

SELF-HELP

a ten minute play by

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Lights up. A restaurant. JOHN, 30s,
sits upstage at the bar,
surreptitiously glancing at...

JANE, 30s, who sits alone at a table
set for two.

She taps her foot machine-gun fast on
the ground. Checks her watch. Glares
at the empty chair beside her, and
checks her watch again.

JANE

(to herself)

You knew this was gonna happen. You knew it. Shouldn't've
even left the apart --

She inhales deeply.

JANE

(to herself)

It's okay. Just remember the steps. Remember. The. Steps.

She flips open her compact, stares
right at it as she speaks aloud.

JANE

Step one: elevate your self-image with verbal affirmations.

She glances away from the mirror,
whispers to herself to build
confidence.

JANE

I'm a beautiful woman, I'm a beautiful woman, I am a
beautiful woman...

She stares right at the mirror.

JANE

(announcing)

I am -- moving on.

She snaps it shut.

John downs his drink, makes his way to
her table.

JANE

Number two: establish long and short-term goals --

John

Ex, excuse me --

What? JANE

I'm, I'm sorry to -- JOHN

What I'd do? JANE

Oh, no, no -- JOHN

You want the table -- JANE

No -- JOHN

It's yours -- JANE

No, but -- JOHN

It's fine -- JANE

I just -- JOHN

Believe me, I don't need it anymore -- I mean, surprise, surprise -- JANE
(realizing who he is)
Oh god, don't tell me.

Yeah. JOHN

You're my -- JANE

I'm sorry I'm late. JOHN

This is so embarrassing. JANE

What? No -- JOHN

You must think I'm a complete -- JANE

JOHN

I think you're great. No, honestly. I mean, I'm, I'm not sure I'm supposed to, you know, show my hands like -- hands? Hand? I don't know if it's... singular --

(gestures for her to sit; she does)

Honestly. I think you look wonderful.

JANE

(brushing off the compliment)

No...

JOHN

No, no, seriously.

JANE

(announcing)

Well. I am a beautiful woman.

(Beat)

JOHN

Okay. Yeah. I'm just saying it's nice to meet you.

JANE

It's my goal to have a pleasant evening.

JOHN

Me too.

JANE

And in the long-term, pursue a meaningful relationship.

JOHN

Are you in a program or something?

JANE

What? Don't be ridic --

JOHN

It's cool if you are --

JANE

-- what kind of loser --

JOHN

-- I mean I'm in one too --

JANE

Oh my god, aren't they fantastic?! Mine texts me a daily affirmation. You?

JOHN

Oh, no, I, I still use tapes.

JANE
What for?

JOHN
I'm just kinda old school --

JANE
No, no, what's your program for?

JOHN
Oh. Yeah. Well...yeah, I kinda have a bad habit.

JANE
Women?

JOHN
Oh, no.

JANE
Cigarettes?

JOHN
No, but --

JANE
Alcohol?

JOHN
Maybe we shouldn't --

JANE
It's alcohol, isn't it? You're an alco -- I should go. I'm sorry, I just don't think someone with a drinking problem would be good for my esteem -- that's my problem, you see. I have low self-esteem.

JOHN
I caught that.

JANE
It's obvious, isn't it? It's pathetic --

JOHN
No --

JANE
It's a pathetic turn-off --

JOHN
No, no, I didn't mean it like...
(deep breath)
And look. I'm not an alcoholic.
(beat)
I bite my nails.

JANE
That's your bad habit?

JOHN
My toenails.

JANE
Okay, that's disgusting.

JOHN
I know.

JANE
Those are -- ewww --

JOHN
I know --

JANE
Those are your feet!

JOHN
I know!

JANE
Then why don't you stop?!

JOHN
I'm trying. I just, you know, okay, the program says I need to find a substitute.

JANE
For your toes?!

JOHN
For my oral fixation.

JANE
And have you?

JOHN
Crack. I mean, carrot sticks sometimes, but you know, mostly crack cocaine.

Jane laughs uncomfortably.

JOHN
I'm not joking.

Jane stops laughing.

JOHN
I am joking, I'm sorry.

The two laugh, loosen up.

JANE
It's pretty wild, you know.

JOHN
What -- what's wild?

JANE
The two of us, both in programs, set up on a blind date --

JOHN
Oh, yeah, no, that would be wild.

JANE
I know, right, it's like what are the --
(stops herself)
What'd you say?

JOHN
What?

JANE
Just now.

JOHN
What?

JANE
You said that would be wild.

JOHN
Yeah.

JANE
Not that is wild -- that would be wild --

JOHN
I'm not sure I --

JANE
Who are you?

JOHN
Wh, what? What are you --

JANE
Who are you?!!

JOHN
I'm your blind date!

JANE
What's my name?

(Beat)

JOHN
Okay, so I'm not your blind date --

JANE
Oh my god --

JOHN
But I am a blind date --

JANE
I don't believe --

JOHN
Look, don't get excited, I, I was just over at the bar, heard
you doing the steps --

JANE
Well, where's my blind date?!

JOHN
Probably stood you up.

JANE
What?!

JOHN
I don't know.

JANE
Why would you say that?!

JOHN
It's just, you know, esteem humor.

JANE
That's a horrible thing to say --

JOHN
I'm sorry --

JANE
Horrible!

JOHN
I just --

JANE
I don't understand why you came and bothered me at all --

JOHN
I thought we could help each other --

JANE

It's SELF-help!!!

JOHN

And how's it working?!!

(Long Beat)

JANE

It's nice getting a text each day.

JOHN

I know --

JANE

Every morning I turn on the phone --

JOHN

I know --

JANE

There's a little beep --

JOHN

Yeah --

JANE

A little message telling me I look beautiful.

JOHN

You do.

(Beat)

JANE

So that's how you're gonna help me, huh? You're gonna tell me I look beautiful every time I feel hideous?

JOHN

No. No. But, okay, look, as I figure it, you probably got low self-esteem for one of two reasons. A. You're an idiot or B. -- B, there's a bunch of shit out there saying it's beautiful for a woman to look like a ten year old boy. Now, okay, as I see it, you can't be an idiot cuz you probably think you are, and if you're right, you wouldn't have low self-esteem, you'd just be accurate -- one more reason you're not an idiot? You follow? No? Okay. What I'm, what I'm trying to say is sooner or later, you're gonna walk past a window or something and before, you know, your little whatever have time to kick in, you're gonna see what I see right now and you're not gonna blame me at all for coming over here.

(MORE)

JOHN (cont'd)

I don't want to tell you you're beautiful. I, I just want to be there to say 'I told you so.'

(Beat)

JANE

(impressed)

And how is it I'm going to help you?

JOHN

You're gonna bite my toenails.

Jane grabs her purse, makes to leave.

JANE

And you were doing so well.

JOHN

No, I'm kidding, I'm just... I was hoping that...

JANE

What?

JOHN

Well, that you could, you know...

JANE

What?!

JOHN

Provide the substitute for my oral fixation.

Jane steps in.

JANE

If you think your fungal foot lips are getting anywhere near -
-

JOHN

Okay --

JANE

I'm serious.

JOHN

You sound pretty sure of yourself --

JANE

I am sure of myself.

(realizing)

Oh. Huh.

Jane looks at John up and down.

He squirms under scrutiny, fidgets with his hands.

JANE

Stop.

JOHN

What?

JANE

(slowly)

Just. Stop moving. Just stand there.

John stops. Stands before her without armor.

JANE

No self-help?

JOHN

No self-help.

Jane takes her compact off the table, stuffs it in her purse. Sets her purse on the table.

JANE

It's a possibility.

Lights down.

End of Play.