

Pick Your Poison

By

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EXT. CUL DE SAC- DAY, EARLY 1900S

Darkness. We are inside a mailbox. The flap opens. Light glows around YOUNG WOMAN 1, the smile of a 1950s housewife.

PARKER (V.O.)

I guess the wrong number phenomenon started way back before the iPhone was ever a thought.

YOUNG WOMAN 1 takes the mail. As she walks back to the house, she sifts through envelopes addressed: Elizabeth Morris, Elizabeth Morris, Elizabeth Morris, Judy Oaks.

INT. CAVE- NIGHT, 2198318927 BC

Young Man 1 stares at pyroglyphics.

JULIE (V.O.)

And before there was the wrong mailbox, there was the wrong cave. You'd think evolution would've straightened us out by now.

He scratches her head. His armpit.

INT. THEATER- DAY

Alone in the audience, middle center, is PARKER, 21, brooding and unshaven, making notes in a worn copy of Romeo and Juliet.

JULIE (V.O.)

Would've turned human interaction into something scientific, an equation of transmitters and receptors, not just a test to assess your patience, your manners.

On the title page, Parker scribbles out the "T" in Juliet.

INT. SCIENCE LAB- DAY

NOW

A line of smoking beakers. With them is "J+P" written in salt. Chipped nails funnel salt around it into a heart.

PARKER (V.O.)

If you're considerate you redeliver Judy Oaks' letter yourself. If you're polite, you apologize and try the next door or cave.

(CONTINUED)

Parker sneaks in. He slams his binder down on the desk, spilling the salt across the table.

Sitting here is JULIE, 21, the imprint of her goggles red across her forehead. She wipes away the remaining salt.

JULIE

Ah, Mr. Spielberg. Just in time.

PARKER

Sorry. I've been auditioning Romeos and Juliets since breakfast.

JULIE

Any prospects?

PARKER

Sure, if Natalie Portman calls me back.

She tries to hand him a beaker, but he reaches for a different one, sniffing it. She takes notes instead.

PARKER

Smells like Thanksgiving.

He stirs with a spoon and licks it.

JULIE

If turkey and cranberry sauce smells like lizard poison...

Parker sways. He drops silently to the floor.

INT. PARKER'S LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Parker lies on the couch. Julie enters with a cup of tea.

JULIE

First rule of lab? Never drink the bleach. Second rule is never to leave the bleach drinkers behind. The good news is that I finished our lab presentation while they pumped your stomach.

PARKER

At least that's out of the way.

JULIE

Natalie call yet?

(CONTINUED)

PARKER

Not yet, but I can think of one
Juliet I want.

Parker takes her hand.

JULIE

Me? Really? I mean, I've never been
on stage before, at least, not
since my second grade production of
Charlie Brown. I was Snoopy, and
well, I puked all over Woodstock.

Beat. Parker pulls his hand back.

PARKER

Oh. Right. That was... dumb.

JULIE

You know what- why not?

PARKER

But, I mean, you're so busy with
the Environmental Club and Peace
Corps applications...

JULIE

I can't be working all the time.
It'll be fun. And we'll get to hang
out, right?

She flashes a smile he cannot say no to.

INT. THEATER- DAY

Julie on stage, stiff as a board, a script to her nose. She
speaks to TIMMY, 21, poker face unwavering.

JULIE

Was ever book containing such vile
matter so fairly bound? O that
deceit should dwell in such a
gorgeous palace!

She beams, curtsies. Parker sits in the audience, front and
center. His horrified face is in his hands.

JULIE

Do you want us to go again? I
flubbed my line in that first part.

(CONTINUED)

TIMMY

May I be excused?

PARKER

How about we give your understudy a try with Romeo, okay Julie? Has anyone seen Maya?

Julie nods solemnly, hopping off stage as MAYA, 21, hair braided with flowers, takes her spot, confidence oozing.

MAYA

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face! Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave? Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!

Parker and Timmy are engrossed. Julie notices, hurt.

INT. THEATER LOBBY- DAY

Julie and Parker exit the theater, head toward the exit.

PARKER

You just need to loosen up a bit.

JULIE

That's what the Charlie Brown director told me. I lack activity in my wrists. I think the bigger problem is remembering all these lines. I messed up that monologue, like, six times.

Maya walks past them, lingers slightly in front of them.

PARKER

Hey, Maya, great job today. I want to talk to you thought about your emotion in Act II. Wanna grab food and talk?

MAYA

I have a free hour. How do you feel about sushi?

PARKER

Not as strongly as I feel about Indian.

(CONTINUED)

JULIE
(uncomfortable)
I'll go, um, work on that
monologue. See you tomorrow, I
guess.

She excuses herself out of the group, frowning as she exits.

INT. SCIENCE LAB- DAY

Parker alone at a table, surrounded by books. He pulls from his backpack a box of chocolates hearts as Julie sits across from him.

He leans forward, offers her the box like it's the golden ticket. She leans forward and takes the box.

JULIE
These are nothing but Aspartame.

She throws it in the trashcan. He tries to intercept but misses.

JULIE (CONT.)
Here's the script for our
presentation. Everything you say is
colored blue.

She hands Parker a packet. He flips through it. On each page, only one line is blue. "

PARKER
All the blue parts say "We added
salt" or "We boiled water."
Shouldn't I say more?

JULIE
(seriously)
You can't tell calcium from carbon.

She works. He glances at the TRASHCAN. Inside, the box is upside down. A card addressed to Julie is taped to it.

INT. BACKSTAGE- DAY

Maya and Julie lounge backstage, scripts in hand.

JULIE
Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt
say 'Ay,' And I will take thy word:
yet if thou swear'st-

(CONTINUED)

MAYA

Do you think Parker's cute?

JULIE

Yes.

(Beat)

I mean, No. He's fine. Why? Did he say something?

MAYA

Well, he keeps looking over here.

They both turn to Parker, across the way. He catches their eye and heads toward them.

MAYA (CONT.)

Is it weird if I ask him out? It's just, being Juliet, it makes me feel all confident and powerful, you know?

JULIE

You're not Juliet. You're my understudy.

Maya pats Julie on the shoulder as Parker approaches.

MAYA

Hey Parker. Julie and I were just talking about that new French film?

PARKER

I hate cinema with subtitles. It could be-

JULIE

I once rented Almost Famous in Spanish once- they called Penny Lane el centavo carril.

MAYA

You should practice, Julie.

PARKER

Timmy's backstage. Why don't you guys run lines?

Julie crumples her script and throws it to the ground as she walks backstage. She looks back:

Maya and Parker laugh. Maya steps closer, touches his arm.

INT. GYM- DAY

Parker bursts into a gym, scouring the unfamiliar territory. He runs to Julie, taking out her aggression on a treadmill.

PARKER

Rehearsal started an hour ago!

JULIE

Just have Maya stand in for me. That's what you plan on doing for the actual show, isn't it? What, you're gonna put bleach in my Gatorade?

PARKER

No bleach drinkers left behind, right?

She rolls her eyes, refocusing on the run. He pulls the pin from the treadmill, sends her flying.

JULIE

I'm not a moron, Parker, I see how you look at her, like she's Natalie Portman straight from Garden State- no, Star Wars, and I'm just Chewbacca.

She goes to the weights rack and starts to lift. He joins.

PARKER

Don't be so dramatic. You just have to learn a few things. Maya can help, she's a great actress-

JULIE

And I'm just not.
(Beat)
That's it. Isn't it?

PARKER

It's just... You're not the right Juliet.

The weights thud to the floor. She gathers her gym things and exits.

INT. LIBRARY- DAY, 1850S

Young Woman 1 is on one side of the bookshelf reading "MORSE CODE 101". She taps Morse code as Young Man 1 listens on the other side.

TRANSLATION ON SCREEN: "I DON'T CARE."

JULIE (V.O.)
 When you come back through your
 brainwaves, you dive through the
 folds of your ventricles.

As Young Woman 1 flips through the book, Young Man 1 leaves, crushed, not realizing Young Woman 1 is still tapping.

TRANSLATION ON SCREEN: "I DON'T CARE FOR TROMBONES."

EXT. HOUSE- NIGHT-, 1950S

Young Man 1 tosses pebbles at an open window.

PARKER (V.O.)
 You dissect the moments that were,
 at first-

HEAR glass break. A light turns on.

MAN (O.S.)
 HEY!

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT, 1950S

Young Woman 1 picks up the glass.

PARKER (V.O. CONT.)
 Something too quick to recognize.

She looks out the window. Nothing but an empty street.

INT. CLASSROOM- DAY, MODERN

A NOTE, folded in half, is passed along a line of desks.

JULIE (V.O.)
 It could be a heartbeat, a hiccup,
 or nothing it all.

The last hand crumples the note.

INT. SCIENCE LAB- DAY

Parker stands alone in front of the class. He rustles his script and glances at the clock, ten minutes after the hour.

PARKER

Julie's just running a little late.

He glances to the door, but no one enters.

PARKER

Let's just, um, start without her.
So we took the carbon...

He glances over a row of chemicals in front of him, unsure which to choose.

PARKER

No, sorry, we took the calcium-

He lifts one at random. It falls from his grasp. Shatters.

INT. THEATER- NIGHT

Julie, dressed in black, slips on stage. The theater is empty. She opens her BACKPACK, full of mischief night essentials: toilet paper, shaving cream, spray paint, a carton of eggs.

JULIE (V.O)

Sometimes, the message floats
through the space between mail
boxes and cave walls, fossilizing
in your ventricles.

She chooses a roll of toilet paper, throws it. It rolls to the other side of the stage.

INT. SCIENCE LAB- NIGHT

Parker cleans up lab supplies.

PARKER (V.O.)

Other times, it's not about the
delivery.

He stumbles upon the table with A SALT HEART, encircling J+P.

INT. THEATER- NIGHT

The toilet paper comes to rest next to a copy of Romeo and Juliet. We have seen it before.

JULIE (V.O.)

In those moments, it makes it. It just isn't decoded the way you want it to.

Julie picks it up. On the first page, written tightly, is "Director's copy. Touch and Parker will kill you."

Right below is the title, the "T" sketched out in Juliet, the name circled with a heart.

INT. SCIENCE LAB- NIGHT

Parker texts with vigor: "SOS" to JULIE.

The sending bar fills but does not complete.

He turns off the lights.

INT. LOBBY- NIGHT

Julie hurries out of the theater, ear pressed to the phone. It rings once.

PARKER (O.S.)

Hey it's Parker. Leave a message.

She hangs up the phone and runs.

EXT. CAMPUS- NIGHT

A crowded street. Parker jogs north. Julie jogs south, Parker's Romeo and Juliet in her hands.

CUT TO:

-Julie as the housewife digging into an empty mailbox.

-Parker as a caveman, huddled by a fire.

-Julie in the library, tap tap tapping away.

-Parker runs down the street.

- Julie tossing the crumpled note into the trash can.

EXT. CAMPUS- NIGHT

Julie and Parker still zig-zag through the crowd. There is no clear point of potential intersection.

Julie is bumped and the BOOK flies.

Parker sees the book fall through the sea of jeans. It lands right near him. He bends down to pick it up. Beat. This is his book.

Parker looks up. Above him is Julie. He stands up. They kiss, a detour in the forever moving crowd.

FADE OUT