

from
Base Two

A Play in Two Acts

by Jennifer Kollmer

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Characters

In Columbus, Ohio, from the same graduating class, Willoughby High School:

- Betsey 28, programmer. Frustrated with a boring job, she invents ways to keep herself busy during the workday.
- Erin 28, single mom and the owner/manager of three gyms.
- Edmund 27, engineer. Trained in microprocessor design, he is content to freelance as a C programmer.
- Harris 26, programmer. Maintains ancient COBOL programs for a living, finding a sort of pleasure in the tedium they present.

Act 1, Scene 5 (continued) A table at a nice Chinese restaurant. BETSEY, EDMUND, and ERIN are working on their meals.

ERIN

What would I have to do? Would you hook me up to some machine?

BETSEY

No, we'd just have to shoot some video, a little interviewing to get a range of facial expressions.

EDMUND

Some basic action shots: punching, shooting, kicking, climbing, which was incredible, by the way, how you scaled that fountain.

BETSEY

All right, you've made your point about the climbing.

ERIN

Hey, you guys want to try my kung pao?

EDMUND

Sure. [*He takes some off her plate.*]

BETSEY

It looks pretty spicy.

ERIN

Of course it is. That's the whole point.

BETSEY

I don't know...

ERIN

Come on, Betsey. Spicy food should totally be a group activity. It's no fun sweating by yourself. [*Nudges her plate toward Betsey, who shrinks away from the challenge.*]

BETSEY

Did you know that pure capsaicin--that's the chemical in peppers that sting--can literally burn through your skin? That's why the smaller peppers are hotter than the larger ones: they have a higher concentration of capsaicin.

ERIN

Smaller is hotter? That's—wait, Betsey, you can't blush *before* trying it.

HARRIS enters, carrying a take-out bag.

HARRIS

This is the emergency that came up?

EDMUND

Oh, sorry. I forgot we'd said...and then Betsey—

HARRIS

Don't sweat it, pal. My server's just down, that's all. And I'm expecting e-mail from Wendy, but hey, you've got "emergencies" here.

ERIN

Harris, right? Remember me? Erin Roberts Mat- Roberts.

HARRIS

Roberts Mat Roberts? That British?

ERIN

Just Roberts.

BETSEY [*to HARRIS*]

Remember, from Willoughby?

HARRIS

No. Sorry.

ERIN

Betsey and I were friends.

HARRIS

Wait. It's coming back. Were you a cheerleader?

ERIN

Yeah.

HARRIS [*to BETSEY*]

She can't still have homework she wants you to do.

BETSEY

I never did her homework.

HARRIS

Yeah, right. She hung out with you because you fit in so well with the other popular girls.

ERIN

She was my math tutor, but that's not the same as doing my work.

EDMUND [*standing up*]

Okay, Harris, let's have a look at that server. Excuse us, ladies.

[*to BETSEY*] Let's chat when you get home, okay?

BETSEY

Okay. Bye.

EDMUND

Bye.

HARRIS

Don't do anything stupid, Collins.

BETSEY

Harris, knock it off.

EDMUND and HARRIS leave.

ERIN

What in the hell? Was he drunk?

BETSEY

No, just dysfunctional.

ERIN

Edmund's a nice guy, running interference like that.

BETSEY

He's been Harris' best friend since they were six.

ERIN

How long have you two been going out?

BETSEY

Me and Edmund? We're not.

ERIN

You practically finish each other's sentences.

BETSEY

We're just friends. We've been friends almost as long as he and Harris have been, but that's it.

ERIN

So Ed's available?

BETSEY

Yeah, I guess. I mean...

ERIN

What?

BETSEY

He's not Mr. Spock. If that's, well, you know.

ERIN

Probably not, but still he seems trustworthy. And I've been thinking I should date a Major Tom.

BETSEY

A what?

ERIN

It's from a David Bowie song.

BETSEY

Yes, "Space Oddity," but I'm missing the connection.

ERIN

Last week in *Cosmo*, someone was saying that all GenXers fit into two categories: Ziggy Stardusts and Major Toms. Rock stars and astronauts. Physical and mental.

BETSEY

Ziggy is physical? I guess he is: "Well-hu—" well, you know, the "snow-white tan" thing.

ERIN

A perfect body on a stage. So perfect you can't do anything but cry at the concert.

BETSEY

But he's sort of mental: he "sucked up into his mind."

ERIN

But that was how he died.

BETSEY

Yeah. And Major Tom died from a mechanical failure.

ERIN

Because he was all in his head.

BETSEY

So which am I?

ERIN

Are you kidding?

BETSEY

Not even a little Ziggy?

Scene 6. Betsey's apartment. BETSEY is online with Edmund. This is part of a voice chat: neither BETSEY nor EDMUND need to type, and BETSEY is free to move about the room as she talks. Edmund's voice is coming through the computer, but neither can see each other. As she talks, BETSEY sits down to a dinner of the leftover Chinese food, working up to the kung pao.

EDMUND

So, has the Eagle landed?

BETSEY

What?

EDMUND

Well, Mission Control, I don't want to get in trouble for broadcasting classified information over this non-secure line, but I have to know.

BETSEY

It's okay to talk, so long as you don't mention details, but why the astronaut theme?

EDMUND

I don't know. It seemed to fit. So has Houston given us a green light?

BETSEY

In English, please?

EDMUND

Did the cheerleader sign up?

BETSEY

Oh, yeah. Why would she be Houston?

EDMUND

I don't know.

BETSEY

The metaphor just doesn't fit. If I'm Mission Control, wouldn't I be Houston?

EDMUND

All right, all right. But she is ready for takeoff? The cheerleader. From Houston.

BETSEY

Yeah. She's pretty psyched to piss off her ex.

EDMUND

Sweet. What the hell was that PlayStation crap? They're not really doing that.

BETSEY

I lost my head for a second there.

EDMUND

It wouldn't work.

BETSEY

Duh. I just wanted her to say yes.

EDMUND

You just lied? For shame, Houston.

BETSEY

Seriously, what's with the astronaut thing? Were you talking to Erin?

EDMUND

No. Obviously not. Why?

BETSEY

After you left, she said that I was a Major Tom.

EDMUND

As in, "Ground control to Major Tom"?

BETSEY

Yeah. Compared to Ziggy Stardust anyhow.

EDMUND

Well, that's obvious.

BETSEY

No, I could be a rock star if I wanted.

EDMUND

You flip out at the idea of someone filming you run across a room. [*beat*] So, did you spread any more classified information in order to achieve liftoff, or did you keep it to the PlayStation fib?

BETSEY

Will you knock it off? Just be glad I closed the deal after you dragged Harris back to his padded cell.

EDMUND

You were pretty mad when we left.

BETSEY

Well, he was— The misanthropy gets really old after a while. Yeah, yeah, people suck. I get it.

EDMUND

He is pretty much stuck in that mode.

BETSEY

But just because you think people are assholes doesn't mean you need to contribute to it. Philosophy is one thing, but action is another matter.

EDMUND

Not that I can blame him entirely. Not that I hate everyone, like Harris does. I just, well, I guess I just don't *get* most people. Like how they flip out, over random things. Women especially. Well, the ones I've dated. They'd get on my case saying I take things to extremes and then go completely ballistic over nothing.

BETSEY

What sort of nothing?

EDMUND

Say I'm caught up in a *Quake* deathmatch or something and I don't want to stop just to look at a dress, somehow that means I don't love her. It's not like you can pause a deathmatch--sorry guys, but my girlfriend's having some sort of outfit crisis.

BETSEY

They'd try to kill you even harder.

EDMUND

Well, you can probably guess that *Quake* story is what happened with the last girlfriend.

BETSEY

The last one? You still play *Quake*?

EDMUND

No—that was a while ago. When *Quake* was still good.

BETSEY

I was going to say...

As EDMUND talks, BETSEY tries and is incapacitated by the spicy food.

EDMUND

What kind of a loser do you think I am?

BETSEY is in too much pain to answer.

EDMUND

I don't know, after breaking up with Shelley... Maybe what I'm looking for just isn't out there: she's got to be a woman, you know. Pretty. But most girls who look like girls can't think of anything else. Women should be able to just assume they look fine unless you say otherwise.

BETSEY [*gasping*]

Oh, that's just not going to work.

EDMUND

Why not?

BETSEY [*still choking*]

Well, for one, that would give you license to say, "Hey, you look like crap today," which is just wrong.

EDMUND

You okay?

BETSEY

Yeah. It's this kung pao. Don't think I've been so aware of the sides of my tongue since—ever.

EDMUND

So now you like spicy food? Anyhow, if my clothes weren't appropriate, Shelly'd tell me, and I'd put something else on. No drama. I don't see a point in getting all emotional about a dress.