

# THIN PINK LINE

a short play by

**Manny Buckley**

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**CJ** – white, 20's, cop, too straight-laced

**ZAIN** – black, 20's, bartender, no nonsense, seen it all

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Time: Dusk. Pride Week, end of June, 2020 in Chicago's Boystown neighborhood. Protests of George Floyd's death, and police brutality have been happening all day.

*(In the alley between The Siren, the bar where **ZAIN** works, and the adjacent building. Faint sounds of protesters, and police sirens are heard. **ZAIN** is on his knees, with plastic police handcuffs around his wrists and a protective mask around his face.*

***CJ** is in police riot gear. **CJ's** helmet has a face shield.)*

\* “ / ” followed by “ \ ” indicates a line continuation.

**ZAIN**

*(The mask is muffling his speech, but he speaks slowly and deliberately.)*

You're silencing me is what you're doing!

**CJ**

What? What are you saying?

**ZAIN**

I said you're silencing me.

**CJ**

*(Offended.)*

No, I'm not silencing you. We have to be cautious.  
I put the mask back on your face for both of our protection.

**ZAIN**

*(Still muffled.)*

You cops are all the same. You only care about protecting your own self.  
You show up in my hood, where I work, crack people's skulls without  
just cause and terrify the neighborhood.  
All of you should be abolished for the inhumane way you treat the  
citizens who fund your donut eating.  
We're human beings, and deserve a modicum of respect.  
You take better care of the drug sniffing dogs than anybody on two legs.  
All your mothers should be ashamed!

*(A beat.)*

**CJ**

I didn't understand anything you just said.

*(Another beat.)*

**ZAIN**

*(Screams.)*

**CJ**

Okay, okay. Stop screaming.  
I will unmask you – If you promise not to scream!

**ZAIN**

*(Nods in agreement.)*

**CJ**

Alright, I'm taking the mask off.  
You don't have to tell me everything you said...just gimme a synopsis.

*(CJ carefully unmask ZAIN, steps a safe distance away.)*

*(A beat.)*

**ZAIN**

I said... you a doo doo head.

*(A beat.)*

**CJ**

Look, you don't gotta use that kinda language, Zee!

**ZAIN**

You a cop in these streets, and these streets are the only thing you will be policing.

What you ain't finna do is police my language.

That badge you got don't mean nothing.

You don't run this! I'd thank you to remember that.

Take out your lil popo pad and jot that down right quick.

*(Small beat. ZAIN realizes CJ knows his name.)*

Wait..did you just say my name! Who is you? Is you FBI, or something?

You can slow your roll, J Edgar Hoover.

You looking at the least militant kween in Boystown.

All I was doing was passing out water bottles to protesters, and waving at twinks.

Show me the felony!

**CJ**

*(Directs rhetorically at himself as much as to Zain.)*

You honestly don't know who I am?

**ZAIN**

Is this mind game Hawaii Five-O edition? Because where is this leading?

*(To the tune of the show's theme song.) Car 54 Where Are You!?*

**CJ**

*(Almost under his breath.)*

Okay, a little offensive, Zain.

**ZAIN**

*(Fed up.)*

Please don't say my name again without telling me yours Officer...

*(Urging the name.)*

**CJ**

Officer James.

**ZAIN**

*(Says name contemptuously.)*

Officer James, is your body cam on?

It would not behoove me to interact with law enforcement without a recording.

Unless you want to reach into my very tight pants for my phone, so I record, I need an answer about that body cam!

**CJ**

Cam's not on, neither of us needs it.

**ZAIN**

You not finna be telling me what I need /

**CJ**

*(Interrupting.)*

\ Zain! *(Small beat.)* It's me Cole. Cole James.

**ZAIN**

*(Blank stare. Zero recognition.)*

**CJ**

The Cole James you ghosted two years ago.

**ZAIN**

Oh, shit /

**CJ**

\ Shit is right.

**ZAIN**

What is this? Why do you have me here? /

**CJ**

\ I'm doing you a favor.

**ZAIN**

How is secluding me in the alley without witnesses doing me a favor?

**CJ**

*(Stern, but sensitive.)*

Do you have any idea what's going on in this city right now?

Civilians are mad, and getting hostile. But you know what?

The boys in blue have had it! When things are peaceful, do we get credit?

No, we don't! But when things go bad, it's ALWAYS our fault.

Everybody's fed up on both sides, and I'm just keeping you outta the way for your own good.

**ZAIN**

So playing cop wasn't enough for you?

You're taking on responsibility as white savior, too!

Seems like a heavy workload.

**CJ**

I don't think you understand the gravity of what I'm saying to you.

Those uniforms out front don't mind bashing your face in.

Been happening all week, even up here in Boystown – especially up here!

**ZAIN**

Shouldn't you be protecting more than just one queer?

Isn't your duty to serve the entire queer community!

Pretty lax of your responsibilities if you ask me.

**CJ**

*(Blurts it out.)*

Yeah, well the guys don't know I'm gay!

*(A beat.)*

**ZAIN**

*(Quietly, calmly.)*

And there it is, Cole!

**CJ**

There what is? *(Small beat.)* And it's CJ now.

**ZAIN**

Call yourself whatever you want now, Cole...CJ...whatever.  
You wanna know why I stopped calling, and texting you?  
That right there. You put up a fantastic front those first few weeks.  
You were nice, I liked you, enjoyed spending time with you.  
But then you showed me that!

**CJ**

Showed you what? What are you talking about?

**ZAIN**

You're a closet case.

**CJ**

What are you talking about? We went out to bars together.  
Our first date was in Boystown.

**ZAIN**

Our first date was in Wrigleyville. Big difference.

**CJ**

C'mon, it's the same neighborhood! We're splitting hairs here.

**ZAIN**

The line separating Boystown from Wrigleyville may be thin,  
but the cultural line is as long as the San Andreas Fault.

**CJ**

You agreed to go.

**ZAIN**

I thought you were being ironic.

**CJ**

I wasn't being anything.

**ZAIN**

Later when I met your sister, you introduced me as your poker buddy.

**CJ**

My sister's a devout Catholic.

**ZAIN**

So!

**CJ**

So, I didn't want to make her uncomfortable.

**ZAIN**

I think you didn't want to make yourself uncomfortable.

**CJ**

That's not true.

**ZAIN**

In 2020 plenty of devout Catholics are comfortable being around gays, supporting gays or even marching in the pride parade alongside them.

And speaking of the pride parade, I invited you to go and you said it wasn't your scene.

**CJ**

That's not my thing!

**ZAIN**

What is your thing?

**CJ**

It's the twenty first century, I don't have to be swathed in the pride flag to identify as gay.

**ZAIN**

Do you?

**CJ**

Do I, what?

**ZAIN**

Openly identify as gay?

**CJ**

What kinda question is that? We dated.

**ZAIN**

Did you tell anyone else we dated besides me?

**CJ**

*(Silent.)*

**ZAIN**

Just what I thought. You didn't have the balls.

**CJ**

Big talk from someone who didn't have the balls to break up.

**ZAIN**

Remember when we went to see Tank and the Bangas?

You ran into some of your cop academy buddies doing police security.

When I came back from the bathroom, I heard you tell them I was your hairstylist.

**CJ**

It was just a little white lie.



**ZAIN**

I'll say.

*(A beat.)*

**CJ**

We had a great time. I liked you. A lot.

Even with the mask on, I knew who you were the moment I saw you,  
even in a crowd full of people.

I saw us having a future together.

**ZAIN**

I didn't see myself having any kind of future with a man afraid to be  
himself.

**CJ**

What you see is what you get!

I'm a southside Irish Catholic who drinks beer, and would rather watch  
the White Sox than Drag Race.

**ZAIN**

There's not a thing wrong with that.

But if you can't be gay in front of strangers, your family or your co-  
workers, you're not being yourself.

**CJ**

*(SCREAMING)*

I DON'T NEED TO WEAR MY GAYNESS AS A BADGE!

*(A beat.)*

**ZAIN**

Then I guess the police badge will have to do...Officer.

*(The sound of rioting, and protesting intensifies.  
We hear louder voices, and sirens. More flashing lights.)*

***(END OF PLAY)***