

Write Home About It

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Cast of Characters

ANDY

26, an aspiring novelist

BETSY

24, a student in medical school

MAX

34, a film studio executive

Scene 1

We're in a park in some big city on the East Coast, in the present day. It is about mid-day on a nice summer day. Not too hot, not too cold. You can hear the birds chirping in the background. ANDY is sitting on a bench, notebook and pen in hand, jotting something down. He's wearing a t-shirt and some jeans, black-rimmed glasses, and a messenger bag leans against the bench, by his side.

BETSY enters from stage left, wearing scrubs, carrying a paper bag lunch, and a book, and walks past ANDY.

BETSY

(gesturing to the park bench)

Do you mind if I sit here?

ANDY

No, go ahead.

She sits down and begins to eat her lunch. ANDY briefly looks in her direction and then resumes writing in his notebook. BETSY quickly looks at him, and then looks back and continues eating her lunch. There is a fairly long silence. All of a sudden, BETSY begins to speak.

BETSY

What are you working on, there?

ANDY
(*without looking up from his notebook*)

Nothing.

BETSY

You have to be working on *nothing*.

ANDY

A book.

BETSY

A book? Oo!

ANDY

Yes. A novel.

BETSY

You're a writer?

ANDY

Something like that.

BETSY

I'm Betsy, by the way.

ANDY

Andy. Andy Ellis. Like the island.

They shake hands.

BETSY

That name sounds really familiar. Why do I know that name?

ANDY

Do you read *The Gazette*?

BETSY

Yes! You're their book reviewer!

ANDY

I'm impressed you remembered. Not many people actually read the bylines.

BETSY

What can I say, I'm an observant one. So what's it about?

ANDY

What's what about? (*Pause.*) Oh, the book. Well, if I knew, I'd be done by now, right?

She smiles.

BETSY

Sure, but you have to have some idea, right?

ANDY

That's part of the problem, I'm still sort of working on it.

BETSY

I want to write a book where the *entire book* is the title. Just one really really long title.

ANDY

How would that even work?

BETSY

I don't know. Really small print? Multiple title pages? Anyway, amazon.com would probably flip out — how would you even list something like that?

ANDY

That is ridiculous. They'd probably just come up with a shortened title. Like *Dr. Strangelove*.

She jokingly punches him.

BETSY

You're no fun.

ANDY

So what do you do? That is, when you're not revolutionizing the world of print media.

BETSY
(*pointing to scrubs*)

You have zero guesses.

ANDY pauses and exaggeratedly strokes his chin, making a show of thinking about the answer.

ANDY

You're an eye doctor, but you specialize in monocles.

BETSY

Actually...

ANDY

Wait, I'm not done. You're the last of your kind, so you're really high in demand. Noblemen from England and France travel across the ocean to come see you for their monocle needs, because you're the best in the business.

BETSY
(*laughing*)

Yes, I have autographed pictures with Mr. Peanut and Uncle Pennybags on my desk.

ANDY

So seriously, what do you do?

BETSY

I'm a med student.

ANDY

Almost done?

BETSY

A couple more years to go.

ANDY

So, if I started to die, right here, right now, could you save me?

BETSY

Probably not.

ANDY

A little less exciting than I had hoped, but I'll forgive you.

BETSY

Thanks.

ANDY looks at his watch.

ANDY

Hey, I actually need to catch the bus, but do you think that we could... uh—

BETSY

Yes.

She pulls out a business card from her bag, writes a number on it, and hands it to him.

BETSY

We can work out the details later.

ANDY

What if I wasn't going to ask you out?

BETSY

Well, then I would have felt silly. But that's a risk I was willing to take.

ANDY

I'll call you tonight.

He exits.

Scene 2

Two weeks later, again at the park bench. ANDY and BETSY are returning from a movie, walking hand-in-hand. They sit down.

BETSY

What a gorgeous evening.

ANDY

I know, right?

BETSY

What did you think of the movie?

ANDY

It was ok, though I won't write home about it.

BETSY

Do you ever write home about things?

ANDY

Sometimes I send telegrams.

BETSY

Oh?

ANDY

(makes motions as though operating a telegraph machine)

JUST SAW MOVIE IN THEATER. STOP. FOUND IT ACCEPTABLE. STOP. COMPANY WAS ENJOYABLE. STOP.

BETSY

(jokingly; fake British film critic/snob voice)

Mmm, yes, well I thought the, mm, *mise-en-scène* really underscored the, mm, Christ-like nature of the protagonist?

ANDY
(in the same voice)

Right-o, I found the juxtaposition of the cinematic elements to be, um, yes, quite smashing. One should hope that it takes a first at Cannes.

They laugh, move closer to each other, and begin to kiss.

ANDY
(in between a kiss; softly)

Wow, I love you.

BETSY *sits upright and pushes him away.*

BETSY

What did you say?

ANDY
(hesitantly)

I love you?

BETSY

Don't say that.

ANDY

Why not?

BETSY

Just don't. That's something guys say to get into girls' pants.

ANDY

That's not how I meant it.

BETSY

You don't even really know me. How could you actually love me?

ANDY

I guess you're right. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry. It seemed like the right thing to say.

BETSY

It's fine. I'm sorry, too. I just had to be sure you weren't toying with me.

ANDY lies down on the bench, his head in BETSY's lap. She plays with his hair.

ANDY

I have a great time with you.

BETSY

So do I.

There is a long pause.

BETSY

How is the paper? I liked your latest review.

ANDY

Thanks. It's going fine, I guess.

BETSY

And the book?

ANDY

Still nothing.

BETSY

You'll come up with something, don't worry.

ANDY

I hope so.

BETSY

You will. Trust me.

ANDY

And if you're wrong?

BETSY

Then I'll break into John Grisham's house, steal a manuscript, and we'll publish it under your name.

ANDY

See, that actually sounds worse.

BETSY

I know. Which is why you can't let me be wrong.

ANDY

No, I guess not. (*Pause.*) How about you? How are things?

BETSY

Nothing new, really. Long hours, as usual. I've just finished my applications for residencies, but I won't hear for a few months.

ANDY

Where did you apply?

BETSY

Mostly places in the area. It's hard to go wrong here. I applied to a few on the West Coast, just in case.

ANDY

If you want me to look at any of your essays...

BETSY
(*jokingly*)

And risk getting reviewed in the paper?

ANDY

Very funny.

BETSY

I'll keep it in mind, thanks.

Scene 3

The park bench, again, a few months later (in early fall). ANDY and BETSY are again sitting on the bench, this time in the evening, as the sun is setting.

BETSY

So, I have some good news.

ANDY

What's up?

BETSY

I got into my first choice residency!

ANDY

That's great news! So you'll be staying here, then?

BETSY

That's the plan!

ANDY

Let me take you out to a fancy dinner.

BETSY

If you insist. (*Pause.*) Andy, I love you.

ANDY

I love you too.

They kiss, after which there is a long pause.

ANDY

(more emphatically)

I love you.

BETSY

Me too. (*Pause.*) Why twice?

ANDY

Did you ever read *L'Étranger*?

BETSY
(*joking*)

You're a snob for saying it in French, but no, I haven't.

ANDY

There's a part where the girl asks the main character, "Do you love me?" and he says, "No, not really." I just wanted to make sure that I was saying it because I was convinced of it and not because it's the right response.

BETSY

Oh, Andy...

She hugs him.

ANDY

Have you finished reading my first draft yet?

BETSY

Yeah, I really liked it.

ANDY

You're just saying that.

BETSY

No, I really did!

ANDY

You're sweet. What do you think of the ending, though?

BETSY

Well...

ANDY

You think she shouldn't die.

BETSY

Yeah, I think I'd rather see her redeemed.

ANDY

I don't know...

BETSY

She's so close to it at the end... she's almost there!

ANDY

You don't think it'd be too heavy-handed?

BETSY

Well, it probably would be. But it seems so wrong to cut her off after she's given up so much to make it back.

ANDY

I don't know, I don't want the ending to be too happy. And doesn't it seem a little fake for it all to resolve itself like that?

BETSY

Maybe. But it's fiction, it's allowed to seem a little fake. Please?

ANDY

Hmm. (*Pause.*) OK. I'll make the changes first thing tomorrow morning.

BETSY

You're a darling.

ANDY
(*joking*)

Anything for you, my dearest.

BETSY

Anything?

ANDY

Anything.

BETSY

A giant castle.

ANDY

I'll begin its construction immediately.

BETSY

It'll include a moat and drawbridge?

ANDY

Naturally. Can you even have a castle without those?

BETSY

Certainly not a good one!

ANDY

It looks like it's about to rain.

BETSY

Yeah, it does.

ANDY

We should hurry to a restaurant if we're going to give you that fancy dinner you deserve!

They get up and begin to walk away.

BETSY

Don't you love it when it's nice and rainy outside? You know, a good rain?

ANDY

No, not really. I find it kind of depressing.

BETSY

Sure, but it's so refreshing!

Scene 4

A few months later, and it is now winter, again with the park bench. Snow everywhere. It's around lunchtime. ANDY and BETSY, wearing heavy jackets, walk over to it, brush off the snow, and sit down, steaming cups of coffee in their hands and jackets on.

ANDY

How's school?

BETSY

You know, the usual. Can't complain. It's rough with exams, but I'll get past it. How about you, how's the paper?

ANDY

Fine... but it doesn't matter anymore!

BETSY

What do you mean?

ANDY

I heard from my publisher today! They want the book!

BETSY

That's incredible! Oh, I knew you could do it! Didn't I tell you that this would happen?

ANDY

I couldn't have done it without you. It gets better, though.

BETSY

Is that even possible? How could it get better?

ANDY

They want to make it a movie!

BETSY

A movie?

ANDY

A movie! And they want to buy the rights to a sequel, too! They want to fly me in to Hollywood to supervise the writing of the screenplay and the whole production!

BETSY
(*slightly souring*)

Fly you in?

ANDY

Come to California with me.

BETSY

How long?

ANDY

A year, at least. Maybe two. And who knows how long if they decide to go with a sequel.

BETSY

A year, maybe two?

ANDY

It'll be fun!

BETSY
(*annoyed*)

You can't just expect me to up and go like this. What about school?

ANDY

You know I've been waiting for a chance like this all my life. I need you, Betsy. I *need* you.

BETSY

What about what I need?

ANDY

You can't take some time off?

BETSY

No. I can't.

ANDY

Please? You know I can't do it by myself.

BETSY

I'm sorry, Andy, I just can't do it. If I stop now, I won't come back and finish. And I've been working hard for this. My parents have been working hard for this. What did you want to be when you were little?

ANDY

I don't know. A private eye, I think.

BETSY

I always wanted to be a doctor. I had this little white coat and everything, and when my uncle came over, I would steal his stethoscope and play with it.

ANDY

Betsy. . .

BETSY

One time, I found an old pill jar and filled it with Smarties and hid it in my drawer. My mom found it and freaked out; she thought they were real.

ANDY

Can we. . .

BETSY

Look, you do what you have to do. I won't blame you for trying to follow your dream. But my dream requires me to stay here.

ANDY

You don't think we could make something work?

BETSY

I want to, but I don't think it will.

ANDY

It never does, does it.

BETSY

If it were a few months, OK. But you don't even know if you're coming back. I need a warm body, Andy, not just a phone call every now and then.

ANDY

I'm sorry.

BETSY

No, I am.

ANDY

So, this is it?

BETSY

I guess so. When are you leaving?

ANDY

In two weeks.

BETSY

It's probably best if we don't see each other again.

ANDY

Why?

BETSY

It'll be better this way.

ANDY

I don't know...

BETSY

Trust me.

ANDY

God, I'm going to miss you.

BETSY

Me too.

Scene 5

A month or two has passed. We find ANDY, wearing a suit, sitting in a chair in a Hollywood executive's office, facing the desk. Movie posters are everywhere, and a stack of scripts sits in the inbox, a stack in a pile labeled "rejected," and one or two in the outbox. The office belongs to MAX, a snappily-dressed Hollywood executive whose sideburns are beginning to grey (think Jonah Jameson), who walks in and takes a seat.

MAX

Well well, if it isn't the man of the hour. I'm Max.

MAX extends his hand across the table, and they shake hands.

ANDY

Andy Ellis. Like the island.

MAX

Oh, believe me, I know who you are. Your work has caused quite a bit of a stir around here. We're itching to get your movie made. Who're you thinking for the lead? Ben Affleck? Matt Damon? Russell Crowe?

ANDY

I don't really know much about acting. I'm sure your people will make a much better decision than I could.

MAX

You're a quick learner, I like that. Flattery will go a long way around here.

He rifles through some paperwork on his desk.

MAX

Well, it looks like someone high up really liked your book... they want you on the set of the movie. We almost never give the writers this much creative involvement in the film. They're usually too afraid to change things, to cut things, to rearrange them.

ANDY

What's your target audience with this?

MAX

The same audience that you were writing for. We're going pretty high-brow on this one. If we put the right talent into it, we think this might have a good shot at an Oscar.

ANDY

Really?

MAX

I know we've given you veto power on any changes, but just follow my advice and I guarantee we'll make the shortlist.

ANDY

This is incredible.

MAX

I know, isn't it? Sometimes I can't believe it myself. Hey, where did they put you up?

ANDY

The Four Seasons down the street.

MAX

No, no, no. We'll have to get you a nice apartment.

He presses the intercom button on his phone.

MAX

Doris? Hey, it's Max. Look, can you get Dennis to set up Mr. Ellis here with somewhere decent to live? Thanks.

(to ANDY) There you go, you should be all set up now.

ANDY

Amazing, thanks!

MAX

Oh, there was something I wanted to ask you about.

ANDY

Sure, what is it?

MAX

You know the ending to the screenplay?

ANDY

Yeah?

MAX

I don't want to step on your turf, but she should die.

ANDY

I dunno...

MAX

Again, it's your call. Trust me, though, I'm the best. I know movies. And if you want this to be big, if you want people to eat this one up, it has to seem deep. It has to seem artsy. She has to die.

ANDY

I'll think about it.

MAX

Don't worry about it, this one's going to be big.

MAX reaches into his desk drawer, pulls out a cigar box, and offers one to ANDY.

ANDY

No thanks, I don't smoke.

MAX

Neither do I, but I make an exception for these whenever I start a new film.

ANDY

So how many is that, at this point?

MAX

More than you can count. One of my babies has won an Oscar every year, for the past forever.

ANDY

How do you do it?

MAX

Did I mention that we've also won at Cannes and Sundance?

ANDY

No, you didn't.

MAX

It's all about how you sell it, Andy, it's all about how you sell it. Your audience is your customer. You are a salesman, not an artist.

ANDY

Sure, but—

MAX

Hey, what are you doing tonight?

ANDY

I...

MAX

Why don't you come to Brad's party with us?

ANDY

Brad? Brad Pitt?

MAX

Of course, who else? Look, I have to run, make yourself at home in here, though. Let Doris know if you need anything.

MAX *exits.*

Scene 6

Several months later, the Monday after the film's opening weekend. Again, we're in Max's office, again ANDY is sitting down, waiting for him to arrive. MAX storms in with a pile of newspapers.

MAX
(*annoyed*)

Have you seen today's papers?

ANDY

No, I've been avoiding them...

MAX

That's a luxury I wish I had.

ANDY

No good, huh.

MAX

That's an understatement.

He sets down the stack, pulls off the top paper, and begins reading.

MAX

The New York Times: "... both pretentious and snooty, this is one film that won't even do well on DVD"

ANDY

Ouch...

MAX throws down the paper and picks up the next one.

MAX

The Washington Post: "While a stellar novel, the adaptors fail to realize that some elements do not play well on the screen. An otherwise-compelling tale that really disappoints in its conclusion."

MAX

I think some undergrad at Harvard liked it, but that was about it.

ANDY

I'm sorry.

MAX

Sorry won't bring the millions back. You'd better hope, for your sake, that we break even.

MAX begins pacing around the room.

MAX

I don't know why I took this. They said you had so much potential. "Max, this kid's really got it! Max, trust us on this one."

ANDY

I —

MAX

Andy, we could have *had* this one! It was so close. If it hadn't been for that stupid ending...

ANDY

Hey! We needed that ending.

MAX

Maybe for the book, Andy, but not for the movie. People just aren't ready for that.

ANDY rubs his face with his hands.

ANDY

Ok, what can I do about this?

MAX

Nothing. Pray?

ANDY

Maybe we can make the sequel more somber to counterbalance?

MAX laughs.

ANDY

What?

MAX

The sequel?

ANDY

Yeah, isn't that what the contract said?

MAX

I don't think you understand. You only get one shot at this.

ANDY

Ok, how about another screenplay?

MAX

The brass upstairs are not going to be pleased with your results. I'm sorry, Andy, it's not looking good for you.

ANDY

I'll do anything.

MAX

Look, it's a tough town. You know what you need to do?

ANDY

What?

MAX

Go home.

ANDY

Excuse me?

MAX

Go home. I like you. You might not have made the best decisions, but I like you anyway. Your best bet is to lie low; no one will be too eager to take a script from you for a while now.

ANDY

Ok. I'll see you at Jenn's.

MAX

No, I meant *home home*. I mean, you can stay here if you like, but I don't see the point. Just leave the keys with Doris when you're all packed up.

ANDY

Tell Jenn I'm sorry I couldn't make it?

MAX

I won't need to. Unfortunately, this sort of thing is commonplace around here.

ANDY gets up and begins to leave.

MAX

Wait, before you go.

ANDY

Yeah?

MAX

Here, take one of these.

MAX pulls out a cigar from his desk and hands it to ANDY.

MAX

For your next book. Don't let this get you down, Andy. We almost did it.

ANDY

I guess so. Almost isn't good enough though, huh.

MAX

No, not really. Take care.

ANDY

You too.

He exits.

Scene 7

A week later, back at the park bench. It's summer, and ANDY is again sitting on the park bench with a notebook. BETSY walks in.

BETSY

Hi.

ANDY

Hi.

BETSY

How are you?

ANDY

Ok. Trying to come up with an idea for a book.

BETSY

When did you get back?

ANDY

Yesterday.

BETSY

Why didn't you call?

ANDY

I don't know. (*Pause.*) How's school?

BETSY

Fine.

There is a long pause.

BETSY

So...

ANDY

So.

BETSY

I saw your movie.

ANDY

Can we not talk about this?

BETSY

You kept my ending.

ANDY

You know, they wanted to change it.

BETSY

I know.

ANDY

How?

BETSY
(*Faux British voice*)

Mm, yes, I try to stay abreast of Hollywood news

He smiles.

ANDY

What'd you think?

BETSY

I liked it. Though I probably won't write home about it.

ANDY

Funny. Do *you* ever write home?

BETSY

I've been known to send a letter or two in my day.

ANDY

Yeah?

BETSY

Yeah.

ANDY

I never got a letter.

BETSY
(jokingly)

I guess you're just not that special.

She looks at her watch.

BETSY

Hey, I have to get back to work, but what if we—

ANDY

Yes.

BETSY

I was going to ask you to do something boring. Like, roll quarters or something.

ANDY

No you weren't.

BETSY

Alright, maybe not.

ANDY

Here, I'll walk with you.

He gets up and they begin to leave.

BETSY

You don't think this is a little too... heavy-handed?

ANDY

Too much of a happy ending?

BETSY

Something like that.

ANDY

It probably is. But I don't mind.

BETSY

Me neither.

They exit.

The End.