

I'M AN ORIGINAL

By Katherine Dubois

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ISBN: 978-1-60003-779-5

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A One Act Dramatic Comedy

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SYNOPSIS: Elliot's contest-winning short story was based on an incident Brooke told him about—in confidence. Brooke is furious. Jesse thinks the dumb quarterback in the story was based on him. He's mad. Iris thinks the story sounds an awful lot like the time someone broke into her locker and ruined her coat. She's suspicious. Kevin thinks the story is an awful lot like his entry. He's upset. Lily thinks the story is making fun of something embarrassing that happened to her. She's offended. As Elliot tries to pacify everyone without giving away Brooke's secret, he digs himself deeper and deeper into a hole, inventing a different "inspiration" for his story to counter each accusation.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 female, 5 male)

ANDREW (m)	On Student Council; a friend of Elliot's <i>(15 lines)</i>
BROOKE (f)	Currently wondering why she was ever a friend of Elliot's <i>(54 lines)</i>
COOPER (m)	Enthusiastic and a bit geeky <i>(13 lines)</i>
DAPHNE (f)	Has both intelligence and good sense <i>(21 lines)</i>
ELLIOT (m)	A fast-talker but not quite a con-artist <i>(101 lines)</i>
FRANNIE (f)	A singer-songwriter <i>(27 lines)</i>
GRETCHEN (f)	On the Yearbook committee <i>(29 lines)</i>
HEATHER (f)	Frannie's friend <i>(17 lines)</i>
IRIS (f)	Cheerleader; not always the nicest girl in school <i>(21 lines)</i>
JESSE (m)	The school's star quarterback; none too bright <i>(18 lines)</i>
KEVIN (m)	Not about to let someone cheat him <i>(17 lines)</i>
LILY (f)	Feistier than she looks <i>(11 lines)</i>

PROPERTY LIST

- Envelope with paper
- School supplies (notebooks, backpacks) as desired

TIME: The present

PLACE: A classroom

DURATION: 30 Minutes

PRODUCTION NOTES

Costumes can be everyday street clothes, Jesse could be wearing a letter jacket. The set can be as elaborate or as simple as you like.

Do Not Copy

AT RISE: *The set represents a classroom. ANDREW enters and addresses the students.*

ANDREW: Hey, you guys, before everyone leaves for lunch, I have an announcement to make from Student Council. Listen up, please. As you know, Student Council, in conjunction with *Muse-ings*, our school's literary journal, has sponsored a short story contest, and I'm here today to announce the winner.

BROOKE: I thought it was going to be Friday.

ANDREW: Well, the committee finished its work a little earlier than expected, so we decided to go ahead and make the announcement today. Winning a \$25 gift certificate to the Good Reads bookshop and publication in *Muse-ings*, I'm happy to congratulate—wait for it—*(HE whips out an envelope and tears it open.)*

COOPER: The envelope, please.

DAPHNE: And the winner is—

ANDREW: Elliot Cameron.

There is a smattering of applause in the classroom as ELLIOT stands up and takes a bow.

ANDREW: *(Reading.)* Elliot's story is a humorous piece entitled "Fumble" about a student whose attempt to booby-trap the locker of the school's star quarterback backfires with hilarious results and a good deal of embarrassment to the narrator. The committee felt there was strong characterization throughout, and especially liked some of the imagery Elliot used when describing the red food coloring. But I won't give any more spoilers. Thanks to everyone who entered this year. There were a lot of strong entries. In fact, the committee is discussing the idea of expanding the spring issue of the journal in order to include some of our runners-up. But in the meantime the top ten entries have been posted on the Student Council webpage for those of you who'd like to check it out.

ANDREW exits and most of the students file out. ELLIOT gathers up his things and sidles toward the door, but BROOKE blocks his escape. THEY are alone in the room.

BROOKE: Red food coloring? Booby-trapping a locker? I told you that story in confidence. You've betrayed my confidence.

ELLIOT: No I haven't. I haven't told anyone.

BROOKE: Haven't told anyone? You've entered it in a short story contest. How is that not telling anyone?

ELLIOT: I haven't told anyone it came from you.

BROOKE: You can't—you can't go win a contest with it.

ELLIOT: You weren't using it. You said your entry was about vampires, or something.

BROOKE: That's not the point. You had no right.

ELLIOT: It's still my story. I mean, just because the idea came from you. I'm the one who wrote it. I'm the one who went to all the work of writing it.

BROOKE: You had no right to write it. Or enter it or—or—you need to tell them not to publish it. You need to get it off the website.

ELLIOT: Whoa, Brooke. Chill.

BROOKE: I mean it, Elliot. Get that story off the website before somebody sees it.

ELLIOT: What do you mean? I want people to see it. It's great publicity. Maybe it will lead to something. At the very least it's something I can put on my resumé. It could be the first step to a career in writing.

BROOKE: Oh, sure. Ghost-writing a celebrity tell-all memoir or some lurid unauthorized biography. Maybe you can get a job with a tabloid and violate the privacy of total strangers instead of just your friends.

ELLIOT: You know, a friend might be happy for my success.

BROOKE: Happy? You expect me to be happy when you—

ELLIOT: What, you're sore because I won with a story you partly inspired?

BROOKE: Because you took something I told you—. Winning will only make it worse, because now everyone will see it.

ELLIOT: So I'm supposed to tell everyone it was your idea?

BROOKE: No!

ELLIOT: Then what—? What is your problem, exactly?

BROOKE: How thick are you? It wasn't my *idea*. It wasn't something I *made up*. It was something that *happened to me*. Something I *did*.

ELLIOT: So?

BROOKE: You've betrayed a confidence. You've—you've violated my privacy.

ELLIOT: You're the one who told me about it.

BROOKE: I didn't know you were going to go publish it in the spring journal!

ELLIOT: Brooke, calm down.

BROOKE: You are the most inconsiderate clod on the face of the planet.

ELLIOT: You just said it wasn't anything you made up. So you can't say I stole it.

BROOKE: It's not about stealing.

ELLIOT: Then what?

BROOKE: Don't you get it? It's something I did. That nobody knows I did. That I don't *want* anyone to know I did. Because I don't want to get in any trouble. That's why I told you *in confidence*. And then you turn around and use it in—

ELLIOT: Oh, is that all you're worried about? I changed it around. Nobody would ever guess it was about you. The narrator's a guy, for one thing.

BROOKE: But you didn't change the red food coloring.

ELLIOT: Well, no. That was the best bit.

BROOKE: The most recognizable bit. You don't think there's a good chance that Iris might—

ELLIOT: She'll never suspect.

BROOKE: Because you know, I—well, I caused some damage I didn't intend to. If anyone found out—I could get suspended or something. I could get in trouble.

ELLIOT: No one will know.

BROOKE: Not even Iris? When she reads about—

ELLIOT: I changed her, too. I didn't want to write about some cheerleader. I made it the quarterback. And I did a pretty good impression of Jesse, too, if I say so myself.

BROOKE: Jesse?

ELLIOT: Yeah.

BROOKE: How does it make any sense if both of them are guys?

ELLIOT: What, you think a guy's never stolen another guy's girlfriend?

BROOKE: That's not the same. A guy can't be a tramp the way a girl can. And then she just threw it in my face—she deserved it. Even if she does find out—. Why did I even tell you? You can't understand. You just think it's a funny story.

ELLIOT: I understand she's a total witch and you wanted to get back at her. But that the whole thing blew up in your face—almost literally.

BROOKE: My eyebrows were pink for weeks. *(HE chuckles.)* It wasn't funny! I had to use mascara on them, do you know what a pain that was? And I had to nearly scrub the skin right off my face. Thank God I had sunglasses on.

ELLIOT: I'm not laughing at you, Brooke. It makes a great story, that's all.

BROOKE: I told you *in confidence*. You should decline the prize and tell them not to publish it.

ELLIOT: And if they ask why, should I tell them that, too?

BROOKE: You creep.

ELLIOT: Brooke, it's not that big a deal.

BROOKE: You didn't even ask my permission. And what if people find out?

ELLIOT: How would they?

Enter DAPHNE, followed by COOPER.

DAPHNE: I read your story, Elliot. Very funny.

ELLIOT: Thanks, Daphne.

DAPHNE: Where did the idea come from? I'm always interested in where people get their inspiration.

ELLIOT: Oh, you know, I just—thought of it.

COOPER: Sometimes people take their ideas from real life, but I think it's more creative to make things up.

BROOKE: Oh, I agree with you, Cooper.

DAPHNE: But even something you make up, there's an inspiration behind it. Something you read, or saw; something somebody said to you that gave you the idea.

- BROOKE:** But this wasn't based on anything anybody said to him. Was it, Elliot?
- COOPER:** My entry was science fiction. So you know I made it up, because it could never happen.
- BROOKE:** Elliot's story could never happen, either.
- COOPER:** Oh, I don't think there's anything impossible about—
- BROOKE:** Not everything that's possible can really happen, Cooper.
- DAPHNE:** And even a science fiction story could be based on something you read, or maybe a movie you saw.
- COOPER:** Well, I read a lot of science fiction, but my story is totally made up.
- ELLIOT:** Besides, the idea is just the starting point.
- DAPHNE:** Right. Two different authors might start with the same idea and write something completely different.
- BROOKE:** Like when Mr. Taza gives us writing prompts.
- COOPER:** Remember the one he gave us about, what if you could become invisible? People took it in all kinds of directions.
- ELLIOT:** That's right. And there's dialog and description and everything, too. So even if someone gave you the idea for a story, it's still your story. Even if it's their idea.
- BROOKE:** That wouldn't really excuse your using it, though, if it was theirs.
- DAPHNE:** Of course, the whole concept of any sort of ownership of an idea is relatively new.
- ELLIOT:** Isn't there that thing you hear that there's only twenty-two story lines in existence? Something like that. Everything's a variation on a set number of ideas.
- COOPER:** Only twenty-two? It seems like there'd have to be a lot more. Like all the made-for-TV movies you see. "Based on a true story." And there's no limit to the things that can happen in real life.
- BROOKE:** Yes, but Elliot's story is too ridiculous to be based on real life.
- ELLIOT:** Totally made up. Pure fiction. No idea where the idea came from.

Enter ANDREW.

ANDREW: Hey, Elliot, are you coming?

ELLIOT: Yeah, sure, Andrew.

BROOKE: Um, we haven't really finished discussing—what we were talking about, Elliot.

ELLIOT: There's really nothing to discuss, Brooke.

ANDREW: Congratulations, by the way. I was so psyched when I found out the winning one was yours.

FRANNIE comes to the door.

FRANNIE: Daphne, there you are. We need you to help us settle something.

DAPHNE: Settle what?

FRANNIE comes into the room, followed by GRETCHEN and HEATHER.

FRANNIE: It's Gretchen. She stole my song.

GRETCHEN: I didn't steal it. I just used it.

FRANNIE: You know that song I wrote? The one I recorded and put up on YouTube?

HEATHER: *Don't Dance on My Dreams*. It's gotten, like, a million hits. It's the most popular thing on the internet.

FRANNIE: Well, Heather, not exactly. But it's doing pretty well. Then Gretchen went and used it for the Yearbook and now everyone who buys the DVD of the Yearbook is going to have a copy of my song.

GRETCHEN: Frannie, they could have a copy of your song by downloading it off YouTube.

FRANNIE: That's not the same. People pay money for the Yearbook, but am I going to see any of it?

GRETCHEN: The members of the Yearbook committee don't see any of that money, either. We work for free.

FRANNIE: She should have asked me first. Daphne, shouldn't she have asked me first?

HEATHER: She totally should have.

GRETCHEN: You posted it for all the world to see. Do all those people have to ask your permission first to listen to it?

FRANNIE: It's not the same. I don't like it that someone's making money off my work. I wrote that song myself. I came up with all the lyrics and the music and everything and do you know how hard it is to find a word that rhymes with "squashed"?

GRETCHEN: Suppose you were on one of the sports teams and we used a clip of a game or a meet for the Yearbook? You wouldn't expect to get paid for that.

FRANNIE: I thought maybe some big studio head or someone would see me on YouTube and maybe it would lead to a recording contract or something but what good does it do me to be in the Yearbook?

GRETCHEN: What harm does it do you to be in the Yearbook? Besides, how likely is it that a song on the internet is going to lead to a recording contract?

COOPER: My brother heard of a guy who got an audition with Trans-Siberian Orchestra because of something that was on YouTube.

FRANNIE: (To DAPHNE.) So anyway, we agreed to come to you because you're, like, the smartest girl in school. So you need to tell us how to fix this.

HEATHER: We knew you'd come up with a good idea.

DAPHNE: Has the Yearbook come out yet? Could Gretchen take it back out?

GRETCHEN: But I used it for this great montage with all kinds of footage from the school year. I went to a lot of work and it looks really great.

HEATHER: That's true, Frannie. It's a great montage. And the clips really fit the words of the song.

FRANNIE: She still shouldn't have used it.

DAPHNE: You don't like the montage, Frannie?

FRANNIE: It's kind of cool. But who sees the Yearbook except people at school? And all my friends have already heard the song.

GRETCHEN: Then why do you care if it's in the Yearbook?

FRANNIE: It just bothers me.

GRETCHEN: You want everyone in the world to hear it, but you don't want anyone at school to hear it? That doesn't make sense.

HEATHER: She has a point, Frannie. If you want to get famous as a singer, exposure can only help.

DAPHNE: How about posting the montage on YouTube? Maybe it'll get the song noticed even more. As long as you credit Frannie for the soundtrack.

HEATHER: I think that's a good idea. It'll promote our school, too.

FRANNIE: But then it's only in the background.

HEATHER: It's still good exposure.

FRANNIE: I worked really hard on that song. It's not just me singing. It's the words and the music and everything. I think it's really creative.

HEATHER: It totally is.

GRETCHEN: I think the montage is creative, too. The way things fit together.

HEATHER: Gretchen's right, Frannie. There's lots of different types of creativity.

GRETCHEN: What do you say? I'll put your name both at the beginning and the end.

FRANNIE: Well—all right.

DAPHNE: And be sure you credit her in the Yearbook, too.

GRETCHEN: I will.

FRANNIE: Thanks, Daphne.

HEATHER: We knew you'd think of something.

FRANNIE: That's a type of creativity, too, isn't it? Coming up with solutions to problems. I mean, not like math problems maybe, but seeing different possibilities.

ANDREW: That's like saying finding a cure for smallpox isn't so much different from writing a short story.

COOPER: Well, that makes sense. Because you would give a scientist or a doctor credit for a discovery the same way you would give an author credit for a story.

BROOKE: So intelligence and creativity are the same thing?

GRETCHEN: Intelligence has to do with analyzing things, which is breaking things down into their parts. And then creativity has to do with all the different ways you can put the parts together to make something new.

HEATHER: Oh, that's good.

DAPHNE: Thinking up the plot of a story is a lot like problem solving. You say, "What if this happened? What might happen next?" It follows a train of thought. You can trace the ideas.

ANDREW: It's tracing ideas backwards that's hard. Because for every idea there was something that inspired it, and that idea was inspired by something before it, and on and on, until you can never say where an idea came from.

FRANNIE: I think ideas can just come from your head.

HEATHER: I think sometimes ideas travel through the air and different people in totally different places can grab them at the same time. Haven't you ever come up with a great idea for an episode of your favorite TV show, and then like the next week, the storyline is the same as your idea? As if they stole your idea out of thin air.

GRETCHEN: Heather, they couldn't have stolen your idea, because the episode must have been written and filmed and everything long before you had the idea.

ANDREW: So the idea must have floated from them to you.

GRETCHEN: Some people say there's only so many ideas in the world. They're bound to turn up over and over.

COOPER: Elliot said that same thing just a minute ago. It must have floated through the air of our school.

GRETCHEN: It's just a coincidence, Cooper.

COOPER: And if you think about it, the internet is kind of like all these ideas floating in the air, too.

HEATHER: No, not really, Cooper. This is more of a cosmic consciousness thing.

GRETCHEN: Or it's possible for more than one person to have essentially the same idea. Two people really can think of the same thing independently. So many people seem to think the world owes them something just because they had an idea.

FRANNIE: But if you go to a lot of work—

ELLIOT: That's the difference, for me. It's what you've done with the idea. If you've turned the idea into a story—or a song—then it's yours. Then it's a work of art.

GRETCHEN: I think my montage is a work of art, too. It's basically a short film. But Daphne's right about giving you credit, Frannie. I'll definitely do that.

ANDREW: Because there's a whole lot of stuff, especially on the internet, that people act like it's free for the taking, but it really isn't.

FRANNIE: Like downloading music.

DAPHNE: What about just the opposite? Instead of using something without giving credit, what about the people that put something of their own on the internet without their name and use the fact that they're anonymous to say something nasty?

FRANNIE: Like cyber-bullying.

GRETCHEN: That's right. I think it's worse to refuse to own up to your own ideas than it is to steal someone else's.

HEATHER: People are way nastier when they think no one knows it was them. And not just insults, but lies and things that can be really damaging.

BROOKE: If something's a lie, does it matter where you publish it?

COOPER: But so many more people see it on the internet.

ANDREW: Suppose Elliot's story got posted somewhere—I mean, somewhere besides the school website. But without his name on it, so you didn't know it was just a story. It might sound almost like a confession. People might think it had really happened.

BROOKE: Of course they wouldn't, Andrew. Who would think a stupid thing like that?

IRIS comes to the door.

IRIS: (To ELLIOT.) Ooh, you're going to get it now.

JESSE marches into the room, brushing past IRIS.

JESSE: There you are, Mr. Fancy World-Famous Author.

ELLIOT: Why, thank you, Jesse. I gather you're referring to the results of the short story contest.

JESSE: Yeah, and I've read your dumb story, too.

IRIS: We've both read it.

ELLIOT: And you didn't appreciate the subtle ironies?

JESSE: I didn't appreciate you tryin' to make a fool of me.

ELLIOT: What do you mean, Jesse?

JESSE: Writing a story where the school quarterback is a big dumb idiot, that's what I mean. I'd like to see how well you can write with your teeth all over the floor.

ELLIOT: Well, I don't actually write with my teeth.

JESSE: I'll teach you to make fun of me.

ELLIOT: Of you? Oh, you mean you think the character in the story was based on you?

JESSE: Well, duh. He's the quarterback, isn't he?

ELLIOT: Inspiration can come from so many sources, Jesse. How do you know I didn't—hear an interview on the television with someone who didn't sound very bright, and decide to base my character on that person?

JESSE: I say you're makin' fun of me and hidin' behind a story to do it 'cause you're not man enough to say it to my face. And I'm gonna split *your* face into about a thousand pieces.

IRIS: And then you'll be sorry.

ELLIOT: Look, Jesse, it's just a story.

JESSE: Well, I don't like it, see?

ELLIOT: And the character can't be based on you, because—because actually it's a true story.

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