

Kate Bell commissioned *Red Sugary Sweet Dreams* for The Lower Manhattan Arts Academy (LoMA) in October of 2013. It was produced and performed at LoMA in December of 2013 as part of Selfies. It was directed by Heather Cambanes and performed by the following cast:

AMBER: Clarice Lennon

JESSICA: Kristen Feliciano

RODERICK, THE KOOL-AID MAN: Julian Baez

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CHARACTERS

AMBER: *In her teens, a guarded dreamer.*

JESSICA: *In her teens, an effusive dreamer.*

RODERICK, THE KOOL-AID MAN: *In his teens, the dashing, heroic Kool-Aid man of everyone's dreams.*

TIME

The present. At the end of the day, at sunset.

SETTING

Outside a high school, and in the mind of dreamers.

JESSICA and AMBER are standing together. AMBER is texting, waiting for a response, looking morose. JESSICA is texting. She gets a response. She smiles, broadly. She turns to AMBER.

JESSICA: So. I have a secret dream.

AMBER: A what?

JESSICA: A dream I've never told anybody in the whole of my life and that means the world to me.

Beat.

AMBER: So . . . what? You're going to tell me it now and . . .

JESSICA: Yes. Because you're my best friend.

AMBER: Okay. Stop. That's a lot of pressure.

JESSICA: No, it's not.

AMBER: No, no, it is. I don't want to be the only holder of your "secret dream."

JESSICA: Why not?

AMBER: Because what if I think it's stupid.

JESSICA: You won't.

AMBER: I might! You don't know. I don't know! You've never told anybody. You're just holding this precious thing in, and, like, that's okay, but if you share it out to the world, then it becomes subject to like, the judgment of the world. And the people in the world. And that is something that most of the time usually sucks.

JESSICA: You had a secret dream.

AMBER: What?

JESSICA: Amber. Don't lie. You had a secret dream. Or maybe you still have it?

AMBER *looks at JESSICA. AMBER turns to go.*

AMBER: Yeah . . . I gotta go.

JESSICA: Oh crap, you do, you do, you do, and you told someone, and they thought it was stupid. Am I wrong?

AMBER: My mom, she, you know, she gets crazy if I'm late, and . . .

JESSICA: You don't have to shut me out, Amber.

AMBER: I'm not, I'm actually concerned about my mother, is that so insane . . .

JESSICA *moves in front of AMBER. She places her hands on AMBER's shoulders.*

JESSICA: You can tell me this thing. You can tell it to me and I will celebrate your dream with you.

AMBER: You won't.

JESSICA: Look at me. How long have we known each other?

AMBER: Not that long. Like a year and a half.

JESSICA: Okay. But, like, we understand each other.

AMBER: I guess.

JESSICA: When you were on your special lady time and you were going out with your family later and you needed other pants, did I or did I not give you the pants off my legs?

AMBER: We were at your house.

JESSICA: Did I or did I not do that?

AMBER: Yes! You did! You gave me your pants! And you didn't even give me a funny look when I didn't give them back for like four months! But you don't even know what you're asking here . . .

JESSICA: It doesn't matter. You tell me your secret dream and I'll tell you mine and we'll be really amazingly excited for each other. I swear this, on my little brother's life.

AMBER: . . . Whoa.

JESSICA: Yeah. I'm serious.

A moment. AMBER moves from JESSICA. She takes a breath. She turns to JESSICA.

AMBER: It's just . . . I told my boyfriend once and he laughed at me. Like for five minutes straight. We were in the park, and he almost fell off the bench. People were looking at us. He just sat there and laughed at me, like, "That's what you've been holding in all this time. Just that."

JESSICA: He's dumb.

AMBER: He is. I like him, but . . .

JESSICA: It's not a forever thing.

AMBER: Definitely not.

She takes a deep breath. She psyches herself up. She looks to the sky.

Okay . . . I grew up here in the city. Like you. But . . . I haven't really ever been anywhere else. I mean, sometimes I go to Brooklyn or Queens, to like see friends or whatever, but . . . there's a part of me that really wants to like . . . see the world.

JESSICA: That's great!

AMBER: I'm not finished!

JESSICA: Okay!

AMBER: This is really, really hard!

JESSICA: Okay, I'll, shut up, okay . . .

AMBER: Okay. So. A lot of people picked on me when I was younger. And still pick on me, because I'm shy and a little weird sometimes. And, like . . . the happiest memories I have of elementary school, are the quiet ones, when everyone else was off running around, playing or laughing or doing something dumb, and they left me all alone. I got to sit there, in the quiet, on the concrete, and eat my lunch . . . and drink my Kool-Aid drink. I didn't have a lot of friends in elementary school. Or middle school. Or like, even now, I don't have that many friends.

JESSICA: Come on.

AMBER: I don't, not real ones. Not ones I actually like on a regular basis like you.

JESSICA: Wow. Thank you.

AMBER: Yeah. Okay. So. In elementary school, as I sat on the con-

crete, and as I drank my Kool-Aid drink, I looked at the, uh . . .

She takes a deep breath. She closes her eyes.

I looked at the red Kool-Aid guy on the juice box and I imagined he was my friend when no one else was. . . . And sometimes . . . I imagined he was even more than that.

JESSICA covers her mouth, amazed. A moment. AMBER looks away, smiling at last, getting lost in her reverie . . . A vision of the KOOL-AID MAN appears, smiling at AMBER.

KOOL-AID MAN: OHHHH YEAH!

AMBER: I imagined that the red Kool-Aid guy would pick me up after school and take me away . . . from everything!

The KOOL-AID MAN approaches, and takes AMBER by the hand. They run away! As she describes the scene, they enact it.

We would go, far from the school yard, and Manhattan and even New York State, and we would travel south, far south, to Hastings, South Carolina, where Kool-Aid was invented, and there I'd start again. He'd take me to his Kool-Aid school, and I'd meet all his Kool-Aid friends, and they'd all like me and wouldn't make fun of me or think I was weird, and we'd all just know each other so, so well, all of us, and we'd understand what we were all going through all the time, because of Kool-Aid, and I'd be so incredibly happy every day! And then, when night came, we new friends would all go our separate ways, and the two us, the Kool-Aid guy and me, we would go out walking in the North Carolina woods, where the sky is full of stars, and underneath an old oak tree, he'd pull me close and, whisper in my ear, saying . . .

AMBER and KOOL-AID MAN: "Amber . . . is it all right if I kiss you now?"

AMBER: And we'd kiss, so quietly and so tenderly . . . and then go off, into the bushes and . . .

She closes her eyes and imagines. The KOOL-AID MAN smiles at her.

KOOL-AID MAN: Oh yeeeeeah . . .

The KOOL-AID MAN is gone. A moment. AMBER looks down at the ground. She doesn't look at JESSICA.

AMBER: That last part is kind of a recent addition to the whole

thing, actually, so . . .

She turns on JESSICA, laughing at herself, bitterly.

HA HA HA! PRETTY DUMB, RIGHT?

JESSICA reaches out a hand to her.

JESSICA: No. No. It isn't. Oh my God . . .

AMBER: What?

JESSICA: I think that's so beautiful . . .

AMBER: Shut up. You don't.

JESSICA: No, I do. I do!

AMBER: You can't! You're just screwing around and . . .

JESSICA: I'm not! I swear!

AMBER: STOP IT!

JESSICA: I can't believe this. But . . . all you just said . . . That's my secret dream too, Amber! Almost exactly!

AMBER: Really?

JESSICA: Yes! YES, OH MY GOD! I sat alone on the concrete, and I drank Kool-Aid, and I dreamt the exact same thing, every day! It's just, it's like you're in MY MIND and in MY LIFE! It's so WEIRD!

AMBER: It's not. It's not weird. We both feel it.

JESSICA: We both do.

AMBER: You swear? You're not . . .

JESSICA: On my little brother's life. Again.

They look at each other. They embrace.

AMBER: This is the best day ever . . .

JESSICA: For me too . . .

They hold each other. JESSICA pulls away.

It's just . . . I . . .

AMBER: What?

JESSICA: I don't know how to say this, but . . .

AMBER: Just say it. Anything. Nothing can change what just happened, here, on the street, outside our school, between two friends, NOTHING . . .

Suddenly, the KOOL-AID MAN enters, swiftly. He moves to JESSICA.

KOOL-AID MAN: My love! The ship awaits! We sail at sunset for Hastings, South Carolina! There we will begin again at my Kool-Aid school, with my Kool-Aid friends. And one night, while walking alone in the North Carolina woods, the sky full of stars, I will pull you close underneath an old oak tree and . . .

He notices AMBER. He turns to her, and bows, politely.

Oh, I'm sorry. I don't think we've met. My name is Roderick, the Kool-Aid man.

He extends his hand.

AMBER: Roderick?

KOOL-AID MAN: Yes. As was my father before me.

AMBER turns.

AMBER: Roderick. I never knew his name . . .

JESSICA: In my dream, he was always Roderick . . .

JESSICA and RODERICK look at each other. AMBER falls to a knee.

I am so, so sorry, Amber. I had no idea. Seriously. This all happened so fast, I had been dreaming of it for years, and then we met last week, and it was him, and I was like "YOU!" and he was like "YOU!" and it was like electric, and I was going to tell you tonight—that was what my secret was all about—and then you said, well, I didn't know you had all that inside you, and I had no idea it was going to be exactly the . . .

AMBER: It might have been better if you laughed at me.

JESSICA: Amber.

AMBER: Give me a minute . . .

KOOL-AID MAN: My love, is there something terribly the matter?

AMBER: "My love . . ."!

KOOL-AID MAN: Your friend, she . . .

JESSICA: Maybe you better go . . . for now . . .

KOOL-AID MAN: The tide awaits . . .

JESSICA: I know . . .

KOOL-AID MAN: If we don't go now we will lose the wind, and by the time we can take ship again your parents will have discovered you're gone and all will be . . .

AMBER turns back, with great force, smiling through tears.

AMBER: No, no, there's no problem here, Roderick. No, not at all! You must go. Both of you . . .

JESSICA: Amber . . .

AMBER: The only thing the matter here is that some people in this world have dreams that stay dreams and some see those dreams burst into bloom, but who are we stay-dreamers to wish ill fortune on our friends in fullest bloom? Why should there not be a little happiness in this world for some, if not for others?

JESSICA: I don't have to go away.

KOOL-AID MAN: My love . . .

JESSICA: Roderick, please . . .

AMBER: No . . .

AMBER takes JESSICA by the hand.

For years, I have lived and felt so alone in all I thought and dreamed. But today, I felt—for one brief fleeting glimmering moment—that someone understood me. And that someone was you, Jessica. For a minute, both our blood was full of red sugary sweet dreams. And even if you go now, that moment will still live in my heart. Today, I am a little less alone. And here I see yet still further proof of that moment's realness—my best friend and my imagined love, now real, are to set off and make a reality of that which, until this afternoon, seemed only the stupid imaginings of my deep loneliness. Jessica. My best friend. Go now to Hastings, South Carolina. Go, drink Kool-Aid, and be happy.

JESSICA: Will you be all right, Amber?

AMBER: I will try to be. I will dump my crappy boyfriend tomorrow, and I will try.

AMBER and JESSICA embrace one last time.

JESSICA: Thank you. Thank you, Amber. I'll miss you.

AMBER: I'll miss you too.

KOOL-AID MAN: And I . . . I will be sad not to know you better,

Amber, best friend of my love. If only . . .

AMBER: It was never to be, Roderick. Never. Not even as friends. I wish you both only the best . . .

JESSICA and the KOOL-AID MAN hold hands, and go, waving to AMBER.

JESSICA: Good-bye!

KOOL-AID MAN: Good-bye!

AMBER: Good-bye!

JESSICA: *Offstage.* Good-bye!

AMBER: Good-bye . . .

JESSICA: *Offstage.* Bye, Amber! I'll never forget you!

AMBER watches them go, smiling and waving. As they go, AMBER'S smile fades. They're gone. A moment. AMBER reaches behind her, and, slowly, carefully pulls out a box of Kool-Aid. She looks at it, longingly. She takes the straw out of the packaging. She punctures the juice box. She drinks long, closing her eyes, dreaming, smiling . . . After a moment, she tosses it aside, takes out her phone, and exits, texting. She smiles, softly, sadly, to herself. Blackout.

END OF PLAY

THE RISING COST OF VINYL

Mark Rigney
