

Lab Rats

by

Patrick Gabridge

Patrick Gabridge
14 Farragut Avenue
Medford, MA 02445
617-959-1437
Pat@gabridge.com
Www.gabridge.com

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CHARACTERS

MIKA KOVALEVSKI Mid 20s-early 30s. Funky, maybe a little punk. Tattoos or piercings might make sense. White.

JAKE (JAEQUAN) SIDWELL Mid 20s-early 30s. Black. On the geeky side, but not necessarily obvious on first glance.

SETTING

Various waiting and exam rooms in hospitals and research labs, in Boston. Each of these is very simply represented. The action should move as quickly and seamlessly as possible. So, even though each waiting room is a different room, this should be indicated with changes of very small details (or lights or projections), and without extensive moving of furniture or decorations or stagehands mucking about in the dark.

TIME

Now.

10/29/15

Scene 1

(Scene: Center stage are two chairs that comprise the waiting room. On either side are two examination rooms, very simply represented, which might have another chair, an exam table/cot, and a basket for clothes.)

(The waiting rooms are different rooms with each scene, so there can be just one detail that shifts or changes to indicate this.)

(At Rise: A waiting room. Mika and Jake sit in chairs, filling out forms on clipboards.)

MIKA

Does this stuff make you antsy?

JAKE

Me?

MIKA

I would *so* like to end up in the control group for once. Just one fucking time. Are you always this calm?

JAKE

I. I guess so.

MIKA

You guess so? How about a little self-awareness? That's the whole point, isn't it? That's what they pay us for--potential side effects and basic self-awareness. So we can tell them what's going on inside. Right? With a zillion fucking forms. I swear every time it's more paperwork.

(Mika sits and tries to fill out her form again.)

MIKA

I'm tempted to just check off things randomly.

JAKE

But. You.

MIKA

I wouldn't. Of course not. I get the rules. Code of the lab rat, and all that.

JAKE

Code?

MIKA

You know: These scientists are trying to accomplish something important, so don't fuck around. Answer honestly and correctly. Sacred responsibility and all that.

JAKE

Right. That. That's how I see it, too.

MIKA

Jesus, look at my hand shaking. I can't believe we've still got two more weeks of this shit. If they pull me off now, they'd better pay me the full amount. Sometimes, I think they try to save their budgets by yanking me at the last minute and acting like it's my fault it didn't go to completion.

JAKE

Yeah. I hate that.

MIKA

Fuckers. Excuse me. I'm not always like this. I firmly blame the medication for. For my mental state. *(suddenly notices something about him)* Ha! I've seen you before.

JAKE

Me? I. Uh. Mass General?

MIKA

Could be. Oh, right, the dialysis trial.

JAKE

Probably.

MIKA

I never forget a face. That's a lie. But I remember you. And you remembered me, of course.

JAKE

Of course.

MIKA

That one was a bitch.

JAKE

It was... pretty uncomfortable.

MIKA

I felt like a human pincushion. Fucking incompetent sadists.

JAKE

At least you've got light skin. They could never find a vein on me.

MIKA

You have perfect skin. I'm so white I'm practically see-through. My skin shows every puncture. The track marks made me look like a fucking junkie. Got me fired from my job.

JAKE

That's terrible.

MIKA

Well, it was either that or the fact that I told my dickhead manager to go fuck himself.

JAKE

They don't like that.

MIKA

I prefer to blame the track marks. Not sure it was worth the six hundred bucks. What's your name?

JAKE

Jake.

MIKA

I'm Mika.

JAKE

Nice to, ah, meet you.

MIKA

A complete thrill, I'm sure. Don't worry, you'll be able to scrape the memory out of your mind if you work at it.

JAKE

No, I--

MIKA

Just kidding. Jesus. You should check out the trial that offers sense of humor implants.

JAKE

That. That'd be cool.

MIKA

They wouldn't take you. You're hopeless. Just kidding. It's the medication talking. You're fine. I'm the one. It's always me. Don't worry. For all you know, this might be how I normally am and I'm in the control group, too. We'll never know. Right? Double blind. I'm done. See you. (*calling out*) Who wants my form? Who wants a complete and beautiful form? I am your data! I am your data!

(Mika exits, waving her clipboard. Jake watches her go, then returns to his paperwork.)

Scene 2

(Exam room. Mika looks out at images or slides.)

MIKA

Blue.

(next image flashes at her)

MIKA

Blue.

(next image)

MIKA

Blue.

(next image)

MIKA

Blue.

(next image)

MIKA

Blue.

(next image)

MIKA

Seriously? Fucking Blue.

(next image)

MIKA

Blue.

(next image)

MIKA

Red! Oh, my god! Thank you! Red, red, red, red!

(next image)

MIKA

Blue.

(Lights out on Mika.)

Scene 3

(A different waiting room. Mika has a logbook in hand.)

(Jake enters, also carrying a logbook. A little agitated.)

MIKA

Fancy seeing you here. Jake, right?

(Jake sits next to her. Fidgety as hell.)

MIKA

Last time you saw me, I was pretty looped on meds from the other trial. Definitely not the placebo. But this stuff isn't doing much. How about you?

JAKE

I AM THE GOD OF HELLFIRE.

MIKA

Oooh. Maybe I am in the control group for once.

JAKE

I AM THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS.

MIKA

I was pretty sure they were testing a laxative.

JAKE

MY BOWELS ARE AS EMPTY AS THE DARK CAVES OF NIMROTH.

MIKA

Side effects are a bitch. Did you miss me?

JAKE

YOUR IMAGE IS BURNED INTO MY BRAIN LIKE THE DESERT SUN.

MIKA

I'll take that as a yes.

JAKE

YOU ARE AS RADIANT AS THE MOON.

MIKA

That's the drugs talking. Not that I don't appreciate it. Flattery will get you everywhere. Seriously, if people say nice things to me, I'm putty in their hands. Which is why I stay away from nice people. Much better for me to hang with assholes. Good thing they didn't give me whatever you've got.

JAKE
YOU WOULD BECOME A BURNING VOLCANO.

MIKA
Exactly. Hey. Do you want something to eat? Maybe take the edge off?

(She takes a small container from her backpack and gives it to Jake.)

MIKA
It's a cupcake. Dark chocolate, with fondant topping, and hazelnut filling.

(He examines it, then devours it.)

JAKE
A UNIVERSE OF PURE JOY HAS ERUPTED IN MY MOUTH.

MIKA
Baking is the one thing I'm really good at. Good enough for people to pay me. Sometimes.

JAKE
YOU ARE THE GODDESS OF TRUTH, HOPE, AND BEAUTY.

MIKA
That's what all the guys say after they eat my cupcakes. Are you okay?

JAKE
I AM HE WHO HAS CRAWLED FROM UNDER THE GROUND, INTO THE LIGHT. I AM HE WHO DREAMS DREAMS. I AM THE CUR WAITING FOR THE KICK AND BEGGING FOR THE BONE.

MIKA
I have a feeling the trial ends for you today. Have you been keeping your logbook?

(He hands it to her. She thumbs through it.)

MIKA
Oh. The switch to red Sharpie was a bold choice. Nice doodles. Yikes. Okay. I don't think the FDA will be clearing this drug. When they say "call if you have any unexpected side effects," I think this is what they mean.

JAKE
I AM A PORTAL TO THE WORLD BEYOND WORLDS.

MIKA
Maybe I'll hang around after, just to make sure you get home okay.

JAKE
YOU ARE THE SILVER LIGHT OF KINDNESS.

MIKA
Not exactly. But you're pretty fucked up. You go in first.

JAKE
GOODBYE MIKA, ANGEL OF A THOUSAND FUTURES.

(Jake exits to the lab, with his log book.)

JAKE
I AM HERE FOR THE SCIENTISTS!

(Mika watches him go, and waits for her turn.)

MIKA
Okay.

(end of scene.)

Scene 4

(Jake and Mika in separate exam rooms.)

(Simultaneously, they each undress down to their underwear and attempt to put on hospital gowns, which, as with all hospital gowns, is difficult to accomplish with any sense of dignity. And these particular gowns might be especially difficult.)

(The undressing and dressing should take on the form of a short synchronized dance piece, which might be a combination of simple, comic, and intimate.)

(They exit to the waiting room.)

Scene 5

(A different waiting room. Jake in a hospital gown, waiting.)

(Mika enters, also in a hospital gown.)

MIKA

Keep your eyes where they belong, Mister.

JAKE

Sorry. I didn't. I wouldn't.

MIKA

Jake, Jake, Jake. What are we going to do with you?

JAKE

Look. About the other day.

MIKA

That was some good shit. You were... Wow.

JAKE

I'm sorry if I said anything too...

MIKA

Talk about blasted.

JAKE

Anything I said, was pure... You know. Medication.

MIKA

What? You don't really want to populate the universe with our children?

JAKE

Did I really--

MIKA

OUR OFFSPRING WILL BE DEMI-GODS!

JAKE

Oh, man.

MIKA

YOUR BEAUTY WILL BLOT OUT THE SUN. You have a way with words when you're six miles high.

JAKE

That. That. That wasn't really me.

MIKA

Are we ever really ourselves? Or maybe we're always ourselves, no matter what.

JAKE

No. No, that wasn't me.

MIKA

Any of us, all concentrated and hyped up, is a lot to take. Better be careful.

JAKE

Yeah. *(beat)* Got any more of those cupcakes?

MIKA

So you were in there somewhere.

JAKE

It was really, really, really good.

MIKA

They're like chocolate crack. You'll be knocking over liquor stores and breaking piggy banks to buy more.

JAKE

You just gave me the first one to get me hooked?

MIKA

First one's always free, but after that, you pay and pay and pay.

(She produces a cupcake in a case.)

JAKE

I don't have any money.

MIKA

One more freebie.

(He takes the cupcake.)

MIKA

Honey caramel. I baked some for the bachelorette party of an old friend. To which I was not invited, I might add.

(He eats the cupcake, carefully.)

JAKE

Wow.

MIKA

Not bad, huh?

JAKE

It's like literal magic.

MIKA

If I made those very often, I'd weigh five hundred pounds. Resistance is futile.

JAKE

"All your base are belong to us."

MIKA

What?

JAKE

Geek humor. Sorry.

MIKA

Ah.

JAKE

Thanks. And. Thanks for getting me home the other day.

MIKA

I loved how you walked up to the Orange Line train and said "I COMMAND THEE TO OPEN." (beat) So, who was that lady?

JAKE

Lady?

MIKA

When I dropped you off. The one who opened the door.

JAKE

My aunt. I've been staying at her place.

MIKA

She doesn't like me. The look she gave me.

JAKE

She's just. Um. Protective.

MIKA

Yeah. A little. "Who is this girl, Jaequan?" You were in no condition to answer. Did she think I drugged you? It was clear she didn't want any explanation from me.

JAKE

She's all right. I'm. I'm just staying there until I can get enough saved up. For a trip. I travel. That's why I do all this. You know? Earn money, to see the world.

MIKA

No shit?

JAKE

Yeah. And. Well. I was thinking. Maybe South America next. Patagonia. Tierra del Fuego. End of the earth.

MIKA

Wow. So you've already been other places?

JAKE

Sure.

MIKA

Where?

JAKE

Oh. Nepal. Turkey. The Maldives.

MIKA

I hadn't pictured you as... An Adventurer.

JAKE

Yeah, I don't fit the stereotype. Not rich, white, or handsome.

MIKA

No. No. That's not what I meant. That's not. What the fuck are the Maldives, anyway?

JAKE

A bunch of islands in the Indian Ocean. White sand, water so clear it's like it's not even there. Like out of a postcard. If sea levels keep rising, they won't be around much longer. The waves will wipe them off the face of the earth.

MIKA

So you just go by yourself, jetting around the world?

JAKE

Yeah. Sure. Pretty much.

MIKA

That's something.

JAKE

This test today gets me closer, but I still have to save a lot more. You ever do the MRI before?

MIKA

I hate it. They stick you into that tube, and for these brain tests they ask you questions in the headphones, but it's impossible to hear because the machines are so fucking loud. Make sure you take out every piece of metal on your body. If you have any hidden piercings, do not mess around.

JAKE

Hidden piercings?

MIKA

You know.

(She points to his crotch.)

MIKA

Because they'll rip right out.

JAKE

Yikes. No. I don't. Have. Anything like that.

MIKA

I wish they'd give me something to take the edge off, but that would mess with the experiment. I was tempted to do a couple shots, before I came over... but you know.

JAKE

The Code.

MIKA

Exactly. So I... I... I might have freaked out a little the last time I did one of these.

JAKE

A little?

MIKA

A lot.

JAKE

It'll be all right. If I hear you screaming, I'll, uh, leap in and drag you out.

MIKA

Yeah?

JAKE

Yeah. I'll be right here.

(Her name is called.)

JAKE

Good luck.

MIKA

Thanks.

(She exits.)

(Jake waits, listening carefully. We might hear the sound of the MRI machine, but no hint of Mika in distress.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 6

(Mika at a table in an exam room. There are several three-dimensional puzzles on the table. And a mug of magic markers.)

MIKA

Tell me when to go. Are you ready? I'm telling you, I'm good at these. Whenever I'm ready? Oh, I'm ready. One, two, three.

(She picks up the first puzzle and solves it with ease.)

MIKA

I hope you were paying attention. And now, with the... Like up my nose? For five seconds? Who inhales a marker for five whole seconds? People whose brains are already fried. Okay. Fine. Whatever. Cast at the end, right?

(Mika uncaps a marker and inhales for a full five seconds.)

MIKA

Whew! Okay. Couldn't give me the strawberry ones? Whatever. Ready. Set. Go.

(She picks up the second puzzle. She struggles, but solves it.)

MIKA

Take that, motherfucker. Sorry. Must be the fumes. Okay. Really?

(She pick up another marker.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 7

(Exam room. Jake enters and puts on a pair of serious headphones. Gives the thumbs up to the examiner. Listens carefully.)

(We hear a tone. Jake raises his hand. Puts it back down when the sound ends.)

(We hear a slightly higher pitched tone. Jake raises his hand.)

(We hear a super high pitched tone. This is dog whistle high, at the very edge of our hearing. Jake raises his hand.)

(We hear nothing. Jake hears something we do not. Raises his hand.)

(end of scene.)

Scene 8

(A different waiting room.)

(Jake has a clipboard full of forms. He finishes the last form and waits.)

(Mika enters with her clipboard, carrying a trash can.)

JAKE

Hey.

(She sits in the chair.)

MIKA

Hi.

(She vomits into the trash can.)

MIKA

Sorry.

JAKE

Are you all right?

MIKA

I'm fine. I'm not pregnant.

JAKE

Oh.

(She pukes into the can.)

JAKE

Are you sure you're okay?

MIKA

Fine. I'm fine.

JAKE

Why... Why would I think you're pregnant?

MIKA

That's the standard punishment for bad girls in movies. They have sex, and then they vomit. That's how you know they're pregnant.

JAKE

Oh. Yeah. I guess you're right. But you're not?

MIKA

Not having sex?

JAKE

Oh. No. Not pregnant. I wouldn't ask if you were having, ah... I mean. Ah. Do you even have a?

MIKA

Boyfriend? Maybe.

JAKE

Oh.

MIKA

No. I don't. But if I did, we might fuck all the time. Or maybe it was with some guy I met at a club, and we did it in the bathroom, or out in the alley.

JAKE

Do you even like going to clubs?

MIKA

No. Maybe it was with some random guy I met in the waiting room of an experiment.

JAKE

Oh. You. You wouldn't do that. Would you?

MIKA

There's lots you don't know about me.

JAKE

Sure.

MIKA

For example: I get really cranky when I puke. But not when I'm pregnant. When I was pregnant, I was not cranky. I was just... weird. Er. Weirder.

JAKE

You were pregnant?

MIKA

Once. Moral retribution.

JAKE

So you're a... you have a...

MIKA

Me? No. No. Can you imagine me having a kid?

JAKE

I don't know.

MIKA

Seriously. Talk about absolute fucking disaster. No, that was not going to happen.

(She retches into the can again.)

MIKA

Pretty sure it's a side effect from last week's testing. It was either the one about magic marker fumes or the cold medicine.

JAKE

Want some water?

(He offers her his water bottle.)

MIKA

Please.

(She takes some deep breaths to steady herself. Drinks most of the water. Pulls herself together.)

MIKA

Thanks.

(She hands him back the water bottle, but he declines.)

JAKE

That's okay. Keep it.

MIKA

You're being nice to me. I warned you about that.

JAKE

Sorry.

(She keeps the bottle.)

MIKA

You probably don't want my puke germs on it anyway.

JAKE

Exactly.

MIKA

It's not my fault I'm allergic to whatever chemicals those sadists were using. So you're here to sign up for the big one?

JAKE

Yeah. Hope I make it.

(He shows her his completed forms.)

MIKA

Ever do a sleep study before?

JAKE

I can never get in.

MIKA

Me neither. \$10,000 brings out every lab rat in town. Even the pukey ones. Do I look all right? If I look like I'm sick, they won't take me.

JAKE

You look fine.

MIKA

If someone like you, and by "someone like you," I mean someone who is generally nice, says I look fine, rather than lovely or whatever, I must look like shit.

JAKE

You look--

MIKA

Don't bother. Hopefully I just look like I need 73 days of rest and relaxation. I love the ad--"plenty of time to catch up on leisure activities."

JAKE

They said I could bring my laptop, if I get picked.

MIKA

Lucky you. I wish they had a kitchen. I know it sounds stupid, but all that time without being able to bake something might send me over the edge. *More* over the edge.

JAKE

Do you know how many they take?

MIKA

Not many. Eight?

JAKE

Maybe we'll both get picked. That'd be cool. I've been talking to Desmond--he was in the study last year. He told me exactly how to fill out the form. On some questions you have to be real careful. Check the wrong box and you're out.

MIKA

I might have talked to Desmond myself. Gotta have the right answers. They try to trick you.

JAKE

Right. To weed us out. But not this time. This time, I'll answer every one perfectly.

MIKA

\$10,000 would pay for a lot of plane tickets.

JAKE

Yeah. Patagonia, here I come.

MIKA

So if you get picked, when it's all over, you'll just go right to the airport? Off you go, into the wild blue yonder?

JAKE

Well. I mean, yeah, sure.

MIKA

Oh. That's cool.

JAKE

But. You know. There's a lot of planning to do.

MIKA

You'd have more than two months to plan. And they'll even let you bring your laptop. What else are you going to do?

JAKE

Actually, I have this game I'm writing. I figure maybe I'll have the time to finish it, you know.

MIKA

A computer game?

JAKE

Yeah. Small scale, multi-player fantasy stuff.

MIKA

Dragons and unicorns?

JAKE

Oh, a lot more than that. You become a character going on a grand adventure, through battles and mazes and fighting monsters.

MIKA

And people will play this?

JAKE

Once I finish.

(She holds out the water bottle.)

MIKA

Cool. Hey. Would you consider refilling this? There's a drinking fountain down the hall. I'm a little wobbly, and I want to save up for when I need to march into the interview room and attempt to look completely healthy.

JAKE

Is that being too nice?

MIKA

Nicer than I deserve, but not too nice.

JAKE

Okay. Sure.

(He takes the water bottle and exits.)

(She quickly picks up his clipboard. Looks over his forms.)

MIKA

Oh. Really?

(She makes a few changes to his forms. Shakes her head. Checks a few more. Quickly returns the clipboard to the chair, as...)

(Jake enters, with the full water bottle.)

MIKA

Thanks.

JAKE

No problem. I hope you feel better soon.

MIKA

I'm sure I will. Hey, what I told you before. About the fact that I was once... Pregnant. I know I made it sound like I didn't... well, it's not something I tell people about. Okay?

JAKE

Sure. Yeah. Of course not. I would never.

(A sound from offstage.)

JAKE

Oh. That's me. Okay, wish me luck.

MIKA

Good luck.

(He exits. Mika looks carefully over her own forms.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 9

(Jake in a different exam room, on a different day. He sits in a chair, and looks out, a little uncomfortable.)

JAKE

I don't. I don't usually like talking about. These things. I'm hoping that I get into that sleep study, over at MGH, but they're taking their time.

So, anyway, here I am. I read that this study is for people who have. Experienced trauma. So, I don't know if I, you know, qualify. But it's \$250. I'm sure it helps some people, to, you know, talk about it. Or to take the pills. I saw there are meds involved, as part of this.

Do I have nightmares? Sometimes.

Sometimes, it's just that, during the day, I get. Distracted. I could concentrate enough to get through high school, 'cause it was mad easy. But then, after. In college. It was hard to. I just kept thinking that my parents might be wondering, about me. Somewhere. And at night, I'd thrash in the covers, my teeth grinding, and no one wanted to room with me, which was understandable. You know? I had to drop out. I had to. It was for the best.

What was the trauma I experienced?

Right. So.

There was just. That one time. Well, I mean. There were times. But this one incident. I was pretty young, six years old. My father was standing there, in the kitchen, with the knife in his hand. And he looked so surprised. His head was bleeding, where she'd hit him with something. And he seemed confused, like "whose blood is this?" But the blood on the knife was hers. Just the second before, they had been screaming and clawing at each other, and the next moment it was just so.

Quiet.

The kind of quiet that when it ends you know there is going to be this explosion, of sound, of grief, of something.

Even though I was so young, I had learned this, from practice. But this time it never came. It just stayed quiet, and that's when I knew it was bad.

(He stops. Waits. Listens.)

JAKE

Someone called an ambulance. She lived. But she was never the same. Never. And he's still in prison.

My aunt took me in. And I. I just. My mom was a strong woman, all those years. It was just a part of them, part of how they were with each other. I never thought anything about it. But then.

And now, sometimes it's hard to talk. To people. I'm okay on the computer. Like with the game, it's so cool. The words and the code just flow out of me. So much better than in real life.

So anyway, that's my story.

How many weeks do we have to do this? It's \$250 at the end, right?

(End of scene.)

Scene 10

(Sleeping facility waiting room.)

(Jake is already there, waiting.)

(Mika enters, dragging a suitcase and carrying two large black trash bags that clank and make an impressively loud racket.)

JAKE

Hey.

MIKA

Hey. *(beat)* What are you doing here? I thought you didn't get in.

JAKE

I didn't.

MIKA

Oh. So.

JAKE

I'm not going to see you for a while. So. I.

MIKA

You're here to wish me sweet dreams?

JAKE

Something like that. Yeah. 73 days is a long time.

MIKA

I hope I can stay sane.

JAKE

Stay?

MIKA

Oh, listen to you. Very feisty. Fine. Maybe I will become sane. You gonna miss me?

JAKE

Maybe. Yeah. I guess so. Yes.

MIKA

That's sweet.

JAKE

I still can't believe they didn't pick me.

MIKA

It stinks.

JAKE

I worked and worked on that application. I was so sure I had everything just right. I had the right answers from Desmond.

MIKA

Maybe they were looking for something different this time.

JAKE

Maybe.

MIKA

What are you saying?

JAKE

It's because I'm black. Happens all the time. When they want to test something terrible, well, then they call up the black volunteers. "Let's see how it works if we don't treat their syphilis?" Sterilizations, lobotomies. Thomas Jefferson and small pox. Sure, that's all fine. But give a brother some serious cash for a sleep study? Never. My brain waves are just as good as yours.

MIKA

Of course they are. Racist bastards.

JAKE

Why is race even on the forms? Huh? Is it relevant to the tests? Are they really going to claim that their results only apply to white people? Do white people have different brains? Different dreams? I guess we don't need to measure black dreams. What's the point, they're worthless anyway.

MIKA

I know it seems bad. But, look. There were a lot of applicants.

JAKE

Don't stick up for them.

MIKA

Sorry. Assholes.

JAKE

I guess they're your friends, now that you're in.

MIKA

No. They're idiots. I just need the money. As much as anyone, I swear.

JAKE

I really needed that money. Really, really needed that money.

MIKA

Right. For plane tickets. To see the world.

JAKE

Tickets. Yeah.

MIKA

You'll still get there. You just might have to stick around a little longer, that's all.

JAKE

I could have finished my game.

MIKA

Which will be brilliant, I'm sure. You still will.

JAKE

I could have. Gotten out. But no.

MIKA

You just have to keep signing up.

JAKE

I will. But for now I get the needle pricks and the creepy meds. And trauma studies. And little twenty dollar tests.

MIKA

You're not the only one who needed this, okay?

JAKE

I know.

MIKA

I'm not looking for a plane ticket. I'm looking for rent. In a big way.

JAKE

I'm happy for you. I am.

MIKA

Really? Look, I'm sorry. Sorry it didn't work out.

JAKE

Whatever. It's good that you're going. What's in the bags?

MIKA

My baking gear, and just about everything else.

JAKE

I thought they don't have a kitchen.

MIKA

It's for when I get out. Wherever I end up. My roommates kicked me out.

JAKE

What?

MIKA

Yeah. Complete bitches when it comes to paying the rent. I told them that once this experiment is done, I'll have plenty of cash. But Amanda is like, *you're three months behind*, and then Tiffany is all up in my grill about baking in the middle of the night, though I hardly ever complain when they're stomping around with their drunk ass boyfriends at one in the morning. And then one of them ate half the cupcakes that I'd baked, baked for you by the way. Last time, it cost me an entire catering gig. How am I supposed to pay my rent if they eat the fucking cupcakes that I'm supposed to sell to pay it? They laugh and act like it's a joke-- me and my little bake sale life.

But I stay, because the place is dirt cheap and has an actual kitchen. I hide out in my room and try not to mess with them. But she ate fucking my cupcakes. Amanda. I know it was her--little chocolate ring around the edges of her lips. Even so, maybe I should not have whacked her over the head with my cookie sheet. She's lucky I didn't have a fucking knife in my hand.

She's pretty strong for a bulimic, spray-tanned little twat. I could have taken her if it wasn't for Tiffany jumping in. Two on one? How is that fair? And I'm the one who keeps the place clean, you know? Because I can't have their long, overly straightened, bleached blond hairs in my frosting. Who are they kidding? No one's hair is that straight.

Look at this--they dented my bundt pan. How am I going to fix that? How am I going to fix any of it? Where am I going to go? This is it. All of my shit, in two bags and a suitcase. At least I've got a place to keep it all together for 73 days.

JAKE

And ten thousand dollars waiting for you when you get out.

MIKA

But where am I going to stay until I get my check? I called to ask--do I get my check on the last day? Because I'm going to need it. And the lady on the phone, she says, *well, no, it usually takes four to six weeks to process the checks*.

JAKE

Damn.

MIKA

Complete fucking bullshit. But what can I do? I need to make it through the entire study first. Which I may or may not do. I might crack up from the isolation or boredom or from picking a fight with one of the other losers whose lives are so marginal they can spend two months sleeping with probes up their asses.

JAKE

Maybe your roommates will calm down a little, since you'll be gone for a while.

MIKA

They've already got the room rented out, to one of their little college friends. Stephanie. Tiffany, Amanda, and Stephanie. Jesus fucking Christ. I can't even go back there, because of the restraining order.

JAKE

Restraining order?

MIKA

More bullshit. Amanda's father is a lawyer--they whip that shit out like candy on Easter: *Here you go little girl, keep that bad roommate away. She's so scary.* I'm not the scary one. You should see the claws on that girl. She's had an entire army of Vietnamese manicurists applying polish for so long, they're like that guy from the X-men.

JAKE

Wolverine?

MIKA

Exactly. Ka-ching. I thought she was going to slice me to bits with those nails. Which is why I caught her upside the head with the cookie sheet. Which sounded good, but she wasn't hurt. It was all for show. *Big bad Mika, let's make sure she doesn't ever come back again. Throw all her shit out into the hall.* I come back and it's just one big pile. I had to borrow the bags from a neighbor. Anyway, I took what fit and left the rest. Let them deal with it.

JAKE

Wow.

MIKA

Yeah. So that was my week. Fun times. How am I supposed to look for a new place when I'm in a hospital room day and night for the next two months?

JAKE

Right. That's tricky.

MIKA

Impossible is what it is. When I get out, I'm going to need a place to stay. A friend. I'm going to need a friend.

JAKE

Sure. You ask a friend.

MIKA

Exactly. So. You and me are friends. Right?

JAKE

Are we?

MIKA

We are.

JAKE

I'm glad.

MIKA

Which has me wondering. You know. If. When I get out. I could. Stay. With you?

JAKE

With me?

MIKA

Until I find a new place. It won't take long. Because I'll have money. I'll have the check coming.

JAKE

It's not really my own place, you know. It's just a room in my aunt's basement.

MIKA

It's better than sleeping on the street. Look, I don't have much stuff. Two bags and a suitcase. That's it. That's all I have in the whole world.

JAKE

She. She.

MIKA

She doesn't like me, I know.

JAKE

She can just be a little hard, sometimes.

MIKA

And I'm a crazy white girl. But I can help around the house. I can bake, I can cook. I am very clean. You wouldn't think so, because my brain is a mess, my life is a mess, but I'm very clean. I can sleep on the floor. Don't answer now. Just think about it. Okay? I mean, if you want to say Yes right this second, that'd be fine. But don't say No. Not yet. Say Maybe. Don't say No. Please. Please don't say No.

JAKE

I don't know.

MIKA

See, that's fine. "I don't know." That is just like a maybe, and that's all I'm looking for. That's it. It'll give me something to hang on to for the next couple months. I know it's shitty of me to ask. You're a good guy and you're nice to me, and now it feels like I'm taking advantage. And I don't want to. I really don't.

JAKE

I understand.

MIKA

Seriously?

JAKE

I know what it's like to not have someplace to go. That's kind of how I'm at my aunt's place. My parents, they. They're not in a position to. And they haven't been. For a long time. So my aunt took me in and got me through school. She works hard, and I try not to get in her way.

MIKA

So that's why you've been traveling? To not be a burden, on her?

JAKE

There's more to it than that. I try not to take up too much of her space, you know.

MIKA

Right. Of course. But I. My options are shit. So, if, maybe, you could just talk to her. Emphasize how temporary this is. Once I get my check, I could pay her back, some rent, you know.

JAKE

Oh. Hm.

MIKA

Tell her that. Tell her that I'm not a moocher, because I'm not. I'll pay. I always pay, even if it takes a long time. But it won't take a long time, because I'll get the sleep check. I'll use some for my new place, and some to pay your aunt. And I'll get a new place, with a kitchen, so I can cupcake my way to a more normal life.

JAKE

I'll try to figure out how to talk to her.

MIKA

Really? Thanks. Thanks!

(She spontaneously gives him a big hug and a kiss on the cheek, which completely throws him.)

JAKE

It's fine. Really. Okay.

(A voice calls from offstage. They stand up, as she prepares to go.)

MIKA

Sounds like they're ready for me.

(Jake reaches into his backpack and pulls out a book.)

JAKE

I got you something. To help pass the time.

MIKA

The Fannie Farmer Baking Book.

JAKE

The people online said it's a classic.

MIKA

Wow. It is. Thanks. I don't know what to. Wow.

JAKE

I'm glad you like it.

(She gives him a real kiss this time. He's awkward, but happy.)

MIKA

I'll see you in 73 days. Don't forget about me.

(She exits.)

JAKE

I could never.

(End of scene.)