

6-24-2015

# Listen, then Speak: Foregrounding Womens Spaces, Stories, and Relationships in Dramatic Writing

Irene Loy

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**LISTEN, THEN SPEAK: FOREGROUNDING WOMEN'S  
SPACES, STORIES, AND RELATIONSHIPS  
IN DRAMATIC WRITING**

**by**

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B.A., Sociolinguistics, Kenyon College, 2000  
M.A., Speech and Hearing Sciences, Indiana University, 2006

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts  
Dramatic Writing**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May 2015**

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Juergen, Matthew, and Tamarin.

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge Gregory Moss, Caroline Prugh, Matthew McDuffie, Julie Shields, Matt Yde, and Amanda Hamp for their mentorship in practice and theory during this MFA program. Further, the friendship of Maria Cordova Andrews has been invaluable to me during the completion of this degree and beyond. I am grateful for the love and support of my family in pursuing my dreams. And above all, I am thankful for my husband and life partner, Scott Edward Lestage, for being so much fun to be with, and for his copious encouragement and love during these three years, before, and after.

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**ABSTRACT**

In this essay, I provide documentation for my theory and practice during this MFA degree. I begin with a short personal essay on my auto-biography leading up to and including this program. Then I follow with an overview of the theoretical underpinnings to my writing practice. Of particular importance here is the framing of listening and spaciousness as feminine and of speaking and activity as masculine, as a means of underscoring the inherent value of that which has traditionally been undervalued in the history of dramatic literature. This characterizes a move toward women's bodies, rather than away from them, including listening to women's internal experiences. I detail how listening is a playwriting tool, one which ideally precedes and functions in tandem with speaking. Next I place my work in the modern feminist playwriting tradition in America, citing Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell, Lynn Nottage, Marsha Norman, Sarah Ruhl, and Kira Obolensky as playwrights in my artistic family tree. Afterward, I analyze three of the plays which I wrote during this program—*Plume*, *Gas'n'Sips*, and *2am Lovely*—for their common and distinctive elements, including their hybridization of Realism with Surrealism, Expressionism, and Symbolism, respectively. My unique style of writing is highlighted as a series of poem-plays, or those which feature highly theatrical stage metaphors as a means of representing onstage that which is otherwise interior. In this, I seek to signify in performance both internal and external aspects of women's lived experiences, their spaces, stories, and relationships. Then the entire script for the twelfth draft of *2am Lovely* is given, followed by a short Appendix, which is an overview of the casting and rehearsal process for the university production of this play in Spring 2015.

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## INTRODUCTION

I have never been a great storyteller. I am always laughing at my own jokes before I get to the punchline, telling the episodes of a story out of order, mixing up my genres, rushing to the end of a story before I have given enough in the beginning. However, I have become especially good at listening. Unfortunately—or to my great fortune, depending on how you look at it—I did not make callbacks to my first college audition, because, to quote the director when I innocently asked him for feedback, I was “not listening” to other people on stage. Thusly I turned my over decade-long attention to the art of listening—how to do it, why it matters, what I can hear when I am not talking so much. In this “detour” from theatre, I made a priority of learning how to listen in healthcare, education, and nonprofit settings. I learned to care deeply what others have to say. Predictably, I went to the other extreme, assuming in the process that I had nothing of value myself to say. Therefore, even upon my return to playwriting, when asked what I was trying to say through writing a specific play, I was dumbfounded: “I don’t know? What am I saying? I thought I was listening.” In this MFA program, I have learned to unearth and cultivate my own voice, husky though it was from disuse, while trying desperately not to lose track of deep listening as a skill. As I go along, I find that listening is best when it happens before uttering a word.

Let’s back up a bit. I was raised by my mother and grandmother in Indianapolis, Indiana. Although I have never really identified with Midwestern culture, my family has always been dear to me. Since my father had a very sparse presence in my upbringing, I used to joke that I was raised by “four mothers”: my mother, plus my grandmother and two aunts on my maternal side. Altogether, these women helped me to see the value in



both home life and travels, in both the familiar and the unconventional. From a distance, I began to revere men, but from up close I began to see the depth and strength in women. It follows that I would write plays with complex, three-dimensional female characters; I have had the pleasure not only of being a woman but also of being close to many other women whom I love dearly.

I was interested in theater from a young age. In Kindergarten, I landed the role of the angel in the Christmas play. I had a single line announcing the birth of Christ. In my white dress, wings, and gold halo, I was to climb to the top of a ladder and make the announcement. However, I had grabbed my mother's curling iron the previous week and burned the palm of my hand. When I got to the top of the ladder, I felt so shy and overwhelmed that I simply looked down and picked at the blister on my palm. There is something profound that has stuck with me from this moment into my adult life, holding as it does both my love of theatre and my sense of its intense responsibility.

The following year, I was cast as Mrs. Claus in a very different type of Christmas play, one in which Santa's wife was starting her own career. I never would have guessed it at the time, but at the tender age of six, I was enthusiastic about alternative roles for females. In this, I can see the seeds of my interest in feminist theatre later on. While I do not view all aspects of life through a gendered lens, the gender bias in much of the history of dramatic writing inspires me to advocate for more female playwrights to be included in the canon, for more plays by female dramatists to be produced, for more complex female characters to be written, and for a greater variety of women's stories to be told on stage and in film. At this point in my writing career, I define feminist plays as those with

women at their center, with women's desires driving their dramatic action, depicting non-stereotypical female characters and stories reflecting real women's lives.

In high school, I was involved in theatre primarily as an actress. Ms. Lucas was our drama teacher, and she gave us an "It Shall be Red" monologue to recite which was very powerful (I have lost the citation). When I started to opt out of drama classes in favor of journalism and creative writing electives, Ms. Lucas was incensed. Nonetheless, I did have the opportunity during high school to attend both the Prelude Academy (in Indianapolis) for acting and the Churchill Academy (at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri) for writing. I had trouble deciding between theatre and writing as tracks at the time. Now I see these dual interests as overlapping in the realm of dramatic writing.

It was during college that I consciously split from theatre. Not only did I stop going to auditions once I failed to make the callbacks my freshman year (noted above), but I also moved away from dramatic writing during my sophomore year. I took an Introduction to Playwriting class that year; in it, we were taught Joseph Campbell and the idea that there is one universal story. I was as dubious of that notion then as I am now. Nevertheless, the tipping point for my nineteen-year-old mind was the assignment to write something from our personal experience. I wrote an intensely personal piece, and (of course) I volunteered for my piece to be read first. Afterward, the other students in the (otherwise all-male) class read a series of superficial accounts of nights at fraternity parties and the like. After that course, I resolved to leave playwriting in particular and theatre in general behind me. As I would see, it was not that easy. Clearly, I was prone to quitting at that age (I also quit cross country freshman year), and I did not declare

theatre as my major (it had been in the running), but the traces of my interest in theatre would follow me into every field I entered in the coming years.

In fact, almost right away, I found ways to include theatre in my studies. I declared an inter-disciplinary sociolinguistics major, in which I looked primarily at the role of gender in interpersonal communication. As part of this degree, I studied abroad in Australia, assistant directing a production of Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* at Australian National University (ANU) while I was there. Iain Sinclair, the director for that show, introduced me to voice and dialect work for actors, a field which would engage my attention for years to follow. For my senior thesis, I directed a night of scenes from prominent plays (e.g. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), with actresses playing female roles and actors playing male roles one night and switching roles the next night. I gave brief questionnaires to audience members and found (through statistical analysis) that when actresses played roles written for men, they were seen as the most powerful but least likeable characters. Although this finding in and of itself may not have been revolutionary, the fact that it was true for a primarily liberal, female audience was particularly astounding. In these ways, I included theatre in my linguistics studies.

After college, I moved to Brooklyn with some friends. That year, I worked with a women's health nonprofit while planning a move abroad to Vienna, Austria. That same year, I started attending and participating in slam poetry competitions in lower Manhattan (at Bar 13). Since I had written poetry for a long while and had previously enjoyed performing, it was refreshing to combine the two in slams. Remarkably, I made it to their finals that year. Ultimately, I found the dominant note of anger in slam poetry (at the time) unsustainable, as I had only a handful of things about which I was angry (i.e., that

could fuel my writing and performing in that tradition). Nevertheless, the experience was liberating. Strangely, when I moved to Vienna, I stopped performing but continued writing, becoming in the process very quiet and withdrawn creatively.

I sought out vocal coaching at the Michael Howard Studios in New York City and with a singing teacher in Vienna. While I learned about resonance, pitch, and intensity, in practical terms, I turned off my voice and became downright mousy. In retrospect, I began to think that something was wrong with my voice, that I needed to rely on others to speak while I listened. This spurious belief led me to focus on Voice Pathology during my first master's degree in Speech and Hearing Sciences at Indiana University (IU)—Bloomington. Of special interest was Professional Voice Use—by actors, singers, and other 'vocal athletes'—and the pathologies which can result from vocal misuse or abuse. I acted as Assistant Vocal Coach on a couple of shows at IU (*The Cherry Orchard* and *Macbeth*). During my last semester, while I completed a medical externship in speech, language, and voice disorders in the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Health System, I sought out a Theatre Voice Internship with Janet Rodgers in the theatre department at VCU. My aim was to get trained in how to move the disordered voice back to a state of health and the healthy voice to the extraordinary capability of performance. But in reality, I was grappling with my own silence and devoicing.

For two years, I worked in a voice pathology clinic at Brigham and Women's Hospital (in Boston), diagnosing and treating voice disorders in professional and non-professional voice users. While it was the perfect application of my graduate studies, I found myself drawing more and more from theatre voice pedagogy to treat voice disorders, trying to bring theatre practices into the clinic setting. At the same time, I

became interested in Drama Therapy, thinking that in that inter-disciplinary field, I could find the intersection of theatre and healing that I was trying to promote with my patients. Still, I found that I wanted a higher standard of aesthetic quality in theatrical work, which was something that was neither the intent nor the spirit of Drama Therapy. During the same time in my life, I also worked at ImprovBoston and found that I love improv comedy and improvisation. Despite my efforts to let theatre go, its insistence on continuing to influence my other endeavors eventually made it clear that I would need to return to the field of pure theatre, in order to learn what I had left behind there.

From that point, I left the medical field and took a position as a Speech-Language Pathologist at Esperanza Elementary in Farmington, New Mexico, with the intent of starting an MFA in Performance in Boulder, Colorado, the following year. My return to performing came that year, with a couple of leads in local community theatre plays. I enjoyed being back on the stage and imagined I was being called to perform. However, during that year in northwest New Mexico, I discovered Albuquerque and the theatre scene here, including Tricklock Theatre Company and their annual Revolutions International Theatre Festival. Since the program in Boulder, upon visiting, did not at all feel like a fit, I chose instead to move to Albuquerque and begin volunteering with Tricklock. This would turn into three years of working with them, along with the discovery of the Dramatic Writing MFA program at UNM. All of the sudden, it seemed time for my return not only to theatre in general but to playwriting in particular. Why?

There were several reasons for my return to playwriting. For one, I realized by this point that I had left out of fear and embarrassment. Further, I had this ongoing dual love of theatre and of writing, and in writing plays there is their perfect synthesis. Not

only that, but I also had these experiences of performing, directing, vocal coaching, and otherwise working in theatre, which would undergird my writing for the stage. Then there was the fact that I had grown so quiet. Now that I had become very good at listening, I needed, literally and figuratively, to rediscover my own voice. Last but not least, given my forays into healthcare, education, and nonprofit settings, I had a unique combination of experiences which would inform my creative writing process.

From the beginning of my return to playwriting, it has been vital to me that I own my personal bias. I cannot escape the facts that I am a woman, a white person, an American, a heterosexual, a practicing Buddhist, a feminist, and a sensitive soul. When I was considering application to this program, I met with the previous UNM College of Fine Arts Dean, Jim Linnell. I shared with him that I was interested primarily in facilitating community-written plays. He urged me to focus on my own stories, to delve into my own experiences before taking on group process. This has turned out to be extremely good advice. Although I am still very interested in facilitating community playwriting processes, this program has shown me that in order to lead a group of people around a table, one must know intimately one's own contribution to the group. Over the last three years, I have gone into myself to retrieve a series of deeply personal plays. While this process has often felt uncomfortable, it has also felt necessary. Overall, it has been a process of listening and speaking in turn, or one of dialogue.

During my degrees in Sociolinguistics, Speech and Hearing Sciences, and Dramatic Writing, the through line has been dialogue. Inevitably (or hopefully), dialogue requires both listening and speaking. Still, I am reminded of when I was a Voice Pathologist, and I would ask people to breathe. Without exception, patients would inhale

first, ignoring the fact that their shoulders were already raised, and there was nowhere for the air to go. So I taught them to exhale first; then they could inhale deeply. Ironically, it seems to be just the opposite when it comes to listening and speaking. I believe we have to let in before we give out. In my opinion, dialogue works better when we listen first, then speak. The same goes for writing plays. In my experience, knowing what I want to say has come from days, months, or even years of listening. Then, after the conversation gets going, I have found I can switch between listening and speaking.

In the next part of this essay, I will detail the theoretical underpinnings of my dramatic work. Then I will discuss the playwrights whose work closely aligns with mine, along with my placement in a broader playwriting lineage. Finally, I will discuss three of the plays which I have written during this program: *Plume* (a first-year play); *Gas'n'Sips* (a second-year play); and *2am Lovely* (my MFA thesis play). This will be followed by a short Appendix examining the rehearsal process for *2am Lovely*. I will be reasserting the importance of both listening and space in the theatre-making process, especially when it comes to representing women's stories theatrically. On the whole, I hope to show why listening first, then speaking, serves as a useful framework for my creative process and when writing plays with female characters at their center.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS TO MY WORK

In my second year comprehensive examination, I wrote, “Ultimately, I am interested in a feminist theatre, one that moves toward the body and not away from it.” At the time, I thought I was writing something obvious—something of inherent value to everyone. What I have since found is that this simple statement is a powerful assertion not only of the equal significance of embodiment and thought but also of the need for representing women’s lived experiences onstage. When we move away from the body, specifically the female body, we tend to view it from the outside, concentrating on its exterior—a woman’s attractiveness and potential as a sexual partner, a caregiver, or other support role. When we move toward the female body, even into its interior spaces, we discover the complex world of her thoughts, feelings, desires, dreams, plans—the incredible inner landscape of her nuanced, subjective self.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of being a woman is just as multi-faceted as that of being a man, but most of our stories do not reflect this reality. Too often, female characters exist at the periphery of the story, serving either to assist or hinder the Hero in his quest. Alternatively, females at the center of stories are often Heroes in disguise. When we place female characters at the core of the drama, we must be careful not to recapitulate the Hero’s journey simply using a female form.<sup>2</sup> There is something feminine which is being overlooked here. In our culture and in our theatre, the value of the feminine needs to be reaffirmed by both men and women. The feminine here includes both listening and spaciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> My reference for this is my personal experience of being a woman.

<sup>2</sup> While I do not subscribe to the essentialist notion that women are inherently different in nature from men, it does seem to be the case that the lived experience of being a woman differs in quality from that of being a man. In other words, although we are not fixed, unchanging entities, we do appear to have another set of experiences. The philosophical thread of study known as phenomenology is fertile ground for this line of thought. In phenomenology, the emphasis is on dynamic experience, not fixed entities.



## *Listening and Spaciousness*

For the purposes of this essay, both listening and spaciousness will be framed as feminine, in contrast with speaking and activity as masculine. I am emphatic that these capabilities are not linked to biological sex; rather, I assert that the *balance* of feminine and masculine traits, or an internal sense of androgyny, is essential in the development of both men and women. While being in a female body may be a readily available metaphor for listening, receiving, and a sense of inner spaciousness (given the internal bodily spaces inherent in female biology),<sup>3</sup> the skills of listening, receiving, and spaciousness can (and should) be developed in any person. The usefulness in separating these qualities into feminine and masculine categories stems from the fact that these apparent dualities have long been asserted in most of Western thought, with one being privileged over the other.<sup>4</sup> Said another way, speaking and activity have been given higher status in our society and our theatre, and their assumed counterparts, silence and passivity, have been denigrated by both men and women. When silence and passivity are reframed as listening and spaciousness, there is the possibility of reclaiming the positive experience of that which is not speaking or activity.<sup>5</sup> Regarding the brief memoir above, I would stress that, when I spoke without listening, I was acting overly masculine; when I listened without speaking, I was acting overly feminine. Neither is a value judgement, except to say that a balance of masculine and feminine is healthier.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to essays by Hélène Cixous for further explication of this perspective. She posits that being in a female body gives women the potential for immediate access to what she refers to as “feminine writing” (Cixous, 1991, 157), but one which is not at all denied to men. In her essay, “Coming to Writing,” she writes, “Continuity, abundance, drift—are these specifically feminine? I think so. And when a similar wave of writing surges forth from the body of a man, it’s because in him femininity is not forbidden” (57).

<sup>4</sup> In *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, the traditional value for masculine speaking style is pointed out (17-20). David Ball stated, “A play is a series of *actions*” (9) [his emphasis] in *Backwards and Forwards*.

<sup>5</sup> Both male and female dramatists have done just that. Pinter’s use of pause and silence as a strategy of power turned this old dichotomy on its head. Gertrude Stein’s landscape plays valued space over action. By the same token, plenty of male and female dramatists have produced plays within traditional values.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in which I practice, the feminine principle is conceived of as spaciousness and the masculine principle as activity. Again, this distinction relates to human qualities which any person can (and should) cultivate and is not linked to biological sex. This spaciousness/activity dichotomy is refreshing, given our passivity/activity split in Western thought:

“But why is space feminine and activity masculine? Why not the other way around? And isn't that description similar to the Western ‘active and passive’! Anyone who meditates knows that space and passivity are not the same thing at all. In any case, space is highly positive in Buddhist thought whereas passivity is of questionable value in Western thought” (Gross, 187).

According to Western thought, then, when it is asserted that drama is action, the assumed correlate—the negative to avoid—is passivity. Characters must pursue what they want and drive the story forward. However, when the opposite of action is conceived of as space, both retain their positive connotation and remain necessary to the creation of theatre. In the approach I advocate, both space and action are valuable. Fortunately, most theatre makers share this view, valuing both space and action equally.

In theatre, space can mean many things. As Noelia Hernando-Real discusses in her book, *Self and Space in the Theater of Susan Glaspell*, “space” can refer to the place where the fictional world of the play occurs, the venue in which the performance takes place, or even the cultural setting in which the venue is located (13). Taken one step further, space can mean the space of the bodies of the actors onstage, which for female characters includes vital spaces inside the female body, such as the uterus, vagina, and heart space. Of key importance is that men also have vital spaces inside their bodies, including their ears, mouths, and heart spaces, but several plays are written as if females are the only spacious ones. That is, just as the (feminine) space of the stage holds the

(masculine) action of the play, female characters often hold space for male characters, in which they grow, act, and learn. This may be one key reason why female stories have been in the background of many male protagonist stories—because the women in these plays have served supportive roles *vis a vis* their male counterparts. In foregrounding women's spaces (including the internal spaces of their bodies), stories, and relationships, the audience may become aware of what was once taken for granted.

In some plays, the theatre space is not only feminine, but also female. For instance, internal female spaces such as the womb could be represented by the stage space. Nevertheless, women's bodies, when they have been theorized about in theatre and elsewhere, have primarily been viewed from the outside.<sup>6</sup> What if, instead, they were regarded for their internal spaces, just as the theatre space is an interior space inside the larger building or context? In her essay "Bodies and Biology" in the collection *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, Lynda Birke points out how the interior spaces of women's bodies are under-theorized compared to their exterior spaces (43). Consider: If a particular setting of a play is difficult for a character to leave, and that space is somehow linked to or controlled by a mother figure, the setting could be interpreted as the literal place, the body of the mother, or even specifically the mother's womb. The same could be true if a son/daughter character is eager to leave home (and thereby initiate a process of individuation from the mother).<sup>7</sup> Although the frequent conflation of feminine space and female space in theatre-making is obvious to me when it occurs, it appears to be infrequently remarked upon in dramatic theory. Still, there are several excellent theories about the world of the play as an important space.

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<sup>6</sup> This point is illuminated in Lynda Birke's essay, cited here.

<sup>7</sup> *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams is a classic example of this.

The world in which a play takes place plays a particularly strong role in the development of the narrative—so much so that the setting may be considered a character in the play. Do the characters like being where they are? Do they seek to leave? Why or why not? What is impeding their leaving or complicating their staying? These questions lie at the heart of much of American drama.<sup>8</sup> Una Chaudhuri refers to this phenomenon as “geopathology...the configuration of a stage space where place becomes a problem for characters”<sup>9</sup> (Hernando-Real, 18). By the same token, Elinor Fuchs approaches the quandaries of space and place through her questions about the world of a play. In her short essay *Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play*, Fuchs argues convincingly for the need to define a dramatic world in exquisite detail. These questions pertain to the space, time, climate, mood, music, social world, and change in this dramatic world.<sup>10</sup> Taken together, the answers to these questions give insight into the container for the play’s action. They have a direct impact on the action, though they are not necessarily active. Here, the world of the play can be conceived of as a feminine (though not necessarily female) space, and the action as masculine. On the whole, for me, this work has been about learning to balance the two.

One of the places I have sought out balance during this program is around the nature of journey. As mentioned, when I took Introduction to Playwriting during undergraduate, it was taken as fact that there is one story in the world, that of the Hero’s

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<sup>8</sup> This is especially true in realistic plays, where the play’s setting often concretizes social circumstances.

<sup>9</sup> Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles*, and Sam Shepard’s *A Lie of the Mind* are excellent examples of this phenomenon, which resolves itself usually in what Chaudhuri refers to as “the victimage of location” or in “the heroism of departure” (Hernando-Real, 18).

<sup>10</sup> While she poses these questions primarily to critics, directors, and dramaturges, they can be useful to playwrights as well in building a play world during the initial stages of writing a play.

journey.<sup>11</sup> However, this sense of journey does not match most of my experience. My internal relationship to what I desire and my external tactics for going about getting it are intrinsically different from that which have been described by Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler. In fact, much of my journey has been *inward*. My sense that I am on a different type of journey led me to *The Heroine's Journey* by Maureen Murdock. In this, the most cogent existing alternative to the Hero's journey, Murdock states:

“Women do have a quest at this time in our culture. It is the quest to fully embrace our feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine. It is a very important inner journey toward being a fully integrated, balanced, and whole human being.... It is a journey that seldom receives validation from the outside world; in fact the outer world often sabotages and interferes with it” (3).

She then goes on to construct an alternate model of the journey, which achieves the “illusory boon of success” (5) early on in the process, leads to the descent into oneself, and ultimately results in healing the mother-daughter split and integrating masculine and feminine energies within oneself. Although I do not advocate conflating womanhood and femininity, in this model I begin to see resonance with my journey.

Along the same lines, French author Hélène Cixous advocated for a development of “feminine writing” (157), which stems from the body. She argued that, although both men and women have access to this form of writing, women have a readily available conduit to it in the form of the female body. In her own words:

“...this is a matter of her own body, of the flesh of her flesh. At last! This time, of all times, she is hers, and if she wishes, she is not absent, she is not fleeing, she can take and give of herself to herself. It was in watching them giving birth (to themselves) that I learned to love women, to sense

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<sup>11</sup> Then, as now, we read both *The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler and *Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell in support of this view. I believe strongly that evidence of this myth has been found in cultures all over the world, because it reflects a dominant masculine perspective. While a female can be cast into the role of Hero and go on her own Hero's journey, I suspect that a journey which values fully the feminine would look and feel different. I have been searching for alternatives that do just that.

and desire the power and the resources of femininity; to feel astonishment that such immensity can be reabsorbed, covered up, in the ordinary” (31).

She says that “One cannot be one’s own source” (43), and as such, there is listening involved. As a writer, I am interested in listening to my source, to what it has to say, before I write a word. This “source” is usually my body or the stories that others tell (and my responses to them). In this way, I aim to write more authentically from myself.

In both of Murdock and Cixous, I find support for going into my body to investigate the nature of the feminine and to journey as a person and as a writer. Anyone can do this; I have chosen to do this, because I sensed in myself a disconnect from the feminine which both of these theorists point to. I have found that delineating what is feminine and what is masculine in oneself is notoriously difficult, but my subjective sense is that femininity includes not only listening and spaciousness, but also deep feeling, empathy, softness, vulnerability, receptivity, uncertainty, and nurturing, which all entail their own form of strength. These are attributes which anyone can develop but which are sorely underdeveloped in many of us. Before, I learned to listen; during this program, I have learned to locate and value my internal sense of femininity.

With respect to theatre, in revaluing and refocusing our attention on femininity, we may be able to reclaim a total picture of theatre’s potential, affirming how the above qualities work in tandem with speech and action. By listening first, we may be able to create plays which value the feminine as highly as the masculine and which reasonably represent women’s actual lived experiences. This is because speaking informed by thorough listening reveals the subjectivity of the speaker more readily. For example, as a sensitive person, I spend a lot of time registering the impact of external events on my internal world, especially on my thoughts and feelings. This is not something that all

women do, or all people, but it is something that I do. Therefore, I appreciate it when works of art (e.g., poetry, paintings, or songs) represent emotion and/or reflection through metaphor, color, instrumentation, and the like. Theatre, with its predominant focus on speech and action, typically frames this kind of moment as static, in that it does not drive the story forward.<sup>12</sup> Still, as a theatre artist, I look for ways to represent this kind of internal experience through appropriate onstage metaphors.

For me, listening is a playwriting tool in three distinct ways. First and foremost, there is the important task of taking in stories from the world. Reading is a primary source of listening for stories which may be told in play format. In this, I find plays, memoir, news, and novels to be great sources of input. Listening to others tell their stories is another. Also, one's own life experience can provide rich material for playwriting, if one listens carefully to it. Second, when it comes time to write a new script, improvised, embodied play is invaluable to me. As I will discuss in further detail below, embodied experience has been a primary source of inspiration for my writing. This process involves getting quiet and going inward to discover that in me which desires to be given voice. Much of what I find is tacit knowledge, so there is the challenge of translating the information into words in script format. I engage in authentic movement and spontaneous speech as a means of locating and culling the stories which are currently salient for me, from all of the input taken in before. Third, once I have drafted a new play, discussion with others (including directors, actors, audience members, other playwrights) reveals to me how they hear the writing and gives me specific input with which to dialogue when I go to write another draft of the play.

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<sup>12</sup> David Ball asserts, "Life goes on; it goes forward" (15); "Plays do not wander" (24); and "In life and on stage unconnected events are irrelevant" (10) in *Backwards and Forwards*. In his framework, moments of internal impact, reflection, or silence are construed as static and therefore contrary to story-making.

Here is the intersection between listening and speaking. Out of silence and listening comes the urge to speak. Once I have “heard” something, either from the body or elsewhere, the question then becomes how to formulate this message or respond to it in writing—especially when the initial “message” may be nonverbal in nature. Clearly the spoken word lies at the heart of dramatic work. How do I translate tacit knowledge into words? How do I identify conflicting impulses? What are the answers to the questions about the world of the play? What is the action of the play? What formal elements are best suited to the telling of this story? Here is where the formless starts to take on form, where the ineffable input of embodied experience can start to turn into creative output. It is very similar to the intersection of silence and sound, stillness and movement, a blank canvas and the first mark upon it, the set design and the first action performed within it. Here is where the juice is, for me and (I imagine) many others. Here is the moment wherein the first word is written and later on, spoken.



## *Speaking*

Once true listening has taken place, then the writing, or speaking, process can begin. A play text on the page is only half of the artistic creation, one that falls under the general heading of ‘dramatic literature’; the other half is the theatrical production. Since play text is meant to be spoken aloud, it is fair to say that writing dialogue is like speaking—or rather, like letting the characters speak their vast array of viewpoints.

What happens once characters speak? Here, theorists from linguistics and psychology have much to offer. In the field of linguistics, Speech Act Theory was first articulated by J. L. Austin (1962) and further developed by John Searle (1965). They were the first in their field to name explicitly that people “do things with words” (e.g., promise, apologize, plead, tantalize), a notion directly applicable to the craft of acting and necessary to keep in mind when writing plays as well.<sup>13</sup> A classic example is the statement, “It’s cold in here”, which could be spoken as a request for someone to turn on the heat, as a criticism, an invitation to cuddle, or an incisive comment on emotional distance in the immediate environment, depending on the context. In real life, we are continuously interpreting even mundane statements in light of the context in which they are spoken, because we understand implicitly that context affects meaning. In the same way, when characters speak, their words carry meaning associated with their context and the intent with which they are spoken. Thus, even a ‘straightforward’ comment is being used for a specific reason. Much of script analysis and actor training focuses on interpreting scripts to find the hidden meaning in dialogue written for the stage.

From the field of psychology, Discursive Psychology (DP) theory also applies to “doing things with words” in dialogue. Theorists Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter

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<sup>13</sup> Within the field of dramatic writing, this is referred to as dramatic action.

developed DP as an alternative to Cognitive Psychology (CP), seeking to explain how language precedes and shapes thought, not the other way around. In specific, they have examined real-world (written and spoken) texts to ascertain how narratives, memories, and details are constructed through word choice. For example, a military operation targeting a “building” sounds neutral, a “military base” wholly justifiable, and a “hospital” downright unconscionable. Changing even a single word can affect attribution and meaning-making. The contribution of DP to the field of Interpersonal Communication is undeniable, in that they have studied how we construct our discourse in situated contexts, much like playwrights do in writing plays. As in playwriting, “talk is the medium of action” is a core principle of DP theory. When it comes to writing dialogue for my plays, I am aware of the need to consider why a character is saying something, how they might word it, and how it might be understood in that context.

One specific application of DP theory to dramatic writing is the recall of memory onstage. Before I studied DP, I assumed that all memories recalled by my characters during the course of the play fell under the heading of ‘exposition’—that is, merely of telling facts about events that occurred before the start of the play. Through the lens of DP, it is now clear to me that memories—rather than being static, fixed entities in the individual mind which are merely recalled in the present (something CP theory would assert)—are in fact socially co-constructed in the present moment. Therefore, there can be and often are disagreements about how a previous event occurred, what the details were, who was culpable for mistakes, and what the lesson or outcome of these events was. This new understanding has enlivened my dramatic writing, so that memory is highly contestable and socially re-constructed by my characters in the moment. As a

result, memory recall for my characters has become highly active, which serves its placement in dramatic dialogue, especially for realistic plays. In other words, rather than being static exposition, the recall of memory now serves a present-tense action (such as blaming, shaming, correcting, cajoling, teasing, etc.) in my plays.

Still, the application of Speech Act Theory and Discursive Psychology to dramatic writing must be approached in a balanced way. Although both contribute much to the understanding of social interactions and how spoken language is active in context, both privilege exterior actions over interior states. As addressed above, this bias is also reflected in the history of drama, focusing as it does on observable actions by characters in specific circumstances. While this focus is understandable, given that theatre is a watched medium, we as dramatists must not in the process discount the interiority of experience altogether. In fact, several ‘-isms’ in the history of modern theatre have aimed at externalizing aspects of internal experience—among them Expressionism, Surrealism, and Symbolism. Just as important to drama as the representation of naturalistic exterior events, including how conversation might realistically be portrayed, is the conveyance of highly subjective interior states, such as dreams, strong emotions, thoughts, and imagination. Despite the fact that most plays attempt either a realistic representation of our surface lives or an alternative depiction of interior states, I seek to do both in my plays, again with the desire to balance both in an equally valid, mutually beneficial approach. In other words, my plays can be seen as the exterior and interior worlds in dialogue, with realism and poetic forms being depicted in turn throughout the plays. With this in mind, we will now turn to an examination of the placement of my work in an artistic family tree.

## PLACEMENT OF MY WORK IN AN ARTISTIC FAMILY TREE

Through this program, I understand now how vital it is for an artist to locate his/her work in an artistic family tree. This process is fruitful not only for the humility that comes in recognizing artists that came before, but also for the camaraderie which results from recognizing in other artists hints of impulses which inform one's own work. For half of the program, I felt unmoored, in that I had not yet found strong examples of work related to mine. While I enjoy and respect highly the dramatic writing of Caryl Churchill, Maria Irene Fornes, Henrik Ibsen, Sam Shepard, John Guare, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Lillian Hellman, Naomi Wallace, Suzan Lori-Parks, and many others, I could tell that what I was up to in dramatic writing had a different flavor to it. During the second half of the program, as I began to uncover other dramatists on a similar pursuit as I, there was a sense of belonging which linked my practice with theirs.

The roots of my artistic family tree are Susan Glaspell and Sophie Treadwell. Both of these female dramatists can be called modern feminist playwrights, and here, at the onset of American modernism, I can see the roots of my own work. On a personal level, I identify with their journeys as women, including their marriages, difficulty with their prescribed gender roles, and respective moves from the middle of the country to the coast and Southwest. On a professional level, I resonate especially with the ways in which both women played with form as a means of expressing women's experiences:

“The plays of both Glaspell and Treadwell are good examples of how European stage conventions were adopted in America and quickly converted into an original and innovative mode of expression...their...plays...show how they struggled with theatrical forms to achieve a voice of their own” (Ozieblo and Dickey, 10).

This is equally true of my own work. During this program, I have researched Expressionism, Surrealism, and Symbolism in detail, finding traces of traditions which each enjoyed their own epoch in Europe<sup>14</sup> but in America were collapsed, overlapped, and intertwined. Including elements of each style in various plays has been a useful tool for telling women's stories dramatically, in that these alternate forms express aspects of experience differently than naturalistic theatre does. Still, realism is important here.

Some critics have believed that realism for the stage is counter-productive for feminist playwriting, assuming that to portray life as it currently stands 'in the real world' is necessarily to reify existing social constraints placed on women. However, I share Glaspell and Treadwell's use of realism as "a strategy of revolt" (Ozieblo and Dickey, 9), preferring to begin with the status quo in order then to subvert it:

"Realism has frequently been considered a patriarchal device that strengthens the power of the established authority. As such, it has been rejected. However, the arguments for realism in the theater are multiple....Realism was a strategy of revolt....Glaspell and Treadwell experimented with dramatic form, interweaving realism with other '-isms' that were replacing one another with great speed as the most avant-garde style in Europe" (Ozieblo and Dickey, 9).

Although Glaspell and Treadwell can themselves be traced back to Ibsen in the realist tradition on the one hand and to all of the European avant-garde styles borrowed from on the other, it is in their unique combinations of realism and other '-isms' which I find the source of the hybrid tradition to which my work belongs.

While I cannot speak for all women, I find that the combination of realism with other '-isms' serves the telling of (some) women's stories, precisely because it values the interior experience as highly as the exterior one. Through stage metaphor and imagery, the audience is given a sense of the female protagonist's internal state, including her

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<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, there were several European artists who straddled or blended multiple traditions, too.

mood and her viewpoint—in sum, her reaction to what has occurred. In this form of theatre, I see my experience reflected. So too, apparently, did Glaspell and Treadwell.

Thematically, Glaspell, Treadwell, and I cover similar territory as well. Both playwrights were fascinated with Freudian and Jungian psychology, popular in America in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they included the unconscious in their work. While Glaspell looked at women’s roles, frustrated motherhood, and orphaned children (Ozieblo and Dickey, 23), Treadwell examined the role of the New Woman, as well as sexual fidelity and the tension between relationship and freedom for women (Ozieblo and Dickey, 103). However, while Glaspell often sought to portray the futility of women’s attempts to escape patriarchal social structures, and Treadwell wrote some female characters who stayed in abusive relationships, or desperately escaped them and had to die as a result, my hope in writing in their tradition—but nearly one hundred years later—is that I can portray female characters who struggle with similar themes but ultimately find a way to overcome these difficulties and live fruitful, fulfilling lives.<sup>15</sup>

Glaspell’s most famous play, *Trifles* (premiered in 1916), is a good example of her work in this modern feminist tradition. In it, she uses the realistic scene of a farmhouse kitchen and a murder investigation to show how women bonding can lead to significant yields. Two women of different social class, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, work together to determine the motive (physical abuse) for a wife, Minnie Wright, killing her husband by examining closely the details of Minnie’s life, which the men in the play consider to be “trifles” and therefore not worthy of consideration. The women’s mutual

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<sup>15</sup> Cixous wrote, “That is why I stopped going to the theatre; it was like going to my own funeral, and it does not produce a living woman or (and this is no accident) her body or even her unconscious” (Aller à la mer, 546). Understandably, she felt she was being complicit in her own murder, watching as she did so many women’s deaths in the theatre. What I would hope is that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century women can experience their awakening without having to pay for the accompanying conflicts literally with their lives.

decision to hide their findings from the men is one of solidarity with the absent Minnie. This one-act is a tremendous example of how a realistic setting can be subverted by highlighting the importance of women's knowledge to the action of the play. Realism is mixed with Symbolism, as evidenced by the pet bird (and other clues) which the women uncover.

For Treadwell, her most famous play, *Machinal* (1928), exemplifies this tradition as well. This play portrays Young Woman as she marries her boss, later begins an extramarital affair, decides to kill her husband in order to be with her new lover, and has to pay for her crime with her life at the end of the play. Formally, Treadwell expertly applies elements of Expressionism, such as archetypal character names and telegraphed speech, to an otherwise realistic setting and storyline, thus blending the two creatively and seamlessly. This combination serves to illuminate the hostile social environment for Young Woman as well as her apparent inability to escape it in her lifetime. Treadwell used an episodic form to convey the narrative, abandoning linearity for "scatteredness, unexpectedness, and the relaxed meditating mind" (according to her stage directions, quoted at length in Ozieblo and Dickey, 148). In many ways, my thesis play *2am Lovely* (discussed in detail below) is in dialogue with this play specifically, in that it too portrays an extramarital affair but offers more degrees of freedom to the female protagonist than would have been possible for her in the past. Certainly, my play *Gas'n'Sips* (analyzed below) combined Realism and Expressionism. In all of these plays, the combination of 'isms' is helpful in portraying these women's stories.

Additionally, my plays mirror not only Treadwell's dramatic form but also her intent in writing. As a modern feminist playwright, she was particularly concerned with

exposing societal expectations for gendered behavior in women and the impact of these norms on women's lives. She used "spoken thoughts" (Ozieblo and Dickey, 148) and other expressionistic devices to convey Young Woman's internal responses in *Machinal*.

In sum:

"Treadwell sought to modify such approaches to stage expressionism for the expressed aim of creating a new aesthetic, one that might have a particular appeal for the female spectator" (Ozieblo and Dickey, 150).

This is precisely what I seek to do with my own work. Although I wrote *Gas'n'Sips* and drafted *2am Lovely* before I read *Machinal*, the resonances with Treadwell's work are astounding. Almost a century after *Machinal* was produced on Broadway, I explore similar themes in my writing with a similar intent. Despite the second wave of feminism in the meantime, American women still face social constraints which affect their lives. That plays could reflect not only current social conditions but also women's internal, lived responses to them is exciting to me. In my plays, I seek to do both in tandem.

The trunk of my artistic family tree is both Lynn Nottage and Marsha Norman. Both of these playwrights belong more to the realism side of the equation, writing as they do such skillful naturalistic plays. Still, the fact that both of these dramatists foreground women's spaces, stories, and relationships shows that we are engaged in similar endeavors. Specifically, they appear to be highlighting the importance of women's lives by emphasizing their concrete details—the way a dress is made or a box of keepsakes organized. Female-female friendships, mother-daughter relationships, and other dynamics are at play which centralize women's lived experiences in their plays.

There are two works by Lynn Nottage which feel particularly in resonance with my own work. These are *Intimate Apparel* (2003) and *Ruined* (2007). Both plays are set



in female-controlled spaces—their bedrooms and a business, respectively—though the men in these plays also influence and contextualize these spaces. That is, the men in *Intimate Apparel* are presented as potential marriage partners for Esther and Mayme (who would then gain access to these private female spaces), while the men in *Ruined* wage a civil war all around (and within) Mama Nadi’s canteen. Of key importance in *Ruined* is that the reveal pertained specifically to Mama Nadi’s body—that she too has been “ruined” by this civil war. In a similar vein, *2am Lovely* is set in a female-controlled space (Tia’s art studio), which the men in the play have less control over. The major reveal of *2am Lovely* is that Jayden miscarried before the start of the play. This is also an example of a reveal which pertains directly to a woman’s experience in her body.

Marsha Norman I include here, not because I am terribly familiar with her full body of work, but because *Night, Mother* (1983) is an extraordinary work of art. It too places the action of the play in a female space (Jessie and Thelma’s house) and foregrounds a female bond—that of a mother and a daughter. They are the only two characters in the play. This play is tragic and heart-wrenching, not simply because Jessie wishes to kill herself, but primarily because Thelma is powerless to stop her. There is a clear Chekhovian element here, since the gun that is introduced in the first act goes off in the third, but the play is written so expertly that one does not mind the use of this hackneyed convention.<sup>16</sup> Plus, although we may hold out hope that Thelma will prevail, she does not—and later we realize, she never could have. Jessie’s desire to end her life on her own terms drives the play’s narrative, making this play an impressive example of straight Realism as a theatrical tool for telling women’s lived experiences. In *2am*

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<sup>16</sup> In *2am Lovely*, there is a creative, productive correlate: In the first act, a blank canvas is introduced. In the third act, it gets painted on. Perhaps this could start a new maxim? “If you introduce a blank canvas in the first act, it had better get painted on in the third.”

*Lovely*, Jayden brings drama into Tia's otherwise peaceful space, much the same way that Jessie's announcement that she is going to kill herself disturbs the peace that Thelma has established in their home. To contrast, Jayden and Tia are able to reconcile. Moreover, Jayden resolves things with her mother, Gail, in a way that Jessie does not.

The branches of my artistic family tree are Sarah Ruhl and Kira Obolensky. Over the course of my writing career, I will likely discover additional 'branches', but for the time being, these two playwrights serve as prime contemporary examples of the kind of dramatic writing to which I aspire. In particular, Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2003) and Obolensky's *Lobster Alice* (2000) elucidate the type of writing to which I am referring. Both playwrights blend Realism and Surrealism artfully using the Orpheus myth and historical facts about Salvador Dali as creative inspiration, respectively, and both of them use a female protagonist to reframe the action of the play. The rules of Hell in *Eurydice* (e.g., stones can talk and getting dipped in the river erases one's memory of language) are clearly defined and followed within the parameters of a surreal world. Further, the Nasty Interesting Man is a thoroughly surreal character. Still, the play begins in a comparatively realistic setting, including swimming outfits from the 1950's and the Nasty Interesting Man's apartment. Similarly, Obolensky takes as her premise Salvador Dali's visit to Hollywood in 1946 and the concurrent animation work that was being done there on *Alice in Wonderland*. The setting is highly realistic, in that it evokes an office of the historical time and place. However, that scarves turn into lobsters, that Alice (the protagonist) can bring her couch from home into the office to recall a memory, and that a young man can morph into a human-sized caterpillar and take Alice into the couch in this play world evidence Obolensky's creation of a blended real-surreal world. In *Plume*,

analyzed below, I attempted a blend between Realism and Surrealism, which morphed into amalgamations of Realism and Expressionism, Symbolism, and other poetic forms later on. Again, the intent here has been to show both the external and internal lives of women within the same play world.

The xylem (water vessels) of my artistic family tree are devised work and community-engaged theatre. This means that, although the six playwrights described above have written products I wish to emulate, devised work and community-engaged theatre are processes by which I enjoy making plays. During this program, as my writing has been mostly a solo process, I have relied heavily on techniques from devised work, such as improvised voice and movement around a theme, recording and dictation of live, spoken text, and curation of appropriate elements from spontaneous production to selection for further drafts. In this, my work with Tricklock has been useful, in that I have witnessed devised work in group process from inception to full production. Also, reading/watching works created by Pig Iron Theatre Company and participating in workshops with their co-founder, Quinn Bauriedel, when he visited UNM during my first year of the MFA, served to fuel use of devised techniques in my own process. In fact, all of the plays I have written in this program include elements derived from my spontaneous, improvised play. When asked to produce new work, I have turned time and time again to my physical body to mine for stories hidden there. This has included input from my life experience, including reading, listening, and travels. The process of listening for my stories has involved a lot of being with silence (or tacit knowledge), uncertainty, going for walks, journaling/reading old journals, and improvising. After the program, I seek not only to continue using these methods in my own writing but also to

facilitate group process in making plays among community members. I am particularly interested in unearthing existing local stories and portraying them through theatre, especially women's stories and local culture.<sup>17</sup> Referring back to Cixous' concept that "One cannot be one's own source" (43), my goal is to listen to the stories which I can 'hear' within my own body, as well as to others' stories. After listening intently, I can better see how telling these stories might best be served in dramatic writing form.

For the time being, I have written eleven plays so far—three one-acts and eight full-length plays. These are:

#### One-Acts

- Imogen/Irene
- The Universe Comes and Goes
- Rosamund

#### Full-Length Plays

- Lion's Port
- Refuge
- Plume
- Gas'n'Sips
- Broken Records
- The Orange Marker
- Just Hours
- 2am Lovely

For the analysis below, I will examine *Plume*, *Gas'n'Sips*, and *2am Lovely*, because individually they stand as strong examples of my work and collectively they illustrate a line of my artistic development over the course of the program. In fact, my director for *2am Lovely*, Heidi Handelsman, referred to them as my "unofficial artist trilogy", a moniker which reflects their connection as plays about women relating to their artistry.

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<sup>17</sup> In my third year of the MFA program, I had the opportunity to attend an intensive training at Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles. The training included both an introduction on how to facilitate a community playwriting process and to devise new work.

## ANALYSIS OF MY WORK: THE UNOFFICIAL ARTIST TRILOGY

Turning our attention to my plays, there are several themes that recur. For one thing, I almost always have female protagonists, in part because telling women's stories is so important to me as a writer, and also because I seek to own my bias (identifying first and foremost as a woman) when writing. Then, I usually foreground a relationship between two women, such as friends, colleagues, sisters, or mother and daughter. This is due to the fact that I wish to portray the events of each play primarily from the perspective of the female characters. Also, I notice that visual art impacts much of my writing, often appearing on stage at some point or throughout the piece. All of these elements can be seen in the three plays I have chosen to analyze in this essay.

I find that my tendency is to write in abstract images and metaphor. Although I have a knack for finding stage images which convey symbolic meaning beyond their literal account, I struggle to write the level of specificity which corresponds to psychological and/or physical realism and which often serves to ground audience members (or readers) who prefer realistic sensory details in storytelling. Further, I wish to convey in stage images emotional content and other information which is experienced internally (i.e., under the surface of the scene). At the same time, I am interested in using highly concrete, naturalistic settings and activities in my plays, in order (like Glaspell and Treadwell) to question the fixedness of our surface reality. Given much feedback I have received and my own reflection, it seems that I am engaging in writing not poetry and not plays in the way they are typically understood, but a series of hybrid *poem-plays* in which narrative is conveyed through highly figurative stage metaphors. For me, this approach is quite natural and follows on fluidly from my earlier writing practice as a poet, but it is

understandably quite disorienting to those who expect a play which includes naturalistic elements to correspond more readily to the ordinary world.

In this part of the essay, I will examine three of my plays: *Plume*, *Gas'n'Sips*, and *2am Lovely*. I have selected these plays because each of them foregrounds women's spaces, stories, and relationships in its own idiosyncratic style. In *Plume*, written during my first year in the program, I used the surreal technique of having half-human, half-bird characters for my entire cast. In *Gas'n'Sips*, I ultimately moved more toward Realism, but not before playing with an expressionistic character and scenes in the meantime. Finally, with *2am Lovely*, I have hit upon a form of Symbolic Realism with poetic interludes, which allow me both to continue telling the narrative and to allow time to register the emotional impact of the events through music and creative movement. In these, I have pulled on traditions of Surrealism, Expressionism, Symbolism, and Realism to create the start of a body of work uniquely my own.

Together, *Plume*, *Gas'n'Sips*, and *2am Lovely* are my "unofficial artist trilogy", because they show a progression of female characters owning their identity as artists with more and more confidence. The arc of these three plays is this: In *Plume*, the female protagonist, Lily, runs an art gallery and loses track of her own talents while supporting the development of a male artist. In *Gas'n'Sips*, through her conversations with the itinerate Wayne, Claire discovers that there is more to life than the town where she was born, and she leaves at the end to pursue a degree in art at a local college. Then, in *2am Lovely*, the inciting incident is when the female protagonist, Jayden, rents space in an artist studio, and the climax of the play is her finishing her first original work of art. All three plays depict a woman making art with a man on stage. These acts of art-making are

highly embodied, spontaneous acts, akin to (or in tandem with) love-making. Importantly, their enactment on stage is process-oriented and physical, rather than detached or intellectual, as are most conversations (in plays) commenting on a finished art product.<sup>18</sup> Each play is the story of a woman's professional, educational, sexual, and/or creative awakening through challenge. Altogether, these plays show my aim of telling women's stories while seeking appropriate formal elements to do so.

*Plume: Realism and Surrealism*

Through embodied play during this program, I have been able to research what stories were lying latent inside of me, asking to be voiced. For example, in Spring 2013, I worked one-on-one with Kristen Loree to develop new material, which turned into the three-character fantasy play, *Plume*. I began the process with a 50-word "mini-saga", from which the following phrase emerged: "Nosedive/into happiness/but first you'll come up with a beak full of grass!" This poetic phrase became the impetus for the entire process, spurring physical play which led into creating three bird-human characters. It was fun discovering characters who were equal parts animal and human.

Essentially, the story of *Plume* is that of Lily, a peahen-woman, having the courage to fly again. Her best friend, Esmerelda (Ezzie), a sparrow-woman, has encouraged Lily to stop flying and to use a ladder instead—in order to protect her from getting hurt again. However, when Luther, a crow-man and artist, comes onto the scene, Lily does get hurt, despite Esmerelda's efforts. Luther claims that some of Lily's

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to the plays *Art* by Yasmina Reza and *Red* by John Logan for examples which depict intellectual conversations about finished art products instead. Happily, the characters discuss the dual nature of order and chaos in John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation*, then enact their conflict actively over the course of the play. This balanced portrayal of both theoretical discussion and enactment of ideas makes this one of my favorite plays.

paintings, which she gave to him as a gift, are his, ending in the process their romantic encounter. Since Ezzie failed to protect Lily from this hurt, she relents to Lily's request and agrees to teach her how to fly again. The play ends with Lily stepping off her perch after a flying lesson—and blackout.

The strength of this early work does not lie in its storytelling. There are many confusing portions, backtracks, and role reversals over the course of the play. What is remarkable is how clear the emotional content of the story is, stemming from a combination of dialogue, visual art, and scenes comprised primarily or entirely of non-verbal action. In the script, I included pop art images with many scenes. Here, I was inspired by Gregory Moss's *punkplay* (2009), in which a major punk song is listed at the start of each scene. In linking a scene with another creative product, we as playwrights can give readers access to the multitude of associations in and between other artworks.

Although in retrospect *Plume* is not well-crafted, the seeds of later works are evident in its form. For example, as in *2am Lovely*, a female friendship is the core relationship of the play, with one female interested in painting and the other in sculpting. Conflict is caused between the two friends by a love interest, not because they are fighting over him, but because one is afraid the other will get hurt. Further, there was visual (2-D and 3-D) art inspiration for the writing of both plays. Some specific images even occur in both, such as dishes and painting a canvas on the floor (“Jackson Pollock style”). Both are episodic, favoring short scenes and jumps in time to longer, continuous time. Both plays take place in female spaces—a gallery and an art studio.

Nevertheless, there are important ways in which *Plume* stands out. First and foremost, there is a humor to the piece, evident through exaggeration and fanciful



qualities, such as larger-than-life sculptures, a game of Hide and Seek and Find, and actors in bird costumes. There is also the primary metaphor of flying for creating art. While Lily is terrified of doing both at the start of the play, she also feels the urge to do both, and ultimately she does. Then, there is Lily's active rejection of Luther after he steals from her, something that comes only at the very end of *2am Lovely*. There is an archetypal battle between the Artist and the Critic (represented by Lily and Esmerelda), a common theme in my work. There are non-sensical moments which emerged from the improvised play and which have not been ironed out into a logical, realistic narrative.<sup>19</sup> As such, the scenes emerge like a compilation of wild dream images. There is a lighter quality to this work than to my subsequent, more serious dramas.

How does *Plume* foreground women's spaces, stories, and relationships? It is vital to the story that two of the three major locations of the play are women's spaces: Lily's art gallery (Prescott Gallery) and the perch. Lily is the curator, and Esmerelda is the caterer, in the art space. Importantly, later on in the play, Luther cannot dismiss Lily from the gallery, because it is her space (called her "dominion" in the play). Further, the tree branch that Lily and Esmerelda have claimed as their perch remains theirs for the entirety of the play, even becoming the site of the business they launch together, a flight school called "Lily and Esmerelda's Aeronautical Amazement Academy". Further, the plot of the story is viewed distinctly from Lily and Esmerelda's perspective, giving the impression of them being two sides of the same consciousness—the creative side that loves risk-taking and the inner critic who warns us to play it safe. While Luther's actions are central to the play's moving forward, it is their *impact* on Lily and Esmerelda's relationship which is of the utmost concern. Here is the desired change from putting

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<sup>19</sup> And, one might ask, if that is necessary. Much of the delight in *Plume* comes from its nonsense.

women's experience in the background of storytelling to moving it up front. Similarly, the relationship between the women is the most important one in the play. Though Luther also plays a major role, it is secondary to their friendship.

Space plays a critical role in this play. Not only are there the two female spaces, as mentioned above, but there is also one male space (Luther's apartment) and the liminal space between the three more realistic settings of the play. This liminal space is meant to represent a thinking and feeling space that goes beyond the concrete events as they occur in realistic settings; the thinking and feeling being explored here are undoubtedly those of Lily (and secondarily, Esmerelda). As such, the audience is given a theatrical entrée into the consciousness of the female characters, something not often sought after or effectively represented on stage. The use of space is critical here for conferring meaning on the audience as seen through a particularly female lens.

Clearly, this play is a combination of Realism and Surrealism. Realistic spaces are used to convey plot points, but the liminal space gives the audience information about the emotional impact of these events on the mindset of the female protagonist(s). Said another way, both the conscious experience and the unconscious ramifications are explored here, as in many of Glaspell and Treadwell's writings.<sup>20</sup> This is a theme which will recur in much of my writing, in an attempt to find forms which effectively depict female emotional response to action on stage. The characters in this play, as well as subsequent plays, are active, but the impact of others' actions is of equal weight here.

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<sup>20</sup> The unconscious was also of key importance to visual artists in Surrealism, including Salvador Dali.

*Gas'n'Sips: Realism and Expressionism*

One of my major second year plays was *Gas'n'Sips*, a play which highlights the different worldviews of a philosopher (Wayne) and a dilettante (Claire) who both work in a convenience store in middle America. It began as a Bakeoff assignment<sup>21</sup> in the Summer of 2013. At some point that summer, I went into a gas station to pay for gas, and the two attendants there—one male, one female—looked sheepish, as if I had caught them in the middle of something. What could they possibly have been doing, or talking about? This question spurred me to write a full-length play. Notably, it was the first time in the program when I had started from a question and created a fictionalized narrative from thinking. It was exciting, because it was a new approach to my work.

The conflict in this story is driven by Wayne and Claire's two opposing viewpoints. Their banter drives the storytelling, which is a romantic comedy up to a point—until Wayne's need for stability and Claire's need for freedom override their desire to be a couple. Wayne has been travelling, running from his past, for as long as he can remember, so as he stumbles into the blessings of staying put over the course of the play, remaining in Claire's hometown is a fit for him. By contrast, Claire has spent her entire life in this town, and her encounter with Wayne helps her to realize that there is much more to explore and discover in the world. Being the primary caregiver for her mother has kept her stuck. Although we never see Claire's mother, her influence on Claire is felt through her brother<sup>22</sup> Dan's insistence that, of the two of them, she is the

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<sup>21</sup> Bakeoff assignments are writing assignments in which students are given a limited set of elements to include in their writing and a restricted amount of time to produce a first draft (in this case, 48 hours).

<sup>22</sup> Of note here is that Dan used to be Dana; the change in this character's sex was to highlight how, in many American families, female offspring are expected to and often do shoulder a greater amount of parent care, once it is needed.

better caretaker for their mother. In the end, when Claire quits her job and leaves her hometown to study art at a university in her state, she achieves freedom.

Again, space is vitally important here, given that the entire play takes place within a convenience store in “middle America”. The exact location of the store is left vague, since on road trips, I have noticed a remarkable similarity among gas stations and pit stops from Nebraska to Kentucky—the vast swath of America between the mountain ranges. Many plays written by playwrights who live on the coasts and seek to represent life in the middle of America tend to take place in stereotypical locations, such as a trailer park in a small town (e.g. *The Patron Saint of Sea Monsters*, by Marlane Meyer, 2013). In contrast, I wanted to depict the complexity of life in middle America—that while one may grow up in a small town, it is always possible to want more.

Thus, there are multiple facets to space in this play. On the concrete level, this play takes place in an ordinary convenience store. It can be viewed as a male space, because Jack is their boss, but given that we never see him and Claire is virtually omnipresent in the play, it can also be viewed as a female space. This space allows for some reflection on the impersonal nature of commercial transactions, a theme in many of my works, but this is not the thematic focus of the play. In the bigger picture, the location is middle America. On a metaphorical plane, the setting is Claire’s mother’s domain, and Claire’s struggle with the store in which she eventually feels entrapped is in a larger sense her struggle for independence from the pressing physical needs of her mother. Una Chaudhuri calls this the “victimage of location” (Hernando-Real, 18). At the end, when Claire leaves her hometown and abnegates her responsibilities as caretaker for her mother, she leaves the convenience store for the first time in the play. Through this

action, she is demonstrating what Chaudhuri refers to as the “heroism of departure” (Hernando-Real, 18). These are two complementary aspects to geopathology, referred to above. Claire’s predicament fits geopathology to a tee, in that: “According to this principle, a character gains full independence and fulfills the creation of their own identity by disentangling themselves from the oppressive place they were fixed to” (Hernando-Real, 18). Only in asserting her distinct life separate from her mother’s is Claire able to claim her identity as an artist and act accordingly by attending art school.

There are many things which worked about this second year play. For starters, I like the musicality of the banter between the two main characters. Both Wayne and Claire clearly grow, but Claire is the main character, because she transforms the most in dealing with her personal demons and leaving her hometown. I truly love these characters, something that helped the audience empathize with both of them as well. Although they have opposing worldviews, spectators are aware that both views are valid, not unlike idea plays like Shaw’s *Major Barbara* or Weiss’s *Marat/Sade*. Like those plays, *Gas’n’Sips* argues both sides of the argument so convincingly that my allegiance as playwright can (hopefully) not be guessed. Further, the utter simplicity of this play served it well. There is one location; there are two main characters in dialogue for most of the play; there are two minor characters who give contextual information to the play.

Again, 2-D art images are important to this play. Specifically, Claire describes paintings which she found impressive on a visit to the Kansas City Art Museum. In response, Wayne mentions Klimt, Warhol, and Kandinsky as painters who “did great things with color”. The image here of a blank canvas on an easel reappears later in *2am*

*Lovely*. As in that play, we get to see the main character painting, but she paints from Wayne's experience, not her own. Still, the action of painting on stage is a powerful one.

There is also a strong influence of poetry on this play. Portions of poems by Rumi and Wordsworth are quoted at length by Claire and Wayne. There are also poetic images, such as Claire's looking at the items in the Gas'n'Sip "as if they are SACRED" at the end of each act. Given my background as a poet, I have a strong affinity for poetic language and images in my plays—especially in contrast with very tangible, even banal, details, such as a convenience store location. Still, over multiple drafts, there was a lot to consider in terms of which formal elements suited the play's telling best.

*Gas'n'Sips* began as a more expressionistic play. There were two characters named for the archetypes they represented: both Customer and Friend/Fiend. Although Customer remains in the current draft, the play has become decidedly more realistic, both on the surface and psychologically, over the revision process. In early drafts, the entire second act took place in a different location, a cabin "up north" in the mountains. Despite activities (e.g. cooking, kayaking) which rooted the second act in Realism, there were decidedly non-naturalistic events (e.g. the way that Friend/Fiend could change his guise at will). By extension, these fantastical elements extended into the convenience store, including time moving backward and Claire's trance dance at the end of Act I. However, over time it seemed that setting the play in one location and using Realism throughout would better serve to highlight Claire's sense of being trapped.

I did not at all set out to be a realist playwright. Nevertheless, I am comforted by criticism of Susan Glaspell's plays which points out how realist mimesis can be used to serve feminist ends: "In her plays Glaspell takes the outside world not as an unmovable

reference to copy, but as the ground for her feminist strategy” (Hernando-Real, 27). In other words, though her (and my) theatre spaces might appear to copy real spaces in the outside world, the playwright’s intent is not to show what currently is but what in the future is *possible* in these external spaces. While Glaspell frequently sought to subvert the subjugation of women to men in the external world, I often portray female protagonists overcoming a strong female presence in their lives or a powerful internal struggle over their own drive for freedom. Both are true in my final play of this analysis, *2am Lovely*.

*2am Lovely: Symbolic Realism with Poetic Interludes*

My thesis play, *2am Lovely*, is my most intimate and comprehensive work yet. In it, I incorporate several elements that have emerged as key to my playwriting during this program. As mentioned above, I place a female-female friendship at the core of my drama, and I portray a female protagonist who is declaring her independence from her mother’s (and her husband’s) expectations, needs, and desires, while also encountering an internal conflict over her habitual urge to meet the needs of others first before considering her own. She gets clear about what she does not want. Not only did 2-D and 3-D images inspire the writing of this work, but they also appear and get created on stage during the course of the play. Additionally, I have included in this play three poetic “interludes”, non-verbal moments of storytelling in which Jayden approaches the art-making process in perfectionistic, haphazard, and balanced ways, respectively.

The idea for *2am Lovely* grew out of my second year comprehensive examination in April 2014. Although it was not one of my five proposed plays for this year, through

discussion it was ascertained that what I needed most was to pare back superfluous elements in my writing and tell the central story I had been approaching from several angles. From that discussion and a thorough review of my work thus far in the program, I identified five kinds of characters that had appeared in multiple works: a female protagonist, a female best friend, a husband/boyfriend, a mother, and a lover. These became the starting archetypes for the five characters in *2am Lovely*: Jayden, Tia, Jori, Gail, and Max. From there, I developed these characters further through writing biographies, monologues, and “outtake” exercises, to gain greater understanding of their inner lives both inside and outside the context of the play.

The seed of this play came even earlier, in reading a biography of modern British artist and poet, Mina Loy, *Becoming Modern*. This excellent example of creative non-fiction gave insight into not only the events of Mina’s life but also the central metaphors of her creative process. For instance, when she was a baby, she remembered seeing soft light reflect through a stained glass window as she was carried out of her home (Burke, 13); this image informed her poetry and her sculpture (e.g. lamp-making) throughout her career. Events from her life included having multiple extramarital affairs in Italy (with Futurists Filippo Marinetti and Giovanni Papini) during World War I and finding love only in her second marriage to boxer Arthur Cravan. I was moved by the intensity and search for identity present in the time that Mina moved from marriage to independence, before moving to America and meeting Cravan. As such, I proposed a full-length biographical play (about this part of Mina’s life) called *Flowering* as one of my thesis play ideas. Ultimately, setting the play in contemporary America in an art studio felt



more relatable to current audiences, so *2am Lovely* proceeded from there. Still, the initial idea inherent in *Flowering* is apparent in all of the drafts of *2am Lovely*.

The story of *2am Lovely* is that of a woman painting an image from a dream she had. The play begins when Jayden rents studio space from her college friend, Tia. Jayden attempts to make the image on her own, but without art training and with a perfectionistic mindset, she does not create anything. When she meets Max, a found object artist who also rents studio space in the same building, she takes him up on his offer to help her create the image. She soon discovers, though, that it has not come out the way she imagined it, and she creates ten different versions that are not “right”. Although she still wants his help, he disappears from her, focusing instead on an art installation he has coming up in a local gallery. Jayden is willing to give up her marriage, to stand up to her mother, and even ultimately to say no to a continued affair with Max, so that she can finally create this image. In the end, she does exactly that.

From a different perspective, this play can easily be framed in Freudian terms. Specifically, Jayden begins the play with an overly strong Superego, which leads her to create nothing in the first poetic interlude. Then, Max comes along and represents to her pure id. Her strong attraction to him comes from her denial of her own id for so many years. This is why the second poetic interlude with Max is hectic; it is pure id expressed. However, neither extreme can give Jayden a sense of herself as an adult; she has merely jumped from the frying pan into the proverbial fire. It is the integration of her understanding of her own desires in the context of societal rules, or ego development, which enables her to complete her painting in the third interlude. Mixing the red of her

dream and painting the canvas with it (at the end of the play) is her first assertion of her own will in the world for a very long time, certainly in her adult life.

Here, we can see the influence of Symbolism on this play. There are myriad symbols in the play, almost too many to count. Nonetheless, there are a few key images which stand out, serving as core examples of Symbolism's influence on this play. First and foremost is Jayden's all-white "artist outfit". In a purely realistic world, her choice is highly unusual, even defiant. In a poetic world, her all-white outfit serves as a metaphor of her naivety, innocence, and status as a bride at the beginning of the play. Moreover, it concretizes the notion that Jayden has habitually maintained herself as a 'blank slate', so that the will of others can easily be 'painted'/impressed upon her. When Jayden paints on herself toward the end of the play, we see a concrete, metaphorical image of her assertion of her own will in the world. Second, although Tia mocks Max's description of his desert collection as emblematic of spiritual aridity, the camel figurines he brings in are symbols for perseverance during a dry spell. Third, the location of the play is both realistic and symbolic; Jayden, in renting art studio space from Tia, has literally and figuratively entered the art world. Following a miscarriage, Jayden has started renting art studio space, in order to paint the dream image which came to her the night of the miscarriage. When Jayden rents the other half, it remains a female space. Max, Jori, and Gail all enter and leave the space throughout the play, but the space is Tia's and, through renting, Jayden's. This has important implications for the story, because unlike *Gas'n'Sips*, this is the space the female protagonist has escaped *to*, not that she wants to escape *from*. It is thus a space of rebellion. Also, Tia's space, given her role as matriarch in the art community, represents an alternate home for Jayden.

One of the primary critiques of initial drafts was that Jayden was a “passive” character. This was connected to her saying, “I don’t know” in response to others asking her what she wants in the first half of the play. In subsequent drafts, I gave her something specific to pursue, the dream image. Still, she remains a character unused to asserting her own will. In this, apropos of the discussion above, Jayden is not being passive but spacious. Her all-white “artist outfit” and her not knowing what she wanted in early drafts stemmed from my desire to tell a story of a woman more concerned with the wants and needs of others than her own. This is frequently the case for women and something which I sought to represent. It also mirrors the trajectory for Young Woman in Treadwell’s *Machinal*. Only mid-way through the play does she become active, pursuing her own desires. All the same, there is still a caveat: “[In Episode 5 of *Machinal*], the Young Woman begins to take a more active role in establishing a life for herself outside of her marriage, but again the voices around her help shape her actions” (Ozieblo and Dickey, 147). One of the great insights that emerged in the revision process was not that Jayden wanted nothing, but that she had substituted others’ desires for her own, and therefore had to go from placing others at the center of her life to asking, “If I were at the center of my life, what would I want?”<sup>23</sup> In this play, she wants to create the image from her dream. She wants to create it perfectly, including getting the red right, as a way of honoring the pregnancy she lost in miscarriage before the play’s opening. Unlike the conventional Hero character, who begins the tale with a strong sense of his own desire and his right to assert it in the world, Jayden must go through the entire process of the play to arrive at that point. What she will assert after this play is unknown; this is the liberation story of her being able to do so.

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<sup>23</sup> This insight came out of discussions with my director, Heidi Handelsman.

One of the great boons in writing this play was reading real-life accounts from women who have experienced miscarriage. Even though miscarriage is quite common,<sup>24</sup> women rarely talk about the experience, given the sense of guilt and shame that they often have around it. Nevertheless, miscarriage comes with a profound grieving process, one that must be acknowledged and worked through, if healing is to occur. In many cases, women make art in response to miscarriage, evidence of “the link between creativity and procreativity” (Seftel 97). This is a theme in my play.<sup>25</sup> Women who create art after a miscarriage are often seeking to create something lasting in the face of an unexpected and very painful loss (Seftel 98). I have been fortunate never to have experienced a miscarriage, but I feel honored in reading these first-hand accounts, and I have tried to be respectful in representing the emotional toll that the experience can have on a woman. As a writer, I have come full circle, listening for and including other people’s stories in with my own personal experiences and storytelling, in an effort to foreground women’s spaces, stories, and relationships on stage.

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<sup>24</sup> Estimates of the frequency of miscarriage vary by country and article. However, they are quite common—1 in 4 to 1 in 7—no matter what the exact numbers are.

<sup>25</sup> Still, it is clear that Jayden’s painting, in the play, is art and not therapy.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in response to vulnerable experiences in the first half of college, I took an over decade-long hiatus from performing and playwriting. Nevertheless, I found ways to include aspects of theatre into every endeavor I pursued while I was away. Given how powerfully theatre continued to show up for me, I decided to return to performing and playwriting further down the line, after working in healthcare, education, and nonprofit settings, in order to find out what I had left behind there. As it turns out, what I had left behind was my voice, literally and figuratively. Completing this MFA program has afforded me the opportunity to reclaim my voice creatively, which for me is linked to voice for my professional and personal voices as well.

During the second half of this program, I have been fortunate to discover examples of playwrights doing similar work and to locate my work in an artistic family tree: modern American feminist playwriting. The foundation of this work is the artful combination of Realism and other '-isms', hybrids which seek to represent some women's lived experiences on stage. I find that my work is comprised of a series of poem-plays, which tell women's stories using highly poetic imagery. Here, the influences of Expressionism, Surrealism, and Symbolism are evident. I am as invested in the internal experiences of my characters as their external ones, in the emotional impact of events as in the events themselves. This attention to formal elements has enabled me to write plays which foreground women's spaces, stories, and relationships. I have listened first, and then spoken, and these plays are the result.

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2am Lovely  
by Irene Loy

Twelfth Draft  
April 2015



## **CHARACTERS**

JAYDEN, a woman in her late 20's-early 30's

TIA, her friend and a sculptor

GAIL, Jayden's mother

JORI, Jayden's husband

MAX, a found object artist

## **SETTING**

Tia's art studio in Richmond, Virginia

## **TIME**

Various times over the course of a year

## **NOTES**

A – takes time.

A / marks an interruption.

A ... is a nonverbal response.

Casting should reflect the cultural diversity of Richmond.

Blackouts should occur only at the end of each Act, if at all.

Gail speaks in a Coastal Southern dialect.

Jori and Jayden work at the University of Richmond.

Tia is always in work clothes, until she goes to the art opening.

Jayden begins in street clothes, then moves into her white "artist outfit". She changes her clothes for the art opening as well.

## **SCENE OVERVIEW**

### **ACT I**

1, around 11am (Spring)

Interlude #1—11am Nothing

2, around 4pm

3, around 7pm (Summer)

4, around midnight

### **ACT II**

5, around 10am

6, around 9pm (Fall)

Interlude #2—9pm Chaos

7, around 5am (the following morning)

8, around 6pm (that same evening)

### **ACT III**

9, around 3pm (a week later)

10, around noon

11, around 8pm (Winter)

12, around 2am (Spring)

Interlude #3—2am Lovely

## ACT I

1, around 11am (Spring)

*Tia is standing among her many sculptures, in various stages of development. Jayden is facing her, a purse slung over her shoulder, holding several hexagonal storage shelves, an easel, and a crate of art supplies, looking nervous.*

*The other half of Tia's studio is empty.*

JAYDEN

So—just anywhere?

TIA

Well, not anywhere. There. On that side.

JAYDEN

So this is your side.

TIA

My half, yeah. (pointing) That's yours.

JAYDEN

K.

*Jayden goes to set up the shelves on her side of the studio.*

TIA

Hexagons?

JAYDEN

Keeps things—organized? Like a bee hive.

TIA

(making bee antennae on her head) Buzz, buzz.

JAYDEN

(uncomfortable) Yeah. Or like—I'm bringing more supplies.

TIA

Of course.

JAYDEN

I'll use them. It's not like—decoration.

TIA

No, I know.

JAYDEN  
At least there's plenty of space here.

TIA  
Mm hmm.

JAYDEN  
Not cramped—like at home.

TIA  
No. That's the blessing of it. I can—

*She spreads her arms out wide, throws her head back, makes some kind of crazy howling sound.*

—if I want.

JAYDEN  
(beside herself) Yeah.

*Beat.*

...Feels weird.

TIA  
What does.

JAYDEN  
This is kind of your thing. Art.

TIA  
I think it's cool you're giving a shot.

*Beat.*

So why'd you finally take me up on it? Renting that half?

JAYDEN  
(suddenly flustered) Nothing! I.

TIA  
You—

JAYDEN  
You'll think it's stupid.

TIA  
No, what?

JAYDEN  
I—um—had a dream.

TIA  
Yeah?

JAYDEN  
Yeah, it was—uh—it was this image, and I can't stop thinking about it, but I know it's a painting, and I know I have to make it.

TIA  
Uh huh.

JAYDEN  
But I have no idea how.

TIA  
That part you can learn.

JAYDEN  
Anyway, I'm gonna try.

TIA  
Cool.

JAYDEN  
I guess.

TIA  
I know what that's like.

JAYDEN  
You do?

TIA  
Sure.

JAYDEN  
So that's why I took you up on it. Finally.

TIA  
(rolling her eyes, teasing) Finally.

JAYDEN  
(self-conscious) Yeah.

TIA  
Oh come on—

*Jayden withdraws from Tia.*

We're making art here—not running a morgue.

JAYDEN  
Yeah no.

TIA  
Well, I'm glad you're here. We're gonna have so much fun.

*Jayden focuses on organizing her art supplies.*

Do you remember—freshman year? The night of Midnight Mayhem.

JAYDEN  
Oh, God. I try to forget.

TIA  
Everybody on campus was filing like drones towards the basketball game. Wearing those stupid jerseys. And we wanted them to go in the opposite direction, toward the art gallery.

JAYDEN  
You had a show./Your welded city!

TIA  
/My welded city! And nobody was turning around! Not the posters, not arm waving, nothing could get them/

JAYDEN  
/Nothing.

TIA  
So I'm out there waving, and I turn around, and you've dropped trou! You're taking your shirt off. I can't believe—the one time we go streaking in all of college, and you started it.

JAYDEN  
I felt strongly about it. At the time.

TIA  
Apparently. Got at least ten people to the gallery.

JAYDEN  
Yeah, but they weren't even looking at the art.

*They laugh together.*  
*Beat.*

TIA  
You want tea?

JAYDEN  
I don't know?

TIA  
Well do you?

*Jayden opens her mouth to say yes, then reconsiders.*

JAYDEN  
I'd better not. Mom and Jori will be here soon.

TIA  
Okay. Mind if I—?

JAYDEN  
Not at all.

TIA  
Cool.

*Tia goes to her electric tea kettle in the corner, turns it on.*  
*Jayden returns to arranging her scant supplies in the shelves.*

JAYDEN  
I got these—brushes? Italian horse hair.

TIA  
Nice.

JAYDEN  
It's whatever.

TIA  
No, it's a big deal. Materials.

JAYDEN  
Well, I'm just painting.

TIA  
It's never just painting.

JAYDEN  
But what you do—with ceramic, steel, bone—I mean, it's amazing.

TIA  
I do alright.

*Jayden gestures to one abstract-looking piece that Tia is working on.*

JAYDEN  
This one is/

TIA  
/unfinished, yeah.

JAYDEN  
That's not what I was going/to say.

TIA  
/But I can see it. In my mind's eye. It's finished (pointing to her head) in here.

JAYDEN  
Right?

TIA  
I just need to bring it into reality.

JAYDEN  
To finish it—

TIA  
To—fish it out of the cosmic sea and plop it down on our reality hot plate.

*Jayden smiles despite herself.*

JAYDEN  
You just need to—harpoon it in its jowls and hoist it onto our proverbial boat.

TIA  
To—reach into the guts of the universe and pull out the innards of its dreams—



JAYDEN

—To—ask the gods a bunch of questions and see what they come up with—

TIA

—To—pat down the hips of the galaxy and watch these gems fall out of its pockets—

*Jayden giggles.*

*Tia's tea kettle starts singing.*

To read its tea leaves and find my creation staring back at me!

JAYDEN

To open the gator's mouth and see it shining at the top of his throat!

*Tia takes Jayden's hands, and they twirl, giggling mixed with the teapot singing, when—*

*Gail and Jori enter.*

*When Jayden sees them, she immediately stops, stands stock still.*

*Tia notices, goes to the tea kettle and silences it.*

GAIL

I thought we had the right place, but it sounded like a kindergarten playground.

*Silence.*

Shall we go to brunch?

JAYDEN

Of course.

*Jayden goes to stand by Jori, who kisses her.*

JORI

Happy Anniversary, Love.

JAYDEN

You, too.

*Jori, Jayden, and Gail start to exit.*

TIA

So, brunch, huh? The three of you?

GAIL

My treat. They can celebrate alone anytime.

TIA  
(to Jayden) You're leaving already?

JAYDEN  
Yeah. I was just—dropping stuff off.

TIA  
Huh.

GAIL  
I can't stand to be in Manchester very long.

JORI  
And we're hungry, so.

GAIL  
This neighborhood is—festive.

TIA  
You mean diverse?

GAIL  
I mean industrial.

TIA  
It's residential, too.

GAIL  
I would never sell a house here!

JORI  
It is a bit—run down.

JAYDEN  
But there's so much going on.

GAIL  
Like a view of the old railroad tracks?

JAYDEN  
Like they converted this old parachute factory/into lofts—

GAIL  
/And in the distance, the cemetery.

JAYDEN  
You're making it sound worse than it is.

GAIL  
Oh yes. It's charming.

*Pause.*

Is it safe?

JAYDEN  
Tia's been renting here for years.

TIA  
I live a few blocks from here, it's never been a problem for me.

GAIL  
But we did have to cross the river to get here.

JAYDEN  
It's still Richmond. We're not on a different planet.

JORI  
Jay. It is far—from our place. You've got to admit.

GAIL  
Exactly.

JORI  
And we need to get going, if we're going to make our reservation/time—

JAYDEN  
/You don't like it here either?

JORI  
It's—odd.

GAIL  
I'll say.

JAYDEN  
I just/

GAIL  
/I don't see the point in arguing it.

*Jayden swallows, knowing she has been beaten.*

JAYDEN  
Fine.

JORI  
Great. I'll go start the car.

GAIL  
We'll come out in just a pinch.

JORI  
Sounds good.

*Jori kisses Jayden, exits.*

GAIL  
(to Tia) Would you excuse us for a moment, Dear?

*Tia looks at Jayden.  
Jayden gives her the eyes: Do it.*

TIA  
Sure.

*She quickly fills her mug with water and grabs a box of tea.*

I'll just drink this in the hall.

*Tia exits to the hallway.*

GAIL  
What are you doin'?

JAYDEN  
What?

GAIL  
(gesturing to the room) This.

JAYDEN  
I'm trying something new.

GAIL  
You needed to do this—today?

JAYDEN  
What? I was/

GAIL  
/Of all days?

JAYDEN  
We're still going to brunch.

GAIL  
You make us drive all the way over here/

JAYDEN  
/It isn't that far/

GAIL  
/When you could have just as easily done this yesterday, or tomorrow/

JAYDEN  
/This time worked for Tia.

GAIL  
Seems it worked just fine for you, too.

*Beat.*

You go off to Philadelphia/

JAYDEN  
/Not that again/

GAIL  
/And leave me alone for FIVE YEARS/

JAYDEN  
/Jori likes Philly. His mom is there/

GAIL  
/Doing God knows what/

JAYDEN  
/Getting PhDs, Mom. Both of us. It's kind of a big deal.

GAIL  
But where is family in all that?

JAYDEN  
You mean you?

GAIL  
I mean a child.

JAYDEN  
...

GAIL  
Seems you got your head on backwards these days.

JAYDEN  
...

GAIL  
Your lease is up in just a few months.

JAYDEN  
So we can worry about it then.

GAIL  
But your focus should be there. On your home.

JAYDEN  
Our apartment?

GAIL  
Maybe you can finally think about buyin' somethin'.

JAYDEN  
I can't really think about that right now.

GAIL  
I could help you look.

JAYDEN  
No, thank you.

GAIL  
But it's a tough market, and I know it/really well.

JAYDEN  
/We'll do it on our own.

GAIL  
You should be lookin' at places with a nursery.

JAYDEN  
...

GAIL  
Are you all tryin' to have a baby?

JAYDEN  
Not at the moment.

GAIL  
Well. Wadn't that the plan?

JAYDEN  
It was, yeah.

GAIL  
You wanted to get your degree. You did. You put it off and put it off, and what did it get you?

JAYDEN  
An education?

GAIL  
But not a family.

JAYDEN  
I'm an adjunct lecturer!

GAIL  
You teach a couple classes, Jay.

JAYDEN  
For the time being! Just while Jori/and I—

GAIL  
/What's keepin' you from startin' a family? What else have you got goin' on right now?

JAYDEN  
Please, give me some time!

GAIL  
You been back for a year, Jay! I would think that you could get the ball rollin' on this.

JAYDEN  
Get the ball rolling?

GAIL

Just tell me—If I need to wait, I'll wait. I've waited. But tell me what I'm waitin' for?

JAYDEN

It's—not the right time.

GAIL

But it is the right time for you to—make art?

JAYDEN

Yes.

GAIL

Explain this to me, Jay.

JAYDEN

...I can't.

GAIL

I want you to have a good life.

JAYDEN

Well, not everybody's good life looks the same, Mom.

GAIL

When I was growing up—Father, Mother, Child. That was how it was done.

JAYDEN

I know.

GAIL

I just worked with a family, to find them a home. In Windsor Farms. It was perfect for them. Nursery, backyard, plenty of room. I would love to be able to find a place like that for you and Jori.

JAYDEN

We're not ready.

GAIL

What are you waitin' for?

JAYDEN

I'm telling you, it's not the right time. Maybe it'll never be the right time.

GAIL

Don't say that.



JAYDEN

What? It might not.

*Beat.*

GAIL

You need to nip this in the bud. This is a DISTRACTION.

*She picks up a sketchbook, throws it away from her, disgusted.*

You're to focus where you're needed most.

JAYDEN

(cold) I'll be out in a minute.

GAIL

Don't take too long.

*Gail exits.*

Interlude #1—11am Nothing

*The lights change.*

*Music plays throughout.*

*Jayden is stiff, holding her body too tightly.*

*Her chest is held so tightly, she has trouble breathing.*

*She places her art supplies in the hexagonal shelves by type.*

*She picks up the sketchbook and a pencil and lifts the pencil to the page.*

*She tries to sketch the image in her head.*

*Tears out the page, discards it.*

*She puts down the sketchbook and pencil, continues to organize her objects by type.*

*Her movements are very serious, self-critical, perfectionistic.*

*Again, she lifts her pencil to the page.*

*She tries to sketch what the image looks like in her head.*

*Scratches it out, tears out the page, discards it.*

*Again the organizing.*

*She goes to look at her sketchbook.*

*And sees only an empty page.*

*She is disappointed in herself.*

*The lights change back as:*

*She grabs her purse and exits.*

2, around 4pm

*Jori is bringing in more art supplies.*

*Tia is sitting drinking tea.*

JORI

That's almost all of it.

TIA

Where's Jayden?

JORI

There's one more box in the car.

*Jori looks around the space.*

Did you put her up to this?

TIA

What?

JORI

It's just—art?

TIA

You'll have to be more specific, Jori. I do this all the time.

JORI

But—for her?

*He laughs.*

I mean, it's kind of—

TIA

Well, I asked her a bunch of times. But she kept telling me no.

JORI

She can do whatever she wants, but/

TIA

/And then, about two months ago, she called me, and it was like suddenly, her life depended on it. Did something happen?

JORI

Nothing to do with art.

TIA

Well, I don't know. But I'm glad she changed her mind.

JORI

This doesn't seem like her though.

TIA

You'd be surprised. I mean—regardless of the project—being around a lot of other people can be good. This like—we did this collaborative project last year, where everybody in the building brought something down. For some people, it was just grabbing something from their studio, like a chair. Other people brought collages they were working on. Or paper mâché masks. Stuff like that. But when you put it all together, it was—incredible.

JORI

Sounds hectic. Like looking at a bunch of garbage and calling it art.

TIA

Who says it's not?

JORI

Almost the whole time I've known her? Jay would have.

TIA

Oh, she's got a wild side to her.

JORI

I know. That's what worries me.

*Beat.*

So, you'll uh—take care of her? Like watch out for her?

TIA

Yeah, Jori. She'll be fine.

*They smile.*

*Jayden enters carrying a box of supplies. She is wearing white jeans, a white cotton button-up shirt, and white KEDS. She looks like a blank canvas. She unloads several mugs for tea and a few paintbrushes, etc.*

What are you wearing?

JAYDEN

My artist outfit.

TIA  
Your what?

JAYDEN  
Oh, just. You know. Thursdays, in kindergarten, when we had art class. You wore all white, or you could put on a smock. You could get anything on it. Everybody had one.

TIA  
I don't think anybody else in this building has one of those.

JAYDEN  
I don't care. It's inspiring.

TIA  
Okay. Well then, good. Have at it.

JAYDEN  
(to Jori) You know, Tia's been renting in this building longer than anybody else.

JORI  
Yeah?

JAYDEN  
She's like—an art mama.

*Tia scoffs.*

It's true!

JORI  
So—you all set?

JAYDEN  
Mm hmm.

JORI  
Okay. You do what you need to do. I'll come back in a couple hours.

JAYDEN  
See you then.

*Jori kisses her, exits.  
Jayden finishes unpacking mugs.  
She sets a blank canvas on the easel.  
She piddles with her art supplies in her shelves.*

TIA  
What are you working on today?

JAYDEN  
Oh nothing yet. I'm still getting the space in order.

TIA  
Yeah well.

JAYDEN  
What?

TIA  
You can do that till the cows come home.

JAYDEN  
Meaning?

TIA  
Meaning nothing. Just, you should see some artists' spaces. They're a mess—

JAYDEN  
Oh. (returning to her task) Not mine.

*Pause.*

But when I'm done—I think I'll try that image I told you about.

TIA  
Good.

*Max pops his head in the doorway.*

MAX  
Hey, Tia.

TIA  
What's up?

MAX  
I was just wondering—if I could go through your scrap metal?

TIA  
Alright.

*Max enters and sifts through a pile of scrap metal on the floor of Tia's work area.*

MAX  
(holding up a couple pieces) Mind if I—?

TIA  
It's trash anyhow.

*He moves over to the other half of the studio, starts looking at Jayden's supplies.*

Those're hers.

MAX  
Whose?

TIA  
Jayden's.

MAX  
(noticing Jayden for the first time) Charmed.

JAYDEN  
Hello?

MAX  
Max. I rent one of the studios down the hall.

JAYDEN  
Cool.

MAX  
What are you working on?

JAYDEN  
Um. Nothing yet. But I'm going to start painting an image.

*Max rears up with a tall into-the-shoulders breath.*

MAX  
I'm always working on something.

JAYDEN  
Like what?

MAX  
The world.

JAYDEN

...

MAX

One object at a time.

TIA

He's a found object artist.

JAYDEN

(doesn't know what that is) Oh.

MAX

Boxes. Labels. I'm assembling the world.

TIA

(rolling her eyes) Right.

JAYDEN

(not understanding) Uh huh.

MAX

One object at a time.

*Pause.*

*Tia throws a ball of clay at Max, hitting him.*

So, studio-mates, huh?

TIA

Yup.

MAX

How's that goin'?

TIA

Good.

JAYDEN

Good, yeah.

MAX

Cool. 'Cause you've had some crazy ones, Tia.

TIA

Don't remind me.

MAX

(to Jayden) The last one—was into miniatures. Dolls nestled into each other. Which would be cool, if it was like Russian dolls. But she would like cut the middle out of a Barbie doll and stick a tiny doll inside of it.

JAYDEN

Ew.

MAX

Yeah, then go on and on about how plastic our lives have become.

TIA

She skipped out, without even paying her last month's rent.

MAX

Sucks.

TIA

Yeah. But at least it freed up the space.

MAX

So—when you here?

JAYDEN

Um (looking to Tia)—whenever I can?

MAX

This place is like a 7-11!

JAYDEN

What?

MAX

Open 24-7!

TIA

(remembering) Oh yeah.

*Tia takes an extra key off the key ring on her belt and gives it to Jayden.*

Come anytime you like.

JAYDEN

(taking it) Thanks.

MAX

(flashing Jayden a charming smile) My best ideas flow at—shit. Any time.



TIA  
Yeah. You're a font.

MAX  
I am! Fountain blue! (making exploding fountain movements) Pssh! Pssh! Ha!  
K. Catch you on the flippety.

*Max exits.*

JAYDEN  
Wow.

TIA  
What?

JAYDEN  
I wish I had that kind of—access.

TIA  
Max? He's just making guesses.

JAYDEN  
He has impulses. He goes with them.

TIA  
Your painting (gesturing to Jayden's mind)—it's in there.

JAYDEN  
Yeah, but—I can't get to it.

TIA  
Give it time.

JAYDEN  
It'll need more than time. I feel like my power is off.

TIA  
So call the electric company.

*Jayden looks at the door where Max just exited.*

3, around 7pm (Summer)

*Tia and Max in her studio.  
They're having tea together.*

TIA  
So how's the installation coming?

MAX  
Not bad.

TIA  
That's cool.

MAX  
Yeah.

TIA  
You excited?

MAX  
Sure.

TIA  
Good for you.

MAX  
I'm really getting into this one.

TIA  
Uh huh.

MAX  
So yeah. I booked the Page Bond Gallery in January.

TIA  
You did?

MAX  
Sure.

TIA  
I've been trying to get in there for years.

MAX  
They're real selective these days.

TIA  
They're the biggest gallery in the city!

MAX  
Yeah, but they still have to be selective, when the rubber hits the road, or whatever.

TIA  
Crazy.

MAX  
Yeah.

TIA  
So like—with what pieces?

MAX  
My desert collection.

TIA  
That old thing?

MAX  
Excuse me?

TIA  
Well like. You've had about a million exhibits of that one at this point.

MAX  
It's cool.

TIA  
I guess.

MAX  
It's a metaphor for spiritual aridity in modern/times.

TIA  
/You've told me.

MAX  
It's still true.

TIA  
Still. That was your thesis piece, wasn't it? In undergrad?

MAX  
I had good impulses. Even then.

TIA  
But—

MAX  
You jealous?

TIA  
What? No.

MAX  
'Cause you sound jealous.

TIA  
I'm not.

MAX  
It's okay if you are.

TIA  
No.

MAX  
...

TIA  
I just—They could use more—variety—is all. Didn't Lucas show his paper elephants there last year?

MAX  
Year before.

TIA  
Recently. So a parade of elephants, a parade of camels—what's the difference?

MAX  
Are you kidding? His was a metaphor for longevity and the way we've broken with community. That's COMPLETELY different.

TIA  
Yeah, but any of us only knew that because you TOLD us. Just looking at it, just walking in off the street and looking at the art DIRECTLY—anybody'd be like, oh, a parade of elephants, a parade of camels. Same difference.

MAX

Yeah, anybody who didn't know anything about art.

TIA

Which is most people, Max.

MAX

Not my fault, Tia.

TIA

No, but—you want only people who know about art to know about your art?

MAX

We can educate. The like masses or whatever.

TIA

Those poor souls.

MAX

Are you making fun of me?

TIA

A little, yeah.

MAX

Why?

TIA

Because I seek to make every piece different. To EVOKE something very, very different each time.

MAX

Are we talking about your art now?

TIA

I have to. Frame it in terms of my own work.

MAX

That's what gets you into trouble.

TIA

So what—now not even artists can reflect on your work?

MAX

It's never very good to think this much about things.

TIA  
Easy for you to say. That show probly came easy to you.

MAX  
...

TIA  
Didn't it?

MAX  
...

TIA  
How'd you get it?

MAX  
I was like, at Randy's, and he has a bud who's dating Clara, who runs the space.

TIA  
Great.

MAX  
What?

TIA  
No, it's just great.

MAX  
What're you so touchy about?

TIA  
My last collection was unlike anything I'd ever done before. I took risks.  
(gesturing to a piece) Like this one. I collaged pieces that shouldn't have gone together, and it WORKED.

MAX  
Good for you?

TIA  
You know what Clara said about it?

MAX  
She said no?

TIA  
She said it was too—REDUCTIVE.

MAX  
Was it?

TIA  
I hate that shit. She's just using BIG WORDS to/

MAX  
/You don't know what reductive means?

TIA  
Of course I do. But I feel like the Claras of the world use it—vaguely.

MAX  
Bullshit.

TIA  
Okay. Define it.

MAX  
What?

TIA  
No, you're so IN the in crowd, define it. What is meant by reductive art?

MAX  
It's a phrase—

TIA  
—which means—

MAX  
It's a way of saying that—

TIA  
—that you're not going to put somebody's art in your gallery.

MAX  
That you find their work overly simplistic.

TIA  
Ha! And a parade of camels is complicated how?

MAX  
I knew you were jea/lous—

TIA

/Seriously. If there's only so much space, and some artists are selected, and some are not, one assumes they have some kind of CRITERIA for making their decisions, right?

MAX

Of course they have cri/teria—

TIA

/Like WHAT? That's what I'm trying to figure out.

MAX

I can't tell you why your show got rejected, Tia.

TIA

No? Because I can tell you EXACTLY why yours did not.

MAX

What are you/

TIA

/Clara has a crush on you.

MAX

That's ridiculous. She has a boy/friend—

TIA

/Still. She told me. At the roof party Fourth of July.

MAX

I'm outta here. You can't keep yourself in check.

TIA

Does it sting? Knowing that men's art can be selected for the bone, too?

*Max gets to the door.*

*Jayden enters in her white outfit.*

*They almost smack into each other.*

JAYDEN

Oh! Sorry. Am I interrupting?

TIA

Nope. Max was just leaving.

JAYDEN

Have to get back to it?



MAX  
Something like that.

*Max starts to exit.*

JAYDEN  
(after him) I'd love to see your work sometime.

MAX  
YOU can come by my studio anytime.

JAYDEN  
Really? I'd love to.

MAX  
Sure. Door's always open.

*Pause.*  
*The air is electric.*  
*Tia glares at Max.*

TIA  
(to Jayden) Max is always happy to have a new convert.

JAYDEN  
What does that mean?

*Pause.*  
*Max exits. Tia looks visibly relieved.*

Seriously, what does that mean?

TIA  
Nothing. I was just giving him a hard time.

JAYDEN  
You should go easier on him. I bet his art is very good.

TIA  
You and everybody else.

4, around midnight

*Alone, Jayden piddles.  
Her canvas is still blank.*

*Max pops his head in the doorway.*

MAX  
Hey.

JAYDEN  
Oh, hey!

MAX  
Tia here?

JAYDEN  
No. Just me.

MAX  
Cool. Can I come in?

JAYDEN  
Sure.

*Max comes in.*

MAX  
You didn't come by my studio.

JAYDEN  
Sorry. I meant to.

MAX  
Wanted to bring these by to show you.

JAYDEN  
Camels?

MAX  
They're from my desert collection, yeah.

*He makes a parade of them on the counter.*

JAYDEN  
Nice!

MAX

It's a—I've been adding things to it for a while now.

JAYDEN

That's so cool.

MAX

(holding one up) This one can stay here, if you want.

JAYDEN

Yeah?

MAX

Start a caravan.

JAYDEN

Sure.

MAX

You collect anything?

JAYDEN

Um, cups?

MAX

Cups?

*Jayden gestures by the electric tea kettle to the cups.*

JAYDEN

I've brought these in for tea, but I have plenty at home, too. My husband/

MAX

/Your husband, huh?

JAYDEN

Yeah.

MAX

Your husband like cups?

JAYDEN

He has this one that's/

MAX

/As much as you do?

JAYDEN

He doesn't really care about things like that.

MAX

Things like what?

JAYDEN

Things, period? He's more into ideas.

MAX

What kind of ideas?

JAYDEN

Well he's a philosopher. Tenure track. So he likes any idea better than things.

MAX

Really?

JAYDEN

Even disturbing thoughts. He'd rather think them than be faced with the reality of something.

MAX

Huh.

JAYDEN

I used to be the same way.

MAX

Then you woke up?

JAYDEN

I mean I guess. I'm the one who notices things now. Like this one cup from the university, it has a chip on the lip of it, and every morning he drinks over the chip. Doesn't turn the cup or anything. Doesn't even register it. It didn't use to bother me, but now it does. I've made it into this game where I look to see if he'll—and sure enough, every morning, he drinks right over that chip like it isn't even there.

*Beat.*

MAX

You?

JAYDEN

Me?

MAX  
This isn't your main gig.

JAYDEN  
Uh, no.

MAX  
You a professor, too?

JAYDEN  
I teach a couple classes. At the university. Also in the philosophy department. I was going to be tenure track too, but that fell through. So I work part-time.

MAX  
Uh huh.

JAYDEN  
So you know.

*Beat.*

MAX  
What's his name?

JAYDEN  
Jori.

MAX  
Seriously?

JAYDEN  
What?

MAX  
Jori and Jayden. You guys have like matching towels, or what?

JAYDEN  
Like—

MAX  
His and hers?

JAYDEN  
I guess. It never occurred to me, that it might sound weird.

MAX  
Not weird. Just—young.

JAYDEN  
Oh.

*Beat.*

MAX  
How 'bout Jade?

JAYDEN  
For what?

MAX  
You. Not Jay-den. Too long. Jade.

JAYDEN  
It's actually spelled with a y/

MAX  
/Short and to the point.

JAYDEN  
I don't know/I

MAX  
/It'll help you sound more legit.

JAYDEN  
Yeah?

MAX  
Yeah.

*She shifts away from him, embarrassed.*

You wanna hear the best piece of advice I ever got?

JAYDEN  
...K?

MAX  
Okay. Here it is. Drum roll, please.

*She beats a drum roll on the countertop with her hands.*



MAX

A canvas. An installation piece. The possibilities are endless.

JAYDEN

Yeah?

MAX

Yeah.

JAYDEN

Well, like what?

MAX

What about this image you're working on.

JAYDEN

Oh. That feels—private.

*Another pause.*

I'd rather hear about your installation.

MAX

Oh, it's gonna be off the hook!

*He moves around the room.*

I got these old suitcases—brown, light blue—real turn-of-the-century-carpetbagger type shit, and I started filling them with a bunch of raw materials—each something you'd find in the desert—you know, like camels, tents, sand—

JAYDEN

The sun?

MAX

What?

JAYDEN

Nothing. Sorry.

MAX

But the thing is, the objects started spilling over. Just overflowing out of the cases and inter-mingling. A camel and a sheik, a tent buried in a bunch of sand—so I said, okay, I'm up for it. Shit went crazy. So now it's a whole desert landscape. Fills the space.



JAYDEN  
Cool.

MAX  
It's a metaphor for spiritual aridity in modern times.

JAYDEN  
Yeah?

MAX  
Yeah. How we need to journey outward to journey inward. I feel like I'm imparting—WISDOM—on people, but outside a temple. Spilling out into the streets.

JAYDEN  
Wow.

MAX  
I have an exhibit scheduled for January.

JAYDEN  
Impressive.

*Pause. Max smiles.*

What if you got visitors to add something to it?

MAX  
Huh?

JAYDEN  
It's already so mixed up/

MAX  
/It's an assemblage. It's supposed to be "mixed up".

JAYDEN  
What if each person who saw it had to add something.

MAX  
I don't know. I've been working on this for a while/

JAYDEN  
/But I mean like themed. You could have the items there, the ones YOU pick out for people.

MAX  
Yeah. Sick!

JAYDEN  
Then it'd just keep growing. (holding up one camel) Like I could add this.

MAX  
Fuck, yeah!

*Max scribbles a note in a nearby sketchbook, tears out the page, pockets it.*

JAYDEN  
You want some tea?

MAX  
Sure.

*She turns on the electric kettle.*

JAYDEN  
It's so fascinating. The world of art. Like anything is possible.

MAX  
It is.

JAYDEN  
I guess. I just always feel limited—to a restricted set of possibilities.

MAX  
Why?

JAYDEN  
That's just—been my experience.

MAX  
Really?

JAYDEN  
Like I can eat with a fork this way (picks up a paintbrush, imitates regular fork use), but not this way (mimes zigzagging her fork wildly mid-air). Feels like I'm out of control!

MAX  
(smiling) Yeah, you're all over the place.

*He moves about the room again.*

MAX

Me? I need to—explore. Thinking about a bike trip next summer? With a buddy of mine. All the way cross country. All the way the hell to California and back.

JAYDEN

Why?

MAX

To move. Be out in it. Make a dent. Meet some people. Have a thought that's different from the ones I've had before. Make some shit. Just make. Shit. Up.

JAYDEN

Meet somebody?

MAX

Eh. Maybe. But that's not what it would be for.

JAYDEN

Cool. It's like—two men against the country.

MAX

More like—two men WITH the country. Moving through it. Along it. Like a river.

JAYDEN

Sounds great.

MAX

Yeah.

*Beat.*

So what's this image you wanna paint?

JAYDEN

That's—personal.

MAX

Come on, I told you about mine.

JAYDEN

...I had a dream where I could see a painting. In my mind's eye.

MAX

What was it like?

JAYDEN  
Powerful. Painful.

MAX  
To look at?

JAYDEN  
To feel.

MAX  
I'm listening.

JAYDEN  
It has these thick red marks on the upper right-hand corner, and these white ovals in the middle surrounded by black outlines. Um. Streaks across most of the canvas, like from crying, or rain. Like a lonely place where you can almost make out a figure in the darkness, but it turns out to be a figment of your imagination. Um. The kind of painting when, on a dry afternoon in an art museum, someone rounds a corner and is arrested by this image. Pierced by it. Straight to the heart.

MAX  
...Wow.

JAYDEN  
Only problem is—I don't have any idea how to do a painting.

MAX  
What is there to it? You just put brush to canvas, and whallah!

JAYDEN  
But I haven't been to art school.

MAX  
So? I just went for the contacts.

JAYDEN  
I hadn't touched a brush in twenty-five years before I came here.

MAX  
So now you have.

JAYDEN  
And—

MAX  
And?

JAYDEN  
I feel like it needs to be perfect.

MAX  
Good luck with that.

JAYDEN  
But if it isn't going to be perfect—I don't know where to start.

MAX  
You just—begin.

JAYDEN  
So you say.

MAX  
I could help you. Make that image.

JAYDEN  
You could?

MAX  
Sure. Sounds intriguing.

*He steps toward her. She stands still.*

It could be our first—collaboration.

JAYDEN  
Yeah?

MAX  
Yeah.

JAYDEN  
Okay.

MAX  
Seriously?

*She reaches out and touches his chest.*

JAYDEN  
Tag. You're it.

*She runs away. He chases her.*

MAX  
Am I?

JAYDEN  
I think you know.

*He leans into her.  
The tea kettle whistles. They laugh.  
He kisses her as the lights fade.*

## ACT II

5, around 10am

*Tia is working on a sculpture. She is incorporating bone into it.  
Jayden is ready to mix the red for her painting, setting out her paints.*

JAYDEN  
What are you trying to do?

TIA  
Fit these pieces together.

JAYDEN  
Why isn't it working?

TIA  
Come see.

*Jayden approaches Tia's work station.  
Tia hands Jayden the piece she is trying to fit.  
Jayden goes and fidgets with the pieces, to no avail.*

JAYDEN  
It won't—

*Jayden steps aside, handing the piece back to Tia.  
Tia works with it, fits the pieces together, popping them into place.*

TIA  
Ay!

JAYDEN  
I loosened them for you.

*They laugh.*

Naw. I've always envied you that.

TIA  
What?

JAYDEN  
Working with your hands.

TIA

You didn't have a dad who was always teaching you welding, or repair. Some other random skill.

JAYDEN

No, you know. I didn't have a dad.

TIA

Oh, Honey. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring that up—

JAYDEN

It's fine. It is what it is.

TIA

Well then, you didn't have a dad to disappoint.

JAYDEN

You haven't/

TIA

/One of my brothers is a welder. The other is a taxidermist. Practical skills.

JAYDEN

Oh, you put yours to use.

TIA

...It's part of a collection. Bird abstractions.

JAYDEN

Cool.

*Jayden goes back to her work area, tries mixing paints into the shade of red she imagines in her mind. It does not come out right.*

Nope. Not it.

*Max appears in the doorway, holding a crate of art supplies.*

MAX

Knock, knock.

JAYDEN

Oh, hey!

MAX

Can I come in?



JAYDEN  
Sure!

*Max enters and sets the crate on the counter.*

MAX  
So the other night you were saying you need more supplies.

JAYDEN  
Yeah?

MAX  
This is basically just some stuff from my studio. (going through it) Books, paints. You know, stuff I'm not really using right now. Thought it might be—good for you.

JAYDEN  
Cool, thanks.

MAX  
There's all kinds of sick stuff in here. Like this one—

*He pulls a hardcover book out of the crate.*

—Strange Ritual. By David Byrne. All kinds of sparks in this one.

*He hands her the book.  
She takes it.  
They linger a bit too long in the transfer.  
Jayden giggles.  
Tia eyes them.  
Max breaks the moment.*

(to Tia) Jade is alright.

TIA  
Jade?

*Jayden blushes.*

JAYDEN  
It's something I'm trying out.

*Max tickles her side.  
She laughs, allows this.  
Tia busies herself, annoyed.  
Quiet.*

*Jayden flips through the Strange Ritual book.*

JAYDEN  
Holy shit.

MAX  
What?

JAYDEN  
This red. Here in the front. It's the one in my head.

TIA  
Really?

JAYDEN  
What's the piece called? "Concrete Monkey".

*She shows Max the image in the book.*

This is the red I'm trying to mix.

MAX  
Cool.

*Max surveys Jayden's art supplies.*

Can I borrow a pencil?

JAYDEN  
Which?

MAX  
The green one.

JAYDEN  
Okay.

*He grabs it.*

MAX  
And a sketchbook.

JAYDEN  
Spiral or no?

MAX  
Spiral.

JAYDEN  
There.

*He takes a sketchbook, too.*

TIA  
Jayden—

JAYDEN  
What?

*Max eyes Jayden's Italian horse hair brushes.*

MAX  
Nice. Italian horse hair. Can I borrow these?

JAYDEN  
Sure.

*He snags those, too.*

TIA  
Come on.

*Pause.*

MAX  
Well, I better get working.

JAYDEN  
Yeah, me too. See you soon!

TIA  
(sarcastic) Toodles!

*Max exits with his new art supplies.*

What's going on between you two?

JAYDEN  
Nothing.

TIA  
Jay. I'm not blind.

JAYDEN

I'm—connecting with other artists here.

TIA

Connecting how?

JAYDEN

Networking.

TIA

Is that what you call it?

JAYDEN

I've—I don't know. I can't explain it.

TIA

Try.

JAYDEN

He said he'd help me with my painting.

TIA

Jayden/

JAYDEN

/Jori can't do that.

TIA

I know how Max operates. Once you open that door/

JAYDEN

/Well, I just assumed/

TIA

/It'll be a hard one to close.

JAYDEN

I don't really/think

TIA

/Jay/

JAYDEN

/Look, okay? Jori is my home base. Our place could not be cozier. He welcomes me home every night, and there's something to that. I belong there. And I can't mess with that/

TIA

/Yeah, no. Some people wait their whole lives for that/kind of—

JAYDEN

/At the same time, Max is this—chaos. He's all over the place. And—I'm drawn to that, too. And actually—I know this sounds bad, but—when I'm with Max, I want to destroy it. Just take an axe to the wall of our apartment and make it NOT SO anymore. I can't breathe in that tiny apartment. There's no room for any of this—there's no room for ME—in our home! It's just Jori. What he wants. What I use to want. But now I feel like I'm starting to want something else. I'm not sure what. Max just feels—closer to it.

TIA

You're skating on really thin ice with that, Jayden.

JAYDEN

I know.

TIA

...

JAYDEN

But what would happen? If I fell through? You know, I've never fallen through. Maybe I would—learn to swim, or something.

TIA

And maybe you would die of hypothermia in the Arctic winter.

JAYDEN

Yeah. But I don't know that.

TIA

Well, I don't exactly know what would happen to me if I jumped in front of a moving train, but I have a pretty good idea. So generally I avoid it.

JAYDEN

I know. But I avoid everything. I avoid EVERYTHING, until I'm just NOTHING. And for once, I'm willing to do SOMETHING, to create something from nothing, and it's NOT WORKING! I can't make it happen, Tia. It's not coming out right.

TIA

Give it some more time. Practice.

JAYDEN

No, I don't want to do it unless it's going to come out perfect.

TIA

It never does. Not the first ten times—the first eighty times/

JAYDEN

/Then I need help. I can't do it alone. And Jori can't help me.

TIA

...If Max helps you, there'll be strings attached.

JAYDEN

I don't care. Something's happening for you! In this place! I want something to happen for me.

TIA

...Just be careful.

6, around 9pm (Fall)

*Jayden is there, looking at the red (Concrete Monkey, third image) in Strange Ritual and trying to mix her own red with the paints.*

*Jori enters carrying a bag of Chinese takeout.*

JAYDEN

Op! What are you doing here?

JORI

Brought you dinner.

JAYDEN

Aw, thanks.

*He moves her things aside and sets the food out on the counter.*

JORI

I got dumplings.

JAYDEN

Cool.

JORI

These have crab meat and roe inside—what a gas!

*Jori laughs.*

*Jayden is more subdued.*

*Jori counts out exactly four dumplings for each of them.*

*They pull stools up to the counter and sit on them to eat.*

*Silence.*

*They eat.*

Did you have a chance to look at those apartment links I sent you?

JAYDEN

...Yeah.

JORI

And?

JAYDEN

They're nice.

JORI

But—?

JAYDEN

—I was hoping we could check out something in the Church Hill area?

*Jori laughs.*

*Jayden does not.*

JORI

You're serious.

JAYDEN

What? It's artsy.

JORI

"Artsy" is code for destitute.

JAYDEN

Up and coming.

JORI

And it's nowhere near the university.

JAYDEN

We could have our own little coffee shop.

JORI

We have one now. It's called Starbuck's.

JAYDEN

We could get that golden retriever we've wanted. There's a dog park.

JORI

There's one on the west side, too.

JAYDEN

But—every fourth Friday, they open up all the art galleries, and it's a big event for the whole neighborhood.

JORI

That's not a reason to live there.

JAYDEN

We could start a vinyl collection.

JORI

Why would I wanna do that?



JAYDEN  
Because it could be fun! For a change of pace.

JORI  
I like the pace we're at.

JAYDEN  
...I know.

JORI  
What's gotten into you?

JAYDEN  
Nothing. I just feel like we always do what you wanna do.

JORI  
I thought we agreed.

JAYDEN  
We do. We did. For the most part. Only now it's changing, for me.

JORI  
Okay...

*He puts down his chopsticks.*

What do you want?

JAYDEN  
Church Hill.

*He picks them back up.*

JORI  
Windsor Farms. So we don't quadruple my commute.

*Pause.*

JAYDEN  
I have something that I need to tell you.

JORI  
Uh oh! (mock suspense sound) Dun dun dun dah!

JAYDEN  
Seriously.

JORI  
Okay?

JAYDEN  
I need to—make a painting.

JORI  
Yeah. That's why you rent here, right?

JAYDEN  
There's uh—an artist here?

*Pause.*

JORI  
Uh huh.

JAYDEN  
He's a found object artist actually. It's really cool. He does these like assemblages? And installations? Like large-scale. Like whole rooms, or bigger—of, um—

JORI  
Yeah?

JAYDEN  
Of—well, everybody's here all the time, it's like a commune.

JORI  
So?

JAYDEN  
Um.

JORI  
What's going on?

JAYDEN  
We may have kissed.

JORI  
Well did you or didn't you?

JAYDEN  
We did.

JORI  
Uh huh. Like a one-time thing?

JAYDEN  
Yeah, um.

JORI  
But you want to again.

JAYDEN  
I want to make art with him.

JORI  
Unbelievable.

JAYDEN  
It's just that with the hallway, and the way it's set up, it's really easy to go to other artists' studios and see what they're up to/

JORI  
/You must think I'm an idiot.

JAYDEN  
I've seen his work, and I think he'd make a really good collaborator/

JORI  
/Collaborator, Jay? That is such bull.

JAYDEN  
But he said he'd help me with the painting!

JORI  
(sarcastic) Oh. Well. Then that must be all he wants.

JAYDEN  
It is. And me too/

JORI  
/I mean that's good if you feel desire in your life. You just need to—I mean, I know we feel it for other people, but you gotta direct it toward me.

JAYDEN  
Do I?

JORI  
Yeah, Jay. We're married. That's what that fucking means.

JAYDEN

I know, but we were so young when we—

*He moves away from her.*

JAYDEN

Whatever happened to your pen drawings?

JORI

My doodles?

JAYDEN

They were good. Where'd you put them?

JORI

I don't remember. Come on—

JAYDEN

I just, when we started dating, you used to do them all the time.

JORI

I only wanna create artsy things when I feel like hell! When I'm depressed, I make the best art. But when things are good, it's like, I don't need it. I don't see the point.

*Beat.*

I haven't wanted to do this kind of stuff in years.

JAYDEN

See—THAT'S the thing. Like I'm supposed to thank you. Like I'm supposed to say, "Great! Wonderful, that means you're happy." But it also means that you're not making anything new.

JORI

I write papers all the time, Jay. I get published,/and—

JAYDEN

/No, I mean like right brain, out-of-the-box, can't-predict-what-it'll-do-next type work.

JORI

Are you bored? With philosophy, or/

JAYDEN

/You're not making art. You're not in touch with that part of yourself.

JORI  
How the fuck do you know what I'm in touch with?

*Silence.*

JORI  
I don't need to create. Not like this.

JAYDEN  
Well, I do.

*Beat.*

I can't not do it. And I—

*Pause.*

JORI  
Is this about what happened?

JAYDEN  
No. Yes. It's—related.

JORI  
'Cause I thought we were past that.

JAYDEN  
Don't you think about it?

JORI  
Of course I do. Every day. But these things happen, and you move on.

JAYDEN  
I—don't think I have. I'm not sure that I can—until something good comes out of it.

JORI  
Jay, I'm not ready/to—

JAYDEN  
/Me either. But I have to make something. Contribute something. And if it's not gonna be that—for the time being—then it needs to be this. Papers are not gonna cut it. I need something like this.—And then I see these people around here who are not just thinking about it, they're actually doing it. Project after project. They're just lit up! You know? It's exciting.

JORI  
It lights you up, huh? Gets you goin'?

JAYDEN  
Come on.

JORI  
No, let's get this out.

JAYDEN  
I'm not/

JORI  
/You all hot and bothered?

JAYDEN  
Stop it.

JORI  
Look, I can forgive one kiss. As a slip up. But I don't want you making anything with this guy.

JAYDEN  
...But I want to.

JORI  
We want things all the time that we can't have.

JAYDEN  
Why not? I'll be good, I promise.

JORI  
...I'm not sure that's good enough.

*Silence.*

JAYDEN  
(mumbling) ...Then maybe we should spend some time apart.

JORI  
Sorry, what? Speak up. Say this to me, if you're going to.

JAYDEN  
I think we need some time apart.

JORI  
Like you WANT time apart? Are you telling me something you desire, Jay?

JAYDEN

No, I'm trying to make an observation. I feel like I'm a million miles away from you. We've got this bridge between us, but I can't cross it—

JORI

I don't even think you want to.

*Pause. She does not move.*

Fuck that. You're not even trying. This isn't about the 'bridge' between you and me. This is about how you wanna go get your rocks off in a different way than you have before. Suddenly you can't stand to be tethered down.

JAYDEN

I'd like to think it's about the art.

JORI

You'd like to! Yep! But I'd like pumpkin beer all year long. So the fuck what?

*They stand apart from each other.*

You know what? (gesturing to her blank canvas) You've been here for months. And you've got shit to show for it. Just an observation.

JAYDEN

(quietly) Right.

JORI

(gesturing to the room) How is it you need this?

JAYDEN

How is it you don't?

*Jori exits, slamming the door behind him.*

*Jayden cleans up the leftover food, throwing it out.*

*Max opens the door and enters the space.*

*She starts toward him.*

*He closes the door.*

Interlude #2—9pm Chaos

*The lights change.*

*Music plays throughout.*

*Jayden kisses Max hard on the mouth.*

*She pulls him into the room by the front of his shirt.*

*Everything here is haphazard, like a scene from “The Science of Sleep”.*

*She lays out a tarp on the floor and lays a large, blank canvas down on top of it.*

*In between kisses, they pull out all different colors of paints, stir sticks, brushes.*

*Jayden coaxes him into showing her how to do the painting.*

*He shows her how to do it, throwing paint on the canvas Jackson Pollock style, and she eagerly follows suit.*

*They are creating an image together.*

*It’s all over the place.*

*He begins to unbutton her shirt, revealing her bra underneath.*

*She takes off his shirt as they kiss.*

*The floor, the wall, the counter.*

*He lifts her onto the counter.*

*A moment.*

*She nods.*

*He leans into her.<sup>26</sup>*

*The lights change back as:*

*He enters her.*

---

<sup>26</sup> Please Note: This part is highly poetic and therefore not meant to be realistic (until the lights change back). That said, in a realistic scene, a condom would be necessary and used here. A condom package can be ripped here and thrown to the floor—or, if not, then its absence should be recognized as wholly poetic. Jayden, as a real female character, would be extremely conscientious here about not wanting to get pregnant at this time in her life.



7, around 5am (the following morning)

*Max is asleep on the floor.*

*Jayden is up, wearing Max's shirt, frantically painting a small canvas. There are eight or nine small canvases strewn around her, all covered in various shades of red paint. She is mixing paint from colors around her. She is so frustrated, she pokes a hole in one of the canvases. Max stirs.*

MAX  
Come here.

JAYDEN  
Oh good, you're up. I need your help.

MAX  
I'm exhausted.

JAYDEN  
I can't get the red right.

MAX  
What?

JAYDEN  
The red. I can't mix it. The one in my head. I can picture it—when I close my eyes, I can see it—but I can't do it. I can't make it.

MAX  
Add some color.

JAYDEN  
Yeah, but which one? Is it yellow? No, that would make it brighter. How do you add blue, without making it purple? And and where are the variations? How do I make it darker?

MAX  
You just do.

JAYDEN  
It's not happening.

MAX  
Come to bed. We'll worry about that later.

JAYDEN  
I can't sleep. Not now.

*Beat.*  
*Max curls up to go back to sleep.*

JAYDEN  
You make it look easy.

MAX  
What?

JAYDEN  
You make it look like—you just walk around, and art falls out of your pockets.

MAX  
You've got canvases there, that's good.

JAYDEN  
It's not right. They're not right.

*He turns over.*

Help me. Come on.

*She pulls on him.*

Come on. Wake up.

*He looks at her.*

MAX  
It's five in the morning, Jade. Let me sleep.

JAYDEN  
But we're partners now.

MAX  
What?

JAYDEN  
We—do this together. That means we make things together. You've got to show me.

MAX  
I already showed you.

JAYDEN  
No, I mean. The mixing. The colors. It's not—I can't breathe.

*She hyperventilates.*

JAYDEN

We should make a plan.—For how we're gonna do this. Uh—every Thursday. I can come every Thursday—Friday, and—Tuesday. And we'll work through it. In stages.—

Maybe you can give me—mixing classes, or we can, trade. Um.—I could show you something about organization maybe?—Or, I don't know. What do you think?

MAX

I think—I'd better go.

JAYDEN

What?

MAX

You're clearly going through something, and I don't belong here.

JAYDEN

Yes, you do! I can't do this alone! You have to help me.

MAX

Yeah. ...I don't think we should do this again.

JAYDEN

What?

*He stands, puts his pants on (over his boxers).*

MAX

I've got my installation coming up. I need to put my focus there.

JAYDEN

Focus?

*Max throws on his shoes.*

What's going on?

MAX

(not turning to her) You've got a lot goin' on right now, and so do I/

JAYDEN

/I don't understand. Things were going so well,/and—

MAX

/Hey. Can you be simple?

JAYDEN

Can I be what?

MAX

Jade? Do your dishes.

*He exits.*

*She sinks to the ground.*

8, around 6pm (that same evening)

*Jayden is lying on the floor, listening to sad music.*

*She is still wearing Max's shirt.*

*She is a mess.*

*A key in the door.*

*Tia enters and flicks on the light.*

TIA

Oh my God, Jayden!

*She goes to her.*

How long have you been here?

JAYDEN

...Since last night.

TIA

Jay...

JAYDEN

I couldn't go home.

TIA

(turning off the music) What happened?

JAYDEN

...

TIA

(looks around) Did you—?

JAYDEN

...

TIA

You did, didn't you.

JAYDEN

So stupid.

TIA

Oh, Honey.

JAYDEN

I got really invigorated. Really alive. And then—he just walked out.

TIA

...

JAYDEN

I feel like I'm grasping at straws, Tia.

*Tia looks at her.*

Why can't I do this?

TIA

You can. You just/

JAYDEN

/I am such a failure.

TIA

You are not.

JAYDEN

I am. I'm failing.

TIA

You teach, and/

JAYDEN

/No, I mean. At everything else.

TIA

What are you talking about?

JAYDEN

Everything was going along so well. I must've messed it up. I don't know what happened.

TIA

Max is just like this/

JAYDEN

/Feels like my soul is being ripped out through my teeth.

TIA

You're exaggerating.

JAYDEN

I'm not.

TIA  
You'll get past this, Jay.

JAYDEN  
I won't. I can't.

TIA  
What do you mean you can't?

JAYDEN  
This is just like before.

TIA  
Before?

JAYDEN  
When I lost the baby.

TIA  
(going to Jayden) What? When were you even pregnant?

JAYDEN  
Two months before I came here.

TIA  
Why didn't you tell me?

JAYDEN  
We lost it before we had time to announce it.

TIA  
...

JAYDEN  
One day I was happy and enjoying a healthy pregnancy. The next day I miscarried.

*Beat.*

I didn't mean to.

TIA  
Of course not.

JAYDEN  
I couldn't help it. I must've done something wrong.

*Tia rubs Jayden's back.*

JAYDEN

I keep going over it in my head, and I can't think of anything, but maybe—what if it was the lifting? Something I ate? The wine I had before I knew?

TIA

It's not your fault.

JAYDEN

Feels like it is.

TIA

...

JAYDEN

That same night, I dreamed of the painting. Felt like I had been given a task. So I came here, tried to start over—and it doesn't make any damn difference. I'm still right back where I started.

*Pause.*

So you see, I am a failure. As a wife, a mother, a lover, all of the above. I'm just not good at being a woman.

*Beat.*

TIA

Go to my apartment.

JAYDEN

What?

TIA

(grabbing her key off her key ring) Here, take my key. Wash up. Get some rest.

JAYDEN

I don't want to/impose—

TIA

/I insist.

*Jayden takes the key, gets dressed in her white clothes, and exits.*



### ACT III

9, around 3pm (a week later)

*Tia and Jayden in the studio.*

*Tia is working on her sculpture.*

*Jayden is trying to mix her red, to no avail.*

*Her canvas is still blank.*

TIA

So—I was gonna go to the laundromat tonight. You wanna come?

JAYDEN

Sure. I only have three outfits with me, so.

TIA

Then we can stream episodes of Downton Abbey 'til we fall asleep.

JAYDEN

Sounds divine.

*Jori hovers in the doorway.*

JORI

(trying to make a joke) Is this where the magic happens?

JAYDEN

Jori!

TIA

Hey, Jori.

JORI

Hey guys.

TIA

(gently) You look like hell.

JORI

Yeah well. I'm not sleeping.

*Beat.*

Can I come in?

TIA

(looks to Jay) Of course.

JORI  
You mind if we talk, alone?

TIA  
(again) Not at all.

*Tia exits.*

JORI  
What's going on, Jay?

*Beat.*

You haven't been home in days—I haven't seen you at work—(*pulls out his phone*)  
You just send me this: "I'll be at Tia's"—?

JAYDEN  
Sorry, I meant to call.

JORI  
But—?

JAYDEN  
But I didn't know what to say.

JORI  
Well that makes two of us.

*Silence.*

Are you leaving me?

JAYDEN  
I don't know what I'm doing.

JORI  
Well, can you think about it—at home?

JAYDEN  
I don't think I can.

JORI  
I don't understand any of this.

*Long pause.*

JAYDEN

Do you remember senior year, the philosophy department Christmas party?

JORI

Remind me?

JAYDEN

Professors Elam and Venn hosted. She was so gracious, and he kept setting out these huge plates of hors d'oeuvres. They had those massive oak built-in bookcases filled with leather-bound philosophy texts. Fresh poinsettias everywhere—a gigantic wreath on their door. Those white columns outside. Their son Blake showed us his ski medals. Their daughter Helen played piano for us. We looked around and said, this is it. This is the ideal. We made our plan right then and there.

JORI

I don't remember it that way.

JAYDEN

And it looked just like theirs. We were going to have a house like theirs, kids like theirs, and tenure for both of us. That was the plan.

JORI

I thought we decided that independently of/

JAYDEN

/We decided we wanted all the same things. The same night.

JORI

Well—that's still the plan. We're still working toward that.

JAYDEN

I don't think so.

JORI

I mean, we've hit a bump/in the road—

JAYDEN

/A bump!? I—

JORI

A setback, but I'm still game/

JAYDEN

/I can't do this.

JORI  
Do what?

JAYDEN  
I don't want that anymore.

JORI  
You don't want that, or you don't want me?

JAYDEN  
I don't want that, and I know that you still do, and it's not fair to you/to—

JORI  
/You're not thinking about what's fair to me! You're ripping away everything I've built my life on!

JAYDEN  
Your life isn't built on/me.

JORI  
/You wanna change how the house looks, fine. The number of kids, okay. But you're saying no to me.

JAYDEN  
...I've seen other things now. Met other people/

JORI  
/Right/

JAYDEN  
/and I'm not convinced anymore. That that's what I/

JORI  
/So you're with him now. Is that it?

JAYDEN  
No.

JORI  
Are you and your artist "collaborating"?

JAYDEN  
No, I don't get to have that either. Apparently.

JORI  
But you would if you could.

JAYDEN  
Yes.

*Pause.*

JAYDEN  
He's—not around. And I miss him. I'm sorry.

JORI  
Don't you miss me?

*Pause.*

Hello?

JAYDEN  
I don't. Not like I thought I would.

JORI  
Does that mean—you've been with him?

JAYDEN  
...Yes.

*Pause.*

JORI  
Forget it.

JAYDEN  
...

JORI  
I could live with any change of plans, Jay. But your being/unfaithful—

JAYDEN  
/I didn't mean for it to/go that far—

JORI  
/I think we should get a divorce.

JAYDEN  
You/what?

JORI  
/Unless there's something else you can tell me that will salvage this?

JAYDEN  
...I can't.

*Beat.*

JORI  
I'll look up—how to do it. I guess we'll get lawyers.

JAYDEN  
I guess.

JORI  
If you want this that badly, you can have it. It's yours.

*Jori exits.*  
*Jayden sits with her head in her hands.*

10, around noon

*Tia is there alone, working on a new metal sculpture.  
After a while, she realizes that she needs a new disk for her angle grinder.  
She sticks her wallet in her back pocket and is about to leave, when—  
Jayden comes in, looking the kind of tired that comes from too much sleep.*

TIA  
Hey.

JAYDEN  
Hey.

TIA  
You feel any better?

JAYDEN  
Not really.

TIA  
I didn't think you'd come in today.

JAYDEN  
Can't sleep forever.

TIA  
Well, I was just gonna run to the hardware store. I need a new disk for my angle grinder. But I'll stay.

JAYDEN  
Go. It's fine.

TIA  
You sure?

JAYDEN  
Yes. I'm fine.

TIA  
Okay. I'll be right back.

*Tia exits.*

*Jayden looks around, listless.*

*Gail enters.*

JAYDEN

...

GAIL

You're divorcin' Jori?

'JAYDEN

We're divorcing each other/

GAIL

/Just stop.

*Pause.*

You didn't call. I had to hear it from him that you've become some sort of—  
vagabond.

JAYDEN

I'm fine.

GAIL

You' don't just do this kind of thing on a whim.

JAYDEN

This isn't a whim/

GAIL

/You stick to it. You go the extra mile.

JAYDEN

This isn't about fixing something that's broken.

GAIL

Have you all even found yourselves a counselor?

JAYDEN

No.

GAIL

What you're doin' is selfish.

JAYDEN

Give me a/break—

GAIL

/You're actin' in your own self-interest at the expense o' someone who loves you.  
What would you call it?



JAYDEN  
You don't really care/what I'd call it—

GAIL  
/I didn't raise my daughter to just do whatever the hell she wants anytime she wants to!

JAYDEN  
Why not? Some people do.

GAIL  
Within reason, Jay. Within reason.

JAYDEN  
Meaning, within what you want. What someone else wants. I'm always thinking about what other people want.

GAIL  
Don't do this to him.

JAYDEN  
I'm not doing anything to him. I'm getting clear!

GAIL  
That's just—a noble excuse.

*Pause.*

Is there someone else?

JAYDEN  
No. Yes. There was.

GAIL  
And—?

JAYDEN  
And now there's not.

GAIL  
This isn't like you. You've never gone against—you've been with Jori nine years. Married for six of them. Six years! Of your young life.

JAYDEN  
Of my YOUNG life.

GAIL

Don't give me that. You're responsible for your own actions, Jay.

JAYDEN

Yes, I am! And when have you ever treated me that way? Never! You never leave anything up to me! Where we eat lunch, the place where I put my coat, how much tip I leave! The way I understand things, how much I'm allowed to speak! It's all up to you, it was always up to you! The whole goddamn time/

GAIL

/You WATCH your language/

JAYDEN

/It was for you. All of it. What I did, was for you. What you did, was for you. It was all for you! Every minute of it. And then I had one breath of freedom in college, and it scared the hell out of me, so as soon as I could, I gripped onto someone, held on for dear life, hoping that he would give me something to make my life about, the way you had. Someone else to worry about, so I wouldn't have to listen to everything inside me that is so fucking chaotic/

GAIL

/Hey now/

JAYDEN

/I could just play along. Do what you wanted. I've never claimed anything of my own. Except this. Space with Tia. Of course you can't just let me have what I want.

GAIL

You've had everything. Every opportunity handed to you.

JAYDEN

You can't listen.

GAIL

I've given you everything.

JAYDEN

You've got nothing new to show me.

GAIL

Maybe I spoiled you. You've had everything, and now you want more.

JAYDEN

You wanted someone to prop you up. I did. I'm done. I'm tired of it. And I can't prop Jori up anymore either.

GAIL

You stood before God and everybody, and you took a vow.

JAYDEN

I was young! We were young.

GAIL

The commitment you made when you married is that you are a unit/

JAYDEN

/So I should think all his thoughts? Have all his preferences? His wishes and needs?

*Pause.*

GAIL

I'm disappointed in you.

JAYDEN

You're—look. I don't know what else to tell you.

GAIL

So you're an artist now? Is that it?

JAYDEN

I don't know what I am. But I'm not you. And I'm not Jori. And I—can't say it any more clearly than that.

GAIL

Yeah well, you don't have to.

*Gail starts to exit.*

You've made your bed. Now lie in it.

JAYDEN

...

GAIL

You've got a good man. And you don't just—give up—a good man, because you feel like it. They don't exactly make them by the dozens.

*Gail storms out.*

*Jayden returns to her paints.*

*Then it hits her: She is all alone.*

*There is a prolonged silence. Jayden sits.*

*Tia comes back in, carrying a small shopping bag.*

TIA  
Are you alright?

JAYDEN  
I think I have all the answers. That I'm sooooo smart.

TIA  
...Jay?

JAYDEN  
I've alienated two of the most important people in my life—and for what?

TIA  
What are you/—?

JAYDEN  
/Jori comes here, and I'm breaking his heart. Mom comes, and I'm disappointing her. But Max—the one I want, the one I'm saying yes to—is nowhere to be found.

TIA  
I actually hope you don't see him again/

JAYDEN  
/Don't say that.—He needs to come pick up his stuff/

TIA  
/Jay/

JAYDEN  
/He HAD BETTER help me with my painting. HE OWES ME.

TIA  
Easy now/

JAYDEN  
/And he took some things of mine.

TIA  
Did he take them, or did you give them to him?

JAYDEN  
I don't remember. I'm pretty sure he took them.

*Pause.*

JAYDEN

It's not like I commandeered HIS SHIT and need it for a project I'm doing.

*Jayden scoops up the crate of Max's art supplies and exits.  
A moment later, she comes right back in.*

Door's locked.

TIA

...

JAYDEN

Fucker.

TIA

Jay/

JAYDEN

/How'm I supposed to make anything without him?

TIA

You'll find a way.

JAYDEN

I have nothing else to go on.

*Jayden goes and gets her cell phone out of her purse.*

TIA

Don't.

JAYDEN

I have to.

TIA

You have to stop.

JAYDEN

His stuff's still here.

*Tia tries to grab the phone out of Jayden's hands.  
Jayden yanks it away.*

JAYDEN

Hey!

TIA  
I can't let you—

*Jayden dials Max.*

JAYDEN  
(to Tia) Voicemail. (into the phone) Hi, Max. How's it going?

*Tia snags the phone.*

...I miss you!

*Tia hangs up.*

Ugh!

TIA  
(pocketing her phone) I'm keeping this for the moment.

JAYDEN  
All this fucking silence! I can't stand it, Tia. It's like none of it ever happened. He doesn't contact me. He doesn't say a word. I try to get him to speak to me.— But nothing.—It's like speaking into space. The sound waves can't travel here at all. There's no air here.—I can't breathe.—There's no way for me to get through.—Or maybe he gets my messages, sits there turning them over in his hands deciding not to—get back to me.—Maybe he laughs and deletes them without a second thought. Probably that. Like I'm not even real, not even here, not even speaking, not even in this body going aaaaaaaarrggghhhhhhhhhhh!!

*She collapses to the floor.*

TIA  
Get up.

JAYDEN  
I can't.

TIA  
Oh yes you can.

JAYDEN  
I want my stuff back.

TIA  
Do without it.

JAYDEN  
I can't.

TIA  
Why not?

JAYDEN  
He has my brushes.

TIA  
He doesn't have all your brushes.

JAYDEN  
He has the nice ones. The Italian horse hair.

TIA  
You don't need those to do a painting.

JAYDEN  
They're my best ones.

TIA  
Still.

JAYDEN  
I can't start anything without those supplies.

TIA  
Just/

JAYDEN  
/I've got his shit here. I want my stuff back.

TIA  
Yeah, probly. But/

JAYDEN  
/I feel so—lost.

TIA  
You're not—look—maybe he did you a favor.

JAYDEN  
Sure.

TIA  
No really.

*She goes and gets the crate of art supplies.*

TIA

Some of this stuff is pretty cool. Maybe you could use it?

JAYDEN

I don't wanna touch it.

TIA

But check it out.

*She opens Strange Ritual to the Concrete Monkey image.*

TIA

Inspiration?

JAYDEN

I'm fresh out at the moment.

TIA

Oh, come on. You can paint your image.

JAYDEN

Not without him.

TIA

Yes. Especially without him.

JAYDEN

Exactly when I needed his support the most, he disappeared on me. Now I don't have him, or Jori, or my Mom/

TIA

/Why do you make it about them?

JAYDEN

What?

TIA

You think I get anything, any support or whatever, from the guys I date? More like, they've never heard of art, or never thought about it, or think it's weird that I do it but are willing to put up with it 'cause they think I'm a good kisser or something—or, worse, they're artists, and it's ALWAYS about their art. They're all like, "My project this, and my project that, and come to my studio to see my work because my work is kind of a big deal and your work is kind of cute and all but it's not really—I mean it's art, but it's not really my cup of tea, but it's cool,



TIA (cont.)

the way you can dig an artist's lifestyle, the way I need to follow the impulse wherever it takes me, you get it I guess so that's cool and, you know, what are you doing later?" Not a single question about my work. After HOURS of painstaking, endless head-nodding listening to every single detail about their work.

JAYDEN

I just thought that/

TIA

/Or my parents? They're all, "She's doing art for now", and "When are you going to get a real job?" They don't know what I'm trying to do with my art, or why. They don't know any of the references I make to any sculptors or painters or any artist we studied in school, but they don't really care about things like that anyway, so it's "What's for dinner?" and "Who won the game?" and "What IS going on with the weather?" I don't even try to talk about it anymore, 'cause then I just get these blank stares. Which just goes to show that they don't get it. If I needed their approval, or encouragement, I'd never get anything done. I'd just sit here pining, or worse, I'd bring them in here for group pining, or we'd go out to brunch—

*Pause. This stings.*

I'm sorry, but I'm sick of this. You rented this space, right? One assumes you wanted to make art in it? Or is that crazy. I've had a million studio mates with these big art projects, but none of them were my friends. So I thought, yeah, my college roommate, floating head extraordinaire, wants to make art, sure, why not, give it a try. But you keep hoping somebody's going to come along and help you do it. And it just doesn't work that way.

You have to make it, Jay. It has to come from you.

*Tia has prepared a palette of paints and two paintbrushes.  
She playfully paints a mark on the shoulder of Jayden's shirt.*

JAYDEN

What are you/

TIA

/Come on!/

JAYDEN

/Get off me!/

TIA  
/Let's see—

*Tia paints another mark on Jayden's shirt.*

JAYDEN  
Oh!

*Jayden grabs a paintbrush and makes a mark on Tia's shirt.  
They laugh.*

TIA  
How about a little of the—purple—

*She marks it on Jayden.*

JAYDEN  
Ah! Alright. Take that!

*Jayden paints on Tia.  
Tia paints on Jayden.  
Spontaneous, playful, fun.  
Back and forth with color and laughter.  
The actresses are welcome to adlib here.*

*Pause.*

*Jayden paints on herself.*

TIA  
Yeah!

*Again and again. So many colors.*

More!

*Jayden paints on herself.  
Laughter mixed with crying.  
Tia regards Jayden.*

You've made it about them. Now make it about you.

11, around 8pm (Winter)

*Jayden has placed the artwork that she created with Max off to the side, along with his crate of art supplies and the camel figurine.*

*The sound of keys in the door.*

*Both Tia and Jayden enter together.*

*Jayden is carrying the brochure from Max's installation opening.*

JAYDEN

Unbelievable.

TIA

Yep.

JAYDEN

He acknowledged me.

TIA

Plain as day.

JAYDEN

(reading) "Thanks to Jade for her contribution to this installation. She made it participatory."

TIA

I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it myself.

JAYDEN

Me neither.

TIA

I think it was good you didn't talk to him.

JAYDEN

Yeah no. I couldn't. He looked busy anyhow.

TIA

Hob-nobbing.

JAYDEN

Uh huh.

TIA

Figures.

*Beat.*

TIA

You know, I've seen that collection about a million times. This time—it was—different. More engaging.

JAYDEN

Yeah well.

*Pause.*

He should come pick up his stuff though.

TIA

Yeah.

JAYDEN

It's rude just to assume—

TIA

Totally.

JAYDEN

Artists.

TIA

I guess.

*Gail appears in the doorway.*

JAYDEN

Mom, I'm not really in the mood/to—

GAIL

/A minute is all I ask. Please.

JAYDEN

You're just going to give me crap about the divorce.

GAIL

I won't. I promise.

*Jayden makes a gesture.*

*Gail enters the room.*

*Beat.*

GAIL  
I brought you something.

JAYDEN  
Yeah?

*Gail pulls a booklet out of her purse.*

GAIL  
I saw this at work on Monday. It's a book of studio apartments for rent in Richmond. I thought you could use it.

JAYDEN  
You're not going to try to find me the perfect place?

GAIL  
You're a grown woman. I figure you can do that.

JAYDEN  
...Thanks.

GAIL  
There's more.

*Jayden pulls out a few old photos from the inside of the brochure.*

JAYDEN  
Who's this?

GAIL  
That's your father.

JAYDEN  
What?

GAIL  
Surprise!?

JAYDEN  
You said we didn't have any photos of him.

GAIL  
I thought if I showed you, you'd disappear into the wild blue yonder. Like he did.

JAYDEN  
Mom, they're—

*Pause.*  
*Jayden flips through pictures.*

JAYDEN  
Is this you?

GAIL  
About a million years ago.

JAYDEN  
They're great shots.

GAIL  
He was a photographer.

JAYDEN  
Really?

GAIL  
Well, mostly amateur stuff. You know. Lamp posts at odd angles. But it seems that the perfect opportunity came along—to photograph lions in the Serengeti of all things—right as—I was telling him I was pregnant.

JAYDEN  
You never told me.

GAIL  
You had a sense.

JAYDEN  
...

GAIL  
You've chosen something haphazard, and erratic—and it scares the living daylights outta me. But it is in your blood. And I (trying on a 'cool' phrase) "get that".

JAYDEN  
Thank you. For this.

GAIL  
Of course. Seemed—time.

*Jayden hugs Gail.*  
*Gail starts to tear up, hides it.*

Well, I'll leave you girls to it.

*Gail starts to exit.*

**GAIL**

You know—becomin' a mother is the best thing I ever did. The best thing.

*A moment.*

*Gail exits.*

12, around 2am (Spring)

*Jori comes by holding a manila envelope.  
He hovers outside the door for a bit, looking in.  
He tries the door, but it's locked. He exits.*

*Tia enters and unlocks the studio door.  
She gets out a new sculpture and works on it.  
Jayden enters and starts working to mix her red.*

TIA  
This is for your new place.

JAYDEN  
Really?

TIA  
If you want it.

JAYDEN  
I'd love it!

TIA  
It could go up in that corner. Beside your futon.

JAYDEN  
Totally.—Thanks for helping me move.

TIA  
No problem.

*They work in silence.*

*Jori reenters carrying the manila envelope.*

*They are stunned that he has come at this hour.*

JORI  
I figured we should get this over with.

JAYDEN  
It's almost 2am!

*He hands her the envelope.*

JORI  
You can look at them. But it matches everything we did in our meetings.



*She takes the papers out of the envelope.  
A new pen drawing of Jori's is there on top.*

JAYDEN  
(looking at him) You did a pen drawing? (then at it) It's beautiful.

JORI  
Yeah well.

*Beat.*

(pointing to the divorce papers) You just need to sign here.

*He hands her a pen.*

JAYDEN  
How've you been?

JORI  
Isn't it obvious?

*Beat.*

Signed a lease on that Windsor Farms place.

JAYDEN  
Good for you.

JORI  
Yeah. Grand.

*Pause.*

Could you—?

JAYDEN  
Sure.

*She hesitates.*

Did you want to talk, or anything?

JORI  
It's already a done deal, so.

JAYDEN  
Okay...

*Jayden signs the divorce papers, goes to put everything back in the envelope.*

JORI  
You can keep that one. If you want.

*She keeps the pen drawing out for herself, hands him the divorce papers and envelope.*

*He puts the divorce papers back in the envelope.*

Thanks. I'll have my lawyer send you a copy.

JAYDEN  
...K.

*Beat.*

JORI  
Take care, Jay.

JAYDEN  
Jori? Thank you. For being so kind about this.

JORI  
Yeah well. I love you.

*A moment between Jori and Jayden.  
It is quite tender and loving.  
Max appears in the doorway.  
The men see each other.  
Jori heads for the door.  
Max moves out of Jori's way, letting him exit.*

MAX  
Hey T, you got any shattered bisque I could use?

TIA  
Now's not a good time, Max.

MAX  
Come on, just a piece or two. Then I'll be out of your hair.

*Tia looks to Jayden, who nods.  
Max comes into the room.*

*He goes and sifts through a pile of pottery shards on the floor of Tia's side.*

MAX  
I just need some random/shards

TIA  
/Uh huh/

MAX  
/But I haven't worked in ceramics in ages, so you/know—

TIA  
/Well, that's all pieces that never were. Might as well use them.

MAX  
Right?

*Long pause while Max sifts.*

How've you guys been?

TIA  
Fine.

MAX  
Didn't see you at the opening.

TIA  
We were there.

MAX  
Oh.

*Pause.*

What'd you think?

*Silence.*  
*Max grabs a couple of random pieces.*

Oh, sweet. That's what I was looking for.

*Max stands, hovers.*

Well.

JAYDEN  
Well?

MAX  
I was wondering—if I could hang out here again. Just stop in and stuff.

JAYDEN  
Now that your installation is up?

MAX  
...I deserved that.

JAYDEN  
Yeah.

MAX  
I was just hoping you guys would let me.

JAYDEN  
I don't think that's a good idea.

TIA  
Yeah no.

MAX  
Don't look at me that way.

JAYDEN  
You haven't called. Or anything for months.

MAX  
But you gotta admit—things got pretty intense.

JAYDEN  
I thought artists liked intensity.

MAX  
You got everything—sorted out?

JAYDEN  
You mean with Jori?

MAX  
Yeah.

JAYDEN  
That's none of your business.

MAX  
And your painting?

JAYDEN  
Still a work in progress.

MAX  
You want—any more help?

JAYDEN  
No.

MAX  
I could show you—technique.

JAYDEN  
What do you want, Max?

MAX  
Nothing. I just—miss hanging out here.

JAYDEN  
Well you should have thought of that.

*Beat.*

MAX  
On second thought, I'm pretty tired.

JAYDEN  
Yeah.

MAX  
I think I'll head out.

JAYDEN  
You do that.

MAX  
Okay.

*Max starts to head out.*

JAYDEN  
You want your stuff?

MAX  
No, keep it.

*Pause.*

You want yours?

JAYDEN  
Not at this point.

MAX  
Cool. It's all mixed in with my stuff anyhow.

JAYDEN  
...Yeah.

MAX  
Okay, well. We'll just chalk it up to—a good time we had.

*He exits, carrying his pieces of shattered bisque.*

TIA  
Yay! That's good, right?

JAYDEN  
Actually I feel—really hollow.

TIA  
...

JAYDEN  
Like there's nothing on the inside.

TIA  
Do you need to/sit down?

JAYDEN  
/I have no idea what comes next, Tia.

TIA  
That's usually the part where it gets juicy.

JAYDEN  
But I am so—empty-handed.

TIA  
That's the perfect time.

JAYDEN  
For what?...

TIA  
To start your painting.

JAYDEN  
But I don't have the red.

TIA  
Jay. Begin.

*Tia kisses her hair, exits. Jayden closes the studio door behind her.*

Interlude #3—2am Lovely

*The lights change.  
Music plays throughout.  
Slowly, slowly, Jayden begins mixing the red in her mind's eye.  
She considers her canvas.  
She mixes her paints.  
She holds some way of applying paint<sup>27</sup> solidly.  
She paints standing upright.  
Not too tight, not too loose.  
She paints the red in the upper right hand corner of the canvas.  
Not in the technique she used with Max, and not in the way before him, when  
she produced nothing at all, but in a style all her own.  
She paints the red of her imagination.  
She paints with her whole body and mind.  
She paints thick red strokes, bursting with feeling.  
It isn't perfect, but it's right.  
The lights change back as:  
She paints the canvas.  
After a while, she steps back, and is pierced by the painting.  
Straight to the heart.*

JAYDEN  
At last.

*End Play.*

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<sup>27</sup> She is not using a paintbrush here. She can use her hands, a palette knife, or any other method besides a paintbrush to apply paint to the canvas here. It needs to be a fully embodied process; simply holding a paintbrush between her fingers is not enough here.

## APPENDIX

Working with the director, cast, and crew for the full production of my play *2am Lovely* has been a thoroughly rewarding experience. My director, Heidi Handelsman, is clearly very versed in her field and has had great insights not only into the text but also for bringing the text to life through staging. She has a great sense of humor and has brought a sense of playfulness to the casting and rehearsal process, including activities with actors, such as compiling and dancing to playlists that the characters would choose. Her humor has also led to the creation of a light-hearted soundtrack for the show and an interpretation of many lines that is lighter than I first intended. This has been especially helpful when balancing levity with some of the heavier moments in the script.

Casting with Heidi was a seamless process, in that we had similar insights regarding the actors we saw audition. For example, we could see when someone looked the part but did not embody the role, or had an unconventional look but physicalized the character, and we both opted for strong physical choices over mere aesthetics. Fortunately, we got all four of the undergraduate actors we selected as a first-choice cast. Then, the process of casting the mother role from the community also went smoothly.

The five-week rehearsal process for this show has been luxurious, allowing time for me to make appropriate revisions discovered with the cast and for Heidi and the actors to make strong staging choices. Given that this is a very physical show, it has been vital that everyone in the process, including the stage managers and crew, has been attuned to how to make the physical space come alive. They have done a great job.

At the same time, I have found the revision process for this play, from December through March, to be very challenging. The overall thrust of the feedback I have



received has been to make the play more specific—i.e., rich in realistic details. As I noted above, realistic detail is not my strong suit; my focus is not there in early drafts. Sometimes, as in the case of nailing down the month/season when specific scenes take place, adding realistic detail actually convolutes the intentionally vague, poetic nature of the script. However, in most cases, adding naturalistic details to back story, providing concrete examples, and giving my protagonist something specific and sensual to pursue have enriched the script. On the whole, I can clearly see how the revisions have made this a stronger play, grounding as they do listeners (and readers) who are more attuned to detail and giving actors more specific information to play.

One of the most helpful activities during the revision process was outlining the story with Heidi, using index cards. Through that process, I discovered that the divorce, rather than Jayden's deciding not to have children, gave structure to the play. Therefore, Jayden's living arrangements—moving from her shared home with Jori, to Tia's apartment, to her own studio apartment—formed the backbone to the story. Further, Gail's role changed in the process from approving Jayden's decision not to have children to accepting Jayden's independent will to get divorced and live on her own. Through this process and these revisions, the script became simpler and more elegant.

All the same, I do prefer the method of collaboration prevalent in ensemble theatres to that in mainstream theatre. While I welcomed the opportunity to make changes to the script, I found that silence was expected of me during rehearsals and production meetings, or that I was expected to filter all of my comments through the director. In the mainstream model, the playwright's role is only to write the script. Therefore, I was chastised for making comments on acting, costume, prop, sound,

lighting, or staging choices. Given my exposure to the ensemble model, in which everyone's input is sought out on all aspects of production, this method seems to limit each theatre maker to his/her specific field, assuming that to give feedback across fields is tantamount to questioning someone's competence. On the contrary, in my experience, inter-disciplinary collaboration can actually make a more holistic product.

There were a couple of times during the rehearsal process when I worried that the show might not go on. The first came when Grey Blanco, the actor playing Jori, got punched in the jaw and had to go to the emergency room. If his jaw had had to be wired shut to heal, we would have had to recast the role. Since Grey was doing such great work, I was pleased to learn that his jaw would heal on its own. He was back in rehearsal within about three days. The second came when Shann Walker, our Stage Manager, had her computer stolen during rehearsal one night. She was so upset that I worried that, if she could not retrieve it, she might be in no state to focus on the show. Fortunately, she got it back two days later, and her focus returned full force to the show.

As far as the performances went, opening and closing night were extraordinary. It felt like my birthday times ten, with large audiences and positive feedback received for both. The matinee performance had a somewhat lower turnout and overall energy, but it still garnered some positive reviews and seemed to land with audiences who had not yet seen the production. I am pleased to have seen all three performances, and I am very happy with the work the cast, crew, and director put into it. I feel that my work has been honored through this process, and I look forward to submitting *2am Lovely* for production in other venues. This, as its initial production process, has been extremely gratifying.