

HURT MY FEELINGS

by Greyson Smith

(Note on formatting: during the original development, the all-caps lines were all read in text-to-speech voices, but feel free to express each line of this text in whatever way best fits its function in the performance. Also the dialogue is indicated with dashes, but they only matter internally to each vignette, meaning that just because an actor is reading the dashed lines in one scene, that doesn't mean that they need to be reading the dashed lines in every scene.)

(Note on tone: to starve yourself is absurd; killing your body so that people will treat you better is a ridiculous thing to do; let that absurdity lead you not only into tragedy, but also into humor.)

HURT MY FEELINGS, I WANT YOU TO DO IT

(We begin in a bathroom. There's a shower running. The two actors stand on opposite sides of the stage in their underwear, facing the other and studying their body. They continue to do this until one of them thinks they have figured out what the other is most insecure about. Whoever does this first puts an X mark on what they think is right. The other does the same.)

Do you feel better about it now?

-(They answer) Do you feel better about it now?

(They answer)

HOW IT FEELS TO CHEW 5 GUM

-This piece of gum is five calories.

Why do you know that?

-I checked.

It's gum. You're not swallowing it.

-It's 5 calories. It says it on the pack.

I know.

-I don't want to know it.

Why do you then?

-That's a stupid question.

I know.

NOBODY WANTS TO FUCK YOU; YOU ARE A SMUDGE, A SHIT FAT NOTHING

How many people like liked you in elementary school?

-(They answer) You?

(They answer)

-I'm (not) sorry.

I'm (not) sorry.

A TRUE STORY THAT HAPPENED TO ME FOR REAL IN REAL LIFE ACTUALLY

Well you know.

-Yes.

He's looking a little big.

-Yes.

I mean. Y'know he's looking a little big.

-Yes.

Maybe get him on a diet.

-Yes.

I have some health magazines or something in the back closet.

-Yes.

Would that be good? Should I get those for him? I think that would be good.

-Yes.

Did you ever buy a treadmill for him?

-Yes.

He probably didn't use it.

-Yes.

I'm really concerned about him.

-Mhm.

Well just because y'know.

-Mhm.

Well he lost all that weight y'know.

-Mhm.

And that fast too.

-Mhm.

I mean he doesn't look healthy.

-Mhm.

He looks. Well you know what he looks like.

-Mhm.

I mean just skin and bones. He looks anorexic.

-Mhm.

As his father you really need to do something.

-Mhm.

He isn't eating enough.

-Mhm.

I should tell him that.

-Mhm.

(One of them begins beating the other up)

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS

You know why I'm doing it.

I KNOW IT'S JUST

What.

WELL IT JUST ISN'T HEALTHY IS IT

What is healthy.

EATING TWO THOUSAND CALORIES A DAY

I don't do anything I don't need that many.

YES YOU DO DID YOU KNOW YOU BURN TWELVE HUNDRED CALORIES EVERY
DAY BY EXISTING ALONE

Right.

YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME

...

YOU CAN'T NOT BELIEVE IT

...

IT'S THE TRUTH

...

LIKE IT'S SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN THAT YOU DO THAT YOU CAN'T THINK THAT
ISN'T REAL

Yeah.

WHAT IF I STARTED SAYING I DON'T BELIEVE IN MATH OH TWO PLUS TWO IS
FOUR NO IT'S NOT SHUT UP TWO PLUS TWO ISN'T FOUR IT'S THREE AND ALSO
THREE ISN'T REAL IT ISN'T A NUMBER I DIDN'T LIKE IT SO I GOT RID OF IT
THAT'S FUCKING STUPID STOP BEING SO FUCKING OH MY GOD IT'S THE TRUTH
YOU DON'T GET TO DECIDE THAT IT ISN'T

Okay.

HOW CAN YOU-

...

I'M SORRY I BLEW UP THERE BUT THIS IS VERY FRUSTRATING TO ME BECAUSE I
WANT YOU TO BE HEALTHY- STOP LETTING THEM BEAT YOU UP IT'S VERY
UPSETTING TO WATCH

What.

THAT PERSON WHO'S BEATING YOU UP

Oh. I didn't notice.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHAT YOU DIDN'T NOTICE THEM?

No.

THEY'RE BEATING YOU UP

Yes.

...

CAN YOU TELL THEM TO STOP

Ummm. No I kind of like it.

WHAT

FEED ME! FEED ME FEED ME I NEED IT! FEED ME! FEED ME!

(The actors return to their far sides of the stage and stand facing the audience, holding notebooks and pens, doing their best to write down everything being played. On the boy's side of the

theater, a voice reads out an intermittent fasting diet regimen, and on the girl's side, a voice reads out a pro-ana diet regimen)

A WELL-INTENTIONED BUT OVERALL MISGUIDED EFFORT

Oh yeah I'm alright.

-Are you.

Yeah I'm good.

-When's the last time you ate.

Uh. I can't remember.

-Like you can't remember specifically when or the last time at all.

I don't know.

-Did you eat breakfast.

Yes.

-Today?

Yes.

-What did you have?

Tea.

-How many calories?

Three.

-That's not too many.

No, but I had lunch.

-What did you have for lunch?

I had two lifesavers.

-How was that?

Unsatisfying.

-I would imagine.

I wasted fifty calories.

-I don't think lifesavers are 25 calories

They're like ten or fifteen.

-Are you going to eat dinner?

I'll probably just drink water.

-How much?

Maybe a liter.

-How much water have you had today?

Two liters. That's why I look bloated.

-You don't look bloated.

Whatever. I've already had like a hundred too many calories today.

-A hundred.

Yes.

-How does that math work?

Over fifty. I try to avoid getting into the triple digits.

-You're not in the triple digits yet today.

I don't like that you just said yet.

HEY I JUST MADE COOKIES DO YOU WANT ONE.

(Next two lines talking over each other, frantically gesturing to each other, desperate, hungry)

But I'm sure that they would love one because I know they love sweets and probably can't turn you down and that would be very nice to do for them I mean you know how they don't eat enough already.

-I think they would absolutely take a cookie and they look just so delicious but I am completely stuffed I already ate earlier and I know that they haven't eaten all day so I am sure they would eat it and maybe more than one.

YOU KNOW THAT THING THAT HAPPENS SOMETIMES WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING A MOVIE

(We see the ideal body: smooth, defined, thin, ribs slightly visible, clean, white, beautiful, smirking, better than you, perfect. They both race to take it, to have it for themselves, but instead they trip over obstacles on the ground, stepping in what seems to be maybe pizza, maybe donuts, maybe mac and cheese, oh god they're sinking into it, they were so close, their hand had almost grazed the perfect body, almost had the privilege to touch even, waist deep, trudging through, pulling out their legs, sinking back in, reaching and failing to grasp. The perfect body smiles at them. Smiles and reaches down, takes a bite of the pizza, of the donut, of the mac and cheese,

and the perfect body laughs at them. Laughs at them for thinking they could ever imagine to achieve what the perfect body was given by god himself. They drown.)

(As they lay on the floor, they get the markers out and slowly draw large Xs across their entire bodies very slowly as the next section plays)

DO YOU FEEL BETTER

DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER

ARE YOU BETTER NOW

IS IT OVER

WILL IT BE OVER

ARE YOU DONE WITH IT NOW

HAVE YOU PROCESSED IT

IS IT DONE

ARE YOU DONE

HAVE YOU GOTTEN BETTER

IT MUST BE OVER

IT'S OVER

YOU'RE DONE

YOU'RE BETTER

YOU'RE OKAY

EVERYTHING IS OKAY

IT'S ALRIGHT

YOU'RE OKAY

YOU ARE GOOD

YOU ARE SO GOOD

YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL

YOU ARE THE BEST YOU'VE EVER BEEN

THIS IS WHO YOU REALLY ARE

YOU ARE PERFECT

THIS IS HOW YOU SHOULD BE

THIS IS HOW YOU WILL BE FOREVER

THIS IS YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

YOU ARE THIS FOREVER

FOREVER

...

FOREVER

(They sit in this for a while. They think about what they've said, what they've done. Whoever decides to first gets up and gets a washcloth, coming back to the other person. They begin to wipe off the X they made themselves.)

Hey remember that thing I said earlier? I don't think I think that actually. I don't think it. I think you might think it, but I don't think it.

(The other one takes a washcloth for themselves, doing the same thing. Once they've both finished:)

-Yeah. Same I think. Same. Yeah.

Yeah.

-Yeah.

(They hold the washcloths and consider them. They don't use them. But they consider them. And we're back in the bathroom.)

(The actors exit.)

Letter from the playwright:

So I wrote this play a while ago, and the original draft didn't have this ending. The original draft just ended with two people lying on the floor, reaffirming their suspicions that they will never get better. I added the hopeful addendum, not because I felt hope or needed to express my honest belief that it is possible to get better, but because I was given a note that the original ending was unpalatably bleak. So I added that ending and convinced myself that I did believe that recovery was inevitable. Now I'm older, and I have an official diagnosis of body dysmorphia, I've gained weight, I have lost much of my calorie-guessing skill, I have stopped talking to people who have devalued me based on my appearance, and I talk to a therapist regularly about my body image and emotional dysregulation. And you know what? I still feel like shit. I've been skinny and felt like shit; I've been fat and felt like shit; I've had long hair and felt like shit; I've painted my nails

and felt like shit; I've worn fancy clothes and felt like shit; I am loved and I feel like shit. I want to believe that I can get better. But still, whenever I see a Beautiful Person, the river of hate that flows through me floods again and fills my skin until I'm a sloshing bag of resentment, ready to be torn open by a smile or a hip bone. And I want to believe that as I grow older, the problems of my youth will fade away, and I'll think how funny it is that I used to care so much about my appearance. But I still want to be Beautiful. I want to be Beautiful so bad. And I'm afraid that I will continue wanting to be Beautiful and continue hating my body for not being what seems so easy for other people. I am afraid. I am so, so afraid.

(End of play.)