

Missing White Woman Syndrome

A ten-minute play

By Leah Roth Barsanti

CHARACTERS

Marjorie: 30s, kind of the worst

Brandon: 30s, also the worst

MARJORIE (30s) and BRANDON's (30s) apartment: a little-more-than-modest living space of an upper middle class couple. They are not engaged, and, in fact, probably moved in too early. They are straight and white, but they are also liberal; and they probably have something (or a few things) strategically incorporated into their apartment or wardrobes to prove, despite being straight and white, they are not part of THE PROBLEM. Brandon works on his laptop at the kitchen counter whilst sipping a chai tea. Marjorie is also on her computer, but hers is balanced on her lap as she reclines on the couch and eats a vegan snack of some sort. She reads something on her computer, frowns, and then animates.

MARJORIE

And another thing, you just don't leave your girlfriend in a national park! I mean, I could see if like... I mean, the park is huge, I get that. It's...

(She looks something up:)

Over 310,000 acres. So maybe... I mean it's possible that if he lost her or she wandered off at night or whatever, it's POSSIBLE that he knew his odds of finding her were slim. But even then, you tell a park ranger, you call the cops, something.

(Beat. She reads a little bit further.)

Unless he knew she didn't want to be found for some reason. Like if they had a fight and she left on purpose? But... you tell someone then, at least after you hear that no one can find her. You don't just high tail it home and then disappear the second the cops start to look for you.

(Beat. She reads further still.)

And people are saying on Reddit that maybe someone had it out for both of them? Like some drug shit or they witnessed something illegal or something... so they killed her and he can't talk or else they'd kill him too, so that's why he's on the run? But like... I don't know. It all seems a little farfetched to me. I mean, Reddit always is but... I just don't see a world where he didn't kill her. Right?

(Beat.)

Brandon?

BRANDON

What?

MARJORIE

You think he killed her, right?

Who?

BRANDON

Brian Lauderie.

MARJORIE

Gabby Petitio's boyfriend?

BRANDON

Yes. That's what I've been talking about this whole time.

MARJORIE

Oh. I wasn't really listening.

BRANDON

No shit.

MARJORIE

(Beat. She goes back to reading.)

And have you seen the video?

BRANDON

(Still not really listening:)

Uh huh.

MARJORIE

Everyone's *saying* the video shows that she was the aggressor in their fights because that's what she told the police, but she's like five feet nothing, and tiny. Not that that... I'm not saying tiny women can't be powerful, they totally can. But I could just totally see her- anyone really, just admitting fault for something once the police arrived just to like... get out of that situation, ya know?

Beat.

BRANDON

Marjorie, come here. Check this out.

MARJORIE

What?

BRANDON

Just... come look.

MARJORIE

Can you bring it here?

BRANDON

I'm plugged in.

MARJORIE

Ugh.

(Marjorie makes a show of getting up from the couch and going over to his computer.)

What am I looking...?

(Beat.)

I thought you were doing work.

BRANDON

I am. This is our new client.

MARJORIE

AngelXXX is your firm's new client?

BRANDON

Yeah, she's suing Only Fans. I guess one of her clients or subscribers or whatever was able to hack the site and get her home address.

MARJORIE

And you thought you should just... familiarize yourself with her work?

BRANDON

I thought I should get to know my new client.

MARJORIE

Intimately, apparently.

Marjorie goes back to the couch and sits down again, scrolling a little more forcefully on her computer. Silence.

BRANDON

Are you mad at me?

(Beat.)

You have said multiple times that you don't care that I watch porn.

MARJORIE

I don't.

BRANDON

That you do it too.

MARJORIE

I do, I-

BRANDON

(Cutoff:)

You've also said, multiple times, that it's better to watch porn on Only Fans because #sexworkiswork and we should support sex workers on platforms that allow them to control the content they're creating.

MARJORIE

I know. I don't care that you watch porn!

BRANDON

So what's the-

MARJORIE

(Cutoff:)

It's the way you watch it!

BRANDON

The way I-

MARJORIE

(Cutoff:)

Your eyes get this... look. Lustful and objectify-y and alpha-y and weird. And doing that to you client's page... I just...

BRANDON

I do what?

MARJORIE

And you mutter to your self sometimes... like... "ass" "tits" and... I don't know what all you're saying but for the past six months that we've been dating, for the three that we've LIVED TOGETHER, you've never said anything remotely like that when we've had sex, but if you did... If you said the things to me that you say about girls in porn videos it would feel borderline...

Beat.

BRANDON

What?

MARJORIE

Nothing.

BRANDON

No, you started the thought, so finish it. It would feel borderline what?

MARJORIE

Sexist! Okay? The way that you watch porn feels borderline sexist.

Beat.

BRANDON

Okay, well, while we're on the subject, I think your obsession with the Gabby Petito case... all your true crime obsessions actually... are borderline racist.

MARJORIE

Excuse me?

BRANDON

How many cases have you been OBSESSED WITH? Like can talk about nothing else obsessed. But you've never once followed a case about a person of color.

MARJORIE

How did this become about me?

BRANDON

You called me sexist.

MARJORIE

I didn't.

BRANDON

You said the way I watch porn is sexist.

MARJORIE

Well...

BRANDON

Well, I'm saying the way you consume true crime content is racist.

MARJORIE

That's... that's actually insane. That's an insane thing to say.

BRANDON

Is it?

(Beat.)

Think about why you find stories about missing white girls to be more compelling than stories about missing Black girls.

MARJORIE

Well... I...

(Beat.)

First of all you should probably refer to them as women.

BRANDON

Okay, think about why you find stories about missing white *women* to be more compelling than stories about missing Black *women*.

(Beat.)

Is it because you expect white women to be safe? Because that's-

MARJORIE

(Cutoff:)

No!

(Beat.)

At least, I don't think that's why.

BRANDON

Then...?

Beat.

MARJORIE

I don't know... I don't know why I do I just do! I see myself in white women. I am a white woman! I don't think that's racist.

BRANDON

Well, I kinda do.

(Beat.)

Marj- you just said you don't see yourself in Black women, that's... kind of definitionally racist.

MARJORIE

Well, I don't think that I should accept definitions of racism from a sexist.

BRANDON

You said you weren't calling me sexist.

MARJORIE

I was obviously calling you sexist, just like you're obviously calling me racist. The other stuff we said was just semantics to make ourselves feel better.

(Beat. She smiles.)

But while we're on *this* topic, how many Black women do you follow on Onlyfans?

BRANDON

What? A few...

MARJORIE

Really? Show me.

BRANDON

I...

He starts to type furiously.

MARJORIE

Brandon!

BRANDON

Okay, I don't.

(Beat.)

But that's only because I like to look at girls who look like you.

MARJORIE

Aww...

(She gives him a "fake cute" frown.)

That's bullshit.

BRANDON

It's sincere!

MARJORIE

So you frequented the websites of sex workers of color before we started dating?

(Brandon's lack of response is his answer.)

Ha! So you're racist too. I'm still better than you, we can still date!

Beat.

BRANDON

Excuse me?

MARJORIE

Ummm... I sort of have this thing... I only date people who are like... morally worse than me. So that if we break up at least I... I've had a lot of people cheat on me in the past and I know this is sort of a weird coping mechanism but my therapist says I should welcome even maladaptive coping mechanisms while I'm going through my "finding myself period," which I am so...

(Beat. Brandon bursts out laughing.)

And you're taking that confession better than I thought you would.

BRANDON

No it's just... I'm the same way.

MARJORIE

You're the... you think you're morally better than me?

BRANDON

You consume basic white girl media and don't recycle.

MARJORIE

The building doesn't recycle!

BRANDON

Allegedly.

MARJORIE

Why should I waste my time bringing our cardboard boxes all the way down to the recycling when the trash shoot is right there and I know for a fact they throw it all together in the same truck when they pick it up?

BRANDON

You know for a fact?

MARJORIE

Yes Brandon, I've seen it, with my eyes.

BRANDON

It's the principal of the thing.

MARJORIE

Whatever.

(Silence.)

You know, if you think about it, it's not my fault. The Gabby Petito stuff.

(Beat.)

I mean, it's the media, right? The media is the problem. They're the ones that sensationalize crimes against white women. They're TELLING me what to consume.

And they're good at it. Is it really my fault that I fall for it?

(Beat.)

I mean, can you think of a story about a missing woman of color that has gotten this much coverage. If one did, I would watch it, I would, right?

(Beat.)

I totally would. I'm not racist, they are, the media people.

Beat.

BRANDON

You know, I could say the same thing.

MARJORIE

How?

BRANDON

The media conditions me to be sexually attracted to white women.

(Beat.)

I'm serious! Swimsuit ads, Victoria's Secret. Hell, even Gaby Petito!

MARJORIE

You're sexually attracted to Gaby Petito?

BRANDON

I mean, yeah she's hot. But my point is: why do I think she's hot?

MARJORIE

I don't know why you think she's hot.

(Beat.)

I mean, I guess I knew people did... she was an Instagram celebrity. I know I shouldn't say "was" when she might still be alive but...

(Beat.)

Anyway, I would think that going missing, possibly being murdered, would negate your sexual attraction to someone.

BRANDON

It totally doesn't, it makes her way hotter. But okay, she was an Instagram celebrity-why?

MARJORIE

Because she looks like one?

BRANDON

Exactly! She looks like an Instagram celebrity, or a Victoria's Secret model, or someone in a swimsuit ad. The media has conditioned me to want to fuck white women! Which is hella racist, of the media. And it's led to my OF account looking racist, but like you said-

MARJORIE

(Cutoff:)

We're not racist.

BRANDON

Exactly! The media is.

MARJORIE

We're victims.

BRANDON

Exactly, we are victims of the white, quasi-liberal, secretly racist-ass media.

MARJORIE

Everything is Fox news in disguise!

BRANDON

Exactly!

MARJORIE

We should protest.

BRANDON

We should.

They make out.

MARJORIE

Should we role play Gaby Petito and Brian Lauderie?

BRANDON

Would that be a little... too shitty?

MARJORIE

Yeah probably.

They make out again. But then...

BRANDON

Wait. Do you still think you're a better person than me?

END OF PLAY.