

INTERMISSION

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

ASHLEY	The artistic director at a small community theater, and girlfriend of...
JASON	Ashley's boyfriend, and the resident playwright at the same small community theater.
GARY	The president of the board of the community theater.

SETTING

Jason's apartment.

SCENE

(Jason is sitting in front of a computer/laptop, make a few final tweaks to a script. He is surrounded by quite a few empty cans of Red Bull. Ashley enters.)

ASHLEY

Hey, Jason.

JASON

Ashley! How's my babe doing?

ASHLEY

Honestly—

JASON

I'm SO glad you're here. After last night's board meeting—

ASHLEY

About that—

JASON

--I had this *amazing* idea for a script, and I just couldn't put it down. So I decided, what the hell, might as well just go ahead and get it all on the page.

ASHLEY

Uh huh.

JASON

Stayed up all night, but I think it's definitely worth it. This one is going to be gold, Ashley. Gold!

ASHLEY

Okay, but can we talk about—

JASON

No no no! You've got to read it. You're going to love it. I just know it. It's new, and it's completely savant guard!

ASHLEY

Avant-garde.

JASON

That's not a thing. Anyway, so you know how Gary was saying about how the theater's gonna have to do something new and...

ASHLEY

About Gary...

JASON

...and gripping... exciting...

ASHLEY

About Gary...

JASON

Something that'll catch people's interest and pack 'em back into the seats?

ASHLEY

Oh god.

JASON

And then Dana said that thing about how we want people to think of the pandemic as just kind of an intermission, and that the next part will be even better?

ASHLEY

Yeah.

JASON

Something about that was...

ASHLEY

Jason...

JASON

It's like an explosion went off in my head! And suddenly I started thinking, what if... well, actually, I won't spoil it. Here. Read it. Here, here!

ASHLEY

Can we... before—

JASON

No! Just read it! It won't take more than like a few seconds, and I know it's just going to blow you away.

(He guides her to the computer.)

I'll read the Lawyer, you do the CEO.

(Ashley just looks at him, but he points to the screen excitedly.)

ASHLEY

(Reading very unenthusiastically)

I don't have to sit here and take this abuse.

JASON

(Overacted...)

You'll sit there until I'm done with my cross-examination!

ASHLEY

(Reading...)

We didn't break any laws. Our emission levels are well-within—

JASON

(Acting...)

You broke the most important laws of all - the Laws of Morality!!

ASHLEY

(Back into conversation mode.)

I'm really lost. Can we at least start at the beginning?

JASON

This is the beginning. Act one, scene one. Anyway, *(back to acting...)* You broke the most important laws of all – the Laws of Morality!!

ASHLEY

(Even less enthusiastic...)

Your Honor, I... *abject?* Do you mean 'object'? And I don't think you want the apostrophe R E there.

JASON

(Still overacting...)

You object? *I* object! You're poisoning the environment! Your hiring practices are sexist and racist! And we all know your dirty little secret!

(Ashley just stares at Jason.)

It's your line.

ASHLEY

(Finally giving in.)

You can't prove anything.

JASON

Oh? You think so? Your honor, let me present... *(Dropping out of character...)* Can you just click to the next page?

(Ashley clicks the mouse. Jason goes into overacting again.)

Exhibit A!!

(Ashley just stares at Jason. She then looks back to the screen. Then back at Jason. Jason nods excitedly.)

ASHLEY

It says 'Intermission'.

JASON

Right! Brilliant, right?!

ASHLEY

Did you... mix something into the Red Bull, or...

JASON

No, no. Ashley, think about it. Why are people going to rush back into the theaters? For the social *experience*! The last thing they need is to be forced to sit there silently in the dark. They want to interact, talk to their friends, have some M&Ms and a Dixie cup of cheap, overpriced wine.

ASHLEY

You never cease to me amaze me, Jason.

JASON

Honestly, I amaze myself. Seriously, I have no idea where the inspiration comes from sometimes, but isn't this just what theater needs right now?

ASHLEY

Half a dozen lines of dialog and—

JASON

There's eight.

ASHLEY

...of dialog, and then straight into intermission.

JASON

Exactly!

ASHLEY

And how long does the intermission last?

JASON

That's the beauty of it. It lasts exactly as long as the director wants it to last! You want a full-length, make it about two hours. You want something that's part of a one-acts thing, maybe just ten, fifteen minutes.

ASHLEY

You know, I thought your Doobie Brothers script was bad...

JASON

It was *not* about the *Doobie Broth*—

ASHLEY

And your play starring a lamp and stick of wood almost got me fired, but—

JASON

Hey. That won awards!

ASHLEY

I know. And to this day I have no idea how. But this...

JASON

Best piece yet, right?

ASHLEY

This has to be the absolute dumbest thing I've ever seen in my life.

JASON
(*Stunned.*)

What?

ASHLEY
You're asking people to pay twenty bucks to attend... basically nothing.

JASON
It's not nothing. It's everything. Don't you get it? I mean, look at the dialog. I've covered all the big, controversial topics – the environment, corporate greed, discrimination! There's humor!

ASHLEY
What humor?

JASON
You probably didn't read the stage directions. When they reveal exhibit A, it's wrapped up like a present.

ASHLEY
So?

JASON
Because right before that, the lawyer says "let me present".

(*Ashley just stares at him in disbelief.*)

Trust me. It'll be funny when you see it.

ASHLEY
Hon, we really need to talk.

JASON
See, that's *exactly* my thought. People need to talk! Face to face! Talking! And that's what this play gives them. They come in, and we set them up with all these important, juicy, timely topics, and then BOOM! It's intermission, and now everyone can talk about them! You're upset about global warming? Talk about how the corporations are destroying the environment. You've had enough with glass ceilings? Discuss how women aren't being treated with equality in the workplace. Gun control? We've got you—

ASHLEY
Stop.

JASON
I'm telling you, Ash, this is—

ASHLEY
Stop. Just... stop.

JASON
You're already sold on it, aren't you?

ASHLEY
I- I don't even know where to begin.

JASON
It's like Seinfeld meets CNN.

ASHLEY
You're not helping—

JASON
It's about nothing! It's about everything!

ASHLEY
It's not going to work.

JASON
I think it's exactly what Dana and Gary are looking for.

ASHLEY
I assure you, it's not.

JASON
So, what? You won't even show it to them? I had a feeling after the meeting last night that—

ASHLEY
STOP! We really need to talk about last night.

JASON
I'm sorry. Of course. You're right. It's long overdue. Should have been the first thing I said when you came in.

ASHLEY
What should?

JASON

Thanking you for inviting me to the board meeting.

ASHLEY

See, that's the thing—

JASON

I had no idea how much fun it would be!

ASHLEY

Because I *didn't* invite—

JASON

I thought it would be boring or super intimidating.

ASHLEY

I didn't invite you.

JASON

But it wasn't! At all! What was that?

ASHLEY

I didn't invite you.

JASON

Of course you did.

ASHLEY

No, I didn't. And Gary is more than just a little I'm-super-ready-to-fire-Ashley angry about you showing up out of nowhere.

JASON

But...

ASHLEY

You just being there would have been bad enough.

JASON

But...

ASHLEY

But your interrupting every other sentence was really—

JASON

But you invited me!

ASHLEY

I assure you I did not!!

JASON

We were standing backstage, and you said it was time for the board meeting.

ASHLEY

Yeah.

JASON

And then you said, and I quote: “you should go”.

ASHLEY

Right. Go. As in “leave”, “go home”. Not “go to the board meeting”.

JASON

Oh. Ohhhhh. W-why didn't you say anything?

ASHLEY

I did. Like a dozen times, but you never heard me.

JASON

I find that hard to believe.

ASHLEY

Because you never shut up. You just kept interr—

JASON

I didn't!

ASHLEY

You're doing it rig—

JASON

I was just excited!

ASHLEY

Obviously. And now I'm just on probation.

JASON

What?!?

ASHLEY

Yeah.

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JASON

But I'm a member of the theater too. This doesn't have anything to do with you!

(Ashley just stares at him.)

I may not be on the board, but I'm the resident playwright. Is it that strange that I'd show up to a board meeting now and then? Maybe I just decided to see what all the fuss is about.

ASHLEY

First of all, they're closed meetings. You aren't allowed to just show up. And second, Gary's not an idiot. He knows we're a couple.

JASON

So what does that mean, probation?

ASHLEY

I don't know.

JASON

You're not fired, though, right?

ASHLEY

No.

JASON

Are they docking your pay or something?

ASHLEY

I'm the artistic director of a community theater, love. There's not that much they can reduce my salary *by* before I'm paying them.

JASON

So...?

ASHLEY

Jason?

JASON

(Cautiously, worried...)

Ashley?

ASHLEY
I wonder if...

JASON
If what?

ASHLEY
What I mean is, I'm thinking it might be a good idea if...

JASON
Oh god...

ASHLEY
If we... you and I... took a little intermission ourselves. Officially.

JASON
You're breaking up with me?!?

ASHLEY
No!

JASON
Then...

ASHLEY
Alright, yes. But only sort of. Hear me out on this.

JASON
Oh my god!

ASHLEY
You do know what 'hear me out' means, right?

JASON
Oh my god, oh my god....

ASHLEY
It means that you stop talking for a minute. I swear, I'm going to call every damn store in this town and tell them to refuse to sell you Red Bull from now on.

(Jason takes a deep, calming sigh.)

Okay. Good. That's good. Now, I think it would help if we *officially* took a...

Intermission.

JASON

Right. Officially.

ASHLEY

Officially.

JASON

Mm hmm.

ASHLEY

And that means...?

JASON

It means that if people ask, we are not currently dating. BUT...

ASHLEY

But?

JASON

We still get together. We still hang out. We still *feel* exactly the same way about each other.

ASHLEY

Just when anyone asks...

JASON

We're on a...

ASHLEY

Intermission.

JASON

Right. And then, after this whole thing blows over, and Gary decides that you are no longer the Jar-Jar Binks of Pandemonia...

Jason
Me-sah no—

Ashley
Shut up. We wait until this blows over. Everyone calms down, and Gary once again just thinks of you as that genius, crowd-pleasing playwright whose royalties are paid in doughnuts...

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JASON

Then we can officially start dating again.

ASHLEY

Right.

JASON

So we're not really taking a break.

ASHLEY

No no. *We are*. It's just a... a break with benefits.

JASON

So... intimate friends.

ASHLEY

Who mutually agree not to have any other intimate friends.

JASON

To be clear, who buys dinner when we go out?

ASHLEY

We don't go out, because we aren't dating.

JASON

I see.

ASHLEY

But it is possible that we might happen to show up at the same restaurant, and then it would be silly not to sit at the same table.

JASON

Especially if we drove there in one car.

ASHLEY

Exactly.

JASON

And so back to the question of who buys dinner?

ASHLEY

I still buy dinner because you're still dirt poor.

JASON

I think I can live with this.

ASHLEY

Good. Now, I think we should tell Gary.

JASON

That sounds... like a very awkward topic to just... drop into a conversation.

ASHLEY

Nevertheless...

JASON

Honestly, Ash, I don't typically talk to Gary just out of the blue. How am I supposed—

(The doorbell rings.)

You've got to be kidding me.

ASHLEY

He did say something about wanting to talk to you about last night.

JASON

You knew he...

ASHLEY

No.

(Jason looks at her dubiously.)

I might, however, have *suspected*...

JASON

And what am I supposed to say to him?

(The doorbell rings again.)

ASHLEY

Whatever it is, it should probably not be said through the door.

(Jason opens the door, and Gary enters.)

Jason. GARY

Gary. JASON

Ashley. GARY

Gary. ASHLEY

Ashley. JASON

(Ashley rolls her eyes at Jason.)

No, seriously. I don't think this conversation can move forward if you don't—

ASHLEY
(Threateningly...)

Jason...

JASON
There it is. *(Turning to Gary...)* So, Gary...

GARY
Jason...

ASHLEY
I swear you will not leave this apartment alive if...

(Jason waves her away from the edge.)

JASON
Gary, I'm really sorry about last night. It was all a big misunderstanding. You see, when Ash told me 'you should go', I thought she meant that I should go to the meeting.

(Gary looks over at Ashley, but Jason grabs his attention back.)

JASON (CONT)

But that's not what she meant. And I probably would have realized that if I had not been amped up on Red Bull and chocolate-covered espresso beans. Which reminds me, can I get you something to ea— Oh, no. You're not hungry. I can see that. I just want you to know that I really never meant to be a disruption. And I'm very sorry. And I won't do it again. And I'm suddenly very conscious of the fact that, despite my saying that I won't be disruptive, I'm still talking, aren't I?

GARY

Is this supposed to be helping your case somehow?

JASON

Did I mention that Ashley just broke up with me?

GARY

(To Ashley, rather surprised.)

You did?

ASHLEY

It was... Yeah. It's complicated. There were a lot of reasons.

GARY

I can only begin to imagine.

ASHLEY

I know. And it's just to... It's more of a separation. A trial separation. We may eventually get back together, but for now I just felt like we needed... I needed... a... an intermission. You know?

JASON

Oh, and speaking of intermissions...

ASHLEY

Jason...

JASON

I was thinking a lot about what you said last night, about how people are going to want something new, something different as we all get back into theaters.

GARY

You two really broke up?

ASHLEY

Yeah.

JASON

And I had this great idea for a piece that I think will really distinguish us as a theater.

GARY

Isn't that's what you said about that Doobie Brothers play?

JASON

That play had nothing to do with the Doobie Brothers.

GARY

Well, it certainly seemed like you must have been smoking a doobie when you wrote it.

JASON

Wait. Oh my god. Is that why they're called the Doobie Brothers?

(They just stare at him.)

Well anyway, no. Nothing like that one. And to save time, it's not like the other one you hated either.

GARY

What other one?

JASON

You know, the love story between the stick and the lamp.

GARY

I loved that one.

ASHLEY
(Shocked...)
What!?!

JASON
(Very pleased...)
You did?

GARY

And it won a few awards, didn't it?

(Jason nods.)

Great stuff. *(Turning to Ashley.)* You really broke up?

ASHLEY

Yeah. Since when did you not hate that play about—

JASON

Very broken. Very traumatic. I cried. A lot. *(Beat.)* So as I was saying, I wrote this new piece that—

ASHLEY

Not the time, Jason.

JASON

You see, that's weird, because it feels like the perfect time. You know, if you wanted to just take a look. A glance. Just a little. You know... *(in an exaggerated French accent)* un poulet.

(The others turn to stare at him.)

It means—

ASHLEY

A chicken. It means “a chicken”.

JASON

Oh. Then not that.

GARY

He's never going to shut up if I don't look, is he?

ASHLEY

No. I generally find it's faster just to read the stuff, but in this case it might be—

GARY

Fine.

ASHLEY

(Finishing under her breath.)

Better to just gouge your eyes out.

GARY

Where is it?

JASON

Right this way, El Presidente!!

(Jason eagerly shows Gary the script.)

JASON (CONT)

I think you'll find—

(Gary turns to glare at Jason.)

...find it easier to read if I shut up.

(Gary starts to read, and Ashley whispers to Jason.)

ASHLEY

The next time we don't go on a date, you're not getting dessert.

GARY

(Having just finished reading...)

So this is the whole thing?

JASON

Right.

GARY

Eight lines of dialog, and then an intermission that lasts until the end of the show.

JASON

Right. You see, it—

GARY

So it cues up a whole truckload of topical conversation starters, and then just... gets out of the way and lets the audience dive into them?

JASON
Exactly!

ASHLEY
What?

GARY

This is brilliant!

JASON AND ASHLEY

(But with very different inflections...)

It is??

GARY

This is pure theater gold! I love it! Avant-garde, simplistic yet subtly Byzantine, engaging but not prescriptive! This is great stuff!

(Jason looks over at Ashley with an expression that says "See? Now what do you have to say?")

(To Ashley...) And you just broke up with him?

ASHLEY

Well, I...

GARY

Jason, what do you say you and I go grab some lunch. We can get to know each other better, talk about the script...

JASON

Uhhh.... Sure?

GARY

Great. My car's out front. Stevenson's Pub okay?

JASON

Yeah. Uh... yeah. Sure.

(Gary exits.)

Did I... Did I just agree to go out on a date with Gary?

ASHLEY

I... I'm not sure.

JASON

But he said he's buying, right?

ASHLEY

I'm... not sure about that either.

JASON

Stevenson's is the place on Ridgemont Avenue though, right?

ASHLEY

Mm hmm.

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JASON

The one that's like thirty-five bucks for an order of wings?

ASHLEY

Mm hmm,

JASON

I don't suppose I could borrow...

ASHLEY

You're asking me for money to go on a date with someone else?

JASON

It does sound a bit awkward when you say it like that.

ASHLEY

And not five minutes after we officially broke up.

JASON

Yeah, but it's a date with Gary, so...

(Ashley gives him a look that could almost be construed as upset at the beginning, but quickly turns into amusement. She then hands him a twenty.)

ASHLEY

I'll be expecting leftovers.

JASON

And you will definitely be getting them.

ASHLEY

And really good ones if he's buying.

JASON

Of course. I'm not an idiot.

ASHLEY

Good. Now tuck in that shirt, head downstairs, and get on with pimping yourself out for that embarrassment you're trying to pass off as art.

JASON

You mean it?

Make me proud.

ASHLEY

You're the best!

JASON

(Jason gives her a quick kiss and runs out. Lights out.)