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Dramatic Publishing

"A smart, bracing production brimming with clever wisecracks [and] some thought-provoking observations on sexual identity." -*The New York Times*

STRAIGHT

BEN LIKES BEER, SPORTS, AND EMILY. AND CHRIS.



BY SCOTT ELMEGREEN AND DREW FORNAROLA

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STRAIGHT

Drama. By Scott Elmegeen and Drew Fornarola. Cast: 2m., 1w. Meet Ben. Ben is a 26-year-old investment banker. Ben likes beer, sports, and Emily ... and Chris. Straight is a provocative new play that deals with fidelity, sexuality and identity in "post-Equality" America. Funny, sad, sexy and surprising, this three-character drama takes a hard look at the moral complex of a generation that prides itself on the pretense of acceptance. One int. set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: S2J.

"A charged piece that showcases why labels still matter, even in 2016." —*Out Magazine*

"A fun, smart take on modern love." —*Forbes*



2016 New York Times Critics' Pick

Cover photo: Acorn Theatre at Theatre Row, New York City, featuring (l-r) Thomas E. Sullivan, Jake Epstein and Jenna Gavigan. Photo: Zack DeZon. Cover design: Cristian Pacheco.

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Straight

By

SCOTT ELMEGREEN and DREW FORNAROLA



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“Originally produced off-Broadway by Andy Sandberg with Caiola Productions, Harrison Chad, Extra Toasty Productions, Peter May, Oliver Roth, and SunnySpot Productions.”

Straight received its world premiere off-Broadway at the Acorn Theatre at Theatre Row, with a first performance on Feb. 9, 2016 and an official opening night on Feb. 29, 2016. The strictly limited engagement concluded on May 8, 2016.

Original Cast:

Ben Jake Epstein
Emily Jenna Gavigan
Chris Thomas E. Sullivan

Director Andy Sandberg
Scenic Design Charlie Corcoran
Costume Design Michael McDonald
Lighting Design Grant Yeager
Sound Design Alex Hawthorn
Original Music Will Van Dyke
Casting Matthew Maisto, CSA
Production Stage Manager E Sara Barnes
Assistant Stage Manager Greg Balla
Assistant Director Alex Hare
General Management Baseline Theatrical
Press Representative Matt Ross Public Relations
Advertising DR Advertising
Marketing Amanda Bohan Marketing

Straight was originally produced by Straight Productions LLC, Caiola Productions, Harrison Chad, Extra Toasty Productions, Peter May, Oliver Roth, and SunnySpot Productions.

Straight

CHARACTERS

BEN: a 26-year-old investment banker living in Boston. He is waist deep in the murky waters of “the Odyssey period,” that much-discussed but little-understood phase between college and “adulthood” when careers idle, family life awaits, and roots are planted nowhere. He and Emily have been dating since their college days at U-Penn without much momentum, and his job in the financial sector provides plenty of money but little satisfaction or direction. Socially capable, casually masculine and always well-liked, Ben is used to winning at life. But he is becoming secretly anxious that the real world is not living up to its promises and worries that maybe “this is it.”

CHRIS: a 20 (and three-quarters!)-year-old history student at Boston College. He likes beer, sarcasm and irony but mostly uses them as a front to mask more deep-seated insecurities. He is socially precocious and, perhaps in compensation for his age, outwardly confident in his interactions with Ben and Emily, making his rare moments of vulnerability surprising, if logical upon reflection. He is appealing, in a boyish way, and he knows it, though he wouldn’t admit that even to himself.

EMILY: 27 and nearing the end of her time in purgatory as a Ph.D candidate in bioinformatics at Harvard. Older than Ben but still a student, Emily looks to him as her window to the “real world,” which she sees as the prize waiting for her at the end of the long tunnel of her studies. Emily holds herself to the highest of standards but without taking herself too seriously. She is quirky, optimistic, social, trusting and idealistic, mentally robust but young at heart.

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in the living room of Ben's apartment, in the present day, between the months of September and January in the city of Boston. The play may be performed with or without an intermission.

NOTE

This play is most effective when both of Ben's relationships are authentic and believable. Additionally, Emily is most interesting when she is played as something other than oblivious to the central conflict of the piece. What these characters don't say is as important as what they do, and what they refuse to express emotionally is a large part of what keeps the stakes high. When invoking tears and raised voices, be precise and deliberate—this pot boils hottest with the lid kept on.

Straight

SCENE 1

(Lights up on BEN, 26, and CHRIS, not quite 21, sitting on the couch watching TV in BEN's apartment. There is about a foot of space between them. A sports game is on, with the sound low. BEN is wearing a conservative suit, its jacket draped carefully over the back of the couch. CHRIS is wearing jeans and a hoodie. Both have beers. BEN's is halffull, and CHRIS' about a quarter full. There is an empty bottle by CHRIS' feet. They watch TV for a bit. They drink their beers. CHRIS finishes his, puts it down by his other empty and turns his attention toward BEN. A beat.)

CHRIS. So.

BEN. So.

(Pause.)

CHRIS. You seem cool.

BEN. Oh. *(A little laugh.)* Thanks. You too.

CHRIS *(beat)*. So?

BEN *(laughs again)*. What?

CHRIS. You've ... *done* this before, right?

BEN. Oh, yeah ... couple-a times ... you?

CHRIS. Yeah.

BEN. Sorry, it's just ... kinda awkward.

CHRIS *(laughs)*. Obviously.

BEN *(a little relieved)*. Right?

CHRIS. Yeah. You cool?

BEN. Yeah, it's cool.

CHRIS. So?

BEN (*a slow exhale*). So.

(CHRIS slides over, closing the space between them. BEN puts down his beer. CHRIS puts his hand on BEN's thigh and begins to move it up and down. BEN puts his arm around CHRIS' shoulders, and they turn in slowly. As they are about to kiss, BEN's cellphone rings with a somewhat embarrassing "this is a specific caller" ring.)

BEN. Shit.

CHRIS. What?

(BEN reaches over to the coffee table and looks at his phone, even though he already knows who it is. He gets up to take the call.)

BEN (*to CHRIS*). I'm really sorry.

CHRIS. Seriously?

BEN (*answering the phone, trying to sound happy*). Hey, what's up! Uhh, still at the office. I know, I'm the worst. Can I make it up to you tomorrow? Yeah, I just don't think tonight's gonna ... I'm sorry. I won't be doing this forever—I won't be ... OK, I ... I love you too, and ... I'll—we'll talk tomorrow, OK? OK. Night.

CHRIS. Hm! (*Beat, laughing pretty hard.*) That the girlfriend?

BEN. Yeah.

CHRIS. She cool?

BEN. Yeah, she's cool.

CHRIS. Aw, she'd totally be into this.

BEN. Dude.

CHRIS (*laughs*). What? If guys can be into that girl-on-girl stuff ...

BEN. Listen, man, I dunno if this is a good idea.

CHRIS (*speaking over BEN*). Maybe a threesome ...

BEN (*overlapping*). It just feels kinda weird—

CHRIS. Well, of course it's weird.

BEN (*pause*). Maybe we should just—

CHRIS (*assertive*). Sit down. (*BEN does.*) Look, I know it's weird.

BEN (*not looking at him*). I'm not sure ... if I want to ... like ...

CHRIS. It's fine.

BEN. If I should ...

CHRIS. Like, no pressure.

BEN (*pause. Looks up, calming down*). Yeah.

CHRIS. We could just ... (*Putting his hand on BEN's chest.*)
Whatever feels comfortable, you know?

(Long pause. BEN kisses CHRIS. After a beat, CHRIS unbuttons the top couple buttons of BEN's shirt. Lights fade.)

SCENE 2

(Lights up on the apartment the following evening. BEN is in the same suit, jacket still off. He is sitting on the couch with his laptop, buttoning his shirt, seemingly erasing the memory of his encounter with CHRIS.

EMILY knocks on the door.)

BEN. Yeah!

(EMILY enters. BEN is relieved to see her. She wears a long,

functional skirt, a t-shirt and a jean jacket, and has a tote bag over her shoulder. In one hand, she's carrying a plastic take-out bag, and in the other, a shoebox with holes in the top. She bounces as she walks across the room, dropping her bag and kicking off her shoes as she goes.)

EMILY. Hey, y'all!

BEN. Hi! That smells good . . .

EMILY (*puts the shoebox and the plastic bag on the couch*).

Pad Thai!

BEN. For me?

EMILY. I figured you hadn't eaten.

BEN. I haven't.

EMILY. See? (*BEN picks up the shoebox.*) Oop—nope—not that.

(BEN puts the box down, digs inside the plastic bag and pulls out a styrofoam box.)

BEN. How's lab?

EMILY. Awful. Work?

BEN. Yeah.

(EMILY stands behind the couch and starts rubbing BEN's head.)

BEN (*cont'd*). Oh, that's a good idea.

(He leans his head back, and she leans hers down. They share a quick kiss. He lifts the styrofoam up to EMILY.)

BEN (*cont'd*). First bite?

EMILY. No thanks.

BEN (*leaning over to look at the shoebox*). What's in here?

EMILY. Open it.

BEN (*opening the lid*). Oh my god!

EMILY. I know! (*Pause*.) It's my leukemia gerbil!

BEN. Why—

EMILY (*to herself*). I guess it's my *anti-leukemia* gerbil, actually.

BEN. ... Why?

EMILY. Well, I was euthanizing Dimitri today—

BEN. Dimitri?

EMILY. Lansky tells me not to name them, but come on, they're just so *cute*—

BEN. Dimitri's a mouse.

EMILY (*sitting down*). Was a mouse. Anyway, I figured I might be a happier person if there was a rodent in my life I didn't have to give cancer to and then kill after eight months.

(She makes a poking motion when she says "give cancer to." BEN puts the styrofoam aside.)

EMILY (*cont'd*). Not hungry?

BEN (*laughing; trying to get this straight*). So between working twelve hours in lab and surprising me with dinner, you *impulse* bought a gerbil.

EMILY. Gilbert. Yeah. (*She shrugs; matter-of-factly*.) The pet shop was right next to Spice & Rice.

BEN (*laughing*). What are you gonna do with him?

EMILY (*taking the box onto her lap, cracking the lid and poking her fingers inside*). Not give him leukemia, I'll tell you that for free.

BEN (*enjoying himself*). You really are crazy—

EMILY (*barreling along*). Aw, look at us, we're like a happy family! Hold on, I gotta send my mom a picture.

BEN (*jovially*). Are we—really—

EMILY (*holding her phone up at arm's length, pointed at them*).

Say, "Cheese!" (*Turning to BEN.*) Do gerbils eat cheese?

BEN. I don't—

EMILY (*back to the camera*). Say, "Happy family!"

BEN. Happy ...

(*EMILY takes the picture.*)

EMILY. OH! Speaking of which!

BEN. What?

EMILY. Guess what!

BEN. What?

EMILY. Danny and Elizabeth? Engaged.

BEN. *What?*

EMILY. I know!

BEN. That's so great!

EMILY. January. You can take off, right?

BEN. I mean, I ... maybe.

EMILY. Ben. You have to be there.

BEN. I will be.

EMILY. But you have to *actually*. Not like you usually ...

BEN. I promise!

(*EMILY squeezes his hand, looks into the box.*)

EMILY (*speaking in her pet voice*). Isn't he cute? And non-terminally-ill?

BEN. Why was lab awful?

EMILY (*shrugs*). Oh, you know.

BEN. C'mon. You know you're gonna tell me.

EMILY. It's nothing. Just haven't resolved any data in three weeks, my advisor still hates women, and I'll never get my PhD or a job! (*Pause.*) Shrug.

BEN. Well, even Bioinformatics Barbie is allowed to have a bad day once in a while.

EMILY (*in a Barbie voice, putting her fist in the air*). My advisor's an asshole! (*Beat.*) Also, don't call me that.

BEN (*laughing*). OK.

EMILY. It's in Vermont.

BEN. What is?

EMILY. The wedding. Try to keep up.

BEN. I—

EMILY. We can stay at a bed and breakfast. Like we did in college.

BEN (*laughs*). Oh, man, those creepy taxidermy squirrels ...

EMILY. Amazing.

BEN (*overlapping*). Horrifying.

(Beat, they smile at each other.)

EMILY. Come on, it's *barely* a two hour drive from here. You can take a few days off!

BEN. I don't—

EMILY. You deserve it.

BEN (*chuckles*). I—No, I really don't—

EMILY. Is work really that bad?

BEN. No, it's fine, that's not ... Things are slower these days, actually.

EMILY. Since when? You were there all night.

BEN. Yeah. *(Pause.)* Well *you* work more weekends than I do.

EMILY. Yes but *I'm* curing cancer.

BEN. And didn't you disappear for, like, three weeks straight last year?

EMILY. Yes, for my prospectus.

BEN *(laughing, Dracula voice)*. Into zat evil hippie Harvard laboratory—

EMILY. To prepare for my prospectus! *(Aside.)* And we aren't hippies. Doug just doesn't shower.

(BEN pushes EMILY down and buries his head into her neck, kissing her. She laughs.)

BEN's phone buzzes with a message from CHRIS. BEN props himself up to check it without pulling away from EMILY.

Pause.)

EMILY *(cont'd)*. What's wrong?

BEN. Nothing. *(EMILY tries to resume kissing BEN. He instead kisses her on the forehead, laughs.)* Where'd that Thai food go?

(She hands him the styrofoam. He takes it.)

EMILY. We don't do this enough anymore.

BEN. I know.

EMILY. Course, if you'd just move in with me ...

BEN. Emily.

EMILY. Tell you what. Why don't I take the weekend off. The whole thing.

BEN. No, don't do that.

EMILY. I'm serious! We can take the T to a random stop—
it'll be fun.

BEN. No—really. Don't plan around me.

(BEN pulls away from EMILY to sit upright.)

EMILY. Why not?

BEN *(looking at his phone)*. Turns out I have to work.

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 3

(Lights up on BEN and CHRIS on the couch. BEN is dressed as in the first scene. CHRIS has dark jeans on but has ditched the hoodie for a sweater and boots.)

BEN. So.

CHRIS *(a cocky little smile)*. So?

BEN. We're back.

CHRIS. We are.

BEN. Round two.

CHRIS. Mhm.

BEN. This is probably really stupid.

CHRIS. Probably.

(Pause.)

BEN. You ... uh ... have a good week?

CHRIS. Same as all the other ones.

BEN. It must be, um, exams soon or something, right?

CHRIS. I guess, probably.

BEN. Probably?

CHRIS. I mean, what'd be the challenge if I knew?

BEN. Well, enjoy that while it lasts. Next thing you know you'll be working seven a.m. till midnight at some investment bank like me.

CHRIS (*laughs*). Right, like I'm smart enough for that.

BEN. Bankers aren't *that* that smart. They're ... medium smart. *Really* smart people never make any money.

CHRIS. Weird.

BEN. Right? I mean, look at Emily, mapping genomes and making less than a truck driver—

CHRIS. Who?

BEN. Um ... Emily? My ... girlfriend.

CHRIS (*laughs*). Oh, right.

(*Pause.*)

BEN. Anyway, bankers are medium smart. Enough to figure out how to sell totally imaginary products all day long, but ... you know, not enough to grasp that they're ... totally imaginary. (*Pause.*) Which, of course, explains this endless cycle of us making a shithouse of money and then—

CHRIS. Falling on your assets.

BEN. Welcome to derivatives.

CHRIS. So this is what you do all day. Sit in some office and dream up make-believe reasons for rich people to give you their money.

BEN (*laughs*). Me? Nooo. I sit in the fourth seat from the left on the eighth of twenty-two long desks on a trading floor.