The Liar Paradox

by

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dramatis personae:
Mark – 21 years old. A pragmatist. Female-to-male trans in the early stages of transitioning.
Jordan – 21 years old. Mark’s twin sister. An exhibitionist and a philosopher.
Violet – 21 years old. Mark and Jordan’s childhood friend. Loyal but uncompromising.
Tony – mid-40s. Mark and Jordan’s father. Has the soul of a poet.

Mark should be played by a FTM or cis-female actor. Although the characters’ ethnicities aren’t specified, I strongly encourage diverse casting.

settings:
The play takes place in Chicago on New Year’s Eve and the days immediately following (and a few weeks before). Additional settings include:
a young woman’s bedroom
a hospital
a lecture hall
a bar

the environment:
This play should feel a little bit like a bottle of champagne the moment you open it. The contents are under a lot of pressure and moving very quickly. Settings should be suggestive rather than literal renderings. Scenes should transition as fluidly as possible. All spaces should feel liminal. The videoscape should feel noirish, as should the monologues.

a note on formatting:
An em dash means a character cuts another off, or cuts herself off. An ellipsis indicates trailing off. Slashes designate overlapping. When a sentence ends with no punctuation, the character stops mid-thought

Unless explicitly called for, there are no pauses in this play.

The translation of Rilke is my own, based on literal translation provided by the very generous Sophie Michel.
in the darkness, b-roll footage:

two little girls playing with their mother’s makeup
the film feels vintage but also home video-esque

the film cuts to two glammed-out women driving
big sunglasses, and scarves wrapped around their heads
like in a film noir.
they are laughing, drinking
one of them pulls out an iPhone

the camera gets shaky, cuts out
and back in to a rapid-fire montage. Everything is hyper-real:
a champagne bottle popping, fireworks exploding
bubbles underwater, roaring fire

the film goes black
we hear a sickening crash

silence

onstage, a silhouette of a young woman in a cocktail dress
she has a glass of something

JORDAN

It felt like fireworks.
Like champagne bubbles rushing through the bottleneck
towards the air’s unbearable heaviness.
It felt like an eternity and a heartbeat at once.
It felt like, so cool.
It’s like, you know, when you’re riding the train
and on the next track a train
roars past in the opposite direction
and you catch a glimpse of someone in that other train
Someone you knew. Someone you loved. Someone you lost.
You lock eyes and they start to say something
to tell you your own secrets
and suddenly the train’s passed
and you’re just looking at your own reflection.

It felt like that.

the sound of a train rushing by
Jordan’s bedroom.  
It looks like a hurricane tore through it.  
Books and papers intermingle with lingerie and dirty clothes.

MARK sits on the edge of the bed.  
His discomfort is palpable.  
He wears a suit that’s far too big for his tiny frame.  
JORDAN sets down her drink and strips off her dress.  
She tries on a different one.  
Throughout the scene she’s distracted,  
engrossed in her preparation

Do you see my?  
Oh never mind.  
What do you think about this dress?  
Too boring?

It’s fine.

That means it’s terrible.

They all look good. Just pick one and—

It makes me look like a rhinoceros going through menopause.  

She peels it off.  
In her bra and underwear,  
starts looking for something on the floor.  
MARK averts his eyes.

Fuck. I dropped an earring somewhere.

Can you put something

Am I making you uncomfortable?

MARK
Not you per se so much as/ you crawling around in your—

JORDAN

I am. You’re so uncomfortable right now.

MARK

No I’m not.

JORDAN pulls up her bra
she stands in front of MARK’s face

JORDAN

What about now?

MARK

Yes. Oh god.
Now I am 100% uncomfortable.
Please for fuck’s sake pull your bra down Jordan.
I’m your brother.
I don’t want to see that.

She pulls her bra back down and resumes her search

JORDAN

Chill out.
You’ve seen me naked literally a thousand times.

MARK

It’s different now.

JORDAN

I guess it is.

She refills her drink.

MARK

Are you coming to the party?
I can’t deal with our high school crowd without you.
I have no idea what to tell them. Please, Jorie.

JORDAN

Later. The guy I’m seeing is coming over in a bit.

MARK

Mr. Mysterious.

JORDAN
He doesn’t have a mysterious bone in his body.  

Bring him with you.  

It’s not his scene.  

So you’re really going throw me to the wolves alone.  

I’d invite you to stay and meet him but Violet said you were having drinks before the party tonight.  

You and Violet were talking about me?  

She wanted advice.  
This dress is better.  

What did you tell her?  

About the dress?  

About me.  

Oh. What do you think about it?  

It’s a little short.  

When did you become such a prude?  

She broke up with me last week.  

She said you haven’t touched her since you’ve been home for winter break.
It's complicated.

This is definitely less menopausal rhino.

Glad I could help.

Listen, if you don’t want to go to the party then don’t. But you can’t keep stringing Violet along.

I’m not stringing her along.

What are you doing?

She said you were sleeping with someone else.

That’s not true. It was a one-night stand. This cute girl from my fluid dynamics class who’d been hitting on me all semester. I was drunk. I called Violet the next morning. I feel terrible about it.

Maybe this isn’t a good time for you to be seeing someone. You should take the time to figure out who you are first.

I don’t want to hurt her. I love her.

Then stop screwing around.

Thanks.

Is it weird for you how similar Violet and I look? There must be a complex for that—not Oedipal, that’s when you want to bang your mom.
Gross. First of all, no,
I never think about that—

Never?

Never.
Second of all, I don’t know,
I’m not the philosophy major.

They don’t cover that in fluid dynamics?
Or did you sleep through that lecture.

At least I’m going to be employed when I graduate.

Doing something boring.
Philosophers didn’t invent complexes.
Ow. Fuck.

I think I just found my earring.
Complexes were invented by *tragedy*. And Freud.

Fuck Freud.

He would like that. He was into sexual deviance.
Is my other shoe over there?

This one?

No, the one with the
Wait it might be under this pile
You know what your problem is?

My twin sister is a certifiable nutcase?
JORDAN
You’re too literal.
You have no sense of romance.

MARK
I have a great sense of romance.

JORDAN
Hey Mark, seriously though?

MARK
What?

JORDAN
You need to tell Dad.

MARK
I will.

JORDAN
When? You haven’t even seen him since you got home.

MARK
Soon.

JORDAN
Promise? He’s really upset. He thinks you hate him.
/Can you zip me?

MARK
The world goes round and round and nothing ever changes.

JORDAN
You of all people know that’s not true.

MARK
She turns around and studies him.

JORDAN
I miss my sister.
I miss the girl I used to share secrets with.

MARK
You still have me.
You can tell me anything.

JORDAN
You want to know a secret?
Yes. I miss feeling close to you.  
Tell me something about your boyfriend.

MARK

Let me retie your tie.

JORDAN

It’s fine.

MARK

It’s lopsided.  
This suit looks really cute on you.

JORDAN

Cute isn’t really the look I was going for.

MARK

Handsome, then.

JORDAN

beat

I let him take pictures of me.

MARK

What kind of pictures?

JORDAN starts applying makeup

MARK

If you have to ask I’m not going to tell you anything else.

MARK

How well do you even know this guy?

JORDAN

Well enough.

MARK

I feel like I should have some purview over guys you let take nudie pics of you.

MARK

When you call them nudie pics you make it sound so pervy.
Because it is.

It was kind of sweet, actually.  

JORDAN

You still haven’t told me how you met him. 

MARK

In my seminar on Ancient Greek philosophy. 

JORDAN

I don’t like him already. 

MARK

Relax. It’s not a big deal. It was just fun. 
C’mon. It’s New Years Eve. 
We’re supposed to be having fun. 
Making revolutions. 

JORDAN

Well now I feel better. 

MARK

Let me tell you a riddle. 

JORDAN

I hate riddles. 

MARK

Everything I say is a lie. 

JORDAN

I don’t get it. 

MARK

It’s a paradox. 

JORDAN

Okay? 

MARK

If that statement is true, then everything I say isn’t a lie. 
If it’s a lie, then something I’ve said is true. 

JORDAN

So did he take the pictures or not? 

MARK
What do you think?

You’re just fucking with me.
You would never be that stupid.

I need another drink.

Bottle’s empty.

I’ll go get something else.

Actually, I should go. I have to pick Violet up.

The party will be fine.
I’ll be there as soon as I can.

I can’t talk to you right now.

You don’t have the right to be mad at me
for what I do with my own body.

You know Jordan, for a philosopher,
sometimes you just don’t fucking think.

Stop trying to make the people around you miserable
just because you don’t know who you are anymore.

I promise you, I’m not the one of us who doesn’t know who I am.

That’s right. You’re an asshole.

Some things never change. Happy fucking New Year.
the sound of fire