

Before the Fall, V3
for The Arabian Shakespeare Festival/New Works
by Sabina Piersol
{Revised May 26, 2016}

Characters

Dani: 38, still pretty schoolteacher writer type
Ian: 30, dorky but handsome, glasses, tall, skinny & athletic.
Nerdy humor, also very sincere most of the time.
Jonas: 30, spritely and enthusiastic rock climber, their mutual
friend

This play moves backward in time: it unfolds in four scenes from after a breakup to the characters' first meeting. Their interactions fluctuate between concealing and revealing, diving in and keeping a safe but uncomfortable distance. We should feel the shifting between hope/not hope, of two people trying to figure out what to do with their desire, and how (and whether, and in what configuration) they can be connected.

Scene 1: Fall 2017, Portland

Cue the song "Ultimate Painting" by Ultimate Painting, which is playing as the lights come up on Dani and Ian in a cafe. We watch them talk wordlessly for several seconds as they converse with the slightly guarded warmth of two people who were once intimate. Music fades into background as we tune into their conversation.

Dani

Um, climbing into the ruins of a brick chimney in Death Valley on acid sounds terrible. *(shaking her head and laughing)* Glad you had fun.

Ian

I'm just so happy you're here.

Dani

You still have little kid bangs.

Ian

They have Supercuts in Portland.

Dani

And it's good to see you still wear white mesh running shoes as normal shoes.

Ian

You never know when you might need to suddenly run a marathon *(David Attenborough voice)* or flee a rapacious female mountain lion in heat. *(beat)* You look great.

Dani

Ha! Not bad for 46, if you go chin up. Or wait -- *(pulling her neck skin back)*

Ian

When you do that your neck totally looks 37.

Dani

Aw, thanks. *(pause)* So we live in the same city again.

Ian

We do, as fate would have it.

Dani

And we're sitting in a cafe together. Do we know why?

Ian

Because we care about each other?

Dani

Not untrue. But is that a reason to sit in a cafe together?

Ian

We could stand. Or, do robot moves.

Dani

(shaking head/laughing) So tell me about your day job. Let me guess: 11th and 12th grade AP English. You start your Moby Dick unit by dressing up as Ahab and lecturing in a weird New England accent.

Ian

Actually I dress up as the white whale, lie beached on my desk and speak only in whale song. *(Makes whale sounds for a moment; then warmly)* It feels so good to be here with you. Can we talk, Dani?

Dani

We are talking, Ian. *(just a tiny bit exasperated)* Unless we're both asleep and our dreams merged and this isn't really happening right now.

Ian

That happened to us once.

Dani

What? When? Actually, let's not --

Ian

In Big Sur.

Dani

(exhaling) Ah, yes. Before the fall.

Ian

Yep. We didn't even pitch a tent it was so hot, and we slept under those gorgeous whispering trees. And while I was dreaming about you, you were having your own special dreams about --

Dani

That all happened. But reminiscing is a habit I'm kinda trying to break, so...

Ian

I was just naming a moment of subconscious coupling. Is that a thing? *(beat)* Sorry, I'll stop.

Dani

(pause; searching for a topic) So tell me about your...neighborhood. What's your favorite food co-op?

Ian

Oh man -- metaphor alert. "Before the fall." I just got it.

Dani

It's good, right?

Ian

It was. Except our Eden was pale gold, not green.

Dani

Everything was so parched. And bright. Is it weird to have nostalgia for the drought? *(snapping to again)* Well, my coffee got cold, and we both know what *that* means. *(beat)* I'm glad we did this, I think. *(getting up to leave)*

Ian

Wait, cold coffee symbolism? You know there can always be more hot coffee! Wait, you're really leaving? *(beat)* I wanted to see if --

Dani

Yeah. I need to be somewhere soon.

Ian

You can't stay a little longer?

Dani

I feel strange. Like I'm telescoping in and out of time. It's probably just hormones. *(getting her things to go)*

Ian

Dani. Will you at least let me know whether you'd be open to --

Dani

I can't right now. Shit, I'm gonna be late.

At this moment, their friend Jonas bursts through the door of the cafe and slams the three of them into a group hug.

Dani

Jesus! Jonas! I thought you were hanging off a cliff somewhere in one of those nut harness things.

Jonas

Surprise -- my nuts are here! Cross Country coaches REUNION! Oh lord have I been looking forward to this. Are you really here for good? *(squeezing her)* Is this really happening? *(looking from Ian to Dani)* Do we all get each other back?

Ian

She's already trying to run away.

Dani

Sometimes people run away if they need to, Ian. *(caught in their embrace; to Jonas)* Why can't everyone be as adorable as you?

They sit (all in a row?); Jonas is massaging Dani's shoulders with friend affection.

Jonas

You're not going anywhere. Where are we drinking? *(whispered)* There are WAY too many laptop zombies in here.

Ian

(hopeful) Our place.

Dani

(to Jonas) I think your place could be considered a 'zone of avoidance.'

Jonas

Ah, but astronomers say there's something *massive* in the Zone of Avoidance.

Ian

According to Einstein, yes, and thank you.

Jonas

(dramatically) All galaxies eventually get sucked into it, even though *no one knows* exactly what's in there.

Dani

Oh, I think I've got a pretty good idea.

Ian

(encouragingly) They say the Zone of Avoidance also contains potato chips and sour cream.

Dani

That is truly compelling, but boys, I'm late for a thing. *(looking at phone)* Although I probably can't get in now. *(to Jonas)* Yoga next week? I'll call you.

Ian

I feel like doing acro yoga *right now*. Don't you, Jonas? *(they pick her up and carry her out as she expresses 'oh shit'-ness /conflicted happiness.)*

Dani

Shit.

Lights down as they exit; Cue "The Less I Know the Better" by Tame Impala.

Scene 2: Halloween 2015, San Francisco

Lights up on a Halloween dance party (Tame Impala song still playing). Jonas, Ian and Dani re-enter, laughing giddy happy, beers in hand. They're carrying her in the same manner, but now they all have Halloween stuff on; capes, hats, masks, or whatever works. (Optional but could be awesome/hilarious: Jonas and Ian are shirtless)

Ian
Do NOT leave us!

Jonas
Never. Leaving San Francisco doesn't mean I'm leaving you guys...Portland's just where my body's going. *(kind of as an aside)*
Plus you kids don't need a chaperone anymore.

Dani wiggles out of their arms, and the three get on the ground and start doing contact improv dance/yoga. Jonas rolls away to get more beer, leaving Ian and Dani on the floor together, where they come into close contact in some absurd way (like her lying on her back and him doing downward dog over her, for example). They've had big crushes on each other for a few years but neither has ever told the other. Everyone knows, though.

Dani
(After Jonas) What was that?

Ian
Hi there.

Dani
Hello, friend.

Ian
(pulls her up so they're standing close; he starts slow dancing with her) Hi.

Dani
(looking at a non-existent watch as she pulls away) Uh, hi. Wow, is it midnight already? Time for an ice bath!

Ian

I don't have a bathtub.

Dani

I do, so I'm gonna go home, fill it with ice, and get in it.

Ian

(nervous/scared, but unable to contain his desire anymore) Dani -- I want you to take me home with you.

Dani

Um, I don't *(doing air quotes)* 'take my guy friends home with me.'

Ian

No, not like that.

Dani

Like what, then? *(long beat as he looks at her with love-y eyes and caresses her face; drops her head)* Fuck.

Ian

(said again, more formally) I want to be with you. *(exhales)* I've been wanting to say that for a long time.

Dani

Look, Ian -- *(excited/terrified)* if we do this and it doesn't work out *(trails off)*...The most important thing is that we stay...*(gesturing to both of them, not finding words)* And are you even over --

Ian

Look, I can't lose you either. Like, ever. *(Beat)* I wouldn't have been ready a few months ago, but now --

Dani

I didn't think you were even close.

Ian

Heartbreak's receding in the rearview mirror...it's like, a speck. *(moving closer, caught up, and believing what he's saying)* I feel ready. I do.

Dani

(looking at his beer, then hers; puts hers down and pulls away, trying to be rational) And we work together.

Ian

I thought about that too.

Dani

Also, when you were born I was in the 7th --

Ian

Shhhhhh, I don't care. *(impulsively picking up a nearby pumpkin)* This is our pumpkin.

Dani

Maybe I should care. *(Regards the pumpkin and laughs)* Okay. *(pause)*
Fuck it.

Ian holds out the pumpkin, and they hold it between them. He leans over and kisses her for the first time (over the pumpkin), and it's good.

Dani

(looking up at him) Uh oh.

Ian

You are such a tender human. And I already love -- *(she cuts him off in the middle of the word)*

Dani

Do NOT.

Lights down as they kiss again; cue "Over the Ocean" by Here We Go Magic

Scene 3: A few weeks earlier in Fall 2015, Big Sur

Song is still playing as lights come up on Dani and Ian dressed in jeans, flannel shirts and flip flops (she's wearing one of his) sitting in camp chairs in front of a campfire (chairs a little way apart). (would cricket sounds here be cheesy or awesome?? i think awesome) They stare into fire, whittling sticks.

Dani

What's up with everyone going to bed? It is SO NICE OUT. Our friends are total losers.

Ian

Losers who ate all the pot chocolate? *(beat)* Anyway, it's still an un-digestible irony that I could love someone with such strength but only be able to put that love into action when we weren't together.

Dani

I know. I was 'so in love' with my college boyfriend the year I lived abroad -- I pined. I wrote letters so hard I got hand cramps. It felt so *real*. And then when I got back --

Ian

The reality was *no bueno*.

Dani

(after a pause) Why does it have to be so complicated?

Ian

Like the elephant seal couple we saw earlier. That did NOT look complicated.

Dani

They were just fucking with wild abandon right there on the beach, and it, like, wasn't weird. *(beat)* I mean, it was for me.

Ian

I bet they didn't need to process 'what it meant' afterwards either.

Dani

Do you think their seal pup will need therapy, though? You know, since it was watching. That part was kinda weird.

Ian

Maybe. *(beat)* I'd like to fuck someone with wild abandon. Just maybe not in direct sunlight.

Dani

And not on sand. I'm gonna say warm air in starlight would be ideal.

Ian

Like tonight.

Dani

Yeah, like right now. *(long, pregnant pause)*

Ian

The question is with who. *(another long pause)*

DaniIan

(simultaneously) I think you mean with whom. I mean 'whom.'

Ian

Grammar dorks! Oh god Dani, I love that we can talk about pretty much anything.

Dani

(Gets up and stands near fire, hugging herself/rubbing her arms)
Talking is...the best. Two linguistically inclined people in the woods together...what are you gonna do?

Ian

A bunch of stuff with their *lingue*. Get it? *(wagging his tongue)*

Dani

Yep -- got that one.

Ian

I saw one of those trees earlier where the trunk's bifurcated so it's like upside down legs, *(holds up two fingers to demonstrate)* and there's a knot right in the middle that looks a lot like --

Dani

Okay. Um --

Ian
What?

Dani
Really?

Ian
It's just been so long. I'm sorry.

Dani
Is that tree nymph nearby? Want me to leave you two alone?

Ian
Not really. I don't trust myself.

Dani
You're so weird.

Ian
I am. I think I'm also pretty confused. (*getting up and standing next to her at the fire*)

Dani
(*without looking at him*) Well, I truly hope that the next pussy your tongue laps gently against is not made out of bark. That might even hurt. Goodnight Ian.

Dani exits, leaving Ian standing alone

Cue [some song by some band] as lights fade [Do Me, Baby by Prince???)

Scene 4: September 2013, a school in San Francisco

In the faculty room. Ian and Dani awkwardly & wordlessly take turns getting coffee. The peripheral, dawning mutual interest is apparent/palpable.

Dani
Half and half?

Ian
Yeah, thanks. *(beat)* Can I -- is that *The Wallcreeper*? Sorry, I'm subbing in seventh grade science today. Rocks. *(puts out his hand)*
Ian.

Dani
Dani. Wait. *(lighting up)* Jonas's friend? I mean soulmate?

Ian
Yes!

Dani
I think we have an all-time favorite human in common. And yeah, it is. Have you read it?

Ian
It's completely insane.

Dani
Who knew a miscarriage in an opening sentence could be so fucking funny? Oh my god, sorry, I don't usually drop 'fucks' at school.

Ian
But it is. I mean, miscarriages aren't funny in real life obviously.

Dani
Yeah, no. Well, let me know if you need anything. I could have brought in my rock collection for your class. Extreme nerding out usually wins them over.

Ian

Check! Already brought my own.

Dani

Really? Interesting.

Ian

Well, see you at lunch I hope. (*goofy earnest smile, head nodding, and dorky wave before exiting*) Nice to meet you, Dani.

Dani

You too. Good luck today.

Ian

(*Spilling on his hand as he walks out, fumbling with coffee and his tie*) Ouch, hot! Bye. (*exits*)

Dani

(*to self*) Absolutely not.

She watches him with interest and a raised eyebrow as he walks out the door. A second later Jonas bursts into the faculty room, singing "Happy" by Pharrell

Jonas

Wait, did you guys just meet? You're gonna be seeing of lot of his legs coming up real soon.

Dani

Excuse me?

Jonas

Newest running coach. His shorts are even shorter than mine.

Dani

Interesting.

Jonas

You know I got my minister's license, right?

Dani

You're insane. (*beat*) I have class right now, but after school? Golden Gate Park?

Jonas
I know the perfect glade.

Dani
Done. How old is he, anyway?

Jonas
Enough.

Lights

Outro song: "Coffee" by Sylvan Esso (maybe...or maybe something else I haven't figured out yet)

FINIS