Collaboration

By Kellie Powell
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These Aren't My Shoes Productions
www.notmyshoes.net
Production History:

_Collaboration_ won Hinman Production Company's First Annual Student Play Competition in 2003, and produced by the group in Binghamton, New York, in April, 2004. It was directed by the playwright. The stage manager was Brandon Ashinoff. The cast was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KIM</th>
<th>Amanda White</th>
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<tr>
<td>SHANE</td>
<td>Joe Coppola</td>
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_Collaboration_ was also produced as part of the Illinois State University Free Stage Festival in Normal, Illinois in April, 2006. It was directed by Tim Zajac. The cast was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KIM</th>
<th>Celeste Burns</th>
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<tr>
<td>SHANE</td>
<td>David Midell</td>
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In November, 2010, _Collaboration_ was produced by Love Creek Productions (Developing Acts Company), in New York City, as part of an evening of short plays by Kellie Powell entitled, _Fuck You And Your Happy Endings!_ which was performed at the Beckmann Theatre, American Theatre of Actors. _Collaboration_ was directed by Linda Loren. The cast was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KIM</th>
<th>Kamaria Williams</th>
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<tr>
<td>SHANE</td>
<td>Alan Barr</td>
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Characters:

**Shane, 22.** Has just graduated from college with a theatre degree. A playwright, lighting designer, and stage carpenter. At his best, a charming realist; at his worst, a selfish cynic.

**Kim, 20.** A writer. After completing one year of college, she spent a year traveling the country. She has just returned home.

Location:

A picnic table in a park.

Time:

June, the current year. Dates may be changed to correspond with the current year. These dates are appropriate for a performance held in the year 2011.

Note:

*JSTMYN* is pronounced: “Just-Mine”
(Lights up. A picnic table in a park. Enter Kim, 20, carrying a bag, which holds, among other things, a notebook and several black Pilot v-ball fine point pens. She sits down and opens her notebook to a page with many notes scrawled on it. She reads her notes, mouthing the words, growing more and more animated, rehearsing. Periodically, she looks up, off-stage, in the direction she came from – she is waiting for someone. She goes back to rehearsing, silently. Shane, 22, enters from the opposite direction, quietly. He carries a messenger-style bag which holds a folder with documents, a notebook, two glasses, a bottle of cheap champagne, and a bouquet of expensive purple flowers. He has two black Pilot v-ball fine point pens in his pocket. He is smiling as he sneaks up on her, pleased with himself, happy to see her. She continues rehearsing, oblivious. He manages to startle her severely, she loses her balance and smacks her head on the ground behind her.)

KIM:
Christ!

SHANE:
Present.

KIM:
You bastard!

SHANE:
Are you all right? That looked bad. Did you give yourself a concussion?

KIM:
You’re not funny, Shane!

SHANE:
How about amnesia? What’s your name?

KIM:
Shane-

SHANE:
Pleased to meet you, Shane. My name’s Brian, but I also go by “Christ” and “You bastard.”

KIM:
Shane, no. Don’t –
SHANE:

Is this seat taken, miss?

KIM:

Shane, I refuse to –

SHANE:

That’s not your line.

KIM:

(Rolling her eyes.) Be my guest.

SHANE:

Why, thank you.

KIM:

Are you satisfied?

SHANE:

(Considers. Flatly.) Seldom, if ever. (She glares at him.)

What?

(Silence, she continues to glare.)

Come on, Kim, don't be mad... You started it...

KIM:

How did I start it?

SHANE:

You wrote JSTMYN – I just thought you and I could act it out. You know, for kicks.

KIM:

No thanks. (Beat.) You would think scaring me would have gotten old by now...

SHANE:

Hey, someday you can use it in a show. Think of me as your Muse. (Rummaging in bag.)

KIM:

It’s a little late for that. (Beat.) Y’know, you could at least apologize for scaring – and scarring – me...
SHANE:

(Producing champagne from his bag.) I took the liberty.

KIM:

Because what reunion would be complete without illegally providing alcohol to a minor?

SHANE:

I won’t tell if you won’t… How are you not legal yet?

KIM:

Still a few months shy of 21. Believe it or not.

SHANE:

Oh, yeah, because if I’m 22, and it’s June, then you’re just 20… That means I’ve known you for five years. Five years exactly, actually, since we met in June…

KIM:

Right here. Doing summer theatre. The summer before my sophomore year of high school, which was your senior year.

SHANE:

(Trying to open the champagne.) Is that why you wanted to meet here? Nostalgia?

KIM:

I guess. (She watches his unsuccessful endeavors. Smiles.) Can you manage?

SHANE:

I’ll get it eventually. No rush. Oh, before I forget, these are for you.

(He hands her the flowers.)

KIM:

Thank you. They’re very nice.

SHANE:

I had to hunt around for them… The town keeps changing on me! Every time I come back, something else is gone. But I don’t have to tell you, right?
KIM:
They went through downtown with a wrecking ball. They got rid of the apartment building where you and Zeke lived, above the bookstore –

SHANE:
So I heard.

KIM:
And our – The Coffeehouse. All while I was somewhere else.

SHANE:
Blows your mind a little, doesn’t it? That life keeps going, even when you’re not there?

KIM:
(Smiles.) Exactly.

SHANE:
You know, it made me really sad when you left town.

KIM:
Why?

SHANE:
With you gone, I had no reason to come back and visit.

KIM:
That’s not true. I mean, come on. You have other friends here. Not to mention your mom.

SHANE:
Still.

KIM:
If I had been here, you probably still wouldn’t have visited.

SHANE:
Well...

KIM:
You were busy. Working.
SHANE:
Maybe not... But I would have felt bad about not visiting. So, how was it? Being away?

KIM:
Fantastic.

SHANE:
Good. So you, what, met new people and had deep talks about Nietzsche and Sartre, and watched lots of movies with subtitles?

KIM:
I still don’t really know anything about Nietzsche.

SHANE:
Me neither, but I plan to.

KIM:
(Facetious.) Mmm-hmmm, it’s on a list somewhere.

SHANE:
Seriously, though. Details.

KIM:
Um, well, I rented a small studio apartment and found a job bagging groceries. I wrote a lot of poetry and went to anti-war protests. When I got tired of that, I went and crashed on Ryan’s mother’s sofa for a few weeks, and then I spent Christmas with my cousin, Carol... I took a couple of classes at a community college and waited tables in a steakhouse. I tried pottery, and was horrible at it, and in the end, I hocked my watch and my Walkman for a bus ticket home. My mom seems really happy to have me back. I haven’t seen many people yet, though.

SHANE:
Thanks for finally calling me.

KIM:
How could I not? After that message you left with my mother? “Shane called... The Pike Street Theatre Company in Chicago wants to produce the script that you two wrote three years ago.” I was... to put it mildly, shocked.
SHANE:
It’s amazing, isn’t it? Our play, Kim. Our baby. They want it. They want to produce it, in Chicago, and after that, who knows? Do you know what this could mean? If the show did well, this might be just the beginning. I mean, keep your fingers crossed, and you might never need to bag people’s groceries again.

KIM:
You’re getting a little ahead of yourself, don’t you think?

SHANE:
Of course. Of course, you’re right, you’re right. Let’s just celebrate the moment. You and I, signing our first contract.

(He produces the contract from his bag, and pulls a pen from his pocket, he hands both to Kim.)
I already signed. I couldn’t wait. Oh, hang on. Give me one second.
(He struggles with the champagne.)

KIM:

SHANE:
(Facetious.) Do you, by any chance, have a corkscrew? (Struggles.)

KIM:

SHANE:
Uh...

KIM:
I can't.

SHANE:
Um, yes, you can.

KIM:
No.
SHANE:  
*Why not?*

KIM:  
Because this play – I can’t let this play be produced. Or published.

SHANE:  
Is this, what, some kind of Bohemian Fear of Success? Money corrupts, or something?

KIM:  
Don’t be a dick.

SHANE:  
Oh, that’s beautiful. You’re trying to ruin my life, and *I’m* being a dick.

KIM:  
I asked you to meet me so that we could discuss this rationally.

SHANE:  
Listen to you – Kim the Diplomat. Did you *practice* this exchange?

KIM:  
Does it matter?

SHANE:  
No. Yes. You were practicing when I walked over. Weren’t you?

KIM:  
I guess…

SHANE:  
Is it going as well as you hoped?

KIM:  
About what I expected… Now, please… Would you just take a deep breath, have a drink or something, and calm the fuck down? Please? And then I’ll explain.

*(A moment of silence. Shane is fuming. He pours himself a glass, tries to calm down. He looks at Kim, who is clearly upset, and softens. He pours her a glass, and pushes it across the table to her.)*
SHANE: (Kindly, with effort.) What is going on, Kim?

KIM: I should have told you a year ago.

SHANE: Told me what?

KIM: That I hate what you did to my show. I feel... that you took what I created, and you destroyed it.

SHANE: Wh...? What?

KIM: My play – the play I wrote – was about devotion and self-sacrifice. I loved the characters I wrote – Ashleigh and Brian – and you made them completely unsympathetic! You completely changed the ending... I should've told you when I first read it, I know that –

SHANE: I've been sending this show all over the fucking country, Kim. And you mean to tell me I did all of that for nothing? I've got the chance of a lifetime here – Christ, you too!

KIM: I don't care! I never thought it would go anywhere. I never thought anyone would want it.

SHANE: But someone does! Why do you want to stand in the way of that? Just because you hate it – what gives you the right to punish me, to take that away from me?

KIM: I owe something to the characters I created. I believe in the show I wrote four years ago.

SHANE: Oh, come on! Do you think anyone would have produced the show you wrote?
KIM:
I never wrote it to get it produced. That’s not the point.

SHANE:
Why do you care then? Even if my version is what gets published, it doesn’t change the original, it doesn’t change what you wrote.

KIM:
Of course it does.

SHANE:
How can you do this to me?!?

KIM:
(Pause.) That’s kind of a cliché, don’t you think?

SHANE:
Shut up.

KIM:
Look. There is a way we can work this out.

SHANE:
I’m listening.

KIM:
Re-write the show. On my terms. And if Pike Street still wants it, then I’ll sign.

SHANE:
Okay, okay, yeah. Fine.

KIM:
Don’t agree yet, I want to tell you want the terms are. First, and most importantly, you have to change the ending back to the way it was.

SHANE:
Are you kidding me? Your version didn’t have an ending.

KIM:
I don’t want to argue with you, Shane. You just have to change it back.
SHANE:
It’s a little late for that...

KIM:
You can’t let her leave. I mean, how can you let Ashleigh leave?

SHANE:
It was the logical ending to the story! I mean, think about it... *Patronizing, slow.* Ashleigh and Brian are in love. But he’s her teacher. He knows he has to leave town. He does, without any explanation, without saying goodbye. Five years later and three thousand miles away, they run into each other in a coffee shop. He pretends not to recognize her, she plays along. And when they finally drop the pretense, Brian starts to think that the two of them might have a future together. And he offers her a chance to be with him, to start over.

KIM:
He stands up, and walks away and comes back. And they pretend to be strangers again. And the play ends.

SHANE:
But the play *doesn’t* end. You just *stopped writing it*.

KIM:
Sometimes the best art is the least satisfying. Haven’t you ever seen *Kissing Jessica Stein*?

SHANE:
No.

KIM:
My ending was open-ended! I wanted to let every person in the audience make their own choice about what happens between them after the lights go down.

SHANE:
No. Something had to happen. Either they go off into the sunset, happily-ever-blah-blah-blah-blah, or she says no, and she leaves. You didn’t make a decision. *Someone* had to.

KIM:
It wasn’t *your* decision to make.
SHANE:
If you felt that way, you could have said so. It's not like I didn't ask. I came to you, and I asked for your permission to re-write JSTMYN.

KIM:
You said you wanted to collaborate with me. And I thought about it, and I said, “Okay. Go ahead. Experiment and send me whatever you come up with.” I didn’t say, “Make it say completely the opposite of what I was trying to say.”

SHANE:
(Scoff.) What were you trying to say? I mean, I liked the concept, but the story didn’t really, y’know, go anywhere. So, whatever you were trying to say, it was lost on me.

KIM:
Thanks, you’ve made that perfectly clear. But just because you didn’t get the message doesn’t mean it wasn’t there.

SHANE:
If you didn’t want me to change anything, you should have said that you were, I don’t know, attached to it.

KIM:
I wrote it! That I was attached to it should go without saying!

SHANE:
I wish it hadn't! Because now I’m fucked. I don't... This isn't... You... This isn’t fair!

KIM:
(Shrugs.) Love and war.

SHANE:
Ha ha. Which is this?

KIM:
Ha ha.

SHANE:
(To himself;) I am in Hell...
KIM:
I know that I should have told you this when you first sent me your version. And you have every right to be upset –

SHANE:
Would you stop it?

KIM:
What?

SHANE:
You and your incredibly rehearsed... Am I really so predictable?

KIM:
Like I was saying –

SHANE:
No, tell me. How long have you been planning this little exchange? And more importantly, what are you trying to get from it?

KIM:
I told you. I just want to find a solution we can both live with. Either you tell the producers no thanks, or we re-write the show, according to my terms. Those are your choices.

SHANE:
Uh-huh. All right, let’s say we go with your odd little non-ending. What are the other conditions?

KIM:
Okay... If you think you could dial back the hostility just a little bit.

SHANE:
(Sarcastic.) Uh-huh.

KIM:
(Commanding.) We're going to go through the script I wrote, and we're going to talk about all the lines you cut. And unless you can convince me that cutting them makes the play better, they go back in.

SHANE:
(As though this is beyond obvious.) All the lines I cut, I cut for a reason.
KIM:
Yeah, well... If they were good reasons, then you shouldn’t have any problems convincing me.

SHANE:
You would actually cost me the chance of a lifetime because of a couple of lines?

KIM:
Life in your absence was no life at all.

SHANE:
What?

KIM:
My line. Ashleigh’s line. One you cut.

SHANE:
Well... who talks like that?

KIM:
Ashleigh does.

SHANE:
What real person would actually say “Life without you–”

KIM:
Life in your absence –

SHANE:
The point is, it’s unreal. It’s...

KIM:
What? Say it. Just say it, Shane.

SHANE:

KIM:
I disagree. Nothing genuinely meant can be cheesy. By definition.
SHANE:
How could any sane person make such a statement? And more importantly, how could they ‘genuinely’ mean it?

KIM:
Don’t you think that’s a little closed-minded? Just because you’ve never felt that way, you think anyone who did would be insane?

SHANE:
Or really, really stupid.

(Kim sighs, collects her things, and starts to leave. Shane panics.)

Kim... Don’t... Please?

(She stops, turns, and looks at him.)

You’re holding all the cards here, okay? You’ve got me right where you want me – desperate, okay? So, I will listen to whatever you have to say. And I won’t be hostile. I promise. Just, please... Sit back down, have a drink with me, and tell me what I have to do to work this out.

(She doesn’t respond. He gets desperate.)

Kim, come on. This is my one shot to actually use my ridiculously expensive Theatre degree. I really don’t want to end up teaching high school drama and English. Because with my luck, I’d end up with a girl like Ashleigh in my class, barely legal and certifiably cute... Don’t you see how badly I need this? Can’t you please sit down and talk to me?

KIM:
(Sighs.) That’s the problem. I want your happiness more than anything – even if it’s at my own expense.

SHANE:
Thank you.

KIM:
You’re welcome. That’s a line, by the way. “I want your happiness more than anything – even if it's at my own expense.” Ashleigh says that. Or at least she did, before your fucking... chop job. And I just said it, and you thought it was me, speaking to you – so it can’t be all that unrealistic, because you believed me. And it can’t be all that gross, because you thanked me.

SHANE:
Unbelievable.
KIM:

What?

SHANE:

I thanked you for staying.

KIM:

(Deep breath.) If you say so. The line goes back in the script, or I walk.

SHANE:

Why don’t you just write me a list? Oh, no, let me guess. Here’s a line I cut: (Hammy.) “You were always so poetic.” Brian’s line.

KIM:

I don’t want that one back. You ruined that line for me.

SHANE:

I just told you the image it gave me –

KIM:

It wasn’t what I intended, and you knew it... Ashleigh tells Brian that after he left, she stopped writing poems, and it made him sad...

SHANE:

But that line, that line... It makes you think of –

KIM:

It didn’t make me think of –

SHANE:

This teacher, having her read –

KIM:

(Covering her ears.) I’m not LISTENING! (She hums, loud, obnoxious.)

SHANE:

Sonnet 120 or something, and like, STARING at her, lecherously-

KIM:

AUGH! You are just determined to make this a show about sex! You turned Brian into a gross old man, and Ashleigh into some kind of Lolita! She’s supposed to be eighteen, and he is 22! And more importantly, and this is my final demand, they did not have sex!
SHANE:
Your demand? These are demands? Who are you to make demands?

KIM:
I’m “Created By…” I’m “Copyright 2006*…” I’m the first – the real – author of JSTMYN.

SHANE:
You agreed to collaborate with me.

KIM:
Yeah, I did. But we didn’t collaborate, Shane, you took my characters and used them to tell your own story. You could have talked to me about what I was trying to say, about what you thought might help me say it better. We could have written a play together. That’s what I agreed to.

SHANE:
So you’re doing all of this to punish me? For what? For not sending you every page and asking for notes? I gave you a draft, and you said nothing about any of this.

KIM:
I told you that I was upset about the implication that Ashleigh and Brian had sex.

SHANE:
I don’t...

KIM:
We were in your car. The day after New Year’s. “Daylight Fading” by Counting Crows was playing on the stereo. And you asked me if I had read your draft.

SHANE:
How can you remember all that?

KIM:
(Shrug.) It was a defining moment. (Beat.) What did I say, Shane?

SHANE:
(Hesitation. He doesn’t know.) You didn’t say that you hated it.
KIM:
You’re right. And I should have. But what would you have done?

SHANE:
I don’t know, abandoned the project. Resented the hell out of you for a while, but eventually I would have gotten over it... Maybe combed through my script, looking for what could be salvaged... (Realization. Forming a plan.) ...I would have put together a show from what I wrote and cut all your lines...

KIM:
You could still do that. But here’s the problem: If you changed it enough to make it not mine, it would probably be too different for Pike Street to still want it. It would basically be like starting from scratch.

SHANE:
You have a copyright on the lines you wrote, not the concept. I change the names, the name of the town, and location becomes, Hell, a park bench instead of a coffeehouse... and suddenly your copyright doesn’t really apply.

KIM:
I don’t know much about copyright law, Shane, but I know you’ve already told the producer, and the board of the company, and probably even the publicist, all about me. And they’re not going to just forget. They’re not going to want to take the risk, Shane. I’ll bet they’d rather do an obscure A.R. Gurney show and tell you to have your agent give them a call if I change my mind.

SHANE:
You vindictive – (He stops himself.)

KIM:
What? Go ahead and say it, you’ll feel better. I should know. I’ve been holding on to all of this for way too long.

SHANE:
You know what? I’m fine. I don’t need to call you a vindictive little bitch.

KIM:
You know... I don’t think I deserved that. But I understand that you’re disappointed and angry –
SHANE:
Stop it! This is not a presentation! This isn’t a skit! I hate that you practiced this.

KIM:
Look, I didn’t have much choice. This is really... really hard for me. Can you think of one time that I’ve said no to you? Doesn’t the fact that I’m saying it this time tell you how much this means to me?

SHANE:
What, are you trying to guilt me?

KIM:
What good would that do? Hmmm? In the five years I’ve known you, have you ever felt guilty?

SHANE:
(Scoffs.) What incredibly noisy crap –

KIM:
No, I asked you. I asked you what you would have said if I had told you the truth... when you first asked me what I thought of your version of JSTMYN. If I had been honest then. And you said you would have resented me. You’re so stubborn –

SHANE:
I’m stubborn? Don’t make me laugh! I’m not the one who’s going crazy over a re-write I didn’t like! I’m not the one trying to ruin a perfectly good story with my... (exploding.) naïve, virginal BIAS!

(Long moment of silence. Shane drinks straight from the bottle.)

KIM:
Feel better?

SHANE:
No.

KIM:
The story was not supposed to be about sex. The teacher-student, abuse-of-power, seduced-by-authority story... it’s been done to death. It’s a cheap and sleazy story.
SHANE:
At least *that* story is *real*. Your version... all the remorse and guilt and disillusionment is inspired by... what? A couple of intense conversations, and a night at the theatre?

KIM:
Christ, Shane, did you even *read* my show? It was a story about devotion, about being in love with someone you know you can’t have a future with.

SHANE:
You think that story hasn’t been done to death?

KIM:
That story can’t die. It’s timeless. Immortal.

*(Shane looks skeptical.)*
What? Am I being too cheesy? Forget I said it, then. Just take out the sex. The people who want to believe they had sex will still believe it. But at least my “naïve” interpretation stays possible, stays alive.

SHANE:
No one will care about this story without the sex. *There’s no story without it.* It’s intangible, it’s unimportant. Come on, a love affair without sex? That’s... meaningless.

*(Kim, shocked, laughs hysterically.)*
What? What is so goddamned funny?

KIM:
*(Still laughing, even choking a little.)* Because, Shane, you just told me something... something that I always thought I wanted to know.

*(She suddenly stops laughing. She takes a deep breath. This is not in her notes.)*
You just told me why you and I have never had sex.

SHANE:
*What?*

KIM:
Now I know.

SHANE:
Don’t... don’t change the subject.
KIM:
Don’t change the subject? Don’t change the subject?!

SHANE:
This has nothing to do with –

KIM:
This has everything to do with! And you know it. And you’ve always known it. The first time you read JSTMYN, you knew. Didn’t you?

SHANE:
…I… suspected…

KIM:
You knew.

SHANE:

KIM:
Do you have any idea how much that hurt me? Your pretending not to get the message? And then distorting the message… twisting it into something it wasn’t, something it was never meant to be… The story was always the simple truth of how much I cared about you… the ecstatic pain of our stolen moments together before an inevitable – and very disappointing – non-ending.

SHANE:
I never asked you to – I never wanted you to feel that way about me. I wanted to just be friends.

KIM:
I’ve always been your friend, Shane – or at least, I’ve tried. And I know… I know you didn’t ask for me to feel the way I do… I didn’t ask for it, either. I wandered into your life as though by accident, and I thought you were odd, and immature, and really, nothing very special. I didn’t ask to love someone who never saw me.

SHANE:
If being infatuated with me was such a horrible experience… why didn’t you just… stop?
KIM:
As if I had the option. (She shows him her pens.) Remember when you gave me these pens? You said, (Imitating him.) “Kim, your writing... deserves better than a Bic.”

SHANE:
Well. I meant that. You’re a Pilot V-Ball fine-point quality writer.

KIM:
(Pause.) Even though you let me down, you still say things like that. Things that no one who ever claimed to love me could come up with. And you meant them. And... life in your absence was no life at all.

SHANE:
That's just... I don't accept that.

KIM:
Well, I lived... but I was never alive the way I was when I was with you. I was just killing time, waiting. And when I thought that maybe I was finally starting to forget about you... you called me. Completely out of nowhere. And told me you were coming home for Thanksgiving. And you asked if you could crash at my place. And I was back at square one. That was my senior year. You had been gone for over a year. Do you remember that night?

SHANE:
What is the point of this, Kim? I know what happened.

KIM:
No, you don't. You only think you do. That's not enough for me, not anymore. And I’ve got all the cards here, remember? And I’ve got a lot on my mind. And if you've got other places to be, then go. But if you want my friendship, and my forgiveness, and my signature on that contract... then you're going to have to listen to me. I tried burying all of this – I even left town because I thought it would help me forget. Well: no such luck.

SHANE:
I don't get it, Kim. You couldn't forget what? What was so life-altering? I mean, I never gave you a ring, Kim. It’s not like I was your boyfriend.

KIM:
Except in the only sense that actually mattered.
SHANE:
Oh, Christ, what does that even mean?

KIM:
Shut up for five minutes, and I'll tell you.

SHANE:
Okay. I'm listening.

KIM:
My senior year. Thanksgiving break. You called me. And you said you’d be at my house by eleven. I stayed up waiting for you, but finally, at three in the morning, I thought: he isn’t coming. And I felt sad, and very stupid, and I went to sleep. And then do you know what happened?

SHANE:
Yeah.

KIM:
Tell me.

SHANE:
I got there, like, 3:30 or so, the front door was unlocked... I came in, and I couldn’t figure out where you were... I finally found you room... and I think I scared you pretty bad...

KIM:
I gave up on you. And as soon as I did... that’s when you showed up. Your hair was dyed blue, do you remember? You had done it that night, and your hands were stained with dye. (She looks at him pointedly for a long moment.) Remember?

SHANE:
Yeah, I guess.

KIM:
We decided to go to sleep. My bed was so small that we couldn't really share without... touching. You started telling me this story... this myth you had read... About lovers who killed themselves.

SHANE:
And you said the way I told the story made it seem very compelling, very sad.
KIM:
You asked me if I felt sad.

SHANE:
You said, “I guess being in bed with you has that effect on a lot of women.”

KIM:
You kissed me. And then you asked me again, if I felt sad. And I had to laugh at that. And you asked me, “Are you okay with this?” You were worried... you didn’t want to lead me on. And I told you that I understood... that what was happening didn't mean... that you’d be faithful to me.

SHANE:
You can't say I didn't warn you.

KIM:
True. But, I didn't know you were going to make out with Annie.

SHANE:
What?

KIM:
That same week.

SHANE:
I don't-

KIM:
Try. Because she told me.

SHANE:
I didn't...

KIM:
What? Owe me anything? Promise me you wouldn't? You’re right. You promised nothing. I don't know if I should applaud your self-awareness, or be hurt that you didn’t even care enough to lie to me. (She looks at him.) When I woke up the morning after, I was covered, head to toe, with red and pink. (Significantly.) Everywhere you had touched me... That was how I found out I'm allergic to hair dye.
SHANE:
What?

KIM:
I couldn’t figure out why I didn’t tell you. I guess I didn’t want you to think it was a sign – an omen that every time we touched, it would hurt me. Because no matter how pain I experienced... it was worth it to me. (Beat.) And then on Friday, when I saw you at Steve’s... and you were with Annie... While you poured yourself another rum and Coke, she told me that you had kissed her. And she said, “I don’t know if it’s the beginning of something... but I hope it is.” And I thought... I don’t know if it’s your beginning, but it feels like my ending.

SHANE:
You said you understood that what happened with us didn’t mean anything.

KIM:
To you. I understood that it didn’t mean anything to you. I knew. But when Annie told me that... It was like I could feel you trying to take our one brief moment away from me... as though you wanted to pretend it never happened, to take it all back...

SHANE:
I didn't want to date you, okay? If you want to hate me for that, go ahead.

KIM:
I don't hate you! God! And I realize now, I could have let you know I was upset... Instead, that night at Steve's... after a few screwdrivers... I hooked up with Matt. And the entire time, I kept thinking – “See? I’m over Shane. Look at me, hooking up with Matt, being completely over Shane.” I tried to prove how “fine” I was with your lack of desire to commit to me, and all I proved was that I never would be.

SHANE:
Then why did you keep letting it happen?

KIM:
Why did you?

SHANE:
(Lamely.) I asked you first.
KIM:

(Deep breath.) Because I knew I wanted those moments – few and far between as they were... I wanted whatever time and affection you could give me. No matter what it cost me. It was enough for me, somehow. I felt like you found comfort in me. And maybe I wasn’t your first choice, you know? But I was glad that I was somewhere on the list. I let it happen again and again, more times than I can even count...

(Beat.) Remember the weekend when I visited you, right after you'd broken up with Lauren, again? I asked you, that night... if you wanted to go farther than before... I got up my nerve, I propositioned you. I wanted you to be my first. And you turned me down. You wanted to keep what kept happening between us... as casual as you could... You just said it yourself. “A love affair without sex is meaningless.” But not to me. (Quiet.) When we took a shower together... or even when you just held onto me while we slept... That meant something to me. Probably more than sex ever could... at least more than it did when it finally happened, and it wasn’t with you.

(He looks at her in amazement.)
Yeah. I finally scanned my v-card, a year ago, with an IHOP waiter. I believe you know him. His name’s-

SHANE:

(Shock.) Greg Laskey?

KIM:
That’s the guy. And after it happened, I had to ask myself, why I had done it... and to be totally honest... part of it was you. I was so desperate to prove I didn’t need you, to stop waiting for you, to stop kidding myself... I had sex with someone I hardly knew. And then – how ridiculous is this? – I spent the next year asking myself what you would do if you found out, if you would think less of me.

SHANE:
I would never judge you because of who you sleep with.

KIM:
Well, thank you.

SHANE:

Maybe... maybe I didn’t want to be your first because I thought you couldn’t handle it. Or maybe I didn’t know if I could handle it.
KIM:
In the end, it was just another method of keeping me at arm’s length, another attempt at pushing me away.

SHANE:
You never went anywhere, though. You answered your phone at three in the morning...

KIM:
Just happy to hear from you, no questions asked.

SHANE:
Maybe I was finding comfort in being with you. And maybe I felt bad about it, I felt like I was using you.

KIM:
You leaned on me. And I wanted you to. I cared about you so much.

SHANE:
I cared about you. I think – I think I needed you to be my friend, because... a lover is someone you strive for, and a friend is the one who’s there for you when you fail.

KIM:
(Softly.) I wanted to be both. (Beat.) But I knew... you’d never strive for me. You’d never have to. When it comes to you, I can't afford to play hard-to-get. You’ll never have to chase me, because I'll always be within reach.

SHANE:
Why me? I never did anything to deserve this.

KIM:
I don't know... But... I’ve seen the best and the worst of you... and I love you. I love the way you can tell me what I’m thinking. I love the way you tell a story, drawing me in. I love you for all the times you convinced me, with a stupid joke, or even just a look... to stop taking myself so seriously and just enjoy my life. Nothing could ever make me regret the way I feel about you. That’s what I’ve been trying to say: That love is never wrong. Even when it grows in the worst conditions, with no encouragement... whether it's based on sex or showers, or just a few intense conversations and a night at the theatre.
SHANE:
Back to the point, huh? Back to your demands?

KIM:
Ashleigh’s monologue was my confession to you. “We both came to see that play at school... You saw me alone, and came to sit by me. It was as though we were the same person... We cringed at the same things, laughed at the same scenes, you elbowed me and whispered my thoughts to me. All I wanted to do was reach those few inches and hold your hand... but I knew I couldn’t. I was trapped. And I started crying in the dark.” You weren’t five years older than me. Just two. You weren’t a teacher, you were a senior. But that didn’t make it any less about you and I. You said the show I wrote was unrealistic. But I meant every word. So tell me how that’s possible.

SHANE:
Truth is stranger than fiction, I guess.

KIM:
You had to know. I sent you a copy, because you said you wanted to know what I was writing. I sent you other things, too. But JSTMYN was what that piqued your interest – and not for the reasons I had hoped. You... pretended not to get the message.

SHANE:
I thought... it would be less awkward. I guess I wanted to pretend that you wrote it about some good-looking teacher’s aide. Maybe I was in a little bit of denial.

KIM:
It... it just made me feel small. Patronized. And then you asked me if we could adapt it... Turn it into a full-length show. You asked me to collaborate with you. And I thought, I thought we could create something together. “Our play,” right? “Our baby?” But you never wanted that. You mangled my art, and buried my message.

SHANE:
I’m... I guess I’m starting to see... why this means so much to you. You feel like I didn’t understand your work. And now, if my version goes out into the world... no one ever will. But you’re wrong. Because I get it now, okay?
KIM:
(Skeptical.) Oh, really–?

SHANE:
Really! I really do. And if you let my version be produced... that doesn’t change what you felt, or what you feel. You love me. I – ...know that. Nothing can take that away from you.

KIM:
With the only possible exception... *(She holds up the contract.)* ...being *this*.

SHANE:
Come on, Kim. Were you trying to tell me, or the world?

KIM:
(Soft.) Both.

SHANE:
What do you want from me?

KIM:
I... want *you*. And if that's not an option... then I want to let go. For good.

SHANE:
What can I do to help? What can I do to provide closure? Never want to see me again? I can arrange that. Just tell me what you need to hear, and I'll say it.

KIM:
Tell me that you don't, and could never love me.

SHANE:
Not the way you want me to. I don’t.

KIM:
What do you think I want from you?

SHANE:
You have this idea about... self-sacrifice... and I don’t know that I buy it... You want too much. You want...
**KIM:**
You don’t know.

**SHANE:**
You want more than I’m willing to part with. You want more than I have in me to give. You want me to be something better than I am.

**KIM:**
I just want to be with you. I want you, just as you are. And if I can’t be with you, I want it to be because you couldn’t be happy with me. Not because I was too scared to tell you the truth. If you don’t want to be with me, it’s not going to be because you didn’t know what you were missing.

**SHANE:**
I can’t make my life revolve around someone that way. I can’t be to you what you’ve been to me. I can’t ever need you.

**KIM:**
I don’t need you, Shane. I choose you.

**SHANE:**
You think I’m something I’m not… I’m not such a great person, Kim.

**KIM:**
I couldn’t love you if you were perfect. If you were perfect, I would lose myself in you. I don’t want to lose myself any more than you do.

**SHANE:**
This isn’t the way it’s supposed to go. You can’t talk me into dating you.

**KIM:**
I suppose I can’t. But I was hoping I could make you think about some things you hadn’t considered. You’ve been stupid. And I’ve been stupid. I’m done being stupid. Are you?

**SHANE:**
...This is just too unbelievable. I mean… you’re going to destroy the best opportunity of my life – you’re going to basically ruin my life – because you love me so much?
KIM:
Ain’t it grand?

SHANE:
You’ve said that you owe something to your story, to your characters, to your message. But what about what you owe to me? If the piece you wrote is a promise you made me... then what matters more? Keeping the promise you made, or just defending it? I mean... if you want the best for me, if you really love me selflessly, and unconditionally.. then let me have this. Let them produce our script.

KIM:

SHANE:
Please. Let them.

KIM:
No, Shane.

SHANE:
I’ll produce it without your signature.

KIM:
And I’ll sue you.

SHANE:
You won't win.

KIM:
I don’t need to win. I even say “lawsuit,” and Pike Street is going to run scared.

SHANE:
You won’t. You won’t do it. Because... you said it yourself. “I want your happiness more than anything, even if it’s at my own expense.” You wrote it!

KIM:
And you cut that line!
SHANE:
Does that make it any less true?

KIM:
(Thinks. Touché.) I have to admit, you’ve got me there. To prove the truth... I have to let you mangle it beyond recognition. If that’s what you decide you really want.

(She picks up one of the pens and signs the contract. She hands it to him. She gathers her things.)

It’s your decision, now.

(She turns to leave; he grabs her hand, but says nothing. They stare at each other as he frantically tries to decide what to say. Finally, he releases her hand, still silent.)

Give it some thought. I told you... I will always be within reach.

(She touches his face, then kisses him. It might, and it might not, be a beginning.)

Thanks for the flowers. Take care.

(She leaves. He lets her. He holds the contract. He moves his hands into position to rip it in half, but reconsiders, and sets it down in front of him. He sits there, lost, and the lights fade. The story here is not quite over. But the play is. BLACKOUT. THE END.)
About the Playwright

Kellie Powell has written over twenty plays. Her work has been produced by Love Creek Productions, Art International Radio, the Illinois State University Free Stage Festival, KNOW Theatre, the Penny Dreadful Players, Studio Z, Hinman Production Company, and Asphalt Jungle. Her plays have been published by These Aren’t My Shoes Productions and JAC Publishing & Promotions.


Powell was born and raised in Central Illinois. She wrote her first extant play in high school, and became involved in the founding of the independent theatre group Stick & Co. Productions. She attended Illinois State University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre. She has also studied at Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York. For more on Kellie Powell and These Aren’t My Shoes Productions, visit: http://www.notmyshoes.net

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– Kellie Powell
Other Plays By Kellie Powell

**Dogface** – A seven-year-old girl is traumatized and scarred after being attacked by a dog. Her classmates ostracize her and give her the name “Dogface”, which continues to haunt her long after grade school.

“Nurses were coming in, mopping up blood and asking questions and trying to establish how much of my face was still there, whether the nerve endings were alive. My face felt puffy, and I was light-headed...

And then, I was lying on a table, squinting into a bright light above me... I can’t feel it. If I look out of the corner of my right eye, I can see it, the silver needle, moving up and down. So I don’t look. You’re not allowed to cry or they might mess up your stitches. You can’t move at all. They keep saying, “It will all be over soon.”

They lied. I was conscious the entire time. I was awake while they sewed my face back together. What I remember most is the bright light, and the strangely disembodied voices of my parents and the doctors, trying to keep the patient calm...”

**Like Dreaming, Backwards** – A short play in which Nell, suffering from depressive psychosis, is encouraged by hallucinatory “messengers” to commit suicide. The play also illustrates the grief experienced by those Nell leaves behind, including her best friend and her mother. Finally, Nell tries to explain her condition.

“The hospital was almost a relief, because I didn’t have to pretend for anyone. I cried all day, and no one took it personally, no one blamed themselves. The honesty was refreshing.

But then, I started to look at the other patients. I was surrounded by people who had been miserable their entire lives. There was an eighty-year-old woman there, who had been in and out of psych wards since she was my age. Every day, she would look at me, and ask, “Why won’t they just let me die?”

And I realized: That was my future. I understood with perfect clarity that I was never going to get better. No therapy, no medication will ever fix me. I can make everyone think I’m normal, that I’m coping, that I’m okay. But I’ve never been okay. I’ll never be okay. I will always be one bad day away from suicide. Until I’m dead. I spend my life trying to delay what I know is inevitable. And any day could be my last.”

Available from These Aren’t My Shoes Productions
www.notmyshoes.net