

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

A woman writer submits a story to her otherwise all male writers group without telling them the piece is autobiographical. As the men deliver their scathing critiques, it quickly becomes evident that she has a different story to tell than the one on the page.

SETTING/TIME

Public library meeting room. The present. An early fall evening.

ACTING NOTES

The dialogue should be delivered with an energetic tempo. This is especially true of group criticism moments with overlapping dialogue. Imagine old Howard Hawks and Robert Altman movies.

When the lighting shifts, Lucy should not break the fourth wall. These are soliloquies not a direct address to the audience. During these moments, the other characters should not acknowledge anything has changed. They do not hear Lucy's lines and should mime their own unheard ad libbed dialogue while suggesting they are engaging with one another and with Lucy.

PUNCTUATION NOTES

A forward slash (/) means the next line begins at the denoted place and another character will be speaking over the remainder of the line.

Double Dashes (--) at the end of a sentence mean the character is cut off from finishing their thought.

Italic dialogue in brackets ([Are you serious?]) means the character is conveying that line in an unspoken manner.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

LUCY (f) -- Late-20s to Early 30s, a first grade teacher and aspiring short story writer. Demure and polite on the outside, cynical and weary on the inside.

OWEN (m) -- Late-20s to Early 30s, medical writer and aspiring novelist. A nerd with potential if only he could get out of his own way.

WALT (m) -- Early 70s, a retired police dispatcher and aspiring screenwriter. The Simon Cowell of the group.

MILES (m) -- Mid- to late-30s, a tax accountant and aspiring screenwriter. Another nerd. Thinks memorizing "Save the Cat" will unlock the secret to writing success. A textbook example of the Dunning-Kruger effect.

TED (m) -- Early 50s, a widowed insurance salesman and aspiring novelist. Empathetic. Sensitive. A guy with more heart than talent.

WOMAN'S VOICE (f) -- Adult of indiscernible age. Voice of librarian over a public address system. Can be pre-recorded.

WALT

In your wet / dreams.

OWEN

I'd take Ava - the robot from the movie Ex Machina. Alicia Vikander was (shakes his head, blows a breath) *man*.

WALT

I'd go old-school. Rachel the replicant from Blade Runner. I'd do a vintage 1980s Sean Young over Vikander and Helfer any day.

TED

Here's one from the vault - Maria the robot from Fritz Lang's silent movie Metropolis.

(Admiring nods from the men as they ad lib "yeah, good one, right, etc.)

LUCY

It was Mildred from circulation.

MILES

Is she / single?

LUCY

Married with grandchildren.

(STAGE LIGHTS DIM. LUCY remains illuminated in a TIGHT SPECIAL. She slumps back in her chair, weary. No one acknowledges this. In the shadows, their conversation continues, words unheard.)

Side 1 Start

LUCY

The students in my first-grade class have better manners. *(Grabs up her coffee cup, crosses to the refreshments table.)* Sometimes these guys give me such a headache. *(Freshens her coffee from a Box O' Joe)* And God knows there's enough testosterone floating around this room to choke a porn queen. All except for you, Owen. *(Starts to cross back to her chair, stops behind Owen.)* Why can't you seem to man-up the way I need you to. I thought you were different... Well, tonight you get one last chance to show me who you really are. *(She returns to her chair, weary.)*

(LIGHTS RETURN TO NORMAL.)

OWEN

...don't you agree, Lucy?

LUCY

[...?]

OWEN

...about the structure of Ted's piece.

LUCY

...oh, ah, yes, absolutely.

TED

Oh, good. Because--

OWEN

And on that note, let's take a quick bio break before we move on to the final submission of the evening.

(TED, MILES and WALT rise and stretch.)

WALT

Thank god. I've gotta see a man about a horse.

MILES

That's the third time in the last hour. If you're not careful, people will think you're having an affair with that animal.

(WALT heads for the door.)

TED

Which is still legal in four states.

OWEN

Why do you know that?

MILES

Don't you remember? He had a sex scene in his alien chicken story.

TED

I told you. It's --

MILES/OWEN/LUCY/WALT

Not a chicken. (*ad lib we know, etc.*)

(*WALT has his hand on the door knob.*)

WALT

Folks, when a man gets to be my age his prostate is master and commander of the fleet.

OWEN

Make up your mind, Walt. Are you sailing a ship or having carnal knowledge with a horse?

WALT

I'm takin' a pee. (*mumbles*) ...or trying to.

(*He exits.*)

MILES

So, Owen. What's left on the agenda?

OWEN

Lucy's story.

MILES

...oh.

LUCY

(to MILES)

What?

MILES

Nothin'. 'Sall good. (*Makes a bee-line for the refreshments table.*) The donuts look tasty tonight.

OWEN

Courtesy of Lucy.

MILES

Did we remember the Boston Cream?

(*LIGHTS DIM on all but LUCY.*)

LUCY

What the hell does that mean? I spend weeks pouring my heart into my manuscript, mining the private aspects of my own life and it means nothing? They're all excited to talk about robot sex, but when it comes to my story and the real thing it's *(mimic MILES, deadpan)* "...oh." *(scoffs, turns to MILES)* I've got your Boston Cream right here, pal *(she flips him the double bird)*.

(LIGHTS RETURN TO NORMAL. A dejected WALT re-enters. They resume their seats.)

MILES

(to WALT)

That was quick.

WALT

(defeated)

Yes. Yes it was.

OWEN

Last up is Lucy's new piece of fiction called "Eventually Ever After." Luce, do you want to...?

LUCY

Sure. Uh, well, this short story--

WALT

Ninety pages of prose isn't exactly short. *(groans and tongue clucks from the group)*. Just sayin'.

LUCY

Well, it came off my finger tips easily. As if I was living life through the characters, you might say... Anyway, I'm open to all suggestions, but what I especially want to know is this: does it ring true? I'm eager to hear your feedback.

Side 1 End

OWEN

Why don't we start with / Miles.

WALT

I don't like the main girl.

OWEN

Ted...

TED

Welp, as I've said, I like the character of Ellen. A lot. I like her story. I can't speak to how authentic it may be, but I guess, what I can say is... I wish I could meet her one day. In person. I think we'd be friends. Roger...? (*shrugs*) Roger was an uncommitted jerk-wad.

OWEN

Moving on to Miles.

MILES

It's a good start. You have some strong main-character energy. But I think it needs a lot of work. Gotta state your theme up front, clarify your set-up, ya know. And the break into act two, it needs some massaging. Addressing those beats should help strengthen your protagonist's journey and put a lot of questions to rest. And sex. It needs a *lot* more sex.

(The men explode with nods and ad libbed expressions of agreement about the sex.)

MILES

Seriously, who buries a sex scene in subtext when you can do it out in the open on the page.

WALT

Naked and Unafraid. (*raps on table*) Hear, hear.

OWEN

Which brings us to Walt.

WALT

The story's a mess. Sorry. It just, well, it is. The whole thing's unbelievable. It would never happen in real life. A woman who chases a loser like that? Nuh-uh. Never. I'd toss it all out and start over. You could rewrite it from the point of view of her sister. That character was more engaging. And she was a genuine hottie. You could lean into the whole sibling rivalry thing. Maybe have them fight, maybe mud wrestle in the roadhouse scene. Ya know, where their bikini tops slip off and they start to writhe against one another, and...

(*LIGHTS DIM on all but LUCY.*)

LUCY

Men really do think their dicks.

(*LIGHTS RETURN TO NORMAL.*)

OWEN

Thanks for that eloquent wrap up, Walt. (*About to pontificate*)
You know, there was this movie once that...

LUCY

...Owen?

OWEN

Right, my turn... ah... Roger is... well... he's
ah... (*searching*)

MILES

A playa

OWEN

Nope.

WALT

An Incel?

OWEN

Noooo...

TED

A closeted gay man?

LUCY

Oh, Hell no.

OWEN

What I was going to say is... Roger is a flawed character. And
as such... he is an obstacle to the Ellen character's goal--

WALT

Goal? What goal?

LUCY

To be understood, accepted, acknowledged. To be seen and supported and fulfilled and...and....*(searching)*

OWEN

...to be loved and cherished for who she is, the way she feels she has a right to be... unconditionally, with out doubt or reservation. To feel she's not alone in this world and never will be again.

(Off this exchange, MILES realizes what's happening.)

WALT

I don't see that in the--

(MILES silences WALT with a cautionary hand on his shoulder.)

LUCY

So Roger is a deeply flawed character?

OWEN

Ah, I don't know. Flawed? Deeply flawed?

LUCY

Owen.

OWEN

Right, no need to split hairs. He is what he is... but... isn't that what makes a fictional character, more... real, authentic, dare I say... likeable?

Side 2 End

(Explosive gasps/groans from WALT, TED, MILES.)

TED

There's that "likeable" character trope again.

WALT

I'll take an irascible anti-hero over "likeable" any day.

MILES

Then again, Save the Cat says--

Side 3 Start

LUCY

(to self, manic, pressured)

Sucks? Yes, your timing sucks! Sweet mother of God. Okay, think, Lucy. Think. Decision time. Ball's in your court. Clock is ticking. Let's see, ah... Intelligent and kind, but emotionally underdeveloped. Aren't they all. Reasonably handsome, but with a questionable wardrobe. Fixable. The sex is good, but not great. I can work with that. (sigh) If God really were a woman she would make this so much easier. (*Blows a breath*) This guy is a heavy lift, but he beats the shit out of cuddling with cats and binge watching Love Island. And I...I...(sighs) Oh, fuck it.

(*LIGHTS RETURN TO NORMAL. She grabs OWEN and plants a long, deep kiss on him.*)

OWEN

I do love you.

LUCY

Yeah, I got that...eventually. Love you, too.

(*MILES pokes his head back in the door.*)

MILES

Hey, if you two are done canoodling... We're heading over to Malarkey's for beers. Come with?

(*OWEN turns to LUCY. She smiles, nods.*)

LUCY

You guys go ahead. I'll finishing picking up then follow in my car.

(*MILES exits. OWEN moves to follow but LUCY grabs his arm, pulls him back, gives him gentle kiss.*)

LUCY

Don't drink too much. You and I are celebrating tonight.

(*Owen responds with a thoughtful grin.*)

LUCY

Wha...?

OWEN

Loving you is the best thing you ever made me do.

LUCY

And don't you forget it, mister.

OWEN

Wouldn't dare. *(kisses her on the cheek)* See ya in a bit.*(He heads for the door.)*

OWEN

(calls out)

Hey, Miles. Wait up.

(He exits. LUCY tosses the rest of the food in the trash, grabs her backpack. She pauses, looks around at the empty room. She suddenly jumps for joy, pumps her fist, pulls the bottom drawer.)

LUCY

Yessssss!

(She exits, hits the light switch on her way out the door.)

LIGHTS OUT.

END OF PLAY.