to the door of the office. The other applicants must have wondered what took so long. When we reach the door, he turns to me.

"Thank you for this chance," he says, shaking my hand. For a split second, all his charm disappeared. His handshake is firm, like his tight-lipped smile. What was that about? I recall how he has always been so hard to read. During our time together, he never lashed out at me, not even a hint of it. I couldn't have been perfect, right? Otherwise...

I let go of his hand. I'm sure he'll be hired. He'll do well. He'll probably date a co-worker, not me, of course, as he'll be in a far different unit from mine. Not that it should matter to me. That's what I tell myself as I watch him leave. I blink, then call the next applicant in.

[By the time the WOMAN finishes, the MAN has changed into a shabbier version of his corporate look. The WOMAN picks up new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: THOSE CRIMINAL BAMBI EYES by sidekickpunchblock

[As the MAN delivers his monologue, the WOMAN supplements his story with visuals, like newspaper clippings and other images.]

MAN: I'm the luckiest person alive. I really should buy a lottery ticket and retire early. Why? Because what are the chances? What are the chances that your boss sends you to buy coffee, then you open the newspaper while waiting for your order, then... You find your ex-girlfriend's picture on page two? Nabbed by cops. Not for murder, thank God--so maybe I'm not that lucky. Anyways, she was caught scamming a man twice her age, and when I read the article, I was like, whoa! I never knew she had it in her!

Well, I felt she had it in her, especially after what I went through, but I never thought she'd actually try and swindle an old geezer off his money... I really dodged a bullet, didn't I? That old geezer could have been me, and I'm not even that old... Or rich... and I think that's why she dumped me. Best day of my life. I was hoping she'd dump me. I was going to dump her, but whenever I thought of that, she'd go Bambi eyes on me, and... What can I do?

At least now, I don't have to deal with those Bambi eyes anymore.

Ah, those Bambi eyes. Look at her. And that Cheshire cat smile. So criminal. Literally, as it turns out. My friends hated her, called her my ball and chain. One even called her a succubus. Who calls anyone succubus? My friends. Tabletop gamers. Pen and paper stuff. That's what RPG-- "role-playing games" --does to your vocabulary. At first I thought they were just jealous. Among all of us, I was the first to have a girlfriend. Her. I always kept telling them, "the real girls are out there!"

I'm being unfair. Stereotyping them. But that's what I thought at the time. I'd

continually skip gaming sessions or bail out early, yes, because of her. No, I wasn't going to take one for the team in your fictitious world when there's a girl waiting for me in the real one.

Real. And now I read about her in the newspaper. When did she turn to a life of crime? Way after she broke up with me? Right after? Or... Wait. I couldn't have been her victim, right? Yes, I spent a fortune on her... Well, to me, it was a fortune. How many collectibles did I have to give up for her? How many of my prized collector's items did I have to sell? They were in mint condition, mind you. I know how to take good care of things. If I could take good care of my collection, how much more someone I cared for?

No. I didn't get scammed. I gave everything to her willingly. I volunteered before she asked. I prided myself for knowing what she wanted before she even asked for it. No, it must have been after.

But how soon after us did she become... This? Why should I care? Now, after everything that happened? Yeah, she did try to soften the blow. Sounded nice, nowhere close to bad as what that "Robert" character did to that musician girl... You guys should really read that story here... She said something to the effect of her being so stupid as exchanging a diamond for fake jewelry. Then I realized that, after everything we went through, all I was worth to her was fake jewelry.

Now that I think about it, it serves her right. She'll be brought to a place where her Bambi eyes will count for little.

What am I thinking? She's going to jail, for crying out loud! Sure, I want retribution for everything that happened to me: I can't hang out with my friends anymore without them harping about how much she weaseled out of me. All those collectibles I have to rebuild. That, and those eight months I could have spent doing something else. I mean, I could have done something more with my life.

Do I want retribution? Do I really want vindication? Hell yeah. But jail time? How much jail time is her crime worth? Somehow, I imagine the cartoony devil and angel appearing over my shoulders. My devil tells me to be happy. My angel tells me not to relish the moment. Her crime was against the old geezer, not me. Her--Let's call it what it is: bitchiness-- as painful as it was to me, isn't the reason she's going to jail.

A third voice pipes in: maybe I should visit her.

My devil tells me, "yes, do. Gloat away."

My angel says yes as well, but for a nobler reason. "She doesn't have anyone caring for her. Why do you think she turned to a life of crime?"

Maybe... Was I at fault? Was it because I couldn't give what she needed? Her picture in the newspaper stares back at me. Teary eyed. Bambi eyed. Man, even a still photo of hers still holds much charm.

My phone rings. It's my boss. Probably wondering what happened to her coffee. Well, time to run back to the office. Little does my boss know that she just saved me from those Bambi eyes. I guess I'm lucky after all.

[The MAN puts away his smartphone. WOMAN looks at him, as he changes back to his college student look. The MAN looks at the letter, then at the WOMAN before leaving. The WOMAN changes back to her black blazer. She glances at her smartphone before putting up a placard.]

PLACARD: INTERMISSION

[The WOMAN takes one last look at her smartphone as she leaves.]

END OF ACT I

ACT II

[Still wearing her black blazer, the WOMAN enters, sits on a stool, then brings out her smartphone. The MAN enters, still dressed like a college student, and likewise sits on a stool. He brings out the letter again, looks at it, before he brings out his smartphone. After a pause, the MAN brings out a placard.]

PLACARD: SCRIBBLES IN RED by sHrprSt

[When the WOMAN sees the placard, she changes into something a lot more casual, like a college student attire, before starting her monologue. As the WOMAN delivers her monologue, the MAN puts on sunglasses and a cap. He then supplements her story by playing guitar.]

WOMAN: The difficulty of dating your artistic collaborator is that when you call it quits, you're bound to leave with them something you urgently need. Such was my case.

Robert was a really nice guy and, wow, did he write the most God-awesome lyrics! His wordplay had the accuracy of Cupid himself. All I really wanted at first was to just learn from him. The next thing I knew... There.

He was nice where it counted. At least, for anyone who wasn't into music. As a teacher, he was brutal. He wanted everything handwritten. The secret is in the intimacy of the paper and pen, of the pen and the hand. According to him, I should feel the quality of my lyrics from the movement of my wrist, hear it from the scratching of the pen's tip on the paper. I still don't know what he meant with that. He was never really concrete with his lessons. I nevertheless did my best to follow his advice. What can I say? I trusted him completely.

Though he had the surgical precision in the way he crafted lyrics, when he critiqued someone else's work...let's just say, it's best not to put your heart into

your lyrics. He'll tear that apart too. The red marks he left on your lyrics with his red pen... what can I say but bloody red?

That, I learned the hard way. And, admittedly, I'm such a slow learner. The pages in my notebook testified to that. Robert never realized how much he made me cry. He'd catch me tearing up sometimes, and then he'll just be so sweet... He just wanted me to come up with something that I'd be really proud of. He didn't want me complacent... I understood that. I committed it to heart. Committed it to heart.

Eventually, having him go through my attempts at lyric writing became just too toxic for me. We still dated-- music enthusiast aside, Robert really was nice as a boyfriend-- and I still wrote in my notebook. But I gave up having him teach me. Instead, I studied his finished output, his numerous drafts. He was meticulous. He'd try dozens of words, varied combinations. He'd list, I think, all the possible phrasings he could muster. For Robert, if it wasn't the best, it wasn't good enough.

And watching Robert at work... that's when he really transformed. From that sweet, warm person that he is, he becomes a cold, quiet word processor: tapping his fingers to the music only he could hear, mumbling inaudibly to himself... Now that I recall, he'd be so hard to read and sometimes he scared me. The way he'd flip through the thesaurus. The way he'd shuffle his notecards. Such cold precision. It felt like mortal sin to take him out of his zone. He'd snap at the slightest distraction.

It was wonderful, though, when he finished. He'd take me out for coffee-- as if he hadn't had enough yet-- and as I'd sip hot black coffee, he'd read out his magnum opus. Just listening to him... And then he'd say I was his muse.

Such a nice guy like Robert... Lyrics brought us together, lyrics tore us apart. My lyrics, for that matter. I was probably lucky. Or, I'd rather think that it was the result of everything Robert taught me. Now that I look at the grant I just won last

July... [*MAN stops playing, stares at the WOMAN, and hurriedly takes off his sunglasses and cap. He fumbles in bringing out his letter. WOMAN continues, unmindful of the MAN's reaction.*] Robert should have been happy for me, right?

It's such a bitter pill to swallow to realize that Robert probably wasn't interested in my growth as a musician. Did he see me as a threat? Or, worse, as his personal groupie? Our last conversation was filled with a lot of curses and, even then... just wow... Robert was still at the top of his game. The best I could muster was a dramatic walk out.

Which would have been cool, until I realized... I left my notebook in his apartment. It took me a week to muster the courage to get it back.

Robert was... Nice. Again. Remorseful. He wished me the best for the artistic grant. I was surprised with how smooth it was, getting my notebook back. Had he asked me to get back together with him at that point, I probably would have said yes. Luckily, he didn't.

As I was walking home, I skimmed through my notebook. For the first time, I looked at my earliest pages. Imagine that: it chronicled my growth as a musician. Inadvertently, it was also a memorabilia of what our relationship was: full of red scribble... [*The MAN stares intently at the WOMAN, as she continues on.*] red cross outs, and red comments. Even on the lyrics I wrote for his birthday, for our anniversary...

On the last page, I noticed a poem written in red. From Robert. Well written, no doubt. Soulful. Convincing. But I thought of July and realized that I had no plans reading his stuff anymore. Instead, I tore the page off, crumpled it, and threw it away. Then I continued walking down the concrete pavement.

[The MAN stares at the WOMAN, then at the letter in his hand. The WOMAN picks up a new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: THE BIRTHDAY PROPOSAL by Legol0rdbu1lder

[The MAN stares at the placard, and then hesitates. The WOMAN stares at him. The MAN reluctantly changes into corporate look, while the WOMAN changes into a saleslady attire. As the MAN delivers his monologue, the WOMAN supplements his story through mime and sporadic echoing of some lines.]

MAN: So I wake up to a flood of texts on my birthday. People wanting to treat me to a drink, to coffee, to a movie, wow, the works. I reject them all, of course. I'm busy. Big project. I'm saving up for what happens after I get that ring I was going to give to Sophie. We've been together for three years, and I feel, since it's also my birthday, it's time. The perfect birthday gift to myself. So my reply to everyone: no.

I put my phone on silent mode before I go on to my big project- yes, on my birthday- planning some house for Mr. Ludovico, this millionaire house collector. Crazy client. The design he wanted was super impractical. That's how it is with people with the money. At least they pay well. I'll need it, when I design my dream house for Sophie and me.

Three freaking hours with Mr. Ludovico. It's one thing to be impractical, it's another to make me design a perennial neighborhood hazard. Unbelievable. But he's willing to pay more. I'll just swallow my pride. I promise Mr. Ludovico that what he was asking for could be done. How? I'll figure it out later. For Sophie.

I'm late for lunch, for everything else. I'll just improvise. I grab a banh mi sandwich-- redundant, I know-- something I can eat on the go. Done. I look at the phone to call the jeweler. Another flood of texts. Wishing me to stay strong, that

they'll be here for me in case I need anything... Uh, thanks, I guess? It's just a birthday, no need to be sentimental.

So I go to the jewelry store to the ring for Sophie, and... This is the unbelievable part: I call the saleslady, see, and she turns and... Hmmm... It's kind of hard to describe. I kinda feel... Guilty? It was just a moment, and then I thought, wow! What's this nice saleslady doing in a jewelry store like this? Red plastic framed glasses that matches her lipstick, her black hair with those subtle brownish streaks... I stop myself, right then and there. I'm about to propose to Sophie, for crying out loud! I can't ogle at the girl who's selling me a ring!

"Proposing, sir, or choosing for a friend?"

"Proposing," I replied.

"She's a lucky girl," Natasha tells me.

Natasha. That's the name on her name tag. I wonder what she meant by saying that. Of course, Sophie's lucky. I love her. I never did anything she wouldn't want me to do. Sophie's a stickler for success. I take it back, then. Sophie's not lucky. She's self-made. Not like that chick dating... what's his name? "Carlos"? Anyway, I hated that story. Just saying. But, hey, it's a free world, especially here online. So, yeah...

So, going back to my story: Natasha packs up the ring, and I pay her the amount that would scandalize a minimum wage earner.

"Good luck, sir. Wishing you the best."

Natasha smiles and shakes my hand. She has soft hands. Lovely smile. Soft hands. I let go. My God, I hope I didn't linger. I hurriedly walk out of the jewelry

store, avoiding Natasha's gaze. Sophie. I'm proposing to Sophie tonight.

I ignore all the unread messages on my phone. Sophie comes first. I call Sophie. Her phone rings. She's not answering. She's probably busy. As she usually is. She's going to be promoted anytime now, she said. I send her a text message. Dinner tonight. Steak. On me. Wink emoticon. Sent.

Last step for today. Secure a table for tonight. I know, I should have done that earlier, but I've been busy. Heck, I've hardly had time to check text messages! Anyway I'm here, and I'll make do with whatever spot is left.

Hmmm... Not the best table around, but it'll do. In my dream house with Sophie, we can have any spot we want. I give the ring to the head waiter. I tell him to bring it out along with the dessert. Nice guy, this head waiter. Very game for these sorts of things. I think of Sophie, before my mind wanders back to Natasha. I mustn't think of Natasha. Especially not now. Not ever. Heck, I just met her for a few minutes, not even an hour.

I take my seat. I bring out my phone. Time to check the text messages. Oh, Sophie texted just now.

"Oh ok. I'll see you then, I guess."

She's under a lot of stress. So much stress she even forgot to greet me happy birthday. Either that or she has a big surprise. I guess the latter.

All this excitement has gotten me thirsty. I ask the waiter for a glass of water. Finally. After three long weeks, I actually have time to reply to text messages. My phone rings. It's mom.

"Are you okay?" she asks me.

"I'm fine, Mom."

"Oh God!" she exclaims. "People have been asking me if you're all right. If you haven't... You know..."

"Mom, what are you talking about? I'm fine. I'm about to propose to Sophie tonight. On my birthday."

I hear Mom sniffing.

"You really have to take time to read your inbox, son. I'm just glad you're alive and well. Enjoy your dinner and happy birthday." Mom hangs up.

Wait. Alive and well?

I quickly go to my social networking account. Wow. Two weeks single. I've been two weeks single and I didn't even know. No wonder everyone was asking if I was all right. I open my email and see Sophie's breakup letter. I was wrong. I've been single for three weeks, not two. How could I have been so neglectful and not notice?

In her email, Sophie told me... It doesn't matter what she told me. Except that it was over and that she really tried her best. That I shouldn't blame myself for what happened. The usual stuff. As if the wording would have made things different.

The waiter arrives and asks if I need anything. I tell him the dinner rolls are fine. He can refill the water for me.

What now? Sophie's coming, probably thinking that I'm looking for closure. Or that I'll beg her to give us another chance. Do I even want that, at this point?

Natasha comes back to memory. Her black hair with those subtle brownish streaks. Her red lips that matched her red plastic framed glasses. No need to feel guilty anymore. Perhaps I should bring the ring to Natasha tomorrow and propose to her instead. Or wait a week or two. Or a month.

Now, all of a sudden, during my annual victory against Father Time, I have all the time in the world. The fact I can contribute to a silly website as exesanonymous.com, yes: I have time.

[By the time the MAN finishes, the WOMAN is in corporate attire again but, this time, looking like a boss. The MAN picks up a new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: WHERE WE'RE NOW by Kaizenrin

[As the WOMAN delivers her monologue, the MAN loosens up his corporate look and supplements the monologue by playing with an imaginary toddler in the background. He generally avoids the WOMAN's gaze except at the very end. On the other hand, the WOMAN stares at the MAN.]

WOMAN: He has a kid now. A girl. He chases her around the coffee shop, almost bumping into that geeky errand boy carrying all that coffee. She laughs, not realizing she almost got her dad into trouble. What is she, one, two years old? I can't really tell.

He looks so happy. That's good. The last time I saw him, he was in tears. Understatement. That time, I demolished him really bad. But what was I supposed to do? Say yes? I know where that leads. It's just his thing, not mine.

Look at him now. He finally got what he wanted. Not with me. Not that I now want to be back with him, no. It's just that what I am looking at is the proof that we were really not meant to be. He's over there, playing with his daughter. And

I'm here, sipping my first ever kopi luwak, celebrating the promotion of my staff. Happy where we are. We're worlds apart. I really don't see a way how we could have worked things out.

So why am I telling this to myself now? He's happy. I'm happy. Happier than we could have been, had we decided to stick it through. And it's not that anyone was really at fault when it ended. We took paths that the other could not follow. That's all. And we loved each other while it lasted. It was a solid three year run. I know all these to be true. So why am I so uneasy?

It's because of how things ended between us. Sure, nobody's at fault, but seeing him devastated back then... Sure, I was the bearer of bad news... But is there really a painless way in telling someone that it's time to part ways? And is there a way to say it without sounding... cruel?

It was on our third year together that I realized that we had gone as far as we could together. We didn't have fights, and as far as as passion is concerned, it was pretty much there. But he wanted something I wasn't willing to give. As mature as he is, he was too in love to notice. I had to take the lead.

My fault was that I took too long figuring out how to tell him. He is the best of his type, quite the opposite of some toxic relationships I've experienced. So he beat me to the draw, and proposed. The worst time to call it quits. But, I told myself, it'll just be worse if I chose a better time.

I wonder who's the mother of his kid? Anyone I know? He has always been a good catch, just not mine. I didn't realize it yet when he first asked me out. If I did, I would have said no.

That's it. Did I lead him on? Did I waste his time? When we first got to know each other, it was clear: he didn't want a girlfriend. He wanted a wife. And when we

were together, all his actions reflected that. I was just basking too much in his attention to notice. He really thought I was the one for him.

I don't know how long I've been staring at him. He, on the other hand, hasn't noticed me. Or pretends not to notice. No, he's busy chasing after his little girl. And what if he does notice me? I don't think that we have anything to say to each other anymore.

And that's the sad part. We were really close once. Maybe being in a relationship was too much for our own good. Maybe if he didn't court me, or maybe if I rejected his advances from the start...

That's the thing with exes: we used to be something. It's not something that's just undone. Yes, I have no desire getting back together with him. But it doesn't mean that I don't miss the things we used to do. The conversations. The hanging out. That's the gamble with relationships. Relationships tend to promise you a lot more, but can easily leave you with a lot less.

His little girl notices me staring at them. [*The MAN stops playing and looks at the WOMAN. They stare at each other. A moment of silence.*] Now he notices me too. I smile and wave my hand at him. He smiles and nods. [*The MAN leaves his chair and moves away from the WOMAN.*] Then he's back to chasing his little girl. And I'm back to sipping my coffee.

As far as I can tell, this is the closure we both might have needed.

[By the time the WOMAN wraps up her monologue, the MAN is wearing a black coat and bowtie. The WOMAN picks up a new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: FARTHER by orpheusong

[As the MAN delivers his monologue, the WOMAN reverts to her blazer. Then, quietly, she just stares at him.]

MAN: To the creators of exesanonymous.com:

I always believed that the secret to a lasting relationship is to keep creating reasons to keep wanting the relationship. That way, when reasons to end the relationship emerge, the reasons to hang on will continue to prevail. We've made it this far; we can go farther. At least, that's what Corinne and I lived by.

Sounds convoluted, technical, but it worked for us. Also, it opened a whole bunch of adventures; some were thrilling, others, well... A lasting relationship doesn't mean happy-happy-joy-joy after all.

There were a lot of things about Corinne that were difficult to deal with. Of course there were irritating quirks, like her cracking jokes only she understood, things like that. But the trickiest for me was her sense of time. It was always her sense of time.

And I'm not simply talking about tardiness. Yes, Corinne was also consistently late, but that's the least of it. She mixed up schedules, not just the time, but even the dates of the month. Many times, we cancelled dates, either because of a prior commitment she forgot about or because there's work to cram.

It would have been fine if it was only me dealing with that, but when it affected my friends, my parents... You can just imagine my frustration and embarrassment. Corinne kept saying sorry. Many times was it so tempting to just scream, "I don't want you to be sorry. I want you to respect the time!"

Of course I never told her that. Sandra, Corinne's best friend, would ask me why I never did. Whenever Corinne said she was sorry, she really meant it. Besides, a

moment of emotional release will only lead to long-term resentment. "We've made it this far; we can go farther." That's what I kept telling myself. "If I learn how to deal with this, I can deal with anything." That's another thing I kept telling myself. We did get farther. And I did learn how to deal with anything that threatened our relationship. Inconvenient, yes. But I loved Corinne.

She dealt with my defects too. Most of my friends find me too uptight and too eager that I always come up with a Plan B. I'm practically on high alert whenever I sense something will go wrong. I take initiative. My colleagues keep telling me to trust them, but my instinct is to trust that they'll let me down. Task-hog. That's what they call me at the office. But I really just can't help it. If I'm like that at work, how much more in my personal life?

Corinne bore with that without any complaint. Though she did keep joking about it. I end up embarrassed, but I do realize that she has a point. I knew I hurt Corinne sometimes, when I bring dinner to her office. Or when I do her errands for her, just so that we can stick to the schedule.

"That's being passive aggressive," Sandra would warn me. "Watch out."

But it seemed that Corinne lived out our mantra as well: "We've made it this far; we can go farther."

And farther we did go.

People had a hard time understanding how Corinne and I were able to stay together for so long. It was actually in the pre-nup shoot that our mutual friends were betting how long we'd be keeping our relationship. With the way Corinne kept me in constant agitation with her sense of time... With the way I inadvertently guilt-tripped Corinne to no end... Some people even said our relationship was too toxic.

Only Sandra understood, in the end. Corinne and I weren't opposites. We were complementary. Her poor sense of time was intertwined with her optimism that I so much needed. My uptight nature pushed Corinne out of her complacency. As the cliché goes, we may not be perfect, but we were perfect for each other.

That's why after five years of agitation and guilt tripping, I mustered up the courage to propose. And she said yes.

That's when things became interesting. Not that Corinne was finally on time for once in her lifetime. It was the storm during the ceremony.

"I hope lightning strikes when we say our I Do's," Corinne whispered to me. And it did. A sign.

It was pouring mad when the ceremony was done. There I was, standing by the doorway. I stared at Corinne in her bridal gown.

Corinne smiled at me.

"You do realize we're exes now," she said.

"Because we're more than what were then?" I asked. Something about finally being husband and wife allowed me to get the hang of Corinne's humor. Corinne just laughed. The storm couldn't break her mood.

"Did you bring an umbrella?" She asked me. I shook my head. The distance between the door and the bridal car was quite a run under the rain. What are the chances I'd be unprepared? What are the chances Corinne would take initiative?

About the same chances that Corinne would be in time for her own wedding. The

same chances that we'd make it this far. About the same chances as... The same chances as lightning striking Corinne down.

It should have been me. I was the one who was supposed to remember that we needed an umbrella. If I did, then...

I probably broke the record for having the shortest marriage ever. Corinne would have been so proud that this thought even crossed my mind.

But that's how it is, right? What does one get, fighting for a lasting relationship? The privilege of watching the person you love most go six feet under. Or giving the person you love most front row seats to your own exit. I've been reading all that you've been uploading here. Given what I've gone through, I don't understand why you people would make a big deal of their breakups.

[The WOMAN momentarily looks away. Mirroring each other, both MAN and WOMAN try to recompose themselves. Brief silence.]

Sandra thinks otherwise. She thinks Corinne and I were an inspiration to many. Short as my marriage was to Corinne, it's probably the happiest any two couples had. That's Sandra for you. Still living out Corinne's brand of humor.

Sandra's a good friend. Very much like Corinne, minus Corinne's poor sense of time. I look at Sandra, I think of Corinne.

Corinne would want me to move on. We've gone as far as we could go. But right now I just want to linger.

[A long silence as both MAN and WOMAN stare at each other. The WOMAN picks up a new placard and shows it to the audience.]

PLACARD: TO MY DEAR, FAVORITE JERK by Sh4hr4z4D

[As the WOMAN delivers her monologue, the MAN changes into black: the same costume from "welcome to exesanonymous.com." He then just stares at the WOMAN with a serene smile. The WOMAN occasionally stares back at him, in between moments of typing into the smartphone.]

WOMAN: My dear, favorite "jerk",

I still can't get over the fact that you hid my identity by calling me "Shahrazad."
Not very subtle, but that's always how I remember you to be.

Although exesanonymous.com is our brainchild, I never imagined that I'd be contributing a story myself. But considering the circumstances, I'm beginning to understand why people would tell stories about those who were important in lives past. Maybe that's why we sometimes call them significant other?

I won't claim to understand everyone's reasons; you did tell me to try and put myself in the shoes of our contributors and their exes. It's only now that I've tried... I've imagined myself as that shifty girl whom we've suspected of cheating... that HR Lady and her awkward interview... even that aspiring lyricist and career woman... More than that, I have imagined you in other roles as well...

I do have to concede: there's something common, universal-- or whatever you want to call it-- that binds all our stories together. What was it you said? Shared human experience? Whatever it is, you're right. I see it now, reading the stories we've uploaded here: stories of regret, of reminisce... stories of denial and hope.

Thank you.

When you first pitched to me the idea of exesanonymous.com, you never knew how much I wanted to slap you. That was the third to the worst thing you did

since that time you thought I was letting you break up with me. I was thinking, after everything we went through, after what you did, you want me to collaborate with you on a website? On a website that deals with exes? Besides, who would even want to contribute to this site? What do they get out of it?

But, like I always have been with you, I kept my peace. I accepted you for who you were: a genius in some areas and a complete idiot in others. In these areas, as you came to admit, you were an idiot. But given the stories we've collected, who isn't? The fact that I'm writing one now...

You really meant it, when you talked about being naive. You were. We were. The way you selected and rejected stories told me that. Some stories were outright bizarre, fictional even, I would suspect. But you uploaded them anyway. You weren't using your naivety as an excuse after all, as it turned out.

I wonder if I realized it back then, that I, too, was naive. Probably not. I was too focused on waiting for you to get knocked back to your senses. Too focused, back then, to have us pick up where we left off.

Then you had to tell the whole world about us. For what? To satisfy online inquiries? To be fair, I think you really believed in the total anonymity of exesanonymous.com. I didn't. I was quite aware how little anecdotes give out clues as to who each contributor is. Funny, now that we're past it, how we finally had a fight, never as boyfriend-girlfriend, but as exes. Maybe not so funny. It was, after all, the turning point, when our remaining conversations changed their tone.

I admire how you fought for our friendship. I raised the right questions, you told me. I remember you saying how sorry you are, like you always do. But I had it. Four years of waiting for you was already bad enough. But to tell the world about what only we shared? That was how I thought back then.

I gave up on you and I'm sorry. The truce, the making up that we had... I know you meant it. But, at that time, I was just saving face. I don't know if you noticed, but you were the only one initiating the conversations, the hangouts... I never did.

I... I eventually dated Jason, partially just to get you off my back. You might have gotten the hint by then. Only that you were too gentlemanly to... No, not gentlemanly. You were a friend when I wasn't. When Jason left, you stuck around long enough to make sure I was going to be fine.

Then you moved on. You and... I was glad you finally dated again. For me, you finally did what you set out to do: overcome your fear of death in a relationship.

When I heard about you and Sheila, I immediately visited the site. Which of these stories provided you your answer? Well, that's how it is, isn't it? One person throws you the questions, another person provides you the answers.

It's not that I wanted to be back together with you. I knew the window for that had passed. It's just that I regret not having told you all this. Not telling you I'm sorry.

But when was I supposed to tell you? Not while you were dating Sheila. Sincere as I was with my intentions, people could easily misunderstand. But when? When you finally got engaged? When you and Sheila got married?

Perhaps that's why I didn't attend your wedding despite your invitation. I was resigned to keep this secret to the grave.

Then the typhoon happened. On your honeymoon. Your mom told me about it.

I try to console myself that you both were at your happiest when it happened. That it wasn't in the least bit painful.

Strange, how fragile relationships are: it takes two to start them and only one--or none--to end them.

When your mom told me, I wondered whether or not I should finally shut exesanonymous.com down. I went through the site again, reading story after story. I followed your advice: putting myself in the shoes of some involved and imagining you doing the same.

Maybe I'll just leave the site be. I have no plans to manage it, as some of the contributions just contain painful memories. Or perhaps I should find someone else to manage exesanonymous.com. You're right, some contributions do provide catharsis. I don't know yet. We'll see.

I know you'll never get to read this. It wouldn't matter to you anyway. I know you've forgiven me. I just wish I could have asked for forgiveness while you were still around. But Drew said I should write anyway. To get things off my chest.

You'd have approved of Drew. He's my version of your Sheila: someone I'd like to kick buckets with. Somebody who would've never been insecure around you.

I should wrap this letter up now. There's just one more thing I'd like to add: Thank you. If there's anything I learned about this brainchild of ours, is that revisiting a relationship past doesn't have to be bitter at all. Among many other things.

May you and Sheila be happy up there.

Sincerely,
Your Jerkette

[The WOMAN looks at the MAN and he looks back at her. He smiles at her and she smiles back. She turns off her smartphone, stands up and leaves. As she does so, the MAN reverts to his

college student attire, when he turns to face the WOMAN, she is gone. He picks up his letter, looks at it, then at the empty chair where the WOMAN used to sit. He carefully folds the letter, pockets it, then exits.]

END OF ACT II

END OF PLAY