

OPENING DOORS

By Dennis Bush

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OPENING DOORS

SYNOPSIS: How do we connect with each other when we shut ourselves off behind doors – both real and imaginary? *Opening Doors* explores the relationships seven young adults have with parents, significant others, friends, and neighbors, as they struggle to make sense of the choices they've made and survive with the emotional explosives hurled at them by others. An 18-year-old wiz kid deals with his abusive childhood by not dealing with it. A young woman tries to break out of the dollhouse-like world she's created for herself. A couple fight, flirt, and figure out the way their relationship works as they strive to understand the differences between men and women. Neighbors launch a war of words, and a young man tries to take control of his life, while launching an offensive against his roommate and anyone else who walks through his door. From absurdly comedic to startlingly tragic, the characters' journeys will touch and challenge audiences, and give actors strong, compelling characters to play.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 Female, 3 Male; 1 Either)

- EMILY (f)..... 19; trapped in the dollhouse-like world she's created for herself. *(54 lines)*
- DAN (m)..... 18; survived an abusive parent and struggles to keep a safe distance between himself and his past. *(47 lines)*
- ADAM (m)..... Mid-20's; funny, flippant; dealing with the fall-out from a fight with his girlfriend. *(123 lines)*

MIRANDA (f)..... Mid-20's; trying to understand the confusing way her boyfriend thinks and acts, while making sure he knows that she's smarter and more emotionally evolved. (115 lines)

SATURDAY (f)..... Mid- to late-20's; passionate, peculiar, and ready for revenge. (36 lines)

OWEN (m) Mid- to late-20's; angry, often irrational; refuses to be ignored. (48 lines)

PARKER (m/f)..... Mid- to late-20's; celebrates the power of words; deep; in pursuit of truth. (43 lines)

DURATION: 40 minutes

SETTING

A twelve-unit apartment building in midtown Manhattan. The present.

SET

No special props or costumes. Simple set, allowing changes of playing spaces to serve as different locations within the apartment complex.

Directors are encouraged to be creative with casting and staging, and to avoid literal use of inferred props or to group actors together so it appears that conversations are happening in places where a character may be speaking directly to the audience.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Reading
Pearl Studios
New York City
July 2012

Opening Doors had a reading in New York City in July 2012 with a cast that included Derrick Trumbly, Melissa Teitel, Nick Coleman, Jamie Carroll, Ian Liberto, and Rafer Singer.

Premiere Production
Phoenix, AZ
October 2012

Opening Doors had its premiere production in Phoenix, Arizona, in October 2012. The original cast included Meggy Lykins, Bishop Shepard, Tony Potts, Isaac Gamus, Robin Hartwell, Hailey Araza, and A.J. Katek. The production was directed by the playwright.

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AT RISE: *A multi-level playing area is revealed. ACTORS are in various spaces, which serve as apartments, hallways, offices, and outdoor spaces, as needed.*

DAN is the farthest from the central playing area. He begins at the end of his work day. He's already left the office, taken the subway to a stop near his apartment, and is now walking the rest of the way home.

DAN: I still don't have any furniture – besides my bed and a TV. I don't really need anything else. Maybe a table and a chair. But that can wait. It's not like I'm throwing parties or having people over for dinner. I just need a place to sleep and watch TV.

EMILY is in her apartment on the second floor of the three-story apartment building in which most of the CHARACTERS live.

EMILY: I can see him through the peephole. I *watch* him through the peephole. In the morning and the evening when he leaves and comes back.

DAN: When I was looking at apartments, I had a few requirements. You have to. Or else you end up with a place you don't want to go home to. (*Listing his requirements.*) The building had to be no more than five blocks away from the subway. And not a high rise. No taller than four stories with no more than sixteen units. Only studios or one bedrooms.

EMILY: (*Simply, innocently.*) He's cute – almost handsome.

DAN: Just room for a couple people in each apartment.

EMILY: A powder blue shirt and gray pants that were pretty tight. (*Clarifying.*) That's what he was wearing this morning. He looked nice – he always does. I think his tie was red-and-blue. I didn't get a good look. He had his back to me.

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DAN: No families with kids. If I want kids, I'll have some of my own and live in a house in New Jersey. Close to a train station. For ease of commute.

EMILY: When he's locking or unlocking his door, he talks to himself. He has actual conversations. With himself.

DAN: When the landlord was showing me around, there was a dead cat in the hall outside one of the apartments on the first floor. It was kind of funny. A dead cat just laying on its back next to #3. Kind of strange. Kind of *comforting*. And, as we walked past it, to get to the stairs, the landlord said, "No pets. No exceptions."

EMILY: He moved in across the hall in the middle of last month. On the 15th. That's the middle. At 6:17 a.m. He made a lot of noise. It woke me up. I looked out through the peephole and saw him. Talking to himself. And I thought, "What an interesting boy!" (*Clarifying.*) He's 18. The landlord told me. He volunteered the information. I think 18 is still a boy. (*Torn.*) But he has his own apartment. So, I guess he's more of a man. (*Truly curious.*) When does a boy become a man? Officially... Undeniably. That's a good question. It's something to ponder.

DAN: The building is quiet. No screaming or anything like that. The other tenants seem nice. When I see them. *If* I see them. I'm not looking to make friends. I *have* friends. A lot of 'em. (*Quick pause.*) Like seven. Seven quality friends.

EMILY: I'm a year older. (*Stating facts.*) The boy should be older. Just like the boy should be taller. It's how it should be. The way of the world. But I'm willing to make an exception in this case. If we were going to date – and we really *should* date – I think he'd like me. If he *met* me. If he doesn't have a problem dating an older girl. An older *woman*.

DAN: Seven is a lucky number. I live in #7. There are seven guys in my department at work. We do data integration. It's kind of complicated. Not for me. Math and science stuff – and technology – comes easy to me. I started college when I was 16. Graduated in May with a double major. Computer science and engineering. Only took me two years. I don't believe in wasting time.

EMILY: If we can get past the door that separates us.

DAN: I'll probably go to grad school next fall.

EMILY: And we have to.

DAN: Or not. I like working. Having my own apartment. Making my own decisions. Not living with my parents. Not talking to my parents. Ever.

EMILY: We have to get past it.

DAN: Except when I moved out of their house... And that was just to say, "Goodbye." (*On his way into the building.*) Somebody moved the cat.

EMILY: He has wide shoulders – at least I think he does.

DAN: Or threw it away. Or buried it.

EMILY: The perspective through the peephole is a little skewed.

DAN: Makes me kind of sad.

EMILY: My roommate thinks *my* perspective is skewed. She texted me that from Chicago, where she's on some kind of business trip. Or vacation.

DAN: I think I'm going to miss it.

EMILY: I'm not sure which. I don't pay attention when she tells me things. She used to call. Three or four times a day. I shut that down pretty quick. A bad habit that needed to be broken.

DAN: I'm definitely going to miss it.

EMILY: Text me or be ignored. Officially. Undeniably. Ignored.

DAN: That's odd.

EMILY: I'm going to open the door, today. While he's unlocking his door and talking to himself, I'm going to open the door and say, "Hello, hi, how are you?"

DAN: I know it's odd.

EMILY: Not "hello" *and* "hi," just one or the other, followed immediately by "How are you?" I'm going to smile and open my eyes wide, so I look energetic and friendly, but not so wide that I look insane. Nobody wants a crazy person living across the hall from them.

DAN: I willingly acknowledge that it's odd.

EMILY: And I'll say, "I've been looking forward to meeting you.... to getting acquainted... to *dating.*" I wouldn't really say that. Just the first part. And, maybe, the second.

DAN: We're all a little odd.

EMILY: But I definitely wouldn't open my mouth and insert my foot all the way up to the ankle by mentioning dating right away.

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DAN: Some of us more than others.

EMILY: *(With resolve.)* I'm going to open the door and talk to him. I'm going to open the door and *converse* with him. I'm going to open the door and *bond* with him. I'm going to *open the door*. *(She grips the doorknob, then releases it; stepping back.)* Just not today.

ADAM is in the hallway outside MIRANDA's apartment. Angry and frustrated, with a few other emotions bouncing around his brain, as well, ADAM stands close to the door. MIRANDA is inside her apartment. She's sitting on a chair close to the door. If she's going to have a fight with her boyfriend through a locked door, at least she's going to be comfortable while she does it.

ADAM: *(Trying unsuccessfully not to yell; outside MIRANDA's door.)*

Open the door.

MIRANDA: *(Shouted, from inside her apartment.)* Go away.

ADAM: I'm not going away till you open the door.

MIRANDA: So, if I open the door, you'll go away?

ADAM: Yeah, after you open the door and let me in.

MIRANDA: I don't think so.

ADAM: It's not about thinking. It's about *doing*. Do it. Open the door.

MIRANDA: It's about me not wanting to see you. So leave.

A quick beat.

ADAM: I didn't mean it.

MIRANDA: Then why did you say it?

ADAM: I say things sometimes. Everybody does.

MIRANDA: So, when you told me to open the door, you didn't mean it? Good. Let's go with that.

ADAM: I meant it.

MIRANDA: How can you be sure?

ADAM: Because I am.

MIRANDA: How can I be sure? *(A quick beat.)* A pause means you don't have an answer. So, let's forget you said anything. Let's forget you were even here. Let's forget you were ever---

In her apartment on the first floor, SATURDAY seems to complete MIRANDA's thought, though the CHARACTERS are not having a dialogue.

SATURDAY: A vegan pumpkin whoopie pie.

ADAM: *(Continuing to stand outside MIRANDA's apartment)* You won't forget.

SATURDAY: The cream... The flakey cake-like cookie.

ADAM: You *can't* forget.

SATURDAY: The breathtakingly pure, scrumptious, pumpkin-y deliciousness fills your whole mouth.

ADAM: I am definitely... seriously... not going anywhere.

SATURDAY: And it's vegan! No dairy. No animal products of any kind.

ADAM: *(As he sits on the floor.)* I'm going to sit right here on the floor outside your apartment.

SATURDAY: Which, to be honest, is hard to believe considering how rich and creamy they are.

MIRANDA: *(Thoroughly frustrated with ADAM's lack of cooperation.)* If you had any manners – any *decency* – you'd leave. I asked you to leave.

ADAM: And I'm choosing to not comply with your request.

MIRANDA: Which is incredibly rude.

ADAM: Or *determined*. It depends on your perspective.

SATURDAY: And my upstairs neighbor got the last vegan pumpkin whoopie pie at the little shop that sells 'em. Two blocks down and one block over. And they only have them once a week.

MIRANDA: I might as well be under siege.

ADAM: It's an indication of my devotion.

MIRANDA: I am under siege.

ADAM: Most women would kill for this kind of dedication.

MIRANDA: It's Medieval.

ADAM: It's love.

SATURDAY: *(Explaining her whoopie-pie logistics.)* It's how it works.

MIRANDA: I'm going to call the police.

ADAM: And distract them from the murderers and rapists they're trying to catch?

SATURDAY: I buy seven. One vegan pumpkin whoopie pie for every day. Till the next week when I buy seven more. It's how I've been doing it for the past twenty-seven weeks.

ADAM: You're just going to throw away almost seven months...

SATURDAY: That's more than half a year.

ADAM: Over some stupid thing that came out of my mouth when I wasn't paying attention to what I was saying.

SATURDAY: And now the woman upstairs – who happened to see me eating one of the vegan whoopie pies and asked where I'd gotten it – has bought up the entire week's supply. All for herself.

MIRANDA: Which is a serious personal problem. Not paying attention to what you're saying is a serious personal problem. One that you should deal with. And fix. On your own time. By yourself. At your own apartment.

SATURDAY: She lives alone. (*Quick pause.*) So do I, but that's not the point. (*Pause.*) I'm not a confrontational person, but a confrontation is going to happen. The question – the *dilemma* – is how and when. You can't do what she did and get away with it. There are consequences. There is payback. There is retribution. Stealing somebody's vegan pumpkin whoopie pie supply is serious. It's extremely serious. They're seasonal!

OWEN: My roommate says we should open the door for better air circulation on hot days. There's a window in the back of the apartment. Just one. In the bathroom. So, he thinks we should open the bathroom window and the front door – though, since there's no *back* door, it's pretty much the *only* door – except the doors on the bedroom and bathroom. But you know what I mean. And nobody in the city leaves their door open to facilitate a breeze. It would be like inviting criminals into your apartment. It would be like rolling out the red carpet and saying, "Steal my stuff while enjoying a delightful breeze." My roommate says that, where he comes from, people leave their front doors open all the time. I said, "Of course, in a house, with a regular door and a screen door, it's perfectly fine to open the door, in that case, because the screen door keeps the bugs out. And it can be locked to make a statement about safety and security." And he said, "We didn't have screen doors. Nobody had screen doors. We just opened the front door and the back door and the breeze would blow through the whole house."

DAN: I really miss that dead cat in the hall.

OWEN: Apparently, my roommate grew up in a shack. In some shabby, shack-filled, shacktastic part of the country. "Shacktastic" is good. I'm going to write that down. I'm going to build a puzzle around it. It's what I do. I'm a writer, in the larger sense, but specifically, I'm the creator of a smartphone app of wacky word searches. It's very popular. Everyone plays it. Even people who say they don't play it, do. It's a guilty pleasure. That's what one of the reviews said: "This is my guilty pleasure."

EMILY: *(Crying.)* I'm going to open the door and say---

PARKER: Awscultate! *(pronounced AW-skuhl-tayt)*

EMILY: "Hello."

PARKER: *(Giving the definition.)* To listen to the sounds made by internal organs – hearts, lungs, etc. – to aid in diagnosis.

EMILY: "Hi."

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PARKER: I have the ability. It's a gift, really. I'm able to listen to people's internal organs. Without a stethoscope. Without even being in the same room with them. It's like being able to hear someone's thoughts but, instead, I hear the heartbeat and digestion in the stomach and intestines. But not at the same time or even the same person. If I hear somebody's heartbeat, I don't hear their digestion and if I hear the food moving through their stomach and intestines, I can't hear their heartbeat. Hearing the heartbeat can be disconcerting. It's like standing next to a bass drum. It feels like my own heartbeat changes its rhythm to match the other person's. I hear the heartbeat of the person in the apartment directly below me. It's kind of like living in Edgar Allen Poe's "Telltale Heart."

ADAM: Open your door. Open your heart.

PARKER: I used to hear a cat's heartbeat.

MIRANDA: Is that supposed to be poetic?

PARKER: It had a very fast rhythm. It made me jumpy. On edge.

ADAM: It's romantic.

PARKER: There aren't supposed to be pets in the building anyway.

No pets. No exceptions. I think people should follow the rules.

MIRANDA: It's a load of crap.

PARKER: So I solved the problem.

ADAM: You used to like it when I said romantic things.

PARKER: The cat's heart is no longer beating.

MIRANDA: Things change.

PARKER: Let's just say that.

OWEN: Needless to say, I don't open the front door.

PARKER: You have to set limits. Have boundaries. Draw the proverbial line in the sand.

OWEN: I don't care what my roommate says.

PARKER: The woman in #1 – the apartment on the first floor, next to the mailboxes – has a very interesting gastrointestinal system.

OWEN: Whooooosh. *(Pause.)* I'm simulating a breeze.

PARKER: It moans and whines, like whatever is going through her digestive system is not enjoying the process at all.

OWEN: I do that, sometimes, to annoy my roommate. Whooooosh.

PARKER: She says she's vegan, but she's not.

OWEN: I make a point of annoying him as much as he annoys me. It's only fair.

PARKER: I've seen her with a hamburger. And not some tofu-meat-substitute kind of burger. It was an actual McDonald's Big Mac. I saw the paper wrapping around it and the McDonald's bag was right next to her.

OWEN: It gives him something to talk about with his friends.

PARKER: She was sitting out in front of the building shoving the Big Mac into her mouth like a junkie. Like it was her last meal before rehab. If there *is* such a thing as meat rehab. Or even poultry rehab – where you'd go cold turkey without the turkey.

OWEN: If he didn't have me to talk about, he'd stand around at parties like he was mute. Like a mime without make up. And paralyzed – but able to stand up. He just couldn't move. Or speak.

PARKER: And, on top of her duplicity, she's greedy. And she's a hoarder.

OWEN: I talk about him all the time to my friends and the people I work with. I amuse them with my tales of roommate oddities.

PARKER: I think hoarders are, by nature, greedy. So there's a bit of redundancy there.

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OWEN: I tell them how he stands between me and the TV and passes gas, and says, “TV stinks. There’s nothing good on.” He thinks he’s being funny. But it’s disgusting. *He’s* disgusting. It’s the only time I think we really do need a breeze blowing through the apartment. But, even then – amidst his toxic fumes – I still say no to the open-door policy. I don’t want to establish a precedent. Lately, though, I’ve begun to be concerned that he leaves the apartment door open when I’m not around. It’s never been open when I’ve come home from being out somewhere, but that’s not conclusive proof that he’s not leaving the door open when I’m away. He might have implanted a microchip under my skin while I was sleeping and, now, he can track my whereabouts on his laptop or phone, so when I get close to our building, he shuts the apartment door as if it had never been open. It’s not as farfetched as it seems. In Central America, where kidnappings are as common as corn, people are having tracking chips implanted under the skin – between their neck and shoulder – so that, if they’re kidnapped, they can be located and rescued. My shoulder was sore a few weeks ago. It could have been when he implanted the microchip. Or it could have been from doing military-style push-ups on the bike path in Central Park to impress a date.

PARKER: I’m lactose intolerant.

ADAM: (*Shouted toward MIRANDA’s door.*) I’m still here.

OWEN: It’s impressive.

PARKER: So I *need* the vegan pumpkin whoopie pies.

OWEN: I could drop and give you twenty, right now, if I felt like it.

PARKER: It’s a matter of *need* versus *want*. I need. She wants.

OWEN: And you’d be impressed.

MIRANDA: Is that an existential realization or a status update?

ADAM: It’s just so you know.

MIRANDA: Noted.

ADAM: That I’m still here in the hallway outside your door. And that I’m sorry.

MIRANDA: That’s the first time you said that.

ADAM: I mean it. I’m sorry.

MIRANDA: Why didn’t you think of that at the party?

ADAM: Because you can’t be sorry before you do something. You have to wait till after you do it to be sorry you did it.

MIRANDA: That sounds like cult-speak. Or Dr. Seuss.

ADAM: *(With a bit of a condescending tone.)* It's cause and effect.

MIRANDA: Don't talk to me like I'm stupid.

ADAM: I'm sorry.

MIRANDA: Which seems to be your new favorite phrase.

ADAM: Please... Just open the door. So we can talk.

MIRANDA: We *are* talking.

ADAM: So I can see your face.

DAN: Sometimes I feel like somebody is watching me.

ADAM: Just enough to see your face.

EMILY: I watch him through the peephole, though sometimes – depending on how much light there is in the hall and how close my eye is to the peephole – I see the reflection of my own eyeball. But it's more than that. It's like I can see the reflection of the guy across the hall *in* the reflection of my eyeball. Like he's in my eyeball. Or deep inside my brain.

MIRANDA: *(Opens her door just a bit.)* That's as far as I'm going to open it.

EMILY: So, sometimes, I'm not sure if I'm watching a version of him that exists in my mind – and says and does things in my head – or if he's the actual person talking to himself as he's coming and going from his apartment.

DAN: It's not paranoia.

MIRANDA: So don't get any ideas about pushing it open all the way.

ADAM: I won't.

MIRANDA: Because you'd knock me over in the process. And that would really tick me off.

ADAM: I won't knock you over. And I will seriously, sincerely try not to tick you off.

DAN: Seriously.

ADAM: Any more than you already are.

EMILY: Am I projecting things – dreaming things while I'm awake – that have nothing to do with the *actual* him?

SATURDAY: I'm not a confrontational person, but a confrontation is going to happen.

MIRANDA: Let's see how well you can stick to that plan.

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EMILY: That would be sad. It would be too sad to comprehend. It would be sadder than watching your dad shoot your dog because it barked too much. So it can't be true. Nothing that sad is allowed to be true.

ADAM: (*Awkwardly beginning the open-door conversation.*) Okay, then....

MIRANDA: I opened my door for that? "Okay, then..."

ADAM: It was a transition. From one thing to another.

MIRANDA: I know what a transition is.

ADAM: Then let me make one.

MIRANDA: Why weren't you this concerned about what came out of your mouth when we were at the party?

ADAM: Because we were at a *party*. When you're at a party, you're focused on having a good time, not what you say or how you say it.

MIRANDA: It was a simple question.

ADAM: Which I just explained.

MIRANDA: I mean at the party. The guy at the party asked you a simple question.

ADAM: I thought you were talking about what I just said.

MIRANDA: If you'd have been paying attention, you'd have realized that I made a transition.

OWEN: I don't really like my roommate, but I think it's important that he likes me.

ADAM: Oh.

MIRANDA: Keep up.

ADAM: It would be easier if we weren't having this conversation – this discussion – in the hallway.

MIRANDA: Halfway in the hallway.

ADAM: What?

MIRANDA: You're in the hallway. I'm not. You're half of the conversation. Your half is in the hall. So, halfway in the hallway.

ADAM: Right.

MIRANDA: Was that another transition?

ADAM: No. It was me agreeing with you.

MIRANDA: Somebody shoot off a flare.

ADAM: Excuse me?

MIRANDA: A flare. A thing that produces a bright flame or flash of light.

ADAM: I know what a flare is.

MIRANDA: Like fireworks but smaller. And not accompanied by the "1812 Overture."

ADAM: And we're shooting off a flare because...

MIRANDA: Because you agreed with me. I was being facetious. Like, "Oh, wow, this is cause for celebration. You agree with me."

ADAM: So you'd shoot off a flare because I agreed with you? Aren't flares more commonly used as a distress signal?

MIRANDA: The flare has burned out.

ADAM: Do you mean that euphemistically?

MIRANDA: I suppose.

OWEN: He doesn't mention me in any of his Facebook posts, emails or texts.

ADAM: Are you saying we're the flare? Our relationship is the flare?

MIRANDA: That's not what I was saying. But maybe we are. Maybe we *are* the flare.

ADAM: We're not the flare. We are definitely not the flare.

MIRANDA: We're certainly not fireworks.

ADAM: As opposed to the flare?

MIRANDA: Exactly.

ADAM: I'm not sure I want us to be fireworks.

MIRANDA: Because our relationship isn't cause for celebration?

ADAM: No.

MIRANDA: No?

ADAM: No. Because fireworks can happen in a relationship. In moments of passion or anger. But it doesn't seem like something you'd want going on all the time. Like constant explosions. Like living in London during World War II, when the Nazis were bombing the city every day. It doesn't seem like something that anybody would want.

MIRANDA: In that example, are we the Nazis, the city of London, the war itself, or some other metaphor?

ADAM: None of the above. We're two people in a relationship who don't want explosions all the time.

MIRANDA: The people in London.

ADAM: I guess.

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MIRANDA: They didn't want explosions all the time. You said so yourself.

ADAM: I don't think anyone wants explosions all the time.

MIRANDA: Except the people who make explosives.

ADAM: They want the explosions to happen to other people, not themselves.

MIRANDA: Sometimes, I think you're like the people who make explosives.

ADAM: I don't want explosions to happen to other people. If anything, I'd be like the people who protest against the people who make explosives.

MIRANDA: So now you're a protestor?

ADAM: I want peace.

MIRANDA: You've been going about it the wrong way.

OWEN: I installed a keystroke-capturing program on his laptop. And I know the password for his phone. When he takes a shower, I look at all the texts he sent since the last time I checked and I read every single word he types on his laptop.

ADAM: Are we talking in the abstract?

MIRANDA: Always. And never.

ADAM: I may have to set off a flare.

MIRANDA: To celebrate the abstract?

ADAM: Because I'm in distress.

MIRANDA: In the hallway?

ADAM: In my life.

MIRANDA: I'm going to shut the door again.

ADAM: You can't be serious.

MIRANDA: There's that word.

ADAM: What word?

MIRANDA: Serious. When the guy at the party asked you if we were serious, you said, "Kind of." Kind of. After almost seven months, we're *kind of* serious.

ADAM: I know him from the gym.

MIRANDA: So you have to equivocate with him?

ADAM: In a sense.

OWEN: And there is never – *not ever* – even a single mention of my name or any kind of reference to me that's hidden under layers of coded euphemisms.

MIRANDA: We have to be noncommittal with people we know from the gym?

ADAM: We're not friends.

MIRANDA: You and me or you and the guy from the gym?

ADAM: The guy from the gym. We're acquaintances. We're gym buddies. We don't have actual conversations. We give an upward head nod or we point when we see each other across the gym or when we're waiting to use the bench press at the same time. A nod or a point. And we make informational small talk. We don't discuss our relationships.

MIRANDA: Is he in a relationship?

ADAM: I don't know.

OWEN: It's as if I don't exist in his world.

MIRANDA: He's never even mentioned if he has a significant other?

ADAM: He likes the Patriots.

MIRANDA: The football team or the colonists who fought in the Revolutionary War?

ADAM: Football.

MIRANDA: And that means you don't discuss relationships with him?

ADAM: We wouldn't do that no matter what team he likes. It's just not what we do.

MIRANDA: So everything remains "kind of" in the world of gym buddies?

ADAM: Kind of.

MIRANDA: If this door was all the way open, I'd have slapped you.

ADAM: Then I'm kind of glad the door isn't all the way open.

OWEN: Which is hurtful. No one wants to be excluded from someone else's world, especially if they're an important part of your world.

MIRANDA: And this mode of communication is just for guys who know each other from the gym?

ADAM: All guys are like guys who know each other from the gym.

MIRANDA: Even if you don't know them from the gym?

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ADAM: Guys don't communicate the way girls do. We exchange information. We talk about things. Ideas... Sports trivia... The reason you want your boss' brakes to fail on a rainy night. But not about feelings. We definitely don't talk about feelings. Or discuss what we think about when we can't distract ourselves by thinking about sports.

MIRANDA: It sounds very isolating.

ADAM: You think?

MIRANDA: I do.

ADAM: I was being flip.

MIRANDA: I always wanted to do a flip. Like a gymnast. Or on a trampoline. Just... flip.

ADAM: So do it.

MIRANDA: I'm not a gymnast. And I don't have a trampoline.

ADAM: Cheerleaders do flips.

MIRANDA: I'm not a cheerleader.

ADAM: I didn't say you were.

OWEN: Which is ironic because I don't like him. I genuinely don't like him. But maybe that's because I feel like I have to have somebody I don't like in my life. (*Explaining.*) To focus on. To direct my frustrations at. To be the target of my... general annoyance.

MIRANDA: Cheerleaders must be one of the things guys talk about when you're not discussing your feelings.

ADAM: Occasionally. They're not one of the top ten things guys talk about with each other.

MIRANDA: That's surprising.

ADAM: You don't give us much credit.

MIRANDA: It's hard to give credit for something that seems so foreign. So wrong.

ADAM: Saying it's wrong is pretty judgmental.

MIRANDA: People judge each other all the time.

ADAM: You're not supposed to do it when you're in a relationship.

MIRANDA: In a perfect world.

ADAM: Shouldn't that be the goal?

MIRANDA: A perfect world or not judging the person you're in a relationship with?

ADAM: Both, I guess.

MIRANDA: I don't think either is possible. Or even practical. Or realistic.

ADAM: That's a kind of fatalistic mind-set.

MIRANDA: And we're back to "kind of."

ADAM: I'm just saying.

MIRANDA: I'm just saying, it's sad.

ADAM: Sad that you're kind of fatalistic?

MIRANDA: That you can't talk about things – really talk about things – with other guys who are supposed to be your friends.

ADAM: Gym buddies aren't your friends. They're gym buddies.

MIRANDA: You said, "All guys are like guys who know each other from the gym."

ADAM: I did. And it's profound.

MIRANDA: And it's sad.

ADAM: It's how we're wired.

MIRANDA: You should rewire yourselves.

ADAM: Which would make us women.

PARKER: Scotophobia (*Pronounced **sko**-tuh-FOH-bee-uh.*)

DAN: It was my mother's idea.

PARKER: Scotophobia (*Now pronounced **ska**-tuh-FOH-bee-uh.*)

SATURDAY: (*Seething.*) The whole weeks' worth of vegan pumpkin whoopie pies.

PARKER: Same spelling. S-C-O-T-O-P-H-O-B-I-A. Different meanings. The pronunciation of one syllable changes everything. Scotophobia (***Sko**-tuh-FOH-bee-uh.*) is fear of the dark. Scotophobia (***Ska**-tuh-FOH-bee-uh.*) is fear or hatred of Scottish people or their culture.

SATURDAY: You can't do what she did and get away with it. There are consequences.

PARKER: I suppose you could be in a dark room and experience both scotophobia (***Sko**-tuh-FOH-bee-uh.*) and scotophobia (***Ska**-tuh-FOH-bee-uh.*)

DAN: Privacy was not allowed.

PARKER: Just like you can be a person named Lulu having a lulu about a lulu.

DAN: No exceptions. No excuses.

PARKER: (*As if it's obvious and everyone else is stupid.*) A lulu can be a remarkable person, idea, or thing.

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DAN: My bedroom door had to be open at all times.

OWEN: Because I can't be annoyed – generally or otherwise – with myself. I can't be frustrated with myself. What purpose would that serve?

DAN: It had to be open at all times.

OWEN: What good would it do?

DAN: No exceptions. No excuses.

OWEN: It would be like standing in front of a mirror and screaming at your reflection.

DAN: No excuses. No exceptions.

OWEN: Except that sometimes that can be very cathartic. And you can't discount the value of things that are cathartic.

DAN: Just like the dead cat.

OWEN: Screaming at your reflection isn't the same as screaming at yourself.

DAN: No pets. No exceptions. No excuses.

OWEN: That would be absurd. Like saying you hate yourself.

EMILY: If your eyes are the window to your soul, what is the door?

SATURDAY: It's like exercise.

OWEN: Saying it out loud.

SATURDAY: I never wear clean clothes to exercise in. That's just stupid.

EMILY: And what is it the door to?

OWEN: You can think it. But when you cross the line...

PARKER: The formerly alive cat could even be a lulu.

OWEN: When you cross the line and say it out loud – say that you hate yourself out loud, then...

PARKER: An ex post facto lulu.

OWEN: You've entered the realm of the absurd.

PARKER: (*Offering a definition.*) A lulu that is ex post facto. An adverb meaning after the fact; retroactively.

OWEN: Which sounds like a place in some fantasy video game.

PARKER: It's interesting that a dead cat can be more of a lulu than a cat that's alive.

OWEN: So I don't say it out loud.

PARKER: And, perhaps, I should have said “allegedly dead cat,” since there’s no corpus delicti (*Pronounced KOR-puhs-di-LIK-ty.*) No actual evidence of a body or physical remains. And without that, no one can be sure whether the cat is alive or otherwise.

OWEN: So we may have to duke it out.

PARKER: Which allows people to create a whole fiction-that-mutates-into-fact about what happened to the cat.

OWEN: My roommate and I.

PARKER: The *alleged* cat.

OWEN: Sometimes, that’s the only way for two guys to deal with a situation. Duke it out. Even if one of the guys doesn’t know there *is* a situation. Especially then. Because then you have the advantage of a surprise duking on your side.

PARKER: Was the alleged cat ever really there? In the hallway. Where the alleged cat was allegedly dead.

OWEN: And that’s a powerful advantage to have. When you’re duking it out.

PARKER: Or was it just a figment of the imagination.

OWEN: And by duking it out, I mean fighting. With your fists. Like a man. Not like some kind of royalty role-play duel.

PARKER: It’s a lulu, really. Any way you look at it.

SATURDAY: It’s stupid.

OWEN: And while we're duking it out, my roommate will have to acknowledge my importance in his life – my integral importance – because if you don't acknowledge the importance of the person duking it out with you, you might as well be duking it out by yourself, which would be like having only one boxer in the ring. (*Getting increasingly angrier.*) Your roommate is supposed to be the other boxer in the ring. It's how it works. It's like any relationship. You both have to be in the ring. Even if you don't like the other person, you have to get in the ring and make sure *they* like *you*, as you punch them in the face. They have to get in the ring. Otherwise, how do you know you exist? (*Unraveling, with fury.*) If a tree falls in the forest and there's only one hand clapping, who hears it fall and what sound does it make? And even if by some messed up stretch of the imagination, he doesn't like me – he can't go around acting like I don't exist. (*Pulling himself together, but still frighteningly intense.*) He can't pretend – not for a second – that I don't matter. He is not allowed to treat me like I'm as invisible as the breeze that would blow through our apartment if we opened the front door and the bathroom window. Which isn't going to happen, because we don't live in a shack. Which I would remind him of when we're duking it out.

SATURDAY: Getting all dolled up in clean clothes...

OWEN: When I'm punching him in the face.

SATURDAY: With your hair and make-up done...

OWEN: Knockin' him around.

SATURDAY: ... When you know you're going to get all sweaty and gross while you're exercising is just stupid.

OWEN: (*Beginning to cry.*) Making him feel like a scared little kid.

EMILY: I had a dollhouse, when I was little.

OWEN continues to cry.

OWEN: Which makes me want to scream at my reflection in the mirror.

SATURDAY: So I wear clothes that I've already worn but haven't put in the laundry hamper. After I wear them the first time, I hang them up on the back of my bedroom door.

EMILY: And the door – the front door on the dollhouse – was like a clip... A clasp. And when you unhooked it – the door clasp – the house opened up and you were inside the house instead of just being able to look inside through the windows.

SATURDAY: I hang them on a hanger. And then I wear them again to exercise in. They're already partly dirty. Partly *soiled*. Which is an odd word for dirty. It sounds like you've rolled around in the dirt – in the *soil*. Which you haven't. Unless you're the kind of person who actually rolls around in soil. Which I most definitely am not.

EMILY: As soon as I did it – as soon as I opened up the house like that, the first time, it made it seem vulnerable. Unprotected. And it was. The rooms were open. You could stick your hands right into the rooms and move things around. You could rearrange the furniture and put your dolls in different rooms. Of course, that's the whole idea. To make it feel like your dolls are actually living in the house.

SATURDAY: And when you wear clothes that aren't the kind of things people usually wear to exercise in, nobody knows what you're doing or where you're going when you're coming and going.

EMILY: I had generic dolls. Like the generic version of a prescription medication, except it's a doll. Like Barbies that weren't actual Barbies but were supposed to look like Barbies and fool people into thinking they *were* Barbies. Even though they didn't. The dollar-store Barbies were a little off. Like their faces weren't quite perfect and sometimes one leg was a little longer than the other one. Or there was a dark spot on the doll's hand. I found the imperfections comforting. Real Barbies weren't. Comforting. They were intimidating. And condescending – quite self-satisfied in their plastic perfection. And not just the measurements – which, if an actual woman had those proportions, she'd be more than likely to have very serious back pain and wouldn't be taken seriously by anyone. Especially men.

SATURDAY: So nobody in my apartment building has any idea when I'm going to work or when I'm going to work *out*, because I wear the same kind of outfit for both. It's important to keep people guessing.

EMILY: So no real Barbie was ever in my dollhouse. Only generic Barbies and mangled generic G.I. Joes that my brother injured in generic G.I. Joe battles. With real explosions. You don't know what disconcerting is till you've had a severed generic G.I. Joe head come flying at you from the other side of the backyard.

SATURDAY: And I always carry a Sharpie marker with me. A big, black professional Sharpie marker. The kind with the really strong smell. Which lets you know it's serious. It's *professional*. It has chemicals in it not meant for children.

EMILY: I nursed them back to health. I was a like a war-zone hospital for injured generic G.I. Joes. Sometimes I mixed up the heads and the bodies they belonged to. No one seemed to mind. None of the generic G.I. Joes complained. They were just glad to be away from my brother and his explosions. Nobody likes explosions going off all the time. Not even generic G.I. Joes.

SATURDAY: And, sometimes, I walk upstairs instead of going out the front door. I walk up to the apartment of the vegan pumpkin whoopie pie thief and I write things on her door. With my professional marker. I write things on her door that are a mix of threats and promises. And just plain witty comments.

EMILY: I turned the dollhouse into a rehab facility for the injured generic G.I. Joes. The kitchen table was perfect for surgery. And the generic G.I. Joes seemed happy in the dollhouse. I decided to leave it open so they wouldn't feel claustrophobic. Fresh air is important for healing and recuperation. I didn't think leaving the dollhouse unlatched and wide open would be a problem. I didn't anticipate any issues arising from my desire to enhance the convalescence of the injured generic G.I. Joes. *(Pause.)* I didn't anticipate the dog. *(Clarifying.)* My brother's dog. During a particularly explosive backyard battle, the dog came into the house to get away from the loud noises and generic G.I. Joe plastic body-part projectiles. But instead of hiding under the bed in my brother's room, the dog got into my dollhouse and chewed up the furniture and the generic G.I. Joes – which seemed even more gruesome than my brother sending them flying across the yard with explosive warfare. I hit the dog with the bottom half of a generic G.I. Joe that I pulled out of his mouth. Not hard. I didn't inflict pet abuse. I just said, "Very bad dog," and smacked him on the nose. He also chewed up a book my mom was reading. Some romance novel. So the dog wasn't allowed in the house after that. My mom's idea, not mine. And there was no ceasefire in the backyard. I told my brother to stop the war, even though part of me loved taking care of the injured generic G.I. Joes and didn't want to halt the flow of incoming wounded. I put my own needs aside and I told him to stop, but he wouldn't listen. Every day, for two hours after school and another two hours after dinner, explosions would go off in the backyard. You could hear them a few blocks away. And they made the dog bark. Since he wasn't allowed in the house anymore, he just curled up by the backdoor and barked. He howled sometimes, too. And the barking and howling annoyed my dad. When you work the night shift like my dad did, being able to sleep when other people are awake is important. So the barking and the howling made him mad. Totally and extremely mad. And he said he was going to put a stop to it. So we went for a ride in the truck. My dad, me, and the dog. My brother stayed home and cried. Like a big baby. And we drove out into the woods. *(Pause; matter-of-fact.)* And my dad shot the dog. *(Pause.)* He had to do something. *(Pause.)* It was sad. I

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didn't cry, though. I wanted to, but I felt like crying would make my dad feel guilty. And, really, it's my brother who should feel bad. His explosions made the dog bark. My brother was selfish and inconsiderate. And there were consequences.

SATURDAY: There have to be consequences.

MIRANDA: I don't think making some adjustments to the way we communicate has to be so difficult.

ADAM: The way you and I communicate or the way I communicate with guys I know from the gym?

MIRANDA: (*Interjecting.*) Who represent all men, because the gym has become some kind of metaphoric microcosm.

ADAM: None of which takes away from the fact that I like that we're together. That I want to be together with you. That I think what we have is serious.

MIRANDA: (*Sarcastically.*) Kind of.

ADAM: (*Choosing to let her comment go.*) But when worlds collide...

MIRANDA: (*As if building on his story.*) And life is obliterated by a giant planetary bang.

ADAM: (*Explaining; finding a better word for "collides".*) When my world with you... *intersects*... with my guy world.

MIRANDA: Guy world?

ADAM: The gym is a guy world. A bastion of maleness.

MIRANDA: Even though there are women who work out at your gym.

ADAM: Which brings out even more guy-like behavior from the guys. It makes them hyper-masculine.

MIRANDA: You haven't been hyper-masculine a day in your life.

ADAM: I wasn't talking about me. I was talking about all guys. In general. And yes, I have.

MIRANDA: You've been hyper-masculine.

ADAM: Every day. Especially at the gym.

MIRANDA: You only go to the gym every other day.

ADAM: So I'm hyper-masculine every other day.

MIRANDA: And how does this super-mega-macho-ness manifest itself.

ADAM: Too many ways to count. The other guys are in awe of me.

MIRANDA: (*Sarcastically.*) I'm sure I would be too.

ADAM: No doubt.

MIRANDA: So give me an example. Just one out of the too many ways to count.

ADAM: (*Thinking.*) When I've done my work out, and I'm dripping with sweat... I smell myself and I reek. I mean, I am rank with sweaty maleness and I look at myself in the mirror and say, "Workin' hard, buddy."

MIRANDA: (*Laughing.*) You call yourself, "buddy."

ADAM: Calling myself Adam...

MIRANDA: (*Interjecting.*) It's your name.

ADAM: (*Continuing, as if MIRANDA hadn't interrupted.*) ... Seems kind of borderline crazy.

MIRANDA: And "buddy" keeps you on the side of sanity, when you're "workin' hard" and reeking of moist maleness.

ADAM: (*Correcting her.*) Sweaty maleness.

MIRANDA: "Guy world" is a strange place, indeed.

ADAM: Which is what I've been trying to tell you.

MIRANDA: Maybe you should have led off with workin' hard and sweaty maleness, buddy.

ADAM: You wouldn't have understood.

EMILY: So I closed up the dollhouse. And super-glued the latch shut.

DAN: My bedroom door had to be open at all times. Privacy was not allowed.

EMILY: (*Her eyes begin to fill with tears.*) And I put the dollhouse in the attic.

DAN: No exceptions. No excuses.

EMILY: Where I think it still is. Unless my dad found it and threw it away.

DAN: One time, when I was twelve, I shut my door while I was doing my homework – because the noise from the TV in the living room was distracting. And my mom made my dad take the door off the hinges right then and there. Not like the Incredible Hulk. He didn't rip the door off and throw it down the hall. He used a hammer and a flat-head screwdriver. And he put the door in the garage. So I got to see my bedroom door every time I went in there. Which was every day. Until I asked if it could be put back on my bedroom door frame. And then my mom told my dad to bust up the door with an ax. And he said, "No." Which would've been funny if it wasn't scary. Because when people stop doing what they always do, it's scary. Because you don't know what's going to happen. The comfort of predictability evaporates. So when my mom picked up the ax, I wasn't sure if she was going to hack up the door or hack up my dad. Seriously. In terms of percentages and probabilities, I think the door and my dad were about even money. In terms of getting hacked up. Or me. I suppose I was an ax-able option, too, though I didn't really think of it at the time. Anyway, the door got it. Hacked up like kindling for a campfire. After that, everything was fine. Well, normal. Which wasn't fine and wasn't normal, if you're comparing it to what normal is for everybody else. Except that my mom never told my dad to do anything anymore. She didn't talk to him. At all. From that point on. And then that became normal. For a while. A couple years. Things become normal a lot quicker than two years but, after two years, you almost forget what the old normal was before the new normal became the only normal you know. Until it's not the normal anymore... When I was fourteen, I was working on a 3-D graphing program on my computer in my bedroom. My mom said dinner was ready and I said, "In a minute." Because a minute was really all I needed to finish what I was doing. And she came into my room with a wooden spoon and she hit my hands so long and so hard that my knuckles were bloody and swollen and I couldn't bend my fingers anymore. And she grabbed my computer keyboard and took it out to the patio, threw it on the grill, poured lighter fluid on it, and set it on fire. Which made me not want to eat anything she cooked on the grill after that. And when I told a friend of mine what happened with the keyboard, he didn't believe

me. He said my mom would never do something like that. He said I was crazy and I needed help. If he lived at our house, he'd have had a very different understanding of what my mom would and wouldn't do. But my dad and I were the only ones who lived in the house with my mom. Everybody else knew her from church or her volunteer work at the food bank or when she led a protest against violent video games. People can be different on the other side of a door. If there's no door, you don't have a choice. Maybe that's why my mom didn't want me to have a door. So I knew she was watching. So I knew *everyone* was watching. And expecting me to be good. And normal. Normal for everybody else. And not like her. Maybe I'm giving her too much credit. Revisionist history. It makes it easier to sleep at night. It lets me stop looking in the mirror for signs of her in my eyes.

EMILY: Sometimes, I have nightmares that the generic G.I. Joes are trapped inside the dollhouse and they can't get out.

SATURDAY: Nobody suspects.

EMILY: Being trapped means that you can't get out.

DAN: My parents are still together.

SATURDAY: No one on the third floor has any idea that I'm the one who's writing things on the vegan pumpkin whoopie pie thief's door.

DAN: I guess that's some kind of accomplishment.

SATURDAY: They're all blaming each other.

EMILY: Ironically, my brother was killed in an explosion.

SATURDAY: They're clueless. Completely without a clue.

DAN: The normal you know is better than something you don't.

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