

DAY ONE

A ten-minute play

By Kelsey Christine McConnell

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JONATHAN, early 30s

VALERIE, mid 20s

RIVA, early 30s

SETTING

An evening in a couples kitchen.
Parallel, snapshots of time from a living room.

To one side is a living room- a natural mess of clutter and disarray. To the other side is a kitchen, pristine.

JONATHAN sits at the kitchen table, scrolling on his laptop.

VALERIE enters the living room through her front door, phone pressed to her cheek.

VALERIE

What? No, I'm okay. Didn't I say I was unflappable? It'll take a lot more than this to get me... Flapped.

(Valerie leans her back against the door for support.)

VALERIE

Sarah, I barely have feelings, let alone ones anyone can hurt... It was never anything serious. I promise, I'm fine... So soon? Alright. Yeah, okay. I love you, too. I'll talk to you later.

(Valerie calmly hangs up the phone.)

A beat.

She throws the phone across the room and throws herself into action, moving about the room like a hurricane. She knocks and hits anything within reach, until she collapses on her couch heaving with sobs and gasping for air, wrecked.

RIVA solemnly enters the kitchen, a stack of letters clutched between her hands.)

JONATHAN

(smiling over his computer)

What do you have there?

RIVA

Take a look at my face and take one guess.

JONATHAN

Baby, I don't know what those letters say-

RIVA

No probably not, but I'm sure you can imagine the gist.

JONATHAN

Listen, nothing happened. I swear. She's just obsessed with me, okay? Whatever she wrote to you-

RIVA

To me?

(Riva huffs a bitter laugh and picks up the letter on the top of the stack to read it.

Valerie sits up, grabbing for the pen and notebook sitting on her coffee table. She writes.)

RIVA

Jonathan, day one and I feel like every piece of my heart has shriveled up and shaken loose. It feels like I've died, and I don't know what to do because you've siphoned all the oxygen out of this place and replaced it with you. I hate-

JONATHAN

Enough.

RIVA

I hate that it doesn't matter to anyone that I never knew- You still managed to make me 'that woman'. Everyone in the office whispers about how I've done my best to ruin a marriage, but no one talks about the promises you broke to your wife while you were making false ones to me. I don't-

VALERIE

(slamming the pen down)

Enough! Enough, Valerie. What the hell do you think you're doing? Documenting all this, so what? The great-grandchildren you'll never have will find this in your attic and laugh at you too?

You think you'll find catharsis out of burning it or something? You'll have better luck burning his house to the ground.

(She brushes the notebook and pen to the ground.)

VALERIE

Suck it up and get over it.

(Valerie exits.)

Jonathan stands and takes the letter from Riva.)

JONATHAN

It's not what it sounds like at all.

RIVA

How long were you with her?

JONATHAN

I wasn't with anyone. No one but you. You know that. All we ever did is flirt, which was wrong, but-

RIVA

But you're lying through your teeth, and you're not as good at it as you think.

(Valerie enters the living room, drifting to the couch like a phantom. She picks the pen and notebook up off the floor and flips to a new page to write.)

JONATHAN

Riva-

(Riva picks up the next letter.)

RIVA

Day eight and even though my head is spinning, I don't feel a thing. Which is strange, isn't it? I'm pretty sure that I loved you. Or that I could have. The lines started to blur. Everything blurred when you touched me.

JONATHAN

There are lots of ways you can touch people.

(Valerie lies on her back and closes her eyes. She lets herself get lost in fantasy. Her hands drift slow over her body, sensuous.)

RIVA

I don't know if your cologne still lingers on my clothes and my skin and my home, or if I'm just that good at conjuring you to mind. I always thought that the way you had to kiss every inch of my skin meant that you were trying to keep me close, but maybe all along you were just trying to use something disposable for all that it was worth.

VALERIE

(bolting upright)

What am I doing? God, I can manage to make a fool of myself even when I'm home alone.

JONATHAN

You're going to believe a handful of letters over me? You know me.

RIVA

These 'handful of letters' span two months, and they seem to know you pretty well, too.

(Valerie moves to her liquor cabinet, the notebook hugged to her chest like it's her only friend. She opens a bottle and take a generous sip.)

JONATHAN

So I made a mistake.

RIVA

Are you referring to the fact that you slept with someone else, or that you ran out of lies to cover it up?

JONATHAN

What do you want me to say? I'd been working late. I was out of my mind. She was-

RIVA

Are you at any point going to apologize? I didn't bring these in here to hear you spit out excuses.

(Valerie fumbles her book open to write.)

JONATHAN

Well, why did you bring them out here? To nail me to the wall? Go ahead. What are you waiting for?

(Riva begins to cry as she flips through the pile to grab another letter.)

RIVA

Day twenty-two and I was almost okay, but I had to speak to you for the first time since I found out you were married, and all the stitches I'd been sewing have ripped open. I wish that the wounds were something physical, so then maybe I'd get an ounce of sympathy from these people. What's worse, is I find myself wishing that I never found out about her at all. Not that you were mine, just that I never knew you were hers.

JONATHAN

Are you angry that she loved me? Because I can't help that. It doesn't mean I felt the same.

RIVA

In my worst moments, I pray that the guilt sits heavy on your left ring finger, and that there are still traces of me that stain you, like the lipstick you were so angry I got on your pillow. But I know that it doesn't, and I know that there aren't. And I wonder if doubts ever creep into your wife's head like they did in mine, and I feel myself feeling deeply sorry that I'm the one who's thinking about her, because I know you never did.

(Valerie stands and starts to put her living room in order.)

JONATHAN

Of course I thought about you.

RIVA

You don't think about anyone.

JONATHAN

Riva, you were the one I came home to. You were the one I chose every day. Valerie was just... She wasn't anything. She was a series of stupid decisions.

(Valerie rips the pages out of the notebook and tosses them in the garbage.

She resumes her cleaning.)

RIVA

(selecting another letter)

How about this one, then? Day thirty-four. I always believed that you matched me flaw for flaw. Every chasm I could thrust between us you traipsed with a promise that we were two of a kind. Now I'll never know if it was my flaws piling up that made you turn away, or yours that made you come to me in the first place.

It should be comforting to me that you chose her in the end—Loyalty isn't dead, after all. But those words you whispered to me, they made me feel comfortable in my own skin for the first time, and I don't know how many of them were real. And I don't know how I'll ever trust a single word anyone ever says to me again. You played your part too well.

JONATHAN

(tearing the letter away)

What does it matter to you how she feels?

RIVA

Because how am I supposed to feel? You played us both for fools. You don't care that she loved you, you don't care about the promises that you made to me. You don't care, and you're not sorry. Well, people aren't expendable, Johnny.

JONATHAN

How can you stand there and try to define me by one mistake?

RIVA

Because it wasn't one mistake! Every time you went to her was a new one.

JONATHAN

And it's over. Can't you just be glad that it's over?

RIVA

How can I be glad when I never would have known in the first place? When there's no way for me to know that she's the only one? Or that every time you leave the house you're not looking for someone else?

JONATHAN

I never went looking.

RIVA

Yeah. Well, there's a lot you didn't do, isn't there?

(Jonathan sweeps his arm across the table, sending a vase crashing to the floor.)

JONATHAN

What do you want from me?

RIVA

Finally. He feels, ladies and gentleman.

JONATHAN

Of course I feel. I love you. Maybe I haven't done it well, but that doesn't mean I have done it at all. I could have run away with her. I could have snapped my fingers and she would have forgiven me. I faltered. I fucked up. I know that. But I chose you after everything.

RIVA

You lied to me.

JONATHAN

What would you have done with the truth?

RIVA

What am I supposed to do with it now? It doesn't come easier hearing it from someone else.

(Valerie moves to the trash, waiting a beat before retrieving the letters.)

She smooths them out over the
coffee table, looking them over.)

JONATHAN

Forgive me. Give me the chance to prove that I can learn from
my mistakes. Let me fix whatever it was that broke between
us.

RIVA

I think that I should go.

JONATHAN

Please. Be the better person. You're always the better
person. I gave up on us, but you don't have to.

(Valerie opens her notebook one
last time and writes.)

Riva slips out the letter from the
bottom of the stack.)

RIVA

Day forty-nine. I almost laughed today, thinking about how,
in the end, all things will fix themselves. You'll live in
the home you built for yourself, with the drafty windows and
the crumbling walls, and you'll exhaust yourself with the
effort it takes to keep everything in place. See, I get to go
on and find someone who actually loves me, and you're stuck
cheating on her.

(Valerie takes the letters and
exits.)

JONATHAN

Don't you let her dictate our lives. She doesn't know a thing
about us.

RIVA

I think that maybe everyone knows a little too much.

(Jonathan grips Riva's wrists.)

JONATHAN

We can still talk this through. Please. If this is a matter
of pride... You still love me don't you? Isn't love more
important than what anybody else thinks?

RIVA

Of course I still love you. Love doesn't work like that- It doesn't just go away... It might never go away.

JONATHAN

So then why hurt yourself more? If you love me, we can make this work. What's the sense in walking away just because you think that you should?

RIVA

(slipping out of his grasp)

Because I... I think that I could have forgiven you, really. But I can't... I can't forget. And I read those letters and I saw... Me. I saw me. And I saw that you made her 'that woman.' Just as she said. You made her that woman that sleeps with people's husbands. That's all anyone sees now. And you did that. You did all of this and you wiped your hands clean, and I... I could be 'that woman.' That woman who stays. And I could lose myself like she did, and it would be for a lot more than forty-nine days. But I've already lost enough, and I don't owe that to you.

(Riva exits.)

Jonathan slowly kneels, picking up the mess he made of the floor.

Valerie enters her living room, sorting through mail. She stops short, opening one of the envelopes.)

VALERIE

Valerie, day one and somehow I'm managing to breathe. I'm not saying it's easy. It's just happening. I don't want to thank you. I'm not that evolved. Not yet. Maybe someday. But I know how Johnny has a way of breaking people down so they don't notice, and I can tell that there's more courage in one pen stroke from you than he has in his entire body. There's something resembling gratitude there, if you squint and read between the lines.

I don't have your patience to write every day, and I don't think I have your way with words. But I know that this is going to suck. And I know one day it won't.

As pointedly as I'm not thanking you, there wouldn't be a day one with out these letters. So please, do something nice for yourself. Give yourself a day one of something new. Something good. Just don't tell me about it.

(Valerie laughs, dropping the stack of mail to the coffee table. She contemplates for a beat.

She turns back and exits.)

The 4th Annual Davenport Theatrical
10 Minute Play Contest