

WHAT YOU WISH FOR

a one-act play

by

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CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

EMMA Recently out of grad school; got laid off at her last job and is very frustrated with her current minimum-wage food service job. Too intelligent, skeptical, and sarcastic to fit in most places. 27.

MARY Sainly, conservative, religious, but a good friend, really. Works as a hostess. 23.

BEN Half emo, half nerd. Has a B.A. in Philosophy which is why he's working at a sub joint. Really would rather be reading comic books. 25.

KARA The kind of girl who was really popular in high school and then found out the real world doesn't follow high school rules. Still stuck in cheerleader mode. 25.

MINOR ROLES

JOEY Starry-eyed kid. 8.

JOEY'S MOTHER

BARTENDER

CUSTOMERS Patrons of Subpar. The script calls for four; these need not all be separate people. Only two have lines. These actors may also play other minor roles.

BILL Manager of Subpar. Has been brainwashed by the Corporation. Mid-40's.

ELVIS IMPERSONATOR

EXTRAS Optional; diners in restaurant, man who passes Ben on the street.

SETTING

A small metropolitan area.

Scene 1: a family-style Italian restaurant

Scene 2 & 4: Emma and Mary's apartment; cheaply but thoughtfully decorated.

Scene 3 & 5: The sub shop Subpar. Cheaply and not thoughtfully decorated.

TIME

The action takes place over three days. 2005.

Scene I

A family-style Italian restaurant. On stage left is a bar, wine glasses hanging above, four stools pulled up to the bar. One stool is occupied by a morose young woman (EMMA) nursing a beer. On stage right are two tables occupied by diners; at the downstage table sits a small boy of about eight with his parents.

Before the lights come up, we hear an extremely off-key rendition of "Happy Birthday," although not the traditional tune, but the cheesier one sometimes sung in restaurants. The lights rise on the restaurant; several waiters are standing around the little boy's table, and a cannoli with a single candle in it sits in front of him. The boy is entranced. His parents are less thrilled.

MOTHER: Make a wish, Joey!

JOEY stares intently at the candle before blowing it out.

Enter MARY, a fashionably and modestly dressed young woman. MARY heads straight for the bar and sits next to EMMA. The bartender comes up, but MARY shakes her head.

MARY: No, thank you. (to EMMA.) Drinking alone again?

EMMA laughs.

EMMA: Hey, Mary. Well, yes, I am technically drinking alone, as I have a beer and there is no one sitting here with me. But I'm not *drinking alone*.

MARY: I guess none of the interviews came through, then?

EMMA: Nope...I'm still a prisoner of food service.

MARY: Why did you come here? I was worried about you.

EMMA: I just felt like a drink, but wasn't up for a real bar. Sitting alone at Bubba's and breathing in middle-aged men's secondhand smoke seemed far too pathetic.

MARY: I'm praying for you.

EMMA: Oh? Are you?

MARY: Do you mind?

EMMA: Go ahead. I can use all the help that I can get. What are you praying for, out of curiosity?

MARY: I'm asking God to help you find your purpose in life.

EMMA: Hm. Sounds good. How long have you been praying for me?

MARY: Two months.

EMMA: Odd. You would think my purpose would have arrived by now. Do you think it may have been misdelivered?

MARY: What?

EMMA: Did you specify to God my exact address? There are probably a lot of Emmas in the greater metropolitan area who need a purpose in life, you know.

MARY: God doesn't need addresses. He can always find you.

EMMA: *laughs*. That sounds like the motto for a new delivery service. GodEx.

MARY: *scandalized*. Emma!

EMMA: But seriously. I wouldn't be surprised at all to find that my purpose in life was accidentally delivered to 206 Raleigh Street instead of 206 Raleigh Road. Somebody's probably running around with a glorious sense of meaning and purpose—MY purpose. I really don't appreciate that.

MARY: Why don't you believe in God, Emma?

EMMA: This isn't about believing or not believing. Even you have to admit not every prayer is answered. I just think this might explain why, that's all.

MARY: Just because God can't answer every prayer doesn't mean—

The bartender leans over the bar towards them. He is holding a wireless phone.

BARTENDER: Excuse me. Emma Walker?

EMMA: Yes?

BARTENDER: There's a call for you.

EMMA: For me? *Takes the phone*. Hello? Oh, hi, Mrs. Tucker. What's up? There's a WHAT? Ha ha. That's pretty funny, Mrs. Tucker. Okay, okay, I'm sorry. You're serious? You can't be serious. You're really serious? Okay, okay, Mrs. Tucker, please don't get hysterical, I'm coming home! *Hands the phone back*. Jesus Christ.

MARY: What was that all about?

EMMA: We've got to get home.

MARY: Why? What's going on?

EMMA: I can't even tell you, it's too ridiculous. Mrs. Tucker said—no, I can't tell you! We just have to go see. It's probably nothing. Unless...God, that would be so weird.

MARY: What are you talking about?

EMMA: *Paying the bartender.* Let's go. And if I were you, I'd start praying now. We might need a head start.

They leave.

Scene II

EMMA and MARY'S apartment, living room. The front door is upstage center, with windows to each side of it; center stage is a couch, and a table upstage left. We hear raised voices; then EMMA's voice rises above.

EMMA (offstage): I don't care whose address is on the work order, we didn't order a zebra!

(pause)

EMMA: Well, does this LOOK like an animal shelter? Use some sense! We can't take in a zebra! This is not a paddock! And if you shove that piece of paper under my nose one more time, I'm going to scream! Just because my name and address is on a piece of paper does not mean I'm going to take in a zebra! (screams) Get out!

MARY: (offstage) It's eating my geraniums!

EMMA: Go find someone else to foist your animals off on!

(The key rattles in the lock, then the door bursts open and the two girls rush in as fast as possible. We hear a male voice say "But, ma'am—" before the door slams shut. EMMA immediately starts throwing all the deadbolts. There is a whinny, a shout, and a flash of something black and white past the left window, then the right window. EMMA and MARY sit down on the floor, their backs against the door. They stare straight forward until we hear the starting of an engine and a truck pulling away. Then they relax slightly.)

MARY: Did that actually just happen?

EMMA: I think so.

Pause.

EMMA: You know, at times like these I almost wish I believed in God.

MARY: So you could have an explanation for all this?

EMMA: No, so I could have someone to get pissed at.

MARY: Oh. *(Too exhausted to be offended.)*

Pause.

MARY: You don't think things happen for a reason?

EMMA: No.

MARY: Really? You believe the zebra was a totally random event?

EMMA: Well, the reason the zebra was here is because those guys drove it here. That's all.

MARY: But Emma, a zebra showing up at our house is too strange just to happen on its own. God must have some reason for sending it to us.

EMMA: Or maybe a butterfly flapped its wings in Australia.

Pause.

EMMA: Well, I don't really feel like sleeping after all that. Want to watch a movie or something?

MARY: Oh, well, actually, I'd love to, but I'm going over to John's...

EMMA: Really? Now? You're going to leave me here all alone? What if the zebra returns, and I'm here unprotected?

MARY: (*nervous*) Oh! Do you think—would you rather I—

EMMA: I was just joking. I'll be fine. But...you are coming for my birthday, right?

MARY: Yes! Of course!

EMMA: Okay...good. *Gets up.* Well. I'm going to go find everything I have in zebra print and burn it. I'll see you later.

Scene III

Behind the counter of a fast-food sub joint. The back of the counter faces the audience; we can see bins of sandwich ingredients and, under the counter, cleaning equipment, etc. The entrance to the store is up left; on the upstage wall are posters of people smiling as they hold up sandwiches.

Two people are working behind the counter, BEN and KARA. BEN looks like he would be more at home working in a coffee shop or an anime store. Kara looks like she should be wearing a cheerleading outfit. But instead, they are both dressed in matching orange polo shirts and visors and long blue gloves. BEN looks worried, like he's waiting to hear a cancer diagnosis, but then, he always looks like that.

EMMA enters, tucking in her orange polo shirt.

BEN: Hi, Emma!

EMMA: Hey, Ben. Kara. Busy morning?

KARA: It's been wonderful! We're selling at 30% above quota, and I convinced five customers to go for the foot-long instead of the six-inch!

EMMA: Wow, Kara. That's really great.

Bell rings as a customer enters.

KARA: Hi! Welcome to Subpar! Have you visited us before?

BEN: You look terrible, Emma...uh...I mean, you look great, you always look great, but you look tired.

KARA: Have you tried our new Exotic Asian Teriyaki Beef Sandwich? It's a little bit of Asia in your mouth!

EMMA: Yeah...I had some trouble with a zebra at my house last night. Hm...I'd better get some more Italian bread.

EMMA heads off to the back.

KARA turns around to the back counter and starts very carefully making the sandwich.

BEN: Zebra?

KARA: What?

BEN: Emma said she had trouble with a zebra...is that some kind of slang?

KARA: What are you talking about? *Turns back to customer.* Are you sure you wouldn't like to make that a foot-long? Make two meals out of one, for only three dollars more?

Another customer enters.

BEN: Hi...what can I do for you?

CUSTOMER: 6-inch, ham and cheese.

BEN: Sure, coming right up. *At the back counter.*

EMMA returns with a bag of bread.

EMMA: God...what I wouldn't give for a Coke right now...

CUSTOMER: *Opening a bottle, and looking at the cap.* Sweet! I won a Coke!

KARA: Would you like to add a freshly baked brownie to that for only 99 cents?

EMMA: Freshly microwaved, you mean.

BEN: That'll be \$4.99. Out of twenty...oops, I mean ten...oops...shoot...how do I void this thing? *Cash register makes a rude noise.* Oops! Sorry...

KARA comes over and fixes the register.

KARA: Sorry about him! He's new! *(To Ben, in a whisper.)* You've been working here two years and you still don't know how to use the cash register? Put some effort into it, Ben! *Rings up her customer.* That's \$7.99. Come to visit us again soon! Don't forget about Double Cheese Thursdays!

Customers leave.

KARA: And Ben...please don't swear in front of the customers.

BEN: I said "shoot!" That's not even PG-13.

KARA: It's the principle, not the particular word, that matters. We're making happy sandwiches, not angry sandwiches! An angry heart leads to an angry sandwich. *Heads to the backroom.*

Emma is shredding lettuce violently. Ben moves over to her.

BEN: We gotta get out of here, Em.

EMMA: What are you talking about? My whole life, I've dreamed of being a lettuce shredder. That's why I got a master's in marketing.

BEN: Do you want to, sometime, I mean, after work, if you, you know, aren't, you know, busy, maybe we could--

KARA returns with a gigantic box.

KARA: Hey, what are you guys standing around for? Remember what Bill says—there's never any reason for idle hands! Why don't you scrub the counter? *Starts to take cans out of the box. BEN gives her a nasty look.*

EMMA starts toward the sink, slips, and crashes to the floor. BEN hurries to help.

BEN: Oh shi--I mean, uh, gosh--are you okay?

EMMA picks herself up.

EMMA: Yeah, I'm all right. I don't even know what I slipped on.

BILL the manager enters. He's a balding guy in his thirties, wearing an orange tie and holding a clipboard. He is followed by a beaming KARA. EMMA and BEN quickly start looking busy.

BILL: Hello there, sandwich makers! How's it going?

EVERYONE: general affirmative response.

BILL: Well guys, you're doing just great! Especially Kara here...30% above quota, and 90% effective on the footing-up! Wow. That's all I can say--wow! You two, though...you're not quite at quota yet...how about we work on that just a teensy bit more, all right?

EMMA: Hey Bill, can I talk to you for a minute?

BILL: Sure, Emma. What's up?

EMMA: Well, do you remember how before I came here, I worked in advertising? Well, I was thinking about a couple ideas for things we could do at the store...I brought some sketches with me, actually, if you want to see them--*Rummages in purse.*

BILL: Emma, Emma, Emma...I didn't hire you as advertising rep, I hired you as a sandwich artiste. Now, why don't you just go back out there and beat your quota record?

EMMA stalks off to the counter. Another customer enters.

EMMA: *(to customer)* Yeah? What are you looking at?

BILL heads back to the backroom.

BEN, making a sandwich, is watching EMMA. KARA is wiping the counter next to him.

BEN: Oh, Emma...I just wish you'd notice me.

KARA drops her towel on the floor. BEN reaches for it at the same time she does; their hands touch. KARA looks at BEN.

KARA: Oh...*(giggles)* How clumsy of me! Thank you!

KARA flounces off to the backroom. BEN stares after her.

SCENE IV

EMMA and MARY's apartment. There are several balloons, blown up by hand, scattered around the floor. There are wine bottles on the table and plates of cheese and crackers and cookies. EMMA is sitting on the couch. She looks at her watch. She sits for awhile. She gets up and eats a cookie. She sits down again. She looks at her watch again. She sighs and kicks a balloon. She picks up her phone and looks at it. She puts the phone down, sighs again, and walks over to the table. She starts opening a wine bottle.

BEN enters downstage left, in a coat and hat. He is hurrying down the street. He is holding out in front of him the book "Dating for Dummies."

BEN: *(reading to himself)* Arrival. Whatever you do, don't arrive on time. That will make you appear overeager. Getting there early is, of course, out of the question. The ideal arrival time is between fifteen and twenty minutes late.

Someone else passes BEN on the street; he quickly hides the book. When the man is past, he checks the book again. We can still see EMMA in her apartment, drinking wine.

BEN: *(reading)* For a large party, arrival before an hour late might seem overeager.

Checks his watch and hurries off downstage right.

EMMA is slumped in the couch with an empty glass. The doorbell rings. She jerks upward and hurries to the door, only a little unsteadily.

EMMA: Oh. Hello, Ben.

BEN: *(entering)* Happy birthday!

EMMA: Thanks.

BEN: You sound so excited.

They sit down on the couch. Ben looks around.

BEN: I'm not the only one you invited, am I?

EMMA: No.

BEN: Oh...nobody else showed up?

EMMA: No.

BEN: Aw man...I'm sorry, Emma.

EMMA: It's okay. *(Takes the plate of cookies and puts it on her lap.)*

BEN: Well...would you like your present?

EMMA: You got me a present?

BEN pulls out a takeout container with foil over it.

BEN: It's my favorite kind.

EMMA opens the container and finds a piece of chocolate cake. BEN rummages in his pockets and pulls out an action figure, some string, and a pinecone, before finding a candle. He puts it in the cake. Looking in his pockets again, he pulls out a lightbulb, an apple, and a bagel before finding a book of matches.

BEN: Here we go. *(lights the candle.)* Make a wish!

EMMA stares at him.

EMMA: What?

BEN: Make a wish! You know, wishes on birthday candles, and all. Sorry, I guess we're too old for that sort of thing..

EMMA is staring at the candle. Slowly, deliberately, she blows the candle out.

BEN: Did you make a wish?

EMMA: Yes.

BEN: Me too.

BEN is gazing dreamily at EMMA. She has taken the candle out of the cake and is examining it intently, not noticing BEN whatsoever.

BEN: Emma...

EMMA looks up.

EMMA: Hm?

BEN leans forward and kisses EMMA. She jerks away, surprised, and they stare at each other for a second.

BEN: Oh jeez...I'm sorry, Emma...I thought...

EMMA: It's okay.

BEN gets up and walks over to the door.

BEN: I'd better go.

EMMA: You don't have to...I don't really...

BEN: No, I think I do.

EMMA stands and watches him. BEN pauses at the door, feeling his pocket. He pulls out a banana.

BEN: Is this yours? I must have picked it up or something..

Hands EMMA the banana. She takes it.

BEN: Well...see you at work, I guess...happy birthday...

BEN exits.

EMMA looks at the banana. She starts to laugh.

EMMA: Hello little banana! *(she kisses the banana.)* You're a magical banana! Ha ha!

She pours some more wine and sits down on the couch with the banana, still laughing.

MARY enters.

MARY: Oh, Emma, I'm so sorry! Traffic was backed up for miles, and I left John's late anyway, and I...are you all right?

EMMA: Hello Mary! I'm magic!

MARY: You're magic? *She walks over, sees the wine bottle, sighs, and picks it up.*

EMMA: Yes! Whenever I make a wish, it comes true! Only not for me. For somebody else.

MARY: That's very interesting.

EMMA: Mary, you don't believe me?

MARY: You've been drinking, Emma.

EMMA: I haven't! Well, not much. But look at this banana! How can you not believe in the banana? Can't you see it?

MARY: Yes, Emma, I can see the banana. Why don't you come to bed now?

MARY leads EMMA out and then comes back in and starts clearing up, putting the wine away and putting the cookies in Tupperware.

MARY: Oh, please, God, bring Emma to the light.

There is a round Japanese lantern hanging on a cord above the table; at this, it falls, hitting MARY on the head.

MARY: Oh, for goodness' sake.

SCENE V

Back at Subpar. KARA is behind the counter; she has curled her hair and is wearing jewelry and extra makeup. BEN enters.

KARA: Ben!

BEN: Hi, Kara.

KARA runs over to BEN.

KARA: And how are you this fiiiiine morning?

BEN: Not so great, really, Kara. I have a real zebra I'm dealing with now.

KARA: Oh? Is there anything I can do to...help? *Shakes her hair back and sticks a hip out.*

BEN: No, thanks. *Pulls on orange polo shirt and blue gloves.*

KARA: You look really nice in uniform, you know. *Runs a finger down his chest.*

BEN looks down at her finger, confused, then turns quickly and starts taking plastic wrap off the tops of containers of sandwich innards.

EMMA enters with MARY and runs to the counter, slapping her hands down.

KARA: Hello! Welcome to Subpar! Oh, it's you, Emma.

EMMA: I've figured it out!

BEN and KARA look at each other, then at MARY, who shrugs.

BEN: Figured what out?

EMMA: The wishes!

KARA: Wishes?

EMMA: Yes! For some reason—I don't know why—whenever I make a wish, or someone makes a wish near me, it comes true, but not for the person who wishes it! For someone else!

BEN: What are you talking about?

MARY: You think...the zebra?

EMMA: Exactly!

BEN: Zebra?

EMMA: I was in an Italian restaurant, and it's this kid's birthday, right? So he blows out his candles, and I just BET he wished for a zebra. And what gets delivered to MY house? A zebra.

KARA: A zebra got delivered to your house?

KARA moves over to Ben and starts running her hands through his hair and otherwise trying to touch him throughout this scene.

BEN: Zebra's not a slang word?

EMMA: But this is crazy! Something's gone wrong with the laws of physics, or probability, or-or-everything! Anything could happen now.

BEN: Wait, wait. Hang on. How do you know the kid wished for a zebra?

EMMA: Because it came *true!*

BEN: I don't really think that proves anything...

EMMA: But what about the banana? (*Pulls out the banana, somewhat the worse for wear*) Last night, when you brought me the cake, Ben, I wished for a banana, and there it was, in your pocket!

A customer enters.

BEN: You wished for a banana?

MARY: Ben was over last night?

CUSTOMER: Are you guys in line?

EMMA: I had a hunch, so I thought I should test it—and there! The proof! (*waves the banana*)

KARA: I don't get what's up with the banana.

EMMA: Wait...you guys still don't believe me? Mary?

MARY: I don't know, Emma...the zebra thing was pretty strange...but you lost me with the banana.

CUSTOMER: Hello?

EMMA: Okay, then! Somebody wish for something, right now! Kara, you wish for something.

KARA notices the customer.

KARA: Hi! Welcome to Subpar! Have you been here before?

CUSTOMER: Uh...yeah. Can I just have a meatball sub, six-inch?

KARA: Are you sure you don't want to foot-up? Twice the size for only an extra third of the price!

EMMA: Ben, you wish for something.

BEN: Uh...okay...

Enter ELVIS impersonator.

ELVIS: Hey, baby. Is this Columbia Records?

KARA: Can I put that on our new rosemary bread for-for-*(Stares at ELVIS.)*

MARY: No. This is a sub shop.

ELVIS: Aw. Right on. Later, daddy-o.

EMMA: Did you wish for that?

Everyone looks at Ben.

BEN: What? I like Elvis.

MARY: You did? You wished for that?

BEN: Yeah. I think you might have something, Emma.

KARA: 'Scuse me, Benny, I have to just squeeze by you and grab some mustard...*(Wiggles past Ben, grinning at him and giggling.)*

EMMA: *(watching them)* Ben...did you happen to wish...that I would...fall for you, or something?

BEN: Are you telling me the reason Kara's all over me is because I wished YOU would notice me?

Everyone looks at BEN. KARA turns on him, holding the mustard like a weapon.

KARA: What?

BEN: Kara, I-

KARA: Are you telling me that my feelings for you happened because of a wish? And you really like *Emma*?

KARA is waving the sandwich around; meatballs and other bits of it are falling off.

CUSTOMER: Hey! My sandwich!

KARA: *(to customer)* Piss off! *(turns on Ben.)* How could you do that? How could you wish that?

BEN: I'm sorry!

MARY: The light!

Everyone looks at MARY, except KARA, who storms off to the backroom.

MARY: I prayed to God that Emma would find the light...and then a light fell on my head.

EMMA laughs.

BEN: The other day! I was mad at Kara, I wished she would fall—and you fell, Emma!

EMMA: What do you have against Kara?

BEN: Nothing! I like Kara, when she's not—

KARA: All right!

Everyone looks at Kara, who has just come in from the backroom. Her chest has grown several cups.

KARA: Who wished this? Who? Emma? Mary? I doubt it was Ben!

MARY's hand flies up to her mouth.

EMMA: *(trying not to laugh)* Well, it wasn't me. Mary?

MARY: I would never wish for something so...so...superficial!

BEN: Don't look at me!

KARA: Augh! You're all lying! What did I ever do to you? First Ben doesn't love me, then I get these...these...

EMMA: Melons? Jugs? Titties?

MARY: *(whispering)* You're not helping!

KARA: *(starting to cry)* I hate all of you! I wish I were dead!

Everyone stops laughing. KARA realizes what she has said and gasps.

CUSTOMER dies, falling behind counter. Nobody notices.

MARY: What happens now?

EMMA: I don't know...

KARA: I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

BEN: Don't worry about it. You're not the one who's going to die.

KARA starts to cry again.

MARY: Maybe we were wrong? Maybe it won't happen?

BEN: Maybe we can stop it? Nobody's dead yet...

EMMA: How can I stop it? I don't even know how I started it.

KARA: I'm sorry! I wish I—

BEN jumps on KARA and covers her mouth.

MARY: It's just not fair that the wishes come true for other people! At least if your own wish comes true, you've brought it upon yourself.

BEN lets go of KARA, stands up, and takes off his hat.

BEN: Maybe it's time to make our own wishes come true. First of all, I'm quitting.

He starts making a sandwich.

KARA: Quitting?

BEN: Yep. High time I did.

KARA: You're not supposed to take more than three slices of meat on your complimentary sandwich.

BEN gives her a look and puts another slice on. Then he takes off his polo shirt and gloves, and leaves them in a heap on the counter. He walks around to where Mary and Emma are.

EMMA: That sounds like a really good idea. Mind if I copy you?

BEN: Go right ahead.

EMMA pulls her uniform out of her bag and tosses it on the counter as well.

EMMA: Hey Mary, want to go see if we can find that life purpose of mine that was misdelivered somewhere?

MARY: Why don't you and Ben go? I'll stay here with Kara...I don't think we should leave her alone.

EMMA: You're a saint, Mary. *(to Ben.)* Well? Shall we go?

BEN: Your wish is my command.

As they are leaving EMMA trips over the dead customer.

EMMA: Oh shit.

Blackout.