

~~LEAVING~~ ESCAPING THE PLAYGROUND

By
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28 Plays Later

Day 9

February 9, 2021

ACT I

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP - A CAFE - DAY

ALEX, a man in his late 20s or early 30s sits at a table with a demitasse of espresso. CLAY, a man in his late 40s enters and approaches the table.

CLAY: Hi. Um... I'm sorry to bother you, but could I join you for a few moments?

ALEX: There are plenty of other tables. I can move if you want this one.

CLAY: No, no... I actually want to talk to you.

ALEX: Me?

CLAY: Yeah, you specifically.

ALEX: Ohhhhhhhhh-kay. Sure. Have a seat.

CLAY sits down and put his own demitasse on the table.

CLAY: I'm not even sure where to start.

ALEX: How about with, "My name is..."

CLAY: Sure. Of course. My name is Clay.

ALEX: It's nice to meet you, Clay. I think. For now at least.

CLAY: It's amazing to meet you. I didn't even consider this a possibility until tonight, when I sat down and read Brief 9.

ALEX: I don't understand.

CLAY: I am doing this thing called 28 Plays Later. Long story short, I have to write a short play every day. Today's brief was to write about a fictional meeting

between two non-fictional people. I thought about doing George Washington and Dernald Tromph. Or maybe Barack O'Bama. Or Eleanor Roosevelt and Dolly Parton. Or even Alexander the Great and Ghandi. But none of them sat very well.

ALEX: Still not following, but okay.

CLAY: I decided to think smaller. More personally. And that's when I realized I could sit down and have a conversation with you.

ALEX: Why me?

CLAY: Because I never got to meet you, and you were... well, you're the only chance at fatherhood I'll probably ever have.

ALEX: Fatherhood? You mean you're my dad?

CLAY: Yeah.

ALEX is taken aback a bit, but recovers quickly.

ALEX: I don't understand. Why don't I know you? Did you give me up for adoption? Did you leave before I was born?

CLAY: Your mom and I separated a long time ago. It was only very recently that I had the courage to cut her out of my life completely. She hurt me really bad, and I'm still feeling the after effects of it, decades later.

ALEX: Decades later? Like, right after I was born? Or... BEFORE I was born?

CLAY: That's just it, Alex...

ALEX: What is?

CLAY: You were never born.

ALEX pales and is speechless.

CLAY: It's not that you were an unwanted child. Honestly, I think things would have been a lot different between your mom and me had you actually been around. I never told her, but I cried when I found out about you.

ALEX: But, why wasn't I around? Did you... oh god, did you abort me?

CLAY: No! God no. I'm sorry I even led you to think that.

ALEX: Then what?

CLAY: Monday, January 21st, 1991. I was 19, and at college at Penn State. Your mom was still up in Erie. That evening, she called me to tell me that she'd had a miscarriage. We didn't even know she was pregnant.

ALEX: But...

CLAY: Yeah. I'm sorry.

ALEX: Then how... ?

CLAY: Fictional meeting between two un-fictional people. Granted, I don't know that you would have been a boy, but if you were, I probably would have wanted to name you Alexander.

ALEX: After Alexander the Great.

CLAY: Yup.

ALEX: Good name.

CLAY: Yup.

ALEX: But why meet with me? And why espresso?

CLAY: We're probably somewhere in southern Italy right now. Summer time. The espresso there is magical. I'd hope that you would have discovered it long before I did, so you didn't miss out on so much enjoyment.

ALEX: Okay, but why me?

CLAY: Because I wasted a lot of time, Alex. Too long with my head in the clouds, trying to keep the rest of the world happy and not focused on what I wanted, or what I needed. You're probably the closest I'll ever get to having a child.

ALEX: Oh. Shit. I'm sorry.

CLAY: Not half as sorry as I am. I've been fighting having to admit this for... well, a long time. Pipe dreams about meeting someone amazing and starting a family... I missed out on a lot of stuff playing the dancing monkey to make people smile.

ALEX: That sucks.

CLAY: Yup, it does. But it's not too late for me to end on a happy note. And maybe that's why I decided to visit you tonight. I need to look at the things that I want, and stop pining over the ones that just aren't feasible anymore. I think children are one of those things.

ALEX: You could always adopt.

CLAY: I am not discounting that possibility. But in the back of my mind, I always imagined that someday, someone would be researching their family tree and stumble across my name and wonder who I was. You're never truly dead until people stop saying your name... I just have to leave my mark on the world some other way.

ALEX: That's a brave way to look at it.

CLAY: Nah, it's bullshit, mostly. I'm trying not to cry.

ALEX: Don't be sad!

CLAY: I'm not sad. (a beat) I'm just... growing up. Facing reality. Letting the child I was back on the playground to enjoy his own game rather than forcing

myself into the fun. I've just got to figure out what my own fun is.

ALEX: Wow. I wish there was something I could do to help.

CLAY: Believe it or not, just by being here in my mind, you are. I guess it's probably a little twisted, or morbid, really. But I'm kinda hoping you'll take little kid me with you. Keep him company. He's a lonely little fucker, and I think there's a big part of me that doesn't want to leave him alone.

ALEX: That's deep.

CLAY: Tell me about it. This whole thought experiment is going places I didn't really think it would.

ALEX: Therapy. It's hard work.

CLAY: Not as hard as actually making changes. It can be rough to figure out what you need to fix. It's a thousand times rougher to actually fix it.

ALEX: Do you think we would have been happy?

CLAY: Oh, god, I hope so. I guess I'll just have to assume that in a different timeline, you're about seven months from turning thirty, and I was a fantastic parent.

ALEX: It's not too late to be a fantastic parent, you know.

CLAY: Yeah. I do.

ALEX: Do me a favor?

CLAY: Sure.

ALEX: Don't dwell on me anymore. Shit, you knew exactly where to look for the diary where you wrote down about that phone call.

CLAY: I should pitch that thing.

ALEX: Maybe. Maybe not. But don't keep it in your fucking desk where you're going to see it every time you look for a stamp.

CLAY: That's fair.

ALEX: Could have been is such a risky game to play. It's like regret, except that you don't get over it. You just get stuck in the fantasy.

CLAY: That's always been a big problem of mine, getting stuck in fantasies. And look where that's got me.

ALEX: I dunno. I think you're doing okay. It's rough, sure, but you're crafty. You'll get where you want to be when you stop hiding in little kid you's daydreams.

CLAY: So you'll take him?

ALEX: I promise he'll never be alone.

CLAY: Thank you.

ALEX: Thank you, dad.

CLAY wipes tears from his eyes and stands.

CLAY: Yeah, therapy is a bitch, man.

ALEX: I think you're doing just fine.

CLAY: Me too, for once.

ALEX: Now go away. You have things to do.

CLAY: Yup. See you around.

ALEX: No, you won't. But that's okay.

CLAY: It is. It really is.

THE END.

Brief 9 - Due by 10 Feb at 10:00am UK time

Today write about a fictional meeting between two un-fictional people.

But let's make this a bit more fun - and make it a meeting that couldn't possibly have ever taken place.

What would Mary Wollstonecraft have to say to Beyoncé over a glass of lemonade?

What would Jesus and Ivanka Trump talk about whilst eating fish and drinking wine?

How would Kierkegaard react to bumping into Ghandi in the street?

What if Beethoven would have managed to get those lessons from Mozart he wanted?

This is fun! I can go on all day... but I won't. I have things to do.

This calls for a duologue but I hate unsolicited calls (hurrah for the end of PPE) - so stick in a few more characters in there.

For 3.14 bonus points - let them eat pie!