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*This play is dedicated to Maureen.*

## **Cast of Characters**

BRANWYN

MARK

## **Setting**

A living room.

## **Author's Note**

Branwyn is pronounced *BRAN-win* with a hard “A” like in the word “grand.” The director is encouraged to use as many props as makes the actress *uncomfortable* on stage (e.g., a canteen, hiking boots, bug spray, two urns, sunglasses, tree branches and anything else one would take on a hike to spread the ashes of a mother and a cat). Spilling, dropping, tripping, and fumbling are all highly encouraged as long as it remains somewhat natural. The director may also wish to have the actress change costumes on stage (i.e., from dirty hiking clothes to regular clothes as long as it is done without nudity). Whatever choices are made, Branwyn should speak and move as quickly and frenetically as possible throughout the whole play while Mark should resemble a deer in headlights.

## Acknowledgments

*I Think You Think I Love You* was originally developed as part of Ensemble Studio Theatre/LA Project's *Winterfest* (Isabel Storey, Elizabeth Logun, Jennifer Rowland, Producers) on February 23, 2003 at Theatre/Theater in Hollywood. It was directed by Jenny O'Hara and the cast was as follows:

BRANWYN ..... Lizzie Peet  
MARK ..... Jake Eberle

*I Think You Think I Love You* premiered on March 23, 2003 at the Ruskin Group Theatre in Los Angeles. It was directed by John Ruskin and the cast was as follows:

BRANWYN ..... Jennifer Palais  
MARK ..... Chad Mogle

# I THINK YOU THINK I LOVE YOU

by Kelly Younger

*(BRANWYN enters, exhausted from a long hike, wearing an overstuffed backpack. She plops down on the chair, dropping the bag at her feet. Leaves fall from her hair and grass from her boots. She begins to unpack when there is a timid knock at the door. She rises and opens it to find MARK wearing a coat and tie.)*

**MARK.** Hi. I'm—

**BRANWYN.** Look. I'm not really in the mood, so let's make this quick.

**MARK.** *(Entering:)* Oh. Is this not—

**BRANWYN.** No, it's fine. I mean it's not, but it is. I just got back from kind of a hike. With my mother. Not *with* her, but *with* her, you know? Her ashes.

**MARK.** Oh?

**BRANWYN.** She died four months ago. No. Five. God has it already been five months? Yes. That's right.

**MARK.** I'm... so sorry.

**BRANWYN.** Why? Did you kill her?

**MARK.** What?! Oh my God, no! I meant—

**BRANWYN.** I know, I know. I'm just kidding. Like I said, I'm in a mood, you know? But it's what she wanted. Not to die, of course, but to hike. Once it got her. Leukemia. That's what it ended up being, even though it didn't start out that way. I mean it did, of course. The doctor said leukemia first, and we we're all like—oh my God! —And she went through all this chemo, you know, a whole summer of it. And then the doctor couldn't find any trace of it. The leukemia. And we all started thinking, maybe she never had it to begin with, you know? Maybe they couldn't find any *(Using her fingers to make quotation marks)* “trace of it” because it was maybe never there. That happens sometimes, you know, where they misdiagnose and of course there's no *(Using her fingers)* “trace of it”...God, I

swore I'd never be that annoying person who uses her hands to make (*Using her fingers*) "bunny ears." But once we thought she maybe never had it, she up and dies. And after we had the bone marrow test and of course the only match is my sister who turned the whole thing into some conspiracy against her, you know, like of course *she* would be a match and I wouldn't because Mom and I we're always a better match and now the one time they get along it's because Mom wants to suck the marrow out of her bones—literally, you know—and by the time I convinced her to go through with it she was of course relieved to find out she didn't have to do it, but then it turned out she *did* in fact have traces of it, it was just hiding. And of course it came out of hiding so quickly that it just jumped out and said, (*Using her fingers*) "I'm back, I'm moving in, bought, sold and furnished, home sweet home" in my mother's body and then that was that.

**MARK.** Are you sure this isn't—

**BRANWYN.** An exaggeration? Are you kidding? That's nothing. My sister, after all this, crowns herself the (*Using her fingers*) "keeper of the ashes." That's what she starts calling herself, the (*Using her fingers*) "keeper of the ashes" as if she were some knight of the roundtable chivalrously guarding both sets of ashes.

**MARK.** Both?

**BRANWYN.** Her cat. Henry. The one that died three weeks before Mom died. She had it cremated too.

**MARK.** You can cremate a—

**BRANWYN.** You can cremate anything. But of course this cat Henry takes on epic proportions. It's no ordinary cat. No. It's Henry, this stray she found like ten years ago at work. A femur, or no, what's the word for a wild cat?

**MARK.** Feral?

**BRANWYN.** That's it. This feral cat that lives in the parking lot where her office is. She starts feeding this thing, and of course she has to name it and names it Henry, so she starts feeding this thing two, three times a day for about three years. But then when she gets transferred across town, she still goes back to feed it. Two, three

times a day. Can you believe that? To leave on your lunch break and go feed a feral cat named Henry at your old job where they transferred you in the first place to get rid of you? And you keep coming back because Henry will supposedly starve to death if she doesn't feed it? And she does this for like another five years, sometimes even getting my mother to go do it when she had a meeting or something if you can believe it, until finally she decided to trap it in a cage. Then she brings Henry home to her apartment, which already has four cats living there—she's one of those women, you know? With a lot of cats? —But Henry of course flips out and the other cats flip out because he's feral and they're not, but then they start acting feral and peeing all over her carpet because they're mad that Lauren brought home this stray. And she has to keep Henry living in a cage, in her kitchen. She never lets the thing out? And she sees nothing wrong with this. So the whole apartment now stinks of cat urine but she thinks this is all in my head and that I'm criticizing her, which of course I am. Wouldn't you?

**MARK.** I'm more of a dog person myself, but I guess—

**BRANWYN.** But the best part is that when Henry dies—she still won't tell me how, I think the other cats got together and poisoned it—she decides to get him cremated. So that's why she's the (*Using her fingers*) “most qualified” to be the (*Using her fingers*) “keeper of the ashes” for Mom because she already has experience keeping the ashes of Henry. And here's where it gets weird.

**MARK.** Here?

**BRANWYN.** She starts having these tea parties and things. With Henry and Mom. I dropped by with a map to plan the hike with her and there she was, at the table, pouring imaginary tea in these little cups, to two urns. I mean one was a bigger urn, my mother's, but she also has this little five pound marble box with Henry in it. And she's in full conversation. And of course I flip out and start laughing, not screaming, but laughing because the whole scene is so absurd, which of course causes her to flip out and start screaming. And that's when I find out Lauren's doing all these weird things with the ashes. I mean beyond the tea party. She's taking Henry and Mom with her on her errands, fastening their seat-belts and everything, to the market, the dry cleaners. She sleeping with them. Can

you believe that? I mean, look, I get it. They're both dead. I miss Mom too—not Henry—but I'm not going to sleep with her ashes. So I demand we do this hike like ASAP because that's what Mom wanted. To go to Castle Rock and spread her ashes. That's where we always went to girls' camp, even Mom when she was a girl, and that's where she wanted her ashes spread. It's this big rock some Indian maiden threw herself off of when she didn't see her hunky warrior coming back from the hunt, or something. But of course Lauren refuses to go hiking. She doesn't want Mom's ashes spread someplace that she can't go visit.

**MARK.** Why can't she—

**BRANWYN.** Exactly. Lauren is a wimp. Every year at camp we all had this amazing hike to Castle Rock, but Lauren would always chicken out saying, it's too far, I have blisters, I'm allergic to high altitude, whatever. So she's basically refusing not only to go on the hike but to give me Mom's ashes. And after going around and around for days she finally agrees to give 'em up but on one condition.

*(She waits for MARK to ask.)*

**MARK.** Oh. Sorry. What condition?

**BRANWYN.** Henry. Uh-huh. can you believe it? She wants me to spread Henry's ashes with Mom's. That's what Mom would want, she says. She really believes Mom wants her ashes mixed in with some parking lot cat named Henry. So I say, fine, thinking I just have to get Mom out of there and up to the mountains. And what was supposed to be this beautiful moment, two sisters, sad daughters, saying goodbye to their mother, together, has now turned into a solo hike with two urns on my back, one my mother, and one a cat.

**MARK.** I don't know what to say. That's awful?

**BRANWYN.** No. What's awful is what I did. Once I get all my gear on and am ready to go, I realize that extra five pounds, what's now Henry, is too much to carry. You know, break the camel's back and all. And so I decide there's no way I'm going to go through with it, and since there's no way Lauren will ever know, I just leave Henry

in the car and start off with Mom. Just the two of us. And I hike and hike. Past the old girls' camp. Past the lake—the one where they filmed *Parent Trap*, remember that old movie with the twins and all the antics and confusion? Not the new one with that freakishly skinny girl, but the one from the 60s with that freakishly homely girl who looked like Anthony Michael Hall in *Breakfast Club* and the editing was so bad you could totally see the split screen trying to pretend that just that one kid was really a twin. Remember?

(MARK shakes his head, completely at a loss.)

**BRANWYN.** Anyway, that's where they filmed it. So I keep hiking up toward Castle Rock. And it's perfectly clear, the day, you know? Really blue up there. You can look out and see the cloud layer, or I guess it's really the smog layer, hovering all over San Bernardino, but where I am, where we are, is fresh and dry and thin. And after about four hours—it used to only take three when I was a kid but that's because, actually, I don't know why that is, it just was—so I finally get there to this huge rock. It's like thirty feet up and there's this huge flat area on top where you can sit and look out over the whole mountain and Big Bear Lake and everything. And I do my thing, you know? What I set out to do.

(She pantomimes the actions.)

**BRANWYN.** I take out Mom's ashes. I recite a line from Shakespeare—*Othello*, she liked that play. Actually, no. I don't think she ever saw it. Or even read it. God what am I talking about? I've never read it. I searched and searched for the perfect poem or song or quotation or something to say at that moment, but I couldn't find anything, so I flipped open a book of Shakespeare plays—he's supposed to be the best, right?—and just dropped my finger down into a play and it was *Othello* so that's what I memorized and that's what I said. And then I said...goodbye Mom...and tossed her ashes up in the air. And by air, of course, I mean wind, and by wind I mean the wind blowing in the direction I'm standing and I'm sorry, but I never paid much attention to those old sailor movies that say never spit into the wind because sure enough Mom blows right out and back at me. And by back at me, of course, I mean my face and by my face I mean my nose and mouth. So of course my face is all wet and weepy so Mom sticks to my face, and I freak out and inhale

with horror and down she goes. Not all of it, or her, but enough, you know? Just a bit to be absolutely horrified that I've just inhaled some of my mother, which I'm sure could be some beautiful metaphor for Mom living inside me and all that sentimental bull but really all I can think is my mother tastes like charcoal. Not that I know, but you can imagine, you know? So I start pouring water out of my canteen onto my face and into my mouth and nose and I'm stumbling all around the top of Castle Rock thinking I'm either going straight to hell for cannibalizing my mother or I'm going straight off the side of this rock like that old Indian girl who couldn't live without her lover. It's okay, you can laugh.

**MARK.** I wasn't going to—

**BRANWYN.** It's okay, really. Totally absurd day.

**MARK.** Wait. This all happened today?

**BRANWYN.** Yeah.

**MARK.** And you're sure you still want to...?

**BRANWYN.** Wait. I forgot the cat.

**MARK.** The cat?

**BRANWYN.** This is the worst part.

**MARK.** It gets—

**BRANWYN.** It always gets worse, doesn't it? I just couldn't bear to mix Mom and Henry up together, no matter how much the cat meant to Lauren, even if Mom occasionally fed the damn thing. So when I got back to the car, I took Henry out of the glove compartment, that's where I put him, I was afraid the sun might shine through the car and burn him or something, which of course couldn't happen because he was in his marble box, and of course he was burnt already. So I took him out, walked across the road and dumped him near a tree. And then, here's the worst part, I took a picture of it, or him. All spread out there. But I had to get real close with the camera so Lauren wouldn't see the car in the background, or the road. I had to pretend that he was dumped right near the rock, which of course by now is a four hour hike away, and nowhere near my mother's remains.

**MARK.** What are you going to tell her when you give her the picture?

**BRANWYN.** The truth, of course. That Mom and Henry are together forever, departed mother and feral cat, atop Castle Rock, Big Bear Mountain, California, United States of America.

*(She sits, exhausted.)*

**BRANWYN.** So. *(Indicating the house:)* What do you think?

**MARK.** *(Looking around:)* About what? the cat?

**BRANWYN.** No. The house.

**MARK.** Oh. *(Looking again:)* It's very nice.

**BRANWYN.** Rare 1930 tudor-style, four bedrooms, three baths, formal living room, quaint dining room, large family room, remodeled kitchen with solid cherry shaker cabinets, upgrades include Anderson double pane wood windows, french doors, designer and faux paint, hardwood floors, all copper plumbing, forced air heat, large backyard with automatic sprinkler systems, and good school district. *(Using her fingers:)* "Lovers of vintage homes won't want to miss this one!"

**MARK.** I see.

**BRANWYN.** Do you want to take a look?

**MARK.** At what?

**BRANWYN.** The house.

**MARK.** Sure, I guess. Do you want me to?

**BRANWYN.** Well the sign does say, Do Not Disturb Occupant, but how else will you know?

**MARK.** Know what?

**BRANWYN.** If you want to buy it.

**MARK.** Your house?

**BRANWYN.** It's my mother's. I can't afford to keep it.

**MARK.** I already have a house. I mean a condo.

**BRANWYN.** Investment property then.

**MARK.** No, I live there.

**BRANWYN.** But you're looking for another one.

**MARK.** No.

**BRANWYN.** Oh, you're a realtor. Sorry. That makes sense. What's your client looking for, because to be honest, this place is a dump. The pipes aren't really copper, just painted that color, the fourth bedroom is really just a closet I squeezed an old futon into, and the school district is crap. Trust me. I went to school here.

**MARK.** I'm not a realtor. I own a used bookstore. Maybe I have the wrong address or something, I was...you're Branwyn, right?

**BRANWYN.** Yes. Winnie. I go by Winnie. *(Standing:)* Wait. Who are you?

**MARK.** Mark.

**BRANWYN.** Mark?

**MARK.** Yes. Mark. *(Pause; no recognition, deeply embarrassed:)* Patrick's friend? He's *(Using his fingers)* "setting us up"?

**BRANWYN.** *(Quickly covering her mouth in a panic:)* Oh my God!

**MARK.** We were going to go to dinner and then that night of ten-minute plays or—

**BRANWYN.** Oh my God! Is that tonight?

**MARK.** I think so. *(Examining tickets from his pocket:)* I mean, I'm pretty sure. I got the tickets for tonight.

**BRANWYN.** I just made a complete... *(Shielding her eyes)* oh my God, I can't even look at you.

**MARK.** *(Looking at his clothes:)* I know. I'm color blind and they don't make adult Garanimals.

**BRANWYN.** No no no, you look fine. You look *great*, but you have to go.

**MARK.** But I'd really like to—

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