

## **28 Plays Later – Challenge #24**

So, as you've gathered, I've been thinking a lot about the idea of whether art should be truthful, or indeed should attempt at representing truth (or perhaps it does so inherently), and if it does, why? And what does it even mean to be truthful? Perhaps it's all nonsensical.

Sebastian! What's the frigging challenge?"  
oh... uhm... I have no idea!

## **BODY POSITIVE**

**By**

**Melissa A. Bartell**

**Time: Now.**

**Place: An empty dressing room with a makeup mirror and vanity center stage. The mirror has no actual glass, just the perimeter of lights.**

**Lights up on Maria, who is seated at the mirror. She's dressed in an outfit that could be a costume for any show set in the 1920's. She begins to take off her makeup as she speaks.**

MARIA:

Whew! That was a show! I injured my hip in the Saturday matinee last weekend. I thought it was just bruised, and called out on Sunday, but on Monday morning, my doctor said I wasn't allowed to perform for a week. He sent me down to the pool at the Y and said, "Just float. Float for a couple of hours. Let your muscles totally relax."

At first, I thought he was crazy. I mean, relax in the pool at the Y? Really? But I found a block of time when there weren't any classes, and since I was going in the middle of the day in the week, I had the pool pretty much to myself.

I spent the first hour trying to keep my head out of the water. I kept starting at every sound. A bang in the locker room – a shout from the lobby – a sudden hailstorm that rained frozen peas on the skylights... it all captured my attention.

Finally, I gave up. I just let my head fall back and my legs rise up. I let my arms float free, and closed my eyes.

It's a funny thing about floating. It's almost like being in a state of sensory deprivation. You're out of place, out of time....

But you're very much in your body.

My body.

I mean, let's be honest, I'm not in my twenties anymore. Hell, it's been a while since I've seen thirty. I've had a child – nursed her – I've never completely gotten over my love affair with carbs – and I'm an accountant – I sit in a desk all day.

My body shows it.

But even without that.... Even without just one of those things, I've always been the girl – the woman – who was teased for being fat. Who had to wear a bra at the age of eight. Who is always too short and too loud and too hairy and too busty and too round.

But in the pool that week, floating? I let myself spread out. I let myself be hairy and curvy, and okay, my breasts were contained in a bathing suit, but hey, not everyone carries two personal flotation devices around with her all the time.

On the third day, started to sing. Now, I'm not a lead in the show, I'm just in the chorus. I have a solo verse of one song. But mostly, I'm just a body filling space. But you know how it is with theatre people. We know all the lyrics to all the songs. We know the choreo to *A Chorus Line* before we hit puberty, and most of us can rap along with Angelica when she's singing "Satisfied," too.

So I spent three days floating in the pool at the Y, singing my heart out. The whole show, start to finish.

In my head, I finished to a round of applause from the desk clerk and the janitor, and the buff guys who are always at the weight machines – you know the ones, and I bow, even though I'm in a bathing suit and my wet hair is trailing rivulets down my back and chest.

But in reality? In reality no one noticed. Or if they did, no one cared.

Even so, my hip stopped hurting, and I felt much more settled in my body, and my soul, when I was done with my pool week.

My husband couldn't keep his hands off me, Friday night.

So, it's Saturday, and I'm back in the show. And there's this scene where most of us are in some state of undress.

**Maria has completed taking her make-up off, and now she rises and begins to take off her costume.**

MARIA: Alright, it's an orgy scene. Well, it's a post-orgy scene. And usually, usually at the beginning of it, I'm standing on stage in my bra and panties with a slip over it. Not nude, just a little risqué. I mean, this is community theatre you know?

But tonight? Tonight, I went out for that scene without the slip. And here's the truth. My bra and panties – this bra and panties – with my tummy pooching over the waist band and my breasts not so perky anymore and my arms with more flab than tone...

And I knew, I knew there were people in the audience who thought, she'd be so pretty if.... She'd be lovely a few pounds lighter... Would a few sit-ups really be so hard?

But I didn't let that affect me.

Because my time floating taught me that my body is perfect for floating. And cuddling. And raising children. And dancing at a pretend orgy.

In theatre, in art, we spend so much time creating the imaginary and covering up our flaws. We use glitter and paste and sequins and tights, and cram ourselves into Spanx and paint over everything.

And maybe we do it because we're representing something we're not, but underneath all the makeup and wigs, we're supposed to be offering truthful emotional moments. We're supposed to entertain, sure, but in a way the audience can relate to.

**Maria removes her bra during this last speech.**

MARIA: Rosalind Russell, though – I bet the young kids coming up don't even know who she is – Rosalind Russell said that acting was standing up slowly and turning around naked.

This is my body. This is my instrument. No art. No artifice. Just me. And if standing up naked in this body means one person, one other woman in the audience feels better because I have flab and stretchmarks just like she does, that's better than a thousand ovations.

**Maria pushes her underwear to the floor, and steps out of them. She stands there on the stage for a minute, silent, naked.**

MARIA: This is my body. Perfect in its imperfections. Flawless despite its flaws. And from now on, I'm not too short or too busty or too round or too loud. I'm just me.

**BLACKOUT.**