

YOU'RE PRETTY, I SWEAR

Kelley Trowbridge

CHARACTERS:

Alice..... Should appear Age 15-16, female. Head in the clouds, curiosity in the heart.

Hattie..... Should appear Age 17-18, female. Goody two-shoes.

The Scientist..... late 50s or early 60s, male. Warm, easy to trust.

Nurse..... 20s or above, male. Cold.

NOTE ON SETTING:

Story takes place in a laboratory compound (cafeteria, dorms, classrooms, etc.). The play was imagined with the intention of a simple set consisting of one table, a few chairs, and various props.

NOTES:

There are other girls in the facility not shown.

YOU'RE PRETTY, I SWEAR

Scene 1

We open in a cafeteria, public school style. There's chairs moving, feet shuffling, chatter. Lunch has just begun. Two girls, ALICE and HATTIE, take a seat together. As HATTIE begins to eat, ALICE picks up her plastic cup and observes it. She holds it up to the light. Outside noises fade.

HATTIE

Why do you still try that? It's never worked for you before.

ALICE sets down the cup. She picks up the plastic spoon from her tray and points it at HATTIE.

ALICE

Did you know that some spoons are made of metal? I read about it in the book he gave me for my birthday this year. It said 'the cool metal spoon...' I bet I could see my reflection in one of those.

HATTIE grabs the spoon from ALICE and sets it to the side.

HATTIE

Can we talk about something else?

ALICE

But don't you ever want to know? I mean, it just— it eats at me. I mean, it can be fun, sometimes, to try and... imagine it, but if I knew...

HATTIE

If you knew, you'd ruin the experiment. Can you stop now, *please*?

ALICE

C'mon Hattie... Doesn't it ever make you even a little angry? I mean, we didn't sign up for this. We weren't even told this was an experiment until like... what, when we were 8? Why can't we just leave? What's stopping us?

HATTIE

God, Alice, when are you gonna get it through your thick head? He's not gonna just... let you go! And even if he did, what would you do? It's *dangerous*. That's what he always told us. Just wait.

ALICE

I can't! I— I have to know. Could you, maybe, I don't know... describe it to me?

HATTIE

No! Ali—

ALICE

Why? Is it horrible?!

HATTIE hesitates.

Oh God, I knew it! It's horrible! I'll nev—

HATTIE

No, Alice! Relax! It's not— it's... pretty. Really. I like it, ok? Are you happy?

ALICE

...you didn't tell me what it looks like.

HATTIE stands and begins to walk out with her things.

Wait, no! Hattie! I'm sorry, come back. I won't talk about it anymore ever again. Okay?

HATTIE turns.

HATTIE

Swear?

ALICE

On my mother's grave.

HATTIE rolls her eyes, but she's smiling.

HATTIE

Okay.

HATTIE comes back to sit at the table. The girls begin to talk again, their conversation drowned out by outside noise. A bell rings and HATTIE exits with her tray. With HATTIE's back turned, ALICE grabs the spoon.

Scene 2

ALICE stands in her bedroom, holding the spoon up towards the sky. She looks at it through different angles, in different hands.

She brings it closer to her face, then farther away.

Footsteps approach; THE SCIENTIST enters. He holds a bag.

THE SCIENTIST

Alice.

ALICE jumps, dropping the spoon. She turns.

ALICE

Sir?

THE SCIENTIST

It's time for your evaluation.

He gestures towards the bed.

Have a seat, please.

ALICE does as he asks. He pulls up a stool and sets his bag to the side. Out of it, he pulls a pen, notepad, and popsicle stick.

THE SCIENTIST

Open wide. Say 'Ahh'.

ALICE

Ahhhh

THE SCIENTIST places the popsicle stick on ALICE's tongue and observes. He takes

notes. He continues to perform typical medical tests. Maybe heartbeat, knee reaction, etc.

ALICE

Thank you for the book, by the way. I really enjoyed it.

THE SCIENTIST chuckles.

THE SCIENTIST

Good, I thought you might like it. I wish I had thought to bring you a new one, knowing how quickly you go through them.

ALICE

That's alright. I've been rereading—

THE SCIENTIST

Alice in Wonderland.

The two laugh.

ALICE

Yeah.

THE SCIENTIST

I could bring you a library, and still I'd find that book in your hands.

ALICE

(jokingly)

You would bring me a library?

THE SCIENTIST chuckles.

THE SCIENTIST

Maybe next week.

ALICE laughs, then hesitates.

ALICE

Next week? Sir, we—

THE SCIENTIST

Only meet biweekly, I know. But I've discussed it with the nurse, and we've decided it would be best to see you weekly from now on.

ALICE

Why?

THE SCIENTIST

How have you been feeling since I last saw you? Emotionally, I mean.

ALICE

Fine. I've been fine, so—

THE SCIENTIST

Be *honest*, Alice.

ALICE sighs.

ALICE

I know what you're trying to ask me.

THE SCIENTIST

Oh? And what's that?

ALICE

You want to know if I've been trying to see myself.

THE SCIENTIST

And have you?

ALICE glances off.

And that's why. I'm... curious about you. You're the only girl who wants to see herself *this* badly. At least, you're the only girl who admits it. Let me ask you, why the curiosity?

ALICE

You've asked me that before.

THE SCIENTIST

I want a better answer.

ALICE

I don't have an answer. *I don't know.*

THE SCIENTIST

He throws his hands up.

Okay, okay. Might I share with you my idea, then?

ALICE

Fine. Shoot.

THE SCIENTIST

I think you want to know your place.

ALICE

What?

THE SCIENTIST

You're curious. It can be a good thing, but it's also the reason you're so... competitive, I believe.

You're desperate to know that you're good enough. You're always asking your peers about their

grades, to know that yours was higher. Or challenging them to races, to make sure you're still the fastest. Wouldn't you agree?

ALICE

I don't—

THE SCIENTIST

I believe— in fact, I'm sure you're trying to do the same thing to your face.

ALICE

No. That's not—

THE SCIENTIST

But you know— that is only going to hurt you. I care about you, Alice. I really do. And I'm *excited* to see what you'll have to offer the world when you get out there. While every other woman is plagued by their appearance from the day they're born, you're learning to value yourself for more than your looks. And what's more, Alice, is that you're *talented*. More so than any other girl here. Your potential— the experiment will benefit greatly. But not if you continue to obsess about this. Do I make myself clear?

ALICE

But, sir— you don't understand. It's like—

ALICE tries to speak but THE SCIENTIST is already closing his notebook and packing up his things.

THE SCIENTIST

I'm afraid we're out of time. But I'll tell you what, you write down your thoughts and I promise you we'll talk about them next week. And I'll ask you to make a promise to me too. Just this week, you won't try to see yourself, okay?

ALICE

Sure, okay. Goodbye.

THE SCIENTIST

Goodbye, Alice. Until next time.

The scientist exits, ALICE is left sitting. She grabs the book beside her and opens it up to a marked page. She stands up and begins reading.

ALICE

'She grasped the cool metal spoon...'

ALICE grabs the spoon from where she had dropped it.

'And noticed the reflection looking right back at her.'

She holds up the spoon and watches it.

Scene 3

ALICE and HATTIE sit together on the floor, playing chess. ALICE has a bag with her, which has a wrapped gift and a book.

ALICE

Do you think I'm competitive?

HATTIE

Sure, but everybody here is competitive. Last week, I walked in on Jo crying because she scored lower than you on the calc test and lost her first place spot on the board. And... you were kind of... gloating.

ALICE

Oh... What'd she get?

HATTIE

A ninety-nine.

ALICE is quiet for a moment.

ALICE

Why are we like that? Why am *I* like that?

HATTIE shrugs.

HATTIE

I dunno.

ALICE moves a piece.

ALICE

Checkmate!

HATTIE

(jokingly)

See? Competitive.

The two chuckle. They begin cleaning up the game.

ALICE

Oh! Let me give you your birthday present!

ALICE pulls the gift out of her bag and hands it to HATTIE. HATTIE unwraps it. It's a beaded friendship bracelet. HATTIE slides it on her wrist.

So you always have me next to you when you're out there– in the real world.

ALICE and HATTIE hug.

HATTIE

I'll miss you. I'll write, I promise.

ALICE

They always say that.

HATTIE looks concerned. The lights flicker.

HATTIE

That's curfew.

HATTIE takes the game and begins to exit.

Coming?

ALICE

You go. I'm gonna stay and read for a little while.

ALICE pulls a book out of her bag.

HATTIE

You'll get in trouble.

ALICE shrugs.

I won't vouch for you.

ALICE

I know, I know. Goodnight.

HATTIE

Goodnight.

HATTIE exits. ALICE moves to a far corner of the room and begins to read. THE SCIENTIST enters, NURSE following with a clipboard.

THE SCIENTIST

Any girls graduating tomorrow?

NURSE

Just one. Number... 46.

THE SCIENTIST

Ah. Hattie.

ALICE perks up at HATTIE's mention. She begins to listen in to their conversation.

Well, prep the surgery room for her. I'd like to have her out as soon as possible.

ALICE

(mouthing to herself)

Surgery?

NURSE

Yes, sir. We can do the facial disfiguration as soon as 4am tomorrow. Should I bring backup?

ALICE gasps without meaning to. She covers her mouth. NURSE shows no reaction, but THE SCIENTIST does something slight. Maybe he quirks an eyebrow.

THE SCIENTIST

Don't bother, she's not a fighter.

NURSE nods and exits. ALICE watches THE SCIENTIST. He looks at his hands and around the room but doesn't turn towards ALICE. He's thinking.

THE SCIENTIST

Alice? Will you come out?

ALICE is silent. THE SCIENTIST turns and locks eyes with her.

Alice...

He seems almost mournful. He takes a step towards ALICE, who backs further into the corner.

ALICE

Don't-

THE SCIENTIST slowly puts his hands up.

THE SCIENTIST

I'm not going to hurt you. Just, please, come with me.

ALICE

But Hattie—

THE SCIENTIST

—is going to be inconsequential, in the grand scheme of things. She's weak, malleable. You, Alice, you are special. I can't— *the experiment* can't lose you. So please...

ALICE stands, slowly. She holds her book out in front of her, like a shield.

ALICE

I love her.

THE SCIENTIST

I've noticed. But she doesn't love you. Not in the same way. Her absence— it will be good for you.

ALICE

Is that what you do to all the girls who come through here? You...*disfigure them*?

THE SCIENTIST nods.

Why?

THE SCIENTIST

That's the experiment. But you don't have to be a part of it, if you don't want to. Alice, I'd like you to work with me, when you're old enough. Would you like that?

ALICE

And do... *that*?

THE SCIENTIST nods. ALICE looks off towards where HATTIE walked away, then back to THE SCIENTIST.

...okay.

THE SCIENTIST smiles kindly as ALICE takes his hand. He leads her away.

End of Play