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The New Shakespearean Stage: Minimalist Theatre and Spectacle Through Text

Andrew R. Morrison

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THE NEW SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE
Minimalist Theatre and Spectacle Through Text

by

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B.A. Theatre, University of New Mexico, 2013

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I will explore my development as a playwright during my time at UNM, and the emphasis I have placed on experimental productions with minimal budget. This culminates in a style of playwriting in which spectacle is created through text, which I name the New Shakespearean Stage, employed in my plays The Break and Welcome to Retroland.
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See attached copies of *The Break* and *Welcome to Retroland*
INTRODUCTION: ORIGIN STORY; OR HOW DID THIS EVEN HAPPEN?

In elementary school, our class had weekly story competitions. You’d write the pieces in class and illustrate them, making little books. The winner got to go read their story to the principal on Fridays. I didn’t win a lot of things, and my parents will happily tell you I wasn’t setting the world on fire in athletics. I was also well behaved, so writing was the only thing that earned me frequent trips to the principal’s office. The only story I remember was one about a snowboarder who lived with his grandmother. They’d been snowed in on the mountain, and she needed something or other to survive, so he had to brave the dangerous board trail down the mountain. The protagonist had hair like a Dragonball Z character--my favorite show at the time--massive, spiked, and blonde, and he wore awesome baggy cargo pants. I can’t remember the ending, but as the well behaved kid I was, I’m sure all worked out in the end for Grandma.

Looking back, I didn’t write the story for the narrative. The plot was merely a frame for a bunch of things I thought were cool. I’d never been snowboarding, and turning into a muscular anime character with huge hair and big eyes seemed equally unlikely, so the solutions were daydreams. Daydreams, however, are internal and private narratives, so writing was the only way to share internal thoughts with others. Writing the cool things down didn’t do much, either. They needed something to do, and so a story became the task. The common saying of “kill your darlings” didn’t apply to me back then, because of a valuable lesson from the writings and daydreams of children: the darlings are the only reason there’s a story. They don’t justify, they don’t apologize or cut. The snowboarder had unrealistically giant hair because I thought a cartoon show was awesome. Dramaturgically, at that age, that was enough justification. Even now, having
learned discipline in the medium, I try to remember that joy I felt at using writing as an excuse to get other people engaged in things I thought were cool. Narrative, sometimes, is just there to give motion to darlings.

Before high school, my only interactions with theatre were the class musicals in elementary school, which I hated, and touring productions of musicals in Popejoy Theater. I remember liking a lot of them, especially *Jekyll and Hyde* because it was so dark, but I never had that theatre-kid moment of knowing I wanted to eventually make theatre. I was still writing stories in classes, namely one called *Kevin Carter*, a sequel to *Harry Potter*, and *The Rise of Monochichu*, about a guy with *Dragonball Z* hair and cargo pants with a transforming sword, fighting many monsters en route to an evil deity named Monochicu, whose name I made up and have been mocked by my father for fifteen years. Theatre, however, remained absent except when my parents took me to Popejoy, or a teacher made me dress up like an ant and sing poorly rewritten covers of dated rock songs with other miserable children. Instead, my interest in narrative, and my understanding of story, came mainly from movies and videogames.

My parents and I have always been fairly movie-obsessed. We each have too many DVD’s, and when one by one entertainment stores shut down, we felt like there was a death in the family. Growing up, my parents employed a bit of a system. For every pop-culture, action driven, exciting film, we would also watch one intellectual, artistic, or classic film. Looking back, this explains a contradiction I’ve always felt in my writing. Watching the more “grown-up” movies, I developed an appreciation of art, of subtext, nuance, atmosphere, and stories that didn’t rely on thrills. At the same time, I would patiently watch while knowing I could soon re-watch *Terminator 2* or play *Legend of*
Zelda on my Nintendo. Ingesting this broader diet of film and media emphasized for me the importance of experimentation with form in combination with the joy of escapism and genre, which is at the heart of my plays.

In my sixth grade English class, I played Laertes in the climactic fight scene in *Hamlet*. This, to my knowledge, was my first encounter with acting. I was very excited about dying onstage. During the performance, the kid playing Hamlet, Chuck Stump (his real name) promptly forgot all of his lines after my death, and I fed them to him from the ground. I was scared of performing, but the group effort of it stuck with me after we were done. So, two years later, I took theatre as an elective on a whim. That semester I played Prince Charming and wrote my first ten minute play, about two kids who skateboard and audition for movies—things I thought were cool at the time.

Plenty of people ask kids what they want to be when they grow up, but people rarely ask what they’re already doing, or what they keep returning to, consciously or not. I took theatre every semester of high school, but only because I ultimately wanted to act in movies. Theatre was the thing I could do at the moment, the thing that was available. I only auditioned for one film in high school, and someone had given me the wrong info, so I showed up for the role of a thirteen year old when I was seventeen. I didn’t get the role. By the end of high school I was depressed, with no idea of what to do next, and felt compelled to get out of Albuquerque. I’d signed up to be an engineering major at New Mexico State, since theatre didn’t seem like a logical thing to major in. Instead, I thought I should major in something career-producing and financially sound-minded, doing theatre on the side when I could. However, I missed the deadline for the dorms, forgot to submit some paperwork, and so instead ended up at UNM. My dad had signed me up as a
theatre major, because he said that’s what he assumed I would want to do. Freshman year, I applied for the film program at UNM, and got in, but then never bothered to join, as I’d taken Paul Ford’s acting class and gotten hooked. All of my hope for film began to feel more like daydreams than destinations. Film acting was something I’d looked forward to doing someday, but never actually did. Theatre gave me a profound feeling of immediacy and possibility, the way a few people and a space can create worlds out of some words, clothes, and furniture. I believe we’re trained to always be looking ahead, toward a goal, an objective. I always felt not quite ready, that I’d start the path to success tomorrow. The whole time, however, I’d been making theatre. When I stepped back and registered that, the goals shifted. I’d been so concerned with figuring out who I wanted to be, I hadn’t given any thought to who I already was.
UNDERGRAD: LEARNING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

I met Tricklock Company my sophomore year, when I was cast in one of their productions. Meeting the company was intimidating to me, and I lost six pounds over the rehearsal period, stressing about my bad posture and weak British accent. Over the course of rehearsals, I was introduced to the ensemble style of work generation. Shyness and hesitation were suddenly obstacles. Overthinking anything slowed the process, separated you from the group. Choreography was built from impulse and trust in your own body and the bodies around you. Sets were built with bodies locked in hard freezes. I’d never experienced that kind of work before, or the elegant simplicity in crafting a performance needing little more than the physical or vocal. The show was scripted, but I was immediately attracted to Tricklock Company for their sense of community, both in the methods they used to generate work, and also in the way they existed together as a kind of artistic family. Having discovered that immediacy theatre grants as I began college, I then became strongly attracted to the ensemble as a principle. I wanted to make work with people I trusted and felt empowered by, far more than I wanted to go out to audition for strangers.

After the show, I took Tricklock’s Ensemble Incubator class at UNM. The production I had acted in, while abstracted, was still a narrative driven play, whereas the Incubator Class did away with narrative or convention entirely. Instead, emphasis was placed on developing physical strength and flexibility, removing barriers between the mind and body, and discovering new ways to tell stories. Work was created in high pressure, devised bakeoffs. The leader would give a list of required ingredients to the groups, and then send them off for twenty minutes or so to create a piece. We quickly
learned not to ask for clarification, as the leaders would say, “ask questions, and you’ll get answers.” Invariably, if someone asked if they were allowed to do something, they would be told no. We were encouraged to cheat if we could get away with it, as that was what made pieces interesting. When time ran out, the piece, no matter how raw, was performed and given feedback. By the end of the semester, dozens of pieces had been made, and from that we carved out a showcase. I can’t emphasize enough how important this class was to my development. By the end of that semester, I had learned to never apologize for my work. I was no longer delaying giving scripts to readers out of fear of it being unfinished. To trust collaborators with work before we have polished it to perfection is what makes a communal medium like theatre so joyful, and what enables a work to be filled with the voices of all participants. Further, many times, the pieces that feel the worst, or least prepared, somehow result in grand moments.

One particular piece we developed in Ensemble Incubator felt particularly doomed. Some days, no matter what you try, ideas just don’t come. In the last few minutes, you scramble the few threads that have accumulated into something resembling a performance. As Tricklock taught me, the only way to fail in such work is to do nothing. We had nothing, but we knew we had to sing a song, make abstracted use of the performance space, and one of us had a metal, flip-top lighter. We set the chairs in erratic placement all over the stage. One of us carried the lighter in the darkness, walking between audience members. He reached the chalkboard, and drew a stick figure couple, then stood beside it. Then, wandering further, he found another performer waiting in a corner. The two went to the board, smiling, and added a child stick figure to the picture. Then, he wandered again, found the third performer, and the smile vanished. The third
performer took him to the board by the wrist, forced an eraser into the first performer’s hand, and began aggressively making the first performer erase the drawings, as the second performer hauntingly sang Happy Birthday. When finished, the third actor blew out the lighter.

We thought we were presenting garbage. Sometimes a piece just doesn’t work out, and you write it off and move on to the next one. Somehow, this ended up being one of the most successful pieces I was a part of that semester. The atmosphere was pervasive, the silence was aggressive, and the simple visuals of faces and chalk drawings in the glow of the lighter was simple and beautiful. The story was also left so open to interpretation that the audience seemed genuinely affected by the hollowness, and they had filled in the gaps of the story themselves. The semester made me appreciate the value of presenting works in progress, and of not being overly concerned with the judgement of spectators. If something is stalled, present it to others, accept feedback, and rework. Before Ensemble Incubator, I was convinced I needed to present myself in the best light, offer a thorough, literary, and elaborate piece to be studied. Much like the physical work was uncomfortable and self-conscious for me at first, the artistic presentation started as cautious and fearful, but soon sharing that incomplete place with others became a joyful, communal experience. I still tell students when I teach not to ask questions they don’t want answers to when giving assignments. If we become too anxious to satisfy requirements, or proving our worth or artistic validity, we reduce ourselves to using theatre to fill out rubrics.

Similarly, our showcase refined the pieces, but didn’t apologize for the raw, bare basic presentation. There was no budget, no extended rehearsal period. There was what
we had, and the time we had to make it in. Of course shows benefit from extended
development and polish, but working in this fashion also first introduced me to the glee
raw productions bring. There is a sense of homemade-ness about the affair, and the
performance feels much like an offering, without apology, to an audience.

Another showcase from undergrad remains one of my favorite evenings of theatre
I’ve experienced. I never got to take Paul Ford’s “Modern Styles” class, but its showcase
gave me the same deep satisfaction as an audience member that the “Ensemble
Incubator” performance had given me as an actor. The evening was chunks of absurdist
texts, performed by a class of actors I’d long looked up to, who were all nearing
graduation. Paul Ford had also taught my introductory acting classes as a freshman, and
was already an important mentor to me. The students in the class had largely been taught
by Paul since they had begun study at UNM, and the trust between them all was clear,
even to an outsider. The production of each piece was simple and basic. In their selection
from Out at Sea, by Slawomir Mrozek, the raft carrying the three men was one of the
simple, prop beds kept in the acting classrooms. Periodically, a stagehand would enter,
calmly cross the length of the stage, and splash water in the actors faces. Later, when the
butler drowned, he sipped water from a glass and gurgled. This was the first time I’d seen
a performance like this. Similar to the Incubator performance, the evening was kept bare
bones and simple, but with discipline, style, and creativity. Over the evening, the strength
of the performances elevated the showcase to a performance I would have gone to see
again. This realization that as an audience member such simplicity could be so infinitely
engaging through the strength of text, direction, and performances left me craving more
theatre that could pull off so much with so little. Entering Graduate School, this would
become a core principle in the performances I wanted to make, and the scripts I wanted to write. The performances were strengthened by the communal strength of the ensemble, and the comfort they felt with each other and the director. If performances could be so strengthened by such investment from every performer involved, this aspect of community could start at the level of the script, in using ensemble casts rather than lead characters.

The suggested career path of the theatre major often mirrors the Hero’s Journey:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell 30)

Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* and its Hero’s Journey outline a story structure present in narratives from ancient times, across cultures which never interacted. It coincides with Aristotle’s Unity of Character, as well, in that it follows one hero on a singular action. The structure of the Hero’s Journey is very useful in crafting scripts, as it essentially outlines stepping stones to give a satisfying dramatic arc to a narrative. Screenwriting is especially fond of the model. In class, we were introduced to the specificity of movie writing, and told that readers faced with hundreds of unsolicited screenplays will likely toss yours aside if the inciting incident hasn’t happened by page ten. The inciting incident, or Call to Adventure in Campbell’s model, is a moment at which by “the merest chance--reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (Campbell 51). Stories begin with the character in their ordinary world, going about their daily lives, at which point a larger world calls to them. The hero then proceeds on their adventure, through
trials and struggle, to reach a climactic confrontation. Succeeding in this, and given wisdom through the experience, they may then return home, enlightened, and ready to mentor the next young, naive hero. The pleasure in this narrative, I would argue, is not that it provides a rubric for a good story, but rather that it appears, intended or not.

Young theatre majors are frequently asked what they plan to do after their degree. The expected answer is to move to one of the cities with larger, more funded theatre environments, such as New York or Los Angeles. This, after all, satisfies the expected arc: a young artist with dreams of success moves off to hit it big in the city. The road will be hard, filled with setbacks, bad auditions, demeaning jobs, and self-doubt, but the sure of heart will hopefully find success and livelihood. I’m reminded of being a kid, daydreaming about starring in movies, or about the screenplays I would write one day. Most of those screenplay ideas have become stageplays, once I realized that I could make plays happen at any moment. The Break, my thesis play in this program, was originally a screenplay. Back then it was a male tennis player, the injury was near the beginning, as an inciting incident, and the story was largely in the alcohol fueled years before the comeback. A similar story, in the end, but focused completely on the character. He was also, in the name of full honesty, likely played by me in my head. Last semester, we were near the deadline of choosing the plays we would have produced in the Spring, and the only story I hadn’t written was the one about the tennis player making an unlikely comeback from a random assualt. Writing the play, Sadie-O made much more sense as a female character, and after cutting down a massive draft with too many characters, Sadie-O and Jen became the throughline. Now, Sadie-O seems to remain the lead character, or
at least the one we spend the entirety of our time with, but the story feels as much like Jen’s as it does Sadie-O’s.

This bias toward the singular perspective of the protagonist is the issue I find with relying too heavily on the Hero’s Journey or other plot-point driven narrative structures. By writing Sadie-O and Jen’s stories, one can still go through and pick out most steps of the journey, and each actually ends up going through a somewhat traditional arc. In the screenplay version, however, I had been so focused on the tennis player’s journey that no other character had the same importance. The world of the story was completely oriented to the lead character, which in a way made the other characters into objects, means to an end. How often do acting classes talk about objectives, or what they want from another character? This creates conflict and compelling drama, but only if the characters are full human beings first. In orienting the world to a lead during a journey, we make other characters mere vessels containing things we need, instead of people.

Theatre is a medium driven by the physical proximity of other people. At the time of performance, a room is full of people making something together. In an age where nearly everything can be downloaded or delivered by a drone, a medium dependent on interaction with living human beings in the same room should prioritize that liveness. If the liveness of community is our priority, we should then tell stories in the theatre that do not orient to the singular goals of an individual protagonist. If I had moved to Hollywood or New York City after high school or after undergrad, maybe I would have had some luck, or maybe I wouldn’t have. Either path would have given a satisfying Hero’s Journey and a moral at the end. I would not, however, have discovered the importance of collaboration, trust, and community in theatre. Instead, everything would be oriented
toward my own success, moving from one show to another, meeting people and wondering what they could do to advance my career.

Rebecca Solnit, in her book *Hope in the Dark*, outlines methods of perseverance for activists disheartened following Bush’s re-election (the book recently regained prominence, in similar disheartening times). In her introduction, she describes a shift in perspective: “My own research was, I realized by its end, a small part of an enormous project going on among many disciplines--psychology, economics, neurobiology, sociology, anthropology, political science--to redefine human nature as something more communal, cooperative, and compassionate” (Solnit xviii). This passage struck a chord with me. For the second time I was nearing the end of a degree from UNM, and the future again opened up to the choice between staying to continue working with trusted collaborators, or moving somewhere new. I am still ultimately open to both options, but this mentality prioritizing community reminded me that no matter where I end up, I should be prioritizing collaboration and community.

I think of the way people shrug at the strange injustices of the industries of theatre and film, the inequality due to race and gender, the strict plot structure expectations, and the strange paths one must take to be “noticed” in the industry. In “Why I’m Breaking Up With Aristotle,” Chantal Bilodeau describes the potential faults with Aristotelian structure. Like Campbell’s Hero’s Journey, Aristotelian structure operates on an arc of inciting incident and rising action to climax, and is widely employed in playwriting:

In contrast, what we need today is a conscious use of dramatic structure in service of societal change. The hierarchical pyramidal worldview is based on values that promote competition, control, and a sense of scarcity--there isn’t enough to go around. And since we have to fight for everything, there will always be winners and losers. The heterarchical worldview, on the other hand, promotes innovation, collaboration, and creativity. It works
with the assumption of abundance--there is enough. We just need to learn to look for it and distribute it more equitably. (Bilodeau)

I am not saying I will always, exclusively, make work in Albuquerque, any more than I am saying no one should move to New York or Los Angeles. All I am saying is that we should prioritize making the work we wish to make, with trusted collaborators, over pleasing standards of corporations that have no idea we exist. In a time when the national arts and funding are greatly threatened, the greatest form of resistance in artwork is strong connections with passionate people, who are capable of working without much money. As an artist about to be let loose from academia, I look forward to submitting scripts nationwide, and hope to someday get produced elsewhere. I even acknowledge that moving elsewhere might become appealing at a later time. However, I also think there is great value in emphasizing the communal shift Solnit described. If a change is to come, perhaps it needs to begin with avoiding stories that emphasize the importance of the individual experience. As Solnit said in that same introduction, “political change often follows culture, as what was long tolerated is seen to be intolerable, or what was overlooked becomes obvious” (Solnit xvi).
BARE BONES: SLOW DISSOLVE AND THE JOY OF SIMPLICITY

Slow Dissolve was my last true genre play. As a writer I still love making use of genre, horror movies, and science fiction on stage. It adds a sense of play, of not taking oneself too seriously. Using that technique, deeper themes can sneak in around the edges, leading to a thought provoking theatrical experience that simultaneously engages with the joyful, childish thrill of narrative. A prime example was Gregory Moss’s collaboration with Pig Iron, I Promised Myself to Live Faster. The show’s breakneck pace, constant location changes, and ridiculousness associated with old science fiction movies was countered with moments of a more heartfelt nature. Consider the Boy filming his starlets, in one of the most tranquil scenes of the play:

I take them and cut them up.
The bits of them I can remember.
I rearrange them.
So they look more like me.
So they resemble me.
They were so good, so beautiful, when I was little.
I just always wanted to be a part of them.
Now I am.
I am a Leading Lady. Watch me walk (Moss 337)

I love the way the play shifts into a somber tone, a more vulnerable voice emerging from where there was chaos and raunchy humor. Many of my early plays in graduate school, such as Helen of Troy Vs. Grendel, emphasized this heightened style. Even now, in my more recent plays such as Welcome to Retroland and The Break, I make use of genre, whether it be in myriad pieces of nostalgic entertainment, or trying to stage a sports movie. What became clear following Slow Dissolve, however, was that I had been using genre as a crutch. Sarcasm is a very safe voice to use, as you’re never quite saying anything too sincerely. It helped me feel like I was safe, that those moments where
the heart does poke out through the genre were never too obvious, because they were so surrounded by irony and archetype. *Slow Dissolve* was a play originally written as a bakeoff, meaning it had required ingredients and a forty-eight hour time limit to be written in, and then further developed to become my first staged reading in the program, which Paul Ford directed.

Paul has never liked having people sit behind music stands, and so he minimally blocked the whole show in rehearsals. Paul would go on to direct more readings of mine in grad school. It didn’t occur to me until recently, as I neared completion of the program, how his staging of these readings affected me. Even though there were scripts in hands, having the bodies on stage in motion and engaging with each other made the reading feel more like a production. Props were loosely pantomimed, but clarified by the descriptions from the stage directions. I was reminded again of those showcases I’d liked so much, in my early years at UNM: there was no sense of apology for not being something bigger. More traditional readings with actors stationed behind music stands, formalized by a half moon arc of chairs and water bottles, seem to apologize for their early state. Yes, the reading is for the sake of developing the script, but the way *Slow Dissolve* engaged with the text gave the audience something more like a finished production. Following this, their notes were the things that truly stuck out, successfully or not. For me, presenting plays in the immobile staged reading seems to plea to the audience to embrace their critical brain, to watch the show searching for as many fine tuning notes as possible. If audiences instead simply engage with the story, with the performance on its feet, their notes then seem to be less intellectual or stylistic, and instead more personal. *Slow Dissolve* would certainly benefit from weeks of rehearsal, not having scripts in hand, and
continued development. However, watching it, even in this early stage, prevented me and the audience from seeing it as an early draft of something that would someday be complete. Instead we watched a show, and gave our opinions accordingly. Much like my dreams of movie stardom in childhood, we’d prevented the show from being a far off dream, and instead made something that was alive and present in the moment, in need of fine tuning.

*Slow Dissolve* thus cemented tastes I had developed as a performer and audience member into techniques as a playwright. The strength of enthusiastic actors, a director, and a writer seemed to top anything that could be pulled off financially. Which is not to say performances don’t benefit from strong design and increased budget, it merely emphasized for me the power of simplicity. The reading not only affected my opinions on production, however, it also set in motion an important recognition of my use of text. *Slow Dissolve* features one of my favorite exchanges I’ve ever written. Beth is a young girl who tried to commit suicide. For recovery, she was sent to an experimental facility, in which she constantly re-enacts a simulation of a night out at a bar. The characters of the simulation are strangers to Beth, but in the simulation, she has a boyfriend named Warren. As Beth gets weary of the simulation, she gets Warren to leave one night, breaking the rules, and leaving the bar:

*Beth looks up, suddenly, and stops in her tracks.*

**BETH:** Warren?

**WARREN:** Yeah?

**BETH:** Warren look up.

*He does.*
WARREN: ...okay?

BETH: What do you see?

WARREN: You mean like, theoretically?

BETH: No I mean just what do you see?

WARREN: ....the sky, Beth.

BETH: No but I mean, describe it to me -

WARREN: Are you getting at some, philosophical, thing, here?

BETH: I just want to see if we’re seeing the same thing.

WARREN: Uh. It’s. Dark, and it’s full of stars. 
Little clouded over.
What do you see?

BETH: ...it’s my wallpaper.

WARREN: What?

BETH: From when I was a kid, my wallpaper -
I used to draw on it in crayon -
Look -
See, there’?
That’s the octopus Professor Bumbles
He hates little girls and feelings
and he lives in a cave under an antique store.
And there’s Marvin Platypus Nurton
And Betsy Mitzy Prairie Dog-

WARREN: Are you having a stroke?

BETH: No, no, this is all from when I was like five -
And there’s me.
Sword on my back.
Trusted dog by my side.
german shepherd.
name was Ferdinand.
...there are enough details in any given street corner to pop your brain.
When there aren’t any, you fill them in yourself.

WARREN: Look, I don’t mean to um, fuck up your poetic moment here, but,
(He points to each spot she pointed to)
Taurus,
Cassiopeia,
Perseus,
and Orion with Canis Major.
I mean, it’s cool to find a personal version and all,
but you can’t exactly claim sole authorship,
those’ve been around a lot longer than we have.
*He laughs, she doesn’t.*

BETH: ...that’s a good point. (Morrison 47-50)

This scene was a late addition to the play, but something about it always felt right.
It finally felt like that moment I mentioned, when the heart pokes out around the edges of
genre. Watching the scene on stage, it had that melodic feel, that pause in all the chaos.
Textually, however, it was doing something that has become vital to me as a writer.
Listening to this text from the actors on stage, who were standing center and looking up
at the roof of the theater together, I realized nothing more was needed. The drawings of
the bedroom didn’t need to be seen, nor did the stars. In fact, what made the scene work
was the fact that nothing was visible, because we didn’t know who was right, or if they
both were. By leaving the space blank and using the text, the audience created Beth’s
childhood drawings, and then oriented them to the night sky that they already knew. The
simplicity was, in this scenario, a benefit to the text. This established the most substantial
technique I’ve developed as a playwright over the course of graduate school, and I have named it The New Shakespearean Stage.
THE NEW SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE

One of my favorite performances I’ve been a part of was only performed once, and in class. Two classmates and I performed Antonin Artaud’s *Spurt of Blood* for Theatre History. It was a simple performance: one of us stood center and read all stage directions deadpan, the other two ran around playing every character in the show. I’ve always loved Artaud. His emphasis on writing for *now*, the moment you *occupy*, and not the one before, felt liberating to me. “Masterpieces of the past are good for the past: they are not good for us. We have the right to say what has been said and even what has not been said in a way that belongs to us...corresponding to present modes of feeling, and understandable to everyone” (Artaud 74). The figure of the writer has become so romanticized by classic texts that writing anything short of eloquent confessions of the soul feels inadequate. Artaud asserts a more punk mindset toward the whole affair. If your play is outdated and forgotten within a year, maybe that’s because it served its singular purpose, and was then outdated. To write without hoping to impress dead geniuses or generations of community theaters was refreshing, and I owe that to Artaud.

*Spurt of Blood* culminates in what can only be described as an orgasm of spectacle, no doubt laden with symbolism and ceremonial origins for Artaud, but in modern times nearly incomprehensible, and impossible to stage. However, performing the piece, the challenge of keeping up with the action was exhausting, as we ran around pantomiming and struggling to keep up with the stage directions being read. I remember this experience not because I thought it was particularly good theatre, but because it introduced me to a stylistic method I’ve used ever since as a writer. The audience seemed to genuinely enjoy our performance, primarily due to the fact that it was so woefully
inadequate in its presentation. Hearing what was supposed to be happening on stage compared to what was literally happening created a contrast that the audience genuinely invested in. The show could have been improved through rehearsal, if we invested more time in uncovering its nuances, philosophies, and points, but I don’t think it would have been better if any of its spectacle had been portrayed more literally. The performance managed to create a sense of play, and the audience played with us.

In his essay, “Theatre is Where Frightened Filmmakers Go to Die,” Jordan Tannahill quotes Darren O’Donnell:

‘With more representational forms, the most current technology to do that is the most interesting...Any other technology is going to leave incredible gaps. So theatre leaves incredible gaps. You can’t do a closeup in theatre. There are so many things you can do in film and television that you just cannot do in theatre, so theatre should just leave it alone’ (Tannahill 93).

Tannahill goes on to add that “far from killing theatre, screen-based mediums have relieved theatre of the burden of verisimilitude, freeing it to explore other expressive currents” (Tannahill 95). If film is now relied upon for resemblance to the real world, or a complete image of thorough representation, then theatre no longer bears that responsibility. Maybe that’s why I felt such joy in Spurt of Blood. We didn’t bring Artaud’s spectacle on stage, but by embracing that, the audience got to make it themselves. We presented an opportunity for an image to be made in the minds of the audience. We did not attempt to visually replicate something, at which point the audience, rather than participating, would mentally review and critique the effectiveness
of our replication. If people go to film and TV for complete images, maybe they come to the theatre for fragments waiting for the audience’s contribution.

I started my play *Welcome to Retroland* with the intention of writing impossible stage directions. I was sick of practicality, and decided to write the story with abandon, leaving logic of production for afterwards. This plan backfired slightly, as I just kept adding more and more to the stage, until I veered so far into impossible that nothing short of the Metropolitan Opera could afford to do the play accurately. In rehearsals for a staged reading, however, the actors and director would talk during breaks about how they would tackle the play’s roller coaster. Shadow puppets, string, rope, a troupe of dancers, a tiny model roller coaster, etc. I’d become too attached to the world of the play and its innumerable objects (in addition to the roller coaster, the stage is later populated with arcade games and theme park attractions) to cut them for sake of stageability, and I was intrigued by the way collaborators were invested in the “how” of stageability, as opposed to asking why any of the stuff was even there.

The reading of *Welcome to Retroland* ended up discarding music stands, in favor of minimalist staging with scripts in hand. *Retroland* takes place in a dry, toxic lakebed, and at the play’s opening, the site is barren. The black box theatre, with minimal lights and bare stage, accomplished this location sufficiently. Our actor playing Stage Directions was also mobile, taking focus during the more elaborate set changes and additions to gesture and describe the massive structures being built onstage for the audience. Once these scenes were blocked, I thought about the Stage Manager in *Our Town* for the first time: “There’s some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery. This is Mrs. Gibbs’ garden. Corn… peas… beans… hollyhocks… heliotrope…
and a lot of burdock” (Wilder, 5). The play doesn’t need these things literally presented, and all that is on stage are ladders for upstairs bedrooms and some chairs. Hearing the words imbued the space with the location, and each audience member pictures the necessary scenery on their own. In Retroland, hearing an actor describe the impossible onstage events as they gestured to the tension grid above us, we imagined steel and track winding above, below, and through the seating banks. One line stuck out in particular; I’d included one moment as my stage direction that was truly impossible, due to physical constraints, and the unlikelihood of it fitting in the budget: “A crane enters, and lifts a massive coaster loop from the ground up to standing. The crane exits” (Morrison 65-66). In every class reading, rehearsal, and performance, that line got a laugh. I think that laugh was only there because of the fact that it was delivered vocally. Any abstraction would surely be intriguing to watch, to see the way designers had tackled it, but hearing it stated by an actor was comical. I’m not sure if it’s the way the crane is treated like an actor, the most expensive tiny role in history, hitting its cues with a sentient enthusiasm and dedication, or if the audience simply knows its impossibility. In either case, the moment benefitted from the presence of Stage Directions as a character, and from those words being heard.

Over my years at UNM, this has become my favorite way to make theatre. I love the bare bones nature of the room, and the way the audience becomes such a vital component of the production. Audience participation is evoked in the subtle responsibility of maintaining the visual life of the playing space. I believe that the grander the visual life of the set and stage, the less obligation rests on the audience. A show with a grand set and budget can be rewarding, but it does not ask for the same
investment from audience members as having to picture a crane lifting a roller coaster on a blank stage. Presenting the image in visual resplendency for the audience enables them to sit back and view the performance as outsiders, which is a pleasant experience, but as Jordan Tannahill’s quote mentioned earlier, theatre is no longer the most efficient form for replicating the real world anyway, relieving us of the stress and burden of creating as convincing an illusion as possible. Instead, we are in a room together and frequently broke, therefore, let our theatre make use of the imaginations in the audience, the worlds created in their heads.

Literally building the roller coaster and amusement park in Welcome to Retroland would also be an act of irreversible permanence. When it is constructed and seen, it is known and universal for each watching audience member. If it is imagined, however, no two amusement parks are the same. I would bet the Bayside Kraken roller coaster for you resembles one you rode in your childhood, perhaps metal where mine is wooden, painted bold colors where mine is faded and muted. When the attractions arrive later in the play, you might know exactly which eighties movie posters hang stage right above the waiting coaster cars, while I am distracted by Nintendo 64 games piled downstage near the pinball machines. Retroland itself is a final resting place for all the expired technology we once loved, now made inadequate by high definition and digital downloads. Therefore the specifics of that technology is dependent on age, upbringing, and personal taste. Your record albums might be my VHS tapes. By leaving the park to the imagination, the performance is not only a communal effort contributing to the play’s fundamental ability to function, it is an experience unique to each individual. The more we rehearsed the
reading, the more I wondered if an empty black box with an actor playing Stage Directions might be the best possible version of the play.

In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud outlines a spectrum of the varying degrees of co-dependency between words and images in comic books. The “word specific” (McCloud 153) comic panel is one in which images minimally contribute to a thorough, literary text. On the opposite side of the scale, the “picture specific” panel presents highly detailed images, employing words only for sounds or accents, the images the primary method of conveying story. Most effective panels operate in the form of the “interdependent, where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (155). In the theatre, we encounter a similar task in balancing textual and visual. Shakespearean and Greek plays live in the word specific category due to their use of description and minimal sets, the visual life of the play limited largely to the bodies on stage. In Greek tragedies action was largely kept offstage, to instead be delivered through dialogue and poetry. Consider the messenger in *Oedipus the King*, a character absent from the play except one scene, in which he delivers news of the climactic moment:

> He rips off her brooches, the long gold pins holding her robes--and lifting them high, looking straight up into the points, he digs them down the sockets of his eyes, crying, “You, you’ll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused! (Sophocles 1402-1406)

The messenger delivers information too brutal to show on stage. Our modern sensibilities are more used to such acts of violence in their full glory, but I wonder which is the most effective. One thing consistently emphasized in workshops in the graduate program has been the importance of putting all action in dialogue. In production, a
playwright’s stage directions are often completely ignored, in favor of the original blocking developed in rehearsals. Dialogue, however, is there to stay, and bringing action and important elements into the dialogue ensures their safety. Incorporating action and texture in dialogue secures the world of the play, and it also invites the cooperation of the audience. Even now, when *Oedipus the King* is relegated largely to the periodic reimagining and the dreaded high school English syllabus, the messenger’s description is strong imagery. Hearing it, one is confronted with the concept of needles digging into eye sockets. If the same moment were to be performed on stage rather than off, we simply receive an interpretation of that image. Further, if such violence is executed with anything less than perfection, it risks parody. Hearing it, the strength of that image lies in our creating it vividly for ourselves, in our minds.

However, just because putting the eye gouging on stage may be less intellectually stimulating doesn’t mean I wouldn’t want to see it. When gore on stage is pulled off in convincing or creative ways, it can be just as rewarding as conveying it through dialogue. As an audience, the focus shifts from the concept of the eye gouging to the sickening feeling of watching the mutilation, and wondering how the techs pulled it off. In other words, shifting from Thought to Spectacle. The major difference is, if the eye gouging is staged, the messenger needs to be cut. Scott McCloud describes Duo-specific panels as “panels in which both words and pictures send essentially the same message” (McCloud 153). On stage, this means we are given the same information twice, visually and aurally. To describe Oedipus gouging his eyes out immediately after *witnessing* Oedipus gouge his eyes out is redundant. It leaves no gaps for the audience to fill in, instead over-explaining until the audience wonders what they are even there for. This is a common
fault in productions of Shakespeare as well; neglecting the text’s ability to convey the
world, we are given too many signifiers pointing to objects using both visual and aural
stimuli, when one would do. Bert O. States points to the difficulty in presenting
Shakespeare’s textual world on film: “When Shakespeare’s cinematic language--able to
carry us wherever the voice leads...is grounded in the hard facts of a real world, caught by
the camera’s literal eye, we are apt to suffer a mild sensory confusion. If there is one way
to make Shakespeare verbose, it is to speak his poetry in a milieu that usurps its
descriptive function” (States 57). If Macbeth describes a dagger hanging in front of him,
perhaps no one needs to dangle one by a string. “The effect is compromised when the
camera and voice overlap, a little like two artists trying to paint the same landscape”
(States 58). If Shakespeare is most effective when presented with minimal aid of scenic
additions to the physical space, the strongest productions of Shakespeare’s works might
be those that are well-performed, but kept as technically minimal as possible.

If minimalist productions of Shakespeare are in this sense preferable, they come
with the added benefit of being cheap to produce. Compound this with the the free rights
to performance thanks to the public domain, and an ideal production of Shakespeare can
be produced for virtually nothing. In the current theatrical climate, with money and
funding always presenting obstacles to small theatres, and financially stable theatrical
institutions so inundated with scripts that submissions are daunting, as a playwright I
wonder if a return to the mentality of the Shakespearean Stage would encourage an
increase in confidence in playwrights, and a more lush fabric in small scale productions.
When we write plays that require large budgets, we depend too much on permission from
institutions. If we write our plays without needing a budget, we increase the potential for
seeing the play locally, while still being able to submit the script in hopes of larger scale production.

As States said, Shakespeare’s language gives such a richness to the world, the mere act of seeing it literally depicted belittles its impact. Meaning the higher the level of presentation, the less likely the production is to succeed. If we embrace the mentality of the Shakespearean Stage in the sense of creating our worlds through text, using words to paint all that we need, can we employ the technique in such a way that the script, if selected for production at a higher financial level, would still benefit from a grander scale? I do not have the ambition to insult or dismiss the benefit of larger scale productions in the theatre, I merely wish to create scripts that are as effective in broke black boxes as they could be off Broadway.

In Welcome to Retroland, as discussed, the roller coaster could be done any number of ways. Thus far, it has only been done verbally, through description, our stage directions as a sort of Greek messenger. If it were done with string, rope, or bodies, we would need less description to fill the gaps. If someone bought a roller coaster and thousands of dated pieces of entertainment, we wouldn’t need any. Each one of those versions, to me, has their own appeal. Simply because theatre is relieved of the burden of constructing thorough, complete images does not mean that spectacle and budget in the theatre are not still entertaining ways to spend an evening. My personal preferences lean toward the simplicity of the black box and the world being conveyed simply and cheaply through voices and bodies, but if someone put on the million dollar Welcome to Retroland I would happily go watch it, and hopefully get paid. In that case, the production would cut the stage directions in favor of visual representation. Welcome to
Retroland is capable of functioning at any level of production or budget, and each level would provide different benefits to the performance. Much as Oedipus’s messenger would be rendered unnecessary through a sneaky blood pack and slight of hand, the text of the Stage Directions would be replaced by spectacle. In fact, in a full production, my stage directions would likely be ignored anyway.

If the setting of Welcome to Retroland operates on the scales from Scott McCloud and Bert O. States, from textual to visual, and descriptive to literal, then The Break uses these scales in its physicality. The Break is a play about professional tennis players, and large amounts of stage time feature professional tennis players playing tennis. The likelihood of this being shown literally onstage is minimal. Further, unless the actors cast have played tennis most of their lives, they are not likely to learn to play convincingly in four weeks of rehearsal. The Break will then depend on some level of abstraction in portraying the sport on stage. The current production of The Break presented as part of the Linnell Festival is cast with actors who had never played tennis before being cast in the production. The production as such uses methods to convey the idea of tennis to the audience as much as it shows it. Players still hit tennis balls, but only on serves, at which point the actors switch to pantomimed swings. This way the cast could focus on combining movement with dialogue, rather than spend three weeks of rehearsal learning a proper forehand. With this method, the sight and sound of tennis balls (when not in use, they cover the stage in a grid), is combined with abstracted movement, and the essence of the sport is maintained. Further, the court itself is broken from realism through its oblong shape, and one upstage corner of the court is raised up off the ground into a large frame centerstage. This prevents anyone who knows the sport to judge where the actors are
positioned, or where the balls would be bouncing with each rally, as the in/out of bounds lines are so abstracted. In the same sense that a spectacle driven show shifts the focus of the audience from completing the image to critiquing the effectiveness of portrayal, *The Break*, if cast with actors who don’t happen to be tennis players, must orient the production to prevent an audience from spending the show critiquing the portrayal of tennis.

At the same time, the abstraction of tennis is perhaps what enables the show to engage with spectacle. If the tennis on stage was to be presented more literally, I think several things would have to change. First, the court would be more literal. Even if the theatrical abstraction of the court looks appealing from an audience, if live tennis was being played on stage, letting it be as competitive as possible would add an aspect of liveness that could be embraced by the production. If the theatre is too small to fit a life sized tennis court (as most are), even one reduced in size could be practiced on by the actors until they find a suitable version of tennis to give the production an element of live competition. This addition would give the production a liveness and chaos, possibly fitting it into what Jordan Tannahill includes as an aspect of the Theatre of Failure: “we are provided a considered framework within which the chaos can be seen and understood” (Tannahill 124). In this scenario, the actors would juggle the text of the play while actively trying to win points, and experiencing frustration or buoyancy accordingly. Admittedly, as of now, this version of the show has not been experimented with, and live play may prove too distracting for a play dependent on character and dialogue driven scenes. Essentially, the more the bodies on stage can carry the image of professional tennis, the less the set should. The audience need only receive the image once; if both set
and actor strive to give a clear message of tennis, it is again, as States described, “a little like two artist trying to paint the same landscape” (States 58). If Retroland’s amusement park can be portrayed on a scale between textual and visual, The Break’s tennis can be portrayed on a scale of literal to abstracted.

One of the first intentions in writing The Break was the challenge of putting a sports movie onstage. It is rare in a sports movie to have an actor capable of the physical feats of their character, but a stunt double or body double can easily be incorporated through cuts and camera angles. Meaning one body is relied on for character, another for physicality. In theatre we do not have this luxury. A stunt person could certainly be used, but that use could not be hidden from the audience. In writing The Break, I hoped to create a script where anyone could play the two characters, whether or not they had the experience with the sport.

When I first read Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics, I thought good playwriting depended on the ideal of the interdependent panel, in which words and images coexisted, neither dominating. Now I believe that describes good theatre. A play’s script is inherently word specific, due to its (typically) being composed of only text. The performance itself, therefore, is where the tension between methods of delivering information must be balanced; where productions ensure how much information is delivered textually or visually. Therefore, in the text, it is the job of the playwright to simultaneously write something complete, thorough through words alone, while leaving gaps to be filled in by collaborators. Brian Michael Bendis discusses writing comic book scripts for artists in his book Words for Pictures as a process designed to inspire the collaborators as much as readers: “the trap of a full script is in being too heavy-handed.
You don’t want to get in the way of the artists and their choices. They are not your art monkeys. They are your collaborators” (Bendis, 37). Reading the script of a comic book, images are hinted at by the writer, a few ingredients laid out, but left to the artist’s interpretation. These are frequently written as direct address to the artist, as well, since the writer knows the text describing images will never be read as part of the final product. Consider the casual tone of Brian K. Vaughn, describing an image impulse to Fiona Staples, in the script for an issue of Saga: “Pull out to the largest panel of the page, as The Will now walks through Sextillion’s massive underground RED LIGHT DISTRICT (which probably looks much like Amsterdam’s, with its neon lights and window performers:...” (Vaughn and Staples, 473). This passage then includes a link to an article with images for inspiration, in the actual script. Vaughn’s text suggests an understanding that it is not his job to maintain atmosphere in the picture descriptions or complete the world on his own. Rather, he is responsible for narrative and dialogue, placing total trust in his collaborator for the visual element. Playscripts have a similar duty to lay a textual foundation for a largely visual medium. In that dynamic, it is important to be thorough in the aspect you are in control of, dialogue, while in everything else leaving room for the contribution of collaborators. Scripts are not inherently literary objects, but they are the only permanent aspect of a medium dependent on live performance. Therefore a script carries the strange responsibility of laying down the play in a form rigid enough to ensure its intentions, and simultaneously loose enough to give space to collaboration. In this return to the Shakespearean Stage, I advocate scripts that allow room for all levels of production, and all stages of interpretation based on the means available.
CONCLUSION: THE BREAK

I feel writers too often feel compelled to write in hopes of large scale production, or to write for small scale, DIY projects. Instead, in this time when funding for the arts is in jeopardy nationwide, I wonder if we must now write with immediacy, with theatre that can be pulled off with nothing by friends in small spaces and little notice. No more only waiting for validation from far off festivals and literary offices flooded with scripts. If we construct our scripts with the world in the words, with the heart in the text, we can still send our plays off to all those places and hope for production, payment, and publicity, but in the meantime contribute quickly and enthusiastically to the artistic fabric of our local communities. If we write plays for both no budget and huge budgets, we write personally, while still pursuing the potential of wider release.

A further benefit of this style is the completion of image it requires from the audience. In rehearsals for The Break, I’m intrigued by the actors and director as they create and develop the characters’ backstories. In many circumstances, the interpretations are not necessarily what I originally thought while writing the scene, but at the same time, the resulting performance presents my original intentions. I thought about this phenomenon often in the initial weeks of rehearsal, and how important it is that the actors get to claim ownership of these characters in this way. If my script included all the original answers, all the backstories and reasons why they behave the way they do, the script would be overlong, boring, and self-indulgent. It would also prevent this investment from the actors and director. Similarly, given that no dialogue is added by the cast and crew during this process, their elaborate backstories are then unseen by the
audience, who is then given the responsibility of creating their own. In this sense the play is never complete except for in performance, and the story of the play is authored by the crew and the audience as much as it is by me. The completion of image discussed in The New Shakespearean Stage is thus completed up to three times: by the director, the actors, and finally by the audience.

*The Break* is an appropriate play to end my time at UNM with, as I feel it exemplifies what I’ve come to value in theatre. The world is established largely through text, and can be produced with most levels of budget, and varying degrees of physicality. The director’s interpretation of the play has resulted in a visually intriguing and wonderfully abstracted production that presents the play in a new light for me, while also reaffirming my goals with the script. Tennis itself has played a large part in developing my views as a writer. I began playing five years ago, and ever since, I’ve been struck by the elegant simplicity of the game. Playing is an act of conversation, receiving the ball as it’s given, and sending it back. Tennis is good acting, and good dialogue. You can never have a plan laid out before the ball is hit on the other side, as the infinite variables added to the spin, distance, and landing spot will always disappoint your expectations. Instead, it is a constant adjustment to the moment’s variables, and the unpredictable responses of human beings.

Tennis mirrors theatre in its structure. Matches are typically played in three sets, or, in men’s slams, the more Shakespearean five set matches. The difference between tennis and theatre, is that if one player wins the first two out of three sets, the match is over. The third set does not need to be played, as the winner has been decided. Dramaturgically, I’ve learned a valuable lesson from this.
In *Three Uses of the Knife*, Mamet compared a good play to a good football game. “Do we wish for Our Team to take the field and thrash the opposition from the First Moment, rolling up a walkover score at the final gun? No. We wish for a closely fought match that contains many satisfying reversals, but which can be seen, retroactively, to have always tended toward a satisfying and inevitable conclusion” (Mamet, 8-9). I say he’s missing something by focusing on the structure of the game in past tense. Unscripted events do not tend “toward a satisfying and inevitable conclusion.” In retrospect, yes, but Mamet is looking at this structure with the eye of a dramatist rather than at the liveness of the event. He’s right in that we will remember the games with the most twists, turns, and upsets. But if you ask a sports fan if they want their team to lose for the first half so they can make a comeback later, I doubt they would say yes. If you asked if they wanted it to be an exciting game, I bet they would. I would say going into a live event hoping for it to fulfill an expected structure would be contradictory to the nature of a live event. We embrace live events because of the unpredictability, the temporality, and the live act of creation.

We don’t go to sports necessarily expecting catharsis, but when it happens, we are profoundly moved. As Jordan Tannahill describes it, this is due to the fact that “the search for meaning and connection, in every piece we encounter, can be satisfying and sustaining until the next watershed moment” (Tannahill 92). Tannahill’s *Theatre of the Unimpressed* emphasizes modern theatre’s need to embrace its liveness, its sense of risk taking, and its potential failure. If it does, when something beautiful happens, we are genuinely, deeply moved, because we witnessed it. The infinite variables present in such a circumstance align to grant us witness to an extraordinary moment, imbued with
meaning far grander than its elements on stage, or on field. Tannahill describes this phenomenon as the Spectre of Failure: “The spectre of failure comes from the knowledge that what is unfolding before us is happening live, and thus alive with the possibility that any moment this production, this event, might fall flat on its face. This face plant could be dull or it could reveal a unique, never-before-seen moment of exquisite beauty” (16).

Liveness is not only appealing due to physical proximity and operation in the present tense, it is appealing because there is the potential to have no idea what kind of narrative we’re in for.

People invest in sports the same way they invest in online gaming. Both mediums provide rules and expectations, but within those rules exist a liveness due to its active assembly from competing elements. Both embrace the contradiction Mamet described: we long for fulfilling, dramatically sound games, but we can’t play those games with that goal in mind. No one competes thinking, “I’ll win the first round, lose the second, and come back in the third, so that it’s dramatically satisfying.” This feels reminiscent of a frequent note given to actors: don’t play the ending. Instead, the goal is broken down into increasingly fractal goals of competition and beating the opponent. In sports and video games, players never know at the outset whether they’re embarking on a full, satisfying narrative, a one-sided blowout, or anything in between. If we approach the story demanding the thorough, cathartic structure, we’re listening to our own enthusiasms and preferences more than we are listening to the story’s.

In the case of The Break, the play did not need to go into the third set. In the sports movie trope, Sadie-O’s performance at Wimbledon would be included. After the play is over, she either wins or she loses, but this is not important to the story. What
matters in the story of Sadie-O and Jen is the fact that she’s playing at all, that she’s made it back to the place where her life had meaning for her, and with her mentor beside her.

To answer the question of whether or not she could win would leave the audience with no questions to answer on their own. For me, leaving UNM, I don’t want those questions answered. Instead, I want to leave the space with a sense of incompleteness, a sense that Sadie-O hasn’t figured everything out yet, that she has plenty more life to live and things to discover after the curtain. If our plays refuse to tie everything up in a neat, dramatic bow of finality, perhaps we can live our lives with that sense of continual development, possibility, and learning.
WORKS CITED


The Break

A new play
by Drew Morrison

Draft 8
3-20-17
drew@tricklock.com
The set is a tennis court.
While in Sadie and Jen’s neighborhood, it is the painted asphalt of an American court.
When at Wimbledon, sod is rolled out and chalked to make a grass court.

The characters are professional level tennis players, and actors should consider play very seriously and competitively at all times. They wear tennis clothes throughout-complete with headbands and wristbands. Full on white at Wimbledon, but they can wear other colors at the neighborhood court if desired, or they wear full bright whites that are gradually sullied over the course of the play.

CAST:
Sadie, female, seen from 6-30 years old.
Jen, female, seen from 27-51 years old.
Stranger, male, somewhere between 20 and 30.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Sadie, six, on her neighborhood court.
She holds a shiny new racket, a cannister of tennis balls, and a dirty stuffed antelope.
Sets the racket carefully down at the service T,
opens the can with a hiss,
dumps the tennis balls into her palm.
She sets the Antelope and the can down by the net.
Picks up the racket and the ball.
Beat.
Drops the ball, swings the racket. If she hits it at all it doesn’t go far.
Picks up the second ball. Repeats the failure.
Picks up the third, swings so hard she almost falls down,
hits the ball so hard it flies out of the court.
Sets the racket down, runs offstage.

She returns with the ball, collects the other two.
Repeats the process, hitting three, chasing them down.

Jen, 27, enters unnoticed. She has her gear over her shoulder and a full ball hopper.
Looks irritated that someone’s here.
JEN
...Hey there.

SADIE
Hey.

JEN
...Bit cold for you isn’t it?

SADIE
I don’t mind.

JEN
...Merry Christmas.

SADIE
Merry Christmas.

JEN
Aren’t you cold?

SADIE
It doesn’t get cold out here.

JEN
Out here?

SADIE
This is supposed to be winter. This isn’t winter. Back home has real winter.

JEN
Where are you from?

SADIE
...

JEN
Okay then.
Isn’t your family waiting for you? Christmas morning and all?

SADIE
I dunno.

JEN
...Look kid I don’t mean to be rude but-

SADIE
I got a racket.

JEN
What?

SADIE
I got a racket for Christmas.

JEN
...Cool?

SADIE
Have you ever heard of Wimbledon?

JEN
Yeah, I have.

SADIE
I’m gonna play at Wimbledon.

Sadie swings at a ball and misses completely.

JEN
Yeah I bet.
How long, do you think you’ll be out here?

SADIE
What?

JEN
How long are you going to use the court?
SADIE
I dunno.

JEN
Okay.
Well.
I need the court.
So.

SADIE
I got here first.

JEN
Yeah you’ll notice I was polite and asked how long you need it.

SADIE
As long as I want I got here first.

JEN
Oh so it’s like that?

SADIE
I’m six.

JEN
Awesome.

SADIE
Do you have a racket?

JEN
What?

SADIE
A racket do you have a racket?

JEN
I have seven.
SADIE
Seven?

JEN
Yeah.

SADIE
Why?

JEN
What?

SADIE
Why do you need seven rackets?

JEN
I like different ones for different moods.

SADIE
That’s desadent.

JEN
What?

SADIE
Desadent. You have more stuff than you actually need.

JEN
...Do you mean decadent?

SADIE
...No.

JEN
Okay.

SADIE
You’re desadent.

JEN
Yeah got it thanks aren’t your parents wondering where you are?

**SADIE**
My mom’s asleep. She and grandma and grandpa fell asleep after breakfast.

**JEN**
So you’re just playing by yourself?

**SADIE**
Yeah.

**JEN**
Two person game, kid.

**SADIE**
You’re here by yourself.

**JEN**
Yeah but I’m gonna practice service.

**SADIE**
You’re in the army?

**JEN**
Look kid I’m not here to explain the sport to you, can I just have the court?

**SADIE**
Mom says it’s rude to tell people to go away.

**JEN**
Your mom’s required to want you around.
I’m not.

**SADIE**
What’s service?

**JEN**
…
Service.
As in a serve.
It’s how you give a ball to the other player to start a point. And you do it really hard so you have to practice it.

**SADIE**
So you’re just giving the ball to someone who isn’t there?

**JEN**
...
You’re an opinionated little thing aren’t you?

**SADIE**
Practice your serve on me.

**JEN**
No.

**SADIE**
Come on practice on me-

*Jen sees the stuffed animal for the first time.*

**JEN**
Why is there a moose on the court?

**SADIE**
That’s not a moose that’s Otto he’s a antelope.

**JEN**
Pretty filthy for an antelope.

**SADIE**
He’s been through a lot.

**JEN**
Oh he has?

**SADIE**
Mhm.
Moved clear across the country, with me and mom
so he could live with us at grandma and grandpa’s.  
Been through the wash a whole bunch.  
Mom resewed his button nose back on after I ripped it off accidently on purpose.

JEN  
Why’d you do that?

SADIE  
Because we could fix it.  
Now you can’t even tell cept he smiles a bit crooked.  
Mom tried to buy me a new bear for christmas  
but bears are dumb and everyone has em.  
Sides. Otto just needs a wash or a hole sewed shut now and then,  
he’s still a good antelope.

JEN  
Isn’t your mom gonna get worried about you?

SADIE  
I dunno.

JEN  
Kid I serve really hard.

SADIE  
Probably not that hard.

JEN  
Look kid I really just want to be alone.

SADIE  
But it’s Christmas!

JEN  
I ain’t Christian!

SADIE  
Neither am I!

JEN
Kid how do you even know what you are?

**SADIE**
Grandpa says Mom’s not being Christian, and so I don’t wanna be anymore either. Everyone at home’s asleep but me. I’m wide awake and I’m bored.

**JEN**
...

**SADIE**
...

*Jen drops the ball, hits it gently over the net.*
*Sadie swings hard and misses.*

**JEN**
Easier swings.

**SADIE**
You said hitting it hard was good?

**JEN**
Yeah once you know how to hit it. Start gentle and easy. Learn the motion. Then you swing hard when you know how.

*Another gentle underhand.*
*Sadie swings gently.*
*So gently that it doesn’t really go anywhere.*

**JEN**
...Okay well a little harder than that.

*Sadie throws her racket on the ground.*

**JEN**
Whoa, hey-

**SADIE**
Stupid racket-
JEN
Oh it’s the racket?

SADIE
Huh?

JEN
Don’t blame your racket kid.

SADIE
But.

JEN
But nothing.

SADIE
...

JEN
Did you hurt it?

Sadie picks up the racket, examines.

SADIE
Little, scratch.

JEN
Careful with those. You can break em easier than you think.
Racket’s your buddy, and it’s got feelings, alright?
Alright?

SADIE
...

JEN
What’s its name?

SADIE
Huh?
Jen holds up her racket.

JEN
This is Mariana.
What’s your racket’s name?

SADIE
It’s just a-

JEN
Uh uh.
Name it.

SADIE
Um.
...Felix.

JEN
Okay.
So every time you get mad,
and hit that racket,
you’re hurting Felix.
Kay?

SADIE
Kay.

JEN
Good.

Jen starts another rally.
Sadie keeps hitting it into the net, off court, all over the place.
A couple of times, she gets mad enough to slam Felix, but restrains herself.
Jen watches her.
Sadie starts mumbling, angrily, to herself.
Jen watches.

JEN
Take a breather-
SADIE
No, no send me another one, I can do it. I’ll get it.

JEN
Easy there, let’s hold on for a minute-

SADIE
No, I can do it-

JEN
...

Jen lobs another one.
Eventually, Sadie gets one back over.

JEN
That’s it,
Good!

As they rally, restarting every time the ball hits the net, Jen’s returns are perfect for Sadie. Jen chases down each erratic shot and sends it back to the ideal spot for Sadie’s swing.
Eventually, someone does something that looks silly, and they crack up laughing.

SADIE
You’re really good.

JEN
Thanks kid.
Been doing it since I was about your age.

SADIE
Is it your job?

JEN
...It was, for a long time.

SADIE
You stopped.
JEN

…

SADIE
Why?

JEN
Look, kid, if you ever wanna know what happened with me, you look it up, okay?

SADIE
Okay.

JEN

…

SADIE
Do you want me to know?

JEN
What?

SADIE
Do you want me to know what happened?

JEN
Not really.

SADIE
Then I won’t look it up.

JEN
Oh yeah?

SADIE
Promise.

JEN
Thanks.
SADIE
I don’t know your name.

JEN
Ha! Well now I’ll never tell you.

SADIE
I’m Sadie.

JEN
Hey Sadie.

SADIE
Or Sadio.

JEN
Sadio?

SADIE
My real name’s Sadio but we say Sadie here because people can pronounce it easier.

JEN
Oh.
Which one you prefer?

SADIE
I don’t know.

JEN
How about Sadie-O?
Until you decide.

SADIE
...Okay.

JEN
...
Do you hear that?

SADIE
What?

**JEN**
Sounds like-
Is someone screaming?

_They listen - we don’t hear anything._

**SADIE**
Oh- that’s my mom.

**JEN**
Is your mother a banshee?
She sounds upset.

**SADIE**
Prolly.

**JEN**
I thought you said she wouldn’t be upset.

**SADIE**
Idunno.

**JEN**
You should get back to her.

**SADIE**
She’s fine let’s play.

**JEN**
She sounds like she’s worried about you.

**SADIE**
I don’t want to stop-

**JEN**
Kid you should get back to your mom.

**SADIE**
JEN
Look
This game,
you’re never gonna feel quite good enough,
but you have to call it sometime.
Stop at a good moment, and you’ll be glad tomorrow.

SADIE
...really?

JEN
Yeah.
Really.

SADIE
...Okay.

Sadie picks up her racket, cannister, and Otto, starts to leave.

SADIE
See you tomorrow!

JEN
Wait what?

SADIE
You don’t hit that hard.

JEN
Thanks.

SADIE
So you can practice on me again tomorrow.

JEN
...

SADIE
I don’t mind.

**JEN**
Aren’t there other kids you can play with?

**SADIE**
Idunno.

**JEN**
…
Gotta be real early.

**SADIE**
I can get up early.

**JEN**
You sure you’re tough enough?

**SADIE**
I’m super tough.

**JEN**
Okay. Tomorrow at nine a.m. Don’t be late.

**SADIE**
I’ll be early!

**JEN**
No. Do not be early.
I get here at 7.
Do not bother me before 9.
If you are here before 9 I will be very angry.

**SADIE**
Okay!

*She starts to leave again.*

**JEN**
Hey Sadie-O.
Sadie turns.

JEN
My name’s Jen Becker.

SADIE
...See you tomorrow Jen.

Sadie leaves.  
Jen watches her go.

JEN
...shit.

SCENE 2

Jen, 33, alone on court.  
She sets her ball hopper down.  
Looks about at the lovely, silent morning.  
Dribbles a ball to herself.  
Deep breath, peace, contentment.  
Gets to serving position.  
Crouches, lofts the ball above her head,  
prepares to serve, and

SADIE
I LEARNED THE WESTERN!

JEN
JESUS FUCK-

Sadie, 12, enters excitedly with her gear.

SADIE
I LEARNED THE WESTERN FOREHAND, BECKER!

JEN
Sadie-O don’t sneak up on people like that-
SADIE
You missed the ball-

JEN
I know I missed the ball-

SADIE
You should always keep your eye on the ball, Becker.

JEN
You scared the shit out of me-

SADIE
That’s what you say-

JEN
I know what I say-

SADIE
“Eye always on the ball, till it’s left the strings.”

Sadie, oblivious, sets her bag down courtside, rapidly starts getting ready.

SADIE
I finally got it - I was hitting a ball against the garage door-
Grandpa didn’t like that, I dented it pretty bad,
but
you were right!
SO MUCH TOPSPIN!
fast and low,
POW!

JEN
Sadie-O it is seven thirty.

SADIE
Is it?

JEN
Yes.
SADIE
I thought it would take longer to get here.

JEN
You thought it would take an hour and a half to walk one block?

SADIE
Idunno.

JEN
9 o clock.

SADIE
Right.

JEN
Not earlier.

SADIE
Right.

JEN
...

SADIE
Lemme show you!

Sadie gets to the baseline, preps for Jen’s serve.

JEN
Sadie-O.

SADIE
Come on, hit me one, I’ll show you the western-

JEN
Sadie-O we have rules.

SADIE
But I’m already out here now we might as well just play.

**JEN**
Did you eat breakfast?

**SADIE**
...Yes.

**JEN**
Sadie-O.

**SADIE**
I did.

**JEN**
What did you eat?

**SADIE**
...

**JEN**
Sadie-O.

**SADIE**
I know.

**JEN**
Eat. Then play.

**SADIE**
Okay okay okay.

**JEN**
...

**SADIE**
...

**JEN**
SADIE-O go eat.
SADIE
Hit me one! I wanna show you!
When we get to the tournament this weekend, they’ll have no idea what hit em!
“Sadie-O fresh out the gates with a W!”

JEN
What did you just say?

SADIE
I heard it on TV.

JEN
Great.

SADIE
Hit me one!

JEN
…
Stretch.

SADIE
Jeeeeeennnnnnn.

JEN
Stretch.
Not hitting you anything if you’re not stretched.

Sadie grumbles to herself while she stretches.
Jen watches.
Sadie tries to stop too soon, Jen’s stare sends her back to stretching.

SADIE
Okay ready.

Jen lofts one to her.

SADIE
POW!
Sadie hits a perfect Western grip forehand.
Jen makes no attempt to return it, watches it land and bounce off.

SADIE
You didn’t even chase it!

JEN
You wanted to show me the shot.

SADIE
Exactly.
BAM.
The Western.
And when I get to Wimbledon?
Play on the grass?
That much topspin, it’ll shoot right by anybody.
Right?

JEN
Great.

SADIE
...
Can we play a set?

JEN
In an hour and a half.

SADIE
Jeeen-

JEN
Nope.
You know the rules.
It’ll give you time to eat.

SADIE
I’m not hungry-
JEN
No. You’re not getting shaky,
playing on an empty stomach.
You’ll be “fresh out the gates”
to lose in the first round this weekend.

SADIE
Did you like the shot though?
Did I do it right?

JEN
...
I’ll tell you at nine.

SADIE
UGH.
FINE.

Sadie-O runs off.

JEN
EAT SOME FRUIT WITH BREAKFAST!

SADIE
OKAY!

Jen watches where she ran off.
She looks at the spot where Sadie’s shot passed her.

JEN
...the hell did she hit that?

Shakes her head, gets back to her serving.

SCENE 3

Jen, thirty seven, waits alone on the court.
She stands at the baseline, racket in hand, impatient.
She looks exhausted.
Eventually, Sadie, sixteen, enters. She looks hungover.
Sets her bag down and hurriedly gets ready.
She pulls a raw egg from her bag, cracks it into a coffee mug, swallows with a wince.

JEN
Ew.

SADIE
Sorry.

JEN
You’re late.

SADIE
I know I said I was sorry.

JEN
Were you drinking last night?

SADIE
Come on let’s play.

JEN
That is not breakfast. We’ve been over this your diet has to keep up-

SADIE
I was late so I stole an egg on my way out, what’s the big deal? I’ll eat big tomorrow, alright?

JEN
You stole an egg?
Where did you sleep last night?

Sadie grins a little.

JEN
Aren’t you a little young to be doing that?

SADIE
Aren’t you a little not-related-to-me to be my mother?
JEN
You’ve got state this weekend.

SADIE
Blegh.

JEN
No don’t blegh. You’ve got state you should be rested.

SADIE
Becker our team is nothing.

Jen, listening/not listening, starts feeding balls to Sadie for backhand drills.
Sadie hits backhand after backhand, talking throughout.
These days they’re both playing at advanced level.

SADIE
Just a bunch of couldn’t-make-it-in-soccer juniors and seniors
praying for that last shot at free tuition
No coordination, all heels
daydreaming about their goddam boyfriends
girlfriends courtside
showing off their shit serves-
I feel fucking sorry for them-

JEN
OhmygodSadieOshutup.

SADIE
What?

JEN
Just focus. JUST FOCUS.

SADIE
They don’t work for me why the hell should I work for them?
I’m done carrying them, Jen, it’s bullshit-

JEN
Sadie-O one U.S. Open Junior’s quarterfinal makes you promising it does not make you a Williams sister.

**SADIE**
I’m gonna be pro soon.

**JEN**
Not with that backhand.

**SADIE**
No come on you said it yourself.

**JEN**
Yeah and I will regret it until the day I die.

**SADIE**
One more year. That was your guess, one more year.

**JEN**
And that’s what you want?

**SADIE**
Of course it is, wouldn’t you?

**JEN**
Sadie I was pro.

**SADIE**
I know.

**JEN**
So I know.

**SADIE**
...you don’t think I’m ready?

**JEN**
Didn’t say that.
Stay off your heels.
SADIE
Let’s go for it now.
What do you think?

JEN
That sounds like a question for your mom.

SADIE
Yeah but I want to know what you think-

JEN
I don’t know, alright?
I only know what happens out here.
That’s my job.
I only know you’re supposed to be here at seven.
You and your mom can figure that other shit out.

SADIE
…

JEN
I’m sorry.

Jen starts a rally.
Sadie swings too hard, hits the backhand into the net.

SADIE
MOTHERFUCKER.

JEN
Will you watch the language?

SADIE
Oh my god I swore at the fucking ball so fucking what?

JEN
You get to Wimbledon with that mouth you’re gonna get fined.
They’re like big ass fines too.
…
Wanna play a set?
Up or down?

**SADIE**
Down.

*Jen spins her racket, checks the logo on the bottom of the handle.*

**JEN**
It’s down, your serve.

*Sadies winds up for a serve. Rally until another failed killshot from Sadie.*

**SADIE**
FUCK. I FUCKING HIT THOSE IN FUCKING YESTERDAY.

**JEN**
Will you just rally for a second?!

**SADIE**
I am rallying-

**JEN**
No you’re not! You’re smacking the shit out of it every time it comes near you!

**SADIE**
Then how am I supposed to get by you?!

**JEN**
Just send it back! Rally! You’re off? Just return it. Send it back till I mishit. Ease up on pace, play out the point.

**SADIE**
You’re just tired of chasing after the fast ones-

**JEN**
Ooooh yeah that’s it. I’m just so tired from all these three shot rallies. I could chase after your kill shots and get em back over all day, you, you *squirrel*. Change tactics when one ain’t working. adapt and survive, Sadie-O-
SADIE
Fuck this and fuck you I hate this fucking sport.

JEN
You liked this plenty when you were a natural, now that you’re working for it you’re getting pissy?

SADIE
I’m not getting pissy, just hoping not to end up a burnout like you–

*Jen stops play.*

JEN
Do not call me a burnout.

SADIE
...Becker I was kidding–

JEN
I don’t care.
if I am working till two a.m. to meet you here at seven
and you show up thirty minutes late smelling like a fifth
and shit talking your teammates
you do not get to call me a burnout.

SADIE
...
I didn’t know you were doing that.

JEN
...I mean, how else could we afford to do this, Sadie?
It’s because we are pulling everything we’ve got for you. because you are good enough to deserve it.

SADIE
...

JEN
...

...
Sadie

…

Jen

Let’s take a break.

Sadie

No, it’s fine.

Jen

No come on.
Let’s go get something to eat, alright?
Let’s go sit down and.
Let’s just take a breather today,
we’ll get back to it tomorrow-

Sadie

It’s your serve.

Jen

…

Jen serves.

They play until Sadie mishits.

Jen

Stay off your heels I’m catching you leaning.

Sadie

OHMYGOD STOP COACHING ME FOR TWO SECONDS.

Jen

FINE!

Sadie

…

Jen

WELL ARE WE GONNA PLAY?
SADIE
I NEED A MINUTE.

JEN
FINE.

SADIE
...

JEN
...

SADIE
WELL IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE SO DAMN QUIET.

JEN
WHAT DO YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT?

SADIE
I DON’T KNOW.

JEN
HOW’S SCHOOL?

SADIE
STUPID.

JEN
GREAT.

SADIE
I HATE IT.

JEN
I DID TOO.

SADIE
...
You know they called again.
JEN
Who?

SADIE
...

JEN
Oh.

SADIE
Even bigger offer.

JEN
I bet.

SADIE
All gear covered.
Training covered.
They’d take care of everything.

JEN
And that’s.
That’s great, Sadie - and, maybe you should take it.
but if you do that, you’re not with me.

SADIE
You don’t know that-

JEN
Oh I know that.
They will make you get a new coach.
Don’t doubt that.

SADIE
Fine, I’ll just be the only pro who lives with her mom and grandparents.

JEN
Makes you look more like an underdog kinda thing.

SADIE
It makes me look more like a loser.

**JEN**
You want a new coach, get a new coach.

**SADIE**
I don’t want a new coach.

**JEN**
…
Look, that, attention? They give you?
That’s just for now.
Eventually they forget what they promise,
and.
That’s a lonely day, when it comes.
…
You don’t want that.

**SADIE**
You don’t know that they hate you so much.

**JEN**
Kid, told you before.
You want to know what happened with me, look it up.

**SADIE**
…
Well anyway.
I don’t need them.
That’s not why I brought it up.
…
I can’t get anywhere playing on a shit school team, Jen.

**JEN**
…
You drop out?
That’s all the eggs in one basket.
Like, officially all the eggs in one basket.
You get hurt?
Lose love of the game?
Then you’ll have nothin.

**SADIE**
Sport spits us out, starts talking about us like we’re old ladies by thirty, right?
So why waste one more year?
This is my school, and home, and church.

…
Let’s go full time.
Fuck it.
I’m going for it.

**JEN**
…

**SADIE**
…

_Jen readies her serve._
_Under the following, they play the best, longest point they’ve ever played._

**JEN**
You’re gonna do this,
Mind first, celebrity second.
You remember that, okay?

**SADIE**
Okay.

**JEN**
You’ve got to be a fortress before you get anywhere near them.

**SADIE**
Uh huh.

**JEN**
Because they’ll throw you to the wolves.
Shoe brands’ll put you on posters.
You’ll cover magazines, you’ll snap photos, perfumes, dresses you’d never wear.

**SADIE**
Sweet.

Sadie stops listening, focusing on the ball.

**JEN**

The love from people you’ve never met will *overwhelm* you. But to them you’re fast food. They’ll be over you in a year, forget you ever existed, on to the next new thing like parasites. But you play the game? Play it for you because you *love* it at your pace and don’t give a fuck who *likes* you for it? Forget obsession, that’s *respect*. Mind first, celebrity second. Stay in control. On your terms. Remember that.

*Sadie mishits and ends the point.*

**SADIE**

GOD. *Slams racket into the ground.*

FUCKING. *Slams it again.*

DAMN. *Slam.*

IT. *Slams it until it’s busted.*

*Beat of breath.*

*Jen watches from across the net. More irritated than surprised,* *this has happened before.* *Sadie picks up the broken racket.*

**JEN**

What was its name?
SADIE
Jen, don’t.

JEN
Name, say it.

SADIE
…
Madeline.

JEN
Say it.

SADIE
Jen.

JEN
Say it.

SADIE
…
Sorry Madeline.

Sadie gently sets Madeline’s remains in her gear bag.
She gets her spare racket.
Goes to the line.

JEN
You done?

SADIE
Yep.

SCENE 4

Sadie, 18, and Jen, 39, stretch out.
Under the following sequence, as they play,
grass is rolled evenly across the court
and white lines are chalked across it.
SADIE
Can we play a set?

JEN
Forehand today.

SADIE
Come on we’ve drilled all week, let’s play a set-

JEN
Not today, Sadie-O.

SADIE
You win a set I’ll do nothing but drills for a month.

JEN
…You never win sets.

SADIE
Then sounds like a safe deal for you.

JEN
What happens if you win?

SADIE
We play another one.
Up or down?

JEN
...Up.

Sadie spins the racket, checks the logo.

SADIE
It’s up, your serve.

Time passes around them.

JEN
Miami’s humid as fuck.
Stay hydrated, stay fed, now more than ever.

SADIE
I’m fine-

JEN
I’ll remember that when you collapse on court in the second set.

SADIE
0 serving 1.

JEN
Draw is in favor of you-
Ivanovic is up first, run her ragged-
she’s strong, but you can outlast her for hours.

SADIE
I beat her and I’ll be ranked -

JEN
Doesn’t matter.
1 serving 1.
You know why you lost?

SADIE
She outplayed me-

JEN
And why’s that?

SADIE
Because she’s number fifteen in the fucking world?

JEN
No, because you were showing off.
Going for the kill shots.
She’ll outhit you all day.
Meaning you have to play patiently.

SADIE
2 serving 1.

**JEN**
How’s the shoulder?

**SADIE**
Still raw.

**JEN**
Immobile tonight, got me?

**SADIE**
Becker, quarters are tomorrow-

**JEN**
Yeah and you’re playing them with your arm intact.
2 all.

**SADIE**
Quit running me around-

**JEN**
Quit hitting right to my forehand!

**SADIE**
2 serving 3.
Fucking sick of getting knocked out by the quarters, Becker.

**JEN**
I know kid.

**SADIE**
You got anything for me?

**JEN**
Patience.
Play it your way, not theirs.

**SADIE**
Is that the only advice you know?
JEN
When you actually listen I’ll say something new.
3 all.
Stay up! Still catching you on your heels!
You’re strong, but not enough to be caught leaning.

SADIE
4 serving 3.
This racket’s too top heavy-

JEN
Yeah well that racket is paying for this whole tournament for you, so adjust.

SADIE
Adapt and survive?

JEN
Exactly. Hooray for sponsors.
3 serving 5.

SADIE
5 serving 4.

JEN
OUT!

SADIE
WHAT?!

JEN
It was out, Sat down past the line.

SADIE
ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?

JEN
...No?

SADIE
THAT WAS FUCKING IN!

JEN
No it wasn’t-

SADIE
RIGHT ON THE FUCKING LINE!

JEN
Why are you yelling?

SADIE
ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?
ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME, BECKER?!

JEN
NO I AM NOT KIDDING YOU!

SADIE
I SAW IT! ARE YOU FUCKING BLIND?!
CALL IT IN!

JEN
NO.

SADIE
CALL IT IN BECKER!

JEN
NO!

SADIE
CALL IT IN, ...biTCH!

JEN
15-40.

SADIE
UGGH.
JEN
SERVE THE FUCKING BALL SADIE-O.

SADIE
CALL IT IN AND I WILL-

JEN
SERVE THE FUCKING BALL.
NOW.
YOU LOST THE POINT.
YOU HIT IT LONG.
AND YOU LOST THE POINT.
SUCK IT UP AND SERVE THE FUCKING BALL.
DON’T YOU TANTRUM AT ME.

SADIE
...

Sadie serves.

JEN
FAULT!

SADIE
I KNOW I SAW IT BECKER THANK YOU.

Sadie serves.

SADIE
...

JEN
...

SADIE
Don’t.

JEN
DOUBLE FAULT!
GAME!
Sadie is fuming.
Becker prepares to serve.
She’s smiling.
Then she starts laughing.

SADIE
Don’t laugh at me.

Jen covers her mouth, tries to stop.

SADIE
Becker.

JEN
“CALL IT IN, ...biTCH!”

SADIE
Shut up.

JEN
You say bitch like a little kid.

Sadie starts laughing too.

JEN
Five all.

SADIE
Stop making me laugh I can’t swing when I laugh-

JEN
Adapt and survive!

They play.

JEN
Stay up! Up on the toes! GOOD!
Follow through - make the choice-
Hard, fast, and flat,
or top-spin with the drop.
Stop confusing grips.
GOOD-

SADIE
Six serving Five.

JEN
Breathe.
Watch that serve.
Don’t hit a toss you don’t want.
You swing when the ball is where you want it.
It works for you.
One hold, that’s all you need.
Just another point.
Just another game.
Don’t get anxious, don’t rush it.
Eye on the ball, keep pace.
Just return it.
Get it back over.
Breathe.
Just another point.
Let the pressure get to you, you’ll choke.

They play.
Sadie wins.

SADIE
HOLY SHIT!

JEN
Well done.

SADIE
SADIE-O WITH THE W!

JEN
Yeah yeah you’re very talented.

SADIE
BECKER IS DOWN FOR THE COUNT!

JEN
Okay.

*Jen waits at the net for Sadie’s celebration to end.*

JEN
Shake my hand.

*Still waits.*

JEN
Sadie.
Shake my hand.

Sadie comes to the net,
they silently shake hands.

JEN
Well played, kid.

*Beat.*
Sadie smiles.
Jen grabs her in a headlock over the net.
They laugh as Sadie struggles to escape.

JEN
Ready for another one?

SADIE
All day!

SCENE 5

*If any more indications are needed, the Wimbledon dual racket logo, or the green walls, can be incorporated.*

Sadie, 19, and Jen, 40, enter in all white and stare at the courts at Wimbledon.
SADIE

...  

JEN

...

SADIE
What the FUCK.  
Jesus Becker, holy-  
I still can’t hit on grass I’m gonna get murdered out here-

JEN
You’ll be fine.

SADIE
It just flies by-

JEN
Low and quick.  
That’s all it is, low and quick.

SADIE
Fuck, Becker.  
Wimbledon.

JEN
...

SADIE
We’re fucking here.  
It’s going to be televised-  
I just wanna touch the grass with my FACE-

JEN
It’s just another court.

SADIE
No it is NOT just another court it’s like a hundred and fifty years-
JEN
What’re the dimensions?

SADIE
Huh?

JEN
The dimensions.
twenty seven feet, by seventy eight feet.
Same size as the crap court back home.
Just some grass and some more people,
that’s all.

SADIE
…
Are you okay?

JEN
Yeah.

SADIE
…

JEN
Just been here before.
I mean.
It’s been fifteen years,
but.
Been here before.

SADIE
You finally gonna tell me what happened?

JEN
You still haven’t looked me up?

SADIE
Nope.
Made a promise.
Someone tried to tell me at the hotel.
I covered my ears and screamed.

**JEN**

Weird.

…
The draw’s rough.

**SADIE**

I’ll be fine-

**JEN**

No, it’s gonna be rough.
Your first round is Kip Milton, that’s.
She’s something special, Sadie.

**SADIE**

She’s got an Achilles’ tendon just like anyone else.

**JEN**

You mean Achilles’ heel.

**SADIE**

No I don’t.

**JEN**

Okay.
Milton’s number two in the world.

**SADIE**

I know who Kip Milton is, Becker.

**JEN**

Listen.
Two U.S. Opens, one French, semis in Australia.
She wins this Wimbledon, she’s number one.
She’s brutal and she’s ready.
You’re a distraction.
You’re a road bump for her.

**SADIE**
Hey.
We’re here.
Becker, we got to Wimbledon.
You think I’m going to let us get sent home after one match?
See how tough she really is.

JEN
...

SADIE
Maybe she’s evil or something.

JEN
What?

SADIE
You know.
Evil.
I’ll be the heroic underdog, cheered on by all the polite English people.

JEN
I think you’re out of luck there. Pinnacle of class.
Only a few years older than you.
All smiles, hugs at the net, never talks back on a call,
They love her here.

SADIE
...So what you’re saying is, if I beat her, I’m taking out the crowd favorite.

JEN
Pretty much.

SADIE
So I’m the villain. I’m the bad guy.

JEN
The foul mouthed, pissy nineteen year old American racquet smasher? Yeah I’d say the cards’re stacked against you a bit, favorite-wise.
SADIE
Well that’s just fucking wonderful.

JEN
Just try not to tantrum.

Sadie examines her raquet.

SADIE
I’d never smash Wallace.
Well.
One of 300 Wallaces. 
I have endless Wallace’s now.
Come on let’s play a set-

JEN
No.

SADIE
No, come on, no drills today. I got some nerves to get out.

JEN
Sadie.

SADIE
Up or down?

Sadie spins the racket, Jen doesn’t call.
It lands, Sadie looks at Jen.

JEN
It’s going to be intense. 
More than anything you’ve experienced. 
Players get out here, in front of thousands of people, thousands more at home, 
they can barely remember the rules, let alone find their forehand. 
Play like you do at home. 
Just another court. 
Milton plays like a god, but she’s still slow to get into her backhand. 
Drill em low and flat to the ad corner, keep her moving. 
You do that, you’ll be fine.
SADIE
...

JEN
...

SADIE
Why are you talking like you won’t be there?

JEN
...I have a flight to catch.

SADIE
You’re, shitting me, right?

JEN
I can’t be here, Sadie.

SADIE
What, at Wimbledon?

JEN
...Yeah.

SADIE
So you’re gonna bail?

JEN
I’m not bailing.

SADIE
Yes you are.
Quitting the second it gets hard.
“Take a break, don’t push pace.”
You know what?
Lean in, Becker.
Push, for once.
It’d be good for you.
JEN
…
Anything you’d like to tell me?

SADIE
Um, don’t fucking leave?

JEN
…I warned you, Sadie.
I did.

SADIE
…

JEN
…when were you going to tell me?

SADIE
Tell you what?

JEN
Sadie, just.
Don’t, okay?
Don’t, make this a joke, don’t play dumb, just.

SADIE
…

JEN
…
when were you going to tell me?

SADIE
…
When we got home.

JEN
Ah.
SADIE
It’s not personal, Becker-

JEN
It’s not personal? Do you know what personal means?
Have you had anything personal before?
Because dumping me for greener pastures feels pretty damn personal.

SADIE
I’m only here because of you, I owe you, everything.
But, I’m going to the next level, Becker!
They’re gonna fund me!
I won’t have to worry about a damn thing but the game!
Me, my mom,
no more living with the grandparents,
no more worrying, and you-

JEN
Don’t do the whole, it was for all of us thing, okay?

SADIE
You always say, drop what’s not working.
Change when something goes stale.
Adapt and survive, right?

JEN
…
Who’s your new coach?
Some dignified retiree?
Not some crash and burn caution tale?

SADIE
Natalia Cronkowski.

JEN
…

SADIE
…
JEN
...

SADIE
Look she’s-

JEN
UGH.
UUUUGH.

SADIE
She’s gonna be-

JEN
SHE’S GONNA BE WHAT?! AWFUL?! YES.
YES SHE WILL.
Christ, the SOUNDS.
THE SOUNDS SHE MAKES.
LIKE A GODDAM,
NARWHAL,
HAVING SEX WITH A,
HELIUM TANK.
That’s what you want?
Well I’m glad this happened, then, Sadie.
Because if that’s what you want
I have been the opposite.
So I’m glad to know
you prefer

She motions a swing with an awful high pitched exhale squeal.
Does it again and again.
Sadie stares.

SADIE
I don’t know personal?
You’re right, I don’t.
Because since I was six years old, I haven’t done shit but this game. With you.

JEN
I seem to remember a little girl who wouldn’t leave me alone.
I. Am only here.
Because you got me to care about you.
Sure, change what’s not working.
But Christ, Sadie, stay human.
Don’t dump everyone with you on day one
for a little money.
...
Good luck on Saturday.
I mean that.
I really do.
But I won’t be watching.

*She leaves.*
*Sadie watches her go.*
*Eventually, she gathers balls to practice service*
*as lights transition, afternoon into evening into night.*
*she reaches the baseline for*

**SCENE 6**

*The courts at Wimbledon, late late at night.*
*Fluorescent court lights pop on with a hum as Sadie sets the ball hopper at the baseline.*
*She puts her headphones in, finds a song on her phone.*
*She serves, the song plays, and this moment lingers.*

*Eventually, a man enters behind her.*
*He carries an old fashioned, wooden racket.*
*He watches her from the baseline.*

**STRANGER**
You’re practicing late.

*She doesn’t hear him.*

**STRANGER**
I said You’re Practicing Late.

*Still doesn’t hear him.*
*He sees her headphones.*
*He circles around in front of her.*
She sees him, jumps.
He makes a “take out your headphones, I’d like to talk to you for a minute” gesture.
A beat, then she does.

SADIE
What?

STRANGER
I said you’re practicing late.

SADIE
Yeah, I am.
How did you get in here? You’re not allowed in here-

STRANGER
Whoa whoa I’m sorry, didn’t mean to scare you.
I’m just um. I’m a big fan of yours and I wanted to say good luck tomorrow.

SADIE
Oh.
Um.
Thank you.
I appreciate that.

STRANGER
You got Kip Milton, first round, think you can take her?

SADIE
...
Well if I didn’t, it’d be pointless to show up, wouldn’t it?

STRANGER
I like Kip Milton.

SADIE
...She’s very good, yeah.

STRANGER
It’s my first time at Wimbledon.
SADIE
Congratulations.

STRANGER
I’m from the states too.

SADIE
Yeah I can tell.

STRANGER
Oh, right, accent, of course.
Ha.

SADIE
...

STRANGER
Bigger than I thought it would be.
Saved for a long time to get here.
Used to be anybody could show up, in the old days,
money out of pocket’d get you in.
Now it’s top dollar, any match worth watching.
Once a thing gets popular, prices UP, am I right?
Till you get sick of it of course. But by then it’s used up.
This grass’ll be brown by then, no one’ll pay to see it.
My God, the grass-

He goes to the court and kneels, feels the grass with his fingers.

STRANGER
Huh.

SADIE
...
what?

STRANGER
Thought it’d feel special.
You know?
Some feeling I’d remember, take home with me.  
But, here I am, hand on the holy grail,  
and it’s all just grass.  
You here alone?

**SADIE**  
My coach is…

**STRANGER**  
Is he?

**SADIE**  
…

**STRANGER**  
…

**SADIE**  
Look um.  
I don’t mean to be rude, but-

**STRANGER**  
What?

**SADIE**  
I’m trying to serve.

**STRANGER**  
Oh! Oh yeah let me get out of your way- I was actually hoping you could sign my racket?

*Extends the wooden racket to her.*

**STRANGER**  
Didn’t mean to interrupt you, sorry, it was my dad’s racket, it’s old.  
Would you mind?

**SADIE**  
…I guess.

*He hands her a pen, holds it out for her to sign.*
She signs quickly.
He holds it like a treasure.

STRANGER
Great.
That’s great.
Thank you.

SADIE
Sure.
Now, if you don’t mind?

STRANGER
Right lemme get out of your way.
Is it cool if I stand over here?
Won’t bother you, I swear.
But if it’s okay I’d like to watch you serve.

SADIE
You got your autograph already-

STRANGER
Photo op, more’n anything, have to admit.
Just one, huh? Come on, one’s not a huge deal, right?
One and then I’ll leave you alone, okay?

SADIE
I’d rather not.

STRANGER
Come on! Just serve for me, once.

SADIE
I don’t like being told what to do.

STRANGER
…

SADIE
…
STRANGER
Look, Sorry. Wasn’t trying to be rude. Just thought it wouldn’t be so much to ask, considering you were gonna be serving anyway.

SADIE
Could you please just leave me alone?

STRANGER
You sure?

SADIE
Please leave.

STRANGER
Don’t have to get angry.

SADIE
Look just go, okay?

STRANGER
What am I doing? I’m just standing here.

SADIE
Then I’m leaving-

Sadie goes to exit.
He cuts her off - not aggressively, but close.

STRANGER
Look, look I’m sorry- just let me apologize alright?

SADIE
Okay whatever but I’d like to leave now, okay?

STRANGER
You’re not even listening to me.

SADIE
Fucking stay away from me, you got it?

**STRANGER**
What did I do?
You know how hard it is to just, meet, someone new?
How lonely it gets?
I’m not inappropriate, I’m polite,
all I asked for was an autograph and a serve, get a photo.
I don’t get what’s so fucking unreasonable about that.
What did I do wrong?
What did I do to get you so fucking freaked out?

**SADIE**
Look you’re making me uncomfortable.

**STRANGER**
Oh look I’m making you uncomfortable. I’m just trying to approach, for fuck’s sake.
Forgive me for thinking I could cross the chasm between us at home,
watching all the famous angels through the cum on the computer monitor.
How do you cross that gap, huh?
You think I can’t fall in love with interviews? Photoshoots?
Body paint bikinis on beaches I’ll never get to see?
I know, deep down I know,
if she knew me, she could love me.
But how do you get there?
Whole lotta cameras and money has got me on the other side of the world, don’t it?
I get a chance.
I deserve a chance.

**SADIE**
This is not how you get your fucking chance, alright?

**STRANGER**
...
Wait, you thought-
You?
Oh.
Oh I’m sorry.
This must be confusing.
No, no I’m not here for you. No offense, it’s not you.
You’re not my type.
I’m here for Kip Milton.
I just need to do something to show her how much she means to me.

_Beat._
*He advances on her.*
*Sadie hits him hard with the racket.*
*He swears and grabs the wound on his head.*
*Sadie screams for help and runs,*
*He catches her by her collar and pulls her back,*
*covers her mouth.*

**STRANGER**
Easy now, easy-

_She struggles, he maintains his grip._

**STRANGER**
Be over in a minute-

_They enter a movement loop of the struggle._
*Each loop they separate a little farther,*
*until they stand some distance apart,*
*but still moving as if they are entangled.*
*Eventually,*
*He sets the wooden racket on the ground by its handle, holding it by the top at an angle.*
*He stomps down violently on the racket, splintering it in half.*
*Sadies knee jerks down violently at a terrible angle.*
*The Stranger lifts the remains of the racquet, stares at it.*

**STRANGER**
I’m sorry Sadie.

*He drops the racket in a pile and runs offstage.*
*Fluorescents pop off to a black out.*
ACT 2

SCENE 1

The neighborhood courts.
Sadie, 25, sits against the fence alone. She has a soft brace on her knee.
She unwraps a giant cheeseburger as she watches the most recent Wimbledon final on her phone.
The meal is long, awkward, and slothlike.
Some sauce probably spills on her clothes, and will remain there the rest of the show.
Eventually, Jen, 46, enters.
She stops when she sees Sadie.

SADIE
...Hiya Becker.

JEN
...

SADIE
You gonna say hello?

JEN
...

SADIE
Well say something it’s getting weird.

JEN
What should I say?

SADIE
Merry Christmas.

JEN
Merry Christmas.
What are you,
What are you doing here?

SADIE
Got homesick.

JEN
Now?

SADIE
What?
I can get homesick.
Still at it with the 7 a.m. serves, huh?

JEN
...

SADIE
Good for you.

JEN
You wouldn’t return my calls.

SADIE
...

JEN
I called, a lot. For a long time.

SADIE
Well. Took you a few years to even try.

JEN
...
How’s the knee?

SADIE
...
There was a minute there between surgery three and four
where I thought I could control cats with my mind.
But I think that was just the painkillers.
Now it’s just sore in the mornings.

JEN
It’s come a long way.

**SADIE**
Five years’ll do that.

**JEN**
…
god this is so uncomfortable.

**SADIE**
What did you expect?

**JEN**
I didn’t expect anything I was just coming out to serve and and and-

**SADIE**
Oh well forgive me for throwing a wrench into your routine, Becker-

**JEN**
I’m anxious, okay?
God,
I’m having this like,
God like I’m having trouble breathing all of a sudden-

**SADIE**
Well breathe then dammit-

**JEN**
Oh thank you Sadie, your solutions are always so effective, I’ll just start breathing.
Jesus, what are you, what the fuck are you doing here?

**SADIE**
I’m home for a bit, okay?

**JEN**
What’s for a bit?

**SADIE**
Month.
JEN
Oh like, a bit a bit.

SADIE
Winter break. Yeah.

JEN
You’re in school?

SADIE
Sure am.
Real nice little community college south of Santa Cruz.
…
I’m a sophomore.

JEN
How?

SADIE
Well I was a freshman first.

JEN
Duh, Sadie,
What are you studying?

SADIE
Physical therapy.

JEN
…

SADIE
Thing is I can only take couple classes at a time.
Gotta work, of course.
So, one class here, one there.
I think I’m on the nine year plan.
Some folks call it purgatory.
But baby steps, I suppose.

JEN
Look, it’s. I’m glad to know you’re doing well, but. I’m not just gonna, act like everything’s ducky, Sadie.

SADIE
We don’t have to.

JEN
Talking to you makes me feel like shit, okay?

SADIE
…

JEN
You threw me away the second something better showed up. You blew off my calls. And yes. They came late. I’m sorry for that. But.

SADIE
It’s messy, so you write me off?

JEN
…

SADIE
I mean I get it. “Know when to call it.”

JEN
Look just. Not today, okay?

SADIE
Sure. Whatever you say.

Beat.

JEN
...Well?

SADIE
...Well what?

JEN
Are you gonna go?

SADIE
My court.

JEN
 Seriously?

SADIE
I was here first.

JEN
You knew I was coming.

SADIE
Yeah so I got here early.
Court is mine and you’ll have to wait your turn.

JEN
You don’t even have a racket.

SADIE
Nope.
Sold em.

JEN
...
You sold all of your rackets?

SADIE
Beatrice, Nurton, Wallace, Theodore, Suzanne, and Molly. Couple grand each on ebay, paid for the first three surgeries and freshman year.

JEN
SADIE
Wasn’t using them anymore anyway.

JEN
Then you don’t need the court.

SADIE
Pretty sure that’s not for you to decide.

JEN
Fine.
I’ll come earlier tomorrow.

*Jen turns to leave.*

SADIE
I’ll sleep here if I have to!

JEN
You do that.

SADIE
You’re really still that mad at me?

JEN
*

SADIE
You don’t think I paid enough?
For fucking you over?

*Jen stops, turns.*

JEN
NUH UH. NO.
Don’t you dare.
Getting blindsided by some fucked up stalker boy is not karma.
Things do not happen for a reason
There is not cause and effect at work.
You had some shit fuckin luck
because some dickhole thought he deserved to see his delusions come true.
Stalkers jerking off to Kip Milton swimsuit issues in mom’s basement
do not get to be agents of justice.
So don’t you fucking dare pretend you earned what happened.

SADIE
...

JEN
...
You did, know that, right?

SADIE
...

JEN
...

SADIE
Look I need a favor.

JEN
Sadie.

SADIE
I need a favor, alright?

JEN
Sadie I don’t trust you.

SADIE
You think I trust you?

JEN
...

SADIE
I was selfish, okay? But come on I was a kid.
Do you know how much shit sponsors were throwing at me?

**JEN**
Only got room for so many betrayals in your heart, kid.
Mine were gone long before you showed up.

**SADIE**
Look, shit got weird
and I get it.
But I *have* to believe there’s enough time to make things right
after they’ve gone wrong.
Otherwise, all this-
what we pulled off,
meant nothing.

**JEN**
...People can’t just start over, kid.
It seems like they can but they can’t.

**SADIE**
Then don’t start over.
Adapt and survive, right?

**JEN**
I already did.

**SADIE**
...
Let’s figure it out in little chunks, okay?
I mean everything that happened is like.
Big.
Like.
Too big to look at all at once without giving up.
So.
Just. Little steps.

**JEN**
...very little steps.
Deal.

**JEN**
...okay.

**SADIE**
Great.
So I need a favor.

**JEN**
...what?

**SADIE**
I need a place to stay.

**JEN**
...

**SADIE**
I know.

**JEN**
Sadie.

**SADIE**
I know.

**JEN**
Sadie that is not a little step.

**SADIE**
It kind of is-

**JEN**
It is not in any way a little step it is the opposite. That’s like a huge step.

**SADIE**
No, no, no, because, with this step, we will be near each other to take all of our little steps.
JEN
If we were dating I’d be dumping you right now cause you’re creeping me out.

SADIE
Or because you’re dating someone waaaay too young for you-

JEN
Gonna kill you.

SADIE
Nope, see, there, little steps.

JEN
Go live with your mom, Sadie-

SADIE
Can’t.

JEN
What do you mean?
Just get your room back-

SADIE
They don’t live there anymore.

JEN
What?

SADIE
Grandma fell down the stairs, and her memory’s in the shitter, so
They’re in an apartment, just a tiny little thing. Less upkeep, you know? No room.

JEN
Then,
Sadie,
why are you here?

SADIE
…
Idunno, alright?
...Court looks like shit.

**JEN**
...yeah.
Watched that crack grow, there.
It started as a little ridge, there, near center at the net.
Spread all the way up to the baseline,
split the whole thing open and started branching towards the sides.
‘S like an infection.

**SADIE**
Wouldn’t hurt somebody to weed it once in awhile.

**JEN**
I did, for a long time, got away from me.
It’ll get fixed up again sooner or later.
Just old.

**SADIE**
Christ you’re not that old Becker.

**JEN**
Talking about the court, Sadie.

**SADIE**
No you’re not.

**JEN**
So *great* to see you Sadie.

**SADIE**
Just saying.

**JEN**
...Colder mornings are starting to hurt, have to admit.
Roll out of bed and my joints feel like they’re locked shut.

**SADIE**
You go down to the floor in the middle of the night?
Easier on the back?
JEN
Yeah.

SADIE
Me too.
See? We’re both old.
Sport spits you out by thirty anyway.

JEN
You’re twenty five.

SADIE
Yeah, well.
Look.
I’m aware this is a big favor.
I need to live somewhere rent free
and work my ass off
so I can get back to the coast by spring.
I will serve coffee and make goddamn lattes
and collect my tips like a good little capitalist
and be on my way.
You’ll hardly know I’m there.

JEN
…
It’s not a big place.

SADIE
That’s okay.

JEN
Every morning at seven I will go to serve alone.
If you mess with that, so help me I will throttle you.

SADIE
This is the last time I will be on a court for a very long time.

JEN
…You’re really not playing at all?
SCENE 2

Sadie, 26, and Jen, 47, argue offstage as they approach the court.

SADIE
Will you just mind your own goddamn business?

JEN
Afterwards, but you have to promise you’ll-

SADIE
Yeah I promised
I already goddam promised
what do you think I’m doing out here-

JEN
You’re just afraid I’m right.

SADIE
I am not afraid you’re right
I already know you’re not right
I’m just indulging you
because I am a fucking patient person.

JEN
Suit yourself.

They enter, both with racket bags. Sadie’s has lived in storage for a looong time. 
Over the following they get out their rackets. Sadie’s is Felix, from her childhood.
JEN
I still say you should let me loan you a racket.

SADIE
Felix will be fine.

JEN
It’s a dinosaur.

SADIE
Yeah well so am I.
I’m already out here goddamit
I am not sinking down another peg borrowing one of your rackets.
My mother bought me Felix, he will do just fine.

JEN
I can’t believe you still have that thing.

SADIE
My mom doesn’t throw anything away.

Sadie takes a bottle out of her bag.

SADIE
Drink?

JEN
No I don’t want a drink-

SADIE
Suit yourself.

Sadie takes a shot.

JEN
You can’t be serious.

SADIE
It’s a nice evening, I’m having a drink.
Don’t get picky.

_They stretch out._
_Jen watches Sadie carefully stretch the knee._
_Sadie straightens her brace._
_Stands up, big breath._

**SADIE**
Alright bitch let’s go.

**JEN**
Up or down?

**SADIE**
No points.

**JEN**
What?

**SADIE**
I’m not.
No points.
Just rally.

**JEN**
...You don’t want to keep score?

**SADIE**
No.

**JEN**
...

**SADIE**
That cool?

**JEN**
Yeah, yeah it’s cool.

_They rally._
When it hits the net, Sadie holds her hands up.

SADIE
We done?

JEN
No we are not done.

SADIE
I hit a ball.

JEN
Shut up.

SADIE
What are you hoping to accomplish here?

JEN
Nothing! I just want you to do something that isn’t awful.
I want you to go outside.
You work, you come home, you complain, you have a drink, you go to bed.

SADIE
You just described my perfect day.

JEN
Bullshit.

SADIE
I thought you liked having me around?

JEN
I do!

SADIE
Then what do you want?

JEN
I’m worried about you, alright?
SADIE
I don’t need you to be worried.

JEN
Yes you do, Sadie.

SADIE
So you bring me to a fucking court?
Think that will make me feel better?

JEN
...It’s where you talk, Sadie.

SADIE
I talk to you at home.

JEN
No, no not like that.
This is where you speak.
You’ve never been much of a socializer, Sadie-

SADIE
Thanks.

JEN
Not an insult.
Just a fact.
You talk with the ball.
Pissed off and reckless.
And I refuse to believe anything can take that away from you.

SADIE
...

JEN
Play a few points?

SADIE
...Some other time.
Sadie goes back to her bag to put her racket away.

Jen stands at the other baseline, disappointed.

Then, anxiously:

**JEN**

I’m twenty-five.

and I show up to Wimbledon, a week early, on my own.

Sadie stops.

**JEN**

My coach had dropped me for some sixteen year old prodigy.

It was all money, but

I was twenty-five, and they’re talking like I’m on my way out.

Like coach ditched me because I wouldn’t be playing much longer anyway.

Elbow was having a rough time, surgery on the left wrist coming up that year.

But Christ, I still had time to go.

Anyway.

I’m alone in this hotel room.

Nobody’d come with me,

didn’t have any friends left, they got sick of hearing “I’m busy.”

And this hotel room’s just so, silent.

It’s deafening.

But I can’t get myself to leave the room all week.

And I’m starting to lose it.

And I start doing a pretty impressive amount of cocaine.

I was really good at cocaine.

And I see with this blinding clarity,

that it’s the game that changed.

All this powerhouse baseline play,

no wonder all our elbows are fucked, our knees aching every morning by twenty five years old.

What happened to serve and volley?

What happened to subtlety? Grace?

So I pull myself out of bed

and decide I’m bringing it back.

I show up to my first round match

number six in the world

against the number one hundred and fifty seventh

and I play the whole match with wooden rackets.
SADIE
…

JEN
…
You already know all this, don’t you?

SADIE
…

JEN
You always said you wouldn’t look me up.

SADIE
I didn’t.
When I was little, my mom said you were “troubled.”
I told her if she didn’t let me play with you I’d move back east with Dad.
First conversation I had with sponsors,
they asked how I could be blowing them off for a cokehead.

JEN
You’ve known, since the beginning?

SADIE
I never looked it up, Becker.
You’re just supposed to assume nobody’s perfect.
You deserve to keep a secret,
have a history that’s nobody’s business.
But, you make one mistake, one bad moment, and that’s all anyone can talk about.

JEN
…
I guess it was kind of hard to believe.

Sadie looks in her bag.

SADIE
God this bag is disgusting.
I think it got flooded at some point.
Should just throw all this shit away.

_Reaches in, removes some towels, dumps them on the ground._
_Reaches in, freezes._

**SADIE**

...

**JEN**

...What?
Snake in there or something?

_Sadie removes an ancient, filthy, battered stuffed antelope._

**SADIE**

Oh my god.

**JEN**

God Sadie don’t touch that-

**SADIE**

It’s Otto.

**JEN**

What?

**SADIE**

It’s Otto the Antelope.

**JEN**

It’s a fucking biohazard-

**SADIE**

What the hell’s he doing in here? I thought he was long gone-

**JEN**

Will you please throw that thing away?

**SADIE**

Mom must have stuck him in here.
Sadie stares at Otto.  
Eventually, she sets the bag back down off court.  
Sits Otto carefully down beside it.  
Picks up her racket.

SADIE

…
Up or down?

JEN

What?

SADIE

Up or down?

JEN

…up.

Sadie spins the racket,  
watches it land.

SADIE

It’s down.  
My serve.

Jen stares at Sadie,  
goes to the baseline,  
gets ready for

SCENE 3

They play.  
Time passes around them.

JEN

Up on the toes, lean in-

SADIE

I am!
JEN
Yeah sure.
0 serving 1.
Eye on the ball-

SADIE
MY EYE IS ON THE BALL!

JEN
Bullshit.

SADIE
1 serving 1.
Will you cut it out with the dropshots?!

JEN
Make me!
2 serving 1.
Knee okay?

SADIE
’S fine.

JEN
Don’t let yourself get moved around so much, control the pace from the baseline.

SADIE
2 all.
What’s the draw?

JEN
Doesn’t matter.

SADIE
It matters, Becker-

JEN
No, this is an experiment, nobody big even knows this tournament exists.
Do not wreck yourself for this.
SADIE
We’re going to New Haven I’m making it worth it.

JEN
Take it easy, first time out.
We’re just testing the waters.
3 serving 2.

Silence.
Sadie, 28, bent over, eyes shut against pain,
one hand holding the knee.

JEN
Sadie-

SADIE
Hang on.

JEN
We’re going home.

SADIE
Becker.

JEN
You’re withdrawing.
We’re going home.

SADIE
I know we’re withdrawing just stop talking you’re annoying me.

JEN
…

SADIE
…
Got to quarters!
Not bad for a gimp, huh?

JEN
You’ve been pushing on it too hard, you can’t cover the court like you used to-

**SADIE**
I know, I know.

**JEN**
You just.
Look, I don’t think we should do this.
This was a bad idea.

**SADIE**
Not asking your permission, Becker.
I’m just getting back in the swing, give it time-

**JEN**
We’ve given it time.
You’re almost thirty and your knee’s fucked.

**SADIE**
You’re the one who was all, “just play the game a bit.”

**JEN**
Yeah, at *home*.
Like in our *neighborhood*.
I didn’t even realize I was coaching you again until we were in Japan.

**SADIE**
Needed a challenge.

**JEN**
You’re not gonna be able to walk in a few years.

**SADIE**
Fuck it.
That’s my problem.
You stick around or don’t, that’s your call.

**JEN**
If I do you have to do something.
SADIE
And what’s that?

JEN
Adjust.
You know.
That thing you’ve refused to do for twenty years.

SADIE
What exactly do you want?

JEN
Push points.

SADIE
...You’re fucking with me.

JEN
...

SADIE
All those years of “no more killshots”
of “rally and keep the rhythm”
Now you want me to fucking killshot?

JEN
Because now you can rally and keep the rhythm.
You’re forehand is looking nasty.
Stronger than I’ve ever seen it.

SADIE
So start over?

JEN
It’s either that, or you don’t play.
If you’re going to destroy yourself out here, at least win.
Change your game.
Adapt and survive.
They play.

SADIE
2 serving 4.

JEN
Push up, catch it on the rise.
4 serving 3.
How’s the cortisone?

SADIE
Fucking miracle working.
4 serving 4.

JEN
Paint the corners with the serve.
Every ace is a point to rest the knee.
4 serving 5.

Sadie wins a point,
Jen leans over on her knees, out of breath.

SADIE
...You okay?

JEN
...
you’ve got a new game.

SADIE
…Becker? Did I break you?

JEN
Shut up I’m fifty not a hundred.
...Nice work.

They shake hands at the net.
Jen starts to leave, Sadie gathers balls in the hopper.
The lights dim from morning to afternoon to evening to night over the following.
JEN
The way you’re playing
I can see you avoiding too much strain on the knee
but it’s working for you.
Just keep generating pace,
keep on the offensive,
smack the shit out of the ball on the rise,
and never let somebody run you around any more than you have to,
you’re golden.
Few years on tour left, after all. Who’d of thought?

Sadie lands at the baseline, as fluorescent court lights pop on for

SCENE 4

Sadie, 29, stands at the baseline with the hopper and a much newer gear bag,
late late at night.
She opens the bag, removes a new racket, sets it down.
Removes a bottle of whiskey, sets it down.
She picks up her racket, loosens up her shoulder.
Starts serving.
*When the serve is in, she readies another.*
*When she faults, she takes a shot of whiskey.*
Eventually, Jen, 50, enters, hands in pockets.
Sadie keeps serving through the following.

JEN
...Bit late isn’t it?

SADIE
Couldn’t sleep.

JEN
You wanna talk?

SADIE
Not yet.

JEN
Kay.

**SADIE**

... 

**JEN**

Whatcha doin?

**SADIE**

If serve is in, you go again. If it’s a fault, you take a shot.

**JEN**

...Oh.

Thought we were done with the drinking?

*Sadie gestures to the other side of the court.*

**SADIE**

You mind?

**JEN**

Okay.

*Jen goes to the other side of the net.*

*As their conversation continues, Jen watches where the serve lands, calls “out” each time Sadie faults, and Sadie takes shots accordingly.*

**SADIE**

How long you think you get, to decide what you wanna be when you grow up?

**JEN**

What, you mean like astronauts or firemen?

**SADIE**

Nah like anything.

**JEN**

Your whole life, I think.

**SADIE**
No.
When’d you start playing?

**JEN**
Seven.

**SADIE**
I was six.

**JEN**
I know I was there.

**SADIE**
Right.

**JEN**
What about it?

**SADIE**
You think if you’d found it on your own time, picked it up at fifteen, or something, you’d have gotten anywhere?

**JEN**
Dunno.

**SADIE**
I don’t think so.
And what if you pick the wrong thing?
I mean what the fuck do six year olds know? They’re idiots.
If some little girl is like, “I want to be an astronaut,”
I’m not gonna just, shoot her into space for the next twenty years of her life.
Fuck I’m twenty-nine years old and I’m just now beginning to not feel like an idiot.

**JEN**
You think you picked the wrong gig?

**SADIE**
I just never did anything else.

**JEN**
And you want to?

**SADIE**
Just, what next?
How many years you think I’ve got left of this?
Hell it takes a shot of cortisone just to keep me upright for a whole tournament,
I feel like something you made in a lab more than an athlete.
In Dubai I barely got off court before I fucking *collapsed*.
Soon you’ll be propping me up in front of the crowds each match,
some has-been out for the ball till the elixir wears off
and she turns back into a pumpkin.
And that’ll work for what, another year or two?
I should have picked one of those jobs that gets more glamorous with age.
This one’s about done with me.

**JEN**
…

**SADIE**
I didn’t mean-

**JEN**
No, no, please tell me more about how gross it is when old people play tennis.
I’m entranced.

**SADIE**
I just meant, this won’t last, forever, alright?

**JEN**
Age six onward you couldn’t hit a ball straight because you only cared about Wimbledon.
Now you’re out here in a crisis because it’ll end someday.
Do you ever just think about *now*?

**SADIE**
Yeah but like what will I *do*?

**JEN**
Coach!
Be an announcer!
Make a clothing line!
Write a book! You’ll make money and survive, I’ll get old and die, and then some little girl will turn up to ruin your service practice some morning.

Sadie hits a serve nearly straight up in the air and wobbles.

JEN
Here my turn.

SADIE
What?

JEN
Trade me I want a turn.

Sadie reluctantly switches places with Jen.

Jen starts serving. Sadie calls “out” when she faults, Jen takes shots from the bottle accordingly.

JEN
I was engaged, once.

SADIE
...You?

JEN
I know.

SADIE
 Seriously.

JEN
Mhmm. And it was. Nice. Actually.

SADIE
It didn’t work out?
JEN
No, Sadie, we’re still happily married.

SADIE
Sorry, I just mean like, what happened?

JEN
Game started slipping.
Barely made it out of the first round in the Open that year.
Had to pick what really mattered to me.

SADIE
...
Wimbledon’s got a wild card for me.

Jen freezes.

JEN
No shit.
When did you hear?

SADIE
Today.

JEN
...You gonna take it?

SADIE
They just feel sorry for me.
Looking for a heartwarmer.

JEN
...you’ll be the crowd favorite for once!

SADIE
Fuck, Becker-
What is it?
One second it’s play the game my way,
play for love,
play for me,
then you’re telling me play for the crowds, be everyone’s favorite. You want me to compete or you want me to love the game? Because, as you also say, we can love the game from home. So what is it? Because so far all you’ve given me are fucking contradictions.

JEN
...I mean, Yeah.
Duh.
...
Were you expecting some, all solving, guidebook?
The fuck are you doing on a tennis court then?
You want things to be so simple, black and white, shallow
go be a preacher.
Or a republican.
Everything else is contradiction.
Adapt and survive.

SADIE
Kip Milton’s looking at retirement.
How much you wanna bet I see her in round one?

JEN
It’s random selection.

SADIE
Not when ratings are involved.
Ten year old match that never happened?

JEN
...
Still say you can take her.
Not like that backhand got faster with age.

SADIE
...
Where did you get wooden rackets?

JEN
What?
SADIE
When you got all coked up.
Where’d you get wooden rackets?
They still make those?

JEN
Nope.
Found em in a thrift store.
Three of em for a couple euros each.
They were a bit moldy.

SADIE
Jesus.

JEN
At one point I tried to return a serve with one of them and it snapped in half.
Lost 6-0, 6-0.
...
But in the last game, I placed a perfect drop shot,
and the motherfucker called it out.
So I just start, fucking, screaming.
This is where all the coke kinda starts taking over.
Like, tantrum.
I start slamming my racket into the grass
but it just, wouldn’t break, wouldn’t even splinter.
And I hear him call out the disqualification
from up there in his fucking chair
and so I just.
I just fucking threw it at him.

SADIE
...
Wait what?

JEN
Oh come on you know this.

SADIE
No! No I don’t know this part-
JEN
How?

SADIE
Nobody ever got that far, they just said you went psychotic on coke and played with wooden rackets, I didn’t let them go farther-

JEN
Shit.

SADIE
You threw your racket at the official?

JEN
Yeah. Seemed like a good idea at the time. And, you know, it was made of fucking wood, so the thing just like, flew. Like waaay more momentum than I expected.

SADIE
Did you hurt him?

JEN
Um. Well. He kind of, caught it, I guess? But The momentum of the racket just sort of, tipped his whole, chair tower over.

SADIE
Oh my god-

JEN
So I don’t know if it was the racket, or the ground. But. Something gave him a concussion.
SADIE

…

They both start laughing.
Around them, grass is getting rolled out across the court, as the setting changes to Wimbledon.

SADIE
Is it pathetic?
To go back?
Should I be letting this go?

JEN
I wish I’d stuck around, after I freaked out.
Shown kids there’re enough years to bounce back from anything.
One bad moment,
and they remember me for a tantrum way more than two grand slams.
More than anything to do with my game.

…
I think you should do it.
I’ll coach you till I need false teeth and forget my own name.
But if you wanna play at home, let’s play at home.
You don’t owe them anything.
Go out on your terms, not theirs.

SADIE
...You’re coming with me?

JEN
...Yeah. I’m coming with you.

SADIE
...I’m sorry.
For the last time we went.

JEN
…
I’m sorry too.

SADIE
I won’t ditch you this time.

JEN
Well.
No one’s really asking you to, this time.

SADIE
Try not to throw anything while we’re there.

The courts finish assembling around them for

SCENE 5

Wimbledon.
Jen and Sadie, in all whites.

JEN
Okay.
How you doing?

SADIE
Fine.

JEN
Really?

SADIE
No.
I don’t know.
Um.
Hyperventilating?

JEN
Well that probably won’t help your chances.

SADIE
No shit?

JEN
Oh hey look I pissed you off and you focused.
How bout that.
Actually the only thing I’ve ever seen that can get you to focus.
Use that on court you’ll be fine.
You got all your Wallace’s?

**SADIE**
Yeah.
...
You know I’m not going to win, right?

**JEN**
Why not?

**SADIE**
I mean I’ll play, but come on, Kip’s out for a legacy.

**JEN**
So are you.
Let her retire getting knocked out in the first round.
That’s not your problem.

**SADIE**
I’m thirty, Becker.
In tennis years that’s like seventy.

**JEN**
I’m fifty fucking one and I beat you last week.

**SADIE**
You’re not playing in Wimbledon!

**JEN**
The only way to lose for sure is to go in saying “I’m gonna lose.”

**SADIE**
I’m gonna lose.

**JEN**
But you’re *here*.
Meaning you are more likely to win Wimbledon
then anybody not here.

SADIE
...I’m more likely to win Wimbledon then people who aren’t playing in Wimbledon.

JEN
Yep.

SADIE
Fulla confidence now, Becker.

JEN
But that’s just it.
There’s a *chance* you could *win*.
You’re not *certain*.
Stop deciding in advance.
I never thought I’d tell you this,
but be more naive.
We should all be so lucky to be naive enough
to believe we can still surprise ourselves.
You look at the daunting and say “that’s impossible?”
That’s death.
“That’s inevitable?”
Death.
There’s no fate,
there’s no order of things,
if there was, there’s no point to doing anything and fuck that world.
Who says you have to go out on a high note?
Retire with grace?
Fuck it.
You wanna play,
you play till you’re *done*.
You wanna be here?
You show up till you can’t get up in the morning.
You stand here in front of them until your spine curves.
Till they scoop your bloated corpse off the court
and unweave the bones of your fingers from the grass.
But whatever happens, you go in and get *surprised*.
Stay up, stay *loose*, keep *pace*.
Nineteen year olds can run all day but they don’t know the game like you.
Win, lose, whatever, you don’t know.  
The future isn’t set.  
*Never* think anything is.  
And if you can pull that off?  
There’s life in you yet, Sadie-O.

Sadie alone, tentatively steps onto the grass at Wimbledon.  
Lights fade around her.  
She opens a new canister of balls, dumps them in her hand.  
She inspects them, bounces one away.  
Sticks one in her pocket.  
Holds the last one, smells it.  
Dribbles it.  
Looks up at the sky.  
Looks across the court.

**SADIE**  
Till they unweave the bones of your fingers from the grass.  
…  
Well.  
Okay.

*Lights fade as she prepares to serve.*  
*End play.*
Welcome to Retroland

A Play by Drew Morrison
WELCOME TO RETROLAND
CAST:
Mariana - Female - Late 20’s, early 30’s.
Grohl - Male - Late 20’s, early 30’s.

“This is not to say that it has been stripped of its inherent beauty. But its beauty has been subjugated by its use, and while its physical condition may be thrilling to behold — water in shades of red, green, amber, and purple — it is a beauty born of environmental degradation.”
- David Maisel

The stage is desolate, empty, and as wide as it can be.

The cabin can be a separate area onstage, or constructed and deconstructed center stage.

Once furniture or objects are brought onstage, they stay there, accumulating, and ignored when not needed.

GROHL
Looking for a vacation spot?

MARIANA
A little more permanent.

GROHL
Pretty isolated out here - stays quiet -

MARIANA
I think a little quiet is exactly what I’m looking for.

Grohl tries a switch.
Nothing happens.

GROHL
Well.
Power’s not working.
I’ll get on that for you.
Ya know most people looking for places in the area are a little older-

**MARIANA (OFF)**
The, water in the shower’s brown-

**GROHL**
Oh, yeah, I’ll get out this week, check the pipes, get gas and power on-

**MARIANA**
How soon can that happen, do you think?

**GROHL**
I work out of the lumberyard up north, takes me by this way heading back home. I’ll drop by.

**MARIANA**
I like the place.

**GROHL**
‘S a pretty good spot, people do pretty cool shit with it -
last tenants, guy was an engineer,
had the this wall covered in chalkboard paint,
every time I came by he had some new building or some shit sketched up on the wall, that was cool.

**MARIANA**
This is chalkboard material?

**GROHL**
Yeah, sorry, I’ll have it covered within a week -

**MARIANA**
No, no leave it -

**GROHL**
It’s really no trouble -

**MARIANA**
No I like it, I’ll keep it.
GROHL
Alright. Internet is still a bit of a crapshoot - never taken to the area -

MARIANA
Oh, no internet, thank you.

GROHL
See? That’s what I say. Whenever internet’s around social media and you see some, celebrity or, you know, some new cat meme you just search and search and search and then you know everything about it and you start to hate it. Know what I mean?

MARIANA
No. There’s post, right?

GROHL
Yeah, there’s a post office in town, in the hotel lobby.

MARIANA
That’ll be enough.

GROHL
And you know, town’ll have your basics, anything else you need, city’s just about a half hour north up the highway - what you’ll do is take that dirt road back out that’ll hook you up with the interstate, stay straight on it till exit 480.

MARIANA
Yeah, I know, actually, I grew up in the city.

GROHL
No way, you’re a city kid?

MARIANA
Yeah.
GROHL
Did we ever meet?
I was going to say you looked kinda familiar -

MARIANA
No, I don’t think so.

GROHL
Huh.
What’re you doing way out here then?

MARIANA
Been gone a long time.

GROHL
Anyone else joining you?

MARIANA
Sorry?

GROHL
Husband, wife, family?

MARIANA
No, no just me.

GROHL
Don’t think there’s ever been a, single tenant before - usually families -

MARIANA
No, I’m looking for something a little more solitary and a little more permanent.

GROHL
You know, I gotta tell you, I mean, not to screw the boss out of a tenant here, but, there’s a lot of studios I could point you to in the city, near the university, might be more what you’re looking for-

MARIANA
Actually I think I’d like a little more distance this time around, but thank you.
GROHL
Suit yourself.

MARIANA
… you were telling me, over the phone, about the lake bed?

GROHL
Oh, yeah - you can actually see it, from back here -

MARIANA
...my god -

GROHL
Right? Something like five square miles, dry as a bone.

MARIANA
How long has it been dry?

GROHL
Ten years, now. Water was diverted during the big rebuild of downtown up north, used up
till there was nothing left.
Used to be an amusement park here, next to the lake, actually -

MARIANA
Yeah, I remember that.

GROHL
Summers at Bayside Park?

MARIANA
Every year.

GROHL
The best, right?
Bad cheeseburgers, broken arcade machines and a ride on The Bayside Kraken.
Whole thing got shut down once the lakebed got toxic.

MARIANA
It’s dangerous?

**GROHL**
Nah, not so much anymore. Winds scoop up dirt from the bottom, that’s the dangerous part, full of chemicals, nasty stuff. But these days it’s pretty much fine. I would just say stay out of the lakebed.

**MARIANA**
Looks pretty deep.

**GROHL**
I know. Keep saying they should just rename it a canyon, make it sound way more appealing, turn the disaster into a tourism spot.

**MARIANA**
...I’ll take it.

**GROHL**
Look, lady -

**MARIANA**
“Look lady?”
Mariana.

**GROHL**
Mariana. I mean, you want a place to get out of town to, few weeks a year then go for it. But looking for a home, I mean, I drag myself over to this place once every few months to kick out squatters and make sure it’s still standing, rest of the time no one even knows it’s here, hell I forget it’s here -

**MARIANA**
Look - lumber, person -

**GROHL**
“Lumber person?”
Grohl.
MARIANA
Grohl.
The fewer people know I live here the better.
Landlord ran all the info he needs, right?

GROHL
Yeah, I mean everything checks out.

MARIANA
Why exactly are you meeting me here and not him?

GROHL
I keep the place up and running.
...Well. I keep the place standing.

MARIANA
Repairman gives the first tour?
Bit sketch.

GROHL
Abandoned cabin on a toxic lakebed,
you were expecting something not a bit sketch?
You know, we couldn’t find much of a credit history for you-

MARIANA
That’s a good thing, right?

GROHL
I mean you haven’t built up credit, so -

MARIANA
So that means I haven’t needed credit, that’s a good thing.

GROHL
Yeah but we don’t know how you manage your credit.

MARIANA
What are you talking about?
GROHL
You have to build credit to get approved for credit.

MARIANA
How is no credit a bad thing?
What, I have to prove I can take care of myself by going into debt?

GROHL
...I don’t know?
Look I mean the owner doesn’t actually care, about that, so, it doesn’t really matter-

MARIANA
You think I can get keys today?

GROHL
Take the weekend and think about it, start at the beginning of the month-

MARIANA
No. Here, I’ll write you the check for the deposit -

GROHL
Like I said I won’t have gas and power on tonight -

MARIANA
I’ll manage.

GROHL
Don’t rush into something -

MARIANA
Trust me I need to rush into something.

GROHL
...I’ll put you in touch with a moving service.

MARIANA
Oh everything’s in my car.

GROHL
...the car you drove here?
MARIANA
Yeah.
You have something for me to sign?

GROHL
Yeah - here it’s um -
This is your lease, here, read it over -

MARIANA
I read it over in the email.

GROHL
You’re really sure, here?

MARIANA
You are a terrible salesman.
Yes, I’m sure.

GROHL
Alright then. Just need you to sign here, initial here, here, and here, and sign again there.

MARIANA
…

GROHL
…

MARIANA
There.
Keys?

GROHL
Yeah - main door, back door.

MARIANA
Fantastic.

GROHL
...your car’s, not very big.
MARIANA
Sorry?

GROHL
You said you brought everything in your car?

MARIANA
Yeah.

GROHL
It just. Seems like a small car.

MARIANA
Trunk’s bigger than it looks.
And you know. Just didn’t have a lot I needed to bring with me.

GROHL
Oh.

MARIANA
...

GROHL
...

MARIANA
Well.
Thanks.

GROHL
Alright, um, I’ll get power up and running-

MARIANA
-tomorrow?

GROHL
...
Yeah. No biggie.
Okay, well, I guess that settles it, I’ll leave you to it.
MARIANA
See you tomorrow.

She closes the door. Waits for the sound of a car starting, and soon the noise fades down the road.

She pulls on a jacket and a hiking daypack, zips up.

MARIANA
“I would just say stay out of the lakebed.”
Psh.
Sissy.

Mariana hikes from the house to the lakebed.

MARIANA
First trek into the lakebed,
Not so bad, actually.
Past the scars where the water’s edge used to lie
ground cracked like bad skin in winter,
bleeding up through split little hexagonal dirt caked scabs, nature’s lazy tiling.
Cold.
But nothing unbearable -
In the end a nice walk and a pretty straight descent.

She reaches the bottom.
Squats, dumps her bag beside her.
Scoops up some dirt, works it between her fingertips, lets it fall.
A few little inhales through her nose, testing the scent.
Then a big inhale.
She nods.

MARIANA
...No worse than a city.

Mariana paces in the lakebed, taking notes in a notebook, mapping the land. She plants little orange flags at key points throughout the stage.
As she works, she holds her cellphone to her ear with her shoulder, redialing between voicemails. Sometimes holds it high in the air and moves, searching for a signal.

MARIANA
Hey Grohl, it’s Mariana, the new tenant at the house by the lakebed, we met yesterday-
You mentioned you’d be by to turn on the power today
(She plants a flag)
so I wanted to make sure I was here to meet you,
Just let me know, thanks.

Plants a flag.

MARIANA
Hey, Grohl, it’s. Mariana, again. Didn’t see you yesterday and wanted to know if I missed you,
give me a call, we’ll figure out a good time for you.

Flag.

MARIANA
Hey Grohl it’s dark out here at night and I’d really like to have some way for it not to be.
Think that’s where you come in.
Thanks.
(Flag.)
This is Mariana, by the way.

Flag.

MARIANA
...Hello Grohl this is Mariana trying to reach you
You remember me I’m sure
I’m the only tenant in that shithole by the lakebed
and I was just calling
because it’s been four fucking days
and I still don’t have fucking power
and I’m wondering when you’re coming out to get that “taken care of”
since in your kind words
it’s “no biggie.”

Mariana piles sticks and logs in a small structure,
lights a match and catches it on fire.

MARIANA
Hey Grohl,
there’s a small bushfire raising up near the cabin
and it looks like it’s going to get bigger.
Hope you can come put it out.

She pours gasoline on the flame.

MARIANA
Oh no it’s getting bigger.

She leaves.
The electricity pops on, the empty cabin lit.
In it, a massive, wooden crate.
Nearby a small campfire.
Grohl enters, frantic.

GROHL
Hello?!

Silence.
He approaches the little fire.

MARIANA
(Off, angry) HEY.

GROHL
Jesus fucking -
Hello?

MARIANA
GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM MY HOUSE.

GROHL
What? Oh no no no it’s Grohl -

MARIANA
Oh, Grohl -
She enters with grocery bags.

MARIANA
Sorry - Must have forgotten what you looked like in the last WEEK.

GROHL
Is this the fire?

MARIANA
What?

GROHL
The fire you said there was a fire.

MARIANA
Oh.
Yeah that’s it.

GROHL
That’s like a… campfire.

MARIANA
What?

GROHL
That’s like a boy scout fire.

MARIANA
And?

GROHL
You said the cabin was gonna catch fire -

MARIANA
I mean it could.

GROHL
...oh my god -
MARIANA
At least something can get you to bother to come out here- I yell fire you’re here in an hour flat.

GROHL
Look I’m sorry, I’ve been busy -

MARIANA
Busy with what exactly, worth leaving a paying tenant a week in the dark?

GROHL
You don’t like it here, find some place else - but something tells me that sketch ass credit check is one of the chief appeals this place has for you-

MARIANA
Don’t you blackmail me you stupid lumberjack-

GROHL
God dammit I almost called the fire department and all for a stupid- Wait.

MARIANA
What now?

GROHL
The lights are on in the house.

MARIANA
Yeah.

GROHL
The power’s on.

MARIANA
Yeah. Figured it out on my own, thanks. Went into town and looked it up online.

GROHL
Then why the hell did you trick me into coming down here?
MARIANA
It’s a matter of principle.

GROHL
Oh for-
I come running out here in a panic, you yelling at me like I’m some burglar-

MARIANA
What do you expect, I’ve been living in a pitch black cabin alone for four days I’m a little paranoid when some dude’s at my front door.

GROHL
Didn’t have to get all yelly about it.

MARIANA
I embrace the bear mentality.

GROHL
The bear mentality?

MARIANA
Yeah. Stretch yourself up as big as you can and scream and the bear thinks you’re bigger than you are. And it leaves you alone.

GROHL
...With bears you’re supposed to ball up on the ground and become as small as you can.

MARIANA
...Well. Maybe someday we’ll run into a bear and we’ll see who’s right.

GROHL
...
So am I just here so you could show me you figured out how to turn on the power?

MARIANA
Heater’s still messed up, water’s been cold.

Staredown.
Grohl pulls out a wrench.
GROHL
Yeah, it gets finicky.

He heads offstage.

GROHL (OFF)
Anybody make the trek out to visit you yet?

MARIANA
No, why?

GROHL (OFF)
Just, you know. Concerns about your sanity, I guess?
Plus you’re local, probably still got some folks in the city, right?

MARIANA
Nah. Not much for entertaining. Sides I bet people would think this is a bit weird.

GROHL (OFF)
Lady wants to live next to a giant dried lake
with a giant cloud of toxins floatin in it,
no neighbors thirty miles in any direction?
Nothin weird about that to me.

MARIANA
See? That’s what I say.

GROHL (OFF)
Check the water?

MARIANA
….
Still cold.

Grohl re-enters.

GROHL
Let it run, takes a minute.
Oh hey, what’s with the giant crate?
MARIANA
Oh, I’ll get it out of here by tomorrow, sorry -

GROHL
No, I don’t care that it’s there, I just mean like what’s in it?

MARIANA
...

GROHL
Just like. Curious.

MARIANA
...

GROHL
None of my business, cool.

MARIANA
Where have you been, anyway?

GROHL
You got the power turned on-

MARIANA
Yeah I know I got it turned on, but you didn’t know that.

GROHL
Hey, told you, half the time I forget this place is even here.

MARIANA
Landlord must be a great guy, seeking out dedicated service like you.

GROHL
Well hey great landlord’s care about credit and references. And steeper rent.

MARIANA
...That’s fair.

GROHL
How’s the water?

MARIANA
...Yep, there it goes.

GROHL
That should do it, once it gets going it usually stays going.

MARIANA
Alright.
Well.
I don’t know, You want a beer?

GROHL
...You’re asking me to hang out?

MARIANA
Yeah, I guess- what?

GROHL
I thought I was in trouble.

MARIANA
I thought we were past that?

GROHL
...

MARIANA
Look, five days with nobody, a conversation doesn’t sound like the worst thing in the world, alright?

GROHL
Don’t wanna intrude.

MARIANA
You’re all the way out here.
May as well interact with a human when I can, right?

GROHL
Sure, I’ll have a beer.

Mariana digs in her groceries.

GROHL
...That’s all the groceries you bought?

MARIANA
Yeah.

She hands Grohl a beer.

MARIANA
...what?

GROHL
Beer, bananas, protein bars, milk?

MARIANA
And cereal.

GROHL
And that’s what you’re fixing to live off of?

MARIANA
You can’t get the power on but you’re concerned about my diet?

GROHL
Look, I said I was sorry about the power thing.

MARIANA
No you didn’t.

GROHL
Oh.
Well I’m sorry.

MARIANA
Thanks.
GROHL
Can get some good vegetables, eggs, beef up here for you-
farm south down the road keeps it reasonable.

Mariana hands him a beer.

MARIANA
Every time I try to start cooking I end up with a fridge full of spoiled food.

GROHL
You just gotta get the right stuff, keep it easy.
My mom’s a chef,
Always made me cook two meals a week for the family, liked it or not-
Then, you know, grew up, kept cooking outta muscle memory.
gotta learn the good habits early.
Can’t teach a grown up new tricks, right?

MARIANA
Well my parents weren’t much in the way of family meals, so it’s simple and easy for
me.

GROHL
No family meals? What kind of folks don’t cook for their kids? What did they do for a
living?

MARIANA
...

GROHL
None of my business.

MARIANA
...
Well.

GROHL
...
Liking the place? I mean, aside from me?

MARIANA
...yeah. Just what I needed.

GROHL
Why?

MARIANA
What, you never wanted to live alone?

GROHL
I do live alone.
God, That smell. Every time I come up here, always surprises me.

MARIANA
Bad?

GROHL
No, not that, just. Something not quite right.

MARIANA
Huh.

GROHL
...That’s a big crate, for sentimental stuff.

MARIANA
It is.

*Mariana gets the bags off the floor, stows groceries in a cupboard, Grohl watches.*

GROHL
...
You’ve got.

MARIANA
What?

GROHL
When you stretched, you’ve got, tattoos.

MARIANA
Oh, yeah, sure do -

**GROHL**
Nobody around here has em.

**MARIANA**
Oh wanna see?

**GROHL**
Oh, no that’s okay, didn’t mean to be inappropriate -

**MARIANA**
Nonsense. They’re dumb anyway.

*She adjusts her shirt to show him her shoulderblade.*

**GROHL**
They’re just.

**MARIANA**
Words, yeah.
When I was eighteen
I thought it’d be a good idea to get every book I’d ever read tattooed on my back.
See?
Little titles and dates.
Of course by twenty I realized how dipshit an idea that was,
but then I had to keep going with it so no one would think I hadn’t read a book since
2008.

**GROHL**
...Huh. That’s.

**MARIANA**
Weird?

**GROHL**
Yeah.

**MARIANA**
Yeah it sure is. I kinda like em though. Only one that’s a bit regrettable, ran out of room, so the last one I ever got had to go in the, well. Tramp stamp for lack of a better word.

*Shows him.*

**GROHL**
“A People’s History of The United States, 2009.”

**MARIANA**
Not my smartest choice. But it’s as close to punk rock as I ever got, so there’s that.

...what?

**GROHL**
Should probly get going.

*He chugs his beer and crumples the can.*

**MARIANA**
Oh.
Wait while you’re here, could you help me unpack the crate?

**GROHL**
Do you have a crowbar?

**MARIANA**
Yeah.

**GROHL**
Huh.

**MARIANA**
What?

**GROHL**
Just, didn’t expect you to have a crowbar.

**MARIANA**
The fuck’s that supposed to mean?

**GROHL**
MARIANA
Come on, let’s get it under the light-

*They push their shoulders into the side of the crate.*

GROHL
Heavy-

MARIANA
Right?

GROHL
There.

MARIANA
Alright, give me a second -

*She starts prying open the crate with the crowbar.*

GROHL
Wood’s pretty swollen -

MARIANA
Yeah, it’s been in a warehouse for ten years -

GROHL
-what is it?- 

MARIANA
Nothing. ‘Parently there was a window, eye level, sent rainwater right into the basement, forever to even notice. Wood on the boxes molded over.

GROHL
Where is this from?

MARIANA
Near here.
GROHL
Here?

MARIANA
Yeah. From a long time ago. Been gone a while.

GROHL
How the hell’d you get it?

MARIANA
Got some good friends and a big truck.

GROHL
Very good friends.

MARIANA
And, you know, some money.
(Crate is opened)
There it is.

GROHL
...Huh. More wood.

MARIANA
Yep.

GROHL
It’s not…

MARIANA
Rotten? Nope. These boxes were made to last, good lining. Pretty sure the poor sap that had to box all this up ten years ago was pretty certain it’d end up standing again someday.

GROHL
What is it?

MARIANA
Nothing.
Hefts a piece of the wood inside, smells deeply.
God. Smell that. Don’t get a splinter in your nose, though, careful -

*He inhales.*

**GROHL**
...shit.

**MARIANA**
Right?

**GROHL**
Smells like an alcoholic’s morning breath. ‘S fucking beautiful.

**MARIANA**
Look, metal’s all fuckin rusted too - this nail’s long past silver into orange.

**GROHL**
God even the dust is like cologne -

**MARIANA**
Cheap cologne -

**GROHL**
Yeah but in a good way, like shit your dad used to wear.

**MARIANA**
...
Here help me unpack it -
Gloves are on the counter.
And put a mask on, much as I like the aroma, not sure I trust inhaling ten years of basement dust -

*They start unpacking into piles on the floor.*

**GROHL**
There’s a shit ton of em in here -

**MARIANA**
Right?
GROHL
Damn. I don’t see work like this anymore.

MARIANA
It’s expensive work.

GROHL
You re-doing your floors?

MARIANA
What?

GROHL
Your floors. Lotsa people doing that these days, you know, re-laying floors, or walls, or whatever, using old wood.

MARIANA
No, I’m not redoing my floors. The fuck do I care what my floors look like.

GROHL
Well, you’ve got a lotta wood, then.

MARIANA
Oh this is only the first box.

GROHL
...how many are there, Mariana?

MARIANA
About a hundred. Trucks brought in the first fifteen today. Fourteen more already down in the lake bed.

GROHL
...Okay, seriously-
What is this?

MARIANA
...
It’s a roller coaster.
GROHL
A roller coaster.

MARIANA
Yep.

GROHL
Where did you get a roller coaster?

MARIANA
I told you, near here.
It’s been in storage a long time,
but it never left.

GROHL
Wait - that’s-
You’re saying, that’s the fucking Bayside Kraken?

MARIANA
One and the same.
Hasn’t stood here in ten years.

GROHL
...My god.

MARIANA
I used to ride this thing every summer.

GROHL
Me too.

MARIANA
Just been sitting there, you know?
People forgot all about it.

GROHL
I didn’t.
MARIANA
Yeah. Me neither.
Ten years gone
and it’s still just out of sight.
Ridden and ridden till people got bored
and away it went.
...You okay? You look upset.

*Grohl is transfixed by the old wooden planks.*
He seems like he wants to say something,
and instead, turns and leaves.

MARIANA
Grohl?

*No response.*

*In the lakebed.*
*Mariana drags on a massive, assembled leg of the coaster by a rope over her shoulder.*

MARIANA
Best lesson I ever learned, like, ever?
Elementary school.

*She ties the rope around the top terrace.*

Beginning of class the Teacher hands us a sketchpad for free time,
every day twenty minutes of coloring,
and she says “Make the paper last, don’t waste it.”
Me? I don’t bother.

*Hoists the rope on her shoulder and pushes forward, the leg raising behind her.*

I sit there in free time and fill pages with scribbles and stick figures, then scrap it and
start a new one.
Most of them barely had more than a handful of marks on em.
Then, halfway through the school year, lo and behold,
I’m all out of paper.
And the Teacher says too bad, we only get the one pad.
So from then on,
I have to go back 
And draw on top of the old drawings.

*The leg comes to standing and looms tall above her.* 
*She stands below and looks up to it.*

And I realized-
If you half-ass it,
If you waste it,
You’re not allowed to complain when you run out of clean paper.
Eventually, there’s no forward left, and you have to turn and face the ruin you’ve left behind you.

*Grohl enters.*

**GROHL**

...what the fuck are you doing?

**MARIANA**

Are you just like spontaneously appearing and disappearing now?

**GROHL**

Don’t change the subject -

**MARIANA**

Cuz you’re on my property.

**GROHL**

what the fuck is that?

**MARIANA**

What does it look like?
This feels like the right spot. We’re deep in, be barely visible unless you come right up the rim, could tuck it away nicely -

**GROHL**

Wait, Wait - you’re not seriously building the coaster?

**MARIANA**

The fuck else would I be talking about?
GROHL
You’re going to build a roller coaster in the goddam lakebed?
The chemicals down here, who the hell knows what the hell’s in the air-

MARIANA
Never confuse adamant sophomores counting ideal calendar statements after monday.

GROHL
...what?

MARIANA
Nothing.
Look, Why not?

GROHL
Why not? Mariana, jesus, you can’t just, it’s illegal -

MARIANA
Who the hell’s gonna notice? No one even knows this place is here anymore-

GROHL
No, you’re right, Mariana, no one knows this is here, except the goddam government. And the goddam government isn’t exactly an old lady with a good yard for baseball, Mariana, it’s kind of the only thing you don’t want to piss off -

MARIANA
An old lady with a good yard for baseball?

GROHL
Nevermind that my point is -

MARIANA
What does that mean?

GROHL
Stop changing the subject -

MARIANA
No, what does it mean?
GROHL
There was an old lady in my neighborhood growing up and she had this, huge, yard,
so we’d play baseball in it,
and every time, she’d get mad, and call the cops,
so we’d take off running every time she picked up the phone,
and we could always run faster than she could call.
So eventually, we just played and she just kinda.
Put up with it.
The government’s not gonna just put up with it.

MARIANA
Well not with that attitude.
Oh come on. First sign of trouble I’ll run out of the yard.

GROHL
And then what? Maybe they’ll look into the only fucking person within thirty miles,
Mariana Kettler -

MARIANA
Oh Grohl. That’s not my real name.

She starts to walk offstage.

GROHL
You shouldn’t be doing this alone-

MARIANA
When I need opinions I’ll ask for them.

GROHL
Let me at least help you move the crates-

MARIANA
Look I haven’t asked for help and I’m not looking for it.
Much as I appreciate the sudden rush of concern, Grohl,
I’m here to work and I’d appreciate it if you left me to it.

She’s gone.
Grohl at a loss for words before he exits, defeated.
Mariana re-enters dragging a new crate.
Starts laying track.
Wind whips the little flags
and she stops now and then to warm her hands

MARIANA
Three weeks in, there’s a nip in the air.
Four weeks and fall winds cut like knives.
I get nineteen splinters in what I consider the worst hour of my life thus far.
Five weeks in I knock my shoulder out of socket when one of the legs fall over.
I make a sling with an old hoodie
and drive into town to look it up online,
and sitting in the back booth of the coffee shop I pop it back in place myself.
Then six weeks in-

GROHL
Hey.

MARIANA
...Hey.

GROHL
How’s it coming?

MARIANA
Slow.

GROHL
You know usually they have like dozens of people to build these things.

MARIANA
Yeah, they do.

GROHL
...
One sounds tough-

MARIANA
With the right attitude and a good internet connection you can build anything.
GROHL
I thought you hated the internet?

MARIANA
I didn’t say that I said I didn’t want it in my home.
What do you want, Grohl? Rent check bounce?

GROHL
You know. This lake, it held water for eight hundred thousand years.
Twenty years ago, started getting channeled north, building up new downtown.
Ten years later, nothing but sand.
Eight hundred thousand years, cancelled out in ten.

MARIANA
Never confuse adamant sophomores counting ideal calendar statements after monday.

GROHL
You ever gonna tell me what that means?

MARIANA
Nickel, cadmium, arsenic, sodium, chlorine, iron, calcium, potassium, sulfur, aluminum, and magnesium.
That’s the shit coming off the lake bed.
On a bad day winds carry it thirty miles north, right into the city.
So who gives a shit, you’ll breathe it in sooner or later anyway.
And people tell you not to smoke.

GROHL
You know this coaster’s pretty important to me.
Reminds me of my folks. Summer breaks.
You too?

MARIANA
Yeah.

GROHL
When did you leave?

MARIANA
Bout ten years ago.

**GROHL**
Why’d you go?

**MARIANA**
Why?

**GROHL**
Come on, indulge me.

**MARIANA**
I was afraid if I didn’t go I’d never leave.

**GROHL**
See? Exactly.
Because it’s just too easy staying where you started, right?
And then you’ve gotta watch it change.
And sometimes it’s like it rots, you know?
Things get rusty and people get old,
and then everything’s changed but you.
I never got far.
Got married at twenty,
moved an hour away,
fucked it all up by twenty two
and came right back.
And then you, out here, suddenly have something that meant a lot to me.
And you say you don’t want help with it.

**MARIANA**
Nothing personal-

**GROHL**
But it is, you know, it is personal.
That, coaster. That meant more to me than anything.
…
I can’t stop thinking about it.
And.
I want to help build it.
MARIANA
Grohl, I’d really rather be alone-

GROHL
Yeah but, you can have all the money you want, and buy whatever you want. You can’t buy my childhood. All you’ve got keeping it yours is money. I’ve got thirty years of summer breaks. And I wanna cash em in.

MARIANA
Look, I am telling you, this is not something you want to be involved with.

GROHL
And I’m telling you I need to be.

MARIANA
You’re not giving up, are you?

GROHL
I have never, truly, invested myself, in anything. And I’m getting too old to be this temporary. Look you want privacy I’ll come out and work nights, you take days. I don’t care. But seems like two people building is better’n one.

MARIANA
Because normally there would be like a hundred.

GROHL
Exactly.

MARIANA
…
Alright, then. No questions though. I don’t wanna talk, I don’t wanna explain.

GROHL
Fair enough. Agreed.

**MARIANA**
Don’t annoy me.

**GROHL**
Likewise.
Where do we start?

**MARIANA**
Let’s get the legs standing.
The second one almost ripped my fucking arm off,
I’ve been avoiding doing another.

*Grohl looks up at the tall structure.*

**GROHL**
You did this one yourself?

**MARIANA**
Yeah.

**GROHL**
Are you like, a crazy person?
Like are you actually just a crazy person?
I’d just like to know.

**MARIANA**
No questions, remember?

*Mariana and Grohl begin raising the legs of the coaster.*
*They stretch from floor to ceiling, most of it hidden above the rafters. Thick wood and rusted metal.*

*Grohl and Mariana lay track.*

**GROHL**
...I mean we should probably talk about something, right?

**MARIANA**
Huh?

**GROHL**
Look it’s been a week out here and it’s so fucking quiet-

**MARIANA**
We had an agreement-

**GROHL**
Yeah yeah yeah but I mean there’s gotta be something impersonal, right?
You know, like, smalltalk or something-

**MARIANA**
I hate small talk.
I’m not good at it.

**GROHL**
See the thing is though nobody “likes” smalltalk,
it’s just what you do.
I think people who say they’re not good at smalltalk just aren’t very nice people.

**MARIANA**
Yeah, this is really making me want to fucking banter with you, Grohl.

**GROHL**
No no but, that’s what I mean,
I’m saying, You don’t seem that way, you seem, person...able.

**MARIANA**
What are you hoping to talk about Grohl?

**GROHL**
Something, easy, I don’t know.
You like movies?

**MARIANA**
Yes.

**GROHL**
Hey, me too.
See?
That was nice.
We conversed.

Silence.

MARIANA
This is the worst part, I think.

GROHL
Hm?

MARIANA
The straight lines of track are totally the worst part to build.

GROHL
Why’s that?

MARIANA
I mean, with the curves, and the slants, the lifts and falls, you know, they’re elaborate, you know, I don’t even think about the work - this, you know, we’re just getting from here, to there. And it takes for fucking ever.

GROHL
Well, if coasters are all twists and turns the fun goes away and all you’ll do is puke.

MARIANA
Ha.
You sound like my mom.

GROHL
She the one who used to bring you to the park?

MARIANA
...

GROHL
Oh come on, it’s a pretty mild question.

MARIANA
She and Dad would trade off.  
I think they were already getting ready to split,  
So we didn’t really do things the three of us anymore.  
Neither particularly liked roller coasters,  
but I’d always talk Dad into it.

**GROHL**

Sorry they split.

**MARIANA**

Eh, it was inevitable.

**GROHL**

Why?

**MARIANA**

She was his lawyer.  
They met when he was getting sued and she represented him.  
Doomed from right there, if you ask me.

**GROHL**

Seems pessimistic.

**MARIANA**

They were in a case, you know, so she just knew, like, everything about him,  
And he knew everything about her before he hired her.  
It’s like looking at the facts of a person and thinking like,  
“Hm. I could love that.”  
Can’t fall in love without being confused about something.  
Without mystery.

**GROHL**

What about siblings?

**MARIANA**

Nah, just me.

**GROHL**

Huh.
MARIANA
So there ya go, congratulations, you got me talking.

GROHL
Likewise, good talk bro.

…

MARIANA
What about you?

GROHL
What?

MARIANA
Family?

GROHL
Oh my god - are you continuing the conversation?

MARIANA
Not for long if you irritate me.

GROHL
Dad runs a restaurant, Mom’s head chef. four siblings.

MARIANA
Four?

GROHL
Yep. Three sis’s, one brother.

MARIANA
Fuck.

GROHL
Two of em still work in the restaurant. We were all there for years. I was busboy from thirteen to twenty five.
Was ridiculous, all of us running the place.
Like the job version of home school.

**MARIANA**
Got burnt out?

**GROHL**
Couldn’t stand the sight of the place anymore.

**MARIANA**
Never work anywhere longer than three years, that’s what I say.

**GROHL**
You must have some pretty high end gig, though -

**MARIANA**
You kidding? You think I’m commuting everyday? No, unemployed at the moment.

**GROHL**
Yeah, but, buying roller coasters, last job must’ve been something pretty classy.

**MARIANA**
Nah I was a bartender.

**GROHL**
...
You know, I kind of like this part actually. You take this, lay it here, bolt that, repeat. Let’s you zone out a bit.
It’s meditative.

**MARIANA**
It’s mind numbing.
I just want to get to the loop.

**GROHL**
...the what?

**MARIANA**
The loop.
GROHL
...you want a loop?

MARIANA
Of course I want a loop, why wouldn’t it have a loop?

GROHL
We can’t build a loop -

MARIANA
Of course we can -

GROHL
Lots of roller coasters don’t have loops -

MARIANA
Yeah dumb ones.

GROHL
How are we supposed to rig a loop?

MARIANA
Look it up online, people make em in their backyards -

GROHL
Bullshit-

MARIANA
Look it up, they do. They’re sketchy as shit and look like they’re going to break every time, but they don’t. It’s doable.

GROHL
How are we supposed to do that without a crane?

MARIANA
…

GROHL
...oh for christ’s sake.
MARIANA
We’d only need it for like a day -

GROHL
We can’t just steal a crane -

MARIANA
Borrow, borrow a crane -

GROHL
We can’t do that either -

MARIANA
Why not? You work in a lumber yard, what’s the point of working in a lumber yard if you can’t borrow a crane?

GROHL
What is wrong with you?!

MARIANA
See?! This is why we’re silent out here! This is why we don’t talk! So you don’t get all “But-What-How” every fifteen seconds.

GROHL
I am not “borrowing” a crane.

MARIANA
Oh come on they won’t even know it’s gone.

GROHL
Mariana it’s a crane, of course they’ll know it’s gone -

MARIANA
Can’t we like rent it out, or something?

GROHL
...You’re insane.

MARIANA
I have initiative.
GROHL
What’s wrong with a roller coaster without a loop?

MARIANA
There’s nothing wrong with it, but when was the last time you went on a loop in a coaster and were like, “I wish the loop wasn’t there?”

GROHL
Every time, actually, they make me nauseous.

MARIANA
Well then what’s your roller coaster dream set up?

GROHL
Those sharp banks, you know? The big ol rise up to the peak and the drop, the twists and turns, momentum -

MARIANA
And we’ll have those too!
I’m tired of the basic ones. *(she uses her hand to show:)*
You know, you go flat, you hit this point, you climb steadily up this way, you hit this point, you come down, you circle back, start over.
Blegh. Boring.
Roller coasters should feel like your whole life on fast forward. It goes like this and that and up and down and around and slow and fast and back. You keep putting kids on this little slow-climb-up-fall-down-return, they’ll think that’s how life really goes.
That’s only one version of it.

GROHL
...what if we don’t build it correctly? What if the car just like, flies off the rails?

MARIANA
Well then I’ll ride it first, and if I die you should probably fix it before you try it.
GROHL
Weirdo.

MARIANA
Square.

They reach the edge of the stage and exit. 
Groans from off stage and metal sliding on dirt.

MARIANA
Come on, just, get it close to the house -

GROHL
Why doesn’t it have any goddam wheels?

MARIANA
This one got gutted over the years, I have to replace them -

They emerge pushing a car of the roller coaster, both of them red faced and straining.

GROHL
OH MY GOD I HATE THIS-

MARIANA
WE’RE SO CLOSE -

GROHL
FUCK YOU SISYPHUS -

MARIANA
WHAT?

GROHL
SISYPHUS -

MARIANA
WHAT’S A SISSYPUS?

GROHL
IT’S THAT ROMAN GUY WHO HAD TO PUSH THE ROCK UP THE HILL FOREVER -

MARIANA
WHY?

GROHL
THAT WAS THE GODS’ PUNISHMENT -

MARIANA
THAT’S DUMB.

GROHL
SERIOUSLY YOU’VE NEVER HEARD OF SISYPHUS?

MARIANA
OF COURSE I HAVE I WAS GETTING YOU TO STOP COMPLAINING - ALSO HE’S GREEK -

GROHL
FUCK YOU -

MARIANA
OKAY WE’RE GOOD STOP.

They collapse on the sides of the car, heavy breath. They climb into the seats and sit. Mariana opens her pack and passes a beer to Grohl.

MARIANA
Okay. Okay. Sooner or later we gotta flip it over-

GROHL
Not now-

MARIANA
Yeah no not now don’t worry not now but sooner or later. Least we can roll it on the way back.

GROHL
How many cars are there?
MARIANA
Four.

GROHL
Shit.

MARIANA
They wanted to give me nine, I was like, fuck no.

GROHL
Good call.
...what are those boxes?

MARIANA
A second roller coaster.

GROHL
...

MARIANA
I’m kidding.

GROHL
Funny.

MARIANA
Here look -

She climbs out and drags a box over, opens the lid.

GROHL
Records?

MARIANA
Yeah. Shit ton of em.

GROHL
Where’d you get them?
MARIANA
Found em, actually. Landfill.
I mean, they’re all crap.
Everyone got rid of all their records and now they all want em back, so it’s pretty slim pickings, there, but every now and then something’s listenable.

GROHL
Huh.

MARIANA
And then, over there, 8 tracks. Cassette tapes.
VHS’s over there.

GROHL
VHS’s?

MARIANA
Yeah. Those, man, found everything.

Grohl digs through the box.

GROHL
“Killer Beavers of Outer Space?”

MARIANA
Porn or bad sci-fi?

GROHL
Naw, it’s horror.
Giusseppe Jacobs, one of the first greats in the genre.
Took a film class at the U one summer.

MARIANA
You’re a college guy?

GROHL
Well. I took a film class.

MARIANA
Understood.
GROHL
You?

MARIANA
Barely. I got an associates and ran like hell.
Ever want to go back?

GROHL
I don’t know.
Sometimes.

MARIANA
You should.

GROHL
Naw. My folks, you know, started college funds for all four of us.
But split four ways it wasn’t much.
And you know, my kid sister,
she’s understanding chaos theory
when her classmates are barely starting to get algebra.
I was never even that good at algebra.
She’s a college kid.
But anyway.
This is a good flick.
You know I haven’t been asking where the money’s coming from -

MARIANA
A good habit, keep doing that.

GROHL
But, you’re not like, robbing banks, are you?

MARIANA
If I was would you turn me in?

GROHL
...maybe?
MARIANA
Well shit, then I’m not telling you.

GROHL
…

MARIANA
...look, I came into some money, and.
This was the appropriate way to spend it.
That’s all I’m going to tell you.
But it’s nothing fucked up, I promise.

GROHL
Fair enough.
Why do you want all this stuff?

MARIANA
Why not?
I mean, it’s just sitting there.
Something should be done with it, right?

GROHL
Do they even still work?

MARIANA
Oh hell yeah.
Analogue, man,
Tapes, cassettes...
You treat em badly, they look crappier,
but I mean they didn’t look all that great to begin with.
Long as you don’t break em they’ll play till doomsday.
I miss collections. You know?
When you could walk into someone’s house,
read the spines of the books on the shelves,
names of the movies alphabetized in a cabinet in the corner.
And it’s so, people dismissed that as materialistic, capitalistic, you know?
Obsession with owning, buying, whatever -
But I never felt that way.
I started feeling like, if I came to your home, and looked at what you liked enough to own,
I know you.
Like, deeply, know you.
No more honest way to get to know someone
than letting them come in and browse your collections.
And maybe it is dangerous to get too attached to things,
Express yourself in someone else’s wording,
because then you’re never actually saying anything
but I don’t know.
I always hate it when old people talk about how technology’s ruining the world
because according to old people everything’s ruining the world
But nowadays everything’s downloaded and fits on a drive the size of a fingernail
and I feel like rooms,
where you walk in and are just, assaulted,
with a, microcosm, of a human heart,
Rooms are slowly just moving toward
blank white walls with a monitor and a hard drive.
And that, to me, is when the human disappears.
Shit, now I’m just rambling.
Sorry, no one should have to listen to this crap-

Grohl kisses her.
She’s surprised
they linger in it,
silent in the breeze off the valley.

GROHL
I’m um - I’m sorry I shouldn’t have -

She kisses him deeply,
doing that awkward first make out shuffling,
as they try to find a comfortable way
to be close together in a roller coaster car.

A beat.

Mariana pulls away. Looks panicked.

MARIANA
...shit.
She exits.
Silence.
Grohl groans and holds his face in his hands.

**GROHL**
Yep.
Good job.
Good job Grohl,
You fuckturd.

He stands,
starts to exit,
turns,
pauses,
starts to follow Mariana,
pauses,
turns,
exits.

*Mariana alone in the valley with a bottle.*

**MARIANA**
...This wasn’t supposed to get complicated.
This was supposed to be simple.
And now of course,
A week passes and no sign of him.
I don’t know if I’m relieved or not.
And I don’t feel much like working.
You know the beginning and the endings of things
those are all well and good
but the fucking middle.
Too far in to go back and too far away to finish.
...
The fuck am I doing.
This isn’t even fucking possible.
I mean. Come on. Two people can’t build a roller coaster.
You need teams and plans and time and.
FUCK YOU KRAKEN.
...I could leave right now.
Leave you like this. Just as is.
No one’d ever know.
Could you forgive me that?

Silence.
Mariana sighs. Swigs from the bottle. Looks about at the empty horizon.
From behind her,
a terrible groan of metal.
She freezes.
Behind her, one of the massive legs of the coaster begins to sway.
She turns to look.

MARIANA
Oh. Motherfucker.

The leg collapses down on top of her.

Tired of huffing down dirty air?
Get away from those nasty big cities!
The Bayside Summer Funland is open all summer
Play on the Beach, get those kids outside,
and take a ride on the Bayside Kraken!
Bayside Summer Funland
We live where you dream to move!

Grohl enters.
Sees the wreckage.

GROHL
...Mariana?

Mariana, pinned from the waist down,
hears his voice and tries to hide.

GROHL
Look Mariana, I’m sorry, alright?
...Okay I totally know you’re out here.

Mariana pulls some wreckage over her head.

GROHL
So you’re either trapped under something heavy and pride-wounding, that’s where my money is, Or you’re dead. You at least have to tell me if you’re dead.

MARIANA
...Grohl.

GROHL
Where are you?

MARIANA
Over here.

GROHL
How long have you been down there?

MARIANA
Couple hours.

GROHL
You’re stuck?

MARIANA
Not sure. Haven’t tried to get out yet.

GROHL
Enjoying the metaphor too much?

MARIANA
I’m going to kill you.

GROHL
Well you might be stuck. So you probably can’t. 
...
Anything hurt?

MARIANA
Got smacked around quite a bit. Nothing broken far as I can tell. Might’ve popped my shoulder out again.
GROHL
Again?

MARIANA
Yeah I dislocated my shoulder a few months back.

GROHL
How?

MARIANA
One of the legs fell on me.

GROHL
Well.
Fool me once.

MARIANA
Where you been?

GROHL
Figured you didn’t want to see me -

MARIANA
No, I didn’t want to talk to you.
You could still have laid track.

GROHL
Things got weird -

MARIANA
Yeah they did, for like a fucking second.
What, you just up and drop everything the second it gets weird?

GROHL
...
Pretty much, yeah, that’s me.

MARIANA
Could’ve told me.
**GROHL**
You didn’t want to know, remember?

**MARIANA**
No, no I didn’t.
So what do you want then?

**GROHL**
Somebody’s gotta check up on you.

**MARIANA**
I don’t need your pity.

**GROHL**
yeah that’s it it’s my pity.
God you suck sometimes.
You’re literally trapped under steel-

**MARIANA**
-as opposed to figuratively trapped under steel?

**GROHL**
...

**MARIANA**
...

**GROHL**
I don’t know why I still come out here.
I don’t.
It’s been nice feeling like a part of something exciting.
New.
Building something.

**MARIANA**
This isn’t supposed to be exciting.

**GROHL**
See only you could think building a roller coaster isn’t exciting.
You keep forgetting all this is optional. This? In the end? Is a hobby. Passion project. And that, Mariana? Is a joyful thing, no matter how badly it hurts. Now do you want my help getting out from under there, or is that something you need to do for yourself too?

*He waits for a response.*
*There isn’t one.*

**GROHL**
That’s what I thought. Be seeing you Mariana.

*He exits.*

*Silence.*

*Mariana starts to struggle beneath the wreckage, favoring one arm.*
*She wriggles until she can swing her legs out, let’s the debris collapse back to the ground behind her.*
*Struggles to standing, one arm held tucked in against her chest.*

**MARIANA**
…Okay. bout a week’s work lost. Could be worse.

*Pokes at her shoulder.*
*Grits teeth.*

**MARIANA**
Oh. Yep. Yeah that’s definitely out. Okay. Okay. Don’t pass out this time. Don’t pass out.

*Couple breaths.*
Grit.
Push.
Pop.
Scream.
Unconscious.

Discerning parents choose Bayside Summer Funland!
Don’t settle for your local, tiny amusement park
Bayside spans four acres of gorgeous lakeside real estate!
Bayside Summer Funland-
Escape the ordinary!

Mariana stares at the track, defeated.

MARIANA
...
Three weeks later and winter’s fully set in
and the sling’s ready to come off
And I’m pretty sure the nerves in my shoulder are more or less fucked.

Silence.
Mariana goes back to laying track.

MARIANA
It doesn’t snow much here
But when it does
it piles up on the track
and the metal’s slick and frozen
wood swollen and damp.

Silence.
Mariana goes back to laying track.
Stops periodically to warm her hands with breath.
She stops.
Yells at the sky.
Dials her phone.
Waits.

MARIANA
Grohl.
It’s Mariana.
I’m sorry.
...okay bye.

_Hangs up, back to work._

_Grohl enters._

**MARIANA**
Hey.

**GROHL**
Hey.

**MARIANA**
It’s fucking freezing.

**GROHL**
It is.

**MARIANA**
...
You here to work?

**GROHL**
You know.
I don’t watch the news often.
Don’t read the paper.
Bad habit, should change it.
But you know I thought you looked familiar.

_He pulls a crumpled newspaper from his jacket._

**GROHL**
“Internet Mogul Dead at 65 -- Daughter, Sole Inheritor, Nowhere to be Found.”
...
No wonder you can buy a roller coaster, you could buy a country if you wanted to.

**MARIANA**
...
Look I didn’t want anyone to know.
GROHL
Company must be pissed.

MARIANA
They’re fine.
I mean, yeah, they’re pissed, but believe me they’re not hurting.

GROHL
Why run?
You know, you could. You’ve got so much you could be doing, you’re out here in the middle of nowhere-

MARIANA
Grohl one newspaper article does not make you an authority.

GROHL
Then explain it to me, for fuck’s sake, give me something - you’ve got who knows how much money and you’re building a damn roller coaster -
You’re no better than those, movie stars, athletes, reality tv hosts.
Millions in the bank and keeping all of it
don’t spread the wealth, no no, just throw down in the nationwide “whose is bigger” contest.

MARIANA
…
I moved as far away from here as possible.
As soon as I could
Didn’t take any money from him.
After Dad died,
And I find out I’ve got everything,
I came back on the road
Made a shit ton of stops on my way here
and I spent as much of it as I possibly could
and every dollar
at some run-down local place.
I think I single-handedly saved the American novelty store.
And do you know how much money is left?
A fucking lot.
Look
I don’t want any of it.
Soon as this is done? It’s all going away.
Your sisters? Brother? You want them to go to college?
You want to go back?
Great.
I’ll send you all.
Twice.
But this, this is mine.
And don’t you fucking judge me.

**GROHL**

...What do you mean, you saved the American novelty store?

**MARIANA**

...Look. If you’re looking to come back,
Winter’s passing in a few weeks.
I want to get the coaster set by then.
There’s a lot of work coming with Spring.

**GROHL**

...
Pay me.
so I can quit the lumber yard.

**MARIANA**

Done.
No more questions.

*Grohl nods.*

**MARIANA**

Okay then.
Welcome back.

**GROHL**

I couldn’t borrow a crane.

**MARIANA**

What?
GROHL
For the loop.
I couldn’t get a crane.
It’s harder to steal one than you’d think.

MARIANA
That’s okay.
I bought one.

GROHL
Of course you did.

They start to exit.

GROHL
You know I have missed this.

MARIANA
You haven’t worked in the snow yet.
It fucking sucks.

GROHL
...and. You know.
I missed you.

MARIANA
...
I missed you too.

They exit.

A crane enters, and lifts a massive coaster loop from the ground up to standing.
The crane exits.

Mariana enters with a small generator and a gramophone.
Squats and tinkers with the generator.

Grohl enters, looks to the sky as he takes off his coat.

GROHL
Getting warmer out.

**MARIANA**
Fucking finally.

**GROHL**
Deliveries all accounted for?

**MARIANA**
Think so - check the list, I left it over there-

**GROHL**
Shit, you’re letting me look at the list?

**MARIANA**
Well, can’t really keep it a secret much longer.

*Grohl scans sheets of paper with a pen.*

**GROHL**
Holy shit-

**MARIANA**
Don’t get all hyperventilate-y on me.

**GROHL**
Um. Look’s like you’re missing one from Kansas and one from Nebraska.

**MARIANA**
Well.
I think we’ll survive.

*The generator whirs to life.*

**MARIANA**
Alright, ready?

**GROHL**
Yep.
MARIANA
Let’s bring in some shit.

She puts a record on.

New Order’s “Ceremony” plays as Mariana and Grohl pull on gas masks and exit.

Mariana and Grohl start wheeling on the attractions on dollies from either side of the stage.

Piles of VHS tapes

Mounds of 8 tracks and cassettes

Arcade machines with missing buttons and temperamental joysticks

Stuffed animals, frayed and heavily used, suspended as prizes in the air

Nintendo 64’s, Ataris, Segas, Playstations

Piles of game cartridges

CD’s

DVD’s

Posters for movies no one remembers

Air hockey, foosball, ping pong.

Home movie theatres

Recliners, sofas, frayed and full of holes

Remote control cars, helicopters.

You get the idea.

Until the stage is packed full amidst the legs of the roller coaster.
Grohl stands with some plans spread on the ground in front of him. Mariana enters, staring at the assembly, silent. She holds a backpack at her side.

**GROHL**
Hey-
Okay so I think if we run power in through the south side then we’ll get a little more oomph -
What?
Something wrong?

**MARIANA**
…

**GROHL**
Mariana?

**MARIANA**
They’re gonna flood it.

**GROHL**
What?

**MARIANA**
The lake bed.
They’re going to flood it.

**GROHL**
Who?

**MARIANA**
EPA.
Those toxins rising up, you know?

**GROHL**
Never confuse adament sophomores.

**MARIANA**
Right.
Dump water on it, keeps it all down.
Saw it on the news.
Kind of ironic.
Took all the water away, need even more to keep the nasty stuff buried.

**GROHL**
So, this is all-

**MARIANA**
Underwater in three months. Yeah.

**GROHL**
...fuck.

**MARIANA**
I really thought.
I really thought this would be permanent, you know?
Even if no one ever knew this thing was here
I figured at least it’s *here*.
If someone stumbles on this place
there’ll be this beautiful thing in it
so maybe it won’t feel so empty.

**GROHL**
…
What are you going to do?

**MARIANA**
…I don’t know.
Maybe not waste any more time.

**GROHL**
So all this was for nothing?

**MARIANA**
This was not for nothing, Grohl.

**GROHL**
…
Well.
Then.
Seems to me the only way to make all this a waste of time would be not to finish.

*Mariana sits heavily down in the dirt.*
*After a beat, Grohl sits beside her.*
*Long silence.*

**MARIANA**
Do you want some music?

**GROHL**
What?

**MARIANA**
Some music, do you want to listen to music?

**GROHL**
...okay.

*Mariana digs in her backpack, pulls out two cassette players with two sets of headphones.*

**MARIANA**
Here this one’s the good one, other one’s headphones only work on one side-

**GROHL**
Oh I can take the broken one-

**MARIANA**
No, no it’s fine.

*They put on their headphones and sit in silence, listening to tapes, for a while.*

Eventually, Mariana turns to Grohl.

**MARIANA**
...I’m glad you’re here.

*Grohl can’t hear her.*
She waves in front of his face, he turns.

MARIANA
I’m glad you’re here.

GROHL
(Shouting) WHAT?!
oh.

Lowers his headphones.

GROHL
Sorry what?

Silence. She kisses him.

Tired of living in pollution?
Escape reality at
Bayside Summer Funland!
We’ll be here until we’re used up,
and then on to the next spot
until some day way far away
there won’t be any spots left

Mariana and Grohl wheel on a new, massive generator.
Mariana starts tinkering with it.

GROHL
Should I even ask where you got that?

MARIANA
Nope.

The generator whirs to life.

MARIANA
...we’re really close, aren’t we?

GROHL
...yeah.

MARIANA  
Holy shit.

GROHL  
Yeah.

MARIANA  
…  
Okay fine.  
Couldn’t have done it without you.  
There.

GROHL  
Psh. Yeah I know.

MARIANA  
Dick.  
Ready?

GROHL  
Ready.

MARIANA  
Holy shit.

GROHL  
Holy shit.

MARIANA  
Okay.

GROHL  
Light it up.

She goes to the generator.

MARIANA  
Okay.
She turns it on.

Nothing happens.

GROHL
...uh oh.

MARIANA
No wait hang on -

She kicks it, resets it.

Lights spring on throughout the stage.
All the screens flicker to staticy life
Movies start playing at random scenes
Action sequences
First kisses
End credits
Christmas lights criss cross above it all
In shades of red, green, amber, and purple
Music from speakers throughout
Different songs from different years,
every style imaginable
Popcorn salted and buttered, deep fried things
scents drifting out to the crowd
An assault on the senses
And through it all
The chuck chuck chuck of the chains in the roller coaster
The two stand and stare
and Mariana takes Grohl’s hand.

MARIANA
What do you think?

GROHL
...I think it’s beautiful.

MARIANA
...
When my grandmother died my mother set up an ofrenda for her on the living room bookshelf.
Pretty simple, you know. Photos of her when she was young, her with her kids, grandkids.
Mom said it was her way to hold on to those who’ve left.
My father said it creeped him out.
He said you shouldn’t hold on.
Thank them and let them drift off into whatever’s waiting,
but you have to let go.
I think this would make them both happy.
And I can’t hold on anymore.

**GROHL**
...so what now?

**MARIANA**
We open it up.
We leave it here,
and people will find it.
They’ll see the lights on the skyline at night
And they’ll find this here waiting for them.
No explanation.
You can’t fall in love without a little mystery.

**GROHL**
Aren’t you worried about people stealing shit?
Posting it online?

**MARIANA**
Nah.
Honors system.
And then it’ll flood.
Whatever’s left by then’ll just sink to the bottom.
And hopefully when people visit the lake
who’ve never seen it like this
Little 8 track casings and old tv’s will wash up between your feet.
And they’ll remember.

**GROHL**
...can we.
MARIANA
What?

GROHL
Can we ride the coaster?

MARIANA
...
Yeah. Yeah we can ride the coaster.

Mariana brings out a sign from offstage that reads
“Welcome to Retroland.
This is yours.
Enjoy.”
She stabs the sign into the ground center stage, in front of the audience.
She and Grohl walk down into the carnival
and disappear amidst the legs of the coaster and the tv screens.
After a while,
house lights come up
and Retroland stays lit up bright
Until the crowd goes down on stage to play old video games and listen to 8 tracks.
After a while,
kick them out so the crew can strike.

End play.