

YELLOW

Roger & Molly are riding in a car, he in the front passenger seat, she behind the wheel. As the play opens, their bodies slowly move forward in unison, then quickly lurch back as she comes to a stop.

ROGER: Are you kidding?

MOLLY: Relax.

ROGER: You could have made that.

MOLLY: Please.

ROGER: Easily. *(beat)* It was yellow, Molly. We had plenty of time.

MOLLY: Did we?

ROGER: Without question.

MOLLY: You always think there's plenty of time, Roger.

ROGER: It's like you slow down and wait for it to turn red. You can't hesitate like that, Molly, you have to commit. You have to commit to making it through.

MOLLY: *(emphatically)* But there never is.

ROGER: Never is what?

MOLLY: Enough time.

ROGER: You'd be surprised.

MOLLY: Would I?

ROGER: *(after a long pause)* Every time, Molly. You do this every time. Do you even notice that about yourself?

MOLLY: Are you psycho-analyzing me again? *(switching to an overly didactic tone)* Yellow does not mean speed-up-it's-about-to-turn-red. It means if you

haven't entered the intersection yet, don't. And if you're already in the intersection, get out of it. Safely.

ROGER: I'm not trying to criticize. I'm just. . .*(he indicates the traffic light)* It's green, Moll, go ahead. *(back to his point)* I'm just trying to point out. . .

MOLLY: Really? Because you sound a little criticize-y to me. In fact, you're a lot criticize-y today. More than usual, I'd say.

ROGER: Don't say criticize-y.

MOLLY: Criticize-y.

ROGER: It's not a word.

MOLLY: Criticize-y. *(pause)* Criticize-y.

ROGER: *(in a dry but playful tone)* Okay. . .that's gonna cost you, Tinkerbell. *(He mimes a slow left hook toward Molly's jaw)*

MOLLY: *(She waves him off with one hand, keeping her other on the steering wheel)* Stop it, I'm driving. And anyway I don't get the Peter Pan reference.

ROGER: It's not Peter Pan. It's a line from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles actually. Don't judge me. *(beat)* Hey, I know! Let's get back to judging YOU!

MOLLY: Yes, we have much more practice in that area, don't we? *(beat)* OK, so you were lecturing me about how I have to commit. *(with flourish)* Com-MIT to the fickle yellow light that beckons brave commuters to forge ahead despite their better judgment.

ROGER: Yes, Molly, commit, dammit! You have to learn to commit and move forward. Not just at a yellow but in other areas of your life. Jesus, you have to stop second-guessing yourself all the time. You hesitate, you falter... and that's what gets you into trouble.

MOLLY: You know I actually hate that word commit.

ROGER: Fear of commitment is an irrational fear, little sis. You're smart enough to know that by now.

MOLLY: I'm not saying I'm afraid to commit. I'm saying I hate the actual word commit.

ROGER: But criticize-y you're okay with?

MOLLY: Criticize-y never bit me in the ass like commit did. Do you not know this story?

ROGER: I have a feeling I'm about to.

MOLLY: Fourth grade. The year of the side ponytail and the nighttime retainer.

ROGER: I remember it well. You were hideous.

MOLLY: It was also the year I learned to hate the word commit. Why? Because it lost me a first-place ribbon in the Saint Peter's spelling bee... after two consecutive years as the reigning queen. Second and Third grade, I was on fire, Roger! Then came fourth grade.

ROGER: Was that why you locked yourself in your bedroom and went on a hunger strike for a week straight, and mom had to slide a tortilla topped with peanut butter on a napkin under your door every night because it was the only thing that would fit and she was afraid you'd die of malnutrition and she'd be chastised as an unfit mother on the front page of the local newspapers?

MOLLY: no. My week long hunger strike was science fair related. It had nothing to do with the commit incident of 1989.

ROGER: God you were a nerd.

MOLLY: I'll never forget it. All-school assembly that day. Mandatory. Everyone had to be there for the spelling bee finals for second, third and fourth graders. I can still see pasty Mrs. Enright leaning her one good elbow on the podium and pressing her big dry lips against the microphone... and she says "Okay, miss Carlington, the word... is comet."

ROGER: Mrs. Enright only had one good elbow?

MOLLY: I, of course, say "can you use that in a sentence please?" because I'm a serious competitor and I know that's a good tactic for buying yourself some time. And Mrs. Enright thinks for a minute, and then she goes (*deliberately deep, slow voice to mimic Mrs. Enright*) "The brightest, most spectacular comet may appear only briefly before it leaves the solar system, never to be seen again." I'm not exaggerating. She had suddenly turned all menacing and intense. Like she was getting off on scaring the bejesus out of a bunch of nine year olds, and I'm thinking "Wow, THAT was ominous..." "

ROGER: Except you probably didn't think ominous. You wouldn't have had the vocabulary for it.

MOLLY: *(she pauses to consider it)* You're probably right. *(she goes back to her slightly revised story)* So I'm thinking, "Wow, THAT was scary. . ."

ROGER: Better.

MOLLY: Thank you.

ROGER: Go on. . .

MOLLY: So anyway... now I'm absolutely dumbfounded thinking about how comets are these incredibly... spectacular... celestial... things... these majestic wonders that mesmerize and mystify and amaze us. . .until suddenly, without warning, they get snuffed out in a flash! Just like that!

ROGER: Well, they don't actually get snuffed out, they get sort of... flung out into space until...

MOLLY: I was in 4th grade, Roger. I'm telling you what I knew in 4th grade. What I felt. In 4th grade.

ROGER: Sorry. Go on.

MOLLY: So now Mrs. Enright's got me in this trance, thinking about these big balls of super bright fire...

ROGER: They're made of methane ice, technically. And water ice.

MOLLY: These big stellar bodies with these long bright tails... just hurtling through space... and from where we sit, they seem so bold and brilliant. But really they're incredibly fragile and fleeting. And my head is just filled with all this... stuff... and I feel like I want to go on thinking about comets forever but, just like the lifespan of a comet, my time is limited. All our time is limited. Our lives are fragile and fleeting like the comet. And the thought of it all makes me start to freak out. But when I try to erase the thought from my mind, I feel like my brain is about to explode.

ROGER: So did your brain actually explode? I don't remember.

MOLLY: No... I suddenly realize I'm in the middle of a spelling bee. It's Mrs. Enright's monstrous ominous voice that brings me back...

ROGER: Her scary voice?

MOLLY: It's Mrs. Enright's scary voice that brings me back down to earth. She presses those prickly lips against the microphone and she goes, "Miss Carlington, your answer please." And suddenly I'm mortified because I'm not sure how long everyone was waiting for me—I mean it could have been forever for all I know—so I spell the word really fast without even thinking... comet... C-O-M-M-I-T...comet. And this kid Aaron goes "Yessssss!" and all the kids in the auditorium start laughing... and I'm thinking, "Oh god, I just fizzled out and died... like a comet. No, not like a comet... like a commit!"

ROGER: I gotta admit, sis, that's simultaneously amusing and tragic. (*indicating the traffic up ahead*) You're gonna want to get out of this lane, Moll. That guy's got his hazards on up ahead.

MOLLY: (*as she turns the steering wheel toward the left*) And do you know what the worst part is? I'd seen the word comet a million times because there was this Halley's Comet poster on the classroom wall right in front of my desk, and I used to stare at it all day long and wonder why Halley was pronounced Hay-lee and not Halley? (*her second pronunciation rhymes with valley*)

ROGER: Believe it or not, that was a collective mistake the whole world started making because of that 1950s band, Bill Haley and the Comets. Pretty sure everyone says Halley now. (*he pronounces it to rhyme with valley*)

MOLLY: Roger, why is it that you know every goddamned thing?

ROGER: (*smiling proudly*) I know, it's crazy, isn't it?

MOLLY: So the word is Halley (*she pronounces it to rhyme with valley*), and for years we said Haley (*she pronounces it to rhyme with Bailey*)... and now it's Halley (*like valley*) again? Can people just change important words on a whim like that?

ROGER: They change all kinds of things. Think about poor Pluto! How about the fact that we actually declassified an entire planet. See, Molly, unlike you and your spelling bee tragedy, Pluto actually has a legitimate gripe. 76 years you're known as a full-fledged planet and—bam!—you wake up one day to find out some pencilneck has downgraded you to dwarf status. You think you got problems, Molly? You got nothin' on Pluto.

MOLLY: Not so fast. I haven't even told you the worst-worst part of my story.

ROGER: There's more?

MOLLY: Get this... I lost to Aaron Patrick, the kid with two first names who used to cheat off my spelling tests. And you know what word he won with? Irony! You want irony? That's irony.

ROGER: I doubt that was a fourth grade word. Irony's not 'til 6th grade at least.

MOLLY: I remember.

ROGER: Okay, sis, whatever. *(something in his side mirror catches his eye; he does a double-take)*

MOLLY: I remember, Roger!

ROGER: All right, don't freak out.

MOLLY: I'm not freaking out.

ROGER: No, I mean don't freak out because there's a cop behind you.

MOLLY: Okay, I'm freaking out. What do I do? Oh, god, he's flashing his lights, Roger. He's pulling me over. What do I do?

ROGER: Pull over. And don't freak out.

MOLLY: I'm freaking out.

ROGER: Pull over—to the left.

MOLLY: I thought the rule is pull over to the right.

ROGER: You can't make it across all those lanes. He wants you to pull onto the left shoulder. And when he asks if you know why he pulled you over, don't answer. It's a trick. Just say you don't know.

MOLLY: Do you see the irony here, Roger? Weren't we just arguing about going through a yellow? And wasn't I the one erring on the side of safety and prudence and caution? And now I'm getting pulled over? Seriously, are you catching the irony here?

OFFICER: How you doin' tonight?

MOLLY: Uh. . .

OFFICER: Do you know why I pulled you over?

MOLLY: Uh. . .

ROGER: No, you don't. You have no idea.

MOLLY: Uh, no I don't, your honor. I have no idea.

ROGER: He's not a judge. He's a cop.

MOLLY: Uh, no I don't, your officer. Officer! I don't have any idea.

ROGER: Oh geeez. C'mon, Moll.

OFFICER: *(he peeks into her car, focusing on the dashboard panel)* I see your dashboard clock is working just fine.

MOLLY: Yes, sir. Officer.

OFFICER: So you're aware it's five-twenty?

MOLLY: Yes, sir?

OFFICER: And did you happen to notice that HOV sign back there?

MOLLY: I think so.

OFFICER: Then you know that the high-occupancy requirement goes on through until 6:00 PM tonight?

MOLLY: Yes, but. . .

ROGER: *(softly)* Molly don't argue.

MOLLY: *(to Roger)* I'm not. *(snapping at him)* You don't know what you're talking about.

OFFICER: I'm talking about the fact that you are driving alone in a high occupancy lane during restricted hours

MOLLY: but... what... What if my brother were here with me?

ROGER: Molly, don't.

OFFICER: *(peering into the car, he sees nothing)* Well, if your brother was here with you in the car, then that would be a different story.

MOLLY: So then it would be okay that I'm driving in this lane? *(catching herself)* Hypothetically, I mean.

OFFICER: Yes it would. . . because then you wouldn't be alone now would you?

MOLLY: *(she is struck by the officer's words)* No. If my brother were here, then I wouldn't be alone.

ROGER: Molly, pull yourself together. You're going to be fine.

OFFICER: But. . .since you are alone, I'm afraid that's gonna cost you.

MOLLY: *(her face slowly breaks into a smile)* That's gonna cost you. . .

M & R: *(together)* Tinkerbelle! *(Molly laughs)*

OFFICER: what's that you just said?

MOLLY: *(pulling herself together)* Officer, I was just wondering.

OFFICER: License and registration please.

MOLLY: *(she hands her license and registration through the window)* Is there any way you can waive the fine and maybe just give me a warning? I've had sort of a rough year.

OFFICER: Haven't we all. *(he walks away)*

MOLLY: *(she shakes her head and keeps talking anyway)* Mine's been particularly rough. *(beat)* I lost my brother. *(She turns and looks at Roger)* I'm sorry, Roger. I don't know why I couldn't get through the yellow.

ROGER: It's okay, Molly.

MOLLY: it's not okay! I should have sped up. I don't know why I hesitated.

ROGER: you can't hesitate anymore. You have to commit. For you this time. You have to commit to making it through.

MOLLY: I don't know, Roger. I don't know if I can.

ROGER: Don't doubt yourself. You'll get through this, I promise. There's plenty of time, Molly. *(Roger steps out of the car and walks away)*

MOLLY: *(looking straight ahead)* You always think there's plenty of time, Roger. *(beat)*
But there never is.

Blackout