**Next to Him**

by Jessica Moss

**EXCERPT– 10 pages**

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**CHARACTERS:**

**ASH**: 16. Attends a private boys school in Toronto. He wears a school uniform.

**PETER**: 16. Attends the same private boys school in Toronto. Also wears a school uniform.

**EVA**: 48. A therapist. ASH’s mother.

The play takes place in several locations, mostly in the home of ASH and EVA, and the private school that ASH and PETER attend.

Transitions should be extremely fast. Instantaneous, if possible.

When one character starts speaking before the other one has finished, the point of interruption is marked ‘/’ (a la Caryl Churchill). When two speakers interrupt at once while the first continues, you will see a ‘/’ and a ‘\*’.

NOTE: This sample includes the first and third scenes of the play. A monologue for EVA and a scene between EVA and ASH occurs between them in the full script.

**SCENE: MEETING**

*(ASH walks into the school theatre. Dark. A match is lit. A face appears in the dark. PETER. They have scripts.)*

PETER: Wielkom/men.

ASH: Holy fuck.

PETER: You are ze actor? Vun ov ze actors?

ASH: Is this where we meet / for the play thing?

PETER: Soon ve shall begin ze spectacle. Ze oration.

ASH: What? Where are / the –

PETER: (*no accent)* Left. There.

*(ASH hits the light. PETER watches the match burn down, waves it out)*

PETER: Ve read ze play.

ASH: Uh. Yeah.

PETER: ALOUD. Vith performance energy.

ASH: Uh. K.

(*beat*)

PETER: (*confrontational, no accent*) Who are you playing?

ASH: Are you in the play?

PETER: What do you think?

ASH: …. Are you?

PETER: Who are you playing?

ASH: Forget what they’re all called. Small parts. Citizen, I think, is that a part?

PETER: Yeah.

ASH: Citizen. Soldier. What are you?

PETER: Brutus.

ASH: Oh. You’re not a what, you’re a who.

PETER: Yeah. Are you here for arts requirement?

ASH: I auditioned.

PETER: Are you here for arts requirement?

ASH: I got in.

PETER: All the boys get in. They have to ask extra boys to audition. And then cast ugly girls in the small boys parts. Are you here for arts requirement?

ASH: Well. Yeah.

PETER: They take a whole bunch of you. Because they have to. For you to graduate.

ASH: Thought it’d be better than band. Or doing that extra project-

PETER: It’s a lot of work. I’m Peter.

ASH: (*insulted*) I know.

PETER: (*mocking*) I know. Just checking.

ASH: You’re in calc with me. And English.

PETER: You’re new.

ASH: In September. Like a month ago.

PETER: I’ve never spoken to you.

ASH: Doesn’t mean I dunno who you are.

PETER: All of you look the same to me.

ASH: Just because we’re not friends.

PETER: Who said we weren’t friends?

(*beat*)

PETER: Jokes.

(*beat*)

PETER: Well now we’re castmates. Team members. Co-conspirators.

ASH: Does Brutus have any scenes with (*he checks his script*) Citizen, soldier, and…Lucius?

PETER: Lucius. That’s a part.

ASH: Yeah? Who is he?

PETER: My servant. Brutus’ servant.

ASH: Oh. (*beat*) Cool.

PETER: We’ll have to rehearse. A lot. I’ll help you. There’s tricks to how to speak it correctly. And what it all means. It’s difficult when you don’t know what you’re doing. You can really fuck up the play when you don’t know what you’re doing. Did you do plays at your old school?

*(ASH shakes his head)*

PETER: What was your old school?

ASH: Jarvis.

PETER: *(shrugs: he doesn’t know it)* Why are you here? Did you move?

*(ASH shakes his head)*

PETER: Are you a genius?

*(ASH looks at PETER)*

PETER: I didn’t think so. So your parents are worried about you. But they don’t think you’re gay or they wouldn’t send you here. Did you beat someone up? /No.

ASH: No.

PETER: Was someone beating you up?

ASH: No.

PETER: Hm. Do you have any drugs?

ASH: What? No.

PETER: Hm. I have drugs. Did your parents get divorced?

*(beat)*

PETER: Whoa. I’m psychic. You kind of have that look about you.

ASH: Fuck off.

PETER: Aw, y’upset about it?

ASH: No.

(*beat*)

PETER: Yes you are.

ASH: Are your parents divorced?

PETER: No, they’re….I don’t have any parents. They were killed in Chernobyl. What did you do at your old school? At Jarvis?

ASH: …I went.

PETER: Yeah. That’s all I do here.

ASH: And the play.

PETER: And the play. That’s good. If you were one of those fuckers who had pride in being here I would have to shoot you in the face.

(*PETER throws his script on the ground)*

Pick that up for me.

*(ASH looks at him)*

*(more forceful)* Pick that up for me.

*(ASH does it. He hands it back to PETER. PETER smiles)*

PETER: We should rehearse. A lot.

ASH: I don’t know.

PETER: No. We have to. After school.

ASH: (*shrugs*) Thursday I have ortho.

PETER: You don’t have braces.

ASH: Retainer. Attached behind my teeth.

PETER: Let me see.

*(PETER quickly moves very close to ASH before he can respond and looks directly into his mouth. ASH opens up almost as a reflex, the whole thing happens so fast)*

PETER: Hm.

*(Beat. PETER stays there a second too long)*

PETER: You have nothing inside of you.

(*Beat.*)

PETER: Want to see what’s inside of me?

*(Beat. Then, PETER pretends to vomit all over the floor. ASH smiles. PETER does it again. Then, ASH does it too, less convincingly than PETER. They both laugh quietly at each other. Beat)*

PETER: *(Suddenly starts swinging his arms wildly, as if they are heavy and he has no power over them. He heads over to ASH and hits him as he swings)* Vell, it’s a gud sing zat people av control over zeir arms.

ASH: Hey!

PETER: Othervise sings vould get very messy very very fast.

ASH: (*laughing*) What the fuck!

PETER: (*still swinging at Ash)* That the fuck. That the fuck.

ASH: Ok. Ok.

PETER: That’s ok? *(A really good belt)* When I do that?

ASH: Ow. Yeah. I guess.

PETER: What’s your name?

ASH: Lucius.

PETER: I meant in real life.

ASH: Oh. *(He laughs half-heartedly)*

PETER: I’m serious. I don’t know your name.

*(beat)*

ASH: Ash.

PETER: (*smiles*) Ok.

**SCENE: I NEED YOUR HELP**

*(Locker room. A month later. Halfway through play rehearsals. After school. PETER approaches ASH. They are alone.)*

PETER: Know your lines?

ASH: Were we supposed to?

PETER: Not for today. Do you?

ASH: No. Kinda. No.

PETER: Oh.

*(beat)*

ASH: Do you?

PETER: I knew them before we started. I need your help.

ASH: School’s done.

PETER: I need an assistant. For a thing. A project.

ASH: For drama?

PETER: What?

ASH: Like a drama thing?

PETER: No. I wouldn’t ask you for help with a drama thing. It’s not for school.

ASH: What is it?

PETER: I told you. A project. You don’t know your lines.

ASH: What?

PETER: You don’t know your lines.

ASH: It’s been like a month of rehearsals, we aren’t supposed to/ know them yet.

PETER: How could I use you for a drama thing when you don’t know your lines?

ASH: I do…./kinda.

PETER: (*mocking*) Kinda. I can’t use you for a drama thing.

ASH: K. (*goes to leave*)

PETER: (*yells*) DON’T LEAVE ME, ASH.

ASH: Jesus!

PETER: *(very pleasant)* Don’t. Leave Me. Ash.

ASH: What do you want?

PETER: Help.

ASH: What help?

PETER: Your help.

ASH: You have to tell me more / if you want me to do anything.

PETER: Have you ever had anything that you could share with just one person before?

ASH: Like a Twix?

PETER: You’re a mongoloid.

ASH: What?

PETER: Like a secret. (*He pulls a watering can from a locker. He shows it to ASH, and puts it on the floor between them*) Like a game.

ASH: What kind of game? No (*goes to leave*).

*(PETER lights a match. ASH hears the sound and turns to look. Watching ASH, PETER lets it burn for a moment, and then drops it in the watering can. Hiss.*

*Beat.*

*ASH is just about to turn again when PETER lights another match. A moment passes. PETER isn’t going to drop it in the can. He looks at ASH. At the last minute before PETER is burned, ASH picks up the watering can and pours water on PETER’s hand, extinguishing the match).*

PETER: Exactly.

*(beat)*

PETER: It’s a really good game.

ASH: What?

PETER: That.

ASH: What?

PETER: Just like you did. Pretend I’m on fire.

ASH: You want me to – (*he half mimes with the can)*

PETER: Not yet. I’ll lie down. And. Look.

(*He indicates the can. ASH reaches in, pulls out a soaked rag*)

PETER: Of course.

(*beat*)

PETER: Glug glug.

*(ASH quickly puts the rag back and the can down)*

ASH: You mean–

PETER: Yes.

ASH: With the –

PETER: Yes.

ASH: How do you know what I’m about to say?

PETER: I don’t. What are you going to say?

ASH: This is-

PETER: Yes. (*beat*) It’s a project. Help me.

*(beat*)

PETER: Please?

ASH: Why?

PETER: So I know what it feels like.

ASH: It feels terrible.

PETER: How do you know?

ASH: You could / get -

PETER: I won’t die.

ASH: How do you know?

PETER: It’s not as easy as that. It takes a whole lifetime to die. Dying is really hard.

ASH: You don’t know that.

PETER: Ok. Neither of us know. So we should find out.

ASH: This is retarded.

PETER: You’re retarded. People do this. We should /know what it feels like.

ASH: People eat eyeballs and cut off their own dicks, but we don’t do that.

(*beat*)

ASH: Are we doing that?

PETER: Next time. Tonight, this.

ASH: I have to go home.

PETER: Why? What’s at home?

(*beat*)

PETER: Nothing’s at home. (*He lays down).* Get me my bag.

ASH: Get your own bag.

PETER: Lucius is Brutus’ servant.

ASH: That’s a play.

PETER: You’re Lucius.

ASH: That doesn’t make me your /servant.

PETER: Pick up the fucking bag, Ashley! Ash tray! Ashton! Ashton Kutcher.

*(ASH does)*

PETER: Ok. We have to get my head leaning back. (*PETER arranges himself, using the bag to get his head leaning back*) Cloth.

*(ASH takes the cloth out of a watering can and drops it on PETER’s face)*

PETER: What the fuck?

*(ASH shrugs)*

PETER: I’m all wet, shitface!

ASH: You’re going to be drowning in a second.

PETER: You’re terrible at this. *(PETER lies back down*) Ok, do it.

ASH: This is stupid.

PETER: You’re stupid. You actually are, eh? You know that, right?

ASH: *(with the can, standing over PETER)* Now?

PETER: Yeah.

*(ASH goes to pour the water over PETER’s face. Immediately, PETER starts retching and writhing).*

ASH: Jesus!

*(PETER lifts up the cloth and smiles, laughing).*

ASH: Oh my god, you fuck.

PETER: K, for real.

*(He puts the cloth back. ASH slowly starts with the water. Again, PETER sputters immediately, but ASH keeps pouring, slowly at first, but faster and faster until he is dumping lots of water on PETER’s face. ASH becomes oddly fascinated. PETER twitches throughout. Suddenly, PETER rolls over and sits up. He coughs.)*

PETER: It feels like white. And cold. Like flying too fast through clouds.

ASH: Did you feel like you were drowning?

PETER: I want to do it again.