

PRECIOUS LITTLE

a play

by Madeleine George

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Contact:

Seth Glewen

The Gersh Agency

phone: (212) 634-8158

email: [sglewen@gershny.com](mailto:sglewen@gershny.com)

## CHARACTERS

A: F, 60s      plays THE APE, DOROTHY, CLEVA, THE BABY

B: F, 40s      plays BRODIE

C: F, 20s      plays THE ZOO GOERS, RHIANNON, EVELYN, DRE, GLORIA

## TIME

Early millennial.

## SETTING

Institutional enclosures: counseling room, office, ultrasound room, audio booth, zoo.

## NOTES

- The Ape does not wear an ape suit.
- The Zoogoers are a single character--the multivoiced character of a crowd--rather than one actor playing many roles. The actor who plays them should not "become" individual Zoogoers and interact with imaginary people, but rather hold mostly still, face mostly out, and allow the voices of the many Zoogoers to pass through her. She is a channel--a different kind of character from everyone else in the play.
- The sparer the set, the better. One desk/table/gurney ought to do it; one recording console/ultrasound machine/lexigram board; one enclosure.
- Generally, actors should move set pieces. Generally, actors should change costumes (if there are costume changes) in view of the audience. Transitions are part of the play, and should generally be lit (except, perhaps, where indicated), and played through rather than rushed through.

Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as *Thou*, our words cling to the threshold of speech.

--Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?  
What atonement is this all about?

--Adrienne Rich, *Twenty-One Love Poems*

1.

*In black: Silence.*

*Then:*

*Jungle sounds. Foliage, birds, moisture.*

*Pinlight up on THE APE, draped over a great gnarled log. She reclines halfway, Odalisque, elegant and weary. She is barefoot; she wears Chanel. She does not wear an ape suit.*

*THE APE lifts her big hand, a stalk of celery in it. She works the celery into her mouth contemplatively, grinding it into her face as if feeding a tree branch into a chipper--leaves and all.*

*THE APE's every movement is animal, heedless and perfect, uncontaminated by ambivalence.*

*Jungle sounds build.*

*We watch THE APE, spotlit, as through the peephole end of an Easter egg: odd figure in an odd world.*

THE APE

*(even, calm)*

I chew. I swallow. I recognize the vegetable. I drop my hand with the vegetable, forget the vegetable. A breeze. I swell my chest to it. Light comes from every direction here. Light comes from the ceiling, someone left the ceiling open here. I stretch myself out on what they have for me to lie on. I smell the air; it smells like buildings here. I smack my lips. I close my lips like a purse over my yellow teeth.

*Sudden shift, to which THE APE does not react:*

*Lights snap up, fluorescent and dry, to reveal THE APE in her enclosure, upstage behind the glass--but there is no glass. Jungle sounds out. THE ZOO GOERS are revealed, played by C, downstage facing out. The instant the shift occurs THE ZOO GOERS are talking.*

THE ZOO GOERS

*(quick--pirouettes of talk)*

Mom look. I'm looking. Oh my *gosh* it's so realistic. Why's he just lying there? He's just chillin. No you're gonna see in a second, like--*voom!* He's gonna get up and start beating the

ground. They look so much like people, how do people not believe in evolution? Hey Aliss, Alissa, lookit the gorilla. Hi gorilla. Hi gorilla. Why won't he say hi. Anna stop it, you wouldn't do that if there wasn't glass there. Okay guys we saw him. Come on Rachel. Zach, come on, we're going to the next thing. We're going to see the *movie* about gorillas. Say bye bye monkey. Bye bye monkey. Bye bye monkey. Bye bye. Bye bye.

*Lights: abrupt, total.*

2.

*Holiday-Inn yellow light up on the counseling room. Fake wood desk, phalanx of Holiday-Inn-uncomfortable chairs on either side. Manila file folder full of papers open on the desk.*

BRODIE--*practical, wry, calm--and* RHLANNON--*ponytailed, peppy, outstanding--are on their feet, about to shake hands. DOROTHY--assembled, aloof--sits beside* RHLANNON.

RHLANNON *seizes* BRODIE's hand and shakes it *vigorously*.

BRODIE

Sarah Brodie. You can call me Brodie.

RHIANNON

Great, that's what you prefer to go by? Brodie? Great.

RHLANNON *drops* BRODIE's hand to make a note of *this in the open file on the desk*.

BRODIE

It's what everyone calls me.

RHLANNON *drops her ball point and as abruptly re-grasps* BRODIE's hand, *resumes the shake*.

RHIANNON

Great, it's great to meet you, Brodie. (*an explanation*) So I'm Rhiannon Doyle.

BRODIE

*(pleasant)*

Rhiannon, is that as in rings like a bell through the night? And wouldn't you love to love her?

RHIANNON

Oh, um, yes, my parents really loved that song when it came out.

BRODIE

*(ha ha--I'm old enough to be your mother)*

So did I.

RHIANNON

*(cheerful, blank)*

Uh-hunh.

*BRODIE turns to DOROTHY.*

BRODIE

And you are?

RHIANNON

Oh this is Dorothy Amberson, my mentor. She's going to be observing me today.

DOROTHY

How are you.

BRODIE

Nice to meet you.

*BRODIE and DOROTHY shake briefly. DOROTHY does not stand.*

RHIANNON

She's not going to be speaking or participating, she's just going to be observing.

BRODIE

*(to RHLANNON)*

First day on the job?

RHIANNON

Oh no, oh no, we're just coming to the end of my transitional period. For the first two months all the new counselors work under the supervision of a mentor counselor and then the mentor counselor phases out. Dorothy's phasing out right now.

BRODIE

Before our very eyes?

DOROTHY

Feel free to ignore me, I'm used to it.

*BRODIE raises her eyebrows, takes a breath to say something but RHLANNON jumps in.*

RHIANNON

Okay great, so why don't we get started. I usually like to start with a few basic questions just to give me a sense of where things are.

BRODIE

By all means.

RHIANNON

And I also like to give clients a heads-up that some of the questions I'll be asking today might feel pretty personal, we will be getting into some pretty personal areas today, but the reason I ask is only because I want to get as complete a picture of you as I can, so I can be really thorough about finding red flags. Okay?

BRODIE

Okay.

RHIANNON

Okay great, so if you'll just do your best to answer as honestly as possible that'll be great.

BRODIE

I'll do my best.

RHIANNON

Great. Okay.

*(RHIANNON emits a satisfied little sigh, looks down at the open file to prompt her)*

Okay so first of all name, that's covered--Brodie. And is this your first pregnancy, Brodie?

BRODIE

It is.

RHIANNON

Great. And how many weeks since your last menstrual period?

BRODIE

Twelve and a half.

*RHIANNON notes this.*

RHIANNON

Great, okay, and your date of birth?

BRODIE

It's not on the chart there? That my OB faxed over?

RHIANNON

It is, yes, on the chart, I just want to confirm it for our records.

BRODIE

Nine twenty-one sixty-eight.

RHIANNON

Great, so that makes you...

BRODIE

Forty-two.



RHIANNON

Great. And is this pregnancy planned or unplanned?

BRODIE

Um...

RHIANNON

Okay, I know this might feel like one of those pretty personal questions I was talking about, but the reason I ask is just informational, so I can help you make decisions later on. In case I have to help you make decisions later on.

*BRODIE glances briefly at DOROTHY, back to RHIANNON.*

BRODIE

People like me plan our pregnancies.

RHIANNON

People, you mean like older moms?

BRODIE

I mean like lesbians.

RHIANNON

*(medium. high. low.)*  
Oh. Oh. Oh.

*She nods a little too vigorously.*

BRODIE

We don't typically get *accidentally* knocked up.

*RHIANNON laughs to show she's not uncomfortable.*

RHIANNON

No, you wouldn't, would you!

*(she laughs again, musically)*

Well great. So okay then, huh, I'm just wondering about this series of questions about your husband then, do I just...skip them I wonder, or...?

RHLANNON *looks sideways at DOROTHY.*

BRODIE

I'm guessing no.

DOROTHY *shakes her head slightly.*

RHIANNON

No of course, no I'm sorry, you just threw me for a loop for a second there--you're my first lesbian!

BRODIE

It's a pleasure.

RHIANNON

But okay yes, I am still going to need to ask you about the father--

BRODIE

Donor.

RHIANNON

Right, yes, because we will need his medical history today. So do you, I mean, is he available?

BRODIE

I happen to have him right here.

*BRODIE reaches into a briefcase by her feet and pulls out a dossier in a manila folder, hands it over to RHLANNON, who reads off it.*

RHIANNON

Number Six Three Nine.

*(RHLANNON begins to page through the dossier, increasingly impressed)*  
Wow, great. This is *great*.

BRODIE

Yes, they're very thorough at CryoBank.

*DOROTHY leans in to read over RHLANNON's shoulder.*

RHIANNON

Wow, I've never actually seen a donor profile before. *(showing DOROTHY)* They've got morbidity going back three generations, a full cancer tree, CMV infection--CMV infection, that's crazy! *(to BRODIE)* Most actual people who come in here have no idea what their CMV status is.

BRODIE

What's CMV?

RHIANNON

*(dismissive)*  
Oh, cytomegalovirus, it's not important.

BRODIE

*Cytomegalovirus* is not important?

RHIANNON

You really don't need to know about it, I wasn't even going to mention it. But it's great that this has it, and he's negative, too, which is great.

*DOROTHY has eased the profile over into her viewing range, reads.*

DOROTHY

"I am an outgoing and laid back and fun-loving guy. I get along with everyone and I like hanging out. My interests include stand-up comedy, kayaking, and hanging out with friends. I think this is a great opportunity to help other people while supporting myself as a sound engineering student."

BRODIE

Nice, right? Vigorous-sounding.

*DOROTHY smiles, takes a breath to respond to that but RHLANNON reinserts herself into the center of the moment.*

RHIANNON

Great, so if I can, if you don't mind?

*DOROTHY nods, recedes.*

RHIANNON (*cont'd*)

Okay so before I get into your history, Brodie, I just wanted to ask if there are any red flags you know about that you want to discuss up front. Any heritable diseases or other risk factors that you already know are on the table?

BRODIE

Not that I know of.

RHIANNON

So just your age.

*DOROTHY casts a look in RHIANNON's direction;  
RHIANNON misses it.*

BRODIE

Right, I guess, just my age--

RHIANNON

*(apologetic)*

Because, you know, one of the things we do have to tell people is that increased maternal age does increase the risk of birth defects.

BRODIE

Yes, I know.

RHIANNON

Of course the majority of pregnancies are uneventful, but it is true that for women over forty the overall risk of birth defects does actually go up to one in one hundred.

BRODIE

Yes, I understand, that's why I'm here.

RHIANNON

I know those statistics can be a little scary to hear, but--

BRODIE

No, I'm not scared of statistics.

RHIANNON

Great, that's great.

BRODIE

You know, I don't know what kind of person is usually sitting here across from you, but I didn't come here so you could convince me about amniocentesis, I came because I know I want the test.

RHIANNON

Oh, great.

BRODIE

I understand my situation. I waited a long time to get pregnant and now I'm perched on a statistical precipice, I get it.

RHIANNON

Great.

*BRODIE addresses most of the following to DOROTHY.*

BRODIE

Not that I'm cavalier about having put myself in this position, I'm not a reckless person. I just, you know, I spent my twenties and the better part of my thirties working extremely extremely hard, my research involves a great deal of travel and I spent years at a time in remote, isolated areas, and then I was on the tenure clock which you may or may not know is designed to suit the needs of young married men with stay-at-home wives and which absorbed all my energy until fairly recently, and then the all-consuming grant proposals, and when I finally did feel like I had the financial and institutional and, ah, emotional stability to turn my attention to this part of my life I was, you know, it was now.

RHIANNON

Sure.

BRODIE

I understand that there's risk involved in what I've done. But it was my choice to do it, it's my choice to have the test, and I'm prepared to make a new choice if it turns out something's wrong.

RHIANNON

Great. Great. That's great to hear.

*Lights.*