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Cast of Characters

MOLLY, a young advice columnist

RENEE, a very down-to-earth friend of Molly who works for the same paper

BRYAN, a young journalist who writes to Molly for advice

MEL, Molly's egotistical ex-boyfriend

JENNA, Bryan's bubbly ex-girlfriend

DALE, Jenna's quiet boyfriend

FEMALE LETTER READER

MALE LETTER READER

Setting

A newspaper office in Boston.

Production Notes

The letters at the beginning of each scene can be read in several ways; having onstage characters read the letters adds to the humor of the play, keeps the audience attentive, and makes blackouts unnecessary. Scene changes and quick costume changes can take place while the letters are being read. The letters can be divided between one male and one female, or among several different people. It's important, however, to make each letter reader uniquely quirky. If all of the letters are read by the same two people, those people should come up with a different voice, stance, and personality for each letter.

The author grants permission for production groups to alter potentially objectionable language.

MANDY DEAR by Hillary Ingber

Scene 1

(The lights come up on a cluttered desk. MOLLY is sitting at the desk typing. She finishes typing, picks up a letter, and begins to read. Spotlight on the desk.)

MALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, You have to help me. Robbie moved out two months ago and I am extremely depressed. For a year and a half Robbie never left my side. We went everywhere together. We'd take long walks. Every night he slept right by me. We even used to wrestle in the park together on Sundays. There was nothing I loved more than Robbie licking my face. You see I used to date his owner. However we broke up, and now she refuses to let me see Robbie. I asked her if we could please put our personal problems aside for Robbie's sake, but my ex is being completely unreasonable. I need your help. I can't live without this dog. Signed, Hoping for Hound

(MOLLY crumples up the letter and throws it away.)

FEMALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, I'm fourteen, and my boyfriend's sixteen. We've been dating for close to six months. He is like the coolest guy I've ever met. Everyone at school is really jealous of me because I'm a freshman and he's a junior and he can drive and he has a truck. Can you imagine? Anyway, last night he proposed to me. He said that we should drive up to Las Vegas and get married. How cool is that? Anyway, the problem is I need parental consent. How should I go about telling my mother? From, In Love in Boston

(MOLLY throws the letter away.)

MOLLY. Fourteen, eh?

MALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, Where do babies come from?

(MOLLY opens her desk drawer and puts the letter in a special folder.)

MALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, Every year I go home to

spend the holidays with my family. We have a large family, and it's important to my parents that we all spend this time together. Last week, however, my girlfriend asked me to come and spend the holidays with her family. Things are getting pretty serious between us, and my girlfriend really wants me to meet her parents. How can I choose between two families? Signed, Hopeless on Holidays

MOLLY. (Typing:) Dear Hopeless, Whom to spend the holidays with is a problem that confronts many couples every year. If you are truly serious about this woman, you need to learn to compromise. I'm sure your family would understand if you explain the situation to them. Let them know that you'll be sure to join them next year and bring your girlfriend. However, before you become the family disappointment, make sure the holidays are the best time for you to meet your girlfriend's family. The holidays are a very stressful time for most people, and many convert this stress into irritability. You may suggest to your girlfriend that the two of you go after the holiday season. If not, pack your bags and hope for the best. Yours truly, Mandy

(Lights come up over the whole office. MOLLY is doing something unusual, like spinning around in her chair. RENEE enters.)

RENEE. Working hard?

MOLLY. I can't find two letters to print. They're either too serious or too ridiculous. I mean look at this one.

RENEE. "Dear Mandy, Will you marry me?" Huh. Well, not to worry; there's a fresh stack right here.

MOLLY. Wonderful, thirty more pages of other people's problems. Here, you take half and I'll take half. If there's anything good in there, give it to me.

RENEE. Alrighty.

MOLLY. Okay, let's see, in love with best friend's girlfriend—unintelligent. Nobody likes me—unfortunate. Can I make a long term relationship work—unlikely. Every time I think about girls I want to vomit—unappealing. Renee, are you having any luck?

RENEE. No, but I'm having fun.

MOLLY. (Opening another letter:) You know it's time for a career change when... (Reading:) "Dear Mandy...." Unbelievable!

RENEE. What, did you find something?

MOLLY. Read this.

RENEE. "Dear Mandy, I just broke up with my girlfriend. I was the one who broke it off because I didn't think the relationship was going anywhere. Well, I now know that I was wrong. I think about my ex all the time. I miss her so much. Mandy, you have to help me. I am so scared that she was the one for me and I let her go. I have to fix this. Signed, Broken in Boston" So, what's the big deal? You get letters like this all of the time.

MOLLY. Hello, don't you get it? This one's from Mel.

RENEE. Mel? Mel as in your Mel?

MOLLY. He's not *my* Mel. He's stupid, pig-faced, lower than the scum on my dog's water bowl Mel.

RENEE. Oh right, that one. How can you be so sure it's from him?

MOLLY. When Mel broke it off, he used those exact words, "I don't think this relationship is going anywhere."

RENEE. Wow, he must be like the only guy in the world who's ever said that.

MOLLY. That isn't all. Mel used to be able to fix anything. It didn't matter what it was, or what had happened to it, Mel could fix it. Anyway, it seemed that I was always breaking everything, and I was always asking him to fix things. So I started calling him Mr. Fix It. Is this making any sense to you? I want to fix this, he signed the letter *Broken* in Boston. And then there's the subtle things. For example, look at the stamp; it's a love stamp. That is so ... Mel.

RENEE. Fine, Molly, give the man a call.

MOLLY. Oh yes, like I would ever call that loser. No, no, no, he asked for my advice, and I'm going to give it to him.

RENEE. What?

MOLLY. (Begins typing:) Dear Broken in Boston, You screwed up

big time.

RENEE. Molly, please don't.

MOLLY. (*Typing:*) I highly doubt your girlfriend will even give you the time of day, and why should she? It sounds to me like you acted completely immaturely, as usual.

RENEE. As usual?

MOLLY. (*Typing:*) However, here are a few things you could do that might help, provided your girlfriend is incredibly openminded, caring, understanding, beautiful....

RENEE. Molly!

MOLLY. All right, all right, calm down. (*Continues typing:*) Here are a few tips that might help. First, take her out to a five-star restaurant. Buy her an expensive piece of jewelry. Very expensive!

RENEE. Don't forget flowers.

MOLLY. Flowers, perfect. Renee, you're a natural.

RENEE. Molly, you're a lunatic.

MOLLY. Name-calling? Really, Renee, don't you think that's a little immature? (*Continues typing:*) A huge bouquet of flowers and a shrine.

RENEE. A shrine? Molly, you're crazy. No, I'm not just name-calling. I really do think you're crazy.

MOLLY. (*Typing:*) I think a small shrine for your girlfriend would show her exactly how much you still worship ... uh, care for her.

RENEE. You do realize that this will get printed in every issue of the *Boston Beat?* Do you realize that other people besides you and Mel are going to read this? What am I saying? Do you even realize that other people besides you and Mel exist?

MOLLY. Relax! It's good advice, if you want to get a girl back....

RENEE. A shrine? Molly, that's not how you get a girl back; that's how you get *you* back. Normal people, on the other hand....

MOLLY. Normal people can take a joke! (She continues typing:) If

you take this advice, maybe, just maybe your girlfriend will give you a second chance. However, you might want to keep this in mind for the next time you decide to act on your selfish, chauvinistic—

RENEE. Molly, I'm serious, if you don't stop right now ... this paper *isn't* a joke ... you can't ... you know what, it isn't my name on the column.

MOLLY. It isn't mine either—it's dearest Mandy's, and we're going to print. Finally!

Scene 2

MALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, I made a huge mistake. I work in a large office, and I think it's important to get to know my coworkers on a personal level. There's one woman who is new to my floor, and I've been trying to get to know her. Last week, when she was taking a coffee break, I came up to her, but couldn't think of anything to say. She was wearing a stunning red blazer, so I finally said, "You look lovely in red." Well, now she's suing me for sexual harassment, and I don't know how to tell her that I didn't mean to offend her. Apparently sorry isn't always good enough. Signed....

(A telephone rings, interrupting the reading.)

MOLLY. Hello. Mel? Well, how *lovely* to hear from you, again. I must say, it's a surprise to hear from you so early. Just couldn't wait to talk to me could ya?

(RENEE enters.)

RENEE. Molly, someone's here to see you.

MOLLY. Hang on, I'm on the phone. It's Mel.

RENEE. Oh, Molly, before you start talking to him I think you should know that Mel didn't write the....

MOLLY. Renee, could you please be quiet, I can't hear what Mel is saying. Let me guess, Mel, you called to ask me out to dinner because you have a big piece of jewelry with my name on it....

RENEE. Molly, listen to me, you're making a fool out of yourself. He didn't....

MOLLY. Mel, could you please hold on for a moment. Renee, I know you are still mad about the letter thing, but obviously it worked, and you were wrong, so stop whining about it.

RENEE. Oh, so that's how it is. You know what, Molly, you're right. Hey, ask him if that whole love stamp thing was just a coincidence. I'm curious.

MOLLY. Right. So, Mel, I just happened to notice the stamp you used. Cute, really. What do you mean what am I talking about? (She covers the receiver with her hand:) He's playing games. Typical.

RENEE. Crazy guy, he probably wants it to be a surprise. You know, the shrine and all.

MOLLY. Right! Listen Mel, there is no need to put on this little "I don't know what you're talking about" act. I was extremely flattered by your letter. It was an adorable idea.

RENEE. Come on, Molly, give the guy a break, tell him you still like him.

MOLLY. I can't, I'm having too much fun messing with him.

RENEE. Oh right, that's always fun.

MOLLY. Listen, Mel, I know why you called. Now you can pretend not to know what I'm talking about if you like. The truth is I still have feelings for you too, but I don't know if I'm ready to forgive you yet. Actually, I have to go right now but ... huh? Well I know you called for a reason; you made that quite clear in your.... You want your boxers back? Mel, this is getting ridiculous. You can stop your little games right now because I figured it all out....

RENEE. Molly.

MOLLY. Hang on, Mel. What?

RENEE. Someone is here to see you, and he's been waiting quite a while.

MOLLY. Well, who is it?

RENEE. I don't know. He says his name is Broken in Boston?

MOLLY. Oh crap.

RENEE. Should I tell him you're busy or should I tell him you're an idiot? Or I could just wait until he's done talking to your editor.

MOLLY. He's talking to Jack?

RENEE. No, but he seems quite eager to meet him.

MOLLY. Mel, I have to go. Uh-huh, I'll mail them to you.

(MOLLY hangs up the phone.)

RENEE. Shall I send him in?

MOLLY. You knew that whole time I was talking with Mel.

RENEE. Well yes, but then you informed me that I was wrong, and I didn't want to sound whiney.

MOLLY. You were purposely trying to humiliate me....

RENEE. Molly, don't waste your energy yelling at me. You might want to prepare yourself for your visitor. He doesn't seem to be having a very good day.

(RENEE exits and reenters with BRYAN.)

MOLLY. Hi, I'm....

BRYAN. That's great, it's nice to meet you.

RENEE. So *you* wrote the famous Broken in Boston letter.

MOLLY. Renee, could you excuse us.

(RENEE exits.)

Listen, I'm sorry if my advice seemed a little bogus; you see I thought you were someone else....

BRYAN. Hold on, I thought the whole point of these stupid advice columns was that you could get advice from someone who *doesn't know you*.

MOLLY. Hey, now there is no need for you to call my column stupid. So the advice I gave you may not have been the best for

your situation. Now that you're here, I'll be happy to give you some real advice on how to handle....

BRYAN. Oh, some *real* advice. Hey, no thanks, I think your last advice did quite enough damage.

MOLLY. Well it's not like you followed it ... you followed it, didn't you?

BRYAN. You owe me fifteen hundred dollars.

MOLLY. Yeah right, for what?

BRYAN. Dinner at The Plateau, a dozen roses, and an expensive piece of jewelry, a *very* expensive piece of jewelry.

MOLLY. Ah, well once again I apologize, but....

BRYAN. You apologize?

MOLLY. Well, what do you want me to do, call your girlfriend?

BRYAN. Oh no, that wouldn't be possible. She changed her number right after she told me I was an obsessive psychopath.

MOLLY. Wait a minute. She called you a psychopath because you took her to dinner and bought her jewelry?

BRYAN. Well that and the.... (Mumbles.)

MOLLY. The what?

BRYAN. Never mind; I just hope you know that sometimes the things you do, especially in your line of work, affect other people.

MOLLY. Wait a minute, buddy.

BRYAN. It's Bryan, not Buddy.

MOLLY. Sorry once again, *Bryan*, but before you start giving me a little morality speech, I want to know what you said. Obviously you did something else that pissed your girlfriend off, and you're trying to blame it on me. The dinner, the jewelry and the....

BRYAN. Shrine. The jewelry, the dinner, and the shrine.

MOLLY. Ouch, that must have been awkward.

BRYAN. Slightly. We walk back to my house after dinner, she agrees to come up. Things are going great until I open my bedroom door, and there's her picture with candles and beads and ... oh never mind, I'm not talking about it with you. The point is she called me names, ran out, and changed her number.

MOLLY. Well it isn't that bad....

BRYAN. Did I mention the restraining order?

MOLLY. Look, I don't know what to say.

BRYAN. That's funny; aren't you paid to know what to say? Are you just having an off week or something? You certainly had lots to say to me in your letter. But seeing as you have nothing to say to me now, I think I'll just ask your editor if he has anything to say.

MOLLY. Hey listen, don't threaten me.

BRYAN. When have I threatened you? I'm guessing his door is that way.

MOLLY. Don't go in there!

BRYAN. Why not?

MOLLY. He's busy. Look, don't go in there. What happened between you and your girlfriend was not my fault. Trying to get me fired....

BRYAN. The sign says "come on in." He really doesn't look all that busy.

MOLLY. Look, I'll make it up to you. I'll talk to your girlfriend, I'll, I'll reimburse you for the jewelry. Please leave my editor out of this.

BRYAN. You know what, I'm sorry to say this, but you give lousy advice, and I really don't think I'm going to take it this time. It was nice meeting you, *Dear Mandy*.

(BRYAN slams the door to Jack's office.)

Scene Three

FEMALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, I moved in with my boyfriend three months ago. Ever since I moved in, it seems that we can't agree on anything. I like alternative, he likes hip hop. I say we carpet the bathroom; he says we go with tile. I want a firm mattress, he wants soft, and yes, we tried the air mattresses—it was a huge disaster. I say white, he says wheat. I want crunchy, he wants creamy. Black white, up down, left right, I'm dying here. He wants Florida for the holidays, I'm all for Vail. Can you tell me how I'm supposed to live with this? Every apology leads to another argument. I think we may have rushed into things. We were both better off when we had our own space. However, now that we've jumped into this, I don't know if it's possible to back up. I really need your help. Sincerely, Out of Luck Opposite

(MOLLY is at her desk, reading a letter. She begins typing.)

MOLLY. Dear Opposite, Boys suck ... a lot!

(BRYAN enters.)

Boys are mean and stupid and immature and they are over-reactors. Every single one of them! Yours always, Mandy

BRYAN. Very insightful.

MOLLY. I thought something smelled funny. Bryan, why are you still here?

BRYAN. Okay, listen....

MOLLY. Go away.

BRYAN. Look, I didn't know that your editor was going to be that, uh, brutal. I think that part of what I said may have been inappropriate.

MOLLY. Oh, which part was inappropriate—the part where you called my column stupid, the part where you insulted me directly, or whatever you said that almost got me fired?

BRYAN. I'm sorry. I was hurt, and I was angry, and you see, according to my therapist, I have this condition ... Mandy, where are you going? Mandy, wait. Mandy.

MOLLY. My name is not Mandy; it's *Molly.* Will you please stop calling me that?

BRYAN. Molly, Mandy, what's the difference?

MOLLY. A couple of L's and an O, Buddy.

BRYAN. Well then, why don't you just call the column "Dear Molly"?

MOLLY. We aren't allowed to use our real names to protect us from psychopaths who storm our offices and follow us around when we're trying to do our jobs.

BRYAN. Oh, so now *you* think I'm a psychopath. Hey, that's two girls in one week.

MOLLY. Congratulations.

BRYAN. You know, there wouldn't be any girls who thought I was a psychopath if you hadn't come into my life.

MOLLY. First of all, *I* didn't come into *your* life. I believe that *you* are the one who wrote *me* that letter, and *you're* the one who walked into *my* office, *twice*. Second, even if you hadn't met me, I'm sure plenty of girls would think you're a psychopath, and third, I'm in trouble as it is and I don't have time to listen to you while you insult me further.

BRYAN. Well then, I guess I'll leave you to your work, if you can call it that. I just thought I'd come to apologize, but I guess you're above apologies.

MOLLY. *I'm* above apologies? Well, why don't you go tell Jack about that? I'm sure he'd love to hear about how *I* won't accept *your* apology. And seeing as you two are so close.

BRYAN. Hey, my girlfriend dumped me; I was angry. Then I made a complete fool of myself trying to get her back, and I was humiliated.

MOLLY. Look Buddy, if you really feel the need to list off your emotions, go back and talk to your shrink. Because I don't have time, and I don't care.

BRYAN. You know, you're a brat.

MOLLY. You're a jerk.

BRYAN. You're obnoxious.

MOLLY. You're stuck-up.

BRYAN. You're immature.

MOLLY. You're a tattletale.

BRYAN. I am not a tattletale.

MOLLY. Running to my boss when you have a problem? Just admit it; you're a tattletale.

BRYAN. Fine, I'll admit that if you'll admit that it was your fault that Jenna left me.

MOLLY. Jenna? Your girlfriend?

BRYAN. Uh-huh.

MOLLY. That wasn't my fault.

BRYAN. It was too your fault, and if you think I'm about to say I was a tattletale because of your immaturity....

MOLLY. Excuse me?

BRYAN. I think using your job and a newspaper to play some little lover's quarrel game with your boyfriend more than qualifies as immaturity.

MOLLY. Hey. At least I mind my own business and don't blame other people for my personal problems.

BRYAN. (Simultaneously:) At least I don't give bad advice to people I don't even know.

MOLLY. (Simultaneously:) At least I don't ask people I don't even know for advice.

BRYAN. You know, I don't know why I even bothered to come here.

MOLLY. Well, I wish you hadn't, seeing as you certainly didn't make my day any better. Then again, I guess that's the way it is for you with most girls these days.

BRYAN. Oh, go to hell!

MOLLY. Fine, as long as you promise not to come looking for me there.

Scene Four

MALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, I hate blind dates. I absolutely can't stand them. However, my roommate was good friends with this girl, and he wanted to take her out. He begged me to come with them because this girl wanted to bring a friend. I was dreading the date and went in expecting the worst. However, I was surprised to find that I really liked this girl. We really hit it off. The problem is, my roommate and his friend didn't. I really want to see this girl again, but every time I bring it up, my roommate just rolls his eyes and changes the subject. I don't know how I can get ahold of her. I don't even know if she wants to see me again. Should I pursue this or let it go? If you think I should try to contact this girl, how should I go about doing it? Please help, Motionless in Massachusetts

(RENEE enters. MOLLY is sitting at her desk with her head between her legs.)

RENEE. Molly?

MOLLY. What?

RENEE. Why are you sitting like that?

MOLLY. I'm thinking.

RENEE. About the way denim feels on your forehead?

MOLLY. Do you really think that my advice helps anyone?

RENEE. Oh, look at the time.

MOLLY. I'm serious. What makes my column different from every other column?

RENEE. The other writers take their jobs seriously?

MOLLY. No....

RENEE. The other columns are researched?

MOLLY. No.

RENEE. Talent!

MOLLY. Renee!

RENEE. All right, I give up—what?

MOLLY. Well, I was going to say "nothing," but thank you, Renee, you have more than proved me wrong.

RENEE. I'm sorry.

MOLLY. I've been thinking, what if I did something different like, um, I don't know, color therapy.

RENEE. Sweetie, this is a newspaper.

MOLLY. So?

RENEE. Black and white. Maybe if you're lucky you could get a few shades of gray in there, but....

MOLLY. Renee, you don't always have to make me feel so stupid.

RENEE. I'm sorry. It's not such a bad idea. We just need a slogan.

MOLLY. Yeah!

RENEE. Something catchy like, "We take the color out of color therapy."

MOLLY. Okay, I get it, bad idea. What about music therapy?

RENEE. What?

MOLLY. Well, all of these letters come down to the same thing: "Relationships suck!" The best advice I can give is, "Gather up a gallon of ice cream, comfy pajamas, and Mindy McCready."

RENEE. Who?

MOLLY. You know, Mindy McCready? "A Girl's Gotta Do"?

(MOLLY turns around and starts singing as BRYAN enters.)

"A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do and now I've got to get to

getting over you."

(MOLLY turns around to point to RENEE, and sees BRYAN.)

You never leave, do you?

BRYAN. Nice singing, cowgirl. Don't worry, I'm not here to see you. Just pretend you don't see me. I'm supposed to meet a Teri Zladger in book reviews. Can you just tell me where his office is.

RENEE. He just switched offices....

MOLLY. That's right, I think his new one's in China. Sorry, Buddy, shall I call a cab?

RENEE. Down the hall, last office on the left.

BRYAN. Thank you. It's nice to know that at least one real person works in this office. And by the way *Mandy*, the name's Bryan.

(BRYAN exits.)

MOLLY. Traitor!

RENEE. Yeah, you almost had him on that China thing. It would probably have taken him weeks to get home. But seriously, I want to hear more about this music therapy idea.

MOLLY. Renee, stop talking. You're making fun of me, and you drive me crazy.

RENEE. (Singing:) "She drives me crazy. Oh ooh. Like no one else. Oh ooh. She drives me crazy and I can't help myself."

MOLLY. How come no one walks in on you when you're acting stupid?

RENEE. Law of probability. The chances of people walking in on you when you're making a fool of yourself are much higher....

(MEL enters. MOLLY falls behind a desk.)

RENEE. Molly, what are you do—Mel, what a surprise.

MEL. Can I talk to Molly?

RENEE. Molly? Oh, Molly. Sorry, she's not here.

MEL. She isn't?

RENEE. Nope.

MEL. I saw her dive behind her desk.

RENEE. No, you didn't.

MEL. Yes, I did.

RENEE. Well, um, okay, she can't see you right now.

MEL. Why?

RENEE. Um, well, she isn't ... wearing pants.

MEL and MOLLY. What!?

RENEE. That's right. It's funny because you know how you always have those dreams where you realize you forgot to wear some article of clothing?

MEL. Uh-huh.

RENEE. Well, that actually happened.

MEL. To Molly.

RENEE. To Molly.

MEL. Uh-huh. Hey Molly, why don't you just come out from under the desk.

(MOLLY emerges.)

MOLLY. Hello, Mel.

MEL. Nice to see you, Molly. I must say I love those pants.

MOLLY. Renee, was that the best you could do?

RENEE. Hey, you put me on the spot. I had to think of something.

MOLLY. And you thought that telling Mel I wasn't fully dressed would get him to leave? Mel, what do you want?

MEL. Well, I was just in the neighborhood, and I really wanted to see you.

MOLLY. You did?

MEL. No. Actually, I'm here to inquire about our little conversation

earlier.

MOLLY. Conversation, conversation ... oh, that one. I'll get your boxers to you as soon as I can.

MEL. Not that part. No, I was thinking more about the part where you said you still had feelings for me.

MOLLY. You must have misheard me. I said I still had, uh, things for you. Your boxers and stuff.

MEL. No, Molly, you didn't say *things.* Molly, I know you're still in love with me.

MOLLY. Excuse me? I am not in love with you. If anything, you're in love with me.

MEL. Molly, stop lying to me. Stop lying to yourself. I know you're in love with me. It's all right. It's good actually. I've decided to take you back. I'm kind of flattered by your cute little obsession.

MOLLY. I am not obsessed with you. You, you disgust me. And for your information, I'm seeing somebody else.

MEL. Oh really?

MOLLY. Yes, as a matter of fact.

MEL. Who?

(BRYAN enters.)

MOLLY. Him.

(MOLLY grabs BRYAN and drags him over to MEL.)

BRYAN. What?

MOLLY. Mel, I'd like you to meet Bryan.

BRYAN. Molly, what are you—

(MOLLY squeezes BRYAN's arm.)

Ow!

MOLLY. *Bryan* and I have been dating for close to two months, so I'm sorry, Mel. You must have gotten the wrong impression.

BRYAN. What impression?

MOLLY. Bryan, Mel here thinks that I'm still in love with him.

BRYAN. Oh, does Mel think the world revolves around him, too? You two must have been perfect for each o—Ouch. Will you stop that?

MEL. Well, it sounds like you two are *real* happy with each other.

MOLLY. Oh we sure are! Right, Bryan?

BRYAN. Huh? Oh, uh yeah, yeah we sure are. Boy, do I love this girl.

(BRYAN puts his arm around MOLLY.)

MEL. Well, the only reason I came by was because Molly here mentioned on the phone that she still had feelings for me.

BRYAN. Molly, is that true?

MOLLY. No, I....

BRYAN. Molly, I can't believe you never talked to me about this. You know maybe you could have mentioned this to me *before* I spent my overtime pay on tickets to Hawaii for the two of us. I can't believe this. Two months, Molly. I've tried to ignore the way you smile every time you talk about him, the picture you have on your dresser. I suppose I should have suspected something was going on when you muttered his name last night in your sleep, but I just kept trying to ignore it. And now, this. You called him? It's too much, Molly, just too much. It's always Mel, Mel, Mel. When is it going to be Bryan?

MEL. Look I'm real sorry, buddy.

BRYAN. My name is Bryan. Listen Molly, I think I'm getting a little upset, and I lost my house key. Could you please give me yours, and we'll talk about this when you get home.

MOLLY. Huh?

BRYAN. My keys to the apartment—I lost them.

MOLLY. You want my keys?

MEL. Molly, it sounds like you owe Bryan an apology.

RENEE. You know for once I think that I agree with Mel.

MOLLY. No.

BRYAN. Molly here isn't one for apologies.

RENEE. I hear ya.

MEL. You can say that again.

MOLLY. This is amazing, incredible. I ... I ... am going to cry.

BRYAN. Oh sweetie, don't cry. We'll get past this. Hey, I'll tell you what, just give me your keys, and I'll go to the apartment and make you dinner, and we can watch *My Fair Lady* when you get home and reruns of *Mork and Mindy* on Nick at Nite.

MOLLY. I'm not giving you my keys.

BRYAN. Well then, how am I going to get into the apartment?

MOLLY. Get a hotel room.

BRYAN. Oh, so you can spend the night with Mel—is that what you're thinking?

MOLLY. All right, all right, quit torturing me.

(MOLLY hands her keys to BRYAN.)

BRYAN. Thanks, honey. Listen, I'll have dinner for you when you get home. Chinese food maybe, I'm not really in the mood to cook. Look Mel, I'm real sorry you had to witness this. Molly and I are really very happy.

MEL. Well, I guess every relationship has its little quirks, right? Especially when this girl is involved.

MOLLY. Our relationship does not have quirks. You have quirks. Bryan and I bring each other flowers and play Uno.

MEL. Uno?

MOLLY. That's right, every night. We play lots of card games, in fact. We sit down and make ourselves tea and pop popcorn and play Uno and gin. And we keep a running score on our gin game.

We were going to play till we hit a thousand, but we hit that long ago, and neither one of us wanted to stop playing so we just kept going. Now we're seeing who will be the first to five thousand, and he may be ahead right now, but I will catch up.

BRYAN. You know, Mel, you're welcome to come play with us some time.

MEL. I think I'll have to pass. Look, I'll see you all later ... maybe. Uh, goodbye.

(MEL exits.)

BRYAN. He seemed nice.

RENEE. Bryan, you're good at this.

MOLLY. Leave leave leave leave! Renee, Bryan, get out!

RENEE. See ya, Molly. Bye, Bryan.

(RENEE exits.)

BRYAN. Are you angry?

MOLLY. Don't talk to me.

BRYAN. You know you risk an awful lot by deciding to get someone else involved in your love life. What's funny is that you keep dragging *me* into it.

MOLLY. I dragged you over because you were the only one around. I thought that perhaps you had a shred of compassion, or sympathy, or something in you, but apparently I was wrong.

BRYAN. Oh come on, it wasn't that bad. You're the one that went off on the whole gin spurt.

MOLLY. Mel, who I hate, came in thinking I liked him and walked out thinking I was obsessed with him. Define "not that bad."

BRYAN. I have a feeling Mel won't be back for a while.

MOLLY. You know, responding to your letter was quite possibly the worst mistake I've ever made. You keep showing up and making my life miserable. I'm sorry. Is that what you want? Will that make you go away?

BRYAN. Hey, you dragged me into this one. I was on my way out the door.

MOLLY. My mistake.

BRYAN. Look, I'll make it up to you. I'll give you a chance to ruin my love life for a second time, if it would make you feel better.

MOLLY. You want me to write another letter?

BRYAN. I want you to come to dinner with me tonight. I happen to know that my girlfriend and her new interest are dining at Il Capriccio tonight, and I want you and me to run into them there.

MOLLY. No! I'm tired, and I'm staying home tonight.

BRYAN. Please.

MOLLY. Why would you ever want to take me? I'm mad at you, and I really, really want to embarrass you.

BRYAN. Well, at least then I wouldn't feel guilty for ruining your chances with that guy.

MOLLY. His name is Mel, and I'm not going to spare you guilt.

BRYAN. Really? Well, in that case, how are you getting into your apartment?

MOLLY. Huh?

(BRYAN dangles the keys in front of her.)

MOLLY. That's not fair; give me my keys. This isn't funny.

BRYAN. It wouldn't be right for me to let you go home mad, would it? And all alone, without a gin partner.

MOLLY. What about you and your *Mork and Mindy* reruns? Give me....

BRYAN. This is an adorable key chain. What is it, some kind of small horse?

MOLLY. It's a monkey.

BRYAN. Well if you ever want to see your beloved monkey-horse again, meet me at the corner of Main and Prospect at six.

MOLLY. I will call security.

BRYAN. I strongly urge you not to involve the authorities in this matter. It could be very hazardous to little Curious Ed's health.

(BRYAN pockets the keys.)

MOLLY. But I need my car.

BRYAN. I'm sure you'll manage.

MOLLY. I'm not coming.

BRYAN. In that case, expect me in your living room at six-fifteen.

MOLLY. You don't know where I live.

BRYAN. Oh, we psychopaths have our ways.

(BRYAN exits.)

MOLLY. I hate you.

BRYAN. (Offstage:) Six o'clock.

Scene Five

(The scene changes from an office to a restaurant setting.)

FEMALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, My friend asked me to do her a favor last month. She had just broken up with her boyfriend and he took it really hard. She asked me if I would take him out for a drink just to help him refocus his stress level. I agreed to it only because she's my best friend, and I thought I could apply my background in yoga and crystal therapy to help him get back in touch with the inner child that we all lose somewhere along the way. Well, it just so happens that I also recently went through a breakup. Apparently my friend decided to return the favor. She is now using her background in massage therapy to console my ex. However, to be quite honest, I don't think much consoling goes on during that hour they spend together each day. When I ask her about this she accuses me of being jealous and says that she's just returning the favor. The problem is I didn't ask her to return the favor, and it makes me very uncomfortable to see them together. I'm serious, Mandy, this situation is giving me really bad vibes. Am I overreacting? What can I say to make my friend stop her behavior? Please help, Flirting Friend

BRYAN. (Pacing, talking to MOLLY's key chain:) Well, little friend, here it is—the moment of truth.

(MOLLY enters behind BRYAN. She is now wearing a nice dress.)

Will Molly claim you, or will I have to throw you into the gutter? "No, no!" Silence! Begging will get you nowhere.

MOLLY. Well it's nice to know that I'm not the only one who acts like an idiot when I think no one else is watching.

BRYAN. Oh. Wow!

MOLLY. What?

BRYAN. You look good.

MOLLY. That surprises you?

BRYAN. No, well, I ... was just surprised that you changed.

MOLLY. Yeah, well fortunately my neighbor has a key. She also has your name and description, by the way.

BRYAN. Fair enough. Look, if you're uncomfortable....

MOLLY. I'm hungry. A free dinner actually doesn't sound that bad.

BRYAN. Who said anything about free dinner?

MOLLY. The problem is, Buddy, I left my wallet in my car, and I seem to have misplaced my keys, so that leaves me fresh out of cash.

BRYAN. How unfortunate.

MOLLY. I know. Is she here yet?

BRYAN. First table on the left.

MOLLY. Oh, wow.

BRYAN. Okay, be casual, I want her to notice me before I notice her. So don't make eye contact, walk straight....

MOLLY. Bryan.

BRYAN. Yeah.

MOLLY. Calm down; I've stalked people before, too.

BRYAN. I'm not stalking her.

MOLLY. Whatever. Besides, I'm just here to humiliate you, remember?

BRYAN. And the free food, right?

MOLLY. No, that's just an added bonus.

BRYAN. Okay, you're making me worried; let's just go somewhere else.

MOLLY. You're really nervous, aren't you?

BRYAN. Well, I just....

MOLLY. You really like this girl, don't you?

BRYAN. I don't know, I just....

MOLLY. I'll tell ya what, I'll go easy on you, if you let me order dessert.

BRYAN. Deal!

(BRYAN starts to walk toward the table, but then turns around.)

You know, maybe this isn't....

MOLLY. Go!

BRYAN. Right!

JENNA. Bryan, is that you? Oh my lord, it is! How are you? It's been forever since I've seen your face, and aren't you looking good! What have you been up to?

BRYAN. Well I....

JENNA. Oh, where are my manners? Bryan, this is Dale. And who is this pretty little thing with you?

BRYAN. Oh this is....

MOLLY. I'm Molly.

JENNA. Well, aren't you cute. Bryan, where did you find her?

MOLLY. Find me?

BRYAN. Uh, actually....

JENNA. Bryan is such a great person.

MOLLY. Really?

JENNA. Well, I guess you'd have to know him as well as I do. (*Whispering:*) He can get a bit possessive though, so watch out. Excellent taste in jewelry, however.

MOLLY. I'm sure.

JENNA. Well please, have a seat.

(JENNA directs BRYAN to a seat next to her, forcing MOLLY to sit at the other end of the table.)

Let's not be strangers. So are you two, uh ... well of course you are. Just look at the two of you. Bryan, I am so glad you found someone. I was so worried about you after the ... well, you know.

MOLLY. No, what? I haven't heard about this. What happened?

BRYAN. Oh, it was nothing....

MOLLY. It's okay, Bryan; I want to hear about it.

JENNA. She should probably know, dear.

MOLLY. Yes dear, I probably should.

JENNA. When Bryan and I broke up, Bryan built a small altar or something for me.

MOLLY. Oh, like a shrine.

JENNA. Exactly. Anyway, it just scared me a little, that's all.

MOLLY. Well, I'm sure he meant well.

JENNA. Apparently he decided to do it after reading some advice column. I mean, like I believe that. Who in their right mind would ever give such bizarre advice?

BRYAN. It wasn't that terrible, Jenna.

JENNA. Wasn't that terrible? Bryan, only twisted people do that kind of thing.

BRYAN. Jenna, just because someone isn't like you doesn't make them twisted....

MOLLY. It's all right, Bryan.

JENNA. I'm sorry, honey, I didn't mean to offend you. Hey, you'll never guess who I ran into the other day.

BRYAN. Who?

JENNA. Larry.

BRYAN. You're kidding. I haven't seen that guy in years; how is he?

JENNA. He's doing great! We were reminiscing about that trip we took to Colorado.

BRYAN. That's right; that was fun.

MOLLY. So Dale, what do you do?

JENNA. Hey Bryan, do you remember the club we went to that first night?

BRYAN. Sure I do.

JENNA. The cross-dressing belly dancers, and that little fat one whose skirt fell off in the middle of his act.

MOLLY. What type of club was this?

BRYAN. Oh, it was just a little....

JENNA. Bryan and I used to take these wild road trips. We would leave first thing on a Thursday without knowing where we wanted to go, and we wouldn't come home until Sunday night.

MOLLY. Sounds like fun.

BRYAN. That was before we had jobs....

JENNA. It was a blast! Hey Bryan, speaking of jobs, I hear you're applying for one. I want you to tell me all about it.

BRYAN. Um, well actually it's a journalism job. I'll be working for a newspaper doing book reviews.

JENNA. Oh, that is super! Which paper?

BRYAN. Actually it's the *Boston Beat.*

MOLLY. What?

JENNA. Oh Bryan, that paper is garbage, hardly journalism. I'm sure my father could fix you up with something better. He has connections, and you are so talented, but honey, if you surround yourself with those incompetent writers....

MOLLY. I have to go.

BRYAN. Molly, wait!

(BRYAN gets up and follows Molly out of the restaurant.)

Molly! Molly, please. Molly, she doesn't know what she's talking about.

MOLLY. Look, I'm tired.

BRYAN. Oh come on, you've taken insults worse than that. You're like the cut-down queen. You can't let Jenna get to you. She's an amateur.

MOLLY. You know, I've been arguing with people all day. I've been taking insult after insult. I just want to go home and be with someone who takes me seriously.

BRYAN. And who would that be?

MOLLY. My dog.

BRYAN. Ah.

MOLLY. You know, it's never good to make too many enemies in one day. There's only so much I can take.

BRYAN. Well, Mandy, maybe you're a real person after all.

MOLLY. Maybe.

BRYAN. Well, how am I going to buy you dessert, if you won't even stay for dinner?

MOLLY. I can't stay.

BRYAN. And why not?

MOLLY. Because if I have to listen to that woman say one more thing, I'll kill her!

BRYAN. Fair enough.

MOLLY. I have the strength you know.

BRYAN. I wouldn't doubt it.

MOLLY. Look, Bryan, you don't need me. That woman worships you. Poor Dale doesn't know what hit him. She refers to you as "honey" or "darling" in every other sentence. This will be good for you. You can go back in there and tell her I left you and that you're really upset. She'll of course want to comfort you. After dinner, Dale will leave, and you'll be home free.

BRYAN. Yeah. Sounds like quite an evening.

MOLLY. Yep, she's a real prize.

BRYAN. Sure ... oh Molly.

MOLLY. What?

BRYAN. Nothing. (Tosses her keys to her:) Thanks, I guess.

MOLLY. Any time, Buddy.

Scene Six

(The scene changes back to the office setting, where RENEE is working.)

FEMALE LETTER READER. Dear Mandy, I read your column all the time. Sometimes, though, it seems that the people who write in make a huge deal out of minor problems. Love is such a blessing, but it isn't easy to control. You should tell your readers that sometimes you just have to let go, and trust fate. Yours truly, Relaxing for a Change

(BRYAN enters, carrying a pile of mail.)

BRYAN. Hi.

RENEE. Hi, Bryan. If you're here to fight with Molly, you'll have to have a seat. She isn't in yet.

(The phone rings.)

Boston Beat, this is Renee.

MOLLY. Hi, Renee.

RENEE. (*To BRYAN:*) You're in luck; it's Molly. Maybe the two of you can chew each other out over the phone. Molly, why aren't you here?

MOLLY. I need to be sick today.

RENEE. What do you mean, you need to be sick? Are you sick?

MOLLY. Well, kind of.

RENEE. What?

MOLLY. I'm troubled.

RENEE. Troubled?

MOLLY. And I have a headache.

RENEE. (To BRYAN:) She's troubled and has a headache.

BRYAN. Tell her to take some aspirin.

RENEE. (*To BRYAN:*) First office rule: never, under any circumstances, give Molly drugs.

BRYAN. I have her mail.

RENEE. Put it on her desk. Molly, if you're not here by noon, I'm going to let Bryan do your column today. For some odd reason, he's here again.

BRYAN. Oh, I work here now.

RENEE. I won't tell her if you won't.

BRYAN. Oh, she already knows. I told her last night.

RENEE. Well no wonder she's refusing to come in.

BRYAN. Very funny.

(BRYAN exits.)

RENEE. Molly, if you aren't coming in, you better e-mail me your letters by noon.

MOLLY. I can't.

RENEE. What?

MOLLY. I'm a terrible writer, Renee. I give lousy advice.

RENEE. Well, Molly, that's beside the point; you have a job and....

MOLLY. You could be Dear Mandy for a day.

RENEE. No I can't.

MOLLY. Why not?

RENEE. Because it's not my job. Molly, what is going on?

MOLLY. Nothing, it's just ... do you think I'm a real person?

RENEE. Molly.

MOLLY. Yeah?

RENEE. You certainly are troubled. Listen, I'll do this for you once.

MOLLY. Oh, Renee, thank you so much!

RENEE. What if I screw up?

MOLLY. Just open two letters and write a little blurb. You can't screw up.

RENEE. All right. But you better get some sleep. And be on time tomorrow. Molly? Hello? Okay, let's see.... (She opens a letter and begins to read it out loud:) "Dear Mandy, I recently met this girl. At first I thought she was a complete snob. The two of us fought every time we saw each other. However, after I spent some time with her, I really began to like her. I have no idea if she would even give me the time of day. I embarrassed her in front of her boyfriend and almost cost her her job. I apologize for all these things. I guess I'm asking if you think I have a chance? Sincerely, Your Buddy in Boston" Not much of a letter. Oh well, it's late. (Begins typing:) Dear

Buddy, If the two of you had such terrible chemistry at first, the chances for a successful relationship are slim, especially if you've already done damage. My advice is, if she hasn't mentioned it, save yourself the embarrassment, and leave it as is. Yours truly, Mandy

Scene Seven

(RENEE is working. MOLLY storms in.)

MOLLY. What in the hell did you do?

RENEE. Good morning—are you feeling better?

MOLLY. You printed this?

RENEE. What?

MOLLY. This letter from Your Buddy in Boston! What were you thinking?

RENEE. I was probably thinking of how you said "you can't screw up." Did I do something wrong?

MOLLY. No, Renee, I did something wrong. I let you handle my column.

RENEE. Molly!

MOLLY. That letter was from Bryan! It was about me.

RENEE. Of course it was; isn't everything? Molly, this is incredible! Have you not learned?

MOLLY. Renee, I mean it this time. It was signed....

RENEE. Molly, stop it. Why would Bryan ever write you another letter? Why would you even think he's in love with you? Why would you care? He hates you. You hate him.

MOLLY. It's different now, Renee. You see, the other night....

RENEE. Molly, I don't want to hear this! Why you keep setting yourself up for humiliation time and time again is a mystery to me. Go sit down and wait until you're ready to thank me for keeping you from making a fool out of yourself twice.

MOLLY. Renee, you don't understand....

RENEE. I don't want to understand....

MOLLY. I really like him, Renee. I know that he hated me and I hated him, but it's different now. We went to dinner and ... well, it's a long story, but I think we hit it off. Oh, I guess it doesn't matter anymore.

RENEE. You're serious about this, aren't you?

MOLLY. Yes!

RENEE. You're insane.

MOLLY. Renee!

RENEE. Absolutely out of your mind.

MOLLY. You ruined my social life.

RENEE. Listen, I covered for you, and now I have a lot to do. I'm not listening to this.

MOLLY. Renee, why won't you believe me?

RENEE. Because, Molly, you play these little games all the time, and you're never right.

MOLLY. I'm right this time.

(BRYAN enters.)

BRYAN. Good morning, ladies.

MOLLY. Bryan, what are you doing here?

BRYAN. I work here now, remember? Book reviews, hardly journalism. We went over it the other night.

RENEE. The other night?

MOLLY. I told you. Bryan, did you read my column this morning?

BRYAN. I sure did.

MOLLY. Before you say anything, let me just tell you that I don't think you understand.

BRYAN. I think I understand perfectly.

MOLLY. No, you don't. You see, I got your letter, but I didn't have a chance to read it. Instead I just asked Renee to do the column because I was upset because to tell you the truth I was jealous of you and your girlfriend. So I never read the letter, but Renee did, and she responded to it. It wasn't me, and I'm so sorry if you thought that I hated you when really I feel exactly the same way you do. And that letter was so cute, and you may be the most romantic person I've ever met and I'm babbling.... What I'm trying to say is I've fallen for you too, Buddy.

BRYAN. You have?

MOLLY. Yes.

BRYAN. Well that certainly clears everything up.

MOLLY. Oh good!

BRYAN. Um, except for the part about the letter. I'm still a little shaky about that part.

MOLLY. What?

BRYAN. What letter are you talking about?

MOLLY. You didn't write me a letter?

BRYAN. Nope.

MOLLY. But the letter was signed ... oh no ... never mind.

RENEE. Ooh, strike two.

MOLLY. Renee, this really is *not* the time.

(MOLLY turns away.)

BRYAN. Well wait, where are you going?

MOLLY. Actually, I was just heading over to the corner. If you need me, I'll be digging myself a giant hole.

BRYAN. Hey, you can't just turn your back on the most romantic guy you've ever met.

MOLLY. Well, turning my back on you is better than turning my

face on you at the moment because my face is about five different shades of red.

BRYAN. Well red's my favorite color, next to purple. Hey, Molly, are you crying?

MOLLY. (Through her tears:) No, it's just that I've had a very stressful week.

BRYAN. Oh well, would it help if I bought you dinner?

(MOLLY looks up.)

MOLLY. Huh?

BRYAN. Yeah you know, and then if you're still feeling stressed, we could catch a movie or play gin or Uno or something.

MOLLY. Are you asking me out?

BRYAN. Well yeah, but I really can't take any credit. Your Buddy in Boston did all the work.

MOLLY. My Buddy in Boston?

BRYAN. Yeah.

MOLLY. How did you know that was his name?

BRYAN. What? Whose name?

MOLLY. The guy who wrote the letter, how did you know his name was Your Buddy in Boston?

BRYAN. I, uh, I read the column.

MOLLY. What was the other name?

BRYAN. What?

MOLLY. I printed two letters. One from My Ex-Buddy in Boston and the other from....

BRYAN. Sleepless in Seattle?

MOLLY. I knew it! You did write that letter.

BRYAN. Uh, no I didn't.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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