

VERSUS
by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

4 M, 4W

girls:

PLUM: mid-late 20s

SHELLY: early 20s

ALIA: late 20s

MAXINE: 40s

boys:

SHEP: late 20s (doubles as PEESE)

VEGA: early 20s (doubles as FRIEND)

TORLANDO: early 20s (doubles as MURRAY, TROPHY)

COACH MAX: 40s (doubles as SHAWN DOUGLASS)

SETTING:

Suburban, coastal New Jersey.

TIME:

Present day.

SCENES

Act I: September

Act II: October

SOME NOTES:

Transitions should be as fast and fluid as possible. This is a play about a sport. Aim for: breathless.

A chalkboard may be used for the trophy cabinet, lockers, etc.

You know would be lovely? The smallest marching band possible: clarinet, trumpet, trombone, some decent percussion.

For April.

ACT I

SCENE: GOING WIDE

SOUND: A Marching Band FIGHT SONG, played softly, as if at a distance.

LIGHTS UP.

Three school desks thrown to the floor. Crashed out on the floor is the FIGHTING PLOVER, a mascot, head held in its wings. Big-bird legs splayed out to the side.

PLUM sits on an upturned desk. Overcoat. She has wet hair. She towels it dry.

PLUM

You know how Maxine talks about daylight? I saw some. And I went for it and now I can't get the daylight to stop.

The PLOVER throws out a waded up Kleenex from its eye hole.

Plum hands it another. It enters through the mouth.

PLUM (CONT'D)

Look, you had a crazy thought. We both did. We had two wonderful crazy thoughts and for like a few minutes we were flying. But we've got to learn the crazy thoughts are different from the other kind.

The plover NODS and blows its nose.

PLUM (CONT'D)

Just drive home and put that whole in a dumpster and don't think.

PLOVER

Does Maxine know?

PLUM

You were on the Jumbotron.

PLOVER

Then she knows.

PLUM

You attacked a player, Shell.

PLOVER

I didn't attack!

PLUM

It looked like *Day of the Animals* out there.

Plum removes the head of the Plover costume.
SHELLY is revealed beneath, sweaty and sad.

SHELLY

What's a mascot for then?

PLUM

The Plover doesn't touch people.

SHELLY

Plover's supposed to give love.

PLUM

The Plover...flaps. Dances and flaps. And taunts. On the sidelines.

SHELLY

Jaime was so happy when he scored. I just wanted to be with him. But I forgot.
About the beak.

PLUM

You forgot who you were.

SHELLY

Is he OK?

PLUM

You knocked him out.

SHELLY

Oh my god.

PLUM

He'll live. He'll have nightmares. But he'll live.

SHELLY

How did you find me?

PLUM

Where else are you going to go?

SHELLY

Why is your hair wet? It's not raining.

PLUM

(ignoring)

Look it's halftime. Police are crawling all over the Union looking for you. Take off the outfit and we'll get out of here.

SHELLY

I can't.

PLUM

Why?

SHELLY

I'm naked. Kindof. What? It's 300 degrees in here. I left my clothes in the car.

PLUM

I'll get them.

SHELLY

I should apologize to Jaime.

PLUM

See: that's the crazy thought in your head. Bouncing around. Breaking things.

SHELLY

I'm going to find him.

SHELLY stands defiantly, struggling to unzip the out of her costume.

PLUM

No you're not. Jaime doesn't want to see you right now.

SHELLY

I need your overcoat.

PLUM

You changed the game. The ref called a penalty.

SHELLY

Your overcoat.

PLUM

What about Madison?

SHELLY

I'll tell you right now: I am NOT going back to the Diaper Genie. Kay? And these breasts? They are not gas pumps. This is my daylight. I'm not going back. Neither can you.

PLUM

What does that mean?

SHELLY

Boys talk. Does Shep know? Or were you not planning on telling your husband until after the honeymoon?

PLUM

(removing her overcoat)

What do you want?

SHELLY

I need you to block.

PLUM

Shelly.

SHELLY

I'm going long.

PLUM

This is going to get complicated.

SHELLY

Field's wide open. What are we waiting for?

ALIA rushes in. She wears an elegant, sparkly dress. She looks like a can of 7-Up. She begins cleaning up.

ALIA

OK OK listen: they got campus police opening every door. Y'all need to put on the juice.

PLUM

Alia, how did you--

ALIA

We were on our way to Atlantic City and I heard it on Sports Radio.

SHELLY

I'm famous!

Shelly is down to her underclothes. She wears panties with "PLOVER TAIL" printed on the back. Plum hands Shelly her overcoat.

ALIA

(Re: Shelly, the PLOVER outfit) The Fighting Plover. This is some shit.

SHELLY

All the other mascots were taken.

PLUM

People can see something in anything.

ALIA

Shelly you take the stairs. Plum: the first cop you see, you say you saw Plover in the West Lot and I'll tell them//

MURRAY, in leather sports jacket, and sunglasses,
ENTERS.

MURRAY

//Whoah whoah Alia, I thought you said this was a feminine emergency.

ALIA

It is.

MURRAY

Well I don't see any tampons.

(beat)

And that's the Plover right there. In the house. What do you fillies have going on?

ALIA

Murray, let's go.

MURRAY

(sotto voce)

Baby, I thought you said you *weren't* down with the plushie thing.

ALIA

Plum, you gotta call this one.

Alia shushes him, shoves Murray off-stage. Just Plum and Shelly remain. Shelly in the overcoat: she looks elegant, gorgeous. Shelly kicks up the collar.

PLUM

Don't Shell. Things are out of control.

SHELLY

Finally.

(going to Plum, more tenderly)

Don't be scared. This is what we wanted.

PLUM

I don't know. I don't know how I got here.

SHELLY

Well: you back up. You study the reel. But I'm going.
(With strange brightness, wave of
fingers)

Ciao.

Shelly exits.

Plum with the Plover costume. Outside, the sound
of commotion, the police getting closer.
Intensifying.

An open MOVING BOX (labeled "BEDROOM")
slides along the floor to Plum's feet.

Plum DROPS the Plover Costume into it.

SCENE: AN ATHLETE DIES TWICE

Sounds of struggle off-stage. SHEP, late 20s, in a
tight jersey, DRAGS a tall TROPHY CABINET on-
stage. Trophies inside jiggling around. A bad idea.

PLUM

You're scratching the floor.

Shep STOPS.

SHEP

That's because the floor is in the goddamn way.

PLUM

Put the cabinet on a blanket and drag the blanket.

Shep goes BACK to dragging it.

PLUM (CONT'D)

What happened to the blanket idea?

SHEP

Way too easy.

(struggling)

And we don't have any blankets.

PLUM

Shep.

SHEP

Just let me. Game's in ten minutes. I wanna get this done and put up the plasma.

PLUM

Did you see this view? We can see the ocean. We gotta go out while it's still warm. We live here and we never go in. Now's our chance.

Shep SITUATES the cabinet.

SHEP

(re: the cabinet)

What do you think? Right spot?

PLUM

The scratches in the floor really draw the eye.

SHEP

We own the place. They're our scratches now.

(beat)

You know my jersey shrank in the dryer.

PLUM

It didn't shrink.

SHEP

Then I'm fat.

PLUM

You're not fat.

SHEP

I fucking love you.

(kisses her. He looks out the "window", whistles)

Sweet view. Plasma'll go right next to it.

Shep EXITS again. We see for the first time his limp.

PLUM

Did you go over the invite list?

SHEP (O.S.)

I'm still trying to decide if my step-father counts as a person. What happens if we send an invitation to his dog but not him?

PLUM

Finish them. Finish something.

SHEP (O.S.)

Just saying. The dog's cool.

Shep RETURNS with an open box marked "WINS".
Plum pulls a newspaper out of her box.

PLUM
(re: the newspaper)
Who's Maxine Gleason?

SHEP
Wife of Coach Max, the new coach the U.

PLUM
She's teaching a class. On football. For women.

SHEP
(taking the paper)
Seriously? Some Powderpuff thing? Is this you coming out to me as lesbian?
Because we could talk about that.

PLUM
Just a class. So I don't have to stand in the doorway every weekend.

SHEP
And hate me.

PLUM
I don't hate you when you watch football. I just feel...excluded.

SHEP
You hate it. It's cool. (handing back the paper) You really want to do it?

PLUM
I'm not prepared to be a football widow before I'm even married.

SHEP
You could make some friends.

PLUM
What do you mean?

SHEP
I heard you at the Stop N Shop.

PLUM
Heard what.

SHEP
You tell that woman that you were "New in town."

PLUM

She looked friendly.

SHEP

We've been living in Kitteny for two years.

PLUM

It's a thing you say. It's an opener.

SHEP

It's creepy.

PLUM

Thank you.

SHEP

It kills me to think your life is getting smaller. We're in a new place now. We get to be new people.

PLUM

But it's September. You're going to vanish on the weekends.

SHEP

I'll be right here. With the snack bowl.

PLUM

I want to be with you. I want to be with your passion.

SHEP

You need a thing, Plum. Everybody needs a thing.

PLUM

You have a thing.

Spotlight on SHEP.

SFX: Roar of crowd. Emotional music. Plum steps out.

PLUM (CONT'D)

(adopting sportscaster voice)

This FanCam Player Close-Up is brought to you by "ManBurger: Mmmm, That Tasty Slab!" Shepley DiSilva was born on the mean streets of New Brunswick, New Jersey, son of proud and poor Italian immigrants.

SHEP

"Proud and poor"?

PLUM

That's how they do it!

(continuing)

DiSilva made his mark for the Plovers as a running back, whatever that means.

SHEP

I've told you so many times sweetie --

PLUM

But it's all just so much roar of the crowd. Why don't we just listen to that?

SFX: Crowd noise COMES UP.

SHEP

Are you making fun?

SFX: change to sad music.

PLUM

Then in the game of the year, against their biggest rival...

SHEP

The Seacats.

PLUM

His knee got hit. Two assholes --

SHEP

Defensive ends --.

PLUM

Dove right for it in a play they call //The Car Crash.

SHEP

(fists pound together)

//The Car Crash.

PLUM

His leg folded in.

SHEP

(change in tone)

We gotta do this part?

PLUM

(to us, no announcer)

Shep says an athlete dies twice. I met him the day of his first.

SHEP turns and accepts CRUTCHES thrown from off-stage. His limping leg is rigid.

Plum holds the newspaper like a medical clipboard with "film" from an MRI.

PLUM (CONT'D)

(chipper)

So that wasn't so bad was it? People tell me they hate the MRI but I think it just sounds like sneakers in a dryer.

SHEP

Tell me.

PLUM

The doctor will explain the film to you. I'm just the technician.

SHEP

Please.

PLUM

Seriously. This is a certificate program. I'm 100 miles from being a doctor.

SHEP

Show me. Come on, my knee is a pincushion. And they've got me on these drugs to make me feel all swimmy and stupid. I've got to know. My future's on that film.

Shep touches her. Slowly, his hand moves to the film, which he takes (and she releases).

SHEP

What am I even looking at?

PLUM

That's your knee.

SHEP

Where's my kneecap?

PLUM

It's...gone. It's somewhere. Moving around.

SHEP weeps.

PLUM (CONT'D)

They'll put it back. They're good at that.

SHEP

What do you know? You're the certificate program.

Tentatively, Plum strokes his hair. He looks up, through tears.

Shep KISSES Her ferociously. They maul each other.

Plum breaks contact.

PLUM

Shep runs a company that makes trophies now. The plaque, the pedestal, the gilded little man-boy. Each has a code-name. Like "Mercury."

Shep makes the "Mercury" Pose.

PLUM (CONT'D)

And "Slugger."

Shep makes the "Slugger" Pose.

PLUM (CONT'D)

And "Heisman".

Shep makes the "Heisman" pose.

PLUM (CONT'D)

In bed, I ask him to do the poses. I got the idea from *Cosmo*.

SHEP

"69 Ways To Please Your Man."

PLUM

Remember Number 40?

SHEP

"Jam Your Finger In His Dark Place."

PLUM

Shep said I raped him.

SHEP

You took something very sacred away from me that night.

PLUM

The last one was: "Let him do what makes him look beautiful." So he did the poses.

(beat)

Now he's got parts of him that I'm not allowed to touch because they remind him that they're there.

Spotlight OFF. Back to present.

SHEP

So this Max dude. They poached him from Texas. They live in that giant mansion behind the Arboretum.

PLUM

(re: the paper)

Class starts tonight.

SHEP

They even redesigned the mascot. Supposedly he thought the Plover looked bush league. Which it does.

PLUM

What's a plover?

SHEP

Wow baby.

(holds her tenderly.)

You live here. It's time to live here.

Shep leaves, taking the box off.

PLUM (CONT'D)

Finish the invitations!

From her "Bedroom" box, Plum removes and dons an overcoat.

END OF EXCERPT