Rinse Cycle

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When the person you love treats you badly, stop waltzing.
Check the mirror, check the stove — kill the plants you never watered.

Hide the spare key, silver and dented from wanting, inside your left cheek. It will sit in that pink pocket, rubbing against brittle gums and soft resentment, for maybe forever, or maybe until next Tuesday.

Don’t let the mailman in.

Your pots gleaming in the sink, clock breaking every midnight, sermons you wish you’d never heard — you sing your own body electric.

You will never fit her left-behind jacket. Its pockets bulge with emptiness, hood draped against your neck, the loose buttons brushing your stained clavicles, descending, dependent.

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Cast of Characters:

JANE. Mid to late 20s, a student, doing laundry
PETER. Mid to late 20s, a dropout, also doing laundry

Time and Place:

A laundromat in Galesburg, Illinois. The present.
At rise: In a small laundromat in Galesburg, Illinois. There are two washers and two dryers visible along with one table in the center of the stage. PETER and JANE are nearly alone in the store, sitting in folding chairs at opposite ends of the stage, waiting for their clothes to finish washing. JANE is talking on the phone; PETER is looking down at a sketch book, tapping it gently with a pencil, glancing up once in a while to look at JANE from across the room.

JANE
(On the phone:)
So then he looks at me, right at the end of dinner and says, “Oh, you should know, I’m not looking for anything too serious,” and slides his hand down my thigh. I didn’t even get to finish my chocolate cake before he tried to take me home. I’m telling you, these guys are like wild animals.

(PETER shifts in his seat and clears his throat in an attempt to get JANE’s attention, unsuccessfully.)

PETER
Excuse me?

(JANE continues to talk on the phone, ignoring PETER.)

JANE
(On the phone:)
Yeah, finding a decent guy who can hold a conversation, maybe does something other than play video games and scroll through Tinder all day? That too much to ask for? (Beat.) Get out more? I’m in school all day and doing homework all night… I get out… Kind of. (Beat.)

(PETER clears his throat and stands up, almost crouching, JANE glances at him.)

PETER
Would you mind…

(JANE looks at PETER while still talking into her phone.)

PETER
You’re very rude, I was trying to talk to—

(JANE looks at PETER while still talking into her phone.)

PETER
I’m sorry, I just, I’m trying to do some work and, you’re talking on the phone so loudly. I can’t focus.

JANE
Mom, I gotta go, some creep has been listening in on our conversation (Beat.) Love you, too.

(PETER takes the phone away from her face.)

(JANE takes the phone away from her face.)

TO PETER:
Satisfied?

PETER
(Beat.)
No, no, you misunderstand, I’m not trying to be a creep or anything. I’m sorry, I just, have some sketches to do and I came here to try and get some work done.

JANE
You’re very rude, I was trying to talk to—

PETER
Your mom… I heard. (Beat.) Sounds like you had a bad date, too.

JANE
Rude and nosey, huh?

PETER
How do you expect anyone to not hear your conversation when you’re shouting into your phone? You might be ruder than me.

JANE
That’s not—

PETER
Anyway, thank you for stopping, sorry about being a creep and sorry about your date. The guy sounds pretty shitty to me.
JANE
Well, we can agree on that.
(A ding is heard. JANE picks up her laundry basket and walks to the washing machine section of the laundromat. She begins putting the wet clothes into her basket.)

PETER
So what happened?
(Another ding is heard. PETER picks up his laundry basket and, like JANE, walks to the washers and unloads his wet clothes, placing them into his basket.)

JANE
I don't really want to talk about it. Especially to someone I've never met.

PETER
I don't really want to talk about it. Especially to someone I've never met.

PETER
So you'll shout about it over the phone with your mom in a public place filled with people you've never met, but you won't talk about it in that public place, with someone who would actually like to discuss it with you. That makes sense.

JANE
I just want to get my laundry done. I'm sorry my phone call annoyed you. Don't you have work to get back to?

PETER
If you didn't notice, you're not the only one with laundry to do.

JANE
Excuse me? That is really none of your business.

PETER
You can tell a lot about a person by what they're washing. (Beat.) Oh, hoodies. Are those sweatpants? Fuzzy socks, too? Been a comfortable couple of days, huh? You don't separate lights and darks?

JANE
Will you just leave me alone? I really don't have the patience for this right now.

PETER
Patience for what? For laundry? Nobody does, you're not alone.

JANE
Patience for you!

PETER
Just underwear. Wanna see?

JANE
Oh god no, I don't really like looking at strangers'... underwear—I should go...

PETER
Peter Wright, it's a pleasure to meet you...

JANE
Are you always this annoying?

PETER
Patience for what? For laundry? Nobody does, you're not alone. (PETER starts loading his clothes into the dryer.)

JANE
Patience for you!

PETER
Just underwear. Wanna see?

JANE
Oh god no, I don't really like looking at strangers'... underwear—I should go...

PETER
PETER extends his hand, still holding the underwear, to JANE. When she ignores it, walking back to her original chair, he drops the underwear and runs his hand through his hair instead."

JANE
Are you always this annoying?
PETER
Annoying? Because I want to talk to you? Come on.

JANE
Fine. Where are you from?

PETER
Galesburg, Illinois, born and raised. I had every intention of getting out of here as soon as I could read a map. Still here. Still having a hard time with maps. That, and I can’t afford to live anywhere else. What about you?

JANE
My name is Jane Walker, and I’m from Chicago originally.

PETER
Chicago, like suburbs or Chicago, like skyscrapers?

JANE
Skyscrapers, I suppose?

PETER
Wait… Why would you leave Chicago for Galesburg?

JANE
Everything is too fast there. I had no time to catch my breath.

PETER
How awful, a fast-paced life in a city, who would want that?

JANE
You’d be surprised how lonely it is, living in a crowded city.

PETER
So you left a busy city because you felt alone, and moved to a city with a fraction of the population to find, what? Loads of people?

JANE
Ha, no, I left the busy city because I felt alone, and moved to a city with a fraction of the population to find… myself, I guess.

(JANE shifts in her chair.)
I came to go to Knox, to become a better writer. I decided to stay because I’ve never felt at home anywhere else.

PETER
So you’re a writer?

JANE
I’d like to be.

PETER
What does that mean?

JANE
It means that I’d like to be a writer, but I’m not currently writing anything. And I haven’t… recently… been writing apart from half-assed assignments for my professors.

PETER
How recent is recently?

JANE
I don’t want to say.

PETER
Come on, Jane, there’s no judgment here.

JANE
Like, a year?
PETER
You’re joking. You spend money to go to a school to learn how to be a writer, and now you’re not even doing it?

JANE
What was that, I recall you said not too long ago, about… No judgment?

PETER
I’m sorry. Why the lack of writing?

JANE
I don’t know. Lack of inspiration, I suppose.

PETER
Maybe you’re just looking in the wrong spots for it. What do you do in your free time?

JANE
I do some volunteering, I read a lot, I like to work out…

PETER
Alright, I know I haven’t known you for long, but I know that’s bullshit.

JANE
Fine, I spend most of my time sitting at home, eating and watching Netflix. I spend my weekends going on dates with people I met the week before, usually on a dating site. The dates, more often than not, go nowhere, and I end up wishing I would have stayed home instead, where putting on makeup and pants is not necessary.

PETER
Now that’s more like it! But those don’t sound like the best places to be searching for this… inspiration.

JANE
Where should I be looking? The laundromat?

(A ding is heard from the dryers. JANE and PETER are looking at one another from across the laundromat; they ignore the sound of the finished laundry.)

PETER
(Beat.) I think it’s me, too.

JANE
I mean your laundry is ready…

PETER
Oh! I meant that, too. Yeah, I’ll go check on my laundry. Which is what we were both talking about.

(PETER stands from his chair and awkwardly walks to the dryers. Each step seems calculated. JANE watches him. Another ding! is heard, JANE gets up and walks to PETER. They both begin unloading their clothes and putting them in laundry baskets. JANE drops a sock onto the ground without noticing and PETER picks it up, putting it under his laundry basket, unbeknownst to JANE. JANE picks up her basket and walks to the center table. PETER follows and they stand on opposite ends and sides of the table.)

So anyway… Inspiration?

JANE
Yeah, you know, a spark. Something that makes me excited to get up in the morning and deserves to be written.

PETER
You think you’ll find that on Netflix and dating sites?

JANE
I guess some part of me does. Modern romance, you know?

PETER
Ha! I highly doubt Tinder and all ten seasons of… what, Grey’s Anatomy? Constitute modern day romance.

JANE
Eleven.

PETER
Sorry?
JANE
There’s eleven seasons of Grey’s Anatomy on Netflix.
(PETER stops folding and looks at JANE, who continues to fold with fervor.
She keeps her eyes on anything but PETER.)

PETER
See what I mean?

JANE
I don’t know what you’re talking about. And… I don’t even know you…

PETER
Oh stop it, you know what you need? You need to stop looking for… whatever
it is you’re looking for, within the confines of that goddamned digital world
you surround yourself with. You complain to your mom about a bad date, fine,
that happens to everyone. But next week what are you going to do? Sit in class
and scroll through guys who are in the same rut that you are? Is that what you
want to do? Doesn’t sound like a fun time to me.
(JANE stops folding and looks at PETER.)

JANE
Hey! You can’t make me feel bad for how I spend my time! And fine, if you
can, then I can do the same to you. If my habits are so flawed, then enlighten
me to the exciting life that you lead. Please, I’d love to hear the marvelous and
thrilling ways that you spend your time.
(PETER looks down and begins to back away from the table,
looking away from JANE.)

PETER
We’re all flawed individuals.

JANE
… Flawed individuals?

PETER
Yeah, I mean, who are we to judge one another, really.
JANE
We're both just talking.
(JANE returns to folding this time more slowly.
She glances at PETER and he, too, returns to folding.)
You know, I feel comfortable in this town,
but there's just something missing. It's hard to explain.

PETER
No I understand, I feel the same way. I've lived here my whole life. I want to
leave every day, but at the same time I think if I went anywhere else, I'd always
wish I would have stayed here. It's not that bad of a town, actually.

JANE
I've lived here for a few years and I can't say I know too much
about the town, unfortunately.

PETER
Yeah, there's a railroad museum… The inventor of the Ferris Wheel was born
here. (Beat.) That sounds super lame now that it comes out of my mouth.

JANE
Ha! No, that sounds as interesting as I could have anticipated.

PETER
Yeah, there's even a railroad festival here every summer, if you can believe it.
(Beat.) We're big on railroads here.

JANE
Oh wow, nothing says crazy college town quite like a railroad festival.
Galesburg is wilder than I imagined!
(JANE starts moving her piles of folded clothing around the table.
She looks confused.)
Shoot.

PETER
What's the matter?

JANE
I'm missing something.
(PETER does not look up from his folding.)

PETER
Aren't we all?

JANE
I'm missing a sock. I have one without a mate.
(JANE holds up the lone sock so PETER can see it.)

PETER
Let me help you.

(JANE and PETER begin looking all around the table for the sock.
They lift and shove piles of clothing. PETER grabs the sock from under
his laundry basket and holds it behind his back without JANE seeing and
then continues to help her look.)

JANE
But yeah, it'd be nice to have someone in my life I could hold a conversation
with who didn't have some sketchy ulterior motive. Someone who inspires me,
but lets me be my own inspiration at the same time. Am I making sense?
(The two of them are still looking for the sock. They are talking to one another
but cannot see the other's face. They move around the room freely.)

PETER
You just crave a life for yourself beyond the ordinary. I feel like most
people want that… Most just don't come out and say it to random people
they meet in laundromats.
(From wherever they are searching the two pause and look at one another,
holding the glance for a beat. They return to searching.)

JANE
Don't you want that, too?
PETER
(PETER plants the sock in one of the washers while JANE’s back is turned.)

JANE
I guess you’re right. Maybe it’s worth a try, though? Maybe there’s something
in this town that can inspire you. Me, too, for that matter.

PETER
I think I’ve got what you’re looking for.
(PETER reaches into the washing machine and comes out with the sock that he
had been hanging on to.)

JANE
(To herself, and the audience.)
You know, I’m starting to think you do, too.

PETER
(Pulling his head from the washer, not hearing JANE’S previous line.)
I found your sock.

JANE
(Beat.) Oh! That’s great.
(JANE reaches for the sock, the two hold it for a beat.
They look at one another.)

PETER
All right, then, looks like you found what you were looking for.
(PETER hands JANE the sock and turns toward his laundry pile,
gathering his items in the basket and returning to his original chair,
preparing for his departure.)

JANE
Peter?
(JANE looks at PETER, sock in hand.)

PETER
Yeah, Jane?

JANE
Would you maybe want to go get coffee?

PETER
(PETER turns awkwardly and looks at JANE. There is a pause.
He scratches the back of his neck.)
Well, I have…

Jane
(Cutting off his response.)
Yeah, I should get going, anyway.

PETER
(Beat.) Yeah, I should head out. I still have those sketches to do.
And looks like I’m not going to find my muse in a laundromat.

JANE
(JANE begins fidgeting nervously with her piles of clothing.)
Oh. Okay.

PETER
Okay, well then maybe…
(PETER pauses, turns, and looks to JANE one last time,
JANE holds his glance for a beat.)
I’ll see you the next time I need to clean my underwear, huh?
(PETER exits.)

JANE
Yeah, catch you later.
(JANE begins loading her laundry into her basket and then stops,
still clutching the sock in her hand.)

End of play.