

Copyright © 2001. Anne Phelan. Sample. STRIKE TWO: A Play In One Act.
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For Steven E. Ahlstrom

CHARACTERS:

RUTH mid-20's, impoverished; works in a
commercial costume shop

SETTING:

Ruth's tenement apartment on a hot Sunday in the summer. She lives in Alphabet City, New York City. No air-conditioning. It is early afternoon.

This play was produced by The Riant Theatre, Van Dirk Fisher, Artistic Director, as part of its Strawberry One-Act Festival in January 2001. It was directed by M.L. Kinney and featured Kirsten Walsh as Ruth.

RUTH:

(Lights a cigarette. Starts to dial the phone. Stops. Hangs up the phone. Thinks about it. Looks around for an ashtray. Gets the ashtray and her glass of iced tea. Picks up the phone and dials a long distance number. Lets it ring. She sits on the floor. Into the phone)

Judy? Yes, it's me. No, I've been up for awhile. What? It's- One. Late night last night, right.

(Rises)

So how are you?

(Stifles a yawn)

Your parents?

(Pause)

Marty's fine.

(She sits in the chair)

A friend of mine from work is looking after him. I tried to get the landlord to let me have him, but he said no pets. Like Marty wouldn't be better behaved than half the tenants. But if you decide you want him, or your mother- I suppose he would. He wouldn't eat for the first few days. No, Rolly never liked Marty very much. Or me, for that matter. Rolly, Richard's lover. You never met him, did you?

(Pause)

Yes, I told him about the funeral. They hadn't been together that long. He sent flowers, he said. Really? He said he was going to.

(Rises, crosses right)

Ben's the guy I'm seeing. I got off at midnight and we went out. Some little place near Bank Street. I've been here a year and I still don't know the names of things.

(Pause)

He's loaded. His father made millions in juice boxes. You knew about Rolly, didn't you?

RUTH (CONTD.):

Yeah, awhile. You've known all along? Since sophomore year?! I guess we haven't talked about Richard since then.

(Sits on the floor)

Oh, work's fine. Like a sweatshop. We just finished the Sesame Street order. Yellow feathers everywhere. Makes me sneeze. And the dust in that place! Summer's slow- not many shows opening. My title is "stitcher" but I do other stuff, too. Not a straight man for miles but-

(Stops HERSELF short. Rubs HER eyes.
Sighs)

You know, I'm sorry. I've got this talent for being subtle.... We got to be friends the year you were in France. Very good friends, junior year.

(Leans against the chair)

He told me ... while we were walking. We used to walk down to the ball field after dinner, once the weather got warm. They had *ziti* at the dining commons for the third night in a row, and I got tomato sauce all over my Pep Boys® T-shirt. What a dumb thing to remember. It was the first day it was warm enough to lie out on the quad. All those sweaty oily bodies. We get to home plate and he asks me if I had any friends who were gay. I didn't know what to say; I mean what a dumb fucking question. Like he was taking a poll, or something. His face got red, and he said, "I'm gay." Like I'd say, "I'm pregnant." Embarrassed, but proud at the same time. He looked like he thought I was gonna kill him. But I just felt cold, like I needed a sweater. I used to have this dream. We were at the beach. He'd throw himself down on the sand next to me and say, "It's all a joke. I just wanted to see if you really love me, Ruthie." So while you were busy making copies of the Mona Lisa, I was.... Well, Williamstown isn't Paris, but it had its moments. I had this all planned, Judy. At our Tenth Reunion, we'd be having a beer at the Purple Sow, talking about how rich and famous we were. How great we'd become since the days we were rooming in Fayerweather.

(Pause)

I never really told anyone. yeah, but you see Betsey got mono at the end of January,

(Rises)

and when she left, they never gave me another roommate. She probably thought something was up with us, but she was gone before it got-

RUTH (CONTD.):

(Slight pause)

I had to promise myself I wouldn't let it get to me.

(Sits in the chair)

Richard, I mean. You were so far away, and- it isn't the kind of thing I could write you in a letter. I kept coming up with dumb excuses to call home, until my mother complained about the bill. That last month of school is a total blur. I must have studied for exams, I guess. So when you called to ask me to stay at your parents', I couldn't. Why?!

(Rises, and crosses right)

Because. I didn't know if you knew he was gay. I didn't want you to have to take sides. And I felt pretty slimy about not telling you in the first place. He was your brother, right? Not some leather boy. And you were my best friend. You are. I wanted to tell you before. God. I'd have that dream about the beach every night. Even after you came back. I'd wake up, and you'd be asleep on the other side of the room. Sometimes, just for a second, I'd think you were him. It was his idea- all the sneaking around. Like you were going to tell anybody. I thought he was just shy. Not really. Not even in the fucking ballpark.

(Snorts)

But it was in the ballpark, how could I forget? Pretty funny. It was hard waking up alone after that. To get used to sleeping alone again. Sleeping, not screwing. Even without a nightmare. I mean the whole thing made me feel pretty fucking stupid. It's tough to feel that dumb and that lonely at the same time. I mean, he left me for a hockey player. Not even field hockey. This big dumb blond jock. To know perfectly well that the man you love is 500 feet away. And he will no more touch you again than fly to the moon.

(Sits in the chair)

It wasn't that I was horny. I was sexless, robotic. I mean, if the only man I ever thought really loved me was gay then I must have brass balls, right? If most of the people who come onto me are women, then I must be a lesbian, right? I like men. Whether they like me or not. Which makes me ... a masochist? It makes me alone, Judy. Ben and I fuck like bunnies. But the rest of the time he bores me to tears.

(Rises)

It's just fucking- it doesn't mean any more than having another beer.

(Sits on the floor, and lights a cigarette)