

Poof!

A play in one act

By Alex Coulombe

Runtime: 25 minutes

Synopsis: Fresh from a robbery foiled by the local superhero, Kathy attempts to gain the confidence of her boyfriend, Donovan, who she suspects could himself be that mysterious superhero, 'The Human Poof.'

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

DONOVAN, a British chemist

KATHY, his girlfriend

OLD-TIMEY REPORTER, voice on the radio

MISTER DISAPPEARERERER, a superhero

SETTING

An apartment, then the city.

SCENE 1

An empty kitchen. The radio plays soft music. Suddenly, in through the window and out of breath enters DONOVAN, a buttoned-up British type looking far more bedraggled than suits him. He fumbles his bag, and out falls a black leather mask which he promptly buries back inside. From a distance, we hear someone coming up the stairs, singing. DONOVAN dives for the kitchen table, grabs a newspaper and a box of Wheaties. He composes himself and does what he can to look nonplussed just as the door opens.

KATHY enters to see DONOVAN sitting down, reading the paper, and eating Wheaties from the box. In this moment, she looks like she belongs in The Addams Family; her hair and professional attire have been obliterated by smoke and ash. She approaches DONOVAN from behind. She waits for him to turn around. She coughs.

DONOVAN
(not looking at her)

Good evening.

KATHY
Hi.

(Pause. KATHY clears her throat.)

DONOVAN

Are you quite well, dear?

(KATHY sits across from him and waits for him to look up. DONOVAN does, and considers her while continuing to chew.)

Hm!

KATHY

Ta-da!

(A beat.)

Are you going to ask what happened?

DONOVAN

What happened Kathy?

KATHY

Can you see what happened?

DONOVAN

Nope.

KATHY

Can you smell what happened?

DONOVAN

Nope.

KATHY

The bank was robbed!

DONOVAN

Then it exploded?

KATHY

Do I look exploded?

DONOVAN

More... exploded upon.

KATHY

Good. Closer. Because the robbery...

DONOVAN

The robbery... involved dynamite...?

KATHY

The robbery was not successful... because... we... were... rescued...?

DONOVAN

Oh, you were rescued by... the police.

KATHY

By our local superhero: The Human Poof!

DONOVAN

Mister Disappearer. And he's not a superhero.

KATHY

Yes he is!

DONOVAN

It may interest you to know that he prefers Mister Disappearer-er. I am of the opinion that simply 'Mister Disappear' would suffice, although...

(He returns to reading his paper.)

KATHY

Well my editor is pushing for 'The Human Poof' to catch on.

(DONOVAN reads the paper and
eats more Wheaties.)

How are you not more interested? I was rescued today by a goddamn superhero!

DONOVAN

There's no such thing as superheroes.

KATHY

(excited)

And! As a chemist working at a smoke factory, dealing with this stuff all day, how can you not take one look at me-- or smell at me-- and know this is from one of his smoke bombs?

DONOVAN

I believe he calls them smoke poofs. But as you bring it up, I do smell $KClO_3$, baking soda, and sugar. Potassium chlorate as oxidizer, dextrin as fuel, and sodium bicarbonate to moderate the temperature. Standard smoke compound.

KATHY

See! That's what I wanted you to say when I came in!

DONOVAN

Not sure I follow.

KATHY

How cool would it have been if I got home and without even turning around you had been like 'Zounds! Kathy my love. My powerful perfumery-level nostril holes detect that you have been involved in a poofy smoky incident involving sugar, salt, dexter fuel, and baking powder!'

DONOVAN

Baking soda.

KATHY

My point is it's no fun have someone guess something, give them the answer, then explain afterwards why they should have come to that answer on their own.

DONOVAN

Apologies. You're absolutely right; I could have done that.

KATHY

You didn't notice when I came in?

DONOVAN

I didn't smell you when you came in.

KATHY

Why not?

DONOVAN

I was smelling my Wheaties.

KATHY

You never smell me.

DONOVAN

I don't think you would like that.

KATHY

Yes I would!

DONOVAN

Well then. I'll do my damndest to accommodate those wishes.

KATHY

I encourage it. Smell me as you please.

DONOVAN

Sounds good. Or rather... smells good? Eh?

(He returns to reading and eating.)

KATHY

You are weird and adorable.

DONOVAN

(Boston accent)

You are.

KATHY

You're eating Wheaties without milk.

DONOVAN

Yes.

KATHY

You don't eat Wheaties without milk.

DONOVAN

Sure I do.

KATHY

Why are you sweaty?

DONOVAN

I'm not.

(KATHY gives him a long,
penetrating stare.)

Stop it.

KATHY

And why haven't you apologized to me?

DONOVAN

For what?! Not smelling you? I just did!

KATHY

You missed our lunch date again.

DONOVAN

Oh. Good gracious. Darling, I'm terribly sorry. I was caught
up at work. I'll have to make it up to you.

KATHY

I have spent more of our relationship waiting for you than
with you. Where are you?

DONOVAN

As I've stated on numerous occasions -- it's work, dear,
work. I get caught up in a project and I--

KATHY

Forget to eat? Forget to come home? Donovan. I think I know
what's going on.

DONOVAN

You do?

KATHY

Are you having an affair?

DONOVAN

No!

KATHY

Not even a gay affair?

DONOVAN

That would still be an affair.

KATHY

Well *I* know that. When did you get home?

DONOVAN

A couple hours ago, like usual.

(She wipes sweat off his forehead.)

KATHY

You're up to something.

DONOVAN

I'm not.

KATHY

You know, if I wasn't waiting for you to pick me up at the bank, I would've been gone when the robbery happened.

DONOVAN

But if you were with me, then you wouldn't have had the pleasure of being rescued by the amazing Mister Disappearererer...er.

KATHY

True. Have you ever seen him?

DONOVAN

Thankfully no.

KATHY

Well let me tell you, there is a ... palpable high in his presence. It is indescribable. But let me try.

DONOVAN

Perhaps you need not-

KATHY

Intoxicating. Definitely that.

DONOVAN

Likely the gas fumes.

KATHY

First there's this calm. Then, excitement. Because you know everything's going to be okay. And there's the thrill of knowing you're about to see how he'll make it okay, y'know? I wonder if his girlfriend or wife or whatever feels that. I mean the danger- knowing he's putting himself in harm's way so often. It must be stressful but also... exhilarating? Do you think he keeps his costume on for sex? I would. Or I'd... like that. All that leather and latex-- he's already using protection. That's considerate.

DONOVAN

I see where you're headed.

KATHY

Okay stay with me here. Just for fun, imagine I'm his girlfriend-- like Mary Jane or Batman's girlfriend or whatever. I'm having a normal night just watching TV, and suddenly he bursts in through the window and sets off an incense poof. The smoke bomb's like a safety word so I know it's him. Flashes of darkness, a soft caress, whooshes of black, a whisper with each touch. That builds to kisses on my neck, kisses all over my body... lotsa tongue stuff. I can't see him until... there in the corner. I stalk him like a cat and I pounce! Aha! I have him. He's still in darkness but I feel his rippling body beneath me and I know he's mine. I try to hold him down, but he's so strong. He has me up against the wall, and he's a wall in himself, inches from me, breath hot, his hand covering my mouth, a big black wall of man driving up into me with acres of--

(DONOVAN's cell phone goes off.

A bizarre ring tone. DONOVAN looks at it, silences it, pockets it.)

KATHY

Well... you get the idea.

DONOVAN

Oh no do go on. Tell me what happens next in this fantasy where you cheat on your boyfriend with a fictional character.

KATHY

Sorry. Are you mad?

DONOVAN

No no of course not. We all have fantasies-- you just tend to be very... open about yours. Provocative imagery to be sure and you're nothing if not creative. Give me a kiss.

(She does. He gets ash on his lips and coughs.)

Now, much as I'd love to ride that wave of American sexual energy you've conjured, I do feel the need to ask if you'd like to clean up? Maybe just wash your hair or-- ow!

KATHY

(she hits him while giggling)

You English bastard.

DONOVAN

Wash up and we'll talk. You know us Brits; can't be seen fraternizing with the great unwashed.

(His phone is buzzing and he looks at it. Just then the radio's music is cut off. The volume increases and plays over their continuing conversation.)

OLD-TIMEY REPORTER

This just in! A high speed chase has ended with ten attackers forming a ring around an abandoned warehouse on Pier Seven. All assailants are heavily-armed, and are rumored to have a hostage in the form of a high-ranking government official.

(MORE)

OLD-TIMEY REPORTER (CONT'D)

Some are speculating it could be the President of these United States. SWAT teams are currently being dispatched, but it could be an hour or more before they arrive on--

(DONOVAN turns off the radio.)

DONOVAN

Oh my head... too much excitement. I'm terribly sorry dear, but it's been a long day and a moment of quiet would do me well. I'll make a quick trip to the library to see if that new book on Tesla's Dynamic Theory of Gravity has arrived.

KATHY

Who texted?

DONOVAN

(looking at the phone)

Tesla. I said Tesla. Why don't you, um, draw a bath and I'll be back before you know it. We'll have a brilliant evening, I promise.

KATHY

(rapid-fire)

Don't go! I haven't even told you about the robbery. There were three great big fat guys wearing Alfred Hitchcock masks and they hadn't even gotten the money yet when this deep, sensual voice coming from nowhere was like 'Justice is a dish best served... smoked' and then poofs exploded like fireworks and we were all coughing and we can't see and the guys were screaming and firing their guns and his cape whooshed by me and--

DONOVAN

(putting on his coat)

Kathy! You're adorable, but my mind has shifted gears and I'm... you know how I can be. Put on some Downton Abbey-

KATHY

Downton Abbey.

DONOVAN

-and try to stop thinking about The Amazing Super Poof. This man seems good-hearted, but is also clearly an attention-starved buffoon. The less credence we pay him, the sooner he can stop this shenanigans and lead a normal life. Till then...

KATHY

I won't talk about him anymore! Tell me about your day! You never talk about your day. I need... I want... please stay?

(KATHY grabs his coat and puts something in his pocket.)

DONOVAN

I'll be back in a flash. Kathy, I love you.

KATHY

Are you the Disappearing Poof?!

(Pause.)

DONOVAN

No.

KATHY

I wish you were.

(DONOVAN kisses her, grabs his bag, and exits.)

Hmph.

(Beat. She goes to her cupboard and pulls out pickles. She eats them.)

He could totally be a superhero, right? Man, what a pickle. At the bank, it was weird. Smoke-dude lingered on me. Lingered on me, like, hard. And when that cape whooshed by, I swear he smelled like Donovan. So let's review, Kathy, you amazing investigative reporter you. Number one: my boyfriend manufactures chemicals that get used in all sorts of tactical espionage actiony stuff.

(MORE)

KATHY (CONT'D)

Two: there's large periods of time during which he's unaccounted for. He gets really uncomfortable when I talk about Doctor Disappearo: that's number three. Number four is he left right when he heard about this hostage crisis. Oh, and five, when The Vanishing Human Poof was at the bank, Donovan was nowhere to be seen. Could they be the same person? Tonight, with the help of an overpriced Radioshack GPS tracking device I put in his pocket, I'm gonna find out. Okay, let's go! Get amped!

(Music plays. She kickboxes
and speaks in rhythm.)

I'm gonna catch him doing super stuff, and he'll trust me and we'll team up, partners in superherodom, nobley fighting back the infinite sea of injustice. A beacon of light in the dark riptide of cruelty and malice.

(She stops.)

What could go wrong? Bah-zing!

(She runs offstage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

*The city streets late at night.
We hear cars, horns, sirens, etc.*

*DONOVAN crosses the stage and
takes off his coat in a corner.*

DONOVAN

(on his cell phone)

I'm already coming. Establish a perimeter and get prepped.

*(After a moment, KATHY enters,
practically skipping. As she
speaks, she crosses the stage.)*

KATHY

--and maybe I can join him! We could be like... The Disappearing Duo! Or I can be a sidekick like... fish-girl or something. Cause of my webbed-feet. But I gotta get in shape first. I could start doing yoga again. I bet I still remember gymnastics. Oh yeah how cool would that be? Like he sets off smoke and then out of nowhere I come flying in with a triple-axel-kick. Kapow! But I don't want him to feel like I'm being overbearing. One week. If I can do yoga for one week and remember some gymnastics, then I get to reward myself by suggesting to him that we team up as Donovan's Dynamic Disappearing Duo. The Quadruple D's! Then we do missions together and -no, no NO-

*(KATHY trips and falls down. She
lifts up DONOVAN's coat. She pulls
out the GPS tracker. She gasps.)*

I'm right. He's changed into poofiform. This is friggin' awesome!

*(A creak is heard from a nearby
catwalk and KATHY spies a shadowy
whoosh.)*

KATHY

Oh my God that was him. Honey! Honey! It's okay I know!
Library my ass, Poof Man!

(She chases after him, singing and
dancing all the way.)

Following my boyfriend, watching him parkour, he's Superman
and I can't, believe I didn't see it before! Gonna make some
crazy love, lots of leather and tights. Super sexy boyfriend,
solving crime all night.

(Lights fade to black as she makes
her way off stage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

A rooftop with a table. We hear the distinct sounds of police, gunshots, and helicopters nearby. It's clear we're not far from the hostage crisis.

From the audience's view, we see that MISTER DISAPPEARERER is on the table in a tight black suit with goggles, a bandana, a mask that covers his face, and a cape big enough to cover the whole table. His voice is deep, mysterious, foreboding.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Get over here!

(Running from offstage, DONOVAN, shirtless and covered in oil, slides over the top of MISTER DISAPPEARERER. Expertly landing on the other side, he spins around and continues to give MISTER DISAPPEARERER a full-body rub-down using his hands, arms, and torso. MISTER DISAPPEARERER grunts. As soon as he's done, DONOVAN goes to his bag, wipes himself with a towel, and starts to remove several items.)

DONOVAN

Here's a new batch of your standard smoke poofs. I can't believe you've already used up the others.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

It's a thrill-of-the-moment kind of thing.

DONOVAN

I was saving these, but fine. A couple new gadgets for you tonight. This sponge? Two chemicals on either side-- squeeze it to activate them and send smoke shooting out of your fist.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Radical.

DONOVAN

Since you're looking at hostages, here's a stick.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

To... beat them?

DONOVAN

To shield them.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Oh. Wait what?

DONOVAN

Swing the stick in front of someone and harmonic frequencies reacting with suspended chemical particles will create a temporary shield.

DONOVAN

Here we have smoke poofs, crying poofs, rage poofs, flaming poofs, and gay poofs.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Gay poofs?

DONOVAN

To induce joy. Like laughing gas.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Ha ha!

DONOVAN

Lastly and most importantly, here's a new mask that'll help you stay even more unnoticed.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Noice. Does it shoot smoke out of my eyes or something?

DONOVAN

No the mask is a blacker black.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

My mask is already black.

DONOVAN

Dark charcoal. Use this one. All right. Good luck and don't get yourself killed. Those gadgets are expensive.

(He tries to leave.)

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Where are you going?

DONOVAN

My girlfriend is waiting for me.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Don't leave like that. I haven't seen you in days.

DONOVAN

I have nothing to say to you.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Come on. What, feeling used again? Donovaaaaan. You know how much you mean to me. What would I do without my Q?

DONOVAN

I feel more like M. Your eyepaint is smearing down your cheek, double-O. Cheers Paul.

(He starts to leave. MISTER DISAPPEARERER tries to clean his face but is so greasy he isn't sure what to do.)

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

You're more to me than some disposable Bond girl.

DONOVAN

If you cared about me, you'd stop risking your life and settle down. And M isn't a Bond girl.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Yes she is. She's in like all the movies.

DONOVAN

M is his boss, Bond girls are... have you actually seen a Bond film?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

(striking a playful pose)

Nope but I'd love to. You free tomorrow?

DONOVAN

What part of East Nowhere did you grow up in?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Have we not been over my origin story?

DONOVAN

I don't have time for this.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

What is going on with you? Talk to me, sugar.

(DONOVAN sizes up the black-leather, greased up man in front of him.)

DONOVAN

I love you. Not Vanishing Powder Man.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

I love you, Donovan.

DONOVAN

Really? Now you finally say it?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

I love you, Donovan.

(MISTER DISAPPEARERER approaches
DONOVAN.)

DONOVAN

Stop it.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
(closer)

I love you, Donovan.

DONOVAN

You have a hostage crisis to get to.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
(one greasy hand on DONOVAN)

I love you Donovan.

DONOVAN
(tearing up)

No thank you.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Donovan. I love you.

(MISTER DISAPPEARERER embraces
DONOVAN and kisses him. DONOVAN
pulls away, covered in lubricant.)

KATHY
(offstage)

Donovan?!

DONOVAN

Shit.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Should I poof?

DONOVAN

No.

(DONOVAN hides in MISTER
DISAPPEARERER's cape just as KATHY
enters. When DONOVAN speaks, he
tries to sound like MISTER
DISAPPEARERER, who mimes talking.)

KATHY
(to MISTER DISAPPEARERER)

Donovan!!

DONOVAN

Kathy!

(MISTER DISAPPEARERER holds DONOVAN
securely behind the cape.)

KATHY
I knew it! I knew you were The Human Poof!

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
Well then young miss... you knew... right. And please, call
me Mr. Disappearerer.

KATHY
God what a sexy voice. How do you pull that off?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
Years of... smoking.

KATHY
(approaching him)
Ahhhhh! Clever. I know I should be mad about the lies, but
man, I am so friggin' thrilled right now. Look how shimmery
your body is, I just wanna--

DONOVAN
Don't come any closer!

KATHY
What?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
There are poof bombs rigged within a ten foot radius of me.

KATHY

What're you doing over there?

DONOVAN

An experiment.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

An experiment that you... cannot see...

KATHY

You have to let me get some pictures for the paper.

DONOVAN

No.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Absolutely!

(MISTER DISAPPEARERER starts posing while KATHY shoots some pictures with her cell-phone. DONOVAN struggles to stay hidden with all the movement.)

KATHY

Amazing Donovan. So I don't want to jump ahead too far, but I want you to start considering the possibility of this whole crime fighting thing being something we do together.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Absolutely!

DONOVAN

--Not!

KATHY

You're right. I need to do some yoga first. But then, y'know, let's talk about it. I've got webbed feet and--

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

You could be... Water-Woman.

KATHY

Is that really not taken?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Don't think so.

DONOVAN

Anyway! Lovely to see you honey but you should head on home.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Ah come on, this is fun.

DONOVAN

Shut up!

(DONOVAN and MISTER DISAPPEARERER
have an awkward little cat fight.)

KATHY

What the hell?

(KATHY marches over to pull the
cape up, but MISTER DISAPPEARERER
reacts with the Shield Stick. With
a loud hum, she and DONOVAN are
both knocked backward. It takes
them a moment to recover.)

DONOVAN

Kathy I'm sorry. It's not what it looks like!

(A beat.)

KATHY

Oh good. Cause it looks like two Chippendales dancers just
broke a no-company-romance policy.

DONOVAN

There's nothing inappropriate about this. The oil is a
lubricant reducing the friction coefficient of any surface to
that of black ice. I apply it when he enters a situation
where he needs to slip in and out.

KATHY

Just as friends?

DONOVAN

As a favor. We met at a conference a few years back and he confided in me his dream of--

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Oh! Is this your girlfriend!?

DONOVAN

Kathy, this is Mr. Disappearerer.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Hey girl.

DONOVAN

But you can call him Paul.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

No she can't!

KATHY

Do you remember me from today? The bank?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Sure don't.

KATHY

How would you feel about being referred to in the paper as The Human Poof?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Please god no.

KATHY

Vanishimo?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

No.

DONOVAN

Kathy.

KATHY

Mister Masked Magician?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

That may work in print but try to say that out loud a few times. Mister Masked Magician.

KATHY

Mister Masked Magician. Mister Mask-ed Magician.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

There's like a full stop there in the middle.

DONOVAN

Kathy do you truly expect me to believe you care about this right now?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Maybe MMM?

KATHY

It's not any harder to say than Mr. Disappearererer.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

It's what my mother called me... before she was taken.

DONOVAN

Kathy there's nothing to be upset about.

KATHY

Murdered?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Aliens.

DONOVAN

Darling please speak to me.

KATHY

Fine Donovan. So you're saying you're Mr. Poof's Batman's Alfred?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
(squeezing DONOVAN)

He's my Q. Not my M.

DONOVAN

Sometimes M.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

I'm James Bond.

KATHY

And there's nothing I should be worried about here?

DONOVAN

No. Nothing. Strictly business.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

You're really going to pretend there's nothing between us?

KATHY

What?

DONOVAN

Paul!

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

You said you'd tell her someday.

DONOVAN

Not today!

KATHY

I actually thought this would be the best night of my life.

(We hear shots fired and screams.
The hostage crisis is getting
heated.)

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Sorry to leave, but I heard the president might be over there, so y'know, that's a big get for me.

DONOVAN

(grabbing him)

Don't! Are you hearing that gunfire?

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

It's fine. Stay with your girlfriend. Goodbye.

(He turns and prepares to squeeze
the poof sponge.)

DONOVAN

I don't want you to die.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

I'll be fine.

KATHY

He'll be fine.

DONOVAN

You're not a superhero!

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

If I stopped all this would you be with me?

DONOVAN

Yes.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER

Even if it means people will die?

DONOVAN

Yes.

KATHY

Donovan...

DONOVAN

Is it so selfish to want what everyone else has?

KATHY

You already do.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
It's time to choose.

DONOVAN
I won't choose.

KATHY
You love me.

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
Me or her?

KATHY
We'll get through this.

DONOVAN
Stop it Paul!

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
I will stop. I love you enough to give this all up.

KATHY
Donovan...

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
Three...

KATHY
Think of the family we could have Donovan...

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
Two...

DONOVAN
Kathy! I wish...

MISTER DISAPPEARERER
One...

DONOVAN
You Paul! Dammit I choose you!

(MISTER DISAPPEARERERER squeezes the sponge. A loud pop and smoke fills the stage. When it clears, he and DONOVAN are gone. The old mask and the Shield Stick are all that remain. KATHY is alone. She stares into the distance as the sirens and gunshots ring louder and louder. We begin to fade to black, but then KATHY stands up. Lights return to full brightness. She grabs the Shield Stick and spins it like a baton, reverberating powerfully.)

KATHY

What could go wrong?

(She puts on the mask and charges off stage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)