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Dramatic Publishing



LIKE BEES TO HONEY

A Play in Ten Scenes

by

ANDREA GREEN

This excerpt contains strong language



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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ANDREA GREEN

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(LIKE BEES TO HONEY)

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For a dear friend who fought the good fight and is
now in recovery.

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Like Bees to Honey was first produced by Luna Stage Company, Montclair, New Jersey, March 10, 2000. This Woman's Work 2000 production was directed by E. Teresa Choate and featured the following artists:

CAST

Keisha TAMELA ALDRIDGE
Jesse. GLORIA FALZER
Sara MONA HENNESSY
15-year-old girl MADDY NUSSBAUM
Rita ROSE PEDONE
Kate KATE REDWAY

PRODUCTION STAFF

Lighting Design JEFF GREENBERG
Set and Costume Design. KAREN LEE HART
Stage Manager JENNIFER ESTEVES
Sound Operator MARIA BALBOA

NOTES

Although they do not speak, the audience becomes members of the recovery meeting in progress. A section of the audience is seated on the periphery of the stage to support this illusion.

A slide or scrim of Toulouse Lautrec's black and white sketch "The Hangover," (also known as "The Morning After") 1899, is recommended as a backdrop at the rear of the stage throughout the play.

The five women are dressed in clothes appropriate to their histories. Each woman wears one accent piece (e.g., scarf, belt, headband, handkerchief) that connects her in some visual way to the mute 15-year-old girl.

The simplest costume changes can be made onstage when the women play men's roles or one male actor can be added to the cast to play all the male parts.

The face of the 15-year-old girl must be indistinguishable, perhaps concealed by a lock of hair on her face. She is disheveled and barefoot, carrying her shoes.

The music of Bela Bartok or Charles Ives is suggested whenever the 15-year-old girl appears; for the transitions, the music of the American composer, George Crumb.

LIKE BEES TO HONEY

A Full-length Play
For 5 Women, 1 female adolescent (walk-on)
1 Man (optional)

CHARACTERS

KATE an unmarried Irish-Catholic nurse, 35
Kate plays Sara's Dad and Teddy

SARA. . . a divorced Jewish college professor of art history, 40
Sara plays Keisha's Dad and Carlos

JESSE a waspy, wealthy, married corporate lawyer, 50
Jesse plays Rita's Employer, Sara's Mother, and Greta

RITA an unmarried Hispanic journalist, 35
Rita plays Kate's Supervisor

KEISHA a black married housewife/mother, 28
Keisha plays Daniel

JESSE, KEISHA, RITA and SARA play Kate's Mother
and Aunts

The MUTE 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL is a walk-on part

SCENE: Before and during a self-help group meeting, perhaps
Alcoholics Anonymous or Rational Recovery.

TIME: The Ever Present.

Approximate running time: 1 hour

LIKE BEES TO HONEY

SCENE 1

SETTING: *The set is stark and spare. The FIVE WOMEN speak from various places onstage.*

AT RISE: *A solo cello piece is heard, something haunting and nostalgic. The stage is dark. The MUTE 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL is visible as the scene opens. Spotlight on KATE and then the light widens to include all the WOMEN.*

KATE. It's bitter cold, one of those dear, dark December nights. But a full moon and a blaze of stars light up the sky. After my late night shift at the hospital, I stop at a neighborhood bar, but afterwards I still feel restless. I take a walk to clear my head. As I start back home, I see a van careen around a corner, then shoot into the driveway across the street and spin around like a meteor gone haywire.

– Get the hell out of here, you stupid bitch.

– You're not even a good fuck anymore.

The door opens and a young girl, maybe 15, tumbles free fall onto the ground. Her coat and shoes and handbag come hurling out of the van after her. A bunch of bottles and beer cans follow. The beer spills all over the driveway and the stench of beer and vomit diffuses into the cold night air.

- My whole goddamn van stinks from your fuckin' vomit; why can't you learn to hold your liquor, you stupid asshole!
- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get sick. Let me back in, Sean. Please—open the door.
- FUCK YOU! And don't call me again either. You make me sick.
- Sean, please. I said I was sorry. Please, please don't leave me here alone.

My deepest instinct is to call out after her, "Let him go. No good will come of this." But the words don't come. The sound of tires screeching and the van is gone. She's sobbing now. Walking barefoot all over the lawn, holding her shoes, trying to collect her things in the dark. "Let me help you," I blurt out. But she walks right past me and never breaks her stride. (*Beat.*) Most of the time, I barely remember her. And then, suddenly, like tonight, she reappears uninvited. (*Beat.*) There are so many things I want to say to that 15-year-old girl—

SARA. But what good would it do?

JESSE. She'll learn in her own time.

RITA. Or maybe she won't.

KEISHA. And, anyway, what would I say?

KATE. Stop before it's too late?

SARA. Stop before there's nothing left worth saving?

JESSE. Find your self's self where it lives?

KATE. And long after she disappears into the night, I can still hear her crying.

(The solo cello music is heard as the MUTE 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL is seen holding her shoes, walking away.)

SCENE 2

AT RISE: *Atonal, edgy music is heard in the transition. The stage is dark. As EACH WOMAN speaks, a spotlight is on her.*

RITA (*on the telephone, words slightly slurred*). Hey, it's me. Send over the usual. Oh, yeah, and—Fred—I'm thirsty—so *andale*, huh?

SARA. I could read my mother's face and know instantly if she was having a bad day. I knew when to keep quiet and become invisible and when to be funny and amusing. Once she told me I had a special knack for making her laugh. But no matter how hard I tried, she never let me get close to her. I learned early and well—

JESSE. —how to fake my parents out. Like when Jack and I were getting stoned out of our minds upstairs while this victory celebration was going on downstairs for my father. It was one of those big, catered, black-tie and champagne events. But on the third floor of our colonial suburban house, we were having our own party. My brother Jack had been selling stuff at school since he was in junior high so we always had the best. A local reporter was there and my parents kept calling us to come downstairs and take photos. (*Beat and then very deliberately.*) My dad had just been reelected mayor.

(*SARA plays KEISHA's DAD.*)

KEISHA. He never questioned me when I told him I was stayin' overnight at my girlfriend's house. I would change into this slinky, black dress in the bathroom of a

gas station on the corner and put on red lipstick and long, dangly earrings. I never had any trouble gettin' served. (*Beat.*) I got laid at twelve. One night, before I went out, I asked my daddy:

- Why are you STARIN' at me like that?
- Because you look just like your mama when I met her.
- You never told me that before.
- I never saw it so clearly before.
- How— How did she look?
- Big, bold, brown eyes like yours. (*Remembering.*) Slender and girlish. A smile so wide and bright it could light up the skies.
- Was she— What was she like?
- Full of fun and mischief—loved to dance—wanted to go and do and know everything.

It was a strange moment. I didn't know till then how much he had loved her. (*Beat.*) He never mentioned her before or since. He was a good man, a thoughtful man. There were three of us kids, and he raised us the best he could after Mama took off. I always knew I was his favorite. I felt foolish and guilty standin' there in my school clothes, knowin' as soon as I left the house I was goin' to change into my night-time gear. (*Beat.*) Until the day he died, I couldn't look my daddy in the eye.

RITA. And when he saved enough money, my father sent me to the United States to get an education. (*Jubilantly.*) "In AMERICA you can BE somebody, Rita!" my mother told me as I left Costa Rica. I was hired by a rich lady to be a nanny for her two-year-old son. On the day she hired me, she explained what was expected of me:

(*JESSE plays RITA's EMPLOYER.*)

RITA'S EMPLOYER (*pleasant but businesslike*). I'm easy to please, Reba. All you need to do is to take good care of my little boy and stay out of my way and you'll do fine, just fine. Now why don't you just go ahead and unpack your things and get started. I'll be in my room for a while, Reba.

RITA. "It's RITA; I'm Rita," I said. I was 17 and it was my first—

KATE. —Contact with alcohol was a pacifier dipped in whiskey that she gave me when I was teething. My mom, Aggie, was a petite, redheaded, Irish lass who laughed a lot and enjoyed a pint or two. Dad was a hard-drinking Irish-Catholic street kid. He'd been a semiprofessional boxer before he bought O'Hara's, the local pub, which he owned and operated until he died. With three hell-raising older sons and a daughter who could belt down the booze with the best of them, drinking was as natural as breathing to the McConnell clan.

SARA. By profession he was a stockbroker, but his real passion was interior design. He loved to buy run-down houses in neighboring towns and transform them. When we moved, we'd leave all our furniture and belongings, except our clothes, and start all over in the new place. It didn't matter if it was in the middle of the school year or in the middle of the week or—

JESSE. —On the weekends, when my parents were out, we made boilermakers with whiskey and beer. By the time I got to Chesterton Private School for Girls, I was already hooked on alcohol. I was 13 years old. The motto at Chesterton was never to let your education stand in the way of your drinking. Right before graduation, my family pulled some strings and got me accepted to the state

university. In my junior year I applied myself just enough to get into law school. Anything was better than a real job. In law school I dated a lot of men—

KEISHA. —Shits, sharks, tough guys, hoods. It made me feel good to go out with some sharp-dressed guy with a flashy car and a lot of cash in his wallet who could take me places my daddy could never afford. Sometimes I didn't want sex, but havin' a few drinks made it a lot easier. Hey, you know, it's part of the scene. After high school, I went for a license in hairdressing and got my first job—

RITA. —Taking care of her son was easy, but no one could have guessed how strange this lady's life was. She rarely came out of her room, except to get ice or tonic for the drink that seemed glued to her hand. I don't think she ever slept at night. I would hear her pacing up and down until dawn. She had almost no visitors and didn't use the telephone much, except to order more Scotch or vodka.

SARA. And there was no point making friends because wherever we were, we wouldn't be there for very long. My father would come home one night—

(KATE plays SARA's DAD.)

SARA'S DAD (*matter-of-fact but not unpleasant*). We sold the house today, girls. You'll need to pack your things soon. I want you to give your mom a hand, Sara. She's been—a little under the weather lately. I don't think she can get things organized the way she's feeling right now. She's going to need your help. The move will be good for her—give her something else to think about— She'll feel better in the new place.

SARA. But Mother didn't care WHERE she lived—(beat)—as long as she had the right vermouth for her martini. And that's how it was—

JESSE. —Until I met Richard at an office party right after graduation. He was a partner in a law firm that had just hired me. He invited me back to his place, and three months later, we eloped. Although we somehow managed to stay married and employed, we went on a binge of coke and alcohol that lasted for the next two decades.

KEISHA. In those days I was drinking Chivas Regal on the rocks; smokin' a lot of weed and feelin' *fine*—until I got pregnant. I wanted to keep that baby, but I knew if my daddy found out, it would kill him. He was always there for us kids—mother AND father to us. I couldn't let him down. You know what I mean? (Beat.) I had a friend who worked at the hospital and she helped me to abort at her place. I saved every penny I made—

RITA. —as a nanny and started to take evening classes in journalism. I wanted to write for a newspaper or magazine. One night my employer invited some guests to a party at the apartment. This was unusual for her, and she asked me to help with the preparations.

(JESSE plays RITA's EMPLOYER.)

RITA'S EMPLOYER. Rita, why don't you join us? You're always studying. Come and have some fun. We couldn't possibly finish all this caviar and vodka tonight. And you'll be a refreshing new face for my jaded, middle-aged friends.

RITA. That night I had my first drink. I liked it right away. The alcohol took me out of myself. I wasn't ashamed of

my accent. And my employer was right, her friends DID find me refreshing. They liked this new, out-going Rita, and, after two martinis, I started to like the Rita I had become. All my life—

KATE. —I wanted to be a nurse. For six years I worked at O'Hara's all day and went to college at night. I never missed a class. My father used to tell his customers, "Kate has a true calling. And it ain't waitin' on tables." (*Beat.*) "Hold on to your dream, Katie," he would say. "It's a damn good dream, and I'm gonna be there to see it happen." But he wasn't. (*Beat.*) He died three months before I graduated.

SARA. "We can't play here; my mom's sick again." My mother's blackouts came more frequently now. She had been an artist for an ad agency until they fired her for not showing up. She never worked again. On good days she set up an easel and sketched outside. But more and more she stayed on the couch in the living room and drank. When we moved again, she was too drunk to help us pack our things. I don't think—

JESSE. —Richard and I know each other any better now than the night we met. It was never about love or sex or intimacy. It was about alcohol and coke. It was about being anybody—except ourselves. And now—

RITA. —years after I've gotten my degree in journalism; after I'd worked for several newspapers and lost half a dozen more jobs after that; after Teddy had lived with me and left me; after I fell into a routine of staying in a bathrobe all day, rarely leaving the apartment, or using the telephone, except to order more gin, I found myself pacing up and down in my bedroom one night, and suddenly caught sight of my reflection in the mirror (*delib-*

erately) and saw the face of the woman I had worked for when I first came to this country at 17—

KEISHA. —and was pregnant again, but Cliff wanted to marry me anyway, even though I wasn't sure who the father was. Cliff is a big, good-hearted guy, as white as I'm black. We met at a bar across from where I worked. He was a social worker then, until he lost his job. He's been driving a truck for a while now to support me and the three kids—

SARA. But even though we moved around a lot, I was smart in school. I never worried about getting good grades. I worried about finding my way home—*(beat)* —and what condition my mother would be in when I got there. When I opened the front door, there was always the smell of booze in the house. And, for me, that became the smell of love. Most of the time, I'd find her—

KATE. —belting down a few martinis from a flask I brought with me to get through the capping ceremony. And that's how I became Katherine McConnell, RN. After the graduation, my family had a big bash. The McConnells got loaded on Scotch and my mother's people were smashed on wine and beer.

(JESSE, RITA, SARA and KEISHA play KATE's MOTHER AGGIE and AUNTS CATHERINE, MARY and TERESA, each with a rich Irish brogue, holding a drinking glass, having a grand time.)

— And here's to me own dear daughter Katie!

— I'LL DRINK TO THAT!

— To our niece Kate, the BEST DAMN McConnell of the lot of us!

- That calls for a round of drinks for EVERYBODY!
- To Katie: the first college graduate in the McConnell clan!
- HERE! HERE! SPEECH!
- SPEECH! SPEECH. Dear Katie!

KATE (*wearing a graduation cap, holding a glass; with real pride*). The only dream I ever had became a reality today. I'll never be just Kate McConnell again. (*Beat.*) I'M KATE MCCONNELL, RN. (*Exaggerated brogue with good humor.*) And don't you be forgettin' it, Mother, and aunties Catherine, Mary and Teresa. Because I intend to be as devoted to me nursin' as cousin Rose is to the convent.

KATE'S MOTHER. BLESS YOU, DEAR CHILD! My heart bursts with joy for ya!

KATE (*pause, no brogue*). I know how proud you are, Mom. I just wish Dad could have been here today. I can't think of anyone I would have wanted to celebrate with more.

AUNTS CATHERINE, MARY, TERESA.

- Ah, Kate, and what makes ya think your father—our dear brother—isn't lookin' down upon ya right now and celebratin' with us?
- HERE! HERE! I'll drink to that!
- To Our Own Katie—and to your dear departed father who's smilin' at ya now—with the greatest pride—as I say these words.
- ANOTHER ROUND FOR EVERYBODY!

KATE. I was on top of the world. And the only way I knew how to celebrate it came out of the glass in my hand. My brothers bragged that we all had a hangover

from JUNE to LABOR DAY that summer. And we probably did—because that's the way we drank when—

KEISHA. —we had the babies and Cliff and I would get high as soon as we put them to sleep. In those days he was into it Big Time. One night after cookin' some crack, Cliff got himself into a fit, screamin', shakin', runnin' wild all over the apartment. I had to call an ambulance. That man nearly scared me to death! After a few days in detox, he was transferred to a live-in treatment center. He's been clean for five years now. Hasn't been near the stuff. I mean THIS MAN IS SOBER! (*Beat.*) At first I HATED him for it, and, bitch that I was, I enjoyed taunting him.

(*Playing, emphasizing the uppercase words by drawing them out.*)

JESSE. Don't you WANNA FEEL GOOD?

SARA. Don't we DESERVE A GOOD TIME?

KATE. It's just so FINE when we're HIGH together.

KEISHA. That I wanna—DIE HIGH.

RITA (*holding telephone, words noticeably slurred*). Fred?

Where the hell are you? Yeah. Yeah. I know. I just thought maybe you forgot how thirsty I am.

(*Atonal, edgy music is heard as the stage goes dark.*)