

PROS AND CONS OF AN IMAGINARY EX

by
Mikey Jackson

Short play

CHARACTERS:

ALICE: Meek yet scatty twenty-something girl next door type.

JOSH: Same age. Handsome and he knows it.

www.mikeyjackson.com

SCENE 1

And... let there be LIGHT.

It's the lounge of a flat, but let's make it simple with two wooden chairs facing the audience, three feet apart.

Meet twenty-something **JOSH**, handsome but all too aware of it. He sits in silence on one such chair. Waiting.

An anxious **ALICE**, same age, marches onto the stage, her hair overly styled, a tad too much make-up, a sexy (but not too slutty) dress with a matching handbag. Judging by her scatty manner, this girl is clearly going out on a first date.

ALICE: He's late.

From her handbag comes her mobile phone.

ALICE: Eight o'clock, that's what we arranged.

She checks for texts, but –

ALICE: Zero messages.

JOSH remains seated, all "told you so."

JOSH: I knew he'd let you down.

We're not sure of this guy's role. A male best friend perhaps?

ALICE: It's five minutes, Josh. No big deal.

He clocks the way ALICE is nervously pacing around the room.

JOSH: Yeah, no big deal at all.

Surrendering, ALICE plonks herself upon the other chair, losing the phone to her handbag.

ALICE: Oh, God, look at me, I'm a bag of nerves.

JOSH: Alice. My advice to you: Text the guy. Cancel your date tonight. Tell him you've got the dreaded lurgy.

ALICE: No. I need to do this. I can't live like a hermit forever. And besides, I've got a good feeling about this one. He seems really nice.

JOSH: How do you know for sure? All you've done is swap a handful of messages on a dating app.

ALICE: You can tell a lot about somebody by how they express themselves in text.

JOSH: What if he turns out to be an axe murderer? Or worse still, married?

ALICE: I refuse to grace your loosely-veiled sarcasm with a suitable response.

JOSH: And of course there are other major factors to consider.

ALICE: Such as?

JOSH: Have you seen his profile pic? You really want to date that?

ALICE: We can't all be oil paintings.

JOSH: And his hair. Surely that's worthy of a massive red flag.

ALICE: It's not like he's grown a mullet.

JOSH: I'm not talking about the style. It's the colour you should be concerned about.

ALICE: What's wrong with ginger?

JOSH: Shhh, keep your voice down, you can't use the G-word any more. The woke police might be listening in.

ALICE sighs, looking away, rolling her eyes. When she returns her attention to JOSH, the man has entered sulk mode.

ALICE: What's that face for?

JOSH: I thought I meant something to you.

What's up with this guy? Is he jealous?

ALICE: You do. But I need to get out there and –

JOSH: Move on?

ALICE: Yes. No. I don't know.

JOSH: If you're so unsure, why bother? Especially as he looks like such a loser.

Cue ALICE'S loud groan as she stands up.

ALICE: Oh, for God's sake, why are you acting like this?

JOSH also takes to his feet.

JOSH: Like what?

They stand before each other, two lost souls, so much pain.

ALICE: I would have stayed with you forever. You know that. But you died, Josh.

Eh? Did we hear her correctly?

ALICE: You died.

They trade stares, sullen, empty. Time stands still. Until –

JOSH: Your date for this evening. Does he know about me? About what happened?

ALICE tips a nod.

JOSH: What did you tell him?

ALICE faces the audience, staring into space.

ALICE: I explained how it happened two years ago. Car crash. The other driver totally off his face on drugs. One moment, the two of us with big plans for the future. The next, our relationship down the proverbial plughole.

It looks as though ALICE is about to cry. But she doesn't. This girl is trying to be oh, so strong.

ALICE: I still can't believe the druggy gonad practically walked away from the accident unscathed.

ALICE, lost, forlorn. But no, she shrugs it off.

ALICE: Right, that's it, it's high time I snapped out of it. I need to move forward. Think about the future. About tonight. My date. My first night out since...

ALICE begins to falter, clearly thinking about her loss. But no, she needs to keep it together. Instead, she races through a flurry of quick-fire questions, not stopping for breath.

ALICE: Josh. Be honest. How do I look? Do I pass? Is my hair all right? Am I wearing too much make-up? And this dress, does it scream "desperate slut out for a good time?" I'd hate to give him the wrong idea. And oh, God, what if he offers to walk me home? What happens on the doorstep? Do I invite him in? No. Too soon. Way too soon. So do I offer him a kiss goodnight? And if so, do I go for a squelchy smacker on the lips or a far more sensible peck on the cheek?

ALICE then realises –

ALICE: I can't believe I'm fishing for first date advice from an imaginary version of my deceased ex.

FX: DING, DONG, it's the doorbell.

ALICE: Oh, God, do you think it's him?

JOSH: I... can't quite tell from where I'm standing.

ALICE freezes, not knowing what to do.

JOSH: Here's a tip. Maybe you should answer the front door.

ALICE: Yes. You're right. Okay, here goes.

And she heads off-stage.

JOSH sits down.

NOTE: We hear ALICE'S off-stage talking.

FX: The front door opens.

ALICE: (UNSEEN) Oh, God, no, keep away from me!

Remaining seated, a look of alarm spreads across JOSH'S face as he listens in.

ALICE: (UNSEEN) I can't accept those flowers! I'm totally allergic! Not only hay fever! The pollen, it brings me out in the most horrendous rash! The doctors, they have no idea what causes it! I'm sorry, but you'll have to take the flowers back! Bye!

FX: The front door closes.

JOSH, puzzled.

ALICE makes her return and remains standing.

JOSH: Did you just send your date packing?

ALICE: It's wasn't him. It was a courier delivering the biggest bunch of blooms I've ever seen.

JOSH: I can't believe the idiot sent you flowers.

ALICE: He doesn't know about my allergy.

JOSH: No, no, I mean why have them delivered by a complete stranger? Surely any normal person would present them to you in person.

ALICE: Maybe Roman is the shy type.

JOSH: Roman? Like, seriously?

ALICE: Roman is a cool name.

JOSH: It's totally pants.

ALICE: In your opinion.

JOSH: I'd say in most people's opinion. Do you really want to embarrass yourself every time you introduce your "new man" to friends and acquaintances?

ALICE, all scowls and hands upon hips.

JOSH: Believe me, you need to get shot of this tosser.

ALICE: Why are you doing this?

JOSH: Doing what?

ALICE: Trying your best to trash this date before the guy has even turned up. This isn't you.

JOSH stands bolt upright.

JOSH: Like, duh of duhs. Of course this isn't me. This is a representation of me from your imagination. And quite frankly, I'm not a fan of how you're currently depicting me.

ALICE: What's that supposed to mean?

JOSH: You've turned me into an asshole.

ALICE: I have not turned you into an asshole.

JOSH: Oh, really? I've been slagging off your date non-stop. That is definitely asshole territory. And what's with my jealousy, my neediness? I never acted this way with you. Ever. And jeez, that line you gave me to say: "I thought I meant something to you." Cringe or what? Admit it, Alice. You've transformed the memory of Josh into something unrecognisable.

ALICE: You're right. I have. And I'm sorry. But the very thought of letting go terrifies me. Oh, Josh, don't you see? In a way, you're my guardian angel. This imaginary version of you who slags off potential suitors means we can stay together forever.

JOSH: Do you realise how doolally that sounds?

ALICE: I don't care. You're all I've got left of you.

JOSH: That's not true. I live each day in your memories. That's how you should be keeping me alive. By remembering the things we did together... but at the same time never regretting the things we didn't.

JOSH reaches out and takes both of her hands.

JOSH: We met. We fell in love. And for a while, we were happy. But Alice, we had our shot. And in the end, we were never meant to be.

ALICE, so emotional, almost tearful.

ALICE: I can't lose you, Josh. Not again.

JOSH: Alice, please listen to me. Would the real Josh want you to play the eternal raincloud loner? Never moving on? Forever wondering what might have been?

ALICE: No, no and no. He'd tell me to let go of the past. Start a brand new chapter. And fill the blank page with whatever happens next.

JOSH: Exactly. And that, my darling, is what you must do.

It's so painful, but ALICE nods her understanding.

JOSH lets go of her hands, then takes one unhurried backward step towards his edge of the stage.

ALICE: I'm scared.

JOSH: It's okay to be frightened.

A second step back.

ALICE: I don't know if I can do this.

JOSH: You can. You will. I believe in you.

A third step back.

ALICE: I love you.

JOSH: And so did I. Once upon a time.

And as JOSH takes further unhurried backward steps –

JOSH: Farewell, Alice.

ALICE: Goodbye, Josh.

JOSH: Live a good life.

ALICE: I'll try my best.

At the very edge of his side of the stage, JOSH pauses. Smiles.
Blows her a kiss. And then he's gone.

For the longest of moments, ALICE stares at the spot where
JOSH once resided.

Then an almost-smile appears on her face.

ALICE: I did it. I finally let go.

She is proud of her achievement. And then –

FX: – DING, DONG, it's that doorbell once more.

ALICE: Right on cue.

ALICE faces the audience, determined.

ALICE: This is it. A brand new chapter. A blank page ready to fill.

One final deep breath to steady her nerves, then –

ALICE: Prepare yourself, Alice. The rest of your life awaits you.

And she heads off-stage, ready to answer that door.

BLACK-OUT

CURTAIN