

5 out
of 10
men

by

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5 out of 10 men
a text for performance by Roland Reynolds

A man, Mike

Mike's brother

Women & Men, who sometimes appear to him as significant figures in his life

One man is kneeling in a pool of light. His name is Mike. He has a black towel covering his head and face. He might be meditating, crying, breathing. Before him on the floor lies a small book, a diary.

Near him but out of his light a young man is running. He listens to music and is travelling a great distance, singing to himself, intent upon his journey. This is Mike's brother.

Actors are welcoming people into the room; they are friendly, open and available and give warm greetings to everyone who enters. They're actors, not characters, and they engage in conversation freely and go in whatever direction these interactions take them.

This continues until all spectators and company are assembled; a signal is given to seal off this space from the outside world and the brother goes to close the door.

A Woman [v/o] – Tell me about your daddy.

A Woman & A Man – Dad. Dad did it the only way he knew how. He didn't laugh all that much most of the time I knew him, wasn't very tactile, very touchy-feely. He travelled a lot, never stayed still, he was always away for weeks on end, especially when I was really young and I thought that was pretty glamorous, my daddy flying around the world but when I was older and he told me what he was doing back then, a shitty job for no pay, going from planes to hotels to offices to hotels to planes in this anonymous grind and we had hardly anything back then, which I didn't really realise at the time, we weren't exactly "deprived" but there was a lot of pressure on him to work over-time and over-over-time to give what mum needed to give us a good childhood. But she hated the life, she gave up Law to look after us and I

remember the guy she's married to now arriving in our life, he was so successful and charismatic and supportive of her and encouraged her to go back into education and she did it when we were older and so when she left dad and we were grown up, she had this new lease of life and a job and opportunities and she was in love again. It was inevitable they divorce and dad took it so well, it was completely amicable, no hard words, no abuse, no arguments (he was the best man like that, he never raised a hand or a voice to anyone, he was always so reasonable with no limit of patience). So they split, she remarried, we were both in uni or just finishing, everyone was very adult and rational about it. And a year later he hanged himself. Didn't say anything to anyone, nobody knew he was depressed or lonely, we were always seeing him and hanging out. We tried to ask his friends why they thought he did it. But it turned out he didn't really have any friends. He didn't leave a note or anything. So we don't really know why. I guess he sacrificed the present so we'd all have a future together. And then we cut him out of the future when it arrived.

A microphone is placed before the man who kneels. He acknowledges the gesture with a glance and a "Thank you." He breathes. He breathes teasingly into the mic, unsure whether he's in the mood to cry or to be mischievous.

Mike – I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't have to. I think it's a big risk for a man to expose himself, to show what's going on inside.

Mike – I'm more than a little afraid. Do you mind if I use a mic? It gives me that feeling of power over you, a sense of superiority, know what I mean? No no no, not really. It makes me feel that I can speak more intimately with you. I think it's intimacy that I've been missing the most recently.

He pauses to look at the people gathered there. He takes them in, sending out smiles and a hello or some to particular individuals, aiming to get some greetings in response.

Mike – You're here. You are here. Are you here? I didn't hear you you, come on, you are here aren't you?

He elicits responses from them, prodding and probing and laughing and teasing.

Mike – I'm more than a little bit afraid of this. I mean, you're here, I'm here, but at the same time we're not here. Are we? This is an illusion, I know that. What I say and do within these walls is not real and not true. This isn't me and if you asked me what is me I'm not sure I'd be able to answer! I'm a man, I would have said before and I would have been sure of it. But in the course of my life up to this moment I have gone through a series of events that have made me call into question my own perception of myself as a man. I don't know what a man is, or what it is to be a man. And I want to find out if there is such a thing, and if there is, whether I need to know what it is. All pretty complicated! So I've come to this place and invoked your presence to help me. This is research and it can't be done alone. Like a life. I always believed and I guess I was taught that a man had to do his life alone. But it's not possible.

Mike – Ok, for the sake of my research, we're going to establish a baseline of sound between us. We're going to do a simple exercise during which you all together will make some noise. It's got to be pleasant, it's not meant to be exposing to you. I'm the one being exposed here remember! Alright, ready? Here we go. I want you to just close your eyes and just sit there.

Mike – Everyone has their eyes closed [*he makes sure of it*], all of you together. Now focus on your breathing. Very good, just breathe in and out, just like usual, no deeper or shallower or faster or slower, but just right, just how you always breathe. Now we're all going to breathe in together [*he breathes in*] and we're going to hum [*he hums a note*], any note, so that all together we can create a continuous harmony and whenever anyone needs to take a breath the sound is continued by the rest of the group. So, keep your eyes closed. Breathe in. And

Everybody hums. After less than a minute Mike calls them to a stop.

Mike – Ok. Just breathe normally. Open your eyes and take a look around you. Look at your neighbours, say hello or tell them your name. I'm asking you to do this because I need you to be more than figments of my imagination, or witnesses or spectators. Sometimes I'm going to ask you to comment. Not comment. More than that, I need you to help me. Because I can't do this alone. I know this is all an illusion, but it's about something real. And it's the illusions

that can reveal to us more about life than we could ever see through reality itself. So let's give it a go.

He takes them all in one last time; acknowledges them. He breathes in and out, steps back, drops them; his brother takes the microphone away from him and he begins to run.

[Note: humming is used to encourage the spectators to make sound with minimal exposure; it is not specifically referred to again in the text, but should be used throughout performance at the ensemble's discretion to add an aural texture in appropriate moments or scenes. By having at least one opportunity to use their voice, each individual spectator should be made aware that when they are invited to speak, make a noise or generally become involved, this invitation is made genuinely and with the offer of support]

Brother *[over the mic]* – A man is running in light. He's not sure how long he's been running but judging from the ache in every joint it must have been a long time, even though at the moment his breathing is still easy, his lungs and heart free. So far.

One by one the other three begin to run alongside Mike. At first he doesn't realise, but gradually he acknowledges them. They begin to play, compete, have fun.

Brother – The breeze plays on his face in a way that reminds him of summer. His skin itches with a night-cooled sunburnt urgency. He feels currents breathing beneath him, magnetic force fields of moon-tugged tides.

Women & Men – Where are you?

Mike – I'm on the sea! I'm in the open. It's open and sunny and hot like it's never hot on the land. I want you to be here with me, jostled by inhuman forces beyond our reckoning. One of those hot, sticky days where you know there must be a storm coming and you're gagging for the rain for relief from it.

Brother – Sleep deprivation. Fasting, hunger. Depression, grief, loss. Figures are running beside him, figures running in light. They run light, on cat-padded paws, running light on their feet like a cat on heat running on a meathouse roof in the middle of the night. This guy came here on purpose. He'd reached the point where he could no longer pretend that everything was ok.

They're fighting, playing, one, two, three, four of them and Mike.

Women & Men – Tell us about your life

Women & Men – How does it begin?

Mike – My life begins with my earliest memory. Two years old, being rocked to sleep by my dad.

When I remember my childhood it's like a movie. It goes like this. Right. Ready? The movie of my life begins

Mike – Well, it depends who made it – there's the Scorsese version that starts with me as a kid in a group of kids running through suburban streets in, you know, mad monkey children, Tony Bennett on the soundtrack, we're tearing up and zooming round, chased out of shops and in and out of the side streets, it's all done in one long sweeping take with humour and light but an undercurrent of violence and always the threat of Catholic guilt, redemption, all that.

Mike – Then there's a Tarantino, you can imagine that, a bit of witty chitter chatter, some burgers and shakes, guns, maybe from the army days, there was a lot of fast talkers around back then, some smart-arse killer types in hilariously dangerous situations, all very unlikely but somehow completely real.

Mike – There's even a Harmony Korine that opens with me in my mid-20s, flat out on a couch in some shitty seedy student flat probably in Peckham or something, and I wake up and throw up, down a couple of vodkas, coat on, couple more shots this is a properly alcoholic lead-in

phase before I even became aware I had a problem, then out the door and stagger into the street, but the characters are stranger, so damaged and deranged, somehow scary and I feel I should pity them but that they're really pitying me.

Mike – But my favourite these days is the Terrence Malick: it starts with my earliest memory, dad rocking me to sleep. I see it in bright light, an airy room with big windows looking onto the sea, muslin curtains breathing billows in the ocean breeze, a bed big as a desert, crisp white sheets starched.

Mike – I guess that's not the real memory though. When I was born my parents were so poor they had to put me to sleep on top of the washing machine, it was that cramped where they lived then. I literally grew up on top of a washing machine. That was a long time before you were born though, by that time they had a semi-detached house and two cars. Fat days. He lost it all again, but that's always been his way, up one year and down the next. Not very sustainable, not very stable. But that's dad.

Mike – I haven't seen dad in quite a long time. Last time I saw him must have been at one of the funerals, I can't remember just off the top of my head which one was first and which one was after.

Brother – Two men are standing at the edge of a grave. It's raining but they hardly notice as their bodies contort against the wet and the wind. A man and his father, and they're looking down into a deep hole with a little coffin resting on the ground. People surround them. A man is murmuring ritual words and making wet, muted gestures. After the service they remain alone, the man's gaze transfixed downwards, his father not knowing where to look or what to say.

Brother – Without realising they've even moved the man is suddenly aware that he's no longer looking down into a hole in the ground but rather he's staring into the amber bottom of a bubbling pint of the good stuff. He looks at the pub around him and wonders why he didn't notice it before. Another, much more consumed pint stands beside his own and he recognises the hand on his own shoulder as the hand of the man standing behind the pint of

beer that stands beside his own as the hand of his father and he realises suddenly that he's in a pub having a pint with his dad.

Dad – You shouldn't blame yourself.

Mike – I'm not blaming myself. For what?

Dad – Good.

Mike – Was it my fault?

Dad – No boy. No. Nothing you could have done.

Brother – He has the distinct impression that he has done something wrong, and that everyone around him knows it but they can't tell him what it is.

Mike – Are you embarrassed?

Dad – No.

Mike – You're just being a bit awkward, have I done something wrong?

Brother – He wonders why he's standing here with this man. In the back of his mind there dances out of reach a particular reason that explains the feelings he's trying not to feel at this moment in time. He knows that if he was stood here with mum instead, she'd be able to make him feel better without him even knowing what the problem is. Mum always makes it better. Dad usually makes it pretty uncomfortable.

Dad – Don't throw it all away. You know what I mean?

Mike – What are you talking about?

Dad – Your life, your career, all that. You mustn't let this ruin your life. You've got to be strong, you've got to cheer up, keep your energy up, spirits. It's not the end of the world

Mike – It feels like the end of the world.

Dad – You're young still.

Mike – Please dad.

Suddenly his dad pulls him over and plants a kiss on his head. The contact throws Mike off and he aggressively pulls away. Dad laughs it off but he is unsettled.

Dad – I only know one thing that'll make you feel good. Come on, tonight I'm in charge and tomorrow you'll be right as rain, we'll have a laugh.

Mike – I'm not in the mood

Dad – You'll be in the mood Mike, don't worry. You'll be in the mood.

Brother – They drink together, at first slowly and quietly, but they gather steam as the soothing buzz causes them to relax into each other's arms. They scramble out into the street. It's a night busy in red-blue neon reflections dancing off the wet streets, drunks roaming, jostling, cars whipping through rain, girls calling and cooing. They eventually answer the call of two girls who ferry them through one harsh-lit doorway.

Dad and Mike start having fun. Eventually, they're being sucked off, still in their clothes, alone in their own light. Dad's got a pair of black lace panties in his mouth that he's moaning through. As they approach cumming, dad reaches out a hand to grab Mike's but he's too far away. Mike looks at the hand grinning as though he could touch it but there's something inside him that resists and the hand is taking on a very symbolic but entirely mystifying significance as it continues to reach out to him and he continues to stare at it and it becomes less and less funny and appealing and then dad's cumming and the hand is gripping the girl's hair violently

and Mike realises that he's cumming too and they both fuck the girls' mouths until they're happy.

While this is happening a phone is ringing. An answer phone message is left by a woman

Woman [v/o] – Hi Michael, it's mum here. Just getting in touch to see how you are. How are you? I don't really know what you're feeling at the moment, I've hardly seen you for these last months. But I know what you're going through. And I'm always here, I'm always just the other end of a phone call. So please call me Mike, please. I love you baby. Ok, well, bye.

Dad forces the panties in his mouth and tries to wrestle a little as they tumble back into the street but Mike pushes him off. Dad pulls him to him, plants another kiss on his head and slaps him on the arse. He's left alone as he stumbles and falls to his knees. He reaches out, searching, finds a pillow and clings to it.