

PLAYING WITH THE PIECES

A ONE ACT PLAY

by Maria Viera Beatty

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Playing with the Pieces

Action of the play: A director and two actors collaborate to develop a new theatrical play that explores contemporary culture.

Characters

Derek: a theater director

Every Girl: an actor in Derek's theater company

Lonely Boy: an actor in Derek's theater company

Setting

A bare stage with a ladder, a few work lights, and several pieces of rehearsal furniture.

Time

Contemporary.

Playing with the Pieces

(Setting: a stage rehearsal space.)

LIGHTS UP

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy are waiting for someone.)

Where is he?
EVERY GIRL

Let's go.
LONELY BOY

We can't.
EVERY GIRL

Why not?
LONELY BOY

We have to wait.
EVERY GIRL

You're sure it was here?
LONELY BOY

What?
EVERY GIRL

That we were to wait.
LONELY BOY

He should be here.
EVERY GIRL

He didn't say for sure he'd come.
LONELY BOY

(Derek comes down the aisle through the audience and goes onto the stage.)

EVERY GIRL
Here he is. Thank God, we don't have to do a play about waiting.

DEREK

Hi, guys. Sorry I'm late. Every Girl, good to see you. Lonely Boy. (He nods to Lonely Boy). Okay, ready to start? You got the new scenes memorized, yes?

LONELY BOY

Didn't exactly make sense...

EVERY GIRL

Not sure what you're trying...

DEREK

A basic love story—boy meets girl, boy loses girl, you know, a traditional plot but with current content—the search for identity... authenticity... celebrity...

EVERY GIRL

Is that even a word?

DEREK

... and loneliness. I'm commenting on the emptiness of contemporary culture. I'm showing a frame of mind. The way life happens now—blurred, instant, at once.

EVERY GIRL

The play is all random and arbitrary. There's no beginning, middle or end.

DEREK

You just have to go with it. We live in an increasingly collective electronic Gothic Baroque culture.

EVERY GIRL

I can relate to that... the story of my life.

DEREK

Okay, Opening monologues. Places, please.

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy take center stage.)

EVERY GIRL

I grew up in the Mid-West in a suburb called Midtown outside of Milwaukee. I was the middle child in a middle class family. When I was in middle school in the middle of taking a mid-term exam it hit me: I wanted to be a star. A big top-of-the-tree star. Every girl wants to be a star.

LONELY BOY

I have to admit I used to be a Fanboy totally immersed in geek culture. I loved comics, video games, anime, Star Wars, and especially hobbits. I never loved skateboarding though—never was very good at it. If some dude insulted something I liked, I'd spam his computer. I took the console wars very seriously. But then I had an identity crisis. I was a Nintendo fanboy who had to accept that the PS2 outsold the gamecube. I lost the faith. Besides I hate zombies. I really hate zombies.

DEREK

Okay, good. Very nice. Thank you. Moving on. Scene one: Boy Meets Girl. Lonely Boy has left a party and sits on the floor of the bedroom stage right. Every Girl works her way through the party crowd opening the door to the bedroom and enters. The bed is piled with jackets. She searches through the jackets looking for hers. She does not see Lonely Boy sitting on the floor leaning against the other side of the bed. He has been engrossed in his iPhone. He looks up.

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy pantomime the stage directions as Derek speaks them.)

LONELY BOY

Coward.

EVERY GIRL

(startled)

What?

LONELY BOY

Sneaking away from the party this early.

EVERY GIRL

I'm not sneaking away. Well, at least, I'm not hiding out.

LONELY BOY

Hiding out? I'm taking a break.

EVERY GIRL

I hate this party.

LONELY BOY

Me, too. Everybody's trying so hard to have a good time.

EVERY GIRL

Everybody's running around demanding attention. Look at me! Look at me!

LONELY BOY

You don't like to be looked at?

EVERY GIRL

Yes, but...

LONELY BOY

Come on, women like to be looked at. If they didn't, they wouldn't dress so sexy.

EVERY GIRL

Guys barely look any more. I swear I could walk into a club stark naked and most guys wouldn't even notice. It seems like in the old days when women only flashed a little leg guys could fall in love. Guys don't fall in love anymore. Now that we're all sex objects there doesn't seem to be much sex.

LONELY BOY

(changing the subject)

Who are you? What do you do?

EVERY GIRL

Why does my identity have to be tied to a job?

LONELY BOY

Let me reframe the question...

EVERY GIRL

How about reframing society? It sets the standards. Everyone wants to be rich, successful, famous, a star, a celebrity. Who the hell wants to be a coffee server? The problem is everybody wants to be looked at; no one wants to look. Everyone wants to write poetry; no one wants to read it. Everyone wants to be a singer; no one wants to listen.

LONELY BOY

What did you answer when people asked you what you wanted to be when you were a little girl?

EVERY GIRL

I always said I wanted to be a dinosaur.

LONELY BOY

(changing the subject)

Do you think opposites attract?

EVERY GIRL

Probably not.

LONELY BOY

Ever heard of the Second Law Thermodynamics?

EVERY GIRL

Nope. But I know the International Law of Cleavage. (She adjusts her bosom.) Always works for me. (She falls out of character.) Scene. Derek, I have a question.

DEREK

What is it?

EVERY GIRL

How come in theater productions now all the actors talk real fast and at the same time and cut in on each other's lines sounding like gerbils on crack?

LONELY BOY

That's the current style.

DEREK

I'll tell you why. Theater directors know that the audience really doesn't want to be there—it's just a quick cultural fix. They'd rather be watching TV. Instant gratification isn't fast enough. Theater's trying to be like TV and film.

EVERY GIRL

So fast-paced dialogue is theater's equivalent of the zapper—move immediately to the next channel the second you lose interest.

LONELY BOY

Or fast forward through the boring bits.

DEREK

No one enjoys words anymore. Images are where it's at.

(Derek stands behind Lonely Boy and manipulates his head as if he were a puppet. Lonely Boy makes faces for each phrase.)

DEREK (cont.)

He's alone. He's lost. Someone is going to die. (Back to Every Girl.) We don't need words to express that.

EVERY GIRL

But there are word people and there are image people.

DEREK

But both are trying to do the same thing. We want our artists to plumb our depths, dredge up our excesses, explore the contradictory nature of our desires.

EVERY GIRL

We want them to startle us into recognizing ourselves for the confused and desperate people we have become.

DEREK

The problem is we have lost our confidence. Self-doubt is the order of the day. You have to have confidence to inspire it. You need to feel that artists have unconditional trust in their own vision. Vision plus hard work... speaking of which could we please go on to the second monologues.

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy take their places.)

LONELY BOY

I'm just a lonely boy. Lonely and blue-- even though I have a significant media presence--chat rooms, Twitter, Timeline, Tumblr, SnapShot, LinkedIn, Facebook. If you're not on Facebook, basically you don't exist. I'm totally accessible, but I've never been more isolated. I'm not one of those guys who live in my mother's basement. Well actually I do live in my mother's basement, but I don't live_live in my mother's basement. The more connected I become, the lonelier I am.

EVERY GIRL

I love fashion. I love style. Looks are important to me. All the girls at the salon where I work feel that way. Fashion is my life. Tina had her lips done. She looked really funny at first--like Donald Duck. Our goal is to look fantastic--presumably for guys. But we only see each other. We arrive each morning, like movie stars on the set, gorgeous, perfect, glamorous, but no one's watching.

DEREK

Very nice. Thank you. Okay, Scene Two: Boy argues with Girl. Begin when you're ready.

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy take their places.)

LONELY BOY

Oh, you're not going to start all that nonsense again are you?

EVERY GIRL

It's not nonsense. I am not nonsense. You doubt my very right to exist.

LONELY BOY

What do you want? What do you want anyway?

EVERY GIRL

I want to be a star.

LONELY BOY

You can be my star.

EVERY GIRL

I want to be the most famous girl in the room.

LONELY BOY

But you have to be able to do something. You have to be realistic. For example, you can't win a gold medal at the Olympics.

EVERY GIRL

But just think of all those product endorsements! And what about Kim Kardashian? She can't do a triple Lutz either. She can't do anything. I could just be famous for being famous.

LONELY BOY

You could be an entrepreneur. There's a Barbie Doll—Entrepreneur Barbie—with a tiny tablet and smartphone.

EVERY GIRL

Oh, please. I don't want to be a hyphenate---actress slash model, model slash hooker, actress slash entrepreneur.

LONELY BOY

You could set up a personal website. There's a company that will enhance your own "brand." Increase your visibility through search engines; raise your profile; establish a more robust digital identity, let your personality shine through.

EVERY GIRL

My goal in life is to have a reality show.

LONELY BOY

What do you know about reality?

EVERY GIRL

We get to pick our own reality. I could have a show about my journey from small-town Texas to Hollywood stardom.

LONELY BOY

But you're from Milwaukee.

EVERY GIRL

I know, but it doesn't have the same panache as Texas. I want to have my own clothing line. I'd start with sportswear and then add fragrances, eyewear, shoes, handbags, then bedding and kitchen ware.

LONELY BOY

What do you know about kitchenware?

EVERY GIRL

Paul Newman sold salad dressing.

LONELY BOY

But why do you think you...

EVERY GIRL

I have that girl-next-door-with-a-hint-of-glamour sense of style. I'm very relatable. I have relatability. I could do a cookbook.

LONELY BOY

The only thing in your frig is cat food and Pelligrino.

EVERY GIRL

Everyone deserves to be amazingly amazing. Scene.

(The actors relax.)

DEREK

I don't know, it just isn't edgy enough.

EVERY GIRL

Sorry.

DEREK

No, it's not your fault. You guys did great. I thought I could still use a traditional theatrical plot: romance, love, despair, death. "The Life of Every Girl" ending with her suicide.

LONELY BOY

Suicide is such a downer. Everyone prefers an up-beat ending.

DEREK

Suicide is a perfectly acceptable ending in theater.

EVERY GIRL

I always thought I'd make a terrific Hedda.

LONELY BOY

In film, endings are better. Godot arrives. The six characters hire another author. Fade out.

EVERY GIRL

I prefer opera. He dies. She dies. They all die.

LONELY BOY

How come in theatrical plays things are always so damn dramatic?

EVERY GIRL

That's why it's called drama, dummy.

DEREK

Okay, suicide, murder, or eternal love... white picket fence... happily ever after? What's it gonna be?

EVERY GIRL

What about jettisoned into outer space?

LONELY BOY

I think we can eliminate that option.

DEREK

(ignoring them)

Okay, suicide is out. But you see what's so great about being a playwright is you are kind of a god. You can take the characters anywhere you want. You can kill them, you can save them at the last minute...

EVERY GIRL

... you can give them horrible diseases.

DEREK

(ignoring her)

Well, we need a good ending. I know, let's have you two do an improv. You might come up with something terrific.

LONELY BOY

I doubt it. In improvs actors always go for the grand emotion. Improvs usually end up in a fierce screaming match. The ending has to come from the playwright. All the pieces have to be tied together.

EVERY GIRL

It won't hurt to try. What have we got to lose?

DEREK

Okay. It's the final scene. We've had romance. We've had love. Now we need despair and death. Places.

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy take their places and begin an improvisation.)

EVERY GIRL

I did say some awful things, didn't I?

LONELY BOY

No. I deserved them. Of course, I must admit I was pretty much upset by them. So upset, I haven't been able to think of anything but you ever since.

EVERY GIRL

Honest.

LONELY BOY

Honest.

EVERY GIRL

Well, I've been pretty upset, too.

LONELY BOY

Look... Seeing you again... Now that I ... I'm trying to say something to you but I'm such a ham I guess I'm not able to without the proper setting.

EVERY GIRL

What do you mean?

(He takes her hand and leads her in a circle ending up center stage.)

LONELY BOY

Well, come here. This is the proper setting.

EVERY GIRL

Why, it's just an empty stage.

LONELY BOY

At first glance. Yes, but wait a second. *(he turns)* A beautiful sunset. Colored lights in a garden. *(he lifts her to the side)* The lady is standing on her balcony. Flooded with moonlight. And you sure look lovely in the moonlight.

EVERY GIRL
But this is silly.

LONELY BOY
Just pretend.

EVERY GIRL
I don't like to pretend. I like reality.

LONELY BOY
You can pretend and it's still a reality. Just a pretend reality.

EVERY GIRL
It's not practical.

LONELY BOY
You're never at your best with practical things.

EVERY GIRL
I'm very practical.

LONELY BOY
I don't accept that.

EVERY GIRL
If I can accept you as an anal compulsive, you can accept me as a manic depressive.

LONELY BOY
I only said that you're not at your best with practical things—like reality.

EVERY GIRL
Reality has only limited appeal.

LONELY BOY
I don't mind that you're a little neurotic.

EVERY GIRL
Neurotic. I'm not neurotic. You're the neurotic one.

LONELY BOY
I'm not neurotic.

EVERY GIRL
Yes, you are.

LONELY BOY

No, I'm not.

EVERY GIRL

Are too.

LONELY BOY

Am not. It there's anyone here who's neurotic it's you.

EVERY GIRL

Right. I'll show you neurotic.

(She pantomimes taking a scarf off from around her neck and strangling him to death.)

LONELY BOY

See what I mean? Improvisation always leads to screaming and yelling and tearing at each other's jugular veins. Actors love it. After the bodies are counted and the gold is divided, they love to eat each other's entrails. It never fails with improvis.

DEREK

Okay, suicide's out. Murder is out. Let's think outside the box here, folks.

EVERY GIRL

Cliché number four hundred and sixty-two.

LONELY BOY

Let's get crazy.

EVERY GIRL

Let's get naked.

DEREK

I'm serious. Suicide, murder... too final, too permanent, too certain... we need something ambiguous... a cliffhanger...

EVERY GIRL

Does he, or doesn't he?

DEREK

You know, I've been thinking. Maybe we need to experiment with new forms. New structures. Maybe we should pick up on this reality show idea. Television is where all the action is now. Everybody who's anybody is doing TV.

LONELY BOY

You're right. Major film directors are producing limited TV series with big name movie stars...

EVERY GIRL

We could do a game show.

DEREK

No one wants to see a game show anymore.

LONELY BOY

Yes, they do. They are still very popular.

LONELY BOY

We could make it very current. It could be kind of like strip poker, but instead of taking off a piece of clothing, the loser has to cut off a body part.

EVERY GIRL

You are so gross.

LONELY BOY

We could call it "Who wants to be Franz Kafka?" and ask questions that have no answers.

DEREK

What about battling clichés...

LONELY BOY

We've already had enough clichés tonight, haven't we?

EVERY GIRL

You can be too rich, too thin, or use too many clichés.

LONELY BOY

(jumping into the game)

You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

EVERY GIRL

We'd better put our thinking caps on.

LONELY BOY

Your eyes are bigger than your stomach.

DEREK

Okay, okay... enough. Let's get back to the problem at hand.

EVERY GIRL.
Your play?

DEREK
No, a game show idea.

LONELY BOY
I know. "Survivor: Eat that worm again."

DEREK
Too close to the original.

LONELY BOY
"America's Got No Talent."

DEREK
Possible.

EVERY GIRL
How about "Zenning: a search for your authentic self."

DEREK
All that self-help crap is tedious.

LONELY BOY
Even better. "So you want to be a Scapegoat."

DEREK
Or "American Scapegoat"—contenders vie to be the ultimate American scapegoat.

EVERY GIRL
How about "Dancing with the Scapegoat?"

DEREK
(with disdain)
Really? Scratch the game show idea. Let's go back to reality TV.
What would reality TV look like if it were staged?

LONELY BOY
It is staged. They shoot sixty hours of footage to get one hour of show.

EVERY GIRL
What would "reality" theater look like?

DEREK

I have no idea.

LONELY BOY

I think it's called realism.

DEREK

As the poet said: God is dead. Realism is finished.

EVERY GIRL

Who's the poet?

DEREK

I have no idea.

LONELY BOY

And now reality always has quotation marks around it.

DEREK

Okay, okay. Let's try an improv. You two, center stage. Be real.

EVERY GIRL

What do we do? What's the situation? What's the action?

DEREK

No action. Just be real.

(Every Girl and Lonely Boy stand there awkwardly.)

LONELY BOY

(after a long pause)

I think therefore I am?

EVERY GIRL

(hesitatingly)

I shop therefore I am?

LONELY BOY

You can't unbake a baked potato?

EVERY GIRL

Reality is when things are for real, like really real, like they're really as real as reality can make them real... Like, shit, man, this is for real...

DEREK

Okay, forget it. This is never going to work. Let's try a talk show. It'll tie in with one of our themes: Celebrity.

EVERY GIRL

Is that even a word?

DEREK

(ignoring her)

Lonely Boy, you play the host. Every Girl, you're the guest. Okay, places.

(They set up a table and two chairs. Lonely Boy takes the host's chair.)

HOST

And for my next guest I have the scrumptious Every Girl.

(Every Girl takes the guest chair.)

HOST

You look marvelous as usual. It's great to have you here. Well let's start with what you've been up to? Tell us about your current project.

EVERY GIRL

I've just finishing shooting a new film. It's very exciting. It's sort of Cirque du Soleil meets The Sopranos. I play a neurotic, crazy, morally compromised, dual CIA FBI agent who's in deep cover as a drag queen. The plot revolves around adultery, polygamy, vampirism, serial murders—the usual dilemmas.

HOST

Well, your star meter is certainly on the rise.

EVERY GIRL

In America celebrity *(she nods proudly to Derek)* is next to godliness. But you have to be careful. Gwyneth Paltrow's a big star and her favorability rating is lower than that of the US congress. I am writing a vegan cook book though.

HOST

Are you worried that might cut into your fan base?

EVERY GIRL

I don't believe veganism is for everyone. Like meat eaters, for example.

HOST

And I hear you've become a social activist.

EVERY GIRL

Well, we all have to give back.

HOST

Tell us about your work.

EVERY GIRL

I have several causes that are close to my heart: prayer in school, lost puppies...

HOST

What about children?

EVERY GIRL

I don't really like children. They have runny noses and they smell funny. I'm more interested in patriotism, world peace, women's rights...

HOST

Well, let me ask you this. Do you consider yourself a feminist?

EVERY GIRL

I'm a post-post- feminist.

HOST

Post-post-feminist? You mean a "bad girl?"

EVERY GIRL

Oh, no, I'm not into that Pop/Slut culture. I'm not a "Phallic Girl." Acting like one of the boys— swearing, drinking, drugs, casual sex, DWIs, rehab... All that "what kind of fuckery is this?" stuff. I'm a girly girl post-feminist. Instead of coming on all strong, hard, and battle-scarred, I come on all childishly flustered, distracted, with just a touch of bewilderment. Slightly off balance. Eager to please, decked out in too short a skirt, too high a heel, and way too large a handbag.

HOST

Why do you choose this type?

EVERY GIRL

I want men to want me. This style just cries: Don't worry about me. I'm no threat to you. See I'm vulnerable, and fragile, and uncertain. I'm not competition, I'm cute.

HOST

Okay. Let me ask you this. To what do you contribute your success?

EVERY GIRL

I believe in “the myth of pluck.” You just have to hang in there and keep trying. We are all entitled to be special. Just because you can’t carry a tune doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be a rock star.

HOST

And I hear you are a very ardent tweeter.

EVERY GIRL

Yep, just today I tweeted “We are each the star in the movie of our own life.”

DEREK

(cutting in)

Okay, that works. Then we’ll end with final monologues. Any ideas?

EVERY GIRL

I’ve got one, Derek. I’ve got a great one. My Oscar acceptance speech.

DEREK

You’ve never even made a film.

EVERY GIRL

I know, but please, Derek. Pretty please. I just know I’ll be nominated eventually. I’ve been working on my speech for years. Everyone, who’s anyone in Hollywood, has their speech prepared. Hell, half the country has their speech prepared. Derek, please.

DEREK

Okay, let’s hear it. And the Oscar goes to Every Girl for “Celebrity.”

(Every Girl quickly kisses Lonely Boy and Derek and rushes to center stage.)

EVERY GIRL

Oh, my god. Oh wow. Thank you. Oh wow. Yeah, I’m kind of speechless. Thank you to the Academy. Thank you for opening your hearts to me. This has been an extraordinary journey. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for our inspiring director. I’d like to thank my agent. I’m so in love with my agent right now. Best advice ever: don’t fuck up the acceptance speech. Ooops! F-bomb. I’d like to thank my stylist, my manager, my new perfume line. And my psychiatrist, my physical therapist, my body double, my stunt double, my dialogue coach (you know who you are). My first dance teacher, my roommate my senior year in college, everybody I’ve ever met in my entire life. I’d like to thank my parents for not practicing birth control. I want to thank Brahms and Beethoven. And I’d like to thank Meryl Streep. Thank you. Thank you so much.

(She walks off in triumph.)

LONELY BOY

Why'd she thank Meryl Streep?

DEREK

Everyone thanks Meryl Streep. Okay, Lonely Boy, we need a final monologue for you. What would be your ultimate goal? Your major triumph?

LONELY BOY

To have 50,000 followers on Twitter.

DEREK

And what would you tweet them?

LONELY BOY

I dunno...

DEREK

You could ask them the question.

LONELY BOY

What is the question?

DEREK

The question is: What is the meaning of life?

LONELY BOY

But what if you're wrong?

DEREK

About the question?

LONELY BOY

No, about the answer. About who you are. What you believe in. What if what you think is important, isn't?

DEREK

You don't have to be sublime, only faithful and serious.

LONELY BOY

No, listen. What if you've got it all wrong? Not just you, but all of us. What if we've screwed it all up so bad that we can never make it right? What if we've backed ourselves into so tight a little corner...

EVERY GIRL

Too scary to think about.

DEREK

Maybe the question is: what is the question?

LONELY BOY

Maybe the question is: how are we to live our lives?

The End

LIGHTS OUT