

The Parts We Play

We cannot kiss because there is
One wife
One husband and
Four kids
between
Us.

We can smile and pretend that we are friends.

We can go to bed with our spouses, close our eyes, and do with them what we wish
we could do to each other.

We can play.

“Does Jennifer care you’re not having dinner at home, again?”

He’s hunched over the menu in our booth at the back. He thinks about it.

“It’s a work dinner. You’re technically a colleague.”

I raise a hand at the waiter to tell him we’re ready. I think about it.

“But she must know the cast doesn’t have dinner together after every rehearsal.”

His eyes stay on the entrées. His face starts to flush like the red leather we’re sinking
into.

“And what does Jay think? And what does Jay know?”

Someone young and tired comes with a little pad and pen.

We order with our heads down.

“The usual.”

Fleshy tartars arrive even though the director is funny about us eating anything raw
before opening night. Yet, we are feeling rebellious. We’re not leads, but we’re
needed.

“I wish we got to play lovers.”

I sip some tap water.

“So we could kiss on stage?”

He gently kicks my shoe under the table and my leg goes numb.

“That would make this easier.”

A wind bursts deep into the bistro as some twenty-somethings approach the bar.

“That would make this hell.”

If we were younger we would do it.

If it was back when what we wanted was not a tiny sub-category to what we did.

Back when we were rising stars. (So we thought).

Him, during his run at The Globe.

Me, washing my hair with mango shampoo on every screen from here to
Timbuktu.

Who would have thought we’d end up here.

“Did you get a call-back for that new sitcom?”

His laugh is hollow. Television hasn’t called us back in years.

“Do you ever feel like our lives have been one endless audition? Everything we say,
everything we do, wear, swear, care about...it’s all just us trying to get the role?”

He looks behind me, not at me, but this time he doesn’t laugh.

“I don’t know if it’s the role that we want. Or just to feel chosen.”

My appetite comes and goes. I speed up my fork so we can finish at the same time.

“Maybe we’ll get something good after the play.”

He cleans his plate with bread from a basket placed a little too close to the table’s
edge.

“Maybe.” Maybe not.

For the first time,

He reaches under the table and pushes five fingertips into my thigh.

“We’ll have to see what happens.”

Something about tonight feels different.

Another waiter asks us if we’re done.

It is getting busy. People are waiting. They might need the booth. I tell her we need
the booth.

The waiter looks at me closely then looks at him. Before she leaves us she wants to

know if we're related.

"We get that a lot."

A guilty smile is exchanged. We are the only people we've ever met with black hair and heterochromia.

"We're cousins", he says.

The server makes her comments but she doesn't get our inside joke.

On stage we really are cousins.

At home we are parents.

In the booth we are happy.

Our thumbs tap our screens and four white digits flash to remind us that we're far past our curfews.

"Let's get ice-cream."

"Since when do we get ice-cream?"

It's cold enough to snow.

We look into each other's mismatched eyes and decide to indulge in one last bite of Betrayal.

"Just order something."

I stand up to choose a cake from a see-through refrigerator. By the time I'm back, my supporting character is on

My side of the booth.

"Did you choose?" he asks.

"I made a choice, yes."

He has officially crossed over the dirty, crumb-covered border, yet, no one else in this busy bistro knows that the world has just turned upside down.

"This is new."

I sit next to him and look around the room, waiting for someone to tell me I've been caught. To tell me this is not allowed, that we are bad people.

His breath is heavy, deep and his hands turn to fists. One bangs the table and the breadbasket hits the floor. He is tired of playing.

"What if we never make it?"

Unlike him, I had come to terms with that long ago.

“They say ‘*you never know*’”. These are the only words I can offer him.

Something with chocolate, cherries and whipped cream lands in front of us and the waiter takes another look, this time with furrowed brows. She picks up the basket and walks away.

“She thinks we’re cousins, remember?”

Somewhere under the table,

Our palms touch.

“This play, you, are the best thing that’s happened to me in a while.”

“This play, you, are the best thing that’s happened to me.”

We are so overdramatic.

More faces pack into our sacred place and drunken chatter makes us inaudible,
invisible, unnoticeable.

It is now, or it is never.

“What would one kiss do?”

Our fingers interlock, the cherry sinks.

The real question— “*are you ready for it all to fall apart, too?*”

I do not think about the toys and the groceries and the mess back home.

He does not think about the bills and the laundry bag and the mess back home.

He repeats,

“What would one kiss do!”

Deep inside,

I’m a star again.

“What wouldn’t one kiss do?”

I stare into his blue eye, then the hazel one, until my own eyes shift to his abandoned seat where only the old, lumpy shell of a coat he shed off remains.

“Just once?”

“Just once.”

He squeezes the fear out my hand while I let my eyelids hang over my vision.

It is now, or it is never.

And then, just then,

We kiss

because there is

One wife

One husband and

Four kids

behind Us.