

*AFTER HOURS*

A one-act play  
by Rebecca Kane

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### Cast of Characters

VERONICA: Female or nonbinary, teen  
BARON: Male or nonbinary, early to mid twenties  
ZOE: Female or nonbinary, early to mid twenties  
GABE: Male or nonbinary, mid twenties to early thirties  
JESSE: Male, mid twenties to early thirties

### Place:

A concert fairground somewhere in South Florida

### Time:

Late summer, modern day

**This play comes with a content warning for sexual assault.**

*[Lights up on a muddy concert fairground. A couple run-down buses and vans are parked near a chain link fence. One vehicle is graffitied with the words "After Hours" and another has "The Intimates" professionally printed on it. Nearby stages and beer tents create a dull roar.]*

*BARON enters from his After Hours bus with a red Solo cup, staring at his phone. He wears tight clothes and maybe a bit of eye makeup, but generally tries hard to look like he's not trying at all.*

*As he enters, VERONICA emerges from The Intimates' bus. She has far too much eye makeup smeared all over the place. Her clothes are in disarray. She might be inebriated. She scrambles for her phone and starts to cry. BARON does not want to see her.]*

VERONICA *[on phone]*:

Laurie? Can you hear me? Lauren! I don't know where I am. Where are you? The parking lot? I don't know where... Laurie?

*[Her phone dies. She sobs.]*

BARON:

Are you okay?

VERONICA:

My phone died. My ride is in the parking lot but I don't know how to get there. I don't even know how I got here.

BARON:

There's like four parking lots here.

*[She's crying so hard she has to sit. BARON can barely contain his annoyance.]*

Were you close to I-4?

VERONICA:

The highway? We were the farthest lot from it. We got here kind of late and--

BARON:

Alright. Walk all the way along this fence, take a right when it ends, and then follow it past the ticket booth things. Your parking lot is the first one you see. Do you want to use my phone?

VERONICA:

Yeah, just to tell her to wait for me, but... her number's in my phone. I don't know it.

BARON:

Of course.

VERONICA:

I'll just... call someone.

*[She takes the phone he offers and walks away from him.]*

VERONICA *[on phone]*:

Mom? It's me. My phone died and I can't find Laurie. Do you have her number anywhere? ... No, mom, we're gonna leave in like two minutes. I had to go back in, I left something-- ... okay. One-five-eight-- Okay. *[she hangs up and goes to texting.]* Hey, are you Baron Wick?

BARON *[hesitating]*:

Yes.

VERONICA:

I really love your band. It's like, not everyone in this scene knows After Hours, but I've been following you since your first ever EP. I saw you when you came to Orlando last year. Backbooth?

BARON:

Backbooth. Don't remind me.

VERONICA:

Your whole set was so great tonight. There was some kind of sound issue in Orlando—

BARON:

There basically was no sound in Orlando.

VERONICA:

Yeah. That sucked. Thank you, this was so nice of you. I'm Veronica, by the way.

BARON:

Please don't tell your friend whose phone you were using.

VERONICA:

I won't. Thank you. Wow, you must be so... *[She starts to dry-heave. BARON is torn between helping her and keeping his hands off. He decides on hands-off. It passes with no puke. She fixes her hair.]* Sorry. I was gonna say you must be so happy. It's the last stop on your tour. You should be partying.

BARON:

This may shock you, but I'm not a huge partier. Your friend is driving, right?

VERONICA:

What?

BARON:

You seem a little... not okay to drive.

VERONICA:

We don't... Laurie's mom drove us.

*[He takes the phone back. She exits. He moves to yell after her or follow her or something, but knocks his beer over by accident.]*

BARON:

Fuck everything.

*[GABE appears from the same shadows BARON did, two beers in hand.]*

GABE:

That sounds time-consuming.

BARON:

Double-fisting? Impressive.

GABE:

Well, one of them was going to be for Jesse. But I think you earned it.

BARON:

For what? Remembering my own lyrics on stage tonight? For the first time ever in five years?

GABE:

For helping orphans find their way home.

BARON:

Oh. Jesus. That girl needs adult supervision. And a glass of water.

GABE:

Fans are adorable but being that close to them gives me hives.

BARON:

That wasn't a fan.

GABE:

She knew you.

BARON:

She barely knows our name. She recognized me from half a wet dream.

GABE:

Better get used to it.

BARON:

Yeah, right. Hey, is Jesse in your bus?

GABE:

I think so.

BARON:

Anyone else?

GABE:

No. They're still at the beer tent.

BARON:

Shit.

GABE:

What?

BARON:

How long have you been watching that whole exchange? With me and that girl?

GABE:

I don't know. First thing I heard was something about Orlando.

BARON:

How ironic.

GABE:

Look, don't think too hard about it. Getting drunk outside our bus is not the weirdest thing I've ever seen a fan do.

BARON:

Yeah, nothing surprises me anymore.

GABE:

*[From his pocket, he shows a mini liquor bottle]* Speaking of... A kid brought us this tonight. How adorable, right?

BARON:

"Serpent's Tongue Vodka."

GABE:

I wonder if she got a fake ID just to buy us some vodka for this reference.

BARON:

Did you name the song after the vodka or did they make you your own because you're so famous now?

GABE:

I wish.

BARON:

Sorry. Don't answer that. It was trying to be a joke but it had no punchline.

GABE:

That's fine. It's the only song on the album I didn't write. I kind of hate playing it.

BARON:

I write all of our songs but I kind of hate playing them anyway. [off the awkward pause] "Trying to be a joke but having no punchline" is the title of my future biography. That or "The Worst-Smelling Twenty-Three Year Old Ever."

GABE:

Hey, listen. We made a shower, kind of. Or, Mike did. Our guitarist? He's crafty like that. If there's no shower wherever we go, he just makes one.

BARON:

Thanks. If I bathed at some point this week, I bet I would be easier to live with.

GABE:

Let me know. I'm going back to the beer tent. This is already warm and I feel like Jesse's in a mood, so I'll get him a cold one. He hasn't left the bus all night.

[GABE exits, just as ZOE enters from the After Hours bus. ZOE looks marginally more put together than anyone else in the play. She has a little notebook with her.]

ZOE:

I've talked to him over P.B.R. every night since Cleveland but I've forgotten his name.

BARON:

That's Gabe. He writes better than I do. Hey, Zoe.

ZOE:

Hey, Baron.

BARON:

The Intimates have a secret shower.

ZOE:

Cool. How long were you talking to Gabe? Did they talk to Ryan today? Do they like the studio we're going to?

BARON:

We didn't talk about any of that. We were just talking about stuff we hate.

ZOE:

Wow, how did you ever stop?

BARON:

Did you notice that every single person in The Intimates is kind of weird?

ZOE:

Yes, I have eyes.

BARON:

I feel like they got bullied in high school and now they pierce their faces and think that means they're living a different life.

ZOE:

You literally just quoted "Serpent's Tongue." The first verse, if I'm not mistaken.

BARON:

You're not. There's no escaping that song.

ZOE:

BARON:

You know, that song is shitty but the rest of the album's fine. More than fine.

ZOE:

I would agree. That's why Jesse is splitting vocals with me, after all.

BARON:

When is that happening again?

ZOE:

About fifteen hours from now. Did you bother looking at your boarding pass?

BARON:

Hey, Zoe, I have an idea.

ZOE:

Oh God.

BARON:

Snakes. Just in huge cages on the stage. Moving around the whole time. Or I could wear one.

ZOE:

I don't know if we could pull it off. Jesse could wear one. Are we talking about a music video or an onstage thing?

BARON:

How about both.

ZOE:

As a metaphor for what?

BARON:

I haven't gotten there yet.

ZOE:

Get there and then come to me with more ideas. Maybe Ryan will find us a snake budget.

BARON:

I have another idea.

ZOE:

Go get a beer, seriously. I can't hear any more.

BARON:

I can't get drunk, I have another idea. Well, not an idea, but a question.

ZOE:

No.

BARON:

Let's say you want to work with someone on a project, because they generally make good stuff and it's a lot like what you work on, but they maybe just did something bad? Like, illegal bad? And not just illegal bad, but morally bad?

ZOE:

What did you do?

BARON:

I didn't do anything!

ZOE:

Who did?

BARON:

No one. This is totally theoretical.

ZOE:

Baron, did Jesse do something?

BARON:

No, listen, I'm not totally sure--

ZOE:

Because if he did, you have to tell me. Jesse may have just gotten sober, but that doesn't mean he won't do something stupid again. If you know for sure that he did something--

BARON:

I don't know for sure.

ZOE:

Then don't bring stuff like your feelings and ideas to me until we are done with this song.

BARON:

You used to love my feelings and ideas.

ZOE:

Are you going to start writing a song anytime soon or should I get Gabe involved so we can have a lyricist who delivers on time?

BARON:

I have a whole plane ride. Add in a shuttle ride to the airport and we're good--

ZOE:

You know that we've only had one single break thirty on the alternative chart and they've had two that got into the top ten over the last month, right? Kerrang magazine features them every single month. They had a full size poster in April. We need to do this song, no matter how much Jesse is freaking you out.

BARON:

He's not freaking me out... more than usual.

ZOE:

You're a terrible liar but we can talk about it later.

BARON:

Thank you--

ZOE:

Because I wanted to give you a couple notes.

BARON:

No. Not again. Ohmygod.

*[He covers his ears, singing over her.]*

ZOE:

Would you cut the theatrics? It's not much. Seriously. It was great overall. It's just tempo stuff, but if I don't say it--

BARON:

Then you'll tattletale on me and Ryan will call and talk about things he doesn't understand in one super huge voicemail because you insisted on some manager who doesn't know how to fucking read music and probably manages actors or some shit most of the time.

ZOE:

Yes. Exactly. I'll tattletale on you because you don't listen to me unless I scream at you in the voice-of-god mic for spilling your beer on me.

BARON:

We have a whole plane ride from Fort Lauderdale to Midway in the morning. Please.

ZOE:

You'll take a Xanax and fall asleep.

BARON:

Do you want another Ryan voicemail explaining the importance of vocal rest again?

*[ZOE rips a page out of her notebook and hands it to him. Her voice is a little softer now.]*

ZOE:

I'm going to the tent. Do you want a beer?

BARON:

Yeah.

ZOE:

P.B.R.?

BARON:

Sure.

*[He stuffs the note in his pocket, ZOE exits to the beer tent. BARON goes over to The Intimates' bus. He knocks and waits. JESSE emerges. He is every inch the mysterious artist frontman, very stoned, with a halo of*

*smoke leaking out around him in the doorway.]*

JESSE:

`Sup, brother.

BARON:

Jesse, I was just wondering...

JESSE:

Shit, me too. I was thinking, we're apparently parked in Podunk, Florida, for the sake of our art, right?

BARON:

Yes.

JESSE:

Where are you from?

BARON:

Chicago.

JESSE:

Chicago proper?

BARON:

Evanston.

JESSE:

You know I'm from New Jersey, right? Newark?

BARON:

I've heard it in an interview or two. Or five.

JESSE:

So this swamp we're in right now kind of wishes it was it was Miami, but it's not, it's just outside of it. Rotting.

BARON:

Sure.

JESSE:

We think this place is just this fringe, devoid of culture, but really, it's nothing new. We went from one outskirt to another outskirt. On purpose. To sing songs. Isn't that a weird ironic art in itself?

BARON [*"get me the fuck out of here"*]:

Wow.

JESSE:

Wow indeed. We always come back to something we know has no use for us because it's easiest.

BARON [*sarcastic*]:

Very insightful. I never thought of it that way. Not since seventh grade at least.

JESSE:

Exactly.

BARON:

Jesse, can I ask you a weird question?

JESSE:

It would be a pleasure.

BARON:

Do you know that girl that came by a while ago?

JESSE:

Which one?

BARON:

That pretty... young-looking one. With all the makeup and hair.

JESSE:

Your singer? Zoe?

BARON:

No. What the fuck.

JESSE:

The YouTube one?

BARON:

Maybe?

JESSE:

You know, I can't say for sure. They're all pretty; all women are beautiful in my book, so that's not gonna help me remember. But everything blurs these days. I can't remember where I stick my dick or leave my heart. Know what I mean?

BARON:

Absolutely.

JESSE:

You work too hard. Take a break, my man.

*[JESSE exits back into his bus. BARON plops on the ground and takes out his phone, pulls up YouTube, searches a few words. As he scrolls through videos, VERONICA appears on stage in the vlogs he pulls up, perfect makeup and hair.]*

VERONICA:

Hi, guys! It's Ronnie, as usual. Merry Christmas, happy holidays, all that. I've been super excited to do this Hot Topic haul for a while, there's all these great Christmas sales. Obviously the star of the show is this Fall Out Boy hoodie I got for only—

*[BARON skips forward in the video. He stops when she holds up a t-shirt for The Intimates.]*

VERONICA:

--And I got two cool t-shirts for the guys, you know, my literal favorites! This one is really cool, it has Jesse's face on it. I'm never taking it off my body. I heard they're going to be at the Freakout Tour this summer, I'm super excited, I was already planning on going because I also kind of wanted to see Shark Tank and No Vital Sign, and I guess I want to see After Hours, but you all remember what happened when I tried to go see them in Orlando with the sound system disaster, I'll post the link to that tour diary in--

[BARON opens a new video.]

VERONICA:

Hi, guys! It's Ronnie, as usual. I hope your day is going as great as mine! So, I made this whole Tumblr post about how I wanted to go the Freakout Tour with The Intimates SO BADLY but I didn't have any money because I was saving to go up to Jacksonville when Black Veil Brides goes there. It wasn't a huge deal, because I've seen The Intimates before, but I started to feel super bummed because I think they're probably going to go back into the studio after this tour and I won't get to see them for a while. But then today mom said that because I got straight A's on my midterms, she got me tickets! Yay! She didn't say this, but I think it's also because I've had such a hard time in school in general. I didn't think that being a freshman would be so hard, I mean, I didn't think high school could be any worse than middle school—

[BARON pauses the video, absorbs it for a minute, then reclines until he is fully lying in the grass. GABE reenters, barely balancing three Solo cups. He crouches to hand one to BARON.]

BARON:

How did you know?

GABE:

A wild guess after knowing you for all of two months.

[BARON basically chugs it.]

GABE:

A penny?

BARON:

What?

GABE:

Sorry, penny for your thoughts.

BARON:

Don't apologize. You sound like me.

[GABE starts to drink one of his two beers.]

BARON:

Can I ask you something personal? You can either answer or punch me in the face for even asking.

GABE:

I'm not really the punching type. Not when my hands are full of beer, at least.

BARON:

A handful of beer seems to have the opposite effect on me. Wanna switch?

[GABE laughs genuinely. A nice moment.]

BARON:

I need to ruin this nice moment now.

GABE:

Are those your specialties? Songwriting and moment-ruining?

BARON:

Just some of my many gifts. [Pause] I thought Jesse was sober now.

GABE:

Is that a question?

BARON:

I'm sorry. Forget this conversation. I will stay on this ground for the rest of the night and never move again.

GABE:

He doesn't do anything crazy anymore. I promise. He just has an occasional beer or joint to take the edge off. It's not like what it was last year. Why? Did you see him do anything weird? Besides the usual weirdness.

BARON:

I guess not. [GABE starts to exit.] Gabe, wait, you mentioned something about a shower earlier?

GABE:

Yeah. Want me to show you?

BARON:

Please.

GABE:

Give me a few minutes. I have to deal with certain divas. Singers... What can you do?

BARON:

Yeah. The worst.

*[GABE exits into his bus. BARON sits against his bus with his beer. He takes out the notes ZOE gave him, maybe reads one bullet, and puts it aside. He opens up the video he was watching earlier on his phone. VERONICA appears again in her vlog.]*

VERONICA:

High school is actually better than middle school in a lot of ways. I can pick more of my classes and there's not as many weird rules about our dress code. It just seems like I'm going to be in school forever. I think that's why I like these bands so much. They talk so much about feeling that way and making it out somehow. Like I saw Jesse talking in an interview about how hard it was to get out of East Brunswick... that's exactly how I feel about Palmetto Park. It makes me think, like, we're so different, but he totally gets me. He'd care. Or he would if he knew me. And his lyrics... they're the best I've ever heard. *[BARON finishes his beer]* That's why I don't mind spending so much money on their merch at Hot Topic. They deserve it. Anyway, I also got this new bandeau top with a galaxy pattern—

*[In the video, she takes her top off. Startled, BARON half-drops half-throws his phone as GABE comes out of his bus, half-lidded, holding a couple towels and washcloths. VERONICA disappears.]*

GABE:

My bad. Didn't mean to scare you.

BARON:

No, it's all me.

GABE:

Sorry it took so long. Jesse's search for the meaning of life continues every time he smokes.

BARON:

Did he figure it out?

GABE:

Yeah, he said it was 'hooking up with girls or whatever.' Do you wanna go take a shower?

BARON:

Yes.

*[They get up and take a walk down the fence.]*

BARON:

How did your set go tonight?

GABE:

The usual.

BARON:

What's your usual?

GABE:

We huddle up before we start to talk about what we're gonna do that night. Then I do what we say, consistently, through the whole set. Jesse starts talking too much between songs, and then Mike thinks he can do whatever he wants, so he ends up kicking over half the equipment.

BARON:

I thought that was all planned.

GABE:

It looks planned if they all derail at the same time. I'm the only one who doesn't, so I look stupid.

BARON:

You don't look stupid. You just look chill.

GABE:

One of my many gifts.

BARON:

Yeah. Did you go meet kids?

GABE:

Fans? Nah, not tonight. They were creeping me out. Don't give me that face, it's too much sometimes. They kept trying to climb over the barrier today. They knocked it down last week, you know, in Atlanta.

BARON:

I was wondering if you had met a specific girl tonight...

GABE:

I can't go around meeting specific girls all the time. It's overwhelming. Who are you thinking about?

BARON:

No, it's dumb... just because I know there was a girl here tonight who had made these videos about seeing these bands.

GABE:

Are you talking about that girl with the clothing channel and tour vlog? The one that came early with the collage poster she and her friends made?

BARON:

I think?

GABE:

Yeah, she tried to get into our sound check. We came out and talked to her. Mostly so she would leave everyone alone for a minute.

BARON:

Was Jesse with you? Did he talk to her?

GABE:

Of course. For way longer than I would have. A solid thirty seconds. Now she can die happy. Did she come up to you too?

BARON:

Just in passing. She seemed upset.

GABE:

Baron, Jesse didn't do anything wrong this time. Maybe he flirted with her a little bit. It probably just blew her mind so much she started crying. I'm sure she wishes he tried to jump her bones, but that would be--

BARON:

Why would she wish that? Why would a girl want her idol to do something shady like that?

GABE:

Any girl here would want to swipe her V-card on a rockstar. Even if his makeup is better than hers.

*[GABE is pulling up a video on his phone.]*

BARON:

I don't think all girls would.

GABE:

Maybe not all girls, but she would.

*[GABE shows the video to BARON. VERONICA appears again.]*

VERONICA:

Hi, guys! It's Ronnie, as usual. Today's video is something people have been requesting for so long, and I swore I was never going to make it, but I caved... I'm reviewing all my favorite band fan fictions! I went through and read all the ones you guys keep posting in the comments, and I have to say, some of you guys are total pervs! So many of these are, like, NC-17. Normally I would be really grossed out, but it's about The Intimates, so... I mean, who hasn't imagined themselves in bed with Jesse, right? Like, more than once. Okay, more like... all the time. Like in class. Or on the bus. Or--

*[The video stops. She disappears.]*

BARON:

She can't be older than fifteen. She doesn't know what she's talking about.

GABE:

I say the same shit now that I said when I was fifteen.

BARON:

Gabe, it's illegal.

GABE:

Good thing it didn't actually happen then. Jesse's not that kind of creep. He just talked to her.

BARON:

Why do I still feel gross?

GABE:

Probably has something to do with not taking a real shower this month.

BARON:

Oh, fuck. I'm so sorry, dude. I have no idea how anyone can stand to be near me.

GABE:

You don't smell bad. I was making a joke. I do that sometimes.

BARON:

Still. I'd kill a man for a shower. I haven't had a real one since... July? What month are we in?

GABE:

August. Don't ask me what Mike did. He just makes it work. He cares a lot about being clean. I should probably care more, right?

BARON:

We're all disgusting. Why should you care?

GABE:

Hooking up with girls or whatever.

*[They've walked to the "shower." GABE sets it up. It's just a hose run through a chain link fence over a very large plastic tub.]*

BARON:

This doesn't look like it'll make me cleaner.

GABE:

You couldn't possibly be filthier.

*[BARON throws his shirt and pants off.]*

BARON:

True. I'm desperate. *[He jumps in and turns the water on.]*  
You're a lifesaver.

GABE:

Thanks. I got next. *[GABE turns away.]* You can take your boxers off if you need.

BARON:

Nah. I'll call this doing my laundry too. Hey, Gabe. I think you're really cool and all.

GABE:

"And all" is never a good segue.

BARON:

Whatever Jesse did with that girl seems off, though.

GABE:

This isn't middle school anymore. We can still be bros even if you think my singer is an asshole. You also seem to be the only person worried about this, so if you don't want to be my friend, you don't have to.

BARON:

Nah. I'm fine.

GABE:

We can make it through the recording and not talk to each other.

BARON:

That would really bum me out.

GABE:

Cool. Talking about Jesse's sexuality makes my dick really soft, so--

BARON:

I'll keep that in mind. [*Awkward pause. BARON doesn't have much else to talk about.*] Did you ever hook up with someone who came to one of your shows?

GABE:

No.

BARON:

Not even back in Jersey?

GABE:

Nope. Did you?

BARON:

No.

GABE:

Have you ever been told you're a bad liar?

BARON:

I mean, I tried once. I couldn't get it up. I said I was drunk and tired, and I was, but I was twenty and drunk and tired every single day, and I still managed to have sex sometimes. And she was cute, she had that whole purple lipstick thing going on. I managed to get it going, barely, like I got inside... but it didn't last long. She said it was fine and acted cool but then when I tried to go to sleep she went to the bathroom and cried.

GABE:

Where was that?

BARON:

Starville Ballroom. East Brunswick or something? Near the airport, sort of? I was pretty wasted.

GABE:

We were at that show.

BARON:

Really?! ... Oh yeah. You were.

GABE:

Did your purple lipstick girl hang by the door and bar a lot?

BARON:

Yeah. She would not even touch the crowd.

GABE:

I remember her.

BARON:

No shit? Yeah, she was hot, right?

GABE:

Not really my type.

BARON:

And of course I messed it up like only I can. Okay, your turn with the third world shower.

GABE:

It's really hard to get your back in that thing.

BARON:

Yeah, I noticed.

GABE:

Stay in. I'll get it for you.

*[Long pause. GABE strips.]*

BARON:

I'm sorry. Dude. I don't...

GABE:

Not at all?

BARON:

I'm sorry.

GABE:

So those antics with your bandmates on stage?

BARON:

I mean, Zoe's there, too.

GABE:

Didn't you say to that one zine that everyone should be open  
"above the waist?"

BARON:

Sorry.

GABE:

What did you think I meant to do by taking you here?

BARON:

I didn't think anything except I want to wash my hair! Is this  
usually how you corner straight guys?

GABE:

Oh yeah. I'm the asshole. Learn to take a fucking hint.

*[GABE exits. BARON scrambles out of the  
"tub." He stumbles for his phone and shoots  
a text. He starts putting his clothes on,  
soaking wet. He stumbles with his phone  
accidentally brings up a video on his phone  
from a recently opened window. It's  
VERONICA, in the same state she left The  
Intimates' van in. She recorded this video  
on her phone, in a parking lot.]*

VERONICA [vlog]:

Hi, guys. It's Ronnie. I think I'm going to delete this  
tomorrow. I don't feel so good. I drank a lot tonight. I  
really hate Angry Orchard. Something bad happened tonight at  
the tour. I don't know if I'll be coming back to Freakout again  
any time soon, or anything like it. The thing is, just... be  
really careful who you trust. Sometimes you think you can, but  
we don't know these people. We don't know anybody, really.  
Sometimes these guys lie. And sometimes when you say no they  
don't listen. I wonder if I should tell you who got me drunk

and all that... I'll probably go to the mall and do another haul tomorrow. Or later this week. I don't know. Bye, love you all.

BARON:

Fuck! Tell me!

*[ZOE enters, with a pile of clothes.]*

ZOE:

You just asked for a towel, but I figured you'd need a change.

BARON:

You know me too well.

*[BARON starts changing into something dry.]*

ZOE:

What'd you do?

BARON:

I'm sorry.

ZOE:

Are we making this song with The Intimates?

BARON:

We probably have a better shot of making something with Jesse than Gabe, which is totally fucked up for reasons I can't even put into words right now.

ZOE:

That's not possible. They're a package deal. If Gabe's not there, no one will write anything for them. He's their version of you.

BARON:

It doesn't make sense. We have nothing to do with them. How can all these people say we're in the same genre? We sound nothing alike. I'm trying to write about finding the love of your life even if you have to crawl on your hands and knees through shit to do it. They're writing about vodka vomit and whatever. How is that all under the same pop punk umbrella?

ZOE:

They know people at Kerrang magazine.

BARON:

What the fuck's a Kerrang? Whatever it is, we don't need it. We'll be fine. I have an idea.

ZOE:

Puppets again?

BARON:

Fire.

ZOE:

I barely trust you with a lighter, so large scale pyro effects are probably out of the question.

BARON:

Is there a way to light a person on fire completely and for them to make it out just fine? Like, a suit or something, with some kind of chemical powder on it and it prevents the fire from lasting too long or spreading. We get someone who's an amazing dancer. Girl or guy, I don't care. We put him or her in a suit of some kind, and they dance around us for the whole song. Beautiful choreography, so people think that's the point. Then we reach the last chorus. At the start of it, we light the dancer on fire. It crawls up until the dancer is totally consumed. And just as we finish up, the fire's out. And he spins a few times, maybe smoking a little bit. Credits roll.

ZOE:

Credits won't roll for a music video.

BARON:

Let's start this trend.

ZOE:

Get dressed. Then go to bed. We have to start leaving for the airport in a few hours. [*He finishes changing and drying off. She looks away.*] What happened with Gabe?

BARON:

I'm sorry.

ZOE:

You keep apologizing. Have you ever tried just not doing stupid stuff?

BARON:

I'm not the one doing stupid stuff!

ZOE:

Except pissing off their lyricist.

BARON:

He also plays bass.

ZOE:

Idiot. You don't know shit about Gabe. He writes the songs and he plays rhythm guitar. Just like you. Except when Jesse gives him notes, he listens.

BARON:

At least I didn't rape anyone tonight!

*[A pause. ZOE is actively deciding whether or not to believe him.]*

ZOE:

Fuck off. Jesse doesn't do that.

BARON:

There was this girl, she's... her name is... *[He reaches for it. No luck.]* She's this fan with a blog.

ZOE:

She's no one.

BARON:

Yeah, but he did something to her.

ZOE:

Prove it.

BARON:

Oh sure, with what crime scene investigation team? Let me whip out a jury and a courtroom. Zoe, why would I make this up?

ZOE:

Because you think Jesse's pretentious as shit.

BARON:

I feel the same way about Billie Joe Armstrong! I'm not calling him a rapist! Wait, just... watch this... *[He's looking for Veronica's video on his phone.]* Hang on... video not found... okay, but where's her... where did her profile go? Okay, it says "Video not available because the profile associated with it has been deleted" but I just need like, two minutes...

*[He looks around, as if expecting her to appear onstage again. She does not.]*

ZOE:

If this is how you're gonna be, don't bother coming to the studio in Chicago tomorrow. Maybe when we get there, it's best if we just go our separate ways.

BARON:

Wait, like just for Chicago? Or what?

*[ZOE exits. He continues changing clothes. The night sky is faintly turning light. He makes his way back to his camp, then gives The Intimates' van one good kick on the side. He dents it pretty well and hurts his foot even more. The door opens just as BARON lowers himself to the ground.]*

*JESSE emerges. The brooding has been replaced by a high, but it's unclear if this is natural energy or an amphetamine of some kind. He is laughing at something on his phone.]*

JESSE:

Bruh. Your real name is Brent Vaughn?

BARON:

Yep. Brent Nathan Vaughn.

JESSE:

That kind of rolls off the tongue. Why didn't you just keep it?

BARON:

None of your fucking business.

*[JESSE sits on the ground beside BARON.]*

BARON:

Spare me, please.

JESSE:

No, listen. I like to pride myself as the kind of man who has just a few very good friends. I don't like to bother with having endless acquaintances.

BARON:

Then you must be having tons of fun in the entertainment industry.

JESSE:

Look, I feel you. Being on this tour hasn't been the easiest spiritual journey ever. It stifles the creative process. Sound check is like, thirty seconds. *If* you get one, *if* your stage is set up on time. And if it is, it makes these terrible creaking sounds like it might collapse at any moment. You want to jump around and have fun and interact with everyone you can reach, but you can't, because when you were in Omaha, all you did was walk too far stage left and then there's a hole in the floor.

BARON:

And a fine. Like it's our fault.

JESSE:

And if you have any new ideas or feelings, anything creative at all, it gets shot down for some safety bullshit. I wanted to climb on the...

*[He points vaguely upwards.]*

BARON:

Lighting truss?

JESSE:

Anything that will take me higher.

BARON:

Ugh.

JESSE:

And god, I just said the word "fire" once to my manager when we were talking about effects, and he just... I feel very restricted doing these fests sometimes. And brother, we've been doing it together. Right next to each other. Parallel stages for months.

BARON:

Which cut my audience in half.

JESSE:

Is that why a sense a wall between us? Because you're on the cusp, my friend. You're almost there. I know the feeling. And you have what it takes. I've known since the moment I saw you in the Starville Ballroom.

BARON:

You remember East Brunswick?

JESSE:

Like it was yesterday. You guys had just decided that you would even be called that—After Hours. The bar was so empty by the time I got there to see you play, all I could get was vodka in water. It made me feel young again. You were so lost in the music, in your own creative process... I was so jealous. And when you came off stage, you had this beautiful creature hanging off you. She found her way to the front and did not leave until she got her hands on you. She had this dark purple lipstick and this ethereal way about her... her energy was timeless, magical, young...

BARON:

You notice youth in pretty girls, don't you?

JESSE:

I just thought she was interesting. I talked to her for a while that night--

BARON:

Of course you did.

JESSE:

--While we waited for you. And then you just disappeared together. So mysterious.

*[Pause as Jesse ponders the mystery.]*

BARON:

She had a bracelet. No stamps. I checked.

JESSE:

Her brother was the bouncer. She got in for free. Sure, it was kind of under the table. It's no one's fault. We don't know much about someone unless we truly know them. Age is part of that. It's just such a shame it has to happen in my home, in Jersey--

BARON:

YOU'RE FROM CONNECTICUT, ASSHOLE! You're not from Newark, you're from Greenwich, Connecticut! You've never lived closer to an airport than a country club! Why the fuck do you say you're from New Jersey anyway? There's shitty parts of Connecticut too! Why do you have to lie? Do you think Kerrang would still be sucking your dick if they knew you were lying this entire time about where you're from?

JESSE:

That's part of the mystery, isn't it? It doesn't have to be, though. We could call an editorial associate from my phone right now if you want... Brent.

*[JESSE waits for a response from BARON, then goes to his van. He comes out with VERONICA's other shoe.]*

JESSE:

Oh hey, if she comes back for this, will you give it to her? I would, but... you know how fans are.

*[JESSE disappears into his van. BARON lets his phone alarm go off and fade away.]*

*Eventually VERONICA shows up, on the other side of the fence, faded and blurry, as if through a screen. She's a hungover mess. BARON cannot make eye contact.]*

VERONICA:

Hey.

BARON:

Hey.

VERONICA:

I needed my other shoe.

*[A pause. BARON throws it to her over the fence. She stares at him while she puts it on in silence. Then she exits.]*

*BARON's phone vibrates. Group text with all members of The Intimates and After Hours:]*

ZOE [text]:

See you all at the front desk of River North Studios at ten AM.

GABE [text]:

Got it

JESSE [text]:

I'll be there

*[BARON stares at his phone as it continues to vibrate with messages. His alarm goes off again. The sun is up. End of play.]*