

Way to Blue by Rachel Solomon

The stage is bright and cheery – bright lighting, birdsong over the speakers. The actors walk on, saying hello to their friends as they pass, going about day to day life. Actors will walk on and off stage, but there are at least 3 people on stage at all times. We start to hear them speaking – overlapping slightly with one another.

I woke up on time today.

I am genuinely happy.

Okay hunnay you rock that natural beauty – mhm!

I feel good.

I am waiting for something good, joyous.

I feel awake.

I am doing alright

I wish I could bottle that up.

I am so thankful

It's a sunny day which means that today must be good.

It's not even noon and I've gotten so much done.

I always feel so much better when I do.

Wanna take a picnic to the park?

I've got the time.

I am full of love to give.

I love seeing progress like that.

I try to encourage myself as much as I can.

As this continues, we start to hear the quiet sounds of a small creek, and the RIVER (played by two actors and a large, long piece of blue fabric) slowly comes onstage. At first it is a small inconvenience, but then it begins to separate some of the actors, until it finally splits the stage in two. While the split is happening, the dialogue of 3 of the actors (including BETTY and NICK) shifts to the below. The other actors are still saying the positive messages above. The RIVER also speaks the positive messages.

It's just a couple of bad thoughts, it's not like I'm missing an arm.

I'm so tired. I need sleep.

And I'm disgusting.

Yeah, this just isn't gonna happen.

Jesus Christ, I don't know why I even try.

I just want to lie here.

No. Just no.

I just don't feel like doing this right now.

What's the point?

During the split, the larger downstage section holds all of the actors except BETTY. If they are "trapped" upstage by the RIVER, they may step over the RIVER to get downstage. The smaller upstage section eventually only has BETTY. NICK is almost caught in the split, but exits the stage, looking at BETTY, before he becomes trapped.

Finally, BETTY comes to a stand-still, hopeless, and reaches for the people across the RIVER. None of them notice, and continue their walking and talking as they exit, except for JEREMY. JEREMY stops, looks at BETTY.

JEREMY: Who helps me the most? Me for the most part. I look out for myself. Because they shouldn't. So it's just me. I look out for myself.

Right as the last line is said, we hear the sounds of a full river, more powerful than the creek. The RIVER is pulled away suddenly and there is a blackout. During the transition, we hear the River sounds as well as the beginning of Alexi Murdoch's "Home". As the lights come back up, we see NICK at a grocery store, as the cashier.

MOLLY: Hello sir!

NICK: Hello

MOLLY: How are you today?

NICK: *(Pause – should he be honest?)* Realistically I am okay.

MOLLY: *(Not really paying attention to his honesty)* Thank you, so just this.

NICK: OK

MOLLY: Lovely weather we're having

NICK: I guess

MOLLY: OK!

NICK: Alright, that'll be \$10.51

MOLLY: Here you go

NICK: Out of 20... *(Hands MOLLY the change)* And 49 cents... *(Realizes he's counted wrong)* Sorry – and a nickel. I'm bad with change...

MOLLY: That's OK, don't worry about it! Alright, you have a lovely day!

MOLLY leaves. BETTY is in the grocery store, too, as a shopper, and goes to NICK's checkout line. We do not hear NICK's conversation, although he is silently speaking to her and going through the motions of a "good cashier" (getting and scanning her shopper's club card, scanning the products, bagging them, perhaps making a comment on how that's a good brand of bread, and then completing the transaction). Instead of this conversation, we hear BETTY's inner monologue.

BETTY: *(To self, turned away from NICK)* It doesn't matter. Yes, it does. You just don't feel like doing this right now. Change the message. People do care, what I do does matter. *(Pause, as the RIVER slowly starts to wind its way around BETTY)* What's the point?

The RIVER is winding its way around BETTY and she turns back to NICK, collects her bag and leaves. NICK tries to reach out to her on a blackout, as we hear the sound of the

River again, and more of Alexi Murdoch's "Home" (0:23 - 0:48, fading out as the lights come up).

As the lights come back up, BETTY is sitting on a couch, watching a TV that is in the audience.

BETTY: Change the message. Change the message.

COMMERCIAL: Do you have crippling anxiety? Well do we have the product for you! Introducing "Pee-Away"! Just drink it, and pee all of that shame away. Your shame will leave your body faster than a stream of urine.

JANE enters the room, sees BETTY on the couch.

JANE: Are you serious right now? This is where you are? This is what you're wearing?

BETTY: Well... it's my apartment, so...

JANE: You know we're supposed to be going out. This is the third time. I'm not staying in for a third time.

BETTY: You should go, and I'm just... I'm just gonna stay at home.

JANE: Nope. Nope. I am getting clothes for you and we're going. *(JANE tosses a dress to BETTY, who puts it on over her cami and leggings as she is saying the next line)*

BETTY: I... ugh... fine... But I don't see why I gotta go to the bar anyways...

JANE: Ready?

BETTY: We're gonna go?

JANE: Yes! We're gonna go!

BETTY: Alright....

As they leave the apartment, the commercial has repeated, and we hear...

COMMERCIAL: Some side effects may include UTIs and all other anxieties in your life just increasing. Pee-Away! Just drink it, and pee all of that shame away.

We transition to the bar, where BETTY and JANE are drinking with friend RODNEY. BETTY goes to the bar to get more drinks, and JANE talks to RODNEY.

JANE: Today was a big day. I was able to get BETTY out of the apartment and out to dinner! She hasn't done anything social in ages. This is huge.

RODNEY: Downside - she's an expensive date! She's run up the bill so high with her drinking.

JANE: At least after drink five I got her to smile!

BETTY returns with more drinks.

BETTY: It's only up from here!

They clink glasses. On the clink, Alexi Murdoch's "12" begins playing (starting around 1:40).

In a mimed/movement sequence. BETTY and friends continue to drink, until BETTY gets progressively more destructive - she is making a scene, getting more emotional, getting more and more drunk. BETTY spills her drink and goes to the bar again for a refill. During this time, JANE speaks to RODNEY again. BETTY returns to hear the end of JANE's speech.

JANE: I want to help but apparently I'm a useless best friend. I try and try and I get nothing back. I can't help her! I'm done. I'm done. I'M DONE! I get that she's "depressed" or "anxious" or whatever she calls it but she needs to snap out of it!

JANE leaves in a huff. RODNEY looks at BETTY, who is hurt by what she has just heard.

RODNEY: My tips? Yoga, kale, face masks. Do something - outside too. Positivity really is a force of nature!

RODNEY leaves, and we see NICK in the back of the bar, surrounded by the RIVER (which is also winding its way towards BETTY). NICK is reaching for BETTY, as we hear the

flowing river and Alexi Murdoch's "12", which fades out and is replaced by "Home", as we transition back to BETTY's living room. BETTY, possibly hungover, is watching tv again. The music fades. The RIVER is quietly and calmly behind her.

BETTY: Positivity is a force of nature...

COMMERCIAL: Are you suffering from that thing they call "depression"? Do you feel like you're just of no worth to anyone? Do you feel like life is just not worth living? WELL IT IS! The cure is right in front of you. It is our Earth. You will be able to come alive by being part of the great gift we call the green planet! Slip off those shoes, find a place in the wilderness, and just stand there, feeling nature all around you. Call now for a personal consultation to be one with the earth, our great planet, and you'll never feel this thing they call "depression" again.

RODNEY comes into the apartment carrying two yoga mats.

RODNEY: Hey...

BETTY: Hi

RODNEY: What's up?

BETTY: Nothing - what's up with you?

RODNEY: How come you're not ready to go? We've got class in like ten minutes!

BETTY: I'm not ready... I don't feel like it... It just is not.... Just sit, come and sit.

RODNEY: What's the matter?

(BETTY is trying to share how she feels but the words aren't coming out properly)

BETTY: I'm just having a moment. Nothing is good. I'm greasy, I'm gross.

RODNEY: You're greasy? I just got done with my shift at Uno's. Come on, this is our thing that we're gonna do on Thursday nights! Yoga! Come on!

BETTY: It makes sense that you're greasy. But I'm just a greasy fuck at home.

RODNEY: Well you look fine to me. Come on, yoga will make you feel so much better.

And it's outside on such a beautiful evening! It will restore the spirit, it will get you out of this funk that you're in. Come on.

BETTY: No...

RODNEY: Don't do this

BETTY: I just...

RODNEY: I've been looking forward to this all day, don't do this to me.

BETTY: I can't. Just sit here with me...

RODNEY: I gotta, I gotta move a bit, come on.

BETTY agrees to go with RODNEY. As we leave, the RIVER begins to follow her. We hear Nick

Drake's "River Man", starting at 1:35. This song continues quietly throughout the next scene, but without the lyrics - just the orchestral section.

OUTDOOR YOGA - BETTY and RODNEY have their yoga mats outside. We hear birds, it is a sunny day, but we also hear the RIVER quietly and calmly moving underneath. The RIVER is partially onstage. All is right in RODNEY's world, but as BETTY twists and tries to enjoy being outside, the RIVER starts calling out to her.

RIVER: Everyone is watching you. That's really stupid. You have to be the person doing everything. You are not enough.

BETTY: I'm drowning.

RIVER: Why? For what? You're always so negative. You always blow things out of proportion.

BETTY: I'm exhausted.

RODNEY: *(To BETTY)* Shhh!

The RIVER sweeps up BETTY as she leaves in frustration. RODNEY is unsure what went wrong with his plan, and continues his yoga as the lights black out. Nick Drake's "River Man" continues, jumping to 3:42. Music fades out as lights come up after scene change.

We are back at the grocery store at NICK's checkout line, where MARY JANE comes through his line. The RIVER is in the background – visible, but not affecting NICK's work too much.

MARY JANE: Hey man, what's up. I'll just take these, thanks.

NICK: Mm.

MARY JANE: Hey, how do you like working here? I have a friend looking for a job and--

NICK: *(Pause – should he be honest?)* Well... It's like... *(He will be honest!)* All these people come in and they're off into the world with their chicken parm dinner and organic fruits, and they treat me like I am some servant of their supermarket experience. *(He's finished ringing up the food)* That'll be \$8.87.

MARY JANE: *(Not registering what she has just heard, except for the total)* Alright cool, here's my card.

NICK: Oh, you put it in the chip reader.

MARY JANE: Oh, these are new, can you do it for me?

NICK sighs and completes the transaction for MARY JANE.

MARY JANE: Sorry, man, I've just never used one.

NICK: Well, you're good to go.

MARY JANE: Have a good night.

MARY JANE leaves. The RIVER slowly starts winding its way towards NICK, speaking as they do:

RIVER: If you work at a grocery store you're a lazy sack of shit. You've got no drive. It's easy.

NICK: *(To self. To the RIVER. To anyone who will listen)* Customer service is far from easy.

RIVER: You are not enough. *(NICK begins speaking over them as the music (Alexi Murdoch's "Home") and the River's sound begins)* It doesn't matter. You don't matter.

NICK: I have wit, smart stuff to say. I'm funny. I am not a throwaway person!

Lights out, the music and the sounds of the River continue, as we find ourselves back in BETTY's living room. To the side, we see NICK getting ready for another day of his job. As the below plays out for BETTY, NICK is taking antidepressant medication and fixes his hair. He turns and is at his checkout line, scanning groceries for invisible customers. BETTY is on the couch, watching TV, huddled in a blanket.

COMMERCIAL: Do you suffer from the shame caused by depression? Well, try our lovely new product - Shame-Off! I once felt the unbearable shame of never being good enough, so I developed these little pills. Just take them, and the shame goes right away.

SATISFIED CUSTOMER IN COMMERCIAL: It wasn't long ago that I was sitting at home eating a half a dozen dinner rolls, when I just felt like there wasn't anything I could do anymore. And I kept thinking "Shame, shame on me." And just like that, from the heavens above, I saw an infomercial for Shame-Off. I bought a lifetime supply, and now I'm feeling better than ever.

COMMERCIAL: Shame on? NO! Shame-Off! Just take these pills, and the shame goes right away.

BETTY gets up, goes to the medicine cabinet, and takes a pill. She returns to the couch and works/plays on her computer. As she is doing this, NICK is going through his daily routine (take an antidepressant, fix his hair, ring up groceries). As they do this, we hear a quiet creek, and the repetitive guitar of Alexi Murdoch's "Home" (2:05- 2:40, repeated and distorted, as well as 4:45-end, without the lyrics). We also hear NICK, BETTY, and the RIVERS, one for NICK, and one for BETTY. The RIVERS are always present now:

NICK: Why am I even here?

RIVERS: All you need is a smile.

BETTY: God, I'm tired.

RIVERS: Stop feeling so anxious. It's in your head.

NICK: I just don't feel like doing this right now.

BETTY: It doesn't matter.

RIVERS: You don't matter.

BETTY: I... don't matter.

They repeat this physical cycle three times, with the lines interspersed throughout, and each time BETTY gets slightly more agitated (why isn't it working better?). The RIVERS begin encroaching more and more on their space, especially on BETTY. On BETTY's last line, she stands up and stares straight ahead.

RIVERS: Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream. (Sung to the melody in Alexi Murdoch's "Home". This can be sung quietly, and then become a bit of a round as the below scene progresses)

As the above starts, her living room and NICK's checkout line disappear, leaving BETTY standing in the exact same place. She is physically present but not mentally present. RODNEY and MOLLY enter. They try to get BETTY's attention, try to get her to go out with them. Eventually they begin physically pulling BETTY, trying to move her using her legs, arms, etc., but she remains immobile. Throughout all of this, the RIVER begins winding its way closer and closer to BETTY, eventually wrapping her in their waters, and preventing RODNEY and MOLLY from getting too close.

BETTY and RODNEY: Can't you just try?

The RIVER gets larger, filling the whole stage, pushing RODNEY and MOLLY away from BETTY, who is still standing frozen in place.

We hear the rushing of a raging river, and "Home" (starting at 2:45). Suddenly, the repetitive guitar of Nick Drake's "River Man" and Alexi Murdoch's "Song For You" begin playing simultaneously. The sound is almost unbearable - at the very least, there are too many different types of sounds at once. BETTY has been swept away to upstage by the RIVER, which has taken over the entire stage. The RIVER is huge, deep, tempestuous. BETTY is standing, unmoving, not present. NICK appears, standing on an island in the RIVER, on the opposite side of the stage. He begins to call out to her. As he speaks, the cacophony quiets and the RIVER's intensity lessens, until only "Song For You" and a quiet creek are heard.

NICK: You are fine. We'll be fine. (BETTY snaps out of it and sees NICK reaching for and calling to her.)

BETTY: Why am I feeling like this?

NICK: I don't know. Why am I feeling like this?

BETTY tries to begin crossing the RIVER towards NICK. She falters.

BETTY: (*Despondent*) I'm trying my hardest every day.

NICK: (*Honest. Genuine*) You are such a hard worker. You are kind. Really, truly, kind.

You are a good person.

BETTY falters again. NICK comes towards her. The river is subsiding.

BETTY: (*This is not a good thing to her*) I feel everything with such intensity.

NICK: I know. But that creates balance. You are loved. And you are unstoppable.

BETTY: (*As she continues moving towards him*) What do you do?

NICK: The internet helps. (*BETTY gives a look and stops*) I know, it's corny, but

sometimes all it takes is a heartfelt story, a stupid meme, or a funny video.

BETTY: I can't help myself. I think about the past, the future, I try to stay present and

put it all in perspective but-- (*At a loss for words*)

NICK: It's gonna be okay. You'll make it okay.

BETTY: You're lying to me.

NICK: But I'm also telling the truth at the same time.

BETTY makes it to the other side of the RIVER, where NICK is. As they continue speaking and walk off stage, we hear minute 3:40 of "Song For You". The RIVER is now more of a small trickle. Before getting completely offstage, BETTY stops, turns, and acknowledges the RIVER's presence (this acknowledgement isn't beckoning or welcoming the river, just acknowledging that it is there). BETTY and NICK leave. The RIVER follows - a part of their lives, but no longer menacing.

Fade to Blackout.

End.