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The Closet Door

By Sam Heyman

[Lights up on CHIP, sitting on the couch in his dorm room, texting on his cell phone. Stage right of his couch is a door leading to the hallway, while on stage left is a door leading to an adjoining bathroom. CHIP should finish texting within moments of the lights coming up, close his phone and then wait a few moments before receiving another one.]

CHIP: Seriously?

[The text is from BRETT, who CHIP has been in a relationship with for some time now. Neither of them are 100% comfortable with their friends knowing of their non-standard sexual orientations, but BRETT is much shyer about it. He's worried that, it being daytime, someone might hear something/walk in/otherwise determine what they're up to, and that might create complications with his friend group, which mostly consists of athletes. CHIP replies, and then expresses his opinion aloud.]

CHIP: Come on, Brett, it's not like people go out on Gay witch-hunts. This isn't Alabama.

[Just then, JESSICA jiggles the handle of the door, finds it locked, and knocks.]

JESSICA: Chip? You in there?

[CHIP mutters something under his breath to the tune of shitballs.]

CHIP: Yeah?

[While JESSICA is talking, CHIP straightens up stuff in his room, and then unlocks the door about when JESSICA stops talking.]

JESSICA: Mind letting me in? Also, why's your door locked while

you're in there? Are you...? No, wait, that would be inappropriate.

CHIP: *[having unlocked the door]*: Sorry, force of habit. Hi.

JESSICA: Hi. Are you going to let me in?

CHIP: Uh, sure. Did you need something?

JESSICA: I just thought I'd, you know, catch up with you. This semester's been so busy.

CHIP: Yeah, uh, it has been. Really busy, like, I have this essay for my Poli Sci class that's due at 5, and I'm only about halfway through.

JESSICA *[energetic]*: You're taking a Poli Sci class? You know, I took a Poli Sci class once—You remember, don't you? Those readings murdered my sleep schedule—maybe I can help you. What are you taking? Analyzing? Politics of Marginalized Groups?

CHIP: Yeah, uh, one of those. Listen, I think I've got it under control, I just need some time alone, to get it all squared away.

JESSICA: You sure? I mean, I can go grab my notes—You know, I got an A in that class.

CHIP: Jessica. I'm sure. But thanks.

[CHIP motions to the door. JESSICA willingly, but reluctantly, exits. Once the door is shut, and locked again, CHIP lets out a sigh of relief and sits himself back down on the couch. He gets another text from the phone in his pocket. It's from BRETT, who has actually arrived at his door. BRETT knocks just as CHIP starts sending his reply.]

CHIP: Jessica, I really don't need help, I just finished half a page since you left.

BRETT: Jessica?

CHIP: Brett? Crap!

[CHIP gets up and unlocks the door. BRETT enters quickly and moves stage left until he's past the couch, facing away from the door.]

CHIP: Well hey there, handsome.

BRETT: Could you close it?

CHIP *[closing the door and locking it]*: Sure. Are you really that freaked out?

BRETT: It's not that I'm freaked out. It's just... you know. This floor's pretty much the entire team, you, and Tyler Yarborough. There's not a lot of room to breathe around here.

[CHIP senses the tension in his voice. He approaches BRETT tentatively.]

CHIP: There are a lot of eyes out there who might not like what they see.

BRETT: Pretty much, yeah.

CHIP: Well, you know I like what I see.

[Just as CHIP reaches for BRETT'S shoulder, some loud knocks sound from behind the door. It's JESSICA. She's upset.]

JESSICA: Chip, can I talk to you for a moment?

CHIP: Hey Jess, it's not actually not a great time, I'm sort of on a roll here, five more minutes?

JESSICA: Not to be unfairly demanding for someone who clearly isn't your mother, but please would you open the goddamn door?

CHIP: Okay, okay, uh...

[He and BRETT have a wordless gestural conversation about their course of action. BRETT ultimately decides to hide in the bathroom. Once BRETT'S safely tucked away, CHIP opens the hallway door.]

CHIP: Hi. Sorry. What?

JESSICA: Have you been avoiding me? Be honest. I understand if you have been, I just, I'd like to know, if you are, why, and if you're not, how's your essay is going, because I'm really actually concerned you're going to write a terrible one like that one I had to read in our FYS.

[CHIP gets out of JESSICA'S way as she advances forward, into the room.]

CHIP: Jessica, calm down, I'm not avoiding you. Is something wrong?

JESSICA: It's just, we used to be so close, and I thought maybe... but now it's like we never talk, and I know we're both busy, but friends are more important than work, that's what you always used to say. I mean wasn't it?

CHIP: It was, and you're right, I'm sorry.

[CHIP and JESSICA hug, with JESSICA facing the hallway door. Though JESSICA recovers quickly, the two remain in close proximity to each other.]

JESSICA: It's okay. But yeah, I'm fine.

CHIP: You sure? You were practically banging down my door a second ago.

JESSICA: If you'll allow me my moments of overemotional weakness, I'll tolerate your irritating habit of not accepting my help.

CHIP: ...Okay.

[CHIP has noticed BRETT peeking out from behind the bathroom door. BRETT'S not sure what to do. CHIP pantomimes flushing the toilet, and BRETT takes a moment to get it, but eventually does and retreats again. This happens during JESSICA'S line.]

JESSICA: It's all socially constructed gender performance and I should want to fight against it, but I don't, really. It helps if I don't think of it as a gendered quality. It's just Jess being Jess.

CHIP: And Jess being Jess is just wonderful.

JESSICA *[laughing]*: Shut up.

[The toilet flushes and moments later, BRETT emerges from the bathroom. JESSICA spins around to see him. Before she can say anything, CHIP fills in the gap of silence.]

CHIP: Finish up in there alright, buddy?

JESSICA: Chip... what's Brett doing here?

CHIP: Well, he was...

BRETT: I was just using Chip's bathroom. Someone ripped the door off the number two stall on my end of the hall, and I appreciate the privacy—not to mention the lack of bacterial rot on the floor.

JESSICA *[to CHIP]*: You clean your floor? I'm impressed.

CHIP: Must be the adjoining room. Brett, did you want to stay over? I think Jessica and I were about to watch some TV.

[It takes JESSICA a moment, but here it is: a chance to reconnect with CHIP.]

JESSICA: We were? I mean, we are?

BRETT: Uh, sure. What are we watching?

JESSICA: Chip! Have you been watching Rupaul's Drag Race?!

[This catches both CHIP and BRETT off-guard.]

CHIP: Uhh, no, not particularly—I mean, I don't think I've ever seen an episode.

JESSICA: This season, you mean. We used to watch it all the time, remember? Oh wait—that was probably really embarrassing. Brett, did you know Chip was...? Are you...?

BRETT: Gay? Uhh, no, not particularly—I mean, not that there's anything wrong with that.

CHIP: But yeah, Brett knows. *[semi-flirtatiously]* He knows, all right.

[BRETT is now very uncomfortable, though not for the reasons JESSICA suspects. JESSICA gives CHIP a light tap with her fist.]

Jessica: Chip, don't be a flirt, straight guys hate that. Or at least, I think most do. Do you, Brett?

Brett: I don't... hate it.

Jessica: Good. I'm sure you get it a lot, from both sexes, as handsome as you are. It's funny how men are starting to be objectified more and more in the media, almost as much as women. Though you guys probably don't interpret it to be a signifier of oppression, do you?

Brett: Yeah, I... No, we... Should I leave?

Chip *[quickly]*: No.

Jessica: Yeah, stay—stay and watch how the other tenth lives!

[CHIP grabs the remote and turns on the TV, plopping himself down in the center of the couch. JESSICA sits to his right, and BRETT, after a moment of hesitation, sits to his left. Meanwhile, JESSICA half-apologizes for her joke.]

JESSICA: I'm not saying all gay people are drag queens—Lesbians are actually drag kings! Sorry, sorry, that was terrible, I'll stop.

CHIP [*letting out a sigh of relief*]: Thank you.

[The three sit in silence watching TV for a few moments. JESSICA holds onto CHIP'S arm, leaning against his shoulder, while BRETT keeps his arms at his sides. After a few moments, JESSICA breaks the silence.]

JESSICA: Why are drag queens so good at looking beautiful? I mean, they put on globs of makeup, sure, but these girls make it work. Have you ever seen a drag show, Brett?

BRETT: N-No. Why w-would I have?

CHIP: Jessica, now you're the one making him uncomfortable. Stop.

JESSICA: Okay, okay. I'm sorry, Brett—I was only asking 'cause I wanted to see what a straight guy thought about drag queens. I mean, they may look hot, but does it bother you that hidden underneath all that lace and sequins there's just some dude? Like take Jade, for instance. She's got nails on that could scratch your eyes out—but she could be the guy who puts bacon on your BLT at Subway.

[It takes BRETT a moment to say what he wants, but he's honest about what he says.]

BRETT: I don't think... it should make any difference. If someone dresses up like that, and they enjoy it, then it shouldn't make any difference if they're a man or a woman underneath.

JESSICA: ...Good answer, Brett! Seriously, why don't we hang out sometime? You seem like a guy with a decent head on your shoulders, I mean, for a LAX bro. No offense. Goddammit, I'm mean, aren't I!

[JESSICA laughs at herself, self-deprecatingly. She's flirting with BRETT, and he laughs awkwardly because he thinks he's supposed to. When the laughter dies down, CHIP speaks up.]

CHIP: So Jessica, it's been a busy semester for you, hasn't it? It's 4pm on a Sunday, don't tell me you've already finished all of your homework.

JESSICA: Ha ha, hardly. I'm actually doing some research for my Comm class—it's cross-listed, of course. I have to watch 6 hours of programming on a specific network and write a paper on how it reinforces or breaks down traditional gender norms.

CHIP: Wow, six whole hours. So you're just starting?

JESSICA: Yup. I'll be here till 10. Unless my roommate gets done fucking her boyfriend and texts me between now and the next commercial break. Seriously, who does that? It's Sunday. Isn't there some sort of Church statute, "Don't have sex on the day of rest?"

BRETT: I think that's Friday. And it's not like they could enforce that.

JESSICA: Whatever, I'm not a Religion major. I just think it's insensitive—*[her phone starts ringing, she fishes it out]* Crap, it's my mom. I've gotta take this. *[As she exits]* Be on the lookout for gender norm deconstruction!

CHIP: It's a show about drag queens, how hard can it be!

[The door slams, and BRETT and CHIP are left alone. BRETT lets out a great sigh of relief, and buries his face in CHIP'S shoulder/chest. CHIP rubs his back, comfortingly.]

CHIP: Gonna be okay, big guy?

BRETT *[into CHIP'S shirt]*: Lock the door, come up with some sort of lie, just don't let her come back in here.

[CHIP gets up and “locks” (i.e. pretends to lock) the door as he says his next line.]

CHIP: I can lock the door, but that’ll only stall her. Was that... ‘uncomfortable for you?

BRETT: The most uncomfortable I’ve ever been. And I like girls! First she asked if I was gay and of course I said no, so I was pigeonholed into that “jock-ish, possibly intolerant straight guy” character. And then she started flirting,

[‘Flirting’ sends BRETT into a swoon of stress. CHIP tries to bring him down to earth with a hug, but BRETT pulls away. CHIP settles for his hands on BRETT’S shoulders.]

CHIP: Brett. It’s really okay. She doesn’t know. And if she did, it wouldn’t matter.

[BRETT breaks away from CHIP’S hold and paces the floor.]

BRETT: Like fuck it wouldn’t matter! She talks the most and the fastest of any girl I’ve ever met. If she finds out there’s a gay varsity lacrosse player, from anyone, she’s gonna know it’s me, and she’s gonna tell everyone!

CHIP: No she wouldn’t. She may seem like a gossip columnist, but she’s more like a--like a journalist. She’d come to me first and ask me if it’s true. Besides, it’s not like she knows anyone that you know. Come to think of it, she doesn’t have that many friends.

BRETT: Okay, so if she did that, if she came to you and asked you, *[impersonating a vapid girl]* “Is Brett gay?” What would you say?

CHIP: Well, what would you want me to do? Lie? Keep up this façade of you being straight and me being the gay friend you hang out with sometimes? Brett, I would protect you if anything happened. No one would tie you to a fence, no one would spray

paint faggot on your locker and not face repercussions from the school. This isn't Laramie, Wyoming. This isn't high school.

[BRETT is quiet, calmed down, but still scared. CHIP walks up to him, and embraces him. They transition into a kiss as JESSICA returns from her phone call. They're still kissing when she enters.]

JESSICA *[as she enters]*: Wow Chip, you didn't lock your door for once—

[BRETT and CHIP continue kissing while BRETT and JESSICA have a gestural conversation. BRETT waves JESSICA off and JESSICA nods profusely and exits, giving him two thumbs up of approval. After JESSICA has hustled off stage, CHIP and BRETT come out of lip lock.]

BRETT: I thought you locked the door?

CHIP: You can't keep locking the world out forever, Brett.

BRETT: So you... Chip, I can't come out yet. Not here.

CHIP: Then don't. Just stay with me.

[The lights go down on CHIP and BRETT in some intimate, non-kissing pose.]

End.