truth or dare

by

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For my aunts, Barbara and Teri, and my grandparents, Elaine and Everett.

“Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.”
-W.S. Merwin
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Casting:
The actors can be of any race or ethnicity, but the casting should be as diverse as possible.

Set:
A living room, a bar, an office building. Sets are minimal. In the beginning, the living room is filled with boxes holding all of Eve and Benji’s belongings. The apartment becomes more put together and comfortable as time passes. In the living room is the door to the apartment, a door to the bathroom, a door to Benji’s room, and a door to Eve’s room.

Projections:
At times, images are projected onto the back wall.

Note:
A “--” indicates the point in a sentence at which a character is interrupted. When two characters’ lines appear next to each other on the page, they are spoken simultaneously.

Characters:
EVE: 22. Impulsive, kind, with a bit of a lying problem.
RIAN (pronounced “Ryan”): 22. Benji’s closest childhood friend. Effortlessly cool; too blunt sometimes; secretly vulnerable, like everyone, except maybe a little more.
JOAN: late 50s. Eve’s mother. Brushes her hair, one hundred strokes, every night.

Setting:
The present, in the type of city that always feels like it’s trying to eat you alive. In other words, New York.
Prologue:

Short cell phone camera videos are projected onto the back wall. There is music; we can’t hear the videos. These videos are Eve’s diary, her day-to-day documentation of life at college: friends walking to the library, holding books; beers clinking together; rolling down a hill; climbing a tree; eating breakfast; reading in the grass; cooking. There is studying, but probably not as much as there should be. Eve is the person behind the camera, but we see her when she hands the camera off to a friend and jumps into the frame so she can do something, like dance on a table at a party or leap into a fountain. She is the joyful instigator of the adventures we witness. Benji, Eve’s best friend, is featured often. The final months of their senior year hurtle by. Eve and Benji, in graduation robes, wave at the camera. In the final clip, in a dark room, Eve’s friends bring her a cake with lit candles, including large ones that say “22.” Eve is overwhelmed; she blows out the candles. The room, and the projector, goes dark.

Scene 1

Eve and Benji sit on the floor of their new apartment, surrounded by boxes overflowing with clothes, books, towels, and bed sheets. All of their belongings. They’ve just finished loading them in; they’re winded, and too tired to start unpacking. A moment of silence as Eve and Benji catch their breath.

BENJI: … What are we going to do?

EVE: Same thing as everybody else, I guess. Learn how to cook. Try not to die.

BENJI: ...You don’t know how to cook?

EVE: Nope. Do you?

He does not. Benji is panicking.

BENJI: What are we doing? Why did we think we could do this? Who let us rent an apartment?

EVE: First of all, we’re not renting. We’re illegally subletting.

BENJI: Oh my god!
EVE: Second of all, we’re gonna be okay.

BENJI: This city is not like where we’re from, Eve. Some places have safety nets. You can struggle, or fail, and you’ll still be okay. This city is like a bulldozer. You either succeed, or you get smushed.

EVE: *(making fun of him)* Smushed?

BENJI: Yes, smushed! I’m sorry I’m not a poet!

EVE: Hey, hey, breathe. Everything’s gonna be okay. This is just the inevitable post-grad terror of moving to a new city where you only know like five people, living on your own for the first time, and trying to make a living in your chosen field--

*This is not making Benji feel better.*

BENJI: Oh my god.

EVE: --After that passes, you’re gonna feel totally calm. Like me.

BENJI: You feel totally calm.

EVE: Yes.

BENJI: Despite the fact that you don’t have a job and we don’t have any furniture.

_Eve stands up. As she speaks, she dumps out the contents of three boxes and lines them up, upside down, in a row._

EVE: Okay, tomorrow we’re going to go to Goodwill and get the cheapest furniture we can find, but until then…

_Eve rummages through her stuff until she finds a bright scarf and throws it over the crates. She points at it triumphantly._

EVE: Coffee table.

BENJI: *(sarcastic)* Looks stable. And where are we going to sleep?

_Eve stacks up boxes into a semi-circle around where Benji is still sitting on the floor. She finds a sheet and blankets and throws them over the boxes, creating a little tent over Benji’s head._
EVE: Blanket fort.

BENJI: (giving in) I love you.

_Eve’s phone rings. She picks it up._

EVE: Hi Mom. Yeah, we’re here. It’s, um… *(she looks around)* small. We haven’t really unpacked yet… *(to Benji)* My mom says hi.

BENJI: Hi Joan!

EVE: *(to Joan)* Did you hear that? He said hi back. *(to Benji)* She wants me to tell you congrats on the job, and she loves you.

BENJI: I love you too, Joan!

_Benji unpacks while they talk, but he’s listening._

EVE: …No, nothing yet. I’m just gonna be looking every day until I get something. Um, I have enough savings to last me until… *(Eve does some mental calculations. It’s not good, but she tries not to let that show in her voice)*. …Yeah, to last me for a little bit. *(Pause)*. I know. I know. Don’t worry, Mom, seriously. *(A longer pause. Joan is really going on about something. Eve is getting more and more stressed out, but she does a good job of hiding it from Joan, if not from Benji)*. I really think I’m gonna find something soon, Mom. I promise. I don’t want you to worry about it. *(A pause, as Joan says, “Well, I would feel better if you had some leads.”)* Oh, um, I do! I do have some leads. Did I not tell you? I have an interview. *(Pause.)* Yeah, woah, I can’t believe I forgot to tell you. Sorry, it totally slipped my mind. *(Pause.)* Yeah, it’s a cool position. Fingers crossed. *(Pause.)* Okay. Well, I’m glad you feel better. Is Dad there? Oh. Okay. Well, tell him I said hi when he gets back. I love you both. Bye, Mom.

BENJI: …What the hell was that?

EVE: What?

BENJI: You don’t have an interview.

EVE: She was freaking out. I had to say something.

BENJI: You can’t lie to your mom. Maybe she’s a little worried about you, but that’s what parents do. It’s okay.
EVE: It’s different with her. She gets so anxious, and she can’t stop talking--

BENJI: Really? I always thought she must be pretty chill. Wasn’t she a bartender when she was like seventeen? And what was that story-- she like, climbed a fence to skinny dip in a private pool, didn’t she?

EVE: Those were her “wild days.” Now all she does is worry. Mostly about me.

BENJI: Okay, well she’s gonna worry more if she finds out you lied to her.

EVE: Well, I’ll get an interview soon and then it won’t be a lie anymore. *(playfully, trying to distract him from what just happened)* I’ll become a famous writer, you’ll be an incredible paralegal, and we’ll make this little hellhole into a home.

BENJI: You’re seriously not worried?

EVE: C’mon, Benji. Life is just a… game of truth or dare. Are you gonna do what life dares you to, or refuse to play?

BENJI: Fine! I’m too susceptible to your stupid metaphors. Let’s christen this apartment.

*Benji pulls a case of beer out from one of the boxes and takes out two cans, handing one to Eve.*

EVE: Warm beer! You shouldn’t have. What are we drinking to?

BENJI: To not getting smushed!

EVE: Yes!

BENJI: And to us. If I’m going to be making incredibly stupid decisions, at least I know you’ll be right next to me, making even worse ones.

EVE: Truth or dare, bitch.

BENJI: Truth or dare.

*They clink their beers together and drink. They look like children inside their blanket fort. They gag.*

EVE: Oh, that’s disgusting.
BENJI: So bad. Sorry. I couldn’t afford champagne.

EVE: It’s so hot in here.

BENJI: We gotta get an air conditioner.

EVE: We can’t afford it.

BENJI: ...Bedtime?

EVE: Yeah.

_Eve gets up to put away the beers. Benji settles down among the blankets and pillows inside the fort._

BENJI: Hey Eve, do you think this is the summer we find our soulmates?

EVE: Maybe. Or you’ll find yours, and I’ll keep getting screwed over by shitty men.

BENJI: _(laughing)_ Yeah dude, you gotta stop doing that.

EVE: How dare you! Your ex-boyfriends are worse than mine.

_Benji laughs. A pause._

BENJI: Eve?

EVE: Yeah?

BENJI: You’re seriously not scared?

EVE: No, I’m not.

BENJI: Good. Cause honestly, if you were as scared as I am, I’d say we should just pack up and go home.

_Benji settles comfortably into the blankets._

Goodnight.

EVE: Goodnight.
Eve turns off the lights. She stands, staring at the blanket fort, for a long moment. She looks around the apartment, filled with boxes. She is completely overwhelmed. She looks at Benji. He looks so small and childlike, asleep in the blanket fort. She wants to protect him but she doesn’t know how. She sits on the ground, already knowing that she won’t be able to sleep. She is terrified. Blackout.

Scene 2

A bar. Rian is sitting alone at a table. Eve enters. She sees Rian and swears silently. She was hoping Benji would beat her here. Eve tries to stall in the doorway, hoping he’ll walk in and save her. She wills him to walk through the door right… now. He doesn’t. Eve tells herself to suck it up; she is outgoing and friendly and she can handle this. She walks over to the table where Rian is sitting.

EVE: Hi. Um, are you Rian?

RIAN: Yes! Hi! Eve?

EVE: Yeah.

RIAN: Hi!

Rian stands up. Eve wonders if she should shake Rian’s hand. No, that’s stupid. This is not a professional meeting. Rian initiates a hug. It’s nice. Eve wishes that she had initiated the hug. But she didn’t. They sit.

EVE: I don’t know where Benji is--

RIAN: Oh, he just texted. He’s gonna be late.

EVE: Oh!

RIAN: But I’m so excited to finally meet you. I’ve heard so much.

EVE: You too! Benji is always talking about you. You guys have been friends since… elementary school? Right?

RIAN: Yeah.

EVE: That’s amazing.

RIAN: Yeah. It’s amazing I haven’t murdered that rat bastard.
Eve laughs.

But I missed the fuck out of him during college. I’ve been trying to convince him to move here for years but he always resisted. How’d you do it?

EVE: It wasn’t easy. He keeps saying “I can’t believe that the place I get murdered is this garbage city.”

RIAN: *(laughing)* That kid is so tightly wound.

EVE: I know! Was he always like that?

RIAN: Oh, absolutely. In second grade, this kid borrowed one of his crayons without asking, and Benji bit him.

EVE: *(laughing)* Oh my god!

RIAN: *(laughing)* He drew blood.

EVE: ...Anyway, we wanted to live together, and I always wanted to come here…

RIAN: Well, I’m glad. And now I get to know you, too!

_Eve smiles. Rian’s charm is disarming. A pause._

I feel like I should ask you all the usual questions, like where you’re from and what you studied, but I already know because--

EVE: Benji told you?

RIAN: *(with no trace of embarrassment)* No. I stalked you on Instagram.

EVE: Oh. Um, so, what do you do?

RIAN: I work in a coffee shop.

EVE: Do you like it?

RIAN: I really do.

EVE: What do you like about it?

_Rian thinks about it. Then:*
RIAN: I like my apron. It’s all clean and white in the morning. I like making those designs with the milk foam. I like seeing the same people every day and remembering their orders. They’re always so surprised, like it’s hard to remember, but it’s not.

EVE: Really?

RIAN: Yeah. Like there’s this guy who comes in almost every day at 8:15 and gets an Americano. I say, Americano, right? And he says, that’s right, in this way where I can tell that he’s not used to people remembering things about him.

Pause.

EVE: How do you do it?

Rian is distracted; she sees something across the room.

RIAN: Shit.

EVE: What?


Rian dives under the table, pulling Eve down with her.

RIAN: I’m so sorry. This girl I used to date just walked in. Well, we didn’t date, we went on a couple dates, it wasn’t a big deal, I mean, it wasn’t a big deal to me. But I do not want to see her.

Rian and Eve are now sitting under the table. Eve is pretty amused by all this.

EVE: Why, did you ghost her?

RIAN: No.

EVE: Did you make up some story? Tell her you were dying of cancer and that’s why you couldn’t see her anymore?

RIAN: Kind of the opposite. I told her exactly why I couldn’t see her anymore.

EVE: Which was?
RIAN: She’s mean and she needs to grow up.

_Eve bursts out laughing._

RIAN: Shhhh!

EVE: You said that to her face?

RIAN: Well, it’s true! She seemed so great at first, but then I heard her yelling at her sister on the phone and I was like _are we five?_ And we went out to dinner and she was rude to the waitress!

EVE: No!

RIAN: Exactly! I felt so bad I left the waitress like a fifty percent tip.

EVE: So, how did the conversation go? When you said she was mean?

RIAN: Not great. I’ve been told I can be… blunt?

EVE: Yeah, no shit.

RIAN: I just value honesty. Why should I make up some lie about why I don’t want to be with her? I felt like I owed her the truth. But maybe I could work on the delivery. Sometimes I just start being honest with someone and I don’t know where to stop. Do you ever have that problem?

EVE: Kind of the opposite, actually.

RIAN: What, you lie?

EVE: Sometimes. Just to… make people feel better.

RIAN: Eve!

RIAN: Okay, Miss Honesty. If you’re so unafraid of the truth, why are we hiding under this table?

RIAN: What?

EVE: I mean, you strive to be the type of person who tells the truth without fear. But this looks a lot like fear.
RIAN: You think I should just let her see me.

EVE: Yeah. I dare you.

Rian accepts the challenge. She gets out from under the table, and Eve quickly scrambles to follow.

RIAN: (calling across the bar) Hi, Mackenzie!
(to Eve) And, she flipped me off. And she’s leaving. Great.

Eve is dying of laughter. Rian sits back down at the table.

EVE: Oh my god. That was amazing.

RIAN: Well, now you know a whole lot about me.

They laugh. A pause.

EVE: Did you really stalk my Instagram?

RIAN: Oh, absolutely. You should probably put it on private. Those captions from high school are embarrassing.

EVE: Oh my god! Please tell me you didn’t actually read those.

RIAN: No, I did. And thank God, or else I would never have known that you had a “sick time” at the 2012 Nebraska State Thespian Convention.

EVE: No!

RIAN: Yes.

EVE: Well, it was a sick time, I’ll have you know. Our improv team got third place.

RIAN: No. Improv?

EVE: Oh yeah. Those conventions were the best. I went every year. And every year, I would be like, I’m going to the state thespian convention! And my parents would be like (imitating) “Did you say you’re going to a lesbian convention?!”

Rian laughs.

RIAN: I mean, they’re basically the same thing, right?
Eve and Rian stare at each other for a moment.

EVE: Oh, I’m… not--

Benji suddenly appears, cutting her off.

BENJI: Hey! Sorry I’m so late!

RIAN: Benji!

Rian jumps up and they hug. Benji sits down with them.

BENJI: So, what did I miss?

EVE: (laughing) So much.

BENJI: Are my two best friends becoming best friends?

RIAN: Yeah, I think so.

Rian and Eve look at each other for a moment and smile. Blackout.

Scene 3

The apartment, a week later. Benji enters.

BENJI: (calling in the direction of Eve’s room) Good morning, sleepyhead!

No response. He tries again, louder.

I said, good morning sleepyhead!

Eve emerges sleepily from her room.

EVE: It’s not morning, it’s five PM. And I was taking a nap.

BENJI: Oh my god, you’re up! That’s so crazy.

Do the dishes.

EVE: Yep.

EVE: Hey. Are you okay?

BENJI: Guess who just moved to an apartment three stops away from us.

EVE: Who?

BENJI: Michael.

EVE: Are you serious?

BENJI: Yeah.

EVE: That motherfucker! Like everything he did wasn’t enough, now he comes to our neighborhood?

BENJI: I know.

EVE: ...Does he know we live here?

BENJI: No, I haven’t talked to him in six months.

Eve gives him a look.

BENJI: I’m serious. I haven’t.

EVE: And you’re not going to?

BENJI: Well, it’s kind of hard not to think about it now that he’s so close by. I want to know how he’s doing. I’m worried about him, I always am.

EVE: I know.

BENJI: And he promised he was going to work on his shit, go to therapy, work on his drinking, all that. I just… I want to know that he’s okay.

EVE: (gently) He promised all that before.

BENJI: Yeah, and I believed him. And then he fucking cheated on me. Again. And meanwhile, he’d always been so paranoid that I would cheat! He checked my phone all the time, made me tell him my passcode. Remember the time he literally was checking my school email? Like I would use my university email address to plot to cheat on him?!
EVE: Yeah. He was awful.

BENJI: He made me feel so crazy. He’d like, go out and get drunk and I’d be like “We were gonna hang out tonight, remember?” and he’d be like “You’re not remembering right. We had plans tomorrow.” It was like… what’s the word?

EVE: *(quietly)* Gaslighting.

BENJI: Yeah. And the shit he said to me when he was drunk. It was scary sometimes. But you know what’s stupid? I still miss him.

EVE: It’s okay—all that happens. Even in a really bad relationship. You still might miss them.

BENJI: Yeah. It was so good sometimes. But it always got bad again.

EVE: Hey. It’s been six months since you’ve talked to him! That’s amazing. And look at you. You’re so much happier now.

BENJI: ...Am I?

EVE: What?

BENJI: Am I happier?

_A pause._

BENJI: Just… don’t let me get drunk and do anything stupid, okay?

EVE: Like what?

BENJI: Like texting him, calling, anything. I’ve tried to check in on him before, just as a friend, but he always finds a way to come busting back into my life. I can’t have it happen again.

EVE: Okay.

_Benji starts to get up and go to his room._

BENJI: Oh, hey. I almost forgot to tell you. Rian texted me today and asked if you’re queer.

EVE: What?
BENJI: Yeah. I laughed so hard when I saw it.

EVE: Why?

BENJI: Because you’re so straight. I mean, you talk about guys so much. You’re always like, “Ugh I’m in LOVE with Joe, do you think he notices me?”

EVE: Oh. Sorry.

BENJI: Please. The love of horrible men is something that bonds us together, dude. Anyway, I told her you’re not queer.

EVE: What did she say?

BENJI: She hasn’t yet.

EVE: ...You should’ve asked me first.

BENJI: (confused) Asked you if you’re queer?

EVE: I mean, isn’t that the type of question that only I can answer?

BENJI: Yeah, I guess. But you’re my best friend, like… I think I’d know if you were queer.

EVE: Well, I mean, if someone asked me something really personal about you, I’d be like, you have to ask Benji. I’d obviously want to answer because you’re my best friend and I want to feel like I know everything about you, but I don’t. I mean you can’t actually know someone’s entire… being. Like, no matter how close you are, it’s not possible to literally know everything about them.

BENJI: Eve, are you queer?

_PAUSE_

EVE: No.

_Benji laughs awkwardly._

BENJI: Okay then.

*He starts to leave again, then remembers something.*
BENJI: By the way, how’s the job search going?

EVE: Not great. I’ve gotten four rejections and the rest just won’t respond to my emails.

BENJI: I’m sorry, dude. That sucks.

EVE: I don’t know what to do.

BENJI: ...So you admit that you’re scared.

EVE: I’m not scared, I’m just stressed. Ugh. I want a cigarette.

BENJI: No, you don’t. You just think you want one when you’re upset. Or when you want to look cool at a party.

EVE: What’s your point?

BENJI: We’re not in college anymore. You have to stop. This is how casual smokers become regular smokers.

EVE: I’m not gonna become a regular smoker!

BENJI: Look, I get that you’re overwhelmed right now. And you think that smoking will make you feel better…

EVE: It will.

BENJI: You have asthma. It will definitely make you feel worse.

EVE: Come on. You have your vices. Everybody does things that are bad for them sometimes.

BENJI: I have no interest in smoking. It doesn’t make you cool, it’s just a disgusting habit.

EVE: It’s not even a habit! It’s just a thing I do at parties!

BENJI: Oh really? Is this a party? Is that what’s happening right now?

*Benji has won.*

EVE: Fine.
Eve uses air-quotes around the words with quotes.

I will “deal” with my “problems” like an “adult.”

BENJI: Good. Rian’s meeting us here so we can check out that bar. But until she comes, I’m going to go take a nap.

EVE: Oh, so you can take a nap, but I have to get up and do the dishes?

BENJI: No smoking while I’m gone!

EVE: Don’t worry. I don’t even have my own.

BENJI: Where were you going to get them, then?

EVE: I don’t know, I usually just cop them from other people! You know I don’t buy my own. Because then I’d be a regular smoker.

BENJI: Okay. This will all get sorted out. I know it will. Just… don’t be scared, okay?

EVE: I won’t.

Benji exits. The instant he’s gone, Eve goes to the bookshelf and pulls out several books. She takes out something that was hidden behind them. It’s a pack of cigarettes. She pulls one out, lights it, takes a drag, and stares into space. She feels like the room is collapsing around her.

On the coffee table, Benji’s phone dings. She stares at it. She is not going to check it. She straightens up some books and takes another drag of the cigarette. The phone dings again. She walks closer to the table, slowly, like the phone might jump up and bite her. She is very close to the phone now. It is drawing her in like a magnet. She “accidentally” sees the screen. She picks up the phone.

Projected onto the wall: Benji’s texts with Rian.

Rian: Wait… Is Eve queer?

Benji: Hahahahahaha no.

(The newest text):

Rian: She’s not?

As Eve is looking at the screen, the phone dings: another text from Rian.

Projected onto the wall: the emoji sad face with a single tear.

Eve feels like her heart just floated up from the bottom of her stomach into her throat. It’s kind of scary. She smiles. She doesn’t know why she’s smiling. There’s a knock at the door.
EVE: Shit.

_Eve frantically puts down Benji’s phone and rushes to put out the cigarette. Finally, she opens the door. It’s Rian._

RIAN: Hi.

EVE: Hey! Benji just went to take a nap, but we can wake him up if you want to get going.

RIAN: Oh no, it’s okay. Let him sleep. We can just hang out for a little bit.

EVE: Yeah. Sure. Do you want… water or anything?

RIAN: I’m okay.

_They sit down on the couch._

EVE: So, did you have any more run-ins with angry exes?

RIAN: Yeah, two or three. They’re everywhere.

_They laugh. This is awkward for some reason. Why is it awkward?_

RIAN: What about you? You got any angry exes around town?

EVE: Well, I haven’t had time to break any hearts here, but back home, I have a couple exes who have written mean songs about me and played them around the local indie rock circuit.

RIAN: A _couple_? Are you serious?

EVE: Yeah. Apparently I’m exclusively attracted to guitar players.

RIAN: Really?

EVE: Unfortunately.

RIAN: What is it about them?

EVE: I can’t explain it. There’s just nothing sexier than a guitar player.
Rian laughs.

RIAN: What does the song sound like? Please sing it. Please.

EVE: No way.

RIAN: Oh my god, please.

EVE: Absolutely not.

RIAN: I’m not gonna let this got.

EVE: Fine.

(singing) “Smile like sunshine, she turned everything around / and then she went and burned my heart to the ground / Oh Eve, Eve, Eve…”

Rian and Eve can’t stop laughing.

RIAN: Oh my god. That is not a good song.

EVE: (teasing) Think you could do better?

RIAN: Absolutely not. Though I did once… write a poem for someone. Actually… more than once.

EVE: Oh my god. Were they as blunt as your break-up conversations?

RIAN: Excuse me! I can be flowery and poetic when I need to be!

EVE: So what did it say?

RIAN: Don’t make me say it.

EVE: I just sang for you!

RIAN: Fine! Okay, I remember writing a poem for this girl, the first girl I ever… I just remember saying that when I kissed her, it felt like… like the most important thing I’d ever done. It felt like the first thing I’d ever done in my whole life that mattered.

Pause. Eve is moved.

RIAN: What, you’re not gonna roast me for that?
EVE: No.

RIAN: ...Have you ever felt like that? Like…?

EVE: No. I haven’t.

Eve suddenly feels like she’s going to cry. Benji emerges from his room.

BENJI: Rian’s here!

Benji sleepily flops down on the couch, on top of Eve and Rian.

BENJI: What’s up? What are you talking about?

EVE: Nothing.

BENJI: Let’s go get drunk, bitches.

RIAN: Yeah!

Benji hops up and pulls Rian up with him. They start towards the door.

EVE: Lemme just get my-- I’ll meet you outside.

BENJI: Okay.

Benji and Rian exit. Eve goes to the mirror and tries to fix her hair. She checks to see if there’s anything in her teeth. Wait, why is she doing this? She rushes to her secret stash of cigarettes, pulls out a couple, and stuffs them in her bra. Then she takes a deep breath and walks out the door.

Scene 4

A week later. Eve, wearing a zip-up hoodie, is in the living room, texting Rian. We see their texts on the projector.

Rian: Okay, yes, I hear you, but DC has Wonder Woman AND Harley Quinn.
Eve: Okay, but Marvel has Black Panther?!?!?!
Rian: DC has Supergirl
Eve: Marvel has Guardians of the Galaxy
Rian: Okay I don’t know how this hasn’t been mentioned yet but DC has Batman.
Eve: Honestly fuck Batman
Rian: WHAT

Benji enters from his room.

BENJI: What are you giggling about?

EVE: Nothing.

BENJI: Okay, weirdo.

A text from Rian pops up on the projector:
We will discuss this in person. I’m almost @ yours.

BENJI: You seem happier.

EVE: Oh. Yeah.

BENJI: Good. How’s job stuff?

Eve puts her phone away. The projection disappears.

EVE: … I did something. You’re not going to like it.

BENJI: What are you talking about?

There’s a knock at the door. Eve goes to get it; Rian steps inside.

RIAN: Hey! What’s up?

BENJI: Eve’s just about to tell us something she did that I’m not going to like.

RIAN: Oh damn. What is it?

Rian sits down on the couch. She’s comfortable making herself at home in their apartment.

EVE: Okay, I’m still applying to writing jobs and waiting to hear back, but in the meantime, I need money, and I know one sure way to get it.

BENJI: What did you do?

EVE: Look, I was desperate--

BENJI: What did you do?!
EVE: ...I called Evil Luke.

BENJI: You didn’t! Eve!

RIAN: Who’s Evil Luke?

EVE: He’s the manager at the restaurant I work at every summer back home. The original restaurant is here in the city, so I asked if they had any openings. He called over and got me a job.

BENJI: Eve! After last summer, you said that you wouldn’t step foot in that restaurant again if they gave you a thousand percent raise.

EVE: Well, I need money! And this is a different location, maybe it’ll be better. I won’t even have to deal with Evil Luke anymore.

RIAN: What made him so evil?

EVE: He--

BENJI: (cutting her off) He’s the most man-splainy, misogynist dickwad of all time. And I’m the one who always had to hear her complain about him.

EVE: I’m sorry. Look, I’m just relieved to know I’ll be able to make rent this month. Even if it means I’m working at the Burger Barn.

RIAN: It’s called the Burger Barn?! That’s fucking hilarious.

EVE: Oh yeah.

_Eve unzips her sweatshirt, revealing a thoroughly embarrassing waitress uniform T-shirt that says “Burger Barn” on the front. Rian laughs and claps, and after a moment Benji gives in and does too. Eve performs a Gypsy Rose Lee-style burlesque striptease with the sweatshirt, eventually revealing that the back of the shirt has some type of horrendous burger pun on it, like “Sun’s Out Buns Out” or “Don’t Go Bacon My Heart”. Eve finishes her fake striptease by twirling the sweatshirt over her head and throwing it. Benji and Rian clap and whistle._

EVE: Okay, okay, settle down.

RIAN: Do you have to wear that to work every day??
EVE: Yep.

RIAN: Oh my god, that’s so funny.

EVE: Okay, you work in a stupid-expensive coffee shop called… what is it again? “Cool Beans?” “Just Brew it?”

RIAN: First of all, it’s a stupid-expensive coffee shop and tea parlor and it’s called Espresso Yourself.

_Eve, Rian, and Benji crack up._

RIAN: _(laughing)_ God, the food service industry is hell.

EVE: _(laughing)_ It’s literally a hellscape.

_They are having fun. They might be flirting. They forget Benji is there for a second._

BENJI: What did your mom say when you told her?

EVE: She, um. She doesn’t know.

BENJI: Well, she must be pretty worried if she thinks that you’re out here without a job.

EVE: It’s gonna be fine, Benji. Don’t worry about it.

BENJI: Wasn’t she freaking out about this like, a week ago?

EVE: Don’t worry about it!

BENJI: So what did you tell her when she asked about your “interview”?

RIAN: What interview?

EVE: …I may have told my mom I had an interview. When I didn’t.

RIAN: Oh god. So what did you do? Just tell her you didn’t get it?

EVE: Not exactly.

_A pause. Then Benji and Rian realize what is going on at the same time._

BENJI: EVE! Are you serious?! You told your mom you got a writing job?
EVE: Fine, I lied! But this is just temporary, I’m just gonna work at Burger Barn until I find something real.

BENJI: What’s gonna happen when she finds out?

EVE: She’s not going to! She lives across the country!

BENJI: Eve--

EVE: Can we stop talking about it? I’m sure Rian didn’t come here to talk about my screwed-up life. Can we just… go to the bar like we were planning?

BENJI: Fine. But please go change. I won’t be seen with you in public with you in that shirt.

EVE: Fine. Rian, now you know that I’m a complete mess. I was hoping to keep up an air of having my shit together.

RIAN: Oh no, this is much more interesting.

BENJI: Go change!

EVE: Fine!

EVE: Fine!

Blackout.

Scene 5

A week later. The apartment. Eve is in the living room. Benji enters from the kitchen.

BENJI: Can you teach me how to make scrambled eggs?

EVE: Sure. You don’t… know?

BENJI: I thought I did but I was wrong. Don’t go in the kitchen for a minute.

EVE: (laughing) Okay.

BENJI: Are you still good to go out with Rian tomorrow?

EVE: ...Out?
BENJI: That bar we wanted to try. With the 70s theme. Remember?

EVE: Oh yeah!

A pause.


BENJI: *(confused)* Yeah, I know.

EVE: No... I *like* Rian.

BENJI: Like…? Like you have a crush on her?

EVE: Yeah.

BENJI: Like a romantic crush.

EVE: Yeah.

BENJI: Like… a gay crush.

EVE: I mean… I guess.

BENJI: So it’s romantic?

EVE: Yeah.

BENJI: And it’s… is it sexual?

EVE: Um. I guess.

BENJI: ...You’re sure you don’t just really… like her as a friend?

EVE: Yeah. I’m sure.

BENJI: Oh.

*Pause.*

To be clear, you are sexually attracted to her?

EVE: Yes, okay, yes! Jesus.
BENJI: And this has never happened to you before.

EVE: No.

BENJI: Woah. So you’re probably feeling pretty freaked out right now.

EVE: Oh. Um. Not really.

BENJI: Here, sit down.

*He guides her over to the coach.*

Do you feel dizzy? Do you want some water?

EVE: I’m not sick!

BENJI: I just mean… I know it can be scary. To realize that you’re not straight.

EVE: I’m not scared. I’m actually… kind of excited about it.

*Benji is not buying this.*

BENJI: This doesn’t need to be a thing that you lie about, Eve. I know how it feels. I’m gonna get you some water. Or tea! Tea is calming.

*Benji exits.*

EVE: *(calling after him)* Am I not calm?!

*Eve is alone on the couch. Benji re-enters with a glass of water. He hands it to her.*

BENJI: Okay, the tea will be ready soon. So tell me. When did this start?

EVE: Um… I don’t know? Maybe when we were at that bar?

BENJI: You mean the first night you met?! Oh my god!

EVE: Benji…

BENJI: Sorry, sorry. So I mean, how do you feel about all this?

EVE: I feel good.
Benji gives her a look.

EVE: No, seriously, I do! This isn’t like me pretending that everything’s fine for my mom, this is like… I genuinely feel… excited about this.

BENJI: So do you know how you, like, identify? Like, what you want to call this?

EVE: Do I have to call it anything?

BENJI: I mean, technically no, but people are going to ask…

EVE: Is it really that big a deal?

BENJI: …You don’t think this is a big deal?

EVE: No.

BENJI: What do you think your family will say? Your mom?

Eve: I don’t know. I guess I haven’t thought about it.

BENJI: Seriously?

EVE: It’s not like it’s any of her business anyway.

BENJI: Okay, if this is so “not a big deal,” then why wouldn’t you just tell her?

EVE: Because I don’t tell her anything!

BENJI: So you do think this is a big deal.

EVE: No, Benji. I actually don’t.

BENJI: Eve… I really think you need to give this some more thought.

EVE: Give what more thought? I like her. Isn’t it that simple?

BENJI: I mean, yes, but there’s all this other stuff that comes with being queer.

EVE: But why? I don’t understand why everyone makes it such a big deal! I mean, I was confused at first, but it was kind of easy to figure out what I was feeling. I wasn’t like, wrestling with it. Liking her feels the same way as it feels when I like guys, so, I’m just gonna go with it.
Pause.

BENJI: Dude. You realize that people have to “wrestle with it” because they’re afraid of what will happen when they come out, right? They’re afraid of what their family or friends will say, or do, or if they’ll even have a home after they come out. And I’m glad that’s apparently not an issue for you, but some of us don’t have that assurance.

EVE: I mean, I know, but… that was kind of in the past, right? We live in the city. We can kiss who we want, and it’s not a big deal.

BENJI: Eve--

EVE: Dude. I kind of thought you’d be happy for me. I mean, you’re the one who’s always saying I need to be more honest and now that I’ve found something I actually want to be honest about--

BENJI: Okay, but you’re being really flippant about--

EVE: I feel like the universe is, like, daring me to act on this! Who would I be if I sat out of the game?

BENJI: Eve! Life is not like truth or dare. Life is like… a loaded gun. Life is like a bomb about to go off. Maybe life is a game for some people, but not for people who are queer! Do you have any idea how fucked up it is that this is “not a big deal” for you?

EVE: I didn’t mean to say that, I just-- I’m not freaking out about this! Why is that a bad thing?

BENJI: You know what, it’s not a bad thing. It’s a great thing. And I wish that I had felt that way, and that so many other people were able to feel that way instead of crying and praying to God to make us different.

EVE: Benji--

BENJI: Do you know why it was so hard for me to leave Michael? Why I kept letting him back into my life, even after all the shit he did? It’s because he got it. He understood. We were both lucky, our parents didn’t throw us out when we told them, they didn’t try to send us away. But they didn’t want to hear about it, either. My parents were so… just awkward. Uncomfortable. And it’s better than what so many other people get but honestly, it still sucks! It sucks that my mom thinks my life is not appropriate dinner conversation! It sucks that everyone in
my family asks my sister about her love life non-stop, and they just really don’t want to know about mine. I would literally be like, “Hey Mom, I’ve been seeing this guy,” and she would put her fingers in her ears and be like “La la la la, I don’t need to hear it!”

EVE: Woah.

BENJI: But when I was with Michael, I actually felt… normal. You know, before things got bad, it was just like… We were in love, and it made sense, and it made me feel…

One time, I came and visited him over a break. We were walking out of a bar, or home from the movies, I don’t remember. But some guy started following us. He wasn’t yelling, he was like, *mumbling*. Just like a steady stream of “why are you throwing this in my face, it’s disgusting, you’ll burn in hell.” I was like, okay, let’s just keep our heads down and get out of here, but Michael turned around and yelled at the guy, told him to quit following us. He wasn’t scared at all. He protected me. And he wasn’t mad at me for freezing, and not knowing what to do. He said it was okay, that he’d be there when stuff like that happened. That he’d keep us safe.

And when I had nightmares about that guy-- I could talk to Michael about it. Because he understood. He always understood. There was *no one* else I could talk to about it.

EVE: *(desperately)* You could talk to me about it--

BENJI: No, I can’t, Eve! I never wanted to talk to you about it because I always thought you wouldn’t get it, because you’re straight. And guess what? You’re not straight. And you still don’t get it.

You have no idea what this shit actually means. Being queer is not fun. It’s not fun to feel like you could get killed for walking down the street. Or get denied jobs, or—fucking healthcare. None of that is part of your little Truth or Dare metaphor.

Straight girls are always like, “God, I hate men. I wish I was gay.” But they don’t. Because no one actually wants to be gay. No one. Not even the ones who are. Not even you. Not deep down.

EVE: But that’s why I don’t want to be afraid to act on this! Who the fuck would I be if I let stupid societal shit stop me from doing the things I want to do?

BENJI: All of that means nothing if you treat this like it doesn’t matter! It’s one thing to take a dare, but it’s another to treat your entire life like a game. Because if you act like nothing really matters to you, then you won’t have to be sad when it doesn’t work out. Right? I’ve seen you in relationships. Maybe you could’ve had something serious by now, but you haven’t, because you always say it’s not that important.
All we did in college was fuck around. Are you gonna do that again with Rian? With being queer? Maybe you should stop treating life like Truth or Dare and act like something in your life is actually important to you.

*Long pause. The tea kettle is whistling.*

EVE: The tea.

BENJI: I’m going out.

EVE: Benji--

BENJI: I’ll be back late.

*He leaves. Eve is standing alone in the center of the living room. The tea kettle is screaming.*

**Scene 6**

*The next day. Eve and Benji’s apartment. Eve is sitting in the living room with her laptop. She stares at the screen. She tries to think of something to write. She doesn’t have anything. She puts the laptop on the coffee table, picks up a pillow from the couch, buries her face in it, and screams. She goes to her secret cigarette stash, pulls one out, and lights it. She takes a drag. Eve hears Benji’s key in the lock. She rushes to put out the cigarette. She just makes it before he enters.*

BENJI: Hey.

EVE: Hey.

*Long, awkward pause.*

BENJI: Are you gonna come out tonight?

*Pause.*

Like out... to the bar. Not out like…

Sorry.

EVE: It’s okay. I don’t think… I’m sick, I think. So.

BENJI: *(concerned)* Yeah? Sick with what?
EVE: Fine, you got me. I lied, I’m not sick.

BENJI: I didn’t think you were lying.

EVE: Well, I was.

BENJI: Hey, um, we should talk about yesterday.

EVE: Yeah.

Silence.

EVE: ...Were you gonna say something?

BENJI: Um, were you?

There’s a knock at the door. Benji walks over to get it. It’s Rian, holding a bottle of wine.

BENJI: Rian! I thought we were meeting you there!

Rian strides in, takes off her jacket, and throws it on the couch.

RIAN: Well, yes, but then I thought, why spend freaking fifteen dollars on a shitty cocktail when I could just pick up some seven dollar wine and we can get wasted in your apartment? Fun fact: I am severely underpaid. Where’s your corkscrew?

Neither Benji nor Eve moves.

Sorry. Is this… not a good time?

Speaking simultaneously:

BENJI: No, no, it’s great. It’s the perfect time.  EVE: We don’t have a corkscrew.

RIAN: That’s okay. I can do it with scissors.

BENJI: Okay. Lemme--

He exits quickly to find scissors.

RIAN: How are you?

EVE: I’m okay. I was just trying to write.
RIAN: How’s it going?

EVE: Not great.

RIAN: Can I read it?

EVE: ...Yeah.

_Eve has no idea why she just agreed to that. She goes to the coffee table and opens her laptop. Rian comes and sits next to her. Eve hands her the laptop._

EVE: Are you sure you don’t want to have some wine beforehand? It’ll probably be a lot better that way.

RIAN: Shut up, I’m reading.

_Eve smiles. A long pause as Rian reads. It’s actually really good._

RIAN: This is really good, Eve.

EVE: Thanks.

_They smile at each other. Benji re-enters._

BENJI: Okay. Scissors.

_He hands them to Rian._

BENJI: Is this safe?

RIAN: Probably not. But you know what? My manager is an asshole, so I’m ready to get wasted.

_Rian stabs one of the scissor blades into the cork and begins to carefully twist the cork out while Eve watches. Benji goes to get glasses._

RIAN: Got it!

EVE: *(impressed)* Damn.

BENJI: I’ll pour.
Benji pours a large glass of wine, but instead of passing it to Eve’s outstretched hand, he puts the bottle down and chugs the whole glass.

RIAN: That’s the spirit!

Rian pours wine for herself and Eve.

RIAN: To having terrible managers, and no health insurance!

RIAN and EVE: (clinking their glasses together) No health insurance!

Benji tries to bring his glass in.

BENJI: No--

EVE (swatting his hand away): You have insurance. You’re not part of this.

RIAN: So, drinking game?

BENJI: Ooh! Never have I ever?

RIAN: No way. I’ve done everything, it’s just embarrassing. Truth or dare!

Eve and Benji visibly react to this suggestion.

RIAN: You guys don’t like that game?

BENJI: No, it’s good, let’s do it. If you pass, you have to drink. Eve, truth or dare?

EVE: Dare.

BENJI: Um… Do a handstand.

EVE: I can’t, I’m scared of being upside down!

BENJI: Fine, drink.

RIAN: I can help you do a handstand.

EVE: I already drank!

RIAN: C’mon, it’ll be fun.
EVE: Okay, fine, but if you drop me, I’ll kill you.

RIAN: Okay.

*Rian helps Eve do a handstand. Eve screams. In spite of himself, Benji laughs. Maybe this can work. Maybe they can have a fun night, and forget about yesterday’s fight. Rian guides Eve down from her handstand and they sit back down. Everyone is laughing.*

EVE: Rian, truth or dare.

RIAN: Truth.

EVE: Okay, what is your… favorite hobby?

RIAN: Booo!

BENJI: What is this, amateur hour? Ask a real question!

EVE: It’s a perfectly valid question!

RIAN: That was pathetic. I think you have to finish your drink because of that.

BENJI: Yeah, good call.

EVE: Seriously? …Fine. *(Eve finishes her glass of wine).*

BENJI: Okay, while Eve drinks, I will ask a *real* question. Hmm… what’s the worst thing you’ve ever done?

RIAN: Um… I guess all those times you and I snuck onto our old elementary school playground at night and smoked weed.

BENJI: Oh, that’s not that bad. Everybody does that.

EVE: *(making fun of them)* Do they?

RIAN: Okay, what’s yours?

EVE: I hit a parked car and I didn’t leave a note.

RIAN: Holy shit!

BENJI: That is so bad, dude.
EVE: Anyway. Benji’s turn.

RIAN: Benji, truth or dare?

BENJI: Dare.

RIAN: I dare you to order us a pizza.

BENJI: Seriously?

RIAN: Yeah, I’m really hungry.

BENJI: *(laughing)* Okay. Then I dare you both to finish your drinks!

RIAN: I dare you to also do that!

*They all chug.*

BENJI: Okay. I’ll be right back.

*Benji exits, and Rian and Eve are left alone.*

RIAN: How are you doing?

EVE: *(Laughing. About the alcohol:)* I’m starting to feel it.

*Pause.*

EVE: Hey. Do you always tell people the truth about how you feel?

RIAN: I try to.

EVE: How do you do it?

RIAN: I just look them in the eyes and say it.

…Why do you think it’s hard for you?

EVE: I just… Sometimes I lie to make other people feel better. A lot of the time, though, it’s really to make myself feel better. But there are some things… that make me want to be honest.

RIAN: Like what?
Benji re-enters.

BENJI: Pizza ordered! Hope you like mushrooms.

EVE: Ew! Benji!

RIAN: Eve, what were you--

BENJI: (affectionately) Rian!

Benji hugs Rian, then sits down between Rian and Eve.

BENJI: You guys. I… am drunk.

RIAN: Good! Me too.

EVE: Me too.

BENJI: Whose turn is it? Eve? Truth or dare?

EVE: Dare.

BENJI: Of course.

EVE: What?

BENJI: You just always pick dare.

EVE: Fine, I pick truth!

BENJI: No, it’s fine, I’m just saying you seem to have a bit of a problem with the truth.

EVE: Well, I told you the truth about something and it didn’t go very well.

RIAN: Wait. What happened?

BENJI: Nothing.

RIAN: …Did you guys have a fight or something?

Benji and Eve speak simultaneously.
BENJI: No.

EVE: Yes.

Rian observes them both for a long moment. Then she stands up.

RIAN: Alright. Both of you. Finish your wine. It’s time for couple’s counseling. I will facilitate. Let’s go.

BENJI: What?

RIAN: My parents are divorced. I went to so much therapy as a kid, you don’t even wanna know. I could do this in my sleep.

Neither Benji nor Eve moves.

BENJI: Rian, I don’t think is a good--

RIAN: Chug. Both of you.

She’s scary. Benji and Eve chug their wine. Rian stands. It’s clear throughout the following exchanges that they are all pretty drunk.

RIAN: Okay. What happened?

Neither of them respond.

RIAN: Come on. You guys are like best friends. How bad could it have been?

Pause.

RIAN: Okay, it was really bad. So which one of you was a dick to the other one first?

BENJI: Damn. Is this what your therapist was like?!

RIAN: Shut up. I’m in charge.

Eve giggles. Rian turns on her.

RIAN: What, you think you’re exempt? You’re in this, too.

EVE: (cowed) Yes ma’am.

RIAN: Alright. Tell me what happened.

Eve raises her hand.
EVE: *(slurred)* I’ll go first. Benji told me I should be more honest so I told him something and he yelled at me.

BENJI: Okay, this is what I’m talking about! You *still* don’t get it!

EVE: You haven’t given me a *chance* to get it!

RIAN: HEY. We use “I” statements in this house.

BENJI: What?

RIAN: “I feel…”

BENJI: Fine. *I feel* that Eve is not taking something seriously, and that she should.

RIAN: Why do you feel that way?

BENJI: Because I see her--

RIAN: *(gentle but stern)* Don’t tell me, tell her.

BENJI: …I see you trying to distance yourself from your emotions, and from life, by treating everything like it’s not a big deal.

EVE: Okay, but some things really aren’t a big deal! And no offense, but you treat everything like it’s the biggest deal and you’re stressed out all the time! I don’t totally want to live that way!

BENJI: I don’t want to live this way either, but I don’t know any other way to live!

RIAN: OKAY. Three deep breaths, both of you!

BENJI: Seriously?

RIAN: Yes!

*Benji and Eve take three deep breaths in unison.*

RIAN: *(Drunk. Misspelled words are mispronounced.)* Okay. Lemme lay something down for you. Eve, you’ve made the choice to confide in Benji, but you shut some other people in your life out by not being *h*honest with them. It sounds to me like when you talk to Benji about your problems, and don’t share them with another
repon-sable adult in your life, it puts a lot of pressure on Benji. He’s feeling that stress as well as his own. Eve, you think that the way you do things means you’re taking care of other people, but you’re akshully not doing a good job of taking care of Benji.
Meanwhile, Benji thinks he knows what’s besht for you, but instead of opening up and being vulnerable with you about how he feels, he lashed out. I think you guys aren’t actually mad at each other right now, you’re just feeling misunderstood.

Pause.

EVE: Holy shit. You are good at this.
RIAN: Told ya.

EVE: *(To Benji:)* Is that true?

BENJI: Yeah. It is true.

EVE: I’m sorry.

BENJI: Me too. I love you.

EVE: I love you, too.

RIAN: Aaaand my work here is done.

BENJI: I have to pee.

*Benji exits. Rian and Eve sit together.*

EVE: Thanks for doing that.

RIAN: Any time.

*A pause.*

EVE: You know, the real worst thing I’ve ever done wasn’t hitting that car. The real worst things I’ve ever done have all happened this summer.

RIAN: What do you mean?

EVE: I don’t know, I’ve been lying to my mom about Burger Barn for weeks now. And I… I think I really fucked up with Benji.
RIAN: It’s gonna be okay. He already accepted your apology.

EVE: I know, I just… I think I’m starting to get what he was saying.

*Pause.*

RIAN: Hey, what were you gonna say earlier?

EVE: Um… I…

*There is a very long pause.*

RIAN: *(trying to help)* I think I might know what it is.

EVE: No, I don’t think so.

RIAN: *(disappointed, hurt)* Oh.

EVE: I…

*EVE’s phone starts ringing. It’s coming from her room.*

EVE: Shit. I’m sorry. I’ll be right back.

Eve exits. Rian stands there for a long moment. She was right about what Eve was going to say, but she doesn’t know that. She thinks she’s just been rejected. Rian goes to the couch, sits down, and drinks wine straight from the bottle. Benji re-enters.

BENJI: Rian!

*He goes over and sits down with her on the couch.*

BENJI: *(drunk)* Rian. I love you. Thank you for being my couple’s counselor.

RIAN: *(drunk)* Benji. Literally, not joking, I would die for you.

*Benji sees that Rian is holding the wine bottle.*

BENJI: Are you okay?

RIAN: Yeah. I just. Thought something. But I was wrong. It’s not a big deal. People are wrong all the time. Ha! Listen to me. I just did the thing.
BENJI: What thing?

RIAN: The thing where you say something’s not a big deal so that you can act like you don’t care.

BENJI: But maybe we should do that! Maybe we should all care about things less!

RIAN: What are you talking about?

BENJI: Okay. Look. Part of the reason I got mad at Eve the other day is because… I think she was right about something, and it freaked me the hell out.

RIAN: What was she saying?

BENJI: Like… Maybe I should take things less seriously. Like maybe, actually, sexuality doesn’t matter.

RIAN: Wait. Why was she--

BENJI: (interrupting) Like bro. It doesn’t matter. Like. Like think about it. Like, just because I always thought I was gay, and a little part of me wanted to kiss girls, and I was like shut up, little part! You don’t matter! I like men! That’s my sess-uality. But like… you can think that your…

RIAN: (supplying the word) Sess-uality.

BENJI: ...is one thing, but really, you were wrong. And you grow up thinking that it’s all a huge deal because everybody always told you that, but maybe they were wrong! Maybe it’s all a LIE.


BENJI: I don’t know! I just feel like… If the world was different and we weren’t so obsessed with stupid labels, maybe I wouldn’t have ruled it out like I did. Like, why should I try to predict who I’m gonna be attracted to for the rest of my life when I have no freaking idea?

RIAN: Bro! Nice!

Rian and Benji high five.

RIAN: Dude, kissing girls is the BEST. If you decide to… you’re gonna love it.
BENJI: Like, girls’ skin is so soft!

RIAN: IT’S SO SOFT.

_Eve re-enters._

RIAN: Hey.

BENJI: Eve’s back! Eve, did you know that Rian and I dated in middle school?

EVE: I… did not know that.

RIAN: _(laughing)_ We were each other’s beards!

BENJI: _(laughing)_ We were each other’s first kiss!

RIAN: Okay, maybe it was _your_ first kiss.

BENJI: What! Who was your first kiss?

RIAN: Kelly Davis, at a sleepover. During truth or dare, actually. It was awesome. Wait Benji, who _was_ your _real_ first kiss?

BENJI: It was Michael, actually.

RIAN: _(joyfully)_ I remember Michael!

BENJI: Dude, you know what’s crazy? He lives like right around here.

RIAN: That’s awesome!

EVE: Benji, did you not tell her?

RIAN: Tell me what?

BENJI: You know what I should do?

EVE: _(warning)_ Benji…

BENJI: Yep. I’m gonna text him.

RIAN: _(encouraging)_ Yeah!
EVE: No!

*Benji drunkenly scrambles to get up from the couch and grab his phone, which is on the coffee table. Eve lunges for him but she’s too far away; Benji gets to the phone first. Eve starts to chase him.*

EVE: Rian! Get the phone!

*Rian freezes, confused. Benji runs, trying to evade Eve.*

RIAN: What’s going on?

EVE: Don’t let him--!

*Eve and Benji run in a circle, shouting. Eve: Benji! Stop! (etc). Benji: No, I won’t, (etc). It is a cacophony of sound and confusion. Rian stands in the center, in front of the couch, utterly baffled. Eve stops at one side of the room. Benji stops at the other. She and Benji look at each other, panting. Benji still has the phone. It’s a stand-off.*

EVE: *(panting)* Benji. Put down the phone. This is not what you would want if you were sober, okay? You do not want to fall back down into this wormhole. Remember what happened last time?

RIAN: Wait. I thought Michael was cool.

EVE: Nope.

*(pointedly, to Benji)*

He cheated on Benji, he lies, he’s manipulative, and whenever you’re talking to him, he takes over your life. He’s controlling. And he makes you feel like you’re insane. It’s not healthy. And I promised you I wouldn’t let you contact him.

BENJI: Okay, but he did that stuff he was in a really bad place and he’s been working on himself a lot--

EVE: That’s what he said last time.

BENJI: It’s been like six months. Seriously, I bet he’s changed.

EVE: *(gently)* No. He hasn’t.

*Eve slowly approaches him. Calm but firm:*
EVE: Benji, give me the phone.

_A long, tense moment-- Benji agonizes over this decision. Finally, he hands her the phone._

BENJI: I’m gonna go throw up.

_Benji exits. A pause._

RIAN: Was it seriously… that bad? When Benji was with Michael?

EVE: Yeah.

_A long pause._

RIAN: Benji told me that he and Michael… that it was on and off but that Michael was a good guy.

EVE: He lied to you.

_Eve deflates. Handling this situation took everything she had._

RIAN: I’m sorry. I encouraged him… I had no idea...

EVE: _snapping a little_ No, you didn’t. You weren’t there.

_This stings Rian. A pause._

_In the silence, there is a shift. Eve and Rian are suddenly very conscious of the fact that they’re alone._

EVE: Um. About earlier--

_Benji, still drunk, sprints back onstage._

BENJI: PSYCH, BITCH, I NEVER THROW UP!

_Benji lunges for the phone in Eve’s hand, tackling her to the ground in the process. Benji grabs for the phone but Eve holds it out of his reach._

EVE: _desperately_ Rian!
Eve throws the phone to Rian, who catches it. Benji tries to go after Rian to grab the phone, but Eve holds onto him. They wrestle for a moment. Ad-libbing—Benji: Let me go! etc., Eve: No! etc.

RIAN: What do I do?!

EVE: Hide it!

RIAN: Do you need help??

EVE: (as she wrestles with Benji) I’m fine, just do it!

Rian runs offstage to hide the phone. Eve and Benji continue wrestling and yelling. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. Rian comes back onstage.

RIAN: Fuck, the pizza!

Rian starts to go to Eve and Benji to break up the fight, then stops and looks at the door. The knocking comes again. Rian starts towards the fight, then the door, conflicted. Meanwhile, Eve finally pins down Benji. Seeing that Eve won, Rian runs to get the door. She opens it. It’s Joan.

EVE: (horrified) Mom.

JOAN: SURPRISE!!

Blackout.

Scene 7

Thirty minutes later, the living room. Joan is sitting on the couch. Eve enters with a cup of tea. She hands it to Joan.

EVE: Okay, well, Benji is throwing up and Rian is taking care of him. I’m so sorry you had to see that.

JOAN: I was young once.

EVE: Yeah. But I bet you weren’t this stupid. I can’t believe you’re really here.

JOAN: Well, I missed my daughter. And now I know you don’t have a bed frame.
EVE: No, I don’t. But we’re improving, actually. Before, I didn’t have a bed. Hey, we should Facetime Dad! It doesn’t feel right being together without him.

JOAN: Oh, um, your dad is… having a guy’s weekend. He won’t pick up.

EVE: Oh, okay. Maybe we can try tomorrow.

JOAN: Alright. I’m gonna go sleep on your floor mattress because this couch is terrible.

EVE: It really is.

*Eve’s mother gets up and walks towards Eve’s room. Then she turns back.*

JOAN: Is there anything else you want to tell me?

EVE: Um. Yeah, actually.

JOAN: *(smiling)* You met someone.

EVE: …How did you know?

JOAN: I always know. Who is he?

Pause.

EVE: She.

Pause.

JOAN: Ah. Goodnight, Eve.

*Eve is alone for a moment, sitting on the couch, confused. Rian enters.*

RIAN: Hey.

EVE: Hey. I’m gonna sleep out here tonight. My mom’s taking my room. How’s Benji?

RIAN: He threw up a lot. I just put him to bed. I’m actually-- I’m gonna spend the night too. If that’s okay. In Benji’s room. In case he needs anything.

EVE: Yeah, of course. Thank you. For everything.
RIAN: No, thank you. I’m so sorry. Again. I had no idea how bad things were with Michael. He never told me.

EVE: It’s okay. Really. I’m sorry I snapped at you. It’s not your fault. (Desperately): I’m not normally like that. I don’t physically fight people. Especially not Benji. We never fight. Except recently, I guess.

... I’m sure that there was a better way to handle all of that but I don’t know what it is.

RIAN: Don’t be embarrassed. I don’t think I know anyone else who would physically fight their best friend to stop them from getting sucked into a toxic relationship.

_Eve laughs. Pause._

RIAN: So what were you trying to tell me earlier?

EVE: Rian… I like you.

RIAN: I like you, too.

_They stare at each other for a long moment. They kiss._

_Eve feels like it’s the most important thing she’s ever done._

_After a long moment:_

RIAN: I should probably check on Benji.

EVE: Yeah.

RIAN: Goodnight.

EVE: (almost a whisper) Goodnight.

_Rian walks back to Benji’s room. Just before she gets to the doorway, she stops and turns back._

RIAN: Hey, Eve.

EVE: Yeah?

RIAN: My favorite hobby is… I play the guitar.

EVE: Are you serious?
RIAN: *(laughing)* Yeah.

*Rian exits. Eve stands in the middle of the room. She’s stunned. She’s happy. Blackout.*

**Scene 8**

*The next morning, early. Eve is asleep on the couch. Under a sheet, she is wearing only her underwear. Her mom enters with two cups of coffee and sits on the edge of the couch.*

JOAN: Good morning.

EVE: *(sleepily)* Hi. What time is it?

JOAN: Seven-thirty.

EVE: Seven-thirty?! We went to bed at like three.

JOAN: What? I can’t sleep past seven-thirty. I made you coffee. 

*She hands Eve a mug of coffee. Eve takes it but doesn’t sit up.*

EVE: Oh my god, thank you.

*Eve shifts uncomfortably under the sheet.*

Eve shifts uncomfortably under the sheet.

I’m, um-- I didn’t have pajamas and it was really hot, so I slept in my underwear. Just so you know.

JOAN: Oh please Eve, it’s fine. I’m your mom, you literally came out of my body.

Eve laughs nervously.

EVE: Okay.

*There is a pause. They sip their coffees. Eve is clearly reluctant to show her body. She stays under the sheet. This makes it awkward for her to drink the coffee, but she tries.*

JOAN: I wasn’t surprised to hear that you’re interested in a woman.

EVE: …Really?
JOAN: Not because of what you were like as a child or anything like that.

EVE: No?

JOAN: No.

EVE: Then why…?

JOAN: Well, because of the school you went to. I know that’s what people do there.

EVE: Oh. Um…

JOAN: So have you given up on men?

EVE: No, I-- I still like men. I think.

JOAN: Whatever happened to that guy you were seeing?

EVE: When?

JOAN: Last summer.

EVE: Oh. Charlie. We broke up.

JOAN: Did he do something? Cheat on you?

EVE: No, we just--

JOAN: Because I know sometimes, that’s why women start…

EVE: Mom, I--

JOAN: *(ultra-calm) You know, I’ve had relationships with women.*

*Eve is completely shocked.*

EVE: What?

JOAN: I dated a woman for three years.

EVE: When?

JOAN: When I was twenty-two.
She looks at Eve deliberately. Eve is twenty-two.

EVE: Oh.

JOAN: That’s what people did in the eighties. I was fed up with men, so…

EVE: Where were you living?

JOAN: Philadelphia, then Toronto.

EVE: …You moved to Canada with her?

JOAN: Well, you know what they say.

EVE: …What do they say?

JOAN: What does a lesbian bring on a second date?

EVE: (not responding to the joke, genuinely asking; as in, "what is going on right now?") …What?


EVE: Oh my god. Wait, so… what happened?

JOAN: Well, I realized that I wasn’t really a lesbian.

EVE: What?

JOAN: I wasn’t really interested in women.

EVE: I mean. You moved to a different country with one, so…

JOAN: (ignoring her) I knew that at my core, I wanted to marry a man, and have children with a man. My essential nature was not that I was a lesbian. I wanted my kids to have a mother and a father.

EVE: I don’t think that means you’re not… it doesn’t mean it wasn’t real.

JOAN: Honestly, I think I was there for the attention.

EVE: For three years?!
Pause.

What was her name?

Long pause.

JOAN: Amy.

....

Anyway, eventually, I had to face the facts. Which is that I was not a lesbian. And I was getting older, and I needed to start something real. So I started dating a man. But when I told him that I’d dated a woman, he didn’t want to be with me anymore.

EVE: Oh.

JOAN: Then I started dating your dad. He wasn’t bothered by my past. After a few months he asked me to marry him. I told him I’d think about it. And my best friend said, "Are you nuts? He’s a lawyer; he can take care of you." So I told him yes.

EVE: That’s really how it happened?

JOAN: Yes.

EVE: I didn’t know that.

JOAN: Yes, well. Children want to believe that their parents had a fairy-tale romance, but it’s so rarely like that. We both wanted kids. The clock was ticking. Anyway. All of this is to say, I did what I did when I was young. But eventually, I had to realize who I really was.

EVE: ...You had to realize that you should marry someone you’d only known a few months just because he was a man?

JOAN: That’s not what I said. It’s just that my...

EVE: Essential nature.

JOAN: Yes, my essential nature was that I wanted to be with a man.

EVE: So you think that just because you wanted to marry a man that must mean that your relationship with a woman wasn’t real? ...You don’t think it’s possible to like both?

JOAN: Like… bisexual?
EVE: Yes.

JOAN: Not really.

EVE: Seriously?

JOAN: I mean, if you’re bisexual can you ever really be committed to someone? Because the ones I’ve known have…

*Joan trails off. There is an awkward pause.*

EVE: …I would never cheat on someone.

JOAN: Of course not. Anyway. I’m telling you all of this because you need to think about who you really are. Just like I did. You need to think about what you want in life. It’s very important not to lead people on, you know. You can really hurt somebody.

EVE: I’m not going to lead her on. Wait… Are you upset with me?

JOAN: Of course not, sweetie. I love you no matter what. And I’ve dealt with all of these-- *(waving her hand at Eve’s face)* --piercings. So I can deal with this. Just... no tattoos.

EVE: Right.

*JOAN gets up. The conversation is over.*

JOAN: I’m serious. A mother can only put up with so much.

EVE: I got it.

JOAN: No tattoos.

EVE: No tattoos!

JOAN: Seriously.

EVE: Okay!

JOAN: *(with surprising intensity)* No tattoos.
Okay, let’s both get dressed now, I want to see the sights.

EVE: Okay.

Finally, Joan exits. Eve sits up and the sheet covering her falls away. She has a tattoo on her back. A big one. She looks down at it. She lets out a short breath, feeling both relief and panic.

Just then, Rian comes out of Benji’s room and sees that Eve isn’t dressed. She quickly covers her eyes.

RIAN: Shit! Sorry! My eyes are closed.

EVE: It’s okay. I’m covered. Mostly. You can-- open...

RIAN: Okay.

Rian uncovers her eyes.

RIAN: Hi.

EVE: Hi.

Pause. They stare at each other. The air is charged.

RIAN: I like your tattoo.

EVE: Thanks.

Rian goes back into Benji’s room. Eve is left on the couch, tattoo exposed. She is still for a long moment as she tries to figure out what to do. Then she remembers that her tattoo is exposed and quickly, under cover of the blanket, throws on her shirt and shorts from the day before. She gets up and goes to the bathroom. Benji enters, looking for Eve, just as Joan re-enters.

BENJI: Mrs. Martin. I’m so sorry for what you saw last night.

JOAN: You can call me Joan, Benji.

BENJI: Joan. I, um-- I’m not usually like… I’m a very responsible roommate.

JOAN: It’s okay, Benji.
BENJI: So, um, how long are you staying?

JOAN: A week. Or two. I’m not sure yet.

BENJI: Oh. I’m sorry that we don’t have a spare room or something--

JOAN: It’s alright. I’m sure Eve won’t mind a few nights on the couch.

BENJI: Yeah.

_Eve re-enters from the bathroom, drying her face with a hand towel._

BENJI: Hey.

EVE: Hi.

JOAN: Why don’t I give you two a minute?

(simultaneously)

EVE: That’s okay. 

BENJI: Thank you.

Joan ignores Eve’s protest and exits.

BENJI: Um. Thank you. For not letting me text Michael.

EVE: Of course.

BENJI: I’m sorry, Eve. I was awful to you.

EVE: No, look, I-- I’ve been thinking about it, and you were right. I was acting like this is nothing. And that was... shitty. ...And I mean, on top of everything, obviously you don’t want Rian to get hurt; she’s your best friend.

BENJI: First of all, bitch. Don’t get it twisted. You’re my best friend. 
And second of all, it’s not that. I just felt like you were having a really different take on all of this than the one I had, and--

EVE: I know. The fact that this has been easy for me to grapple with so far is a huge privilege and I didn’t acknowledge that at all--

BENJI: Wait. I want to tell you something.

EVE: What?
BENJI: I don’t think I’m 100% gay.

EVE: What?

BENJI: ...You know how middle school kids will just say that anything is gay? Like, oh, a purple notebook. Gay.

EVE: Yeah.

BENJI: I was that notebook. In middle school.
And they were right, I mean, I did like guys. But I think I just gave in and called myself gay because they wouldn’t shut up about it. It was always, “Benji’s socks are so gay! Benji’s hair is so gay! Benji’s voice is so gay!” Everything I did.
And the thing is, I didn’t even know it yet. I was like, why is everyone saying this shit? I like girls. And then I watched Pirates of the Caribbean and I was like-- “oh my god, Jack Sparrow.” And I realized I liked guys, so I just stopped protesting. When people said “Benji’s so gay!” I was like okay, yeah, sure! Because it shut them up, and I figured it was true.
But… if the world was better, and I could’ve just figured out my sexuality on my own, at my own pace, maybe I would rather call myself something else. Like bi. Or, I don’t know, just queer.

EVE: Woah.
So it’s both of us, then?

BENJI: Yeah.

EVE: I love you.

They hug.

EVE: You were right, Benji. This shit is a big deal.

BENJI: No. I was wrong. It shouldn’t be a big deal. And it doesn’t have to be for you, if you don’t want it to be.

EVE: I really don’t know what I want.
... This is harder than I thought it would be.

BENJI: What?

EVE: All of it.
Scene 9

A week later. The living room. They now have an air conditioning unit. Eve is frantically searching for something. She checks in between the couch cushions. Then she checks the bathroom. Nothing. She knocks on Benji’s door. Benji emerges sleepily.

BENJI: What?

EVE: Have you seen my work shirt?

BENJI: No.

EVE: You didn’t borrow it?

BENJI: You think I would borrow your ugly-ass Burger Barn--

EVE: (cutting him off) Shh! My mom will hear you!

BENJI: Eve! How long are you gonna keep lying to her? She’s gonna find out!

EVE: How’s she gonna find out?

BENJI: You smell like French fries. Also, how long is your mom gonna stay here? It’s been a week.

EVE: I don’t know, she won’t tell me. She’s being kind of weird.

BENJI: I’ll say.

EVE: What does that mean?

BENJI: Every time I try to ask her questions about how she’s doing, she deflects and asks about me instead. (imitating) “So Benji, tell me, how’s your love life? Whatever happened to that Michael boy, I always liked him. ...Oh, that’s too bad. Well, you’ve gotta get back out there!”

EVE: That’s really not that bad.

BENJI: I wasn’t finished. She told me-- and I quote-- “The only way to get over someone is to get under someone new.”
Just… ask her when she’s gonna leave? Okay?

EVE: Fine. And I do not smell like French fries.

BENJI: You do. The grease gets in your pores, that’s why it won’t go away.

EVE: Seriously? Shit.

_Eve runs to the bathroom to wash her face. Joan enters from Eve’s room with a laundry basket and sits down on the couch. She begins to fold the clothes methodically._

JOAN: Morning, Benji.

BENJI: Morning, Joan.

_Benji goes and stands by the air conditioner to cool off as Joan continues to fold the laundry. Joan notices Eve’s Burger Barn t-shirt in the laundry. She picks it up as though it’s disgusting and pitches it into the trash. Benji doesn’t notice._

BENJI: Um, Joan, I’ve been meaning to say. Thank you so much for the air conditioner.

JOAN: Of course, you can’t be sweaty in your own home! And I have to earn my keep, of course, now that I’m practically a third roommate.

_Benji laughs uncomfortably. Joan holds up a pair of his underwear from the pile of clean clothes._

JOAN: Oh Benji, we have to get you some new underwear. This is not going to catch you any fellas.

_Benji is horrified._

JOAN: You know, it was so hot in here that I thought I could probably only stay a few more days, but now that it’s cool I could stay, oh, for weeks! If that air conditioner keeps running, who knows? Maybe I’ll just move in!

_Joan exits. As soon as she’s gone, Benji looks around for a weapon. He grabs an umbrella from a corner and gets ready to attack the air conditioner with it. Just then, Eve re-enters, drying her face._
EVE: What are you doing??

BENJI: *(lowering the umbrella)* Nothing.

EVE: I still can’t find it. I’m gonna be late.

*Joan re-enters and sits back down to continue folding.*

EVE: Oh my gosh, Mom, you do not need to do our laundry!

JOAN: I might as well, I don’t have anything better to do. Are you heading to work?

EVE: Yeah.

JOAN: You know, I still haven’t heard a thing about your job! I want to know everything!

EVE: Um… yeah. We have to talk about it! I just… I’m late, so…

*Eve tries to exit to her room but Benji catches her eye and gestures at Joan, mouthing “Ask her!”*

EVE: Oh, um, Mom, I was wondering. How long are you planning on staying, exactly?

JOAN: Why, do you want me to leave?

EVE: No! No! It’s just… It’s been a week, I thought Dad might be missing you.

JOAN: It’s good for us to have some time apart, you know. Aren’t I allowed to want to spend time with my daughter?

EVE: Of course! Yes!

*Eve starts to exit when she sees her Burger Barn T-shirt in the trash. She grabs it out.*

JOAN: Eve! What are you doing? That shirt is ratty and disgusting. I threw it away for a reason.

*Joan gets up and snatches the shirt out of Eve’s hands. Eve chases after her. Joan tries to keep it away from Eve throughout the following lines. Benji watches, entertained and unsure what to do.*
EVE: No! I-- I need it.

JOAN: For what?

EVE: Sentimental value, it’s sentimental.

JOAN: Sentimental? Have you forgotten about Evil Luke?

EVE: (as she attempts to grab the shirt) Benji! Help me-- get the--

BENJI: Leave me out of this.

JOAN: Why do you need it?

EVE: I-- Just want to wear it today.

JOAN: Seriously? I’m pretty sure it has a hole in it. Why don’t you wear one of the nice shirts I got you? Why are you acting strange?

EVE: I’m not.

JOAN: Eve. If we don’t have honesty, we don’t have anything.

EVE: I--

BENJI: Eve. Honesty.

Pause. Eve looks at Benji. Then she takes a deep breath.

EVE: I need my Burger Barn shirt because I have a shift. At Burger Barn.

JOAN: ...What?

EVE: At their city location.

JOAN: Your magazine job doesn’t have good pay? You have to do restaurant shifts, too?

Eve is silent.

JOAN: Oh my god. There is no magazine job.

EVE: No. There isn’t.
JOAN: Benji, can you give us a moment? I need to talk to my daughter.

*Benji hurries into his room.*

JOAN: Why did you lie to me?

EVE: I’m sorry, Mom. I didn’t want you to worry.

JOAN: So you lied?

EVE: I’d been trying to find something for so long and I couldn’t, and I needed money… I’m sorry, Mom, I know this is really bad...

JOAN: Yeah, honey, it is.

EVE: Mom, look, I-- I want to make it right. Let’s call Dad right now and I’ll tell him and we can all talk about it together. Okay?

JOAN: *(suddenly)* No!

EVE: What?

*Joan starts for the door as if to leave.*

JOAN: You call. I’ll go out.

EVE: What? Why?

JOAN: I just… I’ll let you two talk.

EVE: No, Mom, I want to do this right. I want to start being actually… honest with you guys. I’ll tell him about the job, and you know what, I’ll tell him about Rian, too, while I’m at it. I just want to talk about everything together. As a family. Okay? So I’m gonna call--

*Eve picks up her phone and starts to dial her dad’s number. Joan grabs it out of her hand and throws it across the room.*

EVE: What the hell?

JOAN: I’m sorry. I-- I don’t want to talk to your father right now.

EVE: What? Why?
Joan sighs.

JOAN: Eve, I have something to tell you.

EVE: What is it?

JOAN: Your dad and I are taking some time.

EVE: ...What?

JOAN: Your dad feels that… things have gotten… stale. He says we don’t have that “spark.” If you ask me, we haven’t had it in a long time, and I didn’t really think it mattered, but I guess it does. To him. He asked for some space. That’s why I’m here.

Pause.

EVE: So you… you’re not just here to see me. You’re here because… you need a place to stay.

JOAN: Yes.

EVE: So you lied.

JOAN: See how it feels?

EVE: Oh my god.

JOAN: Sorry, sorry. That was-- inappropriate.

EVE: Holy shit. This is bad.

Out of nowhere, Joan starts laughing.

JOAN: No, you know what, this is good, this is really good.

EVE: What?

JOAN: (laughing, a little manic) You told me the truth, I told you the truth, it’s all out there. We both lied, now we both know. You’re dating a woman, I used to date a woman. Great, good, this is good. No more hiding, no more lying, just me and my daughter and our screwed-up lives.

EVE: How long do you think… how long are you and Dad going to stay apart?
JOAN: I don’t know. But I don’t want you to be scared, sweetie. I still want to be with your father. I’m just going to stay out of his way for a little while, and let him have his time, and then I’m gonna go back there and tell him that this marriage is worth saving, and I think we can save it.

EVE: Okay.

JOAN: I think this-- whatever it is-- is going to pass.

EVE: Okay.

JOAN: So it’s okay if I… if I stay?

EVE: Of course. Stay as long as you need.

A pause.

JOAN: So how are things going with your new… love interest?

EVE: We really don’t need to talk about it right now.

JOAN: So not well, then?

EVE: ...Jesus. How do you do that?

JOAN: It’s a mother’s gift.

EVE: She just, um. Hasn’t responded to me in a while. We went out for a drink and it was so good, but now she’s… I don’t know. I think commitment freaks her out.

JOAN: Well, are you sure this is the person you want to commit to?

EVE: What do you mean?

JOAN: Have you even been on a date with anyone else?

EVE: I mean, no. But--

JOAN: You know what dating is like? It’s like when you’re standing at the edge of a pool with someone, and you’re scared it’s gonna be really cold, so you agree to jump in at the same time. You make them promise. You’ll both jump on three. You count-- one, two, three. You jump. You hit the water and it’s so cold, even colder than you thought it would be, and sometimes they’re right there next to you, screaming with
you. And sometimes you look around, and you realize that they didn’t jump. And
you’re in the water all alone.
That’s why you don’t want to jump too soon. You have to make sure they’re really
going to jump with you.

EVE: I mean-- I guess-- but if you really like someone, then--

JOAN: It’s up to you. Is it worth it? If you end up in the water alone?

_Eve doesn’t reply._

JOAN: Look honey, Rian might not be meant to last. And there’s no harm in seeing
someone else, too, as long as it’s not serious. My friend Ann’s son lives here. He’s
wonderful. I could set you up.

EVE: Oh my god. That’s what this is about?

JOAN: What?

EVE: You’re telling me to give up on Rian because you want me to date a guy
instead?

JOAN: That’s not what I’m saying, Eve.

EVE: You can’t even give me good advice, because you don’t want me to like girls!

JOAN: I’m just saying, I know from my own experience, that this really can be just
a… a phase!

EVE: How can you believe that? You were with Amy for three years!

…. I don’t get it, Mom. What happened?

_A pause._

JOAN: Do you know what the last thing my father said to me, before he died?

EVE: What?

JOAN: He was in the hospital, at that point. I’d come down to stay with him. We just
talked, or I’d read to him, or we’d do the crossword. We spent weeks like that. But he
was so tired near the end. And when we knew that… that it was time, he looked at
me, and he said, “Make me proud.” That was the last thing.
After the funeral, I went back home. I looked around at my life, and there was nothing to make him proud. I was a college dropout living with a bunch of stoners. Making nothing as a bartender. He had wanted so much more for me. I was ashamed of myself. Of my life. And Amy was… Amy was a part of that. I wasn’t going to make my dad proud. I was in a relationship I had never been able to tell him about. He would’ve been horrified. His daughter. A lesbian.

EVE: …So you “prayed the gay away?”

JOAN: Being with Amy… that was who I was then. But it wasn’t who I really was, it was just--

EVE: So you were ashamed.

JOAN: I was ashamed of a lot of things.

EVE: And now you’re trying to put that on me.

JOAN: That’s not what I’m doing.

EVE: That’s exactly what you’re doing! How can you not see that? You’ve been living this, this-- lie for so long! Acting like the perfect, straight, housewife! You married Dad because you felt like you had to!

JOAN: Now, that’s not fair. Your father and I built a great relationship--

EVE: Yeah? And how’s that working out for you?

JOAN: Eve!

EVE: You had this whole other life, a serious relationship, and you’ve convinced yourself it wasn’t even real because it’s so… shameful! You were so scared of what you felt, that you tried to erase it completely! And now you want me to do the same thing. Well, I won’t, Mom. I just won’t.

Eve leaves. Joan is left alone, sitting on the couch, for a long moment before the lights go down.
Scene 10

Eve and Benji’s apartment, the living room. Eve is sitting on the couch, working on her laptop. She’s trying to write. It’s not working. Benji enters.

BENJI: Hey! How are you doing?

EVE: I’m fine.

BENJI: Really?

EVE: No.
I hate everything and everyone. My mom hasn’t spoken to me in two days, and guess what? Neither has Rian! But you know what? It’s fine, because I’ll just be a server at Burger Barn for the rest of my life and I’ll never get my shit together!

BENJI: Good! You’re getting much better at this.

EVE: What?

BENJI: Honesty! I’m proud of you.

EVE: Hey, how are you feeling about… everything?

BENJI: Not great.

EVE: Yeah.

BENJI: I was talking to some co-workers today. They brought up some guy who works in HR, who happens to be bi, and everybody was just talking about it like it was the craziest thing in the world. “Do you think Brad’s really bi? What are the odds? He seems like he’s just gay. Do you think he says he’s bi so he can have more threesomes?”

EVE: What did you say?

(exhausted) I’m gonna go take a nap.

EVE: Hey. I got a job interview.

BENJI: What?
EVE: For a magazine.

BENJI: That’s amazing!!

EVE: I’ll probably blow it.

BENJI: Hey. You won’t.

_Eve tries to smile a little. There’s a knock at the door._

EVE: Shit.

BENJI: Is that her?

EVE: I don’t know.

BENJI: I’ll be in my room.

_Benji exits to his room. Eve opens the door. It’s Rian._

RIAN: Hi.

EVE: Hey.

_They hug._

RIAN: I’m sorry to just drop by unannounced-- I just wanted to see you.

EVE: Oh.

RIAN: Is that okay?

EVE: Yeah, I’ve just been… confused. Because you haven’t really been responding to my texts.

RIAN: I’m sorry. It’s just… I didn’t know how to tell you over text, but…

EVE: Oh god. Is this you letting me down gently?

RIAN: No, it’s--

_Joan enters._

JOAN: Hi girls! I was just gonna make some tea, do you want some?
Simultaneously:

EVE: That’s okay.          RIAN: No, thank you.

JOAN: (brightly) Okay!

Joan exits. A pause.

EVE: Um, you were saying…?

RIAN: Look, I’m trying not to be as blunt as I usually am, so I wanted to tell you, but I didn’t want to tell you in a way that was too harsh, but--

EVE: If you don’t want to see me anymore, you can just tell me. It’s okay.

RIAN: No, it’s not that, it’s--

Joan re-enters, heading back to Eve’s room.

JOAN: I was thinking of watching a movie on my iPad, do you girls want to join?

Simultaneously:

EVE: Not now, Mom.          RIAN: No, thank you, Mrs. Martin.

Joan exits into Eve’s room.

RIAN: It’s that! It’s your mom living with you!

EVE: What?

RIAN: And you could come to my place but I know it’s really far and you have the brunch shift so you have to wake up early, but we can’t just keep watching movies with Benji and your mom! Obviously, I love Pirates of the Caribbean, but…

EVE: Shit. I’m sorry. I should have realized. We can go out more, we can get out of the apartment--

RIAN: Bars aren’t more private than here. I mean, look, we’ve been…. happening for like two weeks now and we’ve been alone together for a combined total of what, fifteen minutes?

EVE: I know, it sucks, I’m sorry. Having my mom here, it’s just--
RIAN: Is that the only reason?

EVE: What?

RIAN: Is it because your mom is here? Or is it because…?

EVE: What?

RIAN: Look, it’s okay if you’re scared, I just want to talk about it.

EVE: I’m not scared, Rian.

RIAN: Are you doing that thing?

EVE: What thing?

RIAN: The lying thing!

EVE: No! I-- know I’ve done that a lot recently, but I’m not gonna do it to you.

RIAN: It’s just… hanging out with other people is great, but it makes me feel like I’m just your friend and I don’t want to be… just your friend. I know that, but it’s okay if you don’t know how you feel yet, or if you need time to--

EVE: No, Rian. I know how I feel. Everything gets so much better when you walk in the door. I think about you all the time. I… It’s just that I’m sleeping in the living room, there’s no privacy, and I’d come to yours if it wasn’t across town and I didn’t have to get up so damn early… that’s all it is. I’m not scared about this. I’m… happy.

RIAN: I am, too.

_They kiss._

RIAN: So how long is your mom gonna be here?

EVE: She said… until she gets everything figured out.

RIAN: So, indefinitely.

EVE: She’s going through a hard time. And honestly, I think she’s handling it pretty well.
Rian: She showed up unannounced and stole your room.

Eve: ...Yeah.

Rian: Have you thought about giving her a deadline?


Rian: Okay, what about just talking to her?

Eve: I can’t. ...I’m sorry.

Rian: It’s okay. I get it. Anyway, it’s late. ...I should probably go.

Rian gets up to leave.


Rian: What?

Eve: There’s not much room, but....

Rian: You seriously think I wanna crowd onto the couch with you?

Eve: Um, I mean... I--

Rian: I’m kidding.

They kiss. They kiss more than they’ve kissed before. It’s amazing. Lights down.

Scene 11

A few days later. Joan is in the living room, waiting for Eve to come home. Eve enters.

Eve: Hi.

Joan: How was work?

Eve: Fine. Um, Mom, we haven’t really talked about the other day--

Joan: I found something interesting today.
Joan pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Eve’s pack of cigarettes.

EVE: Oh my god.

JOAN: In the bookshelf, Eve? Behind a copy of “Consider the Lobster”? What is this, amateur hour?

EVE: I don’t even really-- I mean I don’t smoke, it’s a disgusting habit--

*With absolutely no self-consciousness, Joan takes out a cigarette and holds it between her fingers. She lights it and inhales.*

JOAN: *(thoughtfully)* It is, isn’t it?

*Joan exhales like a practiced smoker. She might even blow rings.*

EVE: What the fuck.

*Eve stares at her mother for a long moment. Then Eve walks over, pulls a cigarette out of the pack, and lights it. They stand together, smoking, for a long moment, staring each other down.*

JOAN: How long has this been going on?

EVE: I could ask you the same question.

JOAN: On and off for about twenty years.

EVE: Oh. Two.

JOAN: Good. You can still save your lungs. This is actually my first in quite a while. I forgot how good it is.

EVE: Well, you better not get used to it. Dad is not gonna let you keep this up when you go home.

JOAN: That’s true. I guess it’s good that I’m not going home.

EVE: ...What?

*Joan doesn’t reply.*

EVE: ...Mom?
JOAN: I’m leaving your father.

EVE: What? Why?

JOAN: It’s not what I want anymore.

EVE: You told me you were going to go back-- you were going to tell him that this marriage is worth saving--

JOAN: Yes, I was. But that was before I talked to you. You said that I haven’t been living fully because of being afraid, and at first I was furious at you, but you were right.

_Simultaneously:_

EVE: Woah, woah, woah, Mom--

JOAN: (continuing) I’ve been hiding, denying what I want, denying myself the right to actually live--

EVE: I did not tell you to leave your husband--

JOAN: (continuing as though she didn’t hear) I mean, look at my life! I’ve made so many decisions based on what I felt I had to do. Following the path that had been laid out. I was so scared just to take one step off of it--

EVE: Mom, I-- I wasn’t fair to you. It’s not your fault that you were scared. It’s the stupid world’s fault for being the way it is, you were only doing what you--

JOAN: No, baby. I was part of it. It wasn’t just what the world told me. It was that I believed it. I was ashamed. And I see you… I see you doing the things that I was too scared to do. And I want to be done with being afraid.

_A long pause._

EVE: I… I want that for you, too, Mom. But are you sure that this is…? Are you sure that you need to leave Dad? Your marriage?

JOAN: It’s not what I want anymore.

EVE: Then what… what do you want?
JOAN: I don’t know.

_Joan starts laughing._

I don’t know. Isn’t that crazy? I’m almost sixty, and I have no idea what I want.

EVE: Mom, you can’t just--

JOAN: I mean, I look at you! You know what you want. You know who you are. You’ve known you wanted to be a writer since… God, I remember the assignments you brought back. Sixth grade, you wrote this poem about spring… I still remember it—about wanting to swallow all the green in the leaves and have it grow inside you, so that even when winter came again you’d still have it… “The ice melts without help from anyone, and maybe someday, I could be like that, too” … And you brought it home and gave it to me and I thought God, what eleven-year-old writes like this? I’ve birthed a… a person that I have no idea what to do with!

But it didn’t matter. Because you didn’t need my help to know what you wanted.

EVE: Mom…

JOAN: Listen to me. I know it’s hard, and you didn’t get what you wanted right away. But you will. You’re going to find an amazing job. You can’t give up now. You deserve better than that.

EVE: Mom--

JOAN: I mean, you want something. You have no idea how powerful that is. I used to have things that I wanted. Or thought I wanted. And then I got them. And I’m starting to realize that what I wanted, Eve, was not marriage. Or that house we live in. It was not… a husband.

What I wanted was you.
And now I have you. I’ve had you for twenty-two years. And you’re starting your own life.

So maybe it’s time I start mine. Okay?

EVE: Okay.

_Blackout._
Scene 12

The living room becomes a room in an office building, where Eve has her interview. We do not see the interviewer. Eve has just been asked when she knew she wanted to be a writer.

EVE: Um, I guess it was… It was when… We had this famous author come give a reading from his new book at our school. There was a Q&A with him afterwards. People asked him questions about his work and his career, except I didn’t because I couldn’t think of anything smart to say. Anyway. This one guy raised his hand and asked the author if, while he was writing, he thought about his audience and whether or not they’d like it. And the author looked at him like he was stupid and said, “No. If you’re writing because you want people to like your work, then you shouldn’t be a writer. He said, “Being a writer is an absurd thing to do. You spend your time listening to voices in your head, and when you have an idea that you think could maybe, possibly be good, you give up your entire life to try to make this thing that you imagined real. And after you give up all of your time and your sleep and your sanity to this idea, this imaginary thing, you just wait around, praying that the thing you made might actually matter. That it could matter to someone else the way it matters to you.” He said, “That is a ridiculous way to live. So the only reason anyone should ever do it is because you’ll die if you don’t.” And everyone in the room was silent, just staring at him.

And I thought-- holy shit. I actually feel that way.

And I don’t really feel that way about anything else. I could be fine without lots of things, like, I don’t know, kids or marriage, or a 9 to 5 with a regular schedule or… sleep. But when I write I just know that… it’s the thing that I was meant to do. I think the craziest thing about it is believing that you actually have something to say. Having the audacity to believe that your thoughts… your perspective… might be important. I mean, some people have no problem thinking that their thoughts are important. They think that everyone should listen to everything they have to say. I don’t feel that way. It’s hard for me. To believe that what I’m saying matters. But I try anyway.

Blackout.

Scene 13

A few days later, morning. Rian is sleeping on the couch, maybe in a big T-shirt and her underwear or shorts. She hears Joan’s key in the front door and scrambles to
jump up and grab her clothes from the day before-- she wants to hide the fact that she and Eve slept on the couch together. Rian runs into Benji’s room. She makes it and quickly shuts the door behind her, just as Joan enters with shopping bags. Joan puts the bags on the ground and sits down on the couch, tired. She feels something underneath her. She turns and, moving a pillow, finds Rian’s bra. She stares at it. Rian re-enters from Benji’s room, wearing her clothes from the day before, and attempts to make a quick exit.

RIAN: Um, hi, Mrs. Martin, I was just--

JOAN: *(Holding up the bra)* Yours, I presume?

Rian is mortified. She walks over and silently takes the bra from Joan.

JOAN: This isn’t the first time you’ve slept over, is it?

RIAN: Um. I mean.

JOAN: What are your intentions, exactly? You’ve been pretty hard to reach, so, are there real feelings involved, or is this just-- what are you calling it these days, a hook-off?

RIAN: Um… a hook-up?

JOAN: So that’s all it is to you, huh?

RIAN: Um-- No, I mean---

*Joan lets her sweat for a moment, then bursts out laughing.*

JOAN: Don’t worry. I’m just fucking with you.

RIAN: Woah.

*Joan can’t stop laughing.*

JOAN: Oh my god. You looked terrified.

RIAN: I’ll, um-- I should head home.

JOAN: Why? The day’s young. I was just gonna have some smoke if you want some.

RIAN: ….What?
JOAN: Grass? Reefer? Ganja? Chronic? What are the kids calling it these days?

RIAN: ...Weed.

JOAN: Wow. Very creative.

_Joan pulls out a joint and a lighter. She lights the joint, takes a hit, and then offers it to Rian, who hesitates._

JOAN: It’s alright, I’m not gonna call your mom.

_Rian is shocked but she decides to go with it. She sits down on the couch, accepts the joint, and takes a hit. She hands it back to Joan._

JOAN: So. Eve tells me you’re a barista.

RIAN: Yeah.

JOAN: I used to be a bartender, when I lived here in the eighties.

RIAN: Oh man. I bet you have some crazy stories.

JOAN: Oh god, do I. The customer is not always right.

RIAN: That’s for sure.

JOAN: One time this guy came in and asked for gin with a raw egg yolk and salt and pepper. I said there’s no way I’m going to make a drink that I know I’m gonna have to clean off the bar because you puked it up.

RIAN: Then what happened?

JOAN: I got fired.

_There is a pause, and then they both burst out laughing. Maybe it’s the weed, but both Joan and Rian think this is the funniest story of all time. As they’re laughing, Eve enters. She sees them sitting together on the couch, holding a joint, and freezes._

EVE: Um…

JOAN: Hi sweetheart!

EVE: Hi.
JOAN: I was just getting to know Rian here. She’s a lovely young woman.

EVE: ...You’re smoking.

JOAN: Oh, how rude of me. Want a hit?

EVE: I’m good.

JOAN: Alright, I’ll finish it. *(She takes a big hit).*

RIAN: *(staring back and forth between Eve and her mother)* You guys are so alike.

JOAN: *(blowing smoke)* Where do you think she got it from?

EVE: Jesus, Mom.

_Benji enters._

BENJI: Oh wow. Did I just enter an alternate universe?

EVE: Nope. Just my mom, smoking with my… my…

BENJI: Can I join?

JOAN: Absolutely. I have another one. *(She pulls another joint out of her purse).*

EVE: *(to Benji)* Um, so, what’s up with you?

BENJI: Well, I have no idea what I’m doing at my job. I feel like any second someone’s gonna actually see me sitting there in my button-up shirt, like an idiot, and be like, who let this child in here? And also, I’m just confused about some other things, like if I really am attracted to people who aren’t men, why didn’t I know sooner? And why is it that that’s apparently such a weird thing? Why does everybody freak out about this? Now I’m freaking out!

JOAN: Join the club, kid.

RIAN: *(realizing the implication of Joan’s statement)* …Oh shit. Really?

JOAN: Yep.

BENJI: God, I hate feeling like this. I thought I had my shit together.
EVE: Nobody really has their shit together.

BENJI: But didn’t you think we would? By now?

*Pause.*

EVE: I got that job.

*(Overlapping:)*

JOAN: Seriously? BENJI: Oh my god! RIAN: That’s amazing!

EVE: I just worked my last shift at Burger Barn. Ever.

JOAN: I’m proud of you.

EVE: Thanks.

BENJI: *Now* it’s a party!

JOAN: Yeah!

*Eve looks around at all of them—her mom, her best friend, and the girl she’s in love with, smoking a joint in her apartment.*

EVE: Actually, you know what? We’re not doing this.

*Eve pulls the joint out of Benji’s mouth.*

BENJI: What are you doing?

EVE: *(suddenly powerful)* Take a seat, both of you.

*Shocked, Joan and Benji do. Rian instinctively backs off to give them space, but continues watching the scene before her.*

EVE: *(to Benji)* You! Stop feeling sorry for yourself for something you can’t help. They want you to feel sorry! They want you to be ashamed! Are you really gonna give the world the satisfaction? I know it’s scary, but we’re in this shit together.

*Joan snickers to herself, delighted at this verbal ass-kicking, and assuming that she will be spared Eve’s wrath. Noticing, Eve turns on her immediately.*
EVE: (to Joan) And you! Mom, I say this with all the love in the world, and so much gratitude for everything you’ve done for me, and I know you’re having a hard time. But you’ve been staying with us for a month. You need to get out of my apartment and get your house in order. I know Dad was the one who wanted space, but you’re the one who decided you’re not going back. So you need to go back there, and pussy up, and tell him.

JOAN: ...You’re kicking me out?

EVE: Yes, I am.

A pause.

JOAN: Alright then. I’ll go pack.

Joan exits to Eve’s room.

EVE: (to Benji) What are you still doing here? Go!

BENJI: And do what?!

EVE: I don’t know! Get your house in order!!

BENJI: Okay, jeez!

Benji exits. Eve exhales. She turns to Rian. A pause as they look at each other.

EVE: How did I do?

RIAN: That was great.

EVE: Just trying to take a page out of your playbook.

RIAN: It’s better than wrestling them to the ground.

Eve laughs. They look at each other for a long moment.

EVE: I’ve spent a lot of my life pretending like things aren’t a big deal, and I don’t care, and it’s not important. But dating you is a big deal to me.

RIAN: Me too.

Blackout.
Scene 14

A conversation that doesn’t really happen. Eve and her mother stand onstage, addressing the audience, but really addressing each other.

EVE: There are so many things I haven’t told you. I’m only just starting to be honest. I’ve been so afraid that you’ll worry about me. Or that you’ll judge me. And there are some things I just don’t want you to know.

There was this time in elementary school. Someone told me that when I wore my hair in a ponytail I looked just like you. So I wore my hair in a ponytail every day.

And then we got in a fight. I don’t even remember what it was. You probably wouldn’t let me have a sleepover or... So I went in my room and looked in the mirror and took down my ponytail. After that I always wore my hair down. It was like my personal, secret rebellion. Like I was flipping you off and you didn’t know.

But then in high school. I was maybe like fifteen. I heard this kid talking about me in the hall. Kyle Bagley. He didn’t know I was there. He said I was a frigid bitch, which makes sense, because my mom also seems like a frigid bitch.

So I put my hair in a ponytail before I socked him in the nose. And I’d do it again. Because I did it for you.

Eve stands still while her mother addresses the audience.

JOAN: When you were a baby, sometimes I’d wake up in the middle of the night, convinced that you’d stopped breathing. I’d get out of bed and go stand over your crib and watch your chest moving up and down. I thought that if I left the room, you’d stop. Or if I looked away. Or if I--

You’d think maybe it would go away, but it doesn’t. Except now when I wake up I can’t go to your room and make sure you’re breathing. And actually, I don’t even know where you are. I mean, you’re probably in your apartment, but what if you’re not? Maybe you’re at a friend’s house. Or a bar. Or walking alone down a street that I told you to never walk alone down.

You tell me not to worry, and it’s funny. Because there’s nothing that will ever stop me from worrying, and there is nothing that will ever stop you from wanting me not to worry, and there is nothing that will stop either of us from saying “It’s fine.” Maybe that’s what love is.
Or maybe I just hope that that’s what love is. Because sometimes I think that it’s the only thing I know how to do.

_Eve and her mother continue. Lines that are parallel are spoken simultaneously._

EVE:
I used to wear my hair in a ponytail every day.

We got in a fight.
I don’t even remember what it was.

So I put my hair in a ponytail before I socked him in the nose.

I’d do it again.

I think that I am nothing like you. I think that I am exactly like you.

I never know what to say.

I want your life to be as easy as possible.

Sometimes I look in the mirror and I only see you. I don’t even know what I look like.

I’m afraid people will hurt me.
Or that I won’t get the same

JOAN:
I used to stand over your crib and watch you breathe.

I thought that if I left the room, you’d stop. Or if I looked away. Or if I.

Except now when I wake up I can’t go to your room and make sure you’re breathing. And actually, I don’t even know where you are. I mean, you’re probably in your apartment, but what if you’re not?
Maybe you’re walking alone down a street that I told you never to walk alone down.

I think that you are nothing like me. I think that you are exactly like me.

I don’t know which one I’m more afraid of.

I don’t know if I want to protect you from the mistakes I made, or if I hope you’ll make them. So I can comfort you. So I’ll know what to say.

I want your life to be as easy as possible.

I’m afraid people will hurt you.
Or that you won’t get the same opportunities as other people.
opportunities as other people. People will see me differently.
Like you, do you see me differently?
I guess I just want to ask. Do you see me differently now?
Do you see me differently now?

Now that you know.
Do you recognize me?

_A pause. Eve’s mother leaves the stage, and Eve is alone, standing still._

EVE: Mom?
I’ve thought about it, and I think it’s worth it. To jump into the water. Even if you end up there alone. Because… even if you don’t get anything else, you get to know that you did it. You jumped.

_Blackout._

_END OF PLAY._
“If we are not to sacrifice some part of ourselves or our community, we will have to
go through grief, the fear of exposure, and struggle, with only a thin layer of trust that
we will emerge whole and unbroken. I know of no other way to do this than to start
by saying, I will give up nothing. I will give up no one.” –Dorothy Allison, Skin:
Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature

I. Introduction

The first time I heard the word “bisexual”, I was in sixth grade. It was also the
first time I ever heard the word “slut”. Valeria, a girl in my English class, had just
come out as bi. “But she only actually likes guys. It’s just an excuse for her to be a
slut,” a friend informed me. “You know. So she can make out with more people.” At
that point in my life, my greatest worry was whether or not my classmates thought my
thighs were too big, and if my shorts (which I wore even though they terrified me)
were just short enough to mean that I was cool, but just long enough to avoid getting
hit with a detention. This new information about the word “bisexual” filed itself
neatly into the same place in brain: the place reserved for shameful things. Valeria
went from being one of the most popular girls in our school to a pariah. And so my
first lessons about bisexuality were that, 1. it wasn’t real, 2. it was synonymous with
“sluttiness”, and 3. that admitting to being attracted to more than one gender could
ruin your life. You can imagine my terror when, just a few years later, I began to think that I might be bisexual. As soon as the horrifying thought entered my mind, I made myself a promise: if I really was bi, then I would never act on it, and I would never, ever tell anyone. Eight years later, I broke my promise. That’s why I decided to write this play. This essay will analyze American societal ideas of bisexuality as represented in the play *truth or dare*, using queer theory and scientific studies to examine what it means to be attracted to people of more than one gender in America today; what struggles, stereotypes, and particular oppressions are experienced by the people who identify this way; why “bisexuality” is a dirty word, and whether or not we should use it anyway.

*truth or dare* follows a young woman named Eve in the weeks after she graduates from college, during which she is living independently for the first time, trying to figure out her career path, and, unexpectedly, questioning her sexuality. Eve admits her feelings to her mother, Joan, who responds by opening up about her own experiences with dating a woman decades before. Joan feels that her relationship with a woman was “just a phase” and believes that Eve’s feelings for her new friend, Rian, will be similarly transient. While Joan advises Eve against seriously pursuing a relationship with Rian, Eve’s best friend and roommate, Benji, urges her to take her emotions *more* seriously. Benji, who identifies as gay, is unsettled to find that Eve is not as overwhelmed, confused, or upset as he was upon discovering his own sexuality, and calls Eve out for not recognizing the privilege that allows her to act like her newly-discovered queerness is “not a big deal.” But as the characters interact, they are forced to re-examine their own assumptions about sexuality and call into
question their initial reactions. Joan finds that she is no longer satisfied with the life she had chosen decades before, in pursuit of American hetero-normalcy; Benji wonders if he should leave more room for fluidity in his own sexuality, and work to disconnect the trauma and homophobia he has experienced from his sexual identity. In contrast, Eve finds that sexuality is actually more complicated than she initially thought, but that it also has more potential to create meaning in her life; that it could offer her the opportunity to, (in Benji’s words) finally “take something seriously.”

II. Defining Terms

Before diving more deeply into the aforementioned stereotypes and struggles surrounding bisexuality in America, and how they manifest in truth or dare, I’d like to take a moment to discuss the word itself. “Bisexuality” is the word most commonly used to indicate attraction to people of more than one gender. Other possible identities include “pansexual,” “ambisexual,” “polysexual,” or just “queer”. However, all of these words have their own specific definitions that differ slightly but significantly from one another, and none of them are as commonly used as “bisexual.” According to the Williams Institute, people who identify as bisexual are the largest group in the LGBTQIA+ community (though by a narrow margin). However, the word “bisexual” is often met with cringes. Some argue that the word means “attraction to men and women” and thereby upholds a false gender binary, which claims that there are only two genders, male and female, and erases the existence of anyone who may identify as both, neither, or anywhere in between. But bisexuals as far back as thirty

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years ago have defined the word more broadly than that.² The most commonly used definition of bisexual is a much more inclusive one; it was created by acclaimed bisexual activist Robyn Ochs, who said, “I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted romantically and/or sexually to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.”³ In this definition, the “bi” in bisexual means not being attracted to two genders (men and women), but to two categories of gender: those whose genders are the same as one’s own, and those of at least one other gender. This definition therefore includes the possibility for many more genders than two. To reflect this, many people add a plus sign at the end of the shortened “bi”--“bi+”.⁴ Ochs’ definition is widely accepted by bisexuals themselves, but often goes unacknowledged outside of the community. When I use the word bisexual or bi+ in this essay, I am referring to Robyn Ochs’ definition, but I want to recognize that this word is not right for every person who is attracted to multiple genders.

I have chosen to use bi+ rather than pansexual, polysexual, or simply queer in this essay because of the specificity of each term’s meaning. Pansexual means having the potential for attraction to all genders, and people who identify this way may or may not be interested in disconnecting sexual attraction from particular body parts altogether and focusing instead on a person’s essence, regardless of their gender or

³ Ibid.
Polysexual means attraction to many genders. Pansexual and polysexual are far less frequently used than bisexual, and where they are used, the people who identify with them may be subjected to ridicule by those who don’t know what it means. (“Pansexual? So you’re attracted to kitchenware?”) Queer, though once a slur, has been reclaimed by many to encompass any sexuality that is “not straight”; under this definition a person who identifies as a part of the LGBTQIA+ community in any way could choose to use the label “queer.” “Queer” may also be a part of a person’s gender identity. As such, “queer” is too broad a term to use throughout this essay, though it may in fact be the term some people are most comfortable using in everyday speech. Some people argue that bisexuality is an umbrella term under which pansexuality, polysexuality, and the label “queer” may fall. This idea may not be appealing, however, to those who have sought out other labels precisely because they do not connect with the term “bisexuality”.

All that being said, “bisexuality” is the term most commonly used by the research this paper cites, and so that word will be used many times. In this paper, “bisexual” or “bi+” will mean experiencing attraction to those whose gender is the same as one’s own and those of other genders-- not the outmoded definition of

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“attraction to men and women.” This usage is not to suggest that bi+ is the best label for people who experience this type of attraction or that those who choose to use other labels are wrong. It’s not even necessarily a label with which that the characters in the play connect. It’s an unfortunate limitation of language that choosing a particular term is necessary, and at the beginning of this project, I resisted. I hoped to argue that when it comes to sexual fluidity, language may not even necessary. However, as my research continued, I found myself drawing nearer to the opposite conclusion. This paper will argue that the discomfort that often springs from the word “bisexual” is deeply connected to our discomfort around the thing itself, and that both are rooted in myths and stereotypes that are not only unfair, but contribute to increased rates of violence, ill health, and death, and that while claiming a particular label might not be the right choice for everyone, it could help to build community, increase awareness, and allow people to access their rights to health and safety. In *truth or dare*, the characters are ultimately struggling with their discomfort around people who are attracted to more than one gender. This paper will ask readers to make demands of their discomfort when it arises, to recognize the ways in which gay and straight communities are complicit in erasing bi+ identities— and opening the door for their experiences of mental and physical illness, violence, and death.

III. Myths and Stereotypes of Bi+ Identities in America

The stereotypes and myths surrounding bisexuality are unique in that they include prejudice from both mainstream straight society and the LGBTQIA+ community. Many of these myths are more widespread and societally powerful than
the charge that the word “bisexual” upholds a false gender binary. In an article in the May-June 2004 edition of Off Our Backs magazine, author Joy Morgenstern lays out four “Myths of Bisexuality”, which she says are perpetuated by gay and straight people alike: 1. “Bisexuals are disease-ridden sluts or greedy nymphomaniacs”; 2. “Bisexuals are gay people who are still in the closet with internalized homophobia and/or going through a transitional phase”; 3. Bisexual women are “traitors, turncoats and betrayers of the greater sisterhood” for continuing to have relationships with men in spite of their attraction for women, or for not calling themselves lesbians; and 4. “Bisexuals are indecisive, confused neurotics who will never be sexually satisfied.”

The term “bi erasure” is commonly used to express the feeling that bisexuality is invisibilized; that it is not seen as a legitimate identity.

Morgenstern’s definitions of these stereotypes are a good jumping off point for analysis, but they lack some important nuances. Myth number two— that all bisexuals are actually gay people— is more complicated. A 2018 study published by the journal Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity shows that bisexual men are indeed perceived as being actually gay, but bisexual women are actually perceived to be straight. Researchers call this the “androcentric desire hypothesis”— the idea that bisexual men and women alike are really only attracted to men. In other words, the reason that bisexuality is not seen as a “real” sexuality is not because it’s seen as impossible to be attracted to multiple genders, but because it

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is somehow impossible for society at large to believe that anyone who could be attracted to men would also be attracted to women. Is this because women’s bodies are so repulsive? Because the male genitalia is so powerful that once one experiences it, you can’t go back? Or is it because women are the property of heterosexual men alone, and no one else is allowed to find sexual and romantic pleasure in them?

The same 2018 study shows that the belief that bisexual women are primarily attracted to men is particularly strongly held by gay people themselves-- gay men and gay women alike.\textsuperscript{13} As writer Zhana Vrangalova puts it, “the stereotypical perception of a bisexual man is often a ‘gay man in denial,’ but the stereotypical perception of a bisexual woman is a ‘heterosexual in disguise’ who’s hooking up with women temporarily for ‘fun,’ or to attract the attention of straight men.”\textsuperscript{14} According to the study, this perception often leads to lesbians having a negative perception of bisexual women, because bi+ women are seen as more likely to lead lesbians on without having true emotions for them, or, to leave them to be with a man.\textsuperscript{15} It should be noted, however, that despite these strong negative feelings from the lesbian community, and the gay community in general, it is actually heterosexual men who have the most negative attitudes towards bi people.\textsuperscript{16}

Over the past few decades, the perception of gay and lesbian people by American society at large has improved drastically, as evidenced by the 2015

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Supreme Court decision to strike down laws against gay marriage, and the passage of laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexuality in 21 states. There is still much room for improvement, but these wins are a testament to the powerful, long-term efforts of gay rights activists. Studies show that American perception of bisexual people, however, has not been a part of this change. In 2016, a team of researchers from across the country discovered that, between 1999 and 2016, there was “only a little shift” in American attitudes about bisexuals. In the 1999 study, researcher Brian Dodge says, bisexual people were actually rated “more negatively than any other group except injecting drug users.” Since then, Dodge says, attitudes have improved only marginally; nowhere near the seismic shift in American opinion of lesbian and gay people. “We moved up a little bit, from rock bottom,” says Dodge. “But still, attitudes [toward bisexuals] are ambivalent at best.”

This lack of substantial change speaks to the cultural power of stereotypes like the ones Morgenstern detailed: being seen as promiscuous, unable to be monogamous, gay but in denial, or straight and willfully deceiving members of the queer community. Like all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, bisexual people are subject to discrimination, prejudice, and violence from straight people. Historically, many queer people, when discriminated against by mainstream straight society, can turn to the queer community for support and friendship that can be as

18 Ibid.
strong and powerful as that of a healthy family; but discrimination from both within and without the queer community can mean that bisexuals are left without a support system of any kind.

IV. Health Disparities Among Bi+ People in America

Researchers agree that this “double discrimination” not only leads to loneliness and feelings of despair; it causes health disparities and even death. The Washington Post reports that bi+ people “report more experiences of physical pain than their gay and lesbian peers.” In their 2018 LGBTQ Youth Report, which studied children age 13-17, the Human Rights Campaign and the University of Connecticut found that “81 percent of bisexual respondents said they ‘usually’ felt down or depressed over the past week.” This is ten percentage points higher than the number of lesbian and gay youth who reported the same emotional state. “More than three-fourths of bisexual, queer, pansexual and fluid-identified youth” reported that over the past week, they “usually” experienced “feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness.” In adulthood, 40% of bisexual people have considered or attempted suicide, compared to approximately 25% of gay and lesbian people. The study also found that bi+ youth are two times less likely to be out to their healthcare providers than their lesbian and gay peers. As a result, bi+ people may not be accessing the healthcare they need; as the following diagram shows, bisexuals have a much lower

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20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
rate of cancer screening than heterosexuals, and a higher rate of heart disease and STI diagnoses.  

Additionally, the Bisexual Resource Center reports that out of all sexual orientations, bisexual people of any gender are the most likely to smoke cigarettes. (This is nodded at in *truth or dare*; as Eve becomes aware of her attraction to Rian, her every-once-in-a-while smoke turns into a full-blown habit. Meanwhile, when Joan begins to more deeply examine her past relationship with a woman, her decades-old nicotine addiction reignites). Studies also show that bisexual women are twice as likely to have an eating disorder than lesbians and that bisexual women use alcohol at

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higher rates. They are more likely to binge drink and to have alcohol-related problems than lesbian and straight women; and they are more likely to have substance abuse issues in general. According to the Washington Post, researchers agree that these health disparities can be traced back to the negative attitudes towards bi+ people that abound in America. Ethan Meirish says that these negative attitudes create “pressure to conceal” one’s bisexual identity “as well as internalize these stigma[s]. … These types of stressors and double discrimination are related to increased feelings of loneliness, and it’s these feelings of loneliness that heavily contributed to experiencing depression, anxiety and suicidality.”

In addition to increased rates of despression, suicidality, anxiety, eating disorders, addiction, substance abuse, heart disease, and more, bisexual women are more at risk for intimate partner violence than any other population. According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, the proportion of bisexual women who will experience intimate partner violence at some point in their lifetime is 56.9%. That is far above half, and a full 16.5 percentage points above the second-most likely population to experience intimate partner violence (gay women).

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25 Ibid.


28 Ibid.

29 Brown, Taylor N.T., and Jody L. Herman. “Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People: A Review of Existing Research.” The Williams Institute, The University of California,
This number goes up even higher for bisexual women of color and bisexual transgender women. The discrimination that bisexual people receive from both the gay and straight communities is not only hurtful on an interpersonal level; it leads to disproportionate experiences of violence, ill health, and death. All of these health disparities also run along lines of gender, class, and race. Because of intersecting oppressions, people of color, low-income people, and people who are not cisgender are even more at risk for health problems, pain, and death. Bi+ discrimination is literally killing people.

V. Analyzing Negative Attitudes Towards Bi+ People in America

The extreme and widespread health disparities among bi+ people, as described above, and the fact that researchers agree they can be traced to greater stress levels as a result of discrimination from both the queer community and the heterosexual community, indicate that more is at play here than critiques that the word “bisexual” upholds the gender binary. There is deep-seated prejudice towards bi+ people in America, and it comes from all sides. But why? Why do negative attitudes towards bisexual people have so much power? And why isn’t this particular form of discrimination commonly known? Maria San Filippo, author of The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television, argues that bisexuality is de-legitimized by a society that seeks to reproduce “monosexuality”, or attraction to only one gender. In other words, monosexuality is the opposite of bisexuality. San Filippo

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writes, “Monosexuality… is systemically reproduced by pressing social-sexual subjects to conform to either heterosexuality or homosexuality, and by keeping bisexuality (in)visible.” San Filippo argues that bi+ erasure comes out of a widespread but little-noticed cultural belief that bisexuality—not homosexuality-- is the greatest threat to mainstream heterosexual society. San Filippo’s argument is supported by the 2016 study referenced above, which showed that while American attitudes towards gay people have undergone a sea change, attitudes towards bisexuals have barely shifted (and they were already seen as nearly the lowest of the low). San Filippo’s argument is tied up with the concept of homonormativity, the term popularized by Lisa Duggan. In Duggan’s words, homonormativity refers to a gay politics that “does not contest dominant hetero-normative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” In other words, Duggan argues that gay people have succeeded in becoming been more accepted by American society in recent decades only by fitting into normative roles-- by acting as “heterosexual” as possible. This is exemplified by the particular battles of the past few decades-- the calls for gay people to be able to marry, serve openly in the military, adopt children, and receive protection from discrimination in the workplace. Though these wins were extremely significant and exciting for the gay community, Duggan and many other queer

33 Ibid.
scholars argue that gay people are only accepted in American society when they promise that they only want what every straight couple wants-- to be able to get married, have kids, serve their country, and contribute to the economy. Within this framework, queer people can only expect bodily safety when they vow to uphold the very systems that created their oppression in the first place. They must reject the radical politics that were for many decades an integral part of queer culture. Of course, these options and particular modes of living should be available to everyone in America, regardless of sexuality. But the past few decades of change in America show that in this country, a person’s right to safety and equality is conditional. They may be granted the right to not experience violence and discrimination as a result of their mere existence-- but only if they agree to exist in the exact same way straight people do. No living collectively, no polyamory, and no radical political ideology.

San Filippo argues that in their desire to be accepted by American society, the gay community has thrown bisexuals under the bus. She writes, “it is now overwhelmingly the bisexual rather than the homosexual impulse that threatens heteronormativity’s armature-- and that of homonormativity”.

San Filippo argues that, just as there is “compulsory heterosexuality” (as described by Adrienne Rich), there is also “compulsory monosexuality”-- “the ideological and institutionalized privileging of either heterosexuality or homosexuality as the two options for mature sexuality that are socially recognized and perceived as personally sustainable.” By submitting to mainstream society’s expectations, rather than fighting to make room for those whose attraction falls outside those bounds, San Filippo argues, those who

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35 Ibid.
conform to homonormativity are complicit in enforcing compulsory monosexuality, and thereby, erasing bisexuality.\(^{36}\) In other words, conforming to a particular vision of what being gay looks like-- non-threatening, de-politicized, and, as closely as possible, conforming to heterosexual ideals-- is a survival tactic for the gay community, and historically, throwing non-monosexual people under the bus has been a part of that tactic.

This has been effective for so many years precisely because of the power of myths about bi+ people-- one being that bisexual people cannot be monogamous, and are therefore less moral than heterosexual and homosexual people. Conforming to homonormativity means being monogamous-- having one long-standing relationship, and, ideally, marrying that person. In the book *Bi America: Myths, Truths, and Struggles of an Invisible Community*, author William Burleson points out how highly monogamy is highly valued in American society. “It is taught in churches, schools, on television, and in safer-sex education. Most in American consider monogamy to be an imperative for all relationships, that it shows a greater commitment and maturity.”\(^{37}\)

Of course, there is nothing unethical about engaging in polyamory so long as all partners in the relationship consent and communicate. Certainly, some bisexual people may engage in non-monogamous relationships, just as people of any sexuality may; but the stereotype is not that bi+ people may prefer non-monogamy. Rather, it asserts that bi+ people have an innate inability to be monogamous. A deficiency. In this way, according to American societal logic, bi+ people are less moral than


homosexual people, who “at least” have the ability to be monogamous. Kayley Vernallis, in a 1999 essay published by the Journal of Social Philosophy (and written under the assumption that “sexual exclusivity contributes to moral virtues such as trust and loyalty,”)\(^\text{38}\) argues that monogamy creates a strain on bisexual identity. “Monogamy requires bisexuals to sacrifice full sexual flourishing,” but “places no similar demand on heterosexuals and homosexuals.” Taking the example of bisexual women, Vernallis writes, “When she cannot satisfy her desire for sex with the alternative gender, it is not just that she has lost a sexual object: it is as though one half of her sexual self has gone to a nunnery.”\(^\text{39}\) This ridiculous assertion has no basis in scientific data, and only reproduces the untrue ideas that bisexual people are unable to be faithful to one partner, and that polyamory itself is unethical. This myth, despite being false on multiple levels, makes bi+ people unable to fit either the hetero- or homo-normative ideal. In America, non-conforming individuals-- or individuals who are simply perceived as non-conforming-- are seen as less deserving of healthcare, of jobs, and of rights, allowing for the disparities described above.

Another source of negativity towards the bi+ community comes from the threat that the concept of bisexuality places on an important survival tactic for the gay community: the ability to frame same-sex attraction as a person’s only way of being. This rhetoric-- “being gay is not a choice”-- is what turned Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way” into a gay anthem. The logic of the argument is that if being gay is not a choice, if a person is in fact “born this way”, as Gaga sings, then it’s wrong and

\(^{38}\) Vernallis, K. (1999), Bisexual Monogamy: Twice the Temptation but Half the Fun?. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 30(3) (Winter 1999), pg. 347.

illogical to discriminate against them. The need for this assertion was born out of
decades of anti-gay rhetoric that called for gay people to be “cured” of this “disease”;
to simply reject what they were experiencing, and to learn to be heterosexual. Re-
framing homosexuality as a trait a person was born with, rather than a choice they are
actively making, has been very helpful in changing that harmful narrative and
increasing acceptance for gay people in mainstream American society. In recent
years, people who are sexually fluid have been shunned by the LGBTQIA+
community if they say anything to suggest that choice may have a factor in their
sexuality. In 2012, Cynthia Nixon was famously quoted by New York Magazine as
saying, “for me, it [being gay] is a choice. I understand that for many people it’s not,
but for me it’s a choice, and you don’t get to define my gayness for me.”40 Response
to the statement has been called an “international media firestorm”.41 The statement
was widely denounced by gay activists, who criticized her words for potentially
contributing to homophobic rhetoric, and opening the door to the idea that if a person
can choose to be gay, they can also simply choose to be straight. The idea that a
person can choose not to be homosexual has certainly contributed to gay oppression.
It is what allows for the horrific treatment of queer youth at “gay conversion camps”,
or in religious programs. It is a sentiment frequently heard by queer youth when they
come out to family or friends. It can open the door to abuse and violence.

The existence of bisexuality threatens this rhetoric by asserting that there is a
population that may, in fact, have a choice. If a person is attracted to people of the

40 Jowett, Adam and Barker, Sophie (2018). Rhetoric and Etiological Beliefs About Sexuality: Reader
Responses to Cynthia Nixon’s New York Times Interview, Journal of Homosexuality, 65:6, 766-783,
DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2017.1364544
41 Ibid.
opposite gender and of the same gender, couldn’t they simply choose to live as a straight person? And if they do engage in a same-sex relationship, isn’t that a choice they’re making? Are they, at least for that particular relationship, choosing to be gay? That there exists a population who ostensibly do have a choice in who they engage with sexually threatens a narrative that gay people have worked so hard to create, and which has done so much to benefit them. With this knowledge, anti-bisexual sentiment from within the gay community makes a certain type of sense. Particularly for people for whom being gay feels as though it has nothing to do with choice, it could be frustrating to know that there are people who not only might incidentally contribute to harmful ideas about homosexuality, but who could perhaps choose not to engage with homophobia at all. If a person is really bisexual, they could conceivably live as straight and opt out of the discrimination, oppression, and violence that come with having public same-sex relationships in America. Of course, this line of thinking is deeply rooted in bisexual erasure and anti-bisexual sentiment, and has nothing to do with what bisexuals themselves feel about how they want to live their lives, how they want to identify, and how they want to be acknowledged and accepted by others, both in gay culture and in mainstream heterosexual society. These ideas about bisexual people are so powerful that they create conditions under which bi+ people are more likely to experience violence, ill health, and death-- but less likely to receive sympathy from either queer or straight American society for any of it.

VI. Views of Sexual Fluidity in truth or dare
In creating *truth or dare*, I wanted to write characters who feel fall somewhere under the so-called “bisexual umbrella”, but must reckon with the prejudice and potential for discrimination that comes with the identity. It was a challenge to write about stereotypes without falling into them; to explore them without letting the story become predictable and the outcomes inevitable. When I first conceived of Eve, the play’s 22-year-old main character, she was scared about this new development in her identity and apprehensive to explore it. After reading an early draft, my advisor, Professor Karamcheti, suggested that I try to do something more unique. “What if,” she asked, “Eve was excited?” This comment informed the course of my work. It showed me that the only way to truly highlight the ridiculousness of myths and stereotypes about bi+ people is to turn them upside down. What if someone who thought she was straight her whole life finds out she’s bi, and is thrilled to start exploring this new side of herself? What if another character takes the opposite journey from the one we typically see-- they think that they’re gay and realize that they’re actually bi+? What if a character realizes that they’re not straight when they’re much older than the characters in typical coming out stories? What if we witness a child coming out to a parent-- and, unexpectedly, the parent then comes out to their child?

Each character interacts with myths in their own way. Benji is affected by the androcentric desire hypothesis, as described by researchers Matsick and Rubin, which makes him think that if he is attracted to men, he must *only* be attracted to men, despite his own misgivings and initial instinct that he might be attracted to women as well. Joan, meanwhile, has internalized the classic myth that bisexuality is temporary
phase before you “choose one.” Despite the fact that Joan once had a long-term same-sex relationship, she is eager to distance herself from her queerness and conform to heteronormative ideals. Her need to do so is greatly influenced by the death of her father and the feeling that, if she continues to acknowledge and engage with her same-sex desire, she won’t be able to make him proud. Her choice to marry Eve’s father and have a child with him is deeply informed by her lived experiences in a homophobic society. My hope with this narrative is to trouble the very notion of choice. What does it mean for Joan to choose to marry a man, if compulsory heterosexuality and the setup of our society itself makes her feel like this is the only choice she can make? Perhaps because of her own history, Joan is disturbed at the idea that her daughter would choose to explore her own same-sex attraction, and feels no trepidation in doing so. Eve, pushed forward by her personal philosophy of taking what life throws at her as though they are dares in a game of Truth or Dare, sees exploring her same-sex attraction as an opportunity to show bravery and live life to the fullest. This creates tension between the two characters, as Eve comes to see her mother as someone who is not living life fully, and has instead made many choices out of fear. For each of these characters, I was interested in exploring to what extent negative attitudes about bisexual people may be internalized. Though at many points in this process I explored clichés about bisexuality, I found every time that the truth is more complicated. And the truth is what I wanted to write.
VII. Conclusion

It is ironic that this essay dealt so much in defining terms, because truth or dare is so much a play about the failure of language to describe certain experiences. In the beginning of this project, I could not bear to say that I was working on a piece about bisexuality. I would say any other word-- even if it was less accurate-- in order to avoid it. Despite my own discovery of my attraction to people of multiple genders, the word “bisexual” still lived in my head in the place reserved for shameful things, and perhaps it still does. Unlike this thesis, getting it out will be the work of more than a year.

The research I did forced me to confront my own biphobia and bi+ erasure. I had no idea of the health disparities faced by the bi+ community in America-- the horrifyingly high rates of intimate partner violence, the suicides-- and the fact that we are all complicit in these wrongs by continually dismissing bisexuality as a real identity and upholding the harmful myths that surround it. The solution? Researchers propose that bi+ people need community in order to be healthy and safe in America.\(^{42}\) Both the heterosexual and queer communities need to start recognizing bisexuality as a legitimate identity, and commit to rejecting the myths about them that have been circulating for decades. But in the meantime, people who identify as being attracted to more than one gender need to be able to gather, to recognize that they are not alone, to hold space for one another and all of the intersecting identities that they may bring to the table. In order to create a space like that, we need to be able to say who

we are. This is not to suggest that everyone who is attracted to more than one gender needs to adopt the same label, or any label at all. In *truth or dare*, despite the entire plot of the play revolving around Eve’s discovery of her attraction to a woman, she never gives herself a label. Benji plays with the idea of using “bisexual” or “queer”, but doesn’t come to a conclusion. Joan may not be able to move past her own internalized assumptions enough to identify as a part of a non-straight sexual orientation. Sexuality and gender are deeply complicated, and it’s possible that no word can capture a certain person’s experience. Words can fail us. But they can also set us free.

If you-- like me-- have ever cringed at the word “bisexual”, or “pansexual”, or “polysexual”, or “fluid”, it is imperative that you ask yourself why. Demand your discomfort answer: where did you come from? Are you connected to the myths and stereotypes we’ve been inundated with in American society? Ask yourself: is your discomfort with the word connected to your discomfort with the thing itself? Perhaps your cringe, like mine, came from a long-ago experience that informed your thoughts going forward. Whether or not you’d personally connect with the label bisexual, or any label that means being attracted to more than one gender, we can all do our part to normalize and legitimize this sexual orientation and make room for a community of people who identify with it. And while rejecting labels of all kinds can seem like the most radical option, claiming the label “bisexual,” despite the negativity, is radical in another way. It acknowledges that bisexuality is a legitimate identity and gives us the language we need to discuss the problems that bisexual people face. If we are to solve the problems that bi+ people experience, we have to be able to say the
word “bisexual.” We have to name the problem: *bisexual people are experiencing violence, ill health, and death at higher rates than gay and straight people.* And while moving away from labels in our society as a whole may be a good thing, in this case, destigmatizing a label is essential to creating the community that is so desperately needed.

In 1990, the Bay Area Bisexual Network publication *Anything That Moves* published this “Bisexual Manifesto”:

“We are tired of being analyzed, defined and represented by people other than ourselves, or worse yet, not considered at all. We are frustrated by the imposed isolation and invisibility that comes from being told or expected to choose either a homosexual or heterosexual identity. Monosexuality is a heterosexist dictate used to oppress homosexuals and to negate the validity of bisexuality. Bisexuality is a whole, fluid identity. Do not assume that bisexuality is binary or duogamous in nature; that we have “two” sides or that we must be involved simultaneously with both genders to be fulfilled human beings. In fact, don’t assume that there are only two genders. Do not mistake our fluidity for confusion, irresponsibility, or an inability to commit. Do not equate promiscuity, infidelity, or unsafe sexual behavior with bisexuality. Those are human traits that cross all sexual orientations. Nothing should be assumed about anyone’s sexuality, including your own. We are angered by those who refuse to accept our existence; our issues; our contributions; our alliances; our voice. It is time for the bisexual voice to be heard.”

We must make demands of our discomfort around bi+ identities in order to recognize and help one another. To me, this is the meaning of the Dorothy Allison quote at the beginning of this essay. Bi+ people deserve to be a part of queer liberation. As we navigate this complicated issue, there may be “grief, the fear of exposure, and struggle, with only a thin layer of trust that we will emerge whole and unbroken.” But there is no other way to solve these issues than to start by saying “I will give up nothing. I will give up no one.” I can still see Valería’s round, freckled,
twelve-year-old face in my mind, can still hear my classmates whispering about her.

She deserved better than what she got. We all do.
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