The Pull
By Gavin MacNeal

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**Characters:**
Mike: 19ish. A college student who doesn't strike you as particularly interesting; if you met him at a party, you probably wouldn't remember him the next day.

Ryan: Mike's friend. A bit of a stereotypical frat boy, but not a caricature of one. Well intentioned, but loud and outgoing.

Molly: Mike's friend. Mike wishes she was more than that. She's kind, but often detached, and caught up in her own thing.

Nathan: Mike's roommate. Spends a lot of time gaming. Not overly close to Mike, but cares about him when it comes down to it.

Karen: Mike's mom. He's been away at college long enough that she doesn't stress over him, but checks in now and then.

**Setting:**
A very typical college, late autumn, present.

**Synopsis:**
Mike has been going through the motions of college for a few years now, but the stress and empty emotions he's been feeling are taking their toll. Though neither side is fully aware of it, his friends and family are trying to save him from going over the edge.
Scene 1: The Road to Campus

(Lights rise on Mike, alone towards one end of the stage, dressed in bland-colored, typical student clothes. He looks tired. He has a thick rope tied around one wrist, but he doesn’t acknowledge it. He stands at the edge of a busy road, and not at a crosswalk, so no cars are stopping for him. From across the stage behind Mike enters Ryan. Ryan spots Mike and quickly crosses to him. As Ryan nears where the other end of Mike’s rope lies on the ground, Mike slowly begins to step forward, out into the street.)

Ryan: (As Ryan says this, he grabs Mike’s rope off the ground and pulls it, stopping Mike from stepping into the street. He then lets it fall back to the ground. Note: Whenever a character pulls Mike’s rope, neither of them acknowledge it with anything more than the motion of pulling the rope. It is very nonchalant, smooth, and natural. It’s as if they don’t know they’re doing it. It always coincides with getting Mike’s attention another way.) Hey Mike, wait up!

(A car honks loudly and briefly breaks hard, thinking they needed to unexpectedly stop for Mike to cross. He would have stepped into the road if Ryan didn’t show up)

Mike: (Turning to Ryan from both the sound of his voice and the pull of the rope) Oh hey Ryan. How’s it going?

Ryan: Living the dream Mikey! You?

Mike: (hesitating just slightly) Oh I’m fine.

Ryan: How’d’ya think you did on the quiz this morning?

Mike: I think I did alright. Nothing too bad. Except question 4, wasn’t that just out of nowhere?

Ryan: 4? Nah he mentioned there’d be a question like that yesterday. (beat) Ohh but you missed class yesterday didn’t you? Everything alright?

Mike: Yeah, just wasn’t really feeling myself.

(Ryan considers this. Molly enters, heading the opposite direction Ryan was. She’s walking with purpose, not noticing her two friends immediately.)

Ryan: (Notices Molly. Gives a quick tug on Mike’s rope, close to the wrist as he says:) Mol-LY!!

(Mike’s head jolts up to meet Molly’s gaze as she slows and turns to them.) How’s it going Molls?

Molly: (Giving each a smile, a slightly bigger one for Mike) Hey Ryan, Mike.

Mike: (Returning the smile) Hey Molly.

Molly: (Back to Ryan) I’m doing pretty good. What are you two up to?

Ryan: Just heading back from class, ran into this guy. (Mike nods to confirm. To both of them:) Yo are you going to Steven’s party this weekend?

Mike / Molly: Oh I’m not sure... / Yeah, of course!

Mike: (a quick nervous chuckle) Oh, uh, sorry. (He looks up at the now slightly disappointed expression on Molly’s face)

Molly: No worries. (Giving a short tug on the rope around his wrist) And you should come to the party! Steven always gets the best snacks for the munchies. It’s gonna be fun!
Mike: Fair. Alright, I'll try to make it.
Molly and Ryan: Yesss!
Mike: No promises though.
Molly: Oh you'll be there. Alright guys I gotta get going, professor Gibbons always gives you the dirtiest glare if you walk in late. See ya guys!
Ryan / Mike: See ya! / ...Bye, Molly.
Ryan: *(Gives Mike a look as Molly walks away)*
Mike: Oh shut up, it's nothing.
Ryan: *(teasing)* Sure doesn't look like nothing.
Mike: *(smiling, gives Ryan a shove)* Alright let's get outta here.
*(The lights fade as they walk off)*
Scene 2: Mike’s Kitchen

(Lights up on Mike in the kitchen of his apartment. It’s later in the day. He’s cutting a vegetable for dinner, and wears headphones. He’s clearly paying just enough attention to what he’s doing to not accidentally cut himself, but his mind is otherwise in other places, often switching between enjoying the music, to grabbing another piece of vegetable to cut, to getting lost in thought about something else. That something else is whether or not to go to the party, which is tonight. The rope is still on his wrist, the same arm he holds the knife in.)

Nathan: (yelling off stage, playing a competitive online video game) WOOOO! Get FUCKED asshole! Not in my HOUSE! Did you guys SEE that triple kill?!? I’m an actual GOD!

(We may occasionally hear ad libbed outbursts like this from Nathan between now and his next line. Mike stops cutting vegetables briefly, reaches for his phone, and turns up the volume on his music. He is otherwise unbothered by Nathan’s outburst. He’s used to it. He starts to put down his phone, then reconsiders. What’s been on his mind visibly starts nagging him more. Finally he pulls off his headphones, dials, and waits. He looks relieved when it eventually goes to voicemail)

Ryan: (voicemail recording, heard by the audience) Yo you’ve reached Ryan! Either I’m busy or I lost my phone again. Leave a message! (Beep)

Mike: Hey man, I’m gonna have to flake on the party tonight... Let Molly know I’m sorry. (He hangs up. He then immediately looks frustrated with himself. He shakes it off, puts his headphones back on, and resumes cutting. During Nathan’s line, his cutting slows as he gets deeper into his own head. Eventually he’s too distracted, and just barely nicks his finger. He stops cutting and snaps to. He stares down at the knife and his finger, relieved it isn’t bleeding. Then his thoughts turn south. He begins contemplating intentionally cutting himself with the kitchen knife.)

Nathan: (Still off stage, as this is happening) SHIT! No, no no you MORONS! Go for the PAYLOAD, come ON! FUCK!

(He pounds his desk and quickly gets up from his chair and heads on stage into the kitchen. He arrives just as Mike is raising the knife, but doesn’t notice his intent. As he says his next line, he casually but quickly pulls on Mike’s rope, bringing the knife back down to the cutting board, away from his other wrist.) GOD people are dumb. Oh hey Mike, sorry for the noise.

Mike: (Pulling off his headphones as he turns to Nathan, shaking off the thoughts that he now can’t believe went through his head) Ah, you know it doesn’t bother me Nathan.

Nathan: Yeah, I still feel kinda bad when I get that rowdy though. Hey, uh, weren’t you going to Steve’s party?

Mike: Oh, nah. Just not feeling it tonight.

Nathan: Yeah I get that. Steve’s kind of a douche anyway. Throws a great party though.

Mike: (chuckling) You know, you’re right there. On both accounts.

Nathan: (after a beat, and with hesitation) Molly’s gonna be disappointed though, isn’t she?

Mike: (this hurts. He sighs) Yes. Yes she is.
Nathan: *(feeling that he hit a sore spot)* Well, alright, I'll leave you to your dinner. *(With a slight tug on the rope)* Let me know if you want to jam a few games with me later.

Mike: *(expression lightening just a bit, but unable to meet Nathan's gaze)* Can do, Nate. *(The lights fade as Nathan exits back to his room and Mike puts the knife away to continue making dinner, perhaps adding the vegetable to a pan.)*
Scene 3: Mike’s Bedroom
(Lights rise on Mike in his bedroom at night. He now has a rope on each wrist, trailing off to either side out of the light. He looks more tired than ever as he sits on the edge of his bed reading a book. He once again seems unable to focus, thoughts drifting to darker places. He eventually drops the book and flops back on his bed, exasperated. He lies there for a moment until suddenly his phone begins ringing and he is pulled hard to one side by one of his ropes. The lights quickly go up to reveal Karen on the other end of the phone and the rope, waiting for her son to answer. She remains holding the rope throughout the call. Mike fumbles for his phone, checks it, and quickly answers when he sees it’s his mom.)

Mike: Hello?
Karen: Hi honey! It's mom!
Mike: (calmed and cheered by the sound of her voice) Hey mom! What's got you up so late?
Karen: It's only nine! I'm not that old yet, sweetheart.
Mike: Oh sorry, I guess it just felt… later than that.
Karen: Well I just wanted to call and check in on you, how's the second half of the semester going so far? Gotten your midterms back yet?
Mike: Midterms went fine. Low B's on most of them, so nothing too exciting or too bad I guess. Strovsky's midterm was pretty easy, but the class has actually gotten much harder since then.
Karen: Strovsky's still teaching there? You know your father and I met in his class when were in college.
Mike: (more playful than annoyed) I know mom, you say it every time I mention him.
Karen: Oh alright alright, sorry hun. Maybe I am getting that old. (Mike chuckles) So, speaking of how I met your father… any new girls you'd like to tell me about?
Mike: (he’d be more annoyed by this question if he didn’t see it coming from a mile away. sighing:) No mom.
Karen: (realizes she should’ve known better at this point) Alright, sorry I brought it up again.
Mike: No, I'm sorry, I know you mean well. (after a pause) There is one girl I've been talking to -
Karen: Ooh!
Mike: but... we're really just friends.
Karen: Aw, what's her name, what's her name?
Mike: Molly.
Karen: Ooooh Mike and Molly, that's adorable!
Mike: It's nothing mom.
Karen: Well you let me know if it stops being nothing and becomes something. (excited about this idea:) Maybe make a move before Thanksgiving and invite her to join us!
Mike: Mom! Just... leave it be. We'll see what happens.
Karen: Alright hun. Well, I won't keep you, I'm sure you're busy.
Mike: Yeah... busy.
Karen: Ok, buhbye now sweetie!
Mike: Night, mom.

(We see Karen drop the rope as the lights fade and she hangs up. Mike plops his phone onto the opposite end of the bed. We are left with just Mike again. He’s clearly stuck on thoughts of Molly, half daydreaming about her, half wallowing in regret of not talking to her more. The regret begins to take over, and he begins to break down. He frantically looks around the room for some way to vent. His eyes rest on a bottle of pills on his nightstand. He reaches for them, removes the cap, and taps a couple out into his hand. He pauses for a moment, and then tips the bottle more, shaking out an overdose into his hands. He looks down at them, working himself up to swallow them, when suddenly his phone buzzes with a text message, his arm is pulled hard by the second rope in the opposite direction of his mother, spilling the pills onto the floor, and the lights show Molly now holding the other end of the rope, phone in hand. He places the now mostly empty bottle back on the nightstand, reaches for his phone, and is all at once surprised, confused, and elated to see a text from Molly waiting for him. They begin texting back and forth. As she waits for each reply, Molly is slowly twirling the rope, like a strand of hair or an old phone cord. This slowly draws Mike further and further towards her. Reading all the messages out loud would be way too cheesy, so this happens in practical silence, aside from text message notification sounds and some quiet, brief laughs at occasional messages. An option may be to project text messages, but the audience should understand what’s going on by the characters’ reactions and expressions alone. To guide this or provide text if projecting them is desired, here’s how the conversation goes:)

Molly: Hey Mike! Haven't seen you around as much lately. You doing alright?
Mike: (after spending some time considering how to put this) Yeah, just bogged down with work lately. I'm still sorry I ended up missing the party.
Molly: (she didn't want to bring up the party, but was glad he did) I was really looking forward to seeing you there. Luckily you didn't miss much, cops got called pretty early on and sent us all home.
Mike: (he feels bad but good that she wanted him to come) Well, it was one of Steven’s parties.
Molly: (laughing a little) Yeah, he doesn't exactly have the best record, huh.
Mike: (also laughs a little) No he does not. But still I'm sorry I missed it, really. (This takes him a second to work up the courage for. He decides to test the waters) But I'm sure we can find better circumstances to see each other in soon.
Molly: (glad to hear he’ll get out of the house again soon. At this point, she stops twirling the rope between texts, but doesn't loosen up on it yet) That’d be great! You, Ryan, and I should grab coffee or pizza together this weekend, catch up on how the semester is going!
Mike: (a bit disappointed she didn't see what he meant, but still determined) Yeah, that be fun. But uh, I was kinda thinking more... just the two of us.
Molly: *(drops the rope completely now. She didn’t mean to lead him on like this.)* Oh Mike, I’m sorry. I hope I didn’t give you the wrong idea, but we're friends! I like that. I like being your friend. I’m not really interested in anything more right now. I’m really sorry.

*(Mike drops the phone on the floor in front of him when he finishes reading the last message. He looks around the room in utter despair. He slaps the pill bottle off the nightstand, gets up, looks around again, maybe kicks something, and crosses off, holding his head, ropes dragging behind him. The lights on Mike’s room fade out, but Molly’s light stays up for a moment. She sends a final text message before her light fades:)*

Molly: Mike?
Scene 4: The End

(Lights come up on Mike, standing on a chair. He still has a rope on each wrist from the previous scenes, plus one more, around his neck. If there’s a safe way to do so, it should be attached to the grid/flyspace. It’s a noose. The other two ropes trail off out of the light. Mike is shaking with nervousness. He keeps looking down, then out and around him, then back down, etc. as he tries to convince himself that this is the right move, or that it isn’t. Finally he starts to take a step off the chair, and for the first time, acknowledges the ropes on his wrists. It’s like he has been trained that someone will give them a tug to stop him from doing these things, but he didn’t realize it until now. As he starts to take the step, he feels no pulls on the ropes. He’s confused that there’s no pull. He retracts his foot. He takes a deep breath, and begins to step off the chair again. The lights begin to dim as he does so. Then suddenly, the lights brighten and expand to reveal Ryan and Molly holding one rope, and Karen and Nathan holding the other. The four pull him back onto the chair before he can step off. They also are now finally acknowledging the ropes’ existence. Mike tries to step off again, but they pull him back once more. He begins to sob, bringing his hands up to his face. This brings his family and friends closer on the other ends of the ropes. They all quickly now step forward and surround him. Molly and Karen gently remove the noose from his neck. Ryan and Nathan help him step down to sit in the chair. The four of them hold him, comforting him. They then slowly hand him the ends of his ropes, then depart, their eyes lingering on him for their first few steps. He watches them out, then slowly turns towards us with growing conviction. The lights fade out.)