STEP ONE

A one act play about accepting you’re not okay

CHARACTERS

MICHELLE: 23 year old graduate student who crafts a carefully ordered world for herself. Things are starting to come undone.

DR JONES: Late 40s, Michelle’s new therapist.

LISA: Michelle’s roommate, works at the Starbucks on their block.

JANE: An imagined projection of Michelle’s thoughts.

SETTING

Late winter in a downtown Boston neighborhood.

SCENE ONE

MICHELLE sits alone on the center of the couch in their apartment, clearly lost in thought. She begins to move around anxiously, straightening a pile of her grad papers on the table in front of her. Their order satisfies her for a moment but without fail her frown
returns and she rests her head in her hands. JANE enters from
MICHELLE’S bedroom.

JANE: Oh, no. What’s this? Is someone having a bad day?

MICHELLE: (jumps at the sudden sound) Oh, hey. I didn’t know you were
home. No, I’m fine, just… you know organizing some papers.

She offers a smile as JANE leans in the doorway with a cocked
eyebrow.

JANE: Uh huh. You’re such a cry baby. Jesus.

She rolls her eyes and takes a seat next to MICHELLE, knocking a
pile of papers out of alignment in the process.

MICHELLE: (straightening the papers) Ha. I mean, I’m just a little
frustrated with how my thesis is going but it’ll be fine. I can handle
it.

JANE: They’re going to regret giving you that extra time if you don’t
make better use of it. I mean, what have you even been doing today?
Lisa’s been working all day hasn’t she? Have you even left the house?

Just as MICHELLE finishes straightening the papers again JANE
puts her feet up on the table and sends them scattering. MICHELLE
freezes.

MICHELLE: (avoiding eye contact with JANE) Yeah, I’ve gone out.

JANE: Uh huh. Sure.

MICHELLE: H-how was your day?
JANE: Fine. Great.

MICHELLE: Good.

JANE stares MICHELLE down

JANE: You can cut the crap you know.

MICHELLE: What?

JANE: (standing up in a fury) You know what I mean. This “Oh poor me” “Oh Jane’s picking on me again!”

MICHELLE: (finally bringing her eyes to JANE, her voice starting to catch) I-I’m not!

JANE: I’m not the bad guy here!

MICHELLE: I never sai-

JANE: Fucking piece of shit. You’re pathetic. Jesus!

MICHELLE: ... I’m sorry.

JANE: No, if you were sorry then you’d changed.

JANE stamps out of the living room and slams the front door behind her. MICHELLE stands up and with shaking hands starts to gather her papers. Methodically she walks into her room, puts the papers neatly on her desk and slumps against the wall, staring blankly ahead as tears start to form in her eyes.

MICHELLE: Fuck. Fuck, fuck!

MICHELLE slumps down the wall to the ground. She runs her hands through her hair, pausing and grabbing at fist-fulls.
MICHELLE: She’s right. Of course she is, she’s always right.

Frantic, MICHELLE slowly starts to bang her head against the wall, like a child throwing a tantrum and then faster and harder, the pain splintering her frenzied thoughts and bringing her back to some kind of solid ground. As she starts to calm down she can hear the front door open and close.

LISA: Hey, Michelle, I’m home! Man what a day at the café today. There was this one kid, well it was sort of cute, but in an annoying way you know? Anyway, there was this one kid who laughed so hard with a group of friends that Frappuccino came out of his nose! So gross. But my shift ended before I had to clean it up at least.

MICHELLE hears LISA and starts to wipe her eyes and fix her hair to hide any signs of the breakdown.

LISA: Michelle, you home? (knocks on MICHELLE’s door and opens it) Hey! Did you hear my story? It was hilar- Oh my God, Michelle are you okay?

MICHELLE: Yeah of course I am, why?

LISA: Your head...

LISA reaches out to touch where the side of MICHELLE’S temple is already red and bulging. MICHELLE backs away and reflexively brushes hair over it.

MICHELLE: Oh, this. I was taking a nap and when I woke up and accidentally knocked my head on the dresser. Looks kind of bad right?
LISA: (hesitantly) Yeah... you’ve got to be more careful. It’s not joke hitting your head like that. That’s the kind of thing that sneaks up on you, ya know?

MICHELLE: Yeah. I’ll be more careful.

LISA: Maybe I’ll just wrap you in bubble wrap. Protect you from the world.

MICHELLE: If only it were that simple.

LISA: Anyways, how was your day? How’s the thesis going today? Any new headway?

MICHELLE tenses and keeps eye contact with a spot on the wall.

MICHELLE: Yeah! A lot of good progress, I think I’ll be ready to bring it to my professors for revaluation soon.

LISA: That’s great ‘Chelle! (she grabs MICHELLE’S shoulder and gives it a squeeze) You see, I told you, didn’t I?

MICHELLE: You’ve always known best.

LISA: I have, haven’t I. Oh, I forgot I left some frozen groceries out on the counter! Be right back.

Without either of them noticing JANE reappears and sits on MICHELLE’s bed as MICHELLE watches LISA head back into the rest of the apartment.

JANE: You don’t really believe all of her nonsense, do you Michelle?

MICHELLE: No.
SCENE TWO

Months have passed, it’s now nearly Spring. MICHELLE sits alone in an office waiting room, tapping her foot and watching cars go by several floors below her. The door next to her seat reads “Dr. Jones Psy.D.”. The door opens and DR JONES and his last patient walk out.

DR JONES: Mh-hmm, good. Well, Jessica, I’ll see you at the same time next week, take care of yourself until then. Ah, Michelle, please come on in.

MICHELLE follows DR JONES into his office. It’s sparsely furnished, but tastefully decorated with light forest green walls and Degas prints hanging on the walls. DR JONES takes a seat in a single chair while MICHELLE sits opposite him on a leather sofa. They’ve done this routine for 3 weeks now, ever since LISA moved out.

DR JONES: How have you been, Michelle?

MICHELLE: I’ve been okay.

DR JONES: Have you been working on what we talked about last time?

MICHELLE glances up to him nervously.

DR JONES: It’s alright. I know how hard that will be for you. Let’s start today’s session with something a little easier.
JANE emerges from a side room and come to sit on the arm of
MICHELLE’s couch. MICHELLE whimpers softly and shrinks.

MICHELLE: No....

DR JONES: Sorry, I couldn’t quite hear you?

MICHELLE: Sorry, nothing.

JANE: You’re going to a shrink now? Great, perfect. There’s nothing
wrong with you! You’re just a fuck up. Why do you have to go bother
somebody else with your “problems”? This guy has got people with real
issues to help. Have you lost a parent? No. Are you suffering from a
terminal disease or have terminal pain? No. Piece of shit.

DR JONES: Michelle, did you hear me?

MICHELLE: Sorry, what?

DR JONES: I said, why don’t you tell me how the search for a new
roommate is going?

JANE: You know why she moved out right?

DR JONES: You’re living alone now that Lisa had moved out, right?

MICHELLE: Yes.

JANE: It’s because you pulled shit like this. It was always you, you,
you, you, you. Your thesis. Your problems. Your blood under your
nails. You wanted her to catch you. You’re such an exhibitionist. If
you were really hurting you wouldn’t make such a show of it. You knew
she was home, you knew she would hear you, screaming like a baby at
the tiny scratches. Maybe the screams would have been quieter if you’d
gone deeper.

MICHELLE: The search is going okay, but I’ve been a bit distracted by
my grad work recently. And the rent for one isn’t too terrible so I’ve
actually been thinking about just living alone for a while.

JANE: “Alone”.

DR JONES: Michelle, given your history I don’t know if living alone is
the best option right now.

MICHELLE: (quietly) That was an accident.

DR JONES: Lisa finding you might have been but cutting your wrists
like that is no mistake.

MICHELLE: (almost inaudibly) I didn’t cut them.

DR JONES: Sorry?

JANE: Don’t cry you piece of shit. You’re so fucking manipulating, I
hope you’re proud of yourself!

MICHELLE: I, um, I didn’t cut them. I scratched too hard... my skin was
dry.

DR JONES: Mhm. Michelle, those (gestures to where long sleeves cover
forearms) aren’t from scratches. I know that it’s hard to see how far
you’ve come but those aren’t scratches, a knocked head, or a bitten
through lip. They might be a mistake but they weren’t on accident.

(silence)
DR JONES: Michelle, what’re you thinking?

MICHELLE: Um.

JANE: Go ahead, tell him. Shift off your problems to someone else just like you always do. Go ahead. DO IT.

DR JONES: Michelle. Can you tell me about that voice?

JANE and MICHELLE both look up at DR JONES.

MICHELLE: Um.

JANE: He’s bluffing. Don’t tell him about me.

DR JONES: Often when I ask you questions you get lost in your own thoughts. Or you’ll dig into the couch with your fingernails, like you’re fighting something off. Am I right, Michelle?

JANE: Fuck off! Acting like you’re trying to help her – I’m the only one who gives a damn about Michelle!

MICHELLE: (quietly) Stop…

JANE: YOU’RE THE REASON SHE’S LIKE THIS, NOT ME! Indulging her like rotten child, you’re all the reason she’s rotten and full of flies! She’s FINE!

MICHELLE: (quietly) It’s not real… they can’t be true.

DR JONES: Michelle!

DR JONES reaches for MICHELLE’S hand and restrains it as she starts to dig a deep scratch along her red and bruised forearm with her own nails. MICHELLE pulls her arm away from DR JONES, frantic.
MICHELLE: No, don’t! That’s how she goes away! If I do it she’ll go away and I can... I can think straight again. I don’t have to be...

DR JONES: Abused? Michelle, I don’t know what dialogues you’ve been having with just yourself but know that if they’re exacerbating problems then you don’t need to - you shouldn’t listen to them.

JANE sits on the arm of the sofa, quiet as she watches for MICHELLE’s reaction.

MICHELLE: I’m okay.

DR JONES: You know, it’s okay to not be okay. Not being okay is somewhere you might visit, or maybe you find yourself building a second home there, but no house need be permanent.

JANE: (under breath) Fucking piece of shit, Jesus Christ what an idiot.

MICHELLE: Yes.

DR JONES: Sorry?

MICHELLE: I, I think you’re right.

DR JONES: About what.

MICHELLE: I don’t think... I mean, I’m... I’m not okay.

The last sentence caught in MICHELLE’S throat as she finally voiced what JANE had silenced for years. She continued as tears started to flow down her face and her breathing came in gasps that she usually stifled.
MICHELLE: I’m not okay, I’m not okay!

DR JONES: But you know what, admitting that is first step to overcoming it.