

Don't You Remember Me? ????

By Aaron Leventman

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...*

Unsettling goodness with a chewy center,

DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME? A Short Play by Aaron Leventman, gives us a surprise reunion between thirty-something Rona and Jeffrey in a brisk series of phone calls. The back and forth in this tightly woven script gives us a chance to fast forward from high school awkwardness to the prime of adulthood when we've finally got the confidence to say what's on our minds. At the chewy center of things are two characters that are at once relatable and troubling. Rona's more than a bit pushy. Jeffrey's most faithful companion is a dust buster. But these two may have more in common than they think. Too bad they live so far away...or is it? Very satisfying. And unsettling.

RONA

It was the same thing in New York, anyway. After all these years I still haven't learned the basic art of small talk.

DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME?
A Short Play
by Aaron M. Leventman

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CHARACTERS:

JEFFREY WEISSBERG: Slacker, polite, but insincere thirty-something

RONA ELLIOT: Strong willed, divisive thirty-something

PLACE: New York City

SETTING: JEFFREY AND RONA'S APARTMENTS
One half of the stage is occupied by Jeffrey and other
by Rona.

AT RISE:

(LIGHTS UP on Rona's side as she looks at a yearbook. She picks up a phone list next to it, finds a number, picks up the phone, and dials. Jeffrey's side LIGHTS UP. He watches TV as he eats some crackers then gets crumbs on the sofa. He curses then vacuums manically. The phone rings. He shuts it off.)

JEFFREY

Hello?

RONA

Jeff? Jeff Weissberg?

JEFFREY

Sorry, but I don't normally pick up blocked calls and I'm not interested.

RONA

No, this isn't a sales call. It's Rona, Jeff. Rona from Country Day High School in Albany. Don't you remember?

JEFFREY

I think so.

RONA

Were you at the reunion last week? I wasn't sure if I missed you there.

JEFFREY

No, I wasn't. There was no one I wanted to see again. (pause)
I mean, except you, of course. But I assumed you wouldn't be there.

RONA

Because everyone thought I was a freak except you?

JEFFREY

Was that true?

RONA

Pretty much. Even though you were the only person who was

reasonably nice to me, I went anyway.

JEFFREY

Good for you.

RONA

Actually, it sucked. No one even remembered me.

JEFFREY

They're probably all losers now, anyway.

RONA

Actually they all have great jobs and families. You have any kids?

JEFFREY

No. You?

RONA

No, not really. I mean, no. I haven't found the right person to have them with yet.

JEFFREY

Well, these days, that doesn't have to stop you.

RONA

Whatever "these days" means.

(She looks at a page in the yearbook.)

Are you still doing theater? You wanted to be an actor, right?

JEFFREY

You remember that? I thought so for a while, but then reality set in. I work on Wall Street.

RONA

So you sold out. That's cool.

JEFFREY

I've changed a lot since then, okay? No one even calls me Jeff anymore. It's Jeffrey. Anyway, how did you get my number?

RONA

The internet. You can find out almost anything from it "these days,"

as you would say. Are you on Facebook?

JEFFREY

No, I don't have time for that kind of thing.

RONA

Hmmm. Well, I hope it's all right that I called.

JEFFREY

Yeah, it's fine. I'm just sort of in the middle of something here.

RONA

Going out for the evening?

JEFFREY

Uh, not exactly.

RONA

Oh. So you're at home alone on a Saturday night. Interesting.

JEFFREY

Right. Maybe I can give you a call another time.

RONA

Actually, I'm coming to New York City soon so I was hoping we could spend time together, and I could stay with you for a few days.

JEFFREY

Uh, sure. I'll call you.

RONA

That's sweet of you, Jeff. You always were considerate, but were always so careful not to be too considerate. Actually, I should call you. It's sort of long distance.

JEFFREY

Where do you live?

RONA

Nebraska.

JEFFREY

How did you end there?

RONA

It's a long story. I'll call you again sometime, all right?

JEFFREY

I guess.

RONA

But will you pick up? You had sort of a history of dodging calls.

JEFFREY

I did? Are you sure that was me?

RONA

Positive.

LIGHTS DIM

LIGHTS UP

(Jeffrey wakes to his
telephone ringing.)

JEFFREY

Hello?

RONA

Oh my God, Jeff. I'm so sorry. Did I wake you?

JEFFREY

Yeah. It's 4 in the morning. Who is this?

RONA

It's Rona, Jeff.

JEFFREY

It's Jeffrey, remember?

RONA

Sorry, Jeff. Listen, I'll call back another time. I thought it was 4 in the afternoon. I was just kind of lonely, so I...

JEFFREY

I guess I can talk for a few. I only have to get up in two hours.

RONA

You're a real sport. Didn't used to be though. I could barely even get you stay on the phone for five minutes, Jeff.

JEFFREY

It's...never mind. Did we used to go out or something?

RONA

For like a millisecond.

JEFFREY

Did we ever...?

RONA

Nope. Came close once, though. I let you finger me in your car in the school parking lot. But that's as far as it got. I never knew why. You seeing anyone now?

JEFFREY

Not really.

RONA

Just out of curiosity, what's the longest relationship you've ever been in?

JEFFREY

I don't know. A few months, maybe.

RONA

Just what I thought.

JEFFREY

Don't you have to get up for work tomorrow?

RONA

Changing the subject. That's cool. My family's rich so I don't have to work.

JEFFREY

Lucky you. So what do you do all day?

RONA

Paint. Draw. Write poems. Play with myself. Nothing special.

JEFFREY

As long as you're happy, I guess.

RONA

You happy getting up at 6?

JEFFREY

It's not so bad. You have any friends out there?

RONA
(sarcastic) Yeah, I'm the toast of the town.

JEFFREY
I'm sorry.

RONA
After all these years I still haven't learned the basic art of small talk.

JEFFREY
You're doing just fine now. Listen, I should go back to sleep.

RONA
I know. It's too bad I live all the way out here, although you were never too good at returning phone calls, anyway.

JEFFREY
Well, I was a teenager.

RONA
But people don't really change that much, right?

LIGHTS DIM

LIGHT UP

(Jeffrey watches TV again
as he polishes the floor.
His phone rings.)

JEFFREY
Hello?

RONA
Hi, Jeff. It's me again.

JEFFREY
Who's this?

RONA
It's Rona. Who do you think?

JEFFREY
Oh, hey. What's up?

RONA
Home alone again?

JEFFREY

(defensive) Uh, no. I was having a party.

(He turns party music on.)

RONA

(suspiciously) How many people are there?

JEFFREY

I don't know. 20 or so.

RONA

Is that a good turnout for you? I mean, how many didn't show?

JEFFREY

I don't know. The night's not over yet.

RONA

Hey, you want to hear what you wrote to me in our high school yearbook?

JEFFREY

Actually...

RONA

(recites from memory) "Dear Rona, I know that I haven't always been the best friend to you but I hope that we can remain in touch forever."

JEFFREY

Listen, Rona. I was probably drunk when I wrote it.

RONA

That's nice to know.

JEFFREY

You know, I went through a lot in therapy. I'm almost like a different person. You probably wouldn't even recognize me.

RONA

Everyone's changed, that's the problem. You know, in college, I used to get invited to dinners, openings, you name it. I could walk down the street and run into, like 5 people in one afternoon. Now, I hardly know anyone. What happened, Jeff? Why did everyone drift apart?

JEFFREY

Maybe it's because you live in Alaska.

RONA

It's Nebraska. No one in New York even knows I left.

JEFFREY

Actually, I know how you feel.

RONA

You know you can call me any time. I don't have anything to do all day except pick lint out of my bellybutton.

JEFFREY

Why don't you get a job or something?

RONA

There's nothing I know how to do.

JEFFREY

So, volunteer. There has to be something you can do with your life.

RONA

You should talk, Mr. Netflix.

JEFFREY

Look, I never asked you to call me. I don't even remember who you are.

RONA

So you lied to me.

JEFFREY

I felt sorry for you.

RONA

I thought you remembered me. I thought you were my friend.

(She hangs up the phone).

JEFFREY

Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean...Rona?

(Jeffrey dials again.)

Yes, I need the number for a Rona...Rona..., I don't even know her last name. What's the area code for Alaska?

LIGHTS DIM

LIGHTS UP

(Jeff polishes a chair. His phone rings again.)

JEFFREY

Hello?

RONA

Hi, Jeff. It's me. (pause) Me meaning Rona.

JEFFREY

Hey, I tried to call you but I didn't even know your last name.

RONA

It's Elliot, Jeff. Rona Elliot. You never even asked me for my last name.

JEFFREY

I know. I'm sorry.

RONA

Well, I'm on my way over. What's your address?

JEFFREY

What do you mean?

RONA

To visit. I'm in New York. You said you wanted to hang out.

JEFFREY

I did?

RONA

So it's all right if I stay with you for a night or two?

JEFFREY

Rona, I'm sorry, but I'm just not into having company now. I shouldn't have said you could stay here. (pause)

RONA

No, you shouldn't have. But it's all right. Can't we at least get together for dinner? (pause)

JEFFREY

Actually, Rona, I'm, sorry. I'm not free this week. I...I just can't.

(pause)

RONA

We have a lot in common after all. Neither of us has changed one bit, "Jeffrey."

(Rona shakes her head and hangs up the phone. Jeff's apartment goes BLACK. Rona pulls another yearbook out of her suitcase along with another telephone list. She finds a number on it and dials.)

RONA

Hi, Veronica? It's me, Lina Lindquest from George Washington High School in New York City. Did I miss you at the reunion last week? You see, I always remembered you, Veronica, because you were the only person who was nice to me...

BLACKOUT

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS... *Don't You Remember Me?* was inspired by several different but related sources. Over 20 years ago, there was a short-lived spin-off of 60 Minutes called 60 Minutes 2. On one of the segments, a journalist went to a reunion for a high school that he never attended. Everyone except one person pretended that they remembered him. Around this same time, my partner's 6th grade girlfriend tracked him down and starting calling our house repeatedly, 50 years after they initially knew each other, wanting to reignite some kind of connection with him. This posed two questions which fascinated me. Why are some people stuck in a certain part of their lives? Are the people that we thought made a difference in our histories really as significant as we thought they were, or were they idealized by our imaginations?

AUTHOR BIO: Aaron Leventman attended Columbia University's Graduate School for film where his thesis screenplay was given a professional reading at the Union Square Theatre in Manhattan. He moved to Santa Fe from Provincetown after his involvement as a writer/director/actor with the Provincetown Theatre Company. When living in Santa Fe, he performed with most of the local theatre companies in both classics and original plays. He's also appeared in industrials, commercials, short films, and features and is currently represented by Phirgun Main Worldwide in New Mexico.

Aaron has enjoyed over 30 productions of his plays all over the country, many of which are published and available on Amazon.com. He co-produced an evening of his own short works was met with tremendous acclaim including the Mayor declaring LGBT Theatre Day in Santa Fe on opening night for the first time in the city's history. His

recent play *Blanche in a Wheelchair* was a finalist for the Samuel French OOB One Act Play Festival and the Secret Theatre's One Act Factor, both in New York. It is soon to be published by Smith Scripts in the U.K. He was the producer of a monthly online LGBTQ+ short play series through his company Almost Adults Productions which has been bringing together talent and audiences from all over the world.

Aaron is also a playwriting, screenwriting, acting, and film history instructor at Santa Fe Community College, a film festival curator, and has a private writing coach practice. He was proud to have been recently chosen as a fan guest host on Turner Classic Movies, in conversation with TCM host Alicia Malone about the 80s classic *Crossing Delancey*.
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