

The following is excerpted from

“A OR B”

A Two Character Romantic Comedy

By Ken Levine

Sparks start flying when Abby and Ben meet during a job interview for a high-profile marketing job. But are they destined to become lovers or co-workers? Is it possible to be both? This play is two romantic comedies in one, turning romance on its head as we see Abby and Ben travel down two parallel lives, pitting destiny vs. choice, love vs. career, ambition vs. passion and man vs. woman.

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CHARACTERS

ABBY MORGAN – Late 20's/early 30's, attractive, spirited, whip-smart, fun.

BEN STEELE – Late 20's/early 30's, good looking, with an easy charm.

A OR B?

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE -- RESTAURANT BAR (MANHATTAN) -- EVENING

LIGHTS UP. ABBY MORGAN is sitting at a center stage table on her cellphone. She is late 20's/early 30's, attractive, spirited, and fun wearing a **RED** dress.

NOTE: All sets are sparse. Just enough pieces of furniture to suggest the location. Everything is monochromatic so that Abby's dress colors really pop out.

ABBY

(on phone) I love you, Whiskers. Stay out of the dryer. Meow, meow. Okay, Whiskers, put my mom on the phone. (normal voice) Hi, listen, I've got to go. Got a job interview in like one minute... Marketing Director for Insight Research ...oh, a big product testing firm. Which nasal rinse does America prefer? Which squeegee? Y'know -- the secrets we're keeping from Russia... No, we're meeting in a restaurant... A restaurant, Mom, not a leather bar. I don't know. Never met him... My red dress.. No, not cause it's hot. Red sends out a subliminal message. It suggests passion, leadership, self-determination... Okay, you got me.

BEN STEELE enters from Abby's blind side. He is late 20's/early 30's, good looking, with an easy charm. He wears a grey suit and holds a drink in one hand, an iPad in the other. Ben arrives just in time to overhear the following:

ABBY

The message I really want him to get is that I'm a raging nymphomaniac. If he hires me he can be assured of sex at least four times a day.

Ben approaches.

BEN

You start Monday.

ABBY

What? (realizing) Oh, Jesus! (then) Mom, I gotta go. Yes, I was kidding. (hangs up) Holy shit.

Ben sits and extends his hand.

BEN

Hi. I'm Ben Steele.

ABBY

(shaking hands) And I'm humiliated. Abby Morgan. Wow. Listen, what you heard just now was --

BEN

A loving daughter thanking her mother for her concern.

ABBY

Oh. Right. Exactly.

BEN

But good luck when she stops driving. You're going to know every Rite Aid and "99 Cent" store in the state. Would you like a drink?

ABBY

God yes. Unless it's a test. Which drink order would make the best impression? Probably the smart move is to order what you're having.

BEN

Makers Mark and ginger ale.

ABBY

Not a chance. (yelling o.s.) Gin martini, dirty!

Ben smiles.

BEN

So... I Googled you.

ABBY

Yeah, I Googled you too.

BEN

Really? And what did you learn?

ABBY

You first.

BEN

Well, you graduated third in your class at Northwestern. Double major in communications and mathematics. Have an impressive resume. Hundreds of endorsements on LinkedIn. And you've created three apps.

ABBY

Yep. I also won luggage on "The Price Is Right."

BEN

Yes. June 14th, 2013.

ABBY
Oooh, you're very thorough. But so am I.

BEN
Okay. So what did you learn about me?

ABBY
You're deceased. Drove a cement truck in Montana, and lost an eye in World War II.

BEN
(laughs) Yeah, nothing gets by you. Your lethal martini must be up. Stay there.

Ben crosses to the o.s. Bar.

ABBY
(to herself) He totally gets me. The poor sap.

Ben returns with her drink.

ABBY
Thank you.

BEN
No problem.

ABBY
(hoisting her glass) To you being dazzled and suitably impressed.

BEN
(hoisting his glass) To you finishing that drink and still having a central nervous system.

She laughs. They clink, then:

BEN
So according to Facebook you're not in a relationship.

ABBY
Oooh, very subtle backhanded way of asking that question.

BEN
Thank you. H R would approve.

ABBY
No, I'm not seeing anyone at the moment. My Facebook photos are all sunsets and family reunions. And no one who has a guy posts that shit.

BEN
So there would be no distractions? Nothing to divert your focus from work?

ABBY

Yeah, right, that's why you asked that question.

BEN

Total commitment is a must. Right now most of our business is product centered. We'd like to enter the arena of audience testing for movies and TV. I spent all of today with the California Dried Prune Board. Yes, there really is a California Dried Prune Board. It's time we went in another direction. We're going to need to re-brand ourselves, restructure, and reach new clients. It's going to take a lot of work and a lot of ideas. Does this sound like something you'd be interested in?

ABBY

Absolutely.

BEN

Right answer.

He takes out his cellphone, punches in a number. Waits. A beat, the call didn't go through.

BEN

I hate AT&T.

He punches in the number again. This time it does connect.

BEN

Hey, Ted. I've found our marketing director...

ABBY

Yes!

BEN

What?You're kidding? When ...?

ABBY

What? What happened?

BEN

Damn. Okay. Thanks. (hangs up) My partner just hired somebody. Literally two seconds ago.

ABBY

(frustrated) Gaaaaaaa! I hate AT&T more.

She takes a big swig of the martini.

BEN

I'm really sorry, Abby. It would have been nice.

ABBY
I liked you too. Damn! We would've been good together.

BEN
I know.

ABBY
In a year you would've made me partner.

BEN
Well, I don't know about that. Five years... maybe.

ABBY
Two.

BEN
Two? Are you kidding? Three at the earliest.

ABBY
For what I'd bring. Two for sure.

BEN
But that's... (realizing) Wait a minute. What am I negotiating here? You didn't get the job.

ABBY
You're right. Sorry. I always do that. I'm constantly playing "what might have been."

BEN
No no. I do that too. Like what would have happened if I had gone with Verizon?

ABBY
Or I had worn a blue dress?

BEN
Our next president might be Flo from Progressive Insurance.

ABBY
(laughs, then:) Well, I should go. It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Steele.

She stands.

BEN
No. Stay. Please.

ABBY
Why? What else is there to talk about?

BEN
One little change can change everything. If you leave now I may never see you again.

ABBY

Wow. Is that your pick-up line?

BEN

It is now. That was pretty good.

ABBY

Don't flatter yourself. No smart woman would fall for that.
(then) I'll get another drink.

She EXITS. Ben watches her go, smiles,
and lifts his glass in a mini-toast.

BEN

To not wearing blue.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE TWO -- RESTAURANT BAR -- EVENING

OVER DARK WE HEAR:

BEN (OFF STAGE)

...Yes, there really is a California Prune Board. It's time we went in another direction. We're going to need to re-brand ourselves, restructure, and reach new clients. It's going to take a lot of work and a lot of ideas. Does this sound like something you'd be interested in?

LIGHTS UP. Just as before. Abby and Ben sitting at the table.

The only difference is Abby is wearing the same dress in **BLUE**.

ABBY

Absolutely.

BEN

Right answer.

He takes out his cellphone, punches in a number. This time it connects on the first try.

BEN

Hey, Ted. I've found our marketing director...

ABBY

Yes!

BEN

What? You're kidding? When ...?

ABBY
What? What happened?

BEN
Well, you're still in the meeting and I'm done with mine.
Tell her the position has been filledAbby Morgan.

ABBY
(thrilled) Gaaaaaa!

BEN
She's super qualified and she gets me. The poor girl. Bye.
(hangs up) You start Monday. Congratulations. You won the
job by literally two seconds.

He extends his hand. She
enthusiastically shakes it.

ABBY
Awesome. Usually when a man says it took two seconds I have
a very different reaction. But I am thrilled.

BEN
I know you'll do great.

ABBY
Are you kidding? I will be an idea generating machine, a
marketing warrior. In time you'll want to make me partner.

BEN
Well, we don't usually give out partnerships.

ABBY
Yeah, well...we'll just see (hoisting her glass) Yay! I got
the job.

BEN
You're already talking partners?

ABBY
In time. (deflecting) We're toasting now.

BEN
Okay. (hoisting his glass) To working together. No...
To working for me in an office shared by one other person, no
stock options, a probation period, and biannual performance
reviews.

ABBY
Right. Of course. Absolutely. (then) Are there any perks?

BEN
Business cards.

Fantastic. I'm in.

ABBY

They CLINK, and drink.

Health insurance?

ABBY

LIGHTS FADE.

OVER BLACK and perhaps MUSIC during the costume change:

Let me drive you home.

BEN (V.O.)

No, that's okay. I'm very self-sufficient.

ABBY (V.O.)

You've had two martinis.

BEN (V.O.)

So what? You've had two sissy girl drinks.

ABBY (V.O.)

I just had one. And you're sucking on my ice cubes.

BEN (V.O.)

Oh. No wonder the olives seemed square.

ABBY (V.O.)

Seriously. I'll get my car.

BEN (V.O.)

I was kidding. I'm fine. (then) You have a car?

ABBY (V.O.)

Yes.

BEN (V.O.)

Does it have the kind of GPS where you can just type in my name and it will tell you my address?

ABBY (V.O.)

I don't think anything like that exists.

BEN (V.O.)

Then we might have a problem.

ABBY (V.O.)

SCENE THREE -- ABBY'S APARTMENT -- THAT NIGHT

A small one-bedroom on the Upper West Side.

Just enough furniture pieces to sell it. A counter representing a kitchen upstage.

Door OPENS and Abby and Ben enter. She is wearing the **RED** dress. She is a little tipsy. He has his iPad.

ABBY

Come on in. This is my place, I think.

BEN

Nice.

ABBY

Three-thousand, one-hundred and fifty.

BEN

I wasn't going to ask.

ABBY

Yes, you were. It's what everybody asks when they first walk into a Manhattan apartment. 'How much a month you pay for this place?'

BEN

You're a keen observer of human behavior.

ABBY

Yep. Your loss, big boy.

BEN

It will be hard to surprise you.

ABBY

Afraid so.

He takes her in his arms and KISSES her. It's a long passionate kiss. She finally breaks away, then:

ABBY

Nope. I was expecting that. The apartment comes with central air, new appliances, a full bath, and the requisite doorman with an alcohol problem.

BEN

Did you like it?

ABBY

It was okay. And they --

He KISSES her again.

ABBY

-- Fumigate twice a year. (off his look) That was okay too.

BEN

Yes, I know. I'm a student of human behavior myself.

ABBY

So is this going to be a problem?

BEN

What is?

ABBY

The two of us being so predictable that there won't be any surprises? How can you have magic? How can you have passion? How can you have mystery or spontaneity if there are no surprises?

BEN

Yeah, that could be a big problem. Hey, is it okay if I took a bath?

ABBY

Hello? ...What? I didn't see that coming.

BEN

Yes, I know. Do you mind?

ABBY

Taking a bath? Why should I mind? Go through my underwear drawer if you have time.

BEN

Thanks. Where's the bathroom? Over there?

ABBY

You're serious. You're seriously going to take a bath in my apartment.

BEN

My place only has a shower. It's a real treat.

ABBY

Uh huh. And that's the only reason. The fact that I had two gin martinis didn't figure even remotely into your decision?

BEN

Well ...I could leave the door unlocked if you want to join me.

ABBY

Aha!

BEN

Hey, I'm not dead.

ABBY

Yes you are! In Montana. Look, Ben, there's a real distinction between magic and a dick move.

BEN

It's not a dick move. I'm just inviting you to join me. If anything it's romantic and sensuous.

ABBY

You're crossing into Pepe LePew country here.

BEN

Abby, it's not like I'm jumping your bones.

ABBY

This isn't just an elaborate ploy? You don't have candles in your jacket and a soap bomb in your pants?

BEN

No. Of course not. But like all men I carry a loofah sponge.

ABBY

(laughs) There are clean towels on the rack. Make yourself crazy. Oh, before you fill the tub remove the "Price Is Right" luggage.

BEN

Look, if nothing happens, if all I do is shampoo your hair, that would be fine, wonderful.

ABBY

Shampoo my hair? My God. How many martinis does it take for that line to work?

BEN

The same as club sodas. The offer's that good.

ABBY

Well, it doesn't work on me.

BEN

Oh really? You don't like it when a man washes your hair, when he massages your scalp with deep small circular strokes, taking his time twirling your hair into a thick supersudsy froth, digging his fingers in, like kneading bread, increasing the pressure, then decreasing the pressure, causing an exquisite tingle to shimmer all the way down to your toes?

Abby considers a moment.

Well ...?

BEN

She folds her arms, unmoved.

ABBY

Abby is a keen observer of bullshit. Even all liquored up.

BEN

I don't believe it.

ABBY

Maybe I'm a little unpredictable too, Mister.

BEN

Alright. I'll give you that.

ABBY

That's a good thing.

BEN

No, it's not. Not when I was hoping you'd take a bath with me.

ABBY

Go.

He crosses to the bathroom.

BEN

I'm still leaving the door unlocked.

ABBY

Go.

BEN

Dead men tell no tales.

ABBY

Bye bye.

Ben EXITS to o.s. Bathroom. Abby PACES. Should she or shouldn't she follow him in? It's a tough choice. Finally:

ABBY

Oh God. Mother was right.

She CROSSES to the o.s. Bathroom.

LIGHTS DIM.

END OF SAMPLE

SAMPLE