

You're Not Allowed to Ask Me That, a one-man show

By Jake Alexander

(Lights up. A single chair center stage, surrounded by headshots. Jake enters.)

JAKE

Here I am. Comin' in through the audience. Nothing says "pushing the envelope" like making everyone involved...nervous. But now I'm gonna take it a step further: step into the shoes of your seventeen-year-old self. Picture me as an adult, and I ask you: "Why do you want to be the thing you want to be"? *(A beat. Jake turns to the audience.)* The first time *I* got asked this question was when I was seventeen years old. Quick poll here. Show of hands: Raise your hand if you knew what you wanted to be at seventeen-years-old? *(He lets the audience answer.)* And keep your hand up if you are that thing now? *(waits for answer from audience.)* Okay, everyone with their hand up: shut up. Everyone who put their hands down: welcome. Okay, now we're gonna do something else. *(picks someone from the audience, hands them a card)* Can you read this when I tell you to? If not, don't take on this responsibility. You got this? *(waits for response)* Okay. I remember applying to colleges to study theatre, and I'd go on these college auditions, and they always asked why I wanted what I told them I wanted. And as a seventeen year old, who did not know what he wanted to be, let alone why, I would answer like this: *(indicates to audience member with card to go ahead and ask the question "why do you want to be an actor")* "I just fell that acting is the Expression of one's true self, and I love performing, and you know I'm was always looking for the spotlight hahahaha. *(deadly serious)* But really art can change lives and the world and the universe. And my life hasn't always been easy, you know as-" And we'll stop there. *(A beat.)* Clearly: I used to self-identify as a hopeless romantic. Let's go back to the hands: raise your hand if you're a hopeless romantic? *(waits for the audience to respond, indicates that he appreciates their honesty to each person)* I'm no statistician, but if I told you to "shut up" before, sorry. I'm a sucker for romance. I love being in love. The truth is, I've *thought* I've been in love a lot. But most of the time I wasn't. There's probably a lot of hearts I've broken, but the one that I've broken the most is my own. And because of this, I've had a lot of break ups (I'm not bragging). Today, this one will be the worst one I've ever experienced, I'm breaking up with theatre. I'm done. *(reads from notebook)* It says "hold for audible gasps"???

Growing up, I always wanted to be an actor. My mother would say it's because I was attention-seeking, and that's true of all wannabe actors, I think. My father would say it's because I've always been dramatic. That one hurts more, because he always said it with, like, a *tone*. I would say it's because I'm not good at anything else. Do you want to see me dribble a basketball? No, you don't. Do you want to see me do math? The IRS does! I have two redeemable skills: I can talk out loud, and I can move from one place to another while talking. That's all you need to be an actor.

I've wanted to be an actor since I was seven years old. I can't remember when I first thought I'd do it for the rest of my life, because that's not something that really happens. You don't have that epiphany. I firmly believe epiphanies aren't real. You can realize something, but it doesn't happen in a moment. It's not some lightbulb. There isn't an on-off switch. It's a dimmer. The light just gets brighter as the lesson becomes more ingrained. I do remember when acting was introduced to me. Like the start of any good love story, I was set up. My older sister introduced

me. They were in a production of “The Music Man”. And I fell in love. I was seven years old, and I had fallen in love for the first time ever (Sorry to Chelsea M, who was my girlfriend in elementary school at the time). There’s a great song in “The Music Man” called “Til There Was You”, I personally believe it’s one of the most beautiful love songs in musical theatre cannon. And there’s one line that perfectly sums up what it first felt like, meeting theatre for the first time. I’m gonna sing it right now, so you know, strap in: “there were bells/on the hill/but I never heard them ringing/no, I never heard them at all/ til there was you”. That’s how you fall in love.

I started acting. Acting made me who I am. It’s defined my life for so long, given me some of the best people and memories. I love it so much. In a lot of ways it saved me. And I’m so happy to have found it when I did. (*A beat.*) The problem is, I hate it. In a lot of ways it’s ruined me. It’s given me no useable skills. It’s broken my heart and made me desperate and turned me into a person I don’t like.

But sometimes we fall for the wrong person. My first performance was in a musical version of Treasure Island. I played Pirate #5. Here’s the bandana I wore. (*puts on bandana*) I had one line. You want to hear it? (*Jake chants “you’re a pirate” to himself repeatedly*) “There’s no map in here! Just dirty clothes!” I got a laugh. (*shrugs, no biggie*) And then I never stopped looking for that laugh. That reaction. If you listen really closely, you can hear my father sighing from all the way in Connecticut. And yeah, I’m in therapy. But I started wooing that feeling, that reaction from the audience, hoping that acting would have a crush on me back. I didn’t know I wasn’t running towards something, but instead, from something. But I’ll come back to that.

I don’t know if you’ve gotten this yet, but I’m not all right in the head. And it’s theatre’s fault. I mean it’s a lot of other things’ faults, too, but mostly theatre. The rest of this won’t be such a downer, I promise (*shakes head no, it’ll still be a downer*). Some relationships are toxic. Here’s something about acting: you never know how you’re being judged. There’s a goal post, but you can’t see it. There are points, but you’re never really aware of how exactly you win. Everyone has different ideas of success, and no one can agree on any particular metric system to determine who sucks and who doesn’t. But it’s become pretty clear to me that I’m a loser in this game. And that’s one of the reasons I quit. I’m not an actor anymore because I realized, sometime in the last three years after sticking out the toxic relationship for a long, long time, that I wasn’t very good at it. It didn’t have a crush on me the way I had a crush on it. It wasn’t going to develop feelings for me. It wasn’t going to fall in love with me.

I don’t mean the sense that I was a bad actor, I was pretty good, but the pool was pretty shallow. When I first started out, and was auditioning in south-eastern Connecticut, I was sort the go-to for nerdy white guys who can be charming and stupid at the same time. That was my bread and butter for awhile. And I carried that through high school, through college in Boston. And it wasn’t until I moved to New York that I realized that wasn’t good enough. There were *HUNDREDS* of us. And I realized the things I needed to do to succeed in this career, the extra stuff, I had no interest in being good at. I greatly admire people who continue to pursue acting as a career. I admire how you put in the time, the effort, the way you network. You guys are so brave. (*A beat.*) Sorry. You’re all fucking suckers. It’s a toxic relationship! Why would you keep asking to be judged this way? Why would you keep putting yourself out there like this? Why would you keep up the effort, keep printing off those headshots and resumes, keep getting up at

the ass-crack of dawn to pursue this career that is only painful to pursue? I guess I still think you're pretty brave, but I also think you're incredibly stupid.

But I didn't know any of this yet.

I'd fallen in love with acting, as bad for me as it was. And I'd decided I wanted to continue to pursue it. When I was auditioning for college theatre programs, my mom made me promise that I wouldn't go somewhere that I couldn't double-major. Because she thought it wasn't enough to have my only skills be 1. Talking out loud and 2. Walking from one place to another while talking out loud. And I kind of agree. You can't survive on that. So I get into a school in Boston, and I'm not gonna tell you which one it was. But, something you have to know about this particular school, about this particular theatre department is that it is not a BFA program, a Bachelor of Fine Arts program, but instead, a BA program, a Bachelor of Arts. There's nothing "fine" about it, but it was **just fine**. It was interdisciplinary. No one had a concentration in acting or directing or design. You learned everything. And consequently, I learned nothing about the thing I had decided I wanted to do for the rest for my life. (*Pulls out laundry bag*) Sorry, quick thing: Do you guys mind if I take this chance to fold laundry? I've been working on this pretty hard and haven't had the opportunity to take care of this yet. (*waits for approval*) Thanks. (*Begins folding laundry, which is all Boston College apparel*). So I went to this school, which shall remain nameless, and had fun but learned nothing. I guess I didn't learn **nothing**, but my biggest gripe with this school, which again I won't name, was that there are no classes in audition etiquette. There are no classes in the business of being an actor. I learned how to breathe from my diaphragm, and...that's about it. So when I graduate, and I'm auditioning in Boston and then eventually in New York, I was on my own. I moved here and didn't do well. I tried to shape a life that made it easy to audition and make enough money to survive, and have a social life, and also take care of my mental health (which as you can see, is going great). All of which are nearly impossible when you're living on top of each other, and waking up at 4AM to make it to midtown for an audition, and then staying up until 2AM waiting tables because that one group at table 34 **just won't leave**. You try auditioning under those conditions. You try putting your best foot forward. No go ahead, try it. See if you cry. You will.

You know what they did teach us? Don't bad-mouth anyone in an audition. Not how to properly give the tempo of your 16-bar cut to an accompanist, or even what a 16-bar cut was or how to spell accompanist, but instead don't be rude. Which seems pretty obvious, but okay. Don't be mean to anyone, because you never know who the panel of casting directors or artistic directors or interns know, and how they feel about the person you may or may not be bad-mouthing.

You know how some people can't interview for jobs? I can't audition. Here's how it usually went: I would stand up in front of two or three people, sometimes multiple times a week, sometimes multiple times a day, would do my thing, and immediately I could see on their faces if they liked that thing. They usually didn't. (*A beat.*) But the audition isn't over at that. Because there may be some vague questions at the end, like "tell me about **specific line item or production on resume that you've definitely embellished**?" or "how was working with **director on resume who wouldn't remember your name now**?". And the last beat was always the same: "Thank you so much, have a great day". (*A beat.*) I am horrible at this. Just let me leave. Please. I can't fake this. But the problem is, that's a big part of it. Being able to have a stupid conversation

after you've done your thing and they've made that face and you still have to be polite and say "thank you so much, have a great day!"

Towards the end of my love affair with acting, I went into an audition for a series of off-Broadway classic musicals. And right around this same time, there was a professor from this college in Boston who was credibly accused of sexual assault. When I was in school, this was a well-known rumor, that he had made inappropriate comments and moves towards students. And He had just been fired for this; it was the height of the "Me Too" movement, and the university had finally put it's foot down after decades of turning a blind eye. So I go into this audition and I sing my stupid little song, and there were about ten casting directors there for the various musicals. And they ask me their stupid little questions, and finally one woman goes "Oh, Jake, you know *name of professor who had just been fired*?". And I froze. Because I reverting back to the one thing I had learned: don't bad-mouth anyone. And I don't know if she knows what I know, and I just kind of go "yeah, I worked with him." And she goes "how was he?" Now the other casting directors are realizing there's something going on and some hub-bub begins: "what happened?" "who is this?" "What did they do?". And some overlap starts. She goes and I go, and then we stop each other and both say "no, you go." And my anxiety is through the roof, because I still don't know what she knows, how she feels about this particular person. And I blurt out "Well they recently got fired" and the casting director finishes my sentence "for sexual assault" and all I had to do was stay silent. All I had to do was just nod or stand there or even leave. But what I did instead was say "well she said that, I didn't say that." Which was the worst possible thing. Because this entire panel goes quiet. And I realize that what I've just said makes it sound like I don't believe victims. And I go "Well, I mean- I don't know the full story." I dig a little deeper. And they all sort of shuffle their papers. And I go "Well. On that note!". LIKE THAT'S GONNA FIX ANYTHING! And everyone sort of laughs. And I go "Thanks so much, enjoy the rest of your day!" And I leave. (*A beat.*) So I'm not an actor anymore. Because I have hundreds of these stories. And when you realize it's a toxic relationship, you have to cut it off at the root.

So I guess I don't need these anymore. Excuse me. (*Jake exits backstage, and comes back on with a trashcan. Jake begins picking up the headshots and resumes that are scattered around the floor of the stage and throwing them in the garbage.*) I'm so glad to be out of there. But like any break-up, there's a mourning period. I miss it so much. I have so much FOMO. But I get over it because I remember how I struggled, how much I hated the person it made me.

I started seeing someone else. They're great. Funny, smart, make me feel good about myself. They help me through my break up with acting, because the easiest way to get over someone is to focus all your energy on someone else. On something else.

I became a playwright. (*A beat. Reading from the notes.*) It says here in my notebook that I should hold for applause when I say that. I started writing because those who can't do, teach, and those who can't act, find another unstable career to fall back on. You know what the biggest difference is? The beauty of being a playwright is that the entire interaction of "please god, give me a job" now happens through a computer screen. There's no one sitting on the other side of the table saying with their faces "no, we didn't like that thing." They're usually just silent now if they don't like what I send them. The judgment is silent. Sort of like yours is right now! And that's so much better, right?

This relationship **was** better. In the first two years that I'm trying this, I see some success. But I wasn't the thing right away; I was what is known as an "emerging playwright". You can't be emerging and the thing itself. I grow sunflowers on my back patio- I don't call them sunflowers until they have flowers on them. Until then, I say "those are going to be sunflowers". Playwriting wanted our relationship to start slow, to be casual. Acting wanted to have "the talk" right away, like: "no, you're unattractive and poor, so we're done." Playwriting is like "I'll call you". And I'm like "when?" And playwriting says "you're not allowed to ask me that." But I find myself back to answering the question from when I was 17-years-old. (*addresses audience member with question card*) Hey, can you open that card and ask me the question there? (*They do: "why do you want to be a playwright?"*) Because for the first time in my life, I'm putting in the work, and I'm actually good at it. I'm growing. And I'm falling in love again. And this love, it takes me to some really, really incredibly places.

The first short play festival I did was in Pelham, New York. You ever been? Oh gosh, you have to. Pelham, the biggest-little-city-in the world, a cultural hub, opportunities abound, "the land of plenty" it's people call it! This festival was advertised as taking place "exactly 28 minutes from Grand Central Station". That's the same thing as off-Broadway. I now realize that this is a tenet of all short-play festivals: stretching the truth as far as it takes.

Every fringe festival experience is the same. There's always a small space. There's always some obscure rule about how to enter the theatre or exit the theatre or how long you're allowed to be in the theatre. There's always a threat that if you don't sell a certain number of tickets, your show will be cancelled. You're always sharing the space with some strange act, like an authentic Scottish Highland's band, or the poetry slam every other Tuesday except in March. Another facet of fringe festivals: You're self-producing. You're the one organizing, rehearsing, casting, writing, maybe directing, maybe performing; in short: you're financially responsible. The festival provides the space, you do the rest. But the most important thing that all fringe festivals have in common: they are run by the most tread-upon human beings on the planet. All the (mostly) men who run these short play festivals have a deep, deep obligation to this art, and the smallest sense of patience in case anything stands in their way. (*realizes*) Except for this one! This one is great! None of those things are true about the (*furiously flips through notebook*) The Spark New Works Festival!

Here's something I didn't mention: as an "emerging" playwright, you can only really afford to hire your friends. And you want to! You want to see them succeed, and give them opportunities, and show them how much they mean to you by creating work for them. We all want muses. I wanted everyone I loved to be my muse, to create for them. But you know that old adage where people say you shouldn't **you know**, where you eat? That's good advice. But for my first short play festival I hire my friends, I direct and write, I am financially responsible.

This festival manager, we're gonna call him Pete, was organizing the tech, would be the one to correspond with us via email, and was giving us notes on our shows throughout the run. But every time you spoke with him, it was as if the weight of the survival of Pelham, really the survival of the world, rested squarely on his shoulders. You could say "hey Pete, I had a question about this particular cue" and he'd let out a sigh that could move mountains. And then he'd

launch into a diatribe about how stressful this was, how much he had on his plate, how much he wanted this to go well. And you'd end up sympathizing with the man! And never get an answer to your question! This festival was a competition, based on audience vote. And I was so confident that we were going to win, because our play was good. The script was good. My actors, my friends, were great. And I'm not an idiot so I can direct. And we were up against some stiff competition- plays that asked thought-provoking questions like: what if the Flying Dutchman was on the Staten Island ferry? And what if a high school reunion was written like a soap opera? And what if you had to sit through three old men playing a penis through multiple stages of life? And the people of Pelham spoke: We moved on to finals. And I'm feeling pretty good about our chances, and something happens. Something, that when you're an actor you're scared of; but as an emerging playwright, it's like watching a train wreck and knowing you built the train. Here's what happens: One of my actors, goes up on his lines. He skips a huge chunk of the show, and I watch as his scene partner tries to help him out, but they're not getting back on track. They are caught in this. So a fifteen minute play ends up being closer there are callbacks to earlier pages that don't make any sense, there are jokes that don't land, and all the while I'm watching my actors, my dearest friends, try to salvage this play so that we can win. And I know, at the exact same time, that we can't.

All this to say that at this moment, I start to question my choice to give up acting and instead being a playwright. Being a playwright is just as disappointing as being an actor. The bad times are bad, and even when there are good times, they are still pretty bad. And I start to question why I did this to myself. I realize that my relationship with playwriting is just as toxic as it was with acting. But it gaslights me, because then another opportunity comes along and I forget everything I just said. The same play gets selected for a festival in the west village, my NYC debut as a playwright. It's a rite of passage for all actors and playwrights and directors- to do a festival in the west or east village, up four flights of stairs, for an audience of 10 people, and have everyone involved take it super seriously, like their lives depend on it. This time, my friend gets it right. We win this time. (*looks back at notebook*) It says here hold for five-minute standing ovation for the actor who simply *did* their job? Huh.

Maybe it was the momentary lapse, when I questioned my choice, that leads to everything that happens next. I like to think I'm not a hopeless romantic anymore, but there's probably still a part of that inside of me. Because I have a more secure relationship with playwriting, and yet: I hear it. The Song. (*sings to himself*) "There were bells on the hill" FUCK. And I start to think maybe I can have it both ways: maybe I can write and act. Maybe it will be different this time.

I've done this before. I'm having a little déjà vu right now.

I apply to a new works festival in the east village with a one-person show I wrote, the idea being that I would also perform it. I can't explain why. Not expecting to get it. But I get selected. And I got back onstage after a 5-year break, performing in a one-man show that I wrote about my relationship with my father. (*A beat.*) I think some of you were afraid just now that I'd dive into that one-man show, but it was over a half-hour long, and we don't have that kind of time. I'm not going to dive into that show. If you want to see it, produce it for me. If you want to read it, fuck you, why don't you just want to produce it? (*A beat.*) This festival selected me, and I remember what it was like to get that laugh back when I was Pirate #5, and I'm looking for it again. I'm

still in love with acting, I can't get over it, and I'm also in love with playwriting. I'm in the weirdest polyamorous relationship.

Every opportunity feels good, that's the truth, but to write something for yourself, something so personal and so meaningful, and get the chance to do it? To have someone say "hell yeah do that here"? That's something I hadn't experienced before. They were interested in not just my abilities as a writer, but hearing my story as an actor. And that was incredible.

The MO for this festival was the same, of course: same tread-upon festival manager, same weird theatre, same weird entrance/audience policy. But the difference this time around was the fact that this particular festival prided itself on its cash prizes. If I had won this competition, if I had swept the categories, I would have won...well I'm not going to tell how much, but let me put it to you this way, if I had won, if I had swept, I would not be doing this right now. I'd be on a fucking boat. (*A beat.*) I know I've just spoiled the ending, now you know I don't win, but that doesn't really matter. Ultimately, I did win. Because this festival freed me. (*Big smile*)

Now we received so much literature from this particular festival manager, constant emails and contracts and FAQs. And I realize now that this is a tactic: overwhelm them with paperwork so they don't read it. But I did read it, because I'm not stupid. And they said, repeatedly, that there would be a panel of judges, that they would see one of your performances, and that it was not a popularity contest based on number of tickets sold. But everything is a popularity contest, if you think about it.

I self-produce again. I won't tell you how much I spent self-producing this piece for this festival, but I'll say it's an amount that keeps me from being on a boat right now My run goes well. It goes very well. This was unlike anything I had done before. But no one comes to my show that I don't already know. It's great to be loved by those who know you, but I'd be lying to you if I said it's doesn't feel better to be loved by strangers. Because that's true. Actors are told they're talented by their family and friends all the time. And if you're an actor and you aren't told you're talented by your friends and family, you need better friends and different family. Because that's their job. But no one from the festival sees my show. No team of judges arrive to judge me. And I'm furious. Because I paid for this, and I want the cash prizes, I want to go on a boat, and now I'm certain I won't win, or even be nominated. And so I go up to the festival manager, the most tread upon of tread-upon white men, and inquire about the judges. I very simply say "I was promised judges?" I want to know how I can be eligible for boat-money if I was never judged. And this man, this man with a dyed-beard and thick eastern-European accent holds up a hand and says "You're not allowed to ask me that".

Another rule of fringe festivals is their website has to look like it's been designed in the 1980's. And it's always got some stock imagery, like a type-writer or a set of drama masks, and strict language about how they're a "premiere festival" or "one of the best in the city!" or "one of the best just 28 minutes from Grand Central Station!". This festival, however, had a very specific line: "The festival is not required to share with you the process of how winners are chosen." (*A beat.*) If you get offered a job, and the job offer includes a line saying "we don't have to tell you how you will be judged for raises", don't take that job. If you are entering a Miss Universe pageant and they tell you "you will be judged but not by anything you present", don't enter the

Miss Universe pageant. So the tread-upon white, eastern-European man with the dyed beard says “you’re not allowed to ask me that” because they have plastered all over their website the idea that they will judge you, but they don’t have to tell you how you will be judged. And evidently it’s been brought up to them enough times that they have to put that disclaimer out there, to keep themselves from an legal trouble. They’re planning on judging you, you just won’t know how. “You’re not allowed to ask me that” is the answer you give when you want to avoid the tough questions.

And he throws this in my face, and I come back with “it says there would be judges” and he backpedals and says “well I was judging you”. Which feels like a sneaky, sneaky trick. But I knew for a fact that this tread-upon manager had not watched my entire show. And he tries to compliment my work, saying how it was timely and relatable. And I know he’s just sitting there and lying straight to my face. And that’s what happens. This festival has made a fool of me. That’s what happens when you get back together with your ex.

Needless to say, I don’t place. I don’t go on to finals, and I don’t win. I’m not on a boat right now. And I spiral. I spend every waking day focusing on what I did wrong, what I could’ve done right. I’m mad at myself, I’m mad at the eastern-European man with the dyed beard. I’m mad at my audience, my friends for not coming to see my work, maybe it was a popularity contest! And then I’m mad at myself again for blaming anyone but me for the mess I got myself in. I don’t sleep. I don’t write. I put my binder full of 16-bar cuts away on a shelf to gather dust. And I start to question every decision I’ve ever made: Can I keep doing this? Can I keep telling myself it’s fine to be disappointed by these festivals, and by my actors, and by my work, and by the amount of money I spend? Does the pursuit of what I want, the thing I’ve always been trying to get since “The Music Man”, since *Pirate #5*, make me happy? Does the only thing I’ve ever been good at make me happy? Is it even fun? Will it get easier? Is it ever going to change for me? Are the bells even there- Or am I making up the music in my head? And the answer comes back in a roar: I should stop doing it. I don’t like theatre, whether it’s acting or writing. It doesn’t like me back. So I’m giving up the fight. I can’t do this anymore. I can’t keep avoiding these tough questions.

(A beat. Jake throws his notebook in the trashcan.)

That was pretty dramatic. Maybe my father had a point.

Okay I should knock it off. There’s a lot of reasons why I’m breaking up with theatre, most of them I’ve listed tonight, but they’re not close to the truthful answer. I’m not only quitting because I’m bad at this, or because I don’t like theatre, or because I wasn’t properly trained, or because the deck was stacked against me. I told you I’ve been running from something, not toward something. I’m quitting because my greatest fear, the fear I’ve been running from since I was *Pirate #5*, since “Til There Was You”, is that I’ll be rejected. Wholly, and for who I really am. Exactly as this festival has just done to me. *(A beat.)* I’ve said I love you to every single person I’ve ever been in a relationship with. I’ve told every single one of them that I thought I could marry them. I’ve stayed friends with people I know aren’t good for me. I’ve kept eating food I don’t like. I do all of these things because I’m so afraid of rejection. I’ve been this way forever. More than anything I want everyone to like me, and so I’ll do and say what I have to in

order to be liked. Theatre is an easy way to know whether I'm being accepted. I do something up here, you react positively. I see your faces. It's formulaic. *(A beat.)* So that's why I'm breaking up with it all. Because the heart I've broken the most is my own, and I can't keep doing that to myself. Yeah, I'm in therapy. Dr. Paige would be very happy with my progress here tonight.

I feel like I'm getting on the right track. I feel like I'm pulling it together. Every bad thing I've ever experienced, either as an actor or playwright, is behind me. I'm moving on. On to the next thing. I'm not seventeen years old any more. I'm trying to be more than what I once was. I'm trying to get more useable skills. I'm engaged to a real person. I have a stable job. And that's better, right? *(A beat. Something's different.)* But then I heard them again. The bells on the hill. I really thought this time would be different, but I ran into a lot of the same things as last time. So much of what I wanted to say had to be cut, had to be changed. Because that's what you do for what you love. *(A beat. Jake smiles)* The truth is I can't stop. I don't know how to stop. And I don't want to stop. Because I *love* it so much. *(A beat.)* Maybe I avoided the questions for too long. Maybe I should face the truth: I'm not all right up here *(pointing to head)* but I am all right up here *(pointing to stage)*. Maybe it doesn't have to like me back. Maybe I didn't learn anything. Because maybe falling in love isn't supposed to be easy. Listen I get it, I'd be worried about me too. I know what you're thinking. *(addresses the audience member with the question card)* Hey, can you open that card all the way and ask me the final question? *(they do: "Why Do you Keep Doing this to yourself?")* Because this is who I am: not emerging, not some title, but somewhere in between. Always growing. A creator. An actor. A writer. The sunflower and the seed. I'm in love. There's no way to stop that. Maybe this time will be different.

("Til There Was You" starts playing. Jake takes the notebook out of the garbage can and begins to exit. Just before he does, he goes back for the trashcan full of headshots. He picks it up.)

Thank you so much, have a great rest of your day!

(He takes it with him, exits. Lights down. End of play.)