

The Great Divide
By Amy Crossman

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For T.

CHARACTERS:

HER, ages 22-26+ over the course of the play. An optimist who's in deep denial about the fact that she's actually a realist.

TIME:

2014-2018. Maybe a little beyond.

PLACE:

By and large, NYC.

NOTE:

We should never hear ELI, but he's there. The other characters can either be unheard, recordings or live audience participation.

HER drinks a lot in this play, but she's never like... DRUNK drunk, even when she is. She's maybe aware that she's drunk, but she sees and portrays herself as she sees herself being when she's drunk, not how others perceive her. Stay away from annoying sloppy drunk girl, please. Don't play the drunk. Play the human who had to drink to escape her own anxiety.

***BOLD** means HER is talking to someone who is not the audience. Otherwise, it's pretty much just her and them, baby.*

[stuff like this] means that it's intended, but not said.

Music is important.

Breathing is important.

Laughing is important.

Laughing is really important.

PROLOGUE.

As audience filters in, a general wash of lighting. For music, perhaps it's a dull roar of pop hits from 2013-2017, interspersed with telephone ringing, but not in a really super obvious way. Or maybe it's just the pop hits. Or just the telephone. I don't know. I'm not a sound designer.

But either way, as it is time to start the play, the sound builds to a cacophonous point and blackout. Does the phone ring first, and then lights up? Or lights up and then phone ring? Or at the same exact time?

Either way, once lights are up, a tight spot on HER, looking at her ringing phone. A beat. She silences it. A beat. The sound of a voicemail notification. A beat. HER opens her phone, begins to listen to the voicemail. It is not great news. It is in fact, quite bad news. A beat. HER discovers the audience. The sounds of a memory fade in – the sounds of 2013's best pop hits, perhaps other party noises. HER clocks them. They build. They build and they build and they build until:

NEW YEAR'S EVE, 2013

Lights more fully reveal HER, newly 22 and clad in a tight, clingy, polyester and possibly too short dress.

HER

(loudly, drunk, to audience)

HEY!!!! HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

A beat. HER doesn't realize we can hear her. She walks over to the table to grab a drink.

HER

(louder, still drunk)

I SAID HEY!!! HOW ARE YOU!!! HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!

Still not realizing.

HER

(shouting, drunk drunk drunk)

HAPPY NEW -

I - CAN YOU HEAR ME?? HOLD ON!!

HER crosses in to the bathroom – it's not so much a separate physical set as it is maybe a different part of the stage. The lights shift as HER closes the door – either real or pantomimed, and the music cuts out.

HER

(less drunk)

Phewf. That's better.

It's... loud out there. Happy New Year, by the way!

(tiny beat)

2013 has been a big year for me. I graduated college. I moved to New York. Well, back to New York. I'm from New York originally. And I'm living with my parents – but it's just – it's just temporary, for now, you know.

(tiny beat)

This is a party. Eli's party.

(tiny beat)

Oh! Eli! Who's Eli? He's, um –

He's a boy. Man. Person. Anyway, this is his house – apartment. Well, this is the bathroom, actually – his bathroom and also the bathroom of his two other roommates and also maybe his roommate's girlfriend – does she live here? I don't know. *She's* been shooting dirty looks at me since I got here because she brought a friend for Eli tonight but then I showed up and threw a wrench into that whole plan, so.

(tiny beat; drains drink)

Ooo that was good.

I'm gonna get another – do you want one or –

HER starts for the door, but changes her mind when she gets there.

HER

Maybe I'll... Can I just stay here with you... for a bit?

I don't.... I don't know anyone out there except for Eli, and he...

(beat)

He hasn't kissed me yet. Eli. I'm not sure.... why, but, um, whatever. Maybe he's saving it for the big countdown. We've got...

(checking phone)

9 minutes. 9 minutes until 2014. 9 minutes until the moment of truth.

(beat)

Fuck it, I gotta pee.

HER pees.

HER

(peeing)

I did shave tonight. Like... everything. My vagina's going to be itchy for the next two weeks – it always is when the hair grows back in, especially in winter because I guess my skin is drier or something? And I know I shouldn't care, like whatever, a guy should just be grateful that my pants come off at all – he should be grateful to be in my fucking presence, pants or no pants, and...and... no, I know he doesn't get a say as to whether I'm hairy or not – I am a feminist, I am – but also like... what if Eli isn't into hairy vaginas?

(finishes peeing and wipes)

This is all very new. Eli and I met this summer at Shakespeare Camp. Like super serious grown up highly trained professional actor regional theatre Shakespeare Camp. But we didn't really know each other – our paths never really crossed. He was busy playing Henry V in *Henry V* and I was busy playing a sheep in *As You Like It*.

Lights shift. HER in the past.

HER

(to an unseen ELI)

Right, right, right – exactly, I completely agree! What the albatross represents for each of us is –

(to audience)

A few weeks ago, at a largely deserted Biergarten in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. A bunch of other Shakespeare Camp people were supposed to be here, but they couldn't make it, so it's just the two of us. We don't really know each other, but we're two, two and a half, four or five drinks in. And we've just seen *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* with Fiona Shaw at the BAM Next Wave Festival. The whole thing goes completely over my head, but I am not about to let on:

(to ELI)

But you know, I wonder why the decision was made to make such juxtaposing and frankly distracting choices when –

(to audience)

Why am I talking so much? I don't mean any of this shit – I didn't understand that play – some boring nineteenth century poem written about a sad sailor and some bird. So why am I talking now, spewing words to avoid feeling this impending yet ever-increasing sense that somehow this particular moment in time is going to change everything, somehow– oh fuck.

Time slows down. Maybe there's a light shift. This is big, big, huge.

HER

(realizing)

I like him.

(tiny beat)

Like I *like* like him.

Beat. The unseen ELI says something, and HER's gotta pull it together to respond.

HER

(to ELI)

I agree!! I agree – I think she is one of the most underrated actors of our time and –

(to audience)

What is – what is *happening* – oh God it's so hot in here – I'm not going through menopause, right? That happens later, right, not at 22 and – wait.

(even more covertly to the audience)

Is he still looking at me? With his big eyes that look even bigger behind his giant wire-rimmed glasses? They're like, magnified – it's actually unfair how – because – I could stare into them forever and get lost, happily lost and set adrift into the blue-green sea of Eli, never to return, sayonara, arriveaderch – oh he *does* look like Harry Potter a little, doesn't he? My friends are never gonna let me live this down because this is a thing for me – not a – it's not intentional but it does seem to happen fairly regularly – that the people I am attracted look just a little bit like Harry Pot – but quit judging me, okay? This one is – he feels different and he

(with renewed panic or is it excitement?)

– is he – is he still looking at me because I think if he is, I think, I think, I really think it might be time for me to –

(to ELI)

III should go. It's getting late, and I live far from here and –

Beat. The unseen ELI says something.

HER

(to ELI)

Oh, um, with my parents, I live with my parents but just for now since I, you know, just graduated and –

Beat. ELI speaks.

HER

(to ELI)

Inwood? Top of Manhattan? I grew up there –

(beat)

I take the A – well, I'll take the C, and then I'll switch and get on the –

(beat)

Oh, you do that, too?

(beat)

I thought St. Nick was closer to the 2/3 in Harlem – if you have to take that at Barclays – I'm good, I don't mind –

(beat)

Oh, okay, um, cool. Well, I guess, let's split the bill and then we can head on out and –

(beat)

You did!

(beat)

For all of it? Can I give you some –

(beat)

Oh. Okay. Thanks.

(beat. Then, to audience)

You only pay for someone if you like them, right? Like if you *like* like them? Isn't there some sort of unspoken grown-up adult rule about that?

HER and the unseen ELI enter the subway. HER starts this next bit slowly, tentatively, and then gets lost in the rhythm of the ride.

HER

We wait on the C train platform.

What would it be like to touch him, do you think?

The C train comes.

What would happen if I just took his hand in mine?

Passing High Street, passing Fulton.

What would it feel like to be wrapped up in his arms?

West Fourth, 14th.

What would it feel like to be held?

42nd, 50th, 59th

What would it feel like to be held by him?

81st, 86th, 96th

Why does it feel like he sees me, despite it all?

103rd, Cathedral Parkway.

And why is it I can so clearly see him, too?

125th –

HER breaks out of her reverie. Maybe there's a light shift, maybe there isn't.

HER
(to ELI)

125th!

There's the A – that's my train, this one stops at 168th but I'm going up to 207th so I should transf –

(tiny beat)

You don't have to do that, stay, stay on your train, it's –

(beat)

You want to? O - okay.

HER and the unseen ELI run for the express train across the platform. It's exhilarating and scary and funny all at the same time, and they settle into that uncomfortable world of unspoken things.

HER
(to audience)

135th Street, whizzing by.

(beat)

What if I just said something? Or, no – what if he just said exactly what I'm thinking so then I wouldn't have to? But he wouldn't, he won't – he was selectively mute at times tonight – at the theatre, before the show, before the drinks, he hardly uttered two words as my heart pounded, nearly jumped out of my chest so I just babbled on and on because I had this thought, I had this feeling that maybe, maybe this wasn't just a casual friend hang maybe in fact it was actually something resembling a date – and – was he thinking the same – did his heart beat like mine, did it race, is he feeling –

The train pulls into the station.

HER

145th. Eli's stop.

(to ELI)

Okay, well, umm...

That moment when you don't know if you're gonna kiss or... what. A beat. Then, HER and the unseen ELI hug. He breaks their embrace. A beat.

HER
(to ELI)

Oh! No, well... thank you for hanging out with me, um...
(tiny beat)

Yeah! Yeah. Uh... Merry Christmas.

The unseen ELI exits the train, which then pulls out of the station. HER cranes her neck around to see the unseen ELI. A knock at the bathroom door and lights shift, to present.

HER
(yelling off stage)

Occupied!

(to audience, washing hands)

I'm not crazy, right? I've spent the last two weeks pretty convinced that this was gonna happen because all that nonsense on the train, that doesn't just happen - that kind of stuff is rare and hard to find, and when you find it, you're supposed to hold onto it, you don't let go. And I'm holding on, tight, I am - but Jesus is it so confusing. I've been doing stuff that I never ever do. Like I've been listening to the National. The. National. I like COLDPLAY. I'm a Swiftie. I've got embarrassingly mainstream music tastes - I mean, I'm not embarrassed of them, I'm just embarrassed when other people hear about me liking them but I've been listening to The National because they're one of Eli's favorite bands. And I've been enjoying them.

(tiny beat)

And we've been texting too, like all the time, nonstop - good morning, good night, how are you, how was your day - those really quiet, intimate things I don't ever text anyone, like, look, see -

HER shows the audience the texts on her phone - a swath of white and blue.

HER

Yet tonight, everything's been... he hasn't made a move yet, and, I mean, I would think the ball is in his court, right, I show up to his New Year's party where I don't know anyone, I don't know anyone but him, so I think that's pretty obvious, not difficult to -

A knock at the door.

HER

Just a minute!

(to audience)

Okay, okay.

(checks phone)

Oh, wow, okay, four minutes till midnight, cool, okay. Time to get my shit together.

HER adjusts her dress. Fluffs her hair. Maybe finds some toothpaste and brushes her teeth with her finger, or flosses. Continues to play with her phone.

HER

I have done my research. It says on Facebook that he's single. That's empirical data, hard cold fact. And he invited me to this party on Facebook, so he must have known that I would, you know, Facebook stalk him. And yes, okay Facebook relationship statuses don't... *necessarily* mean anything – in high school I was “married” to my friend Emily but like we were just lab partners in Chem and really liked the TV show *Lost* - we weren't really marr[*ied*]- But it also doesn't mean *nothing*, like if he wasn't single, it probably wouldn't say “single”.

A knock.

HER

(yelling)

I'm finishing up, you gotta wait a moment!!!

(steeling, to self in the mirror and/or audience)

Okay. I'm going to do it. I'm going to leave this bathroom. And I'm... maybe Eli going to kiss me, maybe he isn't. Whether he likes me, you know, *like* likes me or not is not a reflection of anything about me. It's not a reflection of my self-worth, or my value as a human being. This is not going to define my year, 2014 is gonna be my year, whether Eli is involved or not, one way or the other, one way or –

Someone pounds on the door.

HER

(yelling)

GIVE ME A FUCKING SECOND JESUS CHRI -

HER flings the door open, or does the door fling open? A vague underscoring of crappy 2013 sentimental romantic top hits trickles in from a far-off room.

HER

(to ELI, drunk)

Oh, hi!

(to audience, sober)

It's Eli.

(tiny beat, then drunk)

What? Yeah, no, I'm fine, I'm –

(beat)

No, I know – just takes a while with tights and heels and –

ELI hands HER a glass of champagne, definitely in a plastic flute. She drinks it over the course of these next few lines. Either a recording of the following lines plays, or ideally a live prompt for the audience flashes, with the audience reading the following lines.

PARTY CROWD

Woo!!!

HER
(to ELI, drunk)

Oh wow is it already –

PARTY CROWD

10, 9, 8....

HER
(to audience, sober)

Oh my god is he going to kiss me?

PARTY CROWD

7, 6 -

HER
(to audience, sober)

Oh my god he's going to kiss me.

PARTY CROWD
(off stage)

5, 4 –

HER
(to audience, sober)

Wait what if he's *not* going to kiss me?

PARTY CROWD
(off stage)

3, 2 -

HER
(to audience, sober)

Fuck fuck fuck oh my god oh my god

PARTY CROWD
(off stage)

1 -

HER
(to audience, sober)

I'm gonna have to do it I'm gonna have to -

PARTY CROWD
(off stage)

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

HER springs onto the unseen ELI, arms swooping up and full on make out, sloppy, tongue, the works. After a moment:

HER

(breaking out of it; to audience, sober)

I can't tell if he's kissing me back.

Back to kissing.

HER

(breaking out of it again; to audience, sober)

I still can't tell if he's kissing me back.

Back to kissing

HER

(breaking out of it; to audience, sober)

Okay he is kissing me back.

(euphoric; other worldly)

Oh my GOD HE IS KISSING ME BACK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I knew it; I freakin' knew it, I'm not crazy, this hasn't all been in my head – he *is* single, Facebook says so – and all the texting, I was right – you don't text with someone that much if you're not into it, you don't say things like how was your day unless you genuinely want to hear it, unless you really want to know – and you don't pay for people at restaurants if you don't *like* like them – and he *like* likes me, he does, he –

HER resumes the kissing. ELI pulls away.

HER

(suddenly, to audience)

– but he kissed me, he did, we all saw that, we all know –

(beat, then to ELI, drunk)

I'm – I'm what?

(beat)

No, no - I've been waaaaaay drunker than this before, waaaay –

(beat)

Awww. That's – that's really sweet, that's – but you're not taking advan –

(beat)

I'm not gonna regret anything. I want to... I mean I like you – like I... *like* like you so I...

Don't ... don't you like like me, too?

A beat. HER kisses ELI again, sweetly and softly. Then more intensely. But she's got the spins at the same time. She pulls away just in time and completely ineloquently, grotesquely, realistically, vomits. The unseen ELI holds her hair back. Rubs her back. Takes care of her.

Throughout this, HER should be checking in with the audience, too, though she says nothing directly to them.

HER
(to ELI)

I'm sorry, this is not how I –
(beat, to ELI)

No, I know, but I really... This is not a cute look and I wanted to look cute for you and–
(beat, to ELI)

Uhhh... half a bottle of wine, a cocktail, two wine-spritzers, two beers, that shot of vodka, and the obligatory celebratory glass of champagne.

(to ELI)

I know, I know, but I was... nervous.
(beat)

You were, too?

A beat. A slightly longer one. ELI kisses HER. A beat. ELI says something.

HER
(to ELI)

What?

(to audience)

Oh my god.

(to ELI)

Oh! No. That'd be, um... Yeah, that'd be nice.

(to audience)

Oh my GOD.

(to ELI)

No, you're totally right, me and the subway home at this state would not be the brightest of

–

(beat)

Right.

Lights shift. HER moves into a bedroom space – there's a small, non-descript bed of a 25-year-old man with blankets haphazardly thrown upon it. HER is thrilled to be there and shares that with the audience.

HER
(to ELI)

Oh, so this is your room?

(to audience)

This is Eli's room.

(to ELI)

Where the *magic* happens!

(catching self)

Not *magic*, I meant...

(to audience)

He's got this tiny twin bed, so it'll be a squeeze for us tonight, and this quilt that is *really* ug –

(to ELI)

Oh wow! She did?

(to audience)

His mom made it.

(to ELI)

It's nice.

HER takes off her shoes and gingerly sits on the bed. ELI sits on the bed. They are both sitting on the bed. A long, awkward beat.

HER

(to audience, quickly)

I've never done this. I've never like, spent the night at human man's apartment, not a real apartment that's like, not a college dorm or –

(beat)

You don't have to – please don't feel like you have to stay here with me just because – you can go back to your party, enjoy it all and –

(beat)

You want to?

(beat)

Oh. Okay.

A beat. HER shifts and lies in the bed. The unseen ELI climbs in behind her. HER is very self-conscious – maybe this dress was too short. She puts her phone on a nightstand beside the bed.

HER

(to ELI)

Do you have enough room? I can squish.

(tiny beat)

Do you have a nightstand on that side? I can put your glasses over here if you –

(tiny beat)

I'm a bit of a blanket hog but I'll try to be consider –

A beat. The unseen ELI holds HER. She lays her arm on top of his. They're cuddling. That's all they do. Maybe she's just paralyzed and a little confused, but also it's nice? A beat. Maybe a light shift. HER sits up, and checks on the invisible ELI.

HER

(to audience, whispered)

He's asleep now.

HER checks again.

HER

(to audience, whispered)

Yeah, he's asleep.

HER gingerly gets out of the bed.

HER

This isn't how... this is supposed to go, right? When you drink too much and you crash at a guy's house, in the bed of someone you really hardly know – when you vomit but he still kisses you anyway... how this works is that he rips off all your clothes and you just kind of lay there or go with the flow and pretend you're really into it even though the world is spinning and you're slurring your words and...

(tiny beat)

But that's not what...

(tiny beat)

We're just... cuddling. Drunk, but we're cuddling. That's it. He's holding me. I'm holding him. The two of us. Here together. Belonging.

Lights shift. HER climbs back into bed. She and the invisible ELI sleep, switching positions. Time passes.

HER

(waking up, to ELI)

Good morning!

(to audience)

I'm still here! This hasn't all been a dream – the two of us, still we're –

The unseen ELI kisses HER. She is surprised.

HER

Oh!

(to audience, checking breath)

Wait, what if my breath stinks?

(to ELI)

You don't care?

HER makes out some more with the unseen ELI. A wave of nausea comes on.

HER

(to audience)

Oh boy. I am *never* going to drink that much again...

(to ELI)

I think I should go. I'm still not feeling too –

(tiny beat)

Uh, sure... You can get me a cab.

(to audience)

He's gonna get me a *cab!*

HER and the unseen ELI say goodbye. She's in the cab.

HER

Should I text him? I should wait. Should I wait? Play it cool, right? Right. Oh, maybe I'll just –

HER's phone dings.

HER

Is that him!? It is him! He's probably gonna say that this was a huge mistake and we never should have –

(reading)

“What are you doing tomorrow?”

(to audience, excited)

What am I doing tomorrow?

(texting, to ELI)

What... am... I doing tomorrow?

(to audience)

I'm seeing a movie I've already seen, but I'm seeing it with him.

(to ELI)

Yeah, that twist at the end I never saw coming.

(to audience)

I'm having dinner at his house even though his roommates are disgusting!

(to ELI)

You washed dishes in the bathtub just for me?

(to audience)

I'm answering a question he asks a few weeks later with –

(to ELI)

Yeah! I want to... “do this thing for real.”

(tiny beat, to audience)

I'm not sure what that means.

(to ELI)

I'm not sure what that means.

(tiny beat, to audience)

AHHHH!!!

(to ELI, playing it cool)

Yeah, I'll be your girlfriend.

HER shares this enthusiasm with the audience.

HER

(to audience)

And a few months later – he's meeting my parents

(to ELI)

This is my mom, this is my dad!

(to audience)

And I'm meeting his!
(to ELI's parents)

Hi!
(to audience)

We hang out with my friends –
(to ELI and friends)

Ha ha ha ha ha!
(to audience)

And we hang out with his!
(to ELI)

Cheers!
(to audience)

And the weather turns warmer –
(to ELI)

You gotta get an air conditioner...
(to audience)

And then it turns colder!
(to ELI, cliché girlfriendy)

Do you have a sweater I could borrow?
(to audience)

We do birthdays together!
(to ELI)

I got you a cake!
(to audience)

And holidays –
(to ELI)

Christmas!!
(to audience)

And tomorrow becomes tomorrow becomes tomorrow – and suddenly –

A countdown, whether the audience or recorded, comes in.

COUNTDOWN

10! 9!

HER

It's been a year!

COUNTDOWN

8! 7!

HER

A whole year!

COUNTDOWN

6!

January to Janu – HER

5! COUNTDOWN

Me and Eli! HER

4! COUNTDOWN

The two of us - HER

3! 2! COUNTDOWN

Here together HER

1! COUNTDOWN

Belonging! HER

HAPPY NEW YEAR! COUNTDOWN

Lights and sound crossfade into:

GAME OF THRONES, 2015.