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John A. McDermott

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IN THE ALLEY WITH THE GIRL WHO PLAYED
ANYBODYS, WHO IS NOW A DOCTOR IN DULUTH

It was nearly noon on a gray August Saturday, the audience already strolling in for the show, and two teenagers lingered by the loading dock, the big bay doors closed. They'd propped open a side door, its black paint chipped, with a brick, a weight for some backdrop or something the light crew used. They were in costume. Anyone looking down the angled alley would have seen two boys: a taller, dark haired one in black pants and a red shirt, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, a purple bandana tied around one wrist, and another boy in jeans and a dark t-shirt, a faded olive jacket and a baseball cap. The tall boy's hair fell over his forehead, the sides slicked back with grease. The other boy was a little, well, rounder, since the second boy wasn't a boy, but a pretty girl hiding her figure, her brown hair tucked up and under the cap. Her lips were red, with maybe a little out-of-character lipstick, and her blue eyes glinted, even in the shadows. Two boys kissing, one holding onto his cap, careful to keep it from falling into the dirty puddles. Their tennies, battered era-appropriate Converse, no garish '80's running shoes, no hot pink or neon green, were wet and would leave tracks on the way back to their respective dressing rooms. The tall boy had a girlfriend, also an actress, but not in this show, and Anybodys' best friend, too, so the kiss was clandestine and stupid and nothing meant for long. If the teenagers could have looked into the near future—an onstage broken nose for him, a rum-drunk night for her—they might have regretted the kiss, the fallout, worse than a make-believe gang fight—but if they could look down that alley and see a further future, how long

would they have held on: the grind of college and next boyfriends and next girlfriends and more tequila than is wise and unexpected babies and decisions to leave theater and get real jobs or go to med school, to leave the alleys before showtimes to other people, less sane people, people who don't have mortgages and who don't have titles either, but still get to pretend to be other people. And then you're in the audience watching them, maybe they sing a song you once knew, kick high in the air you once kicked, and land on both poorly-soled shoes—maybe they would have let that kiss last a little longer because who really cares if it's two boys, or a Shark and a wanna-be Jet, or a boy with a girlfriend and a girl who doesn't really love the boy as much as he'd want her to, maybe it could last a moment longer, for her blue eyes to flash again and the fakegrime smudging her smooth cheeks to hide a blush and her scent, not New York ruffian but Wisconsin girl healthy, to sneak from under the hairspray and asphalt, and maybe that kiss could last a little longer, no Rodolfo and Mimi moment, no Romeo and Juliet pact, but a small defense against the future pressing on the horizon, all that heartbreak and homework and other people we truly love, the ones who waited in the wings, the right ones, while this was all, we told ourselves, just a moment, just pretend.