

Breaking the Ice

A Play in One Act

by

Anna Schwartz

Cast of Characters

TEACHER: levelheaded high school teacher (aged 40-50)

BRANDY: introverted and seeking connection (aged 16-18)

OLIVER: disengaged athlete, Kendra's boyfriend (aged 16-18)

KENDRA: skittish but sweet, dating Oliver (aged 16-18)

MIA: pathological liar in love with Kendra (aged 16-18)

AARON: nervous and likes to be in control (aged 16-18)

ELISE: unapologetically dislikeable (aged 16-18)

CHRIS: overwhelmed with regrets (aged 16-18)

NATHAN: odd outsider who wants to be let in (aged 16-18)

STUDENTS: classmates present in the room, only if numbers permit
(aged 16-18)

A note on casting: Gender is unimportant in the castings except with the trio of Kendra, Mia, and Oliver. Kendra and Mia should be of one gender and Oliver of another. Names and pronouns can be modified to fit the cast.

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(Lights up on a mundane high school classroom filled with desks, backpacks, and students. All students are gathered casually in/around their desks for an icebreaker game led by their TEACHER. They are frozen in time, unable to hear their TEACHER)

TEACHER

The thing about breaking the ice is that no one wants broken ice. Broken ice is just sharp water if you really think about it... I try not to think about it. Broken ice is dangerous, it cuts deep, it makes us vulnerable. So we always end up just *melting* the ice. Painstakingly peeling back layers of "I don't really know you" until we're both drowning in puddles of "I don't really care anymore." And each layer is its own thing. They're not meant to be looked at so closely. They're meant to be broken. Shattered. Collapsed. Destroyed so utterly and completely that all pretenses, false or true, cease to exist on solid enough ground to even try influencing our perceptions. But, again, we don't do that. So my ice breaker, ice melter if you will, is simple. Three fun facts. It's not exactly original, but it takes up enough time that the rest of the class can be reading the syllabus. One less day to plan out. My fun facts have been the same for the past fifteen years. They're not for me. I know it's useless. So I might as well give them a bit of comfort, a bit of strength. Maybe they'll actually break some ice, but I've yet to see any shards.

(The classroom and students come to life)

TEACHER (Cont.)

I'll start us off, ok? No one has ever failed this course, and I don't plan on messing with that streak! I didn't know I wanted to be a teacher until after college, not like some of you with your twenty year plans. And I will never get anyone's name wrong - I've got them memorized already. So, Brandy, why don't you go share your facts?

(BRANDY rises to face her TEACHER and the classroom freezes, unaware of BRANDY's speech or movement)

BRANDY

I hate when you teachers ask us to "share three fun facts about yourselves." Facts are never fun, they just are. Opinions are fun. I wish we got to share three fun opinions. I want to hear if answering unknown phone calls is dangerous, if pennies are worth picking up, or if forgetting an umbrella will really make it rain. I want someone to stand up and say that their fun fact is they hate telling people their fun fact. *(beat)* That'd be a good way to get to know someone: sharing three things we hate. If that's too negative for you, three things we love. Or even three things we know. Three things we know with absolute certainty. I know that superstitions are more trustworthy than people. I know that being invited is always more exciting than showing up. And I know that there are more things that I don't know than things I do. I know that all love is conditional, that growing up sometimes means growing apart, and that everything needs to change for anything to stay the same. And I know that you probably agree, at least a little. And I think that's pretty fun, thinking about how things work the way they should. So if you still want to hear, I suppose my three fun facts are that I am more like you than unlike you, that the impossibility of uniqueness makes us both feel less alone, and that it would mean the world to me if you said that you knew it too.

(The classroom reanimates, with BRANDY standing silently in the gaze of her TEACHER and class)

TEACHER

Brandy? Anything to say?

BRANDY

(unsure)

Um... I was born in a taxi? And I've got a pet chameleon. His name's chalk. 'Cause he's a chalky color.

(OLIVER snickers, KENDRA elbows him affectionately, and TEACHER turns her head in his direction)

TEACHER

I think we've found our next volunteer! Oliver, your facts?

OLIVER

Well I play baseball.

KENDRA

(teasing)

That's not a fact.

OLIVER

It *is* a fact.

KENDRA

Fine, but it's not *fun*. Say something fun.

(OLIVER rises and classroom freezes except for TEACHER and BRANDY, who remain attentive and animate)

OLIVER

She wants something fun. I don't have time for fun. I've got practice. And homework. And whatever else I end up doing during all the time that I want to be doing something else with. Maybe even something with her. I don't feel like I'm wasting time with her. Everything moves like jello, all slow and smooth and calm. Being with her is the only thing I can do that isn't a *chore*, isn't a task. That time doesn't even count. It's not even real life, it's some sort of parallel plane of living. But to her, I think I might be... taking up time. But who cares? She wants fun, they all want fun. No, they want happy. I don't have happy, I have busy. Too busy to feel, too busy to see, too busy to realize I'm too damn busy for my own good. Too busy for anyone's own good. But, stick with me, in a way it *is* for my own good. 'Cause when I'm not busy on the outside I'll get busy in my head. And my brain will start moving too fast, and the gears will all grind together, and then all the little gear-bits that got grinded off will just come shooting out all over the place. But they don't wanna hear that. Guess I'll just have to keep *them* busy so I don't get hit with their little gear-bits.

(OLIVER sits and classroom reanimates)

OLIVER

Something fun? Ok. I play baseball in an ugly, green uniform. Better?

(KENDRA tries to answer, but is cut off)

TEACHER

Great. How about you, Mia?

(MIA rises and classroom freezes except for BRANDY, TEACHER, and OLIVER)

MIA

He only said one. One lousy fact. That hardly seems fair. None of us like these little games, but Oliver gets to skip out. *(deadpan)* Just like he skips math every day! Ha. I love a bad joke. Although technically that was a pun, because of the double-meaning-wordplay. I guess I like puns too. Maybe that can be my fun fact, I like puns. I wonder if anyone *doesn't* like puns. I'd be surprised, and I'm never surprised. There's another! I don't get surprised easily. *(condescending)* That could be fun. You know what'd surprise me? If someone just said that their fun facts were all just lies. Just made up. Lies are always fun. It's just easier to lie when you can, you know? There's the third: I like to lie. 'Course now that I've said that you'll never know how much of this is true. That's the problem with lying, no one knows when it stops. Not even me. So I could say that my fun fact is that I know all of the names of Kendra's cousins because I stalked her mom's facebook account. Or that I know she'll be at that strip mall this Saturday for her 6-month haircut. I could even say that I have a playlist of all the songs she's ever mentioned. *(beat)* Or I could say I've got a boyfriend, but you wouldn't know him. He lives in Canada. His name is Harold, but I call him Harry because Harold is a gross name. Not that Harry's much better. Actually, his name is Carlos, and I'll call him Carl. I guess I don't know anything more about him than you do. Probably because he's not real. Well I can't say that, there might just be a teenaged Carlos somewhere in Calgary at a Tim Hortons right this second. If I

told you there was, would you believe me? People usually believe me. *(to classmates)* Let's see what you'll swallow.

(MIA sits and the classroom reanimates)

MIA (Cont.)

I've got cousins in Calgary. They don't have phones, so I never talk to them. And we only see them on Thanksgiving.

(a pause)

KENDRA

American or Canadian?

MIA

(startled)

Excuse me?

KENDRA

(frantic)

American Thanksgiving or Canadian Thanksgiving? 'Cause I've heard they were two different weeks. 'Course Canadian Thanksgiving doesn't make much sense anyways, at least not in the traditional Thanksgiving sense. But I guess it's more about gratitude and family and shit / now

TEACHER

Kendra!

KENDRA

Sorry ma'am. *(pronounced saw-ree)* Or sorry. *(pronounced sore-ee)* Little Canadian pun. Though it's not really a pun, since the mispronunciation doesn't change the meaning. Or is / it?

MIA

American.

KENDRA

What?

MIA

It's American Thanksgiving. That I visit them. 'Cause I've got the week off.

TEACHER

Let's not get too far off track now, girls.

(KENDRA rises and the classroom freezes except for TEACHER, BRANDY, OLIVER, and MIA)

KENDRA

Off track. She couldn't be more wrong. This is exactly the track I want to be on. Talking with her, you know? She's a special one. One of those shimmering people you can't help but admire. I've only ever misjudged three people. Everyone else I read right. *(beat)* Oliver too. He's one of them. In a way he's the best of them, 'cause he's *mine*. My perfect statue of a man, my David. Shining just a little brighter than all the other marble statues of those special people. Wish I could be one of 'em. *(beat)* No one asked for my facts. But Oliver avoided it pretty well. He knows I don't like "public speaking." So I'll just give you one fact, so you don't miss out. Not too much of an intrusion, right? My fact is that I'm jealous. Jealous of Mia. Jealous of girls like her. Jealous of guys too. And everyone in between. Jealous of his chestnut hair, of their crisp accents, of her shiny smile. Jealousy is a nasty little bug. Makes you feel... immature. Whiny and needy and bratty and rude. I'm jealous of people who aren't jealous. People who can live without that sour taste on their tongues of "I want what they have." But I've got plenty. I guess that makes me ungrateful. I've got a nice family, a sweet boyfriend, and a pretty face. Maybe they're just as jealous of me as I am of them. They're good at hiding it. I hope I'm good at hiding it too.

(KENDRA sits and the classroom reanimates)

TEACHER

Nathan, how about you share now?

NATHAN

Yes ma'am.

(NATHAN rises and the classroom freezes except for BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, and KENDRA)

NATHAN

But I don't think it'll help much. Everyone already hates me. Well, hate is a bit strong. But they don't like me. I don't blame them. Personality isn't my shining virtue. What can I say that'll make them get it? Get that my creepy stare is me trying to start a conversation, get that my awkward jokes were planned out days in advance, get that my weird hobbies are the only thing distracting me from the loneliness of my life. Get that just because I'm a bit shy, I can either be two things: a sexy, mysterious guy, or a total loser. And given that I'm not ruggedly handsome and 6 foot 5, I'm a total loser. It's so unfair, isn't it? But that's high school. That's life. So I guess I can say that I skipped a grade. Or that I can code a video game. Or that I've got a collection of 27 vintage tee shirts. But they don't care anyways. Or maybe they do. But they've got a crap way of showing it.

(NATHAN sits and the classroom reanimates)

NATHAN (Con.t)

I listened to 280,000 minutes of music last year. Not that I calculated, Spotify counted for me. And I like computers. But not as much as I like being without them.

BRANDY

Wait, what?

NATHAN

Like real life. Face to face stuff. You know?

TEACHER

Ohhh-kay then, who's next? *(pause, look around)* Aaron?

AARON

'Course.

*(AARON rises and the classroom freezes except for
TEACHER BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, KENDRA, and NATHAN)*

AARON (Cont.)

I keep three facts ready for this type of stuff. I think I've had the same three all year. Nothing too wild, but I like to know what I'm saying before I say it. Because what you say is what people hear. And what people hear is what they think. And what they think is what they say, and that's what you hear. And I don't like hearing things about me. So as long as I control what I think, I'll control what I say, and control what they hear, and... well, you get the picture. It's important to have a bit of control over the bit of things you can control. 'Cause you certainly can't control much.

(AARON sits and the classroom reanimates)

AARON (Cont.)

I'm the last of six brothers. I've never left the country. And I... I have uh...

*(The classroom freezes except for BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA,
KENDRA, and NATHAN)*

AARON (Cont.)

Did I say the brothers one already? I think I did. Is it worse to repeat a fact or to be one fact short? How am I one fact short, is there nothing else interesting about me? Well shit.

(The classroom reanimates)

AARON (Cont.)

My middle name is Myles.

(a pause, MIA gives an awkward thumbs up)

ELISE

Can I go next?

(TEACHER nods)

ELISE (Cont.)

When I was little, all I wanted to be when I grew up was nice.

(The classroom freezes except for TEACHER BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, KENDRA, NATHAN, and AARON)

ELISE (Cont.)

But I'm not nice anymore. I think I used to be - I know I tried to be. But I'm not anymore. Now when I sit up late at night I don't think about how I'm going to change the world. All I can do is hope the world might change me. Might make me nice again. *(beat)* I wish I had come up with this, but to be honest I found it on reddit. Anonymous of course. Someone said that we all have a bit of "I want to save the world" in us. But it's ok if we only save one person, and it's ok if that person is ourselves. But I can't even save myself. Can't even be nice to me.

(The classroom reanimates)

ELISE (Cont.)

I like nice people. Which means I don't really like me.

(The classroom freezes except for BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, KENDRA, NATHAN, and AARON)

ELISE (Cont.)

But who does these days? Like *themselves* I mean, not like me. Maybe I will eventually. Maybe I'll treat myself like someone I love, and maybe someday that would mean treating myself well. Because right now it doesn't. But it's not like that's my decision. I can't make sense of what happens between my brain and my mouth sometimes. So I just accept it, being a bitch. 'Cause if I did care to be nice, I'd still be mean; only I'd be mean and guilty. So...

(The classroom reanimates)

ELISE (Cont.)

I choose regret for doing what I do over regret for not doing what I want.

(The class pauses, reacting individually to ELISE's answer. TEACHER looks around for a student who hasn't shared yet)

TEACHER

Let's uh... Anyone else?

ELISE

I don't think Chris went yet.

(Chris gives TEACHER a pleading look but is not met with sympathy. He rises and the classroom freezes except for TEACHER, BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, KENDRA, NATHAN, AARON, and ELISE)

CHRIS

Don't know why she'd say that. Not like I have anything too interesting to share. Not like Elise. I mean that was wild, even for her. I understand it though, in a way. Regret eats away at you. But so does doubt, and so does failure. So there's not really a good option, a good method of choosing when to take a chance. Choosing when to speak and when to be spoken to and when to listen and when to be listened to. None of us have that control. All we can do is just keep pushing through. There is no 'other side'. There's only what you have and what you make of it. So if you still want to hear,

(CHRIS remains standing and the classroom reanimates)

CHRIS (Cont.)

I suppose my three fun facts are that

CHRIS, BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, and KENDRA

I am more like you than unlike you, that

CHRIS, BRANDY, OLIVER, MIA, KENDRA, NATHAN,
AARON, and ELISE
the impossibility of uniqueness makes us both feel less alone,
and that

ALL (including TEACHER and STUDENTS)
it would mean the world to me if you said that you knew it too.

THE END