

ALOOF
A play in one act
By Craig Houk

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Cast of Characters

BEN 29 years old. He has average looks and an average build. He is withdrawn, self-suppressive.

Place
Boston

Time
1999

Ben: *(He sits in a chair. He eyes the therapist who sits opposite him. There is a sense of arrogance about him at this moment.)* This might seem a little grotesque to you, but I actually often plan, to the detail in my mind, how I can kill people. And I find that I'm not too particular about how I do it. Some are slow and agonizing. Some are quick and painless. Sometimes I surprise them. But, mostly, I like it when they see me coming. The look of terror in their eyes. The feeling of helplessness. Of hopelessness. *(Beat.)* It amazes me the thoughts that go through my head sometimes. They come to me almost every moment of the day and, now and then, I think they'll never stop. But they do. For a while. And then they come back again, drilling themselves into my head one after the other until my head almost splits in two. And then they stop again. Each time, I pray they don't return. But I've found, over the years, that prayers are never answered. Well, not mine anyway. I think it's a test of my sanity. *(Beat.)* Sometimes, I think so much that I can think the whole world away. I have the power to make life appear entirely insignificant. I can do that. Some power, huh? It's times like that when I want to kill myself. But I can't do that. I'm as petrified of death as I am of life. You know, I wish there was someplace in between life and death. A quiet place to hide. Because, if there was, I'd go there and wait to see if anyone noticed I was gone. *(He rises and moves up and around the chair, eyeing the therapist and trying to catch a glimpse of the notes he's making.)* Some people believe that when life is done with you, that's when you die. I believe, when you're done with life, that's when you live longest. *(Moment.)* Mostly, I don't speak to anyone. *(He sits again.)* I'm making an exception with you because, believe it or not, I trust you. I mean, from the moment you walked in here, I knew. Most people who walk through that door are here to harm me. But you seem different. *(Beat.)* Mostly, I just say one word, over and over again. You think I'm crazy? Put one of those attendants in this room with me for five minutes, I'll show you crazy. I hear they flip a coin to see who doesn't have to come in here. And, of course, they think I'm helpless. And I let them think that. I shit my pants. And wet my pants. And pull out my hair. And beat my head against the wall. Sometimes, I feel like a Betsy Wetsy doll. But I'll do anything. So that I never have to leave this room. Because I feel safest here. Not entirely safe. But mostly safe. *(Beat.)* You want to know what word it is that I repeat over and over again, don't you. You're just dying to know, aren't you? *(He rises, turns the chair around and then sits backwards in the chair.)* Okay, well, I'll tell you. But be forewarned... Sometimes, when I start, I have a difficult time stopping. *(Beat.)* Aloof. That's it. That's the word. Aloof. One word, two syllables. Kind of cute, huh? Aloof. Mmmm, I love that word. I love the sound it makes when it leaves my mouth. Aloof. See, I warned you. I don't know

why, but, sometimes, I get an erection when I say it. Aloof. (*He looks down.*) But not today. Sorry. (*Beat.*) You look relieved. I bet you are. Relieved. I mean, how uncomfortable would that be. If I got an erection and, here you were, sitting just inches away. Eight inches away. (*Beat.*) I'm not really that big. (*Moment.*) Have you ever been to Fenway? And I don't mean the baseball park. With men in tight pants running in circles trying to score. I mean the Fenway Gardens. With men in tight pants running in circles trying to score. (*Beat.*) Oh, you're not from Boston. (*Beat.*) They flew you in from New York. Just to see me? (*Beat.*) Oh, you have other... clients. (*Beat.*) Well, I'm a little disappointed, I guess. For a brief moment, I thought I might be special. (*Almost retreats but steadies himself.*) Well, anyway... the gardens. They're beautiful in the summer time. Especially at night. Do you have any idea what goes on there at night? (*Beat.*) Well, if the rumor involved anonymous, unprotected sex between men, it wasn't a rumor. And even if you have the most vivid sexual imagination, believe me, nothing you could imagine would ever compare with what really goes on there. Men behaving like animals in heat. With their pants down to their ankles and their asses in the air. Begging to be penetrated. And those are the same men that, not two hours before, were throwing you attitude at the club. The same men who wouldn't give you a second glance. Or a second thought. It's magical how shit turns to gold when desperation sets in. (*Moment.*) Yeah. I've been there. At night. Mostly, I'd sit on a park bench just on the outskirts. And I'd watch the men as they'd parade in and out. (*Beat.*) Sometimes, I'd try to match them up. I'd try to guess who might end up with who. Truth is, I'd never really know. Because most of the men who went in there alone would come out exactly the same way. Alone. And then they'd head back to their homes, or apartments, or hotel rooms. Or to their wives or lovers. Satisfied that they were able to have relations with a man whose face they'd never be able to recognize in the daytime. (*Beat.*) Occasionally, I'd go in as well. Well, I don't have much self-control anyway and I barely have any friends let alone a lover. But mostly, I just sat on that bench. Hoping that someone might catch a glimpse of me before they disappeared into the darkness. Hoping that they might sit next to me. And talk to me. And invite me to lunch. Or to dinner. Or to a movie. Or to anywhere but there. But no one ever did. So, against my better judgment, I'd get up off that bench and I'd evaporate into the night air. I'd become aloof. (*He quickly retreats upstage of the chair. Moment.*) There was a man who I'd see every day on the Red Line as I'd go back and forth to and from work. He was always there. Without fail. What are the chances do you think? That in a city of 674,000 people, I would wind up sitting across from the same guy every single day. No matter what train I'd get on and no matter what seat I'd sit in, there he was. And in his left hand, a cup of

coffee that he never drank but just continually blew on to cool it off. And in his lap, a copy of the Boston Herald. And he just sat there, his eyes blinking like hazard lights on a car, scanning every page and every word of that ridiculous publication. And as he read the paper, he maneuvered his coffee out of harm's way while he quickly turned the pages with his right hand. And he turned those pages so abruptly that it made the most aggravating sound I'd ever heard. Like an anxious flock of pigeons taking off. And no matter how often he turned those pages, I was always startled. I could never get used to it. (*Beat.*) I imagined killing that man. I imagined shredding that newspaper and shoving the pieces down his throat. And, as he suffocated, I imagined pouring the hot coffee into his crotch. (*He slowly returns to the chair and sits.*) I imagined him trying to scream with the bits of paper jammed in his throat as the hot liquid burned away at his balls. (*Beat.*) Some people believe that when life is done with you, that's when you die. I believe, when you're done with life, that's when you live longest.