Flaws in My Father | better engaging with trauma, grief, loss, and pain through storytelling.

Neil Fontano

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Flaws in My Father |
better engaging with trauma, grief, loss,
and pain through storytelling.

by

Aniello Fontano
A.A, College of Dupage, 2011
B.A. Directing and Design, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2014

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
Dramatic Writing

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2020
For my parents -

and James.
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I would first like to thank my family at UNM —
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To my committee —
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To my mentors —
christopher oscar peña and Caroline Neff. You have supported me for far too long and with unimaginable vigor. Having you in my corner has been the joy of a lifetime. I hope this paper brings me one step closer to feeling deserving of all you give me.

To Erik Ehn -
I will keep it very short. | A good friend, a better man.

To my parents —
Everything I am, is you.

To my Chicago community —
I would rattle off fifty names of people who have shaped who I am. I might launch into spiraling stories about late nights and early mornings. I could wax poetic to the tunes of Brother Starrace and reminisce about sleeping on back porches and dancing in Campbells Soup cans. I should melt into the epic of how we all came to be family.

But we don’t have that kind of time.

For now - my love for all of you bleeds out shamelessly. I am proud to be your brother.
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ABSTRACT

In the following essay, I will review my playwriting methodology and growth as an artist during my time as a Dramatic Writing Candidate at the University of New Mexico. I will begin by examining my personal narrative and the initial impulse to apply for and accept a position in the Dramatic Writing Program. I will continue by dissecting my own writing methodology and its numerous influences: a sense of place, character, and time. Further, I will give an explanation of and demonstrate my own methods developed during my second year work on “Thelonius | My Brother’s Keeper.” In addition to academic research and response, this paper will include excerpts from my work throughout the program and my thesis play, “summertime | an interlude” in its entirety. Ultimately, through the examination of these works, I will attempt to answer the question that has guided and motivated me through each:

How does one utilize dramatic writing tools to work therapeutically through their own personal narrative?
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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Today is April 14th, 2020. It has been over a calendar month since I left my apartment, aside from one trip to the grocer and two trips to urgent care. I have asthma in addition to a continuously progressing lung infection. My last trip to the doctor resulted in a bronchitis diagnosis and a second cycle of steroids and antibiotics. While relatively normal, the current circumstances have increased the perceived severity of anything having to do with a respiratory issue. In case you are reading this in the distant future, the world has been “blindsided” by Covid-19 (or “the Coronavirus,” SARS-CoV-2, “The Rona” — whatever you prefer to call it).

This is only necessary knowledge as the world shut down in an unprecedented way after I defended the following paper in front of my heroes. In fact, the last time I left my apartment for any reason other than food and medicine was to defend this paper on March 13th, 2020. After passing the defense with distinction, I was instructed to rewrite and edit sections before resubmitting the paper to the University of New Mexico Digital Repository. Three days later, I had difficulty breathing and became febrile. Since then, I have been struggling daily to get my respiratory health back on track while not contracting the virus, which I fear has not worked, as I am being tested for the virus tomorrow. I am exhausted from a buffet of pills and an inability to get a a full night of sleep. This is not my normal.

I intended on rewriting the majority of the paper, doubling my resource materials, working with UNM Libraries, and resubmitting a paper that far exceeds the expectations set for me. As the writer, I feel I should share those goal have not been fully
accomplished. Instead, I have made my health the priority. I will be losing my insurance and employment, and during the time of COVID-19 and my current diagnoses, finding a plan to maintain my health and the health of those around me has been my main focus.

In order to earn my MFA, the University requires this paper to be submitted to a Digital Repository, meaning it will exist forever on the internet. If you search my name, this paper will come up. If you have done so and find yourself reading this, I think it is important you understand the circumstances under which it was edited and submitted.

My work is heavily focused on the folx living around or below the poverty line in this country. I am unconcerned with the “plight” of the rich and never will be. The fact that every athlete, celebrity, and billionaire has managed to get free testing for COVID-19, without even having symptoms, while folx struggling to pay rent cannot get tested until they have a room in the ICU is shameful. Yesterday, I paid $120 for life saving inhalers; eat the rich.

I have worked tirelessly for the past three years to earn my Master’s Degree. My cohort, professors, mentors, and department have strived to create an environment where artists can grow to their full potential. Because of this, I am leaving a better artist. One day, I will revisit the final submitted version of this paper and undoubtably shake my head. I will revisit the long list of notes I never got to address. I will wish I had done more. I will wish I had more time. I will wish I could change the past, but I cannot. This paper is a representation of what I was able to do with the time, mental, and emotional capacity I have — and I am proud of that.
I. INTRODUCTION | BEFORE EVERYTHING

“White is a funny color. It's so light it can blind the world to who you really are. Gets caught in your eyes. Reflects an emptiness—some say it's a way to begin again—a clean slate. I say, it erases what used to be there. And that's your soul. But maybe that's what it is to me only. For my Brother, it could different. For my Brother...I hope it is. I wish you could be here. That's a fucking lie. I mean, it wouldn't be, if you were somebody else. Like you used to be when we were kids. before...everything.”

El Grito del Bronx
by Migdalia Cruz

I will start by painting a picture, a picture that allows for some context of the author for those who have never met me, or are potentially reading this long after it was written. I am thirty years old. I have long black hair, a graying beard, and large eyebrows. I have a scar on my forehead from where I was hit with a beer can. My front tooth is chipped from blunt force with a glass bottle. My hands are callous, with scars from past burns, distracting from their roughness. My body is worn and cracks constantly from injuries that have never properly healed. I walk with a slight limp in my right leg from multiple knee ligament injuries that I simply ignored after they were sustained — and I write. I write a lot.

My very first memory is jumping on my grandmother’s couch. It was an old whiskey brown couch with worn springs and a lifetime of stains. I remember holding my cousin JJ’s hand as we competed to see who could jump the highest. I remember he won. I remember my first fight, first party, first kiss, first heart break; my first poorly inhaled cigarette and the coughing fit that followed. I remember the first time I saw my favorite spot in the world, a small strip of broken asphalt on South Rockwell in Chicago. The top
layer is completely destroyed, revealing a deeper layer of worn, dark red brick from some
time long before I was born.

When it rains, the crevice at this spot fills with water and just looks like a shallow
dip in the asphalt that created a puddle. However, anyone who works or lives in the area
knows its true identity — a pothole — and are rightly cautious. If you are unfamiliar with
the street, there is a risk of crossing over it and causing serious damage to your car (or
ankles). That spot has existed long before I came into this world, and given the way the
city is so hurried to fix potholes, I am sure it will be there long after I am gone. There is
something about that layer of worn, dark red brick that I admire and aspire for my work:
something more than meets the eye, affecting all who come across it, and is deeply
familiar, if only to a few. I will always remember it; but for every moment and symbolic
pothole I remember, there are ten I have lost. Somewhere between adolescence and
writing this paper, I subconsciously erased large sections of my life — sections I am
trying to rediscover through my work.

Out of all these memories and moments — moments of my brothers, sisters,
aunts, uncles, cousins, and resilient mother — the core of my heart and work is my father.
Not that any other person is less significant or impactful, it is just difficult to look at one
of us and not see the other. Growing up, I was scared of him. He was never angry,
vviolent, or possessing of any alarming quality that would inspire fear, but he was certain.
He was determined and focused in a way I never thought I could be. He worked more
hours than I could count and never seemed to stop. There were times I would go to sleep
to him arriving home and wake up to him having left for work an hour or two prior. He
took care of my mother, myself, and every member of our extended family in a way you only see in bad Hallmark movies. He somehow did all of this with ease. It was astonishing. I was scared I could not live up to what he was. I was terrified I would grow up to be a disappointment. In my eyes, he was perfect.

My father was the youngest of five children, born to a four foot tall Italian immigrant and her stern, unshakeable husband. My Grandparents met shortly after the Korean war and moved to the United States to start a new life and family. Once in the states, my grandfather spent most of his life as a butcher and my grandmother spent hers doing just about everything else.

There was an unspoken consensus that all this new family had was each other. Through thick and thin they were emotionally, mentally, and physically required to be there. My father and his siblings worked at our family’s shop every day of their young lives, often taking days off of school to help at the store. They were a small army of Italian stereotypes with huge hearts and tough skin. In the neighborhood, legend has it that if you hit one of the Fontano brothers, you would immediately get hit back by eight fists balled up into white knuckles.

A group of North Siders once slapped my Aunt Mary in an ice cream shop. A half hour later, they were dragged out the front, unable to walk. Understandably, my dad never told me that story; I heard it two years ago from an old man at a bar in the neighborhood. Apparently, he worked at the ice cream shop and was there that day. When he told me, he had no idea who I was, he just loved to tell that story.
My neighborhood is built on the strength of stories. Years after most families have been pushed out, their legacy and legend exist through tall tales and hushed secrets. To some end, my love for stories was sparked here, in the ruins of old three flats and alleys paved with dirt. Growing up, my bedtime stories were that of neighborhood plight and overcoming class obstacles. I learned from a young age the power of knowledge, awareness, and acceptance. As I encountered adolescence, my love for stories bled into an appreciation and fascination for the many ways they are told on a grander scale. My career as a storyteller began started in that little neighborhood; a career that has, without much conscious choice, lasted my entire life.

I was a child actor and model whose passion for performance art continued to grow as my career developed. The arts have been a constant in my life, one I have leaned on for self-care and self-preservation. I find a sense of comfort in the dark spaces of theaters, glorious glow of a screen, and ink stained pages of scripts. With each form comes a series of unique stimuli that help spark my own processes and aid in my engaging with the human experience. Before we dive into technique and process, it will be helpful to dissect the role these forms play in my life to better communicate how my engagement with them has led me down a path of not only self discovery, but growth.

In theater, I find immediacy: the lights go out and life begins. There is no rewind, pause, or fast forward. Lives play out on stage and an audience remains in silent conversation with them. As in all forms, the relationship between the audience and creators is of great importance to the work. However, in theater, there is less of a filter between the two parties. The play decides when, how, and why the audience receives
information. The audience in turn must consciously or subconsciously accept, dissect, and develop thoughts and emotions around the information as it is given. This causes a sense of urgency and surprise highly reflective of everyday life. Further, in theater, both parties are experiencing the work together, allowing for a symbiotic relationship unique to live performance.

My work in theater exists for that purpose. I strive to immerse my audiences in the world of the play for a specified time. I am concerned with individual, personal moments, and the ripples effect caused by them. My work as a playwright is centered and focused; “No frills or high language,” I have often said. I am concerned with empathy through experience, allowing audiences to watch drama (and thereby trauma) unfold on stage in real time. It is in this immediacy that I found the strength of theater: a group of artists, living in the narrative of the play for of development, rehearsal, and ultimately performance, allows for a unique type of depth of character and story. Further, each artist and audience member brings a lifetime of experience, skill, and perspective to the room and project. The wealth of information and influence that exist in a theatrical space allow for a perfect storm of stimuli, driving the work to garner some sort of response. One must understand that while a writer can plant seeds of motive and message in their work, even the most explicit are open to interpretation from an audience. The relationship is symbiotic: we, as theater artists (myself as playwright), remain in conversation with our audience members’ internal dialogue — but we cannot control it. For my own body of work, the best I can hope for is that a sense of passion and empathy emanates not only from the work itself, but from all those in the room when the lights go out and the story
has been told. I can hope I have done the technical and emotional work required to
present something from the heart on stage, and that feeling is palpable in the room.
Theater lives in a moment. It is ever changing and flows rhythmically through space
before disappearing. In an age when seemingly everything is saved and locked away in a
vault to be viewed later — theater is alive, and therefore instant and fleeting. It is
romantic.

Film is grandiose and precise: years of preparation, banks full of money, and
innumerable people working toward the creation of meticulously prepared, spectacle
driven material. Film by nature is focused: each millisecond weighed and measured in
preparation for its contribution to the final cut. Where theater workers often find
themselves passionately working paycheck to paycheck (if they are lucky), there is
money to be made in film, changing the dynamic of the form entirely. It takes years and
millions of dollars for a work to go into production, and at times, even longer to release it
to the public. The sheer amount of money spent on television and film prevents many of
the living, breathing, growing and changing aspects of live theater that may cause
instantaneous and adventitious reactions from its intended audience.

In screenwriting, we fixate on how information is being delivered to garner the
exact response we want. It is not only in our specificity, but in knowing our work and
audience that we find success. We build our narratives to give information how, why, and
when we want. Yes, playwrights use a similar tactic, but the nature of the exchange is
dramatically different. In today’s world, a film or television audience has the luxury of
watching again and reforming opinions. There is significantly less pressure on the viewer
to formulate thought as information is given, because technology has allowed us to serve as audience members of film for our entire lives. While we use screenwriting tools to ensure that first viewing accomplishes our narrative and emotional goals, the knowledge of the “re-watch” can factor heavily into the work. Television productions companies worry as much about season ten as they do about season one; where theater fixates on the present narrative, space, and time — film broadens that focus.

For me, the nature of screenwriting allows me to explore the longevity of my stories. Where my playwriting work is centered, focused, and often a small glimpse into a world for a short period of time, my work as a screenwriter is far grander. I allow myself the exploration of a lifetime of narratives in film, mirroring the longevity of the tall tales of the neighborhood. I set out to build entire worlds that need to be explored in ten seasons or a feature film; worlds that cannot exist in an hour and a half on stage. I find utilizing the technical capabilities of today to be the best way to go about this. Film (for me) is where I bring to life the narratives that are too grand for my stage. Ultimately, I appreciate both forms, and embrace each for what they give me as an artist. It is not so much writing a specific narrative for film or theater, but finding where the narrative itself belongs.

I have explored the two forms one can relate to my craft, but finding a third is necessary when dissecting the art form. Far before one’s work is seen on a screen or in a theater, it is read on paper. The art of script writing and reading is, in itself, another form entirely — it is ancient and forever. In small bookstores, libraries, and unknown nooks in homes we find the written word. I, myself, have a small library worth of novels, non-
fiction works, plays, and comic books stored in music cases I am consistently working through. While performance and film need to be accessed at a specified time, ink on a page exists fully on its own. No technology or scheduling is needed to sit and read a writer’s work; but until someone cracks open the front cover to read, words on paper are just dried ink. They come to life with willing eyes, an engaged mind, and an open heart. Unlike their final products, scripts are silent and longing. In them, we strive to appeal and entice the senses without the spectacle present in live theater or fully produced film. The audience of script is more often than not one singular person forming an opinion on their own: reading at their own pace, leaping forward, and crawling back whenever necessary. The audience of one is resounding and powerful, fully in control of the experience. For that reason, I find the way the words exist on the page to be of the utmost importance. As the writer, once I leave the room these words are all that are left. I have no control of them, yet they hold immense power over my narratives. To that end, I cherish they art of the on-page word as one might a painting or sculpture: it is there to be admired and inspire a new form of art. The dried ink will give life to the film or play it inspires.

I, like so many artists, have been on all sides of these experiences. I find value in each and have cherished the memories they have given me. This passion and appreciation led to my artistic experimentation. I spent time as an actor represented by a brilliant agency, as a Journeyman working in film for large production companies, as a proofer for folx fine tuning scripts for publishing, and perhaps, most of all, as an audience member. At a certain point in my artistic development, these worlds converged and I found a commonality: writing. So, I continued to write.
As a younger artist, I did not write plays and did not understand poetry. My only existing works were violently written through misunderstood tears and a desire to understand my past and present: a two hundred page nightmare trying desperately to comprehend the addiction that had stolen my friends lives; a daydream about an abusive relationship that derailed my development for too long; a fever dream about a taxidermy bird who sang Irish lullabies and waxed poetic about my grandmother; things I could not keep inside but did not understand, and all lacking structure. They were words — just words.

Writing, nonetheless, became the one constant in my life. Prior to raised scars and graying hair, I have written. I have written out of necessity and sometimes joy, but never with career aspirations. I began writing to combat trauma and self destruction; writing emotions I was not capable of engaging with at the time. I would put words on paper and light the paper on fire, hoping somehow the act would heal the broken parts of me. Before everything, I was trying to claw my way out of a hole — a hole of my own making, but still terrifying.

My father’s voice echoes in my head every time I sit down to write: “The worst thing in life is wasted talent.” I would like to believe it is a motivational tool to keep me moving forward, but as I get older I see it as a reflection on himself. My decision to write full time was, as always, was inspired by my father. In the back office of that same mom-and-pop store where we have all worked, he once asked how I was. At the time, I was working seventy hours a week with my hands, investing heavily in band aids, coffee, and melatonin. I told him I was fine —“Fine.”
He told me *fine* should never be good enough. He told me he was not happy with his career, with what he had done with his life. He told me he dreamed of working in real estate and living somewhere warm. He dreamed of spending more time with my mother and being able to take time off to finally go on a vacation (we had only ever been on one vacation). He told me he wanted to leave. After a lifetime in the neighborhood, the memories and shadows were too much. He told me he was not a smart man, but he knew that he did not like going to work every day, nor seeing the same cement he had since the day he was born. It did not make him happy; it never made him happy, but he had to do it. It was *fine*.

*Fine should never be good enough.* I applied at universities and interviewed. I told them about my love for Stephen Adly Guirgis, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Migdalia Cruz, Christopher Oscar Peña, and Sam Shepard. I told them I worked with my hands but wanted to earn a life where it was not required. I told them I was not formally educated in dramatic writing and my artist resume was filled with acting and directing credits. Two questions came up in every interview: “What do you want? What’s the purpose for getting your MFA?” I never had an answer. The closest I could muster was that I was scared. I live in constant fear of waking up at sixty years old and feeling like my father. I am scared one day I will realize I never gave myself a shot at happiness. I am scared I will wake up seeing the same slanted floor and cracked window frames I did back at my apartment in the neighborhood. I am scared to let people down; I am scared to let myself down.
Earning this degree and presenting this accompanying academic paper are in direct response to those fears. They are an unexpected haymaker to my own insecurities. The truth is, I am scatter-brained, devastatingly decisive,crippingly emotional, and fighting to grow from my own ignorance. I am as imperfect as this paper and more unsure of my ability to regurgitate academic jargon. Frankly, if I could present my position in person a thousand times I would choose to do so before letting this ink dry and locking these words in a vault forever. I imagine this is why I love dramatic writing; my goal is personal growth and honest communication with an audience. The ink dries but is written from the heart — and I do it because I must.

I write because every time I have been scared, the act of writing has gotten me through. It is every memory I have and each one I have lost. It is my family, friends, triumphs, and fears. It is everything.

I say these things with complete confidence now, having earned my degree and passed my dissertation defense with distinction; but admittedly, it took a long journey of self discovery and growth to get to where I am, and I will need to continue down that road to grow further. There are countless moments that contributed to my identifying the role this art plays in my life — far too many to list in any academic paper. However, I imagine I might summarize the culmination of these moments and the knowledge gained as my purpose: something I thought had evaded me entirely.
II. JOKES AT A FUNERAL | THE PURPOSE

“With no purpose
what am I with no purpose
Without a trajectory
I’m not even a man
you know?”

wonder if it’s possible to have a love
affair that lasts forever, or things I found
on craigslist
by christopher oscar peña

When my Uncle Jimmy died, my father asked me if I wanted to give the eulogy.

This is the first thing I remember my father being completely incapable of doing — so, he asked me. This eulogy would be the first in a long line of written and delivered memorized monologues about loved ones. All I remember now is the laughter echoing through the old church: cackles reverberating off ancient marble and stained glass. I remember a sea of hands wiping eyes in between dry heaves and belly laughs. To this day, that first Eulogy is the funniest thing I have ever written.

“What’s the purpose for getting your MFA?” At first, I found comfort in surface level answers: a masters degree would allow me to teach at a high level, convey my commitment to the craft, give me time to write, and give me the knowledge and skill set to earn a career as a writer. While all those are true, I have always felt like there was an unspoken purpose — a purpose to be found in honest self reflection. This purpose is not guided by a desire to pay bills, have insurance, or gain acceptance in my field, but by a need to shine a light on the joy of our humanity; a need to find the tear filled smile behind a broken heart.
Growing up, I was encouraged to reflect on my feelings inwardly, acknowledging every aspect so that I might analyze and react appropriately. While this was endlessly beneficial, the awareness brought with it caution. Feelings and emotions needed to be acknowledged, however, they also needed to stay internalized. There was a learned fear that expressing one’s feelings would reveal weaknesses. So, as a young man who experienced high levels of trauma, I would bury fearful thoughts and emotion within myself, so, at the very least I would appear unscarred.

I remember being a young child and watching Angels with Dirty Faces. The penultimate scene depicted James Cagney’s Rocky Sullivan, a stone cold, archetype gangster making a decision to fake fear publicly on his way to the electric chair. Moments later, the final scene opens with a group of neighborhood kids—who idolized Rocky —reading the newspaper headline about his death: “Rocky Goes Yellow: Killer Coward at End.” After a reframing, we see one of the young men read the opening line in disbelief: “No sooner had he [Rocky] entered the death chamber that he tore himself from the guards grasp and flung himself on the floor screaming for mercy.” The kids continue to read in awe as their hero is slowly reduced to a remorseful child. (The reason for Rocky’s decision, of course, is to de-idolize himself to ensure the neighborhood kids would not make the same mistakes he did.) This stuck with me. It was the first vivid memory I have that illuminated a crack in my upbringing; I wished I had seen more people cry. I had been punched once or twice for shedding a tear, but I did not know why. If acknowledging my feelings, thoughts, and emotions were positive things, why could I not wear them on my sleeve? Even more so, why could no one else?
Throughout the years, I had accepted this as the norm. Confining pain was the only socially acceptable way to deal with trauma. I lived in this frame of mind, and would remind myself of it when I became truly frantic. I held friends while they suffered with an overdose and dialed the police through blurred vision and shaking hands. I watched my best friend get sentenced to prison and walk out of my life for eight years. I lost person after person to addiction. I went to wakes and gave eulogies like it was simply a normal day. I identified with this false strength: the ability to bury emotions and appear to not feel anything at all. I believed the approach would protect me from the world, although it never could. I had built a wall around myself, yet knew I would drown when it started to rain.

As one horrific event after another piled dirt on a shallow grave, I searched for an outlet: a way to engage more thoughtfully with my life and traumas so that even with everything piled on top of me, I would not suffocate. Writing gave me a way to breath. I wrote every minute I was not working. I lost sleep because of it. I then began to consider my situation. If writing was taking such an enormous weight off my shoulders, what was the next step? What was the next building block to better engaging with trauma? I decided I would start being more vocal and open about myself. Perhaps, too open and vocal, but overcorrecting is often the first reaction to fixing a problem. I discussed everything and anything others would allow, so I could begin to learn how to better cope with past and present traumas. The combination of writing and expression brought me to a better place.
That place is where I am today. I continue to write through trauma because the act itself helps me to better examine my own experiences and the way they continue to affect me. This therapeutic act has had the largest influence on who I am as an artist and person today. Every one of my works can be traced to an event that cut me too deeply to heal with only positive thinking and reflection. I write trauma selfishly, so I can continue to move through the world in a healthy way. For me, writing of multiple forms brings with it some comfort and healing, but the act of writing something that could one day be shared and easily empathized with is something greater. I publicize and create narrative around my trauma for performance. Within my work, I am able to take past and present emotions, relationships, and actions of myself and those closest to me, and continue to humanize them; I write so I can further empathize others and myself. In my work, I am able to give feelings to a character — to a person — and they will be able to stay as such: a living, breathing, complicated soul in ever-changing situations and struggles. As will be discussed later on, trauma, grief, and loss are intricate things that require empathy and understanding. If I were to write of them separated from the things they most affect (situations, people, and relationships), I believe there would be much less amelioration of my cognition and that of those who are able to read or witness my writing. Trauma, like so many other things, has a heartbeat. That heartbeat is one that touches every living thing. Pain is universal and undefinable, leaving nothing but questions and momentary answers. As this is the case, I hope to explore trauma and the associated pains, not define or cure them.
The way one engages with internalized or externalized pain caused by trauma is what interests me. While reading theoretical rants about trauma, grief, loss, etc. fuels me in numerous ways, I would never subject another person to academic theory, nor am I good at writing it. I simply try to know people, conversation, listening, and learning. To appreciate all of it and refuse to live any other way. I know what it is like to hide, and conversely, what it is like to be vulnerable.

Placing trauma in a play or screenplay is a delicate and intentional act, despite it being a personal necessity. The audience can be involved in this trauma or simply pick up on its nuances; however, in my work, the choice is given to the audience. I write only what you would witness if you were a fly on the wall. For me, setting trauma within a narrative is putting ten people at that table with a glass of poison sitting at its center. If not one of them knows it is poison, at some point, someone will drink it.

Trauma is a glass of poison in a well populated room. It exists in space regardless of our knowledge and can continue to eat away at individuals and collectives if not engaged. It takes a boldness and desire to find a healthier state of being to engage with it, which is a steadfast goal of my own. For metaphor purposes, one might say if no one is allowed to leave the room until the glass of poison is empty — you have drama. We then may begin to question how the glass can be emptied, why, and by whom.

My narrative work is concerned with the conversations that circle the glass. Assuming it must be emptied, why must it be emptied? What circumstances have landed us in this position? Further, are the people in the room aware it is poison? If not, does someone drink it? If so, is there still a way or reason someone would drink it? By simply
saying our characters in the room must engage with the glass of poison, we have brought to light endless questions that need answers. These answers will be found through a series of writing processes in hopes of creating a full narrative.

These processes are composed of learned technical skill and continually developing writing methodology; however, long before I begin putting pen to paper, I dedicate time to research the subject matter I intend to represent on stage. Trauma is clearly the main focus and motivation for my work, so the majority of research time has been devoted to it. Trauma, a moving-target, umbrella term, can be defined as, “actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (APA 271), subsequently, its survivors are many and diverse. However, even scientific definitions are known for their adaptations and reforming, and I fear formal and academic definitions (even when research oriented) can often lack inclusivity. For the purpose of this paper, I will not limit what is or is not trauma. I believe trauma is defined by the perception of an experience, whether it be consciously or subconsciously perceived. So, you, the reader, must determine it. What is trauma to one, may not be trauma to another. It is the culmination of a person’s natured and nurtured character forced to live an event or experience that is perceived as disturbing, negative, or stressful. I cannot emphasize this enough — I am not a doctor or psychologist, nor do I claim to be. For my own comfort, I will move forward allowing you, the reader, to define the word for yourself, knowing how I define it for myself. Assuming the definition of the word is interpreted uniquely by different people, my approach is to be educated on the narrative subject matter as thoroughly as possible, while still allowing for flexibility and subsequently, inclusivity. While academic and
medical journals are often helpful, I have found published autobiographical journaling to be the most useful. These journals are often similar to a theatrical monologue in form and content, giving an honest, unstructured, and revealing look into trauma and associated experiences. When focusing on trauma, one must understand it is not one singular momentary event, but the ripples that lead up to the event and the ripples that can be found afterwards. There is no predictable story arc to a traumatic event, its causes, or effects. We cannot simply read a book or watch a documentary and claim to understand every case of trauma; to even begin to utter the sentence would be supreme ignorance. What we can do as human beings (and in my case as an artist) is continue our research formally and informally into the field. We can read articles, watch documentaries, have conversations around the water cooler, and be open about our own experiences. We can live more openly in the hopes those around us will bless us with their own life story and experiences. Hopefully, these adjustments to our practice and lifestyle will better prepare us to build narratives that acknowledge preconceived notions about trauma, and emphasize the realities of human interaction. When you boil it down, we are dealing with people, not an idea. Knowing our world, its characters, and their personal experiences allow us to better represent all of those aspects in an honest way. Only through this practice may we find some semblance of emotional engagement and can work not only our through own defined trauma, but that of the world and characters we create.

When I came to UNM, I was unconsciously writing through my own pain. Now, I sit here three years later realizing I can utilize this for therapeutic benefit of myself and others. I continue to write stories rooted in painful memories and frustrated thoughts, but
now the work is deliberate and purposeful. I set out to better engage with my own trauma, grief, loss, and pain with a continuously growing set of skills and understanding of the medium I have chosen. The words are no longer violently written through misunderstood tears and a desire to understand my past and present; instead, they are music. They are the result of numerous tacks and processes that have proven both healthy and productive. I have found my purpose.

Whether it be through academic study, interview, structured conversation, or rants at a bar, I devote my time to studying the ways human beings engage with different facets of pain and put them on stage to find some semblance of resolve. It is no grand gesture; there is no intent to change the world. It exists as momentary contentment in an otherwise treacherous circumstance. I want audiences to have the opportunity to experience trauma in an honest, open, and heartfelt way. I hope they leave having felt witness to something they might not have otherwise seen, and furthermore, with the motivation to question their own relationship with trauma. I want them to see someone, something, or some idea that they recognize.

It is the moment I watched Angels with Dirty Faces and realized there was a hole in my upbringing and a gap in my knowledge. It is the moment we find faults in ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities. But my work is not about pain, but about joy — the joys we find in our humanity: tears that turn into laughter, the irony of loss, the life in death, and the jokes we tell at funerals. My purpose propels my process: a process that begins by defining the characters within the work who will serve as my educators, and by finding the voices who will give breath to the purpose of the piece.
III. EXCERPTS FROM “DÉCÈS” BY ANIELLO FONTANO
*(FALL, MFA YEAR ONE)*

(I am inclined not to give context for the excerpts in this paper. That being said, I have included a short preface for each of my excerpts to aid those desiring more background. If you feel them unnecessary, skip the following and read only the monologues.)

Décès was my first deep dive into my relationship with death. It is a play made up of a series of scenes, monologues, fluxus pieces, artistic experiments of chance, and music: all of which would take place simultaneously in a large space. An audience member would enter and find themselves in a room with a mostly drunk Arlecchino. This clown would give them a numbered ticket and send them to explore the building and pieces at their own chosen pace and order. At a certain point, their number would be called and they would be directed to enter the only locked room in the building. Inside the room would be a single, old, red landline phone with a note reading, “call someone you love.” The nature and design of the piece call for more than one excerpt. Below are two pieces from the show: one rooted in chance, the second a monologue.

**ÉGOÏSTE**

*A person with a gun.*

*They speak one of the following, put the gun to their head, and fire.*

*With the loud pop, blackout.*

*Thirty seconds later — lights up, rinse, repeat with a different text.*

To my friends, my work is done — Why wait?

I have a toothache.

I am going to put myself to sleep now for a bit longer than usual. Let’s call it an eternity.
I'm so sorry—God forgive me.

All fled—all done, so lift me on the pyre; The feast is over, and the lambs expire.

I must end it. There's no hope left. I'll be at peace. No one had anything to do with this. My decision totally. Oh my love Kate, you did all you could. I'm unemployable & a nuisance. Forget me, remarry, be happy.

They tried to get me; I got the bastards first!

I am afraid, I am a coward. I am sorry for everything. If I had done this a long time ago, it would have saved a lot of pain. P.E.

Life has become unbearable for me… I have become unbearable. Forgive me.

'J'ai une âme solitaire'. I am a lonely soul.

It's nobody's fault. I want to be with my brothers.

Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck.

Dear mom,
I am writing this letter to say goodbye and thank you for giving me life and don’t cry I don’t want you to be sad I want you to remember the fun times and happy times. At my funeral make everyone wear bright colors to remember my personality I know I have been a pain at the best of time but I am with nan and grandad now. So I love you and goodbye till piper that she can have my room tell tasha that I am sorry for every thing sorry tash and tell dad he is the best and he can have my xbox and games and mum you can have everything else. Please by strong for me!! Lots of love.

And so I leave this world, where the heart must either break or turn to lead.

And now, in keeping with Channel 40's policy of always bringing you the latest in blood and guts, in living color, you're about to see another first - an attempted suicide.

Goodbye, everybody

Goodbye, my friend, goodbye
My love, you are in my heart.
It was preordained we should part
And be reunited by and by.
Goodbye: no handshake to endure.
Let's have no sadness -- furrowed brow.
There's nothing new in dying now
Though living is no newer.

Things just seemed to go too wrong too many times.

Let's see if I get myself with this one.

I myself and my wife - in order to escape the disgrace of deposition or capitulation -
choose death. It is our wish to be burnt immediately on the spot where I have carried out
the greatest part of my daily work in the course of a twelve years' service to my people.

All fled - all done, so lift me on the pyre;
The feast is over, and the lamps expire.

Don't worry, it's not loaded

I cannot die without, contented and serene as I am, reconciling myself with all the world -
before all others - with you, my dearest Ulrike. Give up the strong expressions which you
resorted to in your letter to me: let me revoke them; truly, to save me, you have done all
within the strength, not only of a sister, but of a man - all that could be done. The truth is,
nothing on earth can help me. And now good-bye: may Heaven send you a death even
half equal to mine in joy and unutterable bliss: that is the most heart-felt and profoundest
wish that I can think of for you.

Call Dr. Horder.

Dear World, I am leaving you because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am
leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck.

We had a death pact, and I have to keep my half of the bargain. Please bury me next to
my baby in my leather jacket, jeans and motorcycle boots. Goodbye.

Dearest,
It seems as if I have been spending all my life apologizing to you for things that
happened whether they were my fault or not.
I am enclosing your pin because I want you to think of what you took for me every time
you see it.
I don’t want you to think I would kill myself over you because you’re not worth any
emotion at all.
It is what you cost me that hurts, and nothing can replace it.
TOXICOMANE

A person smokes a cigarette, but never exhales smoke.

I worked on cars when I was younger
we didn’t have much money
but my cousin worked at this garage on the south side
and he said as long as I kept my mouth shut and learned the right way to do things
I’d be fine.
It wasn’t a life changing experience or anything but I think it was the first time I understood what an engine was.
The idea of an engine.
It’s this machine with countless small moving parts that all need to be in perfect, or at least decent, working order.
Or the entire thing collapses in on itself.
You’ll hear metal scraping against metal and fluids bubbling up and clogging tubing.
You know what I mean.
But nobody ever teaches you about cars.
It’s not common knowledge.
Like if you hear a noise, you gotta take it to a mechanic. That’s how they fuck you. Cause you can’t fix it yourself, even if you know a little bit about cars, if you try and fix it and fuck it up more that could be a huge bill.
So you don’t.
You take it to a “professional” who can fix it for you.
But since they know you NEED to take it to them, they fuck you on the price.
Cause without them nothing gets fixed you know?
Doctors, lawyers, dentists they’re all the same.
They can name a price cause you have no idea what you’re doing and without them your teeth fall out
Or you go to jail
Or you die
Do you know how fucked up it is in this country that you gotta pay to have a baby!?
I mean, ok, maybe that’s kinda your decision
But like, when you’re real sick
Like if you have cancer or somethin
If you have lung cancer and you don’t smoke I’ll gladly chip in some money so you don’t die.
That’s what it is
They know you need help
And they know they’re the only ones who can give it to you
So fuck you
That’s how mechanics are
Engines are a bunch of tiny parts needa be working or your car will slowly die on you. OR it might just die altogether one day for no fuckin reason so you better pray you can pay to fix it and that they actually do fix it when they say they will
Where was I going with this?
So.
So much of life is like that.
A bunch of little things that contribute to the success of failure of something big, and the smallest change to the way things are working can cause a huge problem.
Like a machine.
Where I grew up there weren’t many options.
I knew this one girl who went to college after high school, but she dropped out pretty quick into her first month there.
I don’t remember her name.
I never got to do much.
Which is probably my own fault.
I heard this joke once, I probably won’t tell it right.
But I heard this joke once about heroine.
It’s like heroin is
going a blowjob and having your face licked by puppies at the same time.
I don’t think that’s what it was.
Maybe a bit,
but I’ve never gotten a blowjob and had my face licked by puppies at the same time.
So I don’t
So I don’t know.

Imagine you’re sick.
All the sickness you’ve ever had piled up in your body weighing you down.
Just mucus and spit and water in your fuckin lungs and a fever and all that shit.
Then, in a second, it’s gone.
I mean literally a second.
See I don’t know if it’s the high that gets you.
The highs fuckin great don’t get me wrong, but you smoke some weed and you won’t fuckin die and that feels great too. It’s solving a problem.
It makes you feel whole when you’re broken.
The problem with that logic obviously being that it’s what breaks you in the first place.
I managed to get out. Not OUT out.
But out for long enough to see how stupid I was. Your head gets clearer but you’re never not addicted. You always want that feeling again and there’s nothing like it. Some color to drown out the darkness. To wake you up. I was clean for... A year and a half. Chip and everything. My best friend killed himself. That’s what set me off. It was selfish now that I think about it. Instead of trying to be there, be present, I wanted to shut out the world and make the pain go away. I did half of what I usually did. Half. Literally. Like a baby amount, if babies did heroine. Baby’s can’t do heroine obviously, but you get it. You know what’s the most fucked part of it? You do it to see color right? To feel good. Get out of the fucked up world you live in. But in the end it just leads back to darkness. To nothing. To this. It takes you by the hand and leads you past suburban houses with white picket fences, Volkswagen beetles and mom vans in the driveway, and then when you’re staring this fuckin paradise in the face it sneaks behind you and blows the back of your fuckin head off.

I had a kid.

A week and a half before it happened. I never once thought of him that day. Never thought what it’d be like for him without me. And I don’t think I would’ve cared.

I just wanted that feeling.

I hope he hates me.

I hope he spends his life hating everything I was.
Growing up, I spent time after school watching my dad behind the counter of the shop and studying the way he engaged with people. He loved them. With everything he had, he loved every person that stood across from him. Perhaps more than that, he showed them all respect. Folx that know him continue to praise his ability to draw focus in a crowded room and show empathy for even the most distant stranger. He is everyone’s best friend. As the world continues to grow from ignorance (albeit slowly)—and he continues to meet complex individuals of varying identities he has not yet encountered—he desires to better educate himself, so that he might learn the best way to engage with this new generation; so once again, my father turned to me.

The arts and individuals within various communities have been gracious enough to allow me to learn from them. Throughout my years as a working artist, I have been welcomed into spaces that have helped me on my own (never ending) journey from ignorance. Even after attaining my Master’s Degree, the majority of my time in this industry has been spent as a performer. In fifteen years or so, I will eclipse the two decades I spent working as an actor (to varying degrees of success). Despite the length of time, legitimacy of representation, depth of study, and long resume, I never considered myself a professional actor. I always thought myself a student, attempting to piece together some semblance of a process that might carry me to new heights. Some lessons have been forgotten, while others have translated well to my work as a playwright.
As an actor, I was enamored with Commedia dell’arte. I studied feverishly and used the archetypes as a base for my work as an actor, often looking at my character through Commedia’s lens and working inward from there, adding layers and depth. Upon my transition to writing, this process proved to be even more useful. To start, I will briefly examine commedia dell’arte for the purpose of later expounding on its influence in my character development.

Commedia dell’arte started in the 16th century in Italy and has influenced nearly every comedic work since its inception. I find it important to note, before delving into form specificities, that in development and execution Commedia is of the European perspective. Countless cultures have applied its archetypes and form to their own works, but at its core it was developed to address and acknowledge the European experience of its time. In its traditional form it utilizes masks, improvisation, physical comedy, and archetypal characters — originally used to highlight issues amongst societal classes in Europe. Those characters belong to one of four categories: The Zanni (servants), Vecchi (old men), Innamorati (young lovers), and Capitani (captains).

When taking in a commedia show, one will often see Arlecchino (the faithful, yet absent-minded servant) trip over their own feet and make things worse for their love interest or master. One might watch Il Capitano (the captain) boast across the stage about his exploits before being taunted by lower class characters, resulting in his always failed attempt at punishing them. The unchanging specificity of the characters has allowed for the form to influence some of our most successful comedic works: shows like *The Office*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Friends*, and *Seinfeld* utilize commedia archetypes to build
characters that can be inserted into any situation and clash in the most hilarious of ways. However, commedia serves as far more than fodder for chuckles and syndication.

When developing characters, I often begin by likening them to a commedia archetype. I start by looking at the circumstances I have laid out in my mind (with the understanding they will change) and considering which commedia characters will provide the most material. In my thesis play, I knew I wanted to explore toxic relationships. I wanted to delve into the symbiotic toxicity in small groups of people and grapple with how individuals in small communities both propel one another to greater heights and hold one another back. Ultimately, I settled on the relationship between Colombina and Pierrot as a jumping off point. Colombina is often depicted as a mischievous maid, not always virtuous, and often making decisions out of pure selfishness. The sad clown Pierrot lived to earn the love of Colombina, viewing her as an unattainable goddess. The relationship is both complementary and toxic. Colombina giving Pierrot a reason to believe in something, and Pierrot giving Colombina a trusted shoulder and companion, regardless.

In commedia, this relationship is unchanging and straightforward, but removing the traditional frame of the form allows for a deeper examination of these characters. In my thesis play, Colombina takes the form of Vince, a struggling single father trying to give his ill daughter a better life; whereas we find our Pierrot, David, having just been released from prison and trying to find meaning through his relationship with his childhood friend, Vince.

Vince, like Colombina, has been on his own nearly his entire life. Lower class and uneducated, he works tirelessly at three jobs to provide for his young daughter. While
very much a warm and joyful person, he is selfish and prideful to his core after being raised by old world parents. As anyone with a wooden spoon wielding grandmother will tell you, you provide for your family at any cost or you quickly become a failure in the world’s eyes. Over the course of the play, we see the devastating lengths Vince is willing to go to to provide for his daughter, and the depth of his selfishness and desire for self-preservation. The complexities of the Colombina character are more fully explored in the piece, as we find ourselves in love with this flawed but passionate single parent.

A mirror image of Pierrot (the sad clown), David has an overwhelming desire to serve. After failing to protect his younger sister from his abusive father, his only self-worth comes from a deep-seated savior complex. This manifests itself in self-destructive acts of “heroism,” which ends in David sacrificing himself for the good of others. Of course, in these sacrifices are layers of fear and self-loathing: a crutch for a broken person. He spends his life trying to figure out who he is outside of prison, while fighting the sense of hopelessness that often accompanies release. We examine not only aspects of this individual character, but encounter the countless issues with the American prison system through him.

By using commedia archetypes as a springboard, I am able to continue my work by subverting the expectations one might have for those characters. Subversion is yet another tool of the writer that adds depth and complexity to the work. As Maria Irene Fornes states, “It’s much more interesting when the form is completely new and has nothing to do with the standard form. Life doesn’t happen according to standard development, and life is interesting.” (1) With this thought in mind, I consider my own
biases and expectations of the character. I weigh their circumstances at any given moment and try to isolate the most likely outcome. In doing so, I might try to push back against these expectations for a different result. This challenges not only the standard form of commedia archetypes, but my own biases and pre-conceived notions. The most tried and true example of character subversion is the oft used *anti-hero*. These characters are a favorite among writers because in their duality we are able to surprise audiences with their decision making. It is within this grey area we find both attributes of a hero and villain, subverting both archetypes at once. I use the example not to limit what subversion is, but to show the strength in the tool. By dissecting and pinpointing less explored traits of a character archetype, we are able to push the bounds of what that character can contribute to our work.

I allow my always developing writing process to fuel my subversions. As a consistent over-thinker, I am committed to having a loose approach to first drafts. I have an idea of who a character is, but throughout my first draft, they become flesh and bone. I allow them to break from my own expectations and imposed narrative, and live in their own voice.

I begin with visualization, a tack I initially learned from reading articles written by one of my inspirations, Irene Fornes: “And I say to [my students]: ‘Visualize one of your characters, and visualize the face.’ And I ask questions. ‘Visualize the body, the position of the body, what is the person wearing, what is the room, the furniture in the room, where is the light coming from?’” (4) This type of visualization helps to begin specifying the characters. I begin to chip away at the archetypes and find the nuance and
depth in the human beings. Once I have created a picture in my mind of each character, I start to work on the embodiment required for my first draft. I consider body language, injuries, age, lifestyle, known and unknown disability, and anything that might effect the way a person *moves* through the world. I often practice moving throughout a given space as the character. I will use tactics learned in my younger years as a performer to find nuance in the physical movement and vocal performance of my character. Once within the body of a character, I contemplate how notable factors would effect the psyche of this person. A lifelong smoker moves through the world different than a marathon runner; the vocal cadence of an alcoholic is drastically different than a jazz singer. After a series of experimentation with each character, I have a clear enough image of the space and those in it to begin writing. I know the energy in the room, how the space is taken up and divided, and further, what circumstances have landed these people in that space. This understanding leads me to developing the language of the piece.

I have always been fascinated by conversation, arguably the most important outcome of language. The musical nature of conversation is perhaps the cornerstone of my work, lifting my words off the page in an undeniably rhythmic way. I find myself fixated on the ways characters interact vocally as it is one of the few truly unpredictable things in the world. Despite having intimate knowledge of your partner’s habits and thoughts, one *will*, at some point, be surprised. There is a brilliant danger in conversation: each statement and response having the potential to blow up the person’s world. Unless used as a tool, characters cannot have preconceived knowledge of how their words will be received.
Conversation is unpredictable. To claim, “I know what this person would say” is not only false, but damning to the process. I imagine to some extent it is like a great composer developing a piece: they possess the tools and skill to drive the work in a direction, but to contain it and block progress with assumptions about its limitations is damning. Similarly, only by relinquishing control can a writer truly find the type of free conversation that one would find in a bar or on a street corner. As a writer, I am searching for lived in response, built on a history of relationships and knowledge of character. To this end, I often talk through my first draft as I write. Using the aforementioned knowledge of character, voice, breathe, cadence, weight, body language, and any and all manner of communication, I begin to audibly talk through the play in character. I then note where I find myself stumbling to respond or thinking more critically. I allow the characters to live and develop in real time, not pre-exist on a piece of paper or stage. Information gained by integrating “actor brain” into my process cannot be found by working silently in a room. I find only by vocalizing dialogue and monologue does it ring true to me. In short, I sit alone in a room and talk to myself. I rant and rave with all of the knowledge I have gained through my exercises to create a first draft free of criticism and fine tuning. There I will begin to see the characters for who they truly are. They no longer exist as an archetype, but as someone I know deeply; someone that breathes and has a heart beat.

This brings about my next concern as a writer — the space these flesh and blood characters will inhabit.
My grandfather spent roughly sixty years walking one block from the front of his building to the family store. Everyday, he would wake up around six in the morning and slowly inch toward the store for his fourteen hour day. As my grandfather aged, his ability to make the journey diminished. He was pained sitting in his house staring out the window at the neighborhood, unable to make the walk on his own. Once aware, my dad got up early every morning to walk my grandfather to the store. He would hold my grandfather up and they would walk — just the two of them, walking the same sidewalk path that has been there since before I was born. They admired the few buildings that still stood and reminisced about the past.

Last year, my father fell and shattered his knee. He too, could not walk — so, I took his place. I walked my grandfather to and from Fontano’s whenever possible. We admired the buildings and reminisced. There is something about that walk that is special; that five minute walk on ancient concrete surrounded by sacred brick. That place has a soul. It lives and breathes. It has a heart beat.

A heart beat: the rhythmic thud of a blood pumping organ inside the chest. A heart beat has the power to help define space. The speed and power tell us everything we need to know about where our character is. Are they somewhere warm or cold? Are they somewhere that feels like home or hell? Are they excited or complacent? The sound of a heartbeat can help identify the otherwise unknown.
Sensory stimulation has slowly gotten control over my creative process. I attribute it to spending most days completely alone aside from the hours I spend in class. I have learned to relish false silence. I say false because it is never really silent. Every moment of every day is filled with stimuli, each of them actively impacting our lives. At this very moment, there is a metal tingling from somewhere inside my wall, creating a different feeling in my apartment. I feel nervous. I am not entirely sure if the tingling had gone on forever unnoticed or started moments ago due to an issue with my water heater. I imagine my heart is beating slightly faster now, further changing the space and energy of this room. The realization that within silence is specificity of place informs my thoughts about the conception and drafting of my theatrical world.

Whether a dive bar on the southwest side, the desert of New Mexico, inside a whale’s mouth, or on the tip of a dandelion, the place gives greater definition to the conditions of the play; the feeling of these characters being in this place with its unique stimuli. I chase that feeling as I write, perhaps to put myself anywhere but alone in my apartment, or simply as it has become an integral part of my process. I need to take the moments necessary to build this place in my mind, and feel like I am each of these characters in this world: engulfed in its sights, smells, sounds, textures — everything that steers the senses one way or another. I use visualization and audio stimulation to help transport myself. Often, I will create soundscapes and playlists that feel like the world. In addition, I might create a look book with photos, textures, videos, article clippings, or other relevant information to aid myself. A last ditch effort in immersing myself in a world is often physically writing the script in a place reminiscent of the one I am
creating. I have been known to write sprawled out on rooftops, sitting on curbs, or nestled in the corner of a dive populated by motorcycle clubs and moonshine enthusiasts. I imagine this is to remind myself that the places I create in my mind already exist in one way or another. The feeling of being in any one place can in so many ways be universal.

I find great comfort in small neighborhood establishments. I enjoy two-item menus, stained counter tops, and being on a first name basis with people. Notable only because every person finds comfort and joy in some type of place. Perhaps a place reminiscent of their home or the opposite of it. Each of us has our own version of two item menus and stained countertops. It is, as said, the feeling of this place that is important. Whether it be a naturalist setting or one undefined, there is an energy an audience can recognize. There is a soul, heart, and feeling in this place, but created by what we perceive of its stimuli.

At this point in my career, I have found consistencies in the worlds of my work. I often liken the texture of my worlds to cement, brick, or wood. The images those words conjure are that of building, resilience, and growth. Despite a specified time, the world of the work often feels ancient. One feels a history within the set that reaches before and after the narrative of the work. Some of our world’s greatest marvels were built before any living human, and (if undisturbed) might very well outlast us all. Similarly, the world of my work is often stoic and resilient until disrupted by an outside force. It is important that the world within my work feels like its own entity, one with meaning and a story far more intricate and expansive than can be acknowledged in the time allotted. It is assumed
the place does not just exist for my particular timeframe, which greatly impacts the perception of the work.

These grand ideas and ranting thoughts about place are only as good as the technical application of them. Where does one draw the line? How does one communicate specificity of place while embracing the collaborative nature of dramatic writing? While I internally operate in specificity (visualization and embodiment fueling my work), on paper I communicate setting in a manner designed for collaboration. I do not need to tell the color of the floors or height of the bar stools I see while writing if the two are not integral to the narrative and world. However, telling the reader this particular dive bar is the type that “keeps the Christmas lights up all year because they’re lazy (not fashionable)” is incredibly important. I treat place as I do every other element: what is necessary and helpful to building the world and what is self-indulgent fodder? A reality one learns early and relearns often in this field is to “kill your darlings.” While not pretty on paper, the idea is conductive to growing as an artist.

Love the work. Love what inspired it, what it is, and what it is capable of being; but above all else, know that if any part of it hinders or does not actively contribute to the success of the piece, get rid of it. Unchangeable commitment to a particular location and geographic specificity allows a play to be one thing. It will live, breathe, and exist in this one place forever — which is yet another tool to be acknowledged. As I dive head first into dramatic structure, I continue to chip away at the marble of the piece; leaving behind what is unnecessary and embracing what is beneficial.
Where Décès fell onto the page a scatter brained experiment in form and function, 

*life in bottles* was a painstakingly focused dissection of alcoholism and its relationship with childhood trauma, created with puppets. When discussing the play, it is important to know that I love Kendrick Lamar’s body of work. Love is a strong word, but appropriate here. I find myself an imposter in certain works of his, and a pointed recipient in others. Listening to his albums has become a continuous educational experience and inspirational practice in my life.

With this passion and appreciation, I set out to write a play that flowed rhythmically in time with Lamar’s album “To Pimp A Butterfly.” That is to say, if you were to start the album and first line of the play at the same time, the ending of songs and scenes would be simultaneous. Which is an exhausting and impossible undertaking given the unpredictability of an actor’s performance; but as can often be said, I tried anyway.

Armed with a passion for rhythm, music, and a desire to explore the depth and complexities of addiction, I needed a vessel; an avenue that would allow me to delve into the aforementioned without fear. Puppets proved to be my solution. With the exception of our lead, Cook, the cast of *life in bottles* is made up entirely of puppets. These puppets represent tortured traumatic memories of Cook’s past and the manifestation of his pained childhood. We open on Cook jumping off a hotel balcony, and take a journey from there backward as his first imaginary friend follows a memory driven yellow brick road to try and save Cook before he crashes into the cement below.
It is a fever dream: an experiment in rhythm and time that would help shape all of my work from then until now. Below is the singular fourth wall break in the show. It lands at scene (and track) eleven. A turning point in Cook’s narrative where he attends an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Here, the audience serves as the other members of the group:

*Cook sits in the audience.*

*After a beat he makes his way to a podium on stage, and speaks directly to the audience.*

**COOK** | My name’s Wesley Cook, um, people call me Cook.

And I’m an alcoholic. I say that like I made the decision, you know? Like I woke up one day and decided I was gonna be an alcoholic. Which isn’t really far from the truth I guess. Um. So it’s fucking weird, things only become a problem when you want them to. You’re not an alcoholic until you decide you’re an alcoholic, until you realize you are. But if step one is admitting you’re an alcoholic, and you never admit you are, are you ever really?

I am though. I’m pretty sure of it. Doctors have told me. My body actually needs alcohol to function right, which is why I always feel like shit now. Oh, fuck, yeah, it’s been twenty-seven days since my last drink. I’m not sure whether or not I’m supposed to tell you that, but everybody else did so - I hate when people come up here and talk about how good they feel not drinking. You’re lying. If you hated drinking you wouldn’t have become an alcoholic in the first fucking place. Nobody shoots themselves in the foot and then goes, “oh man, I fucking hated that. Let me try that again.” Nah. It’s the fucking lunatics that enjoy that shit, what’s it called? Masochism? Or is that just a sex thing? Like you like getting spanked or something.

But I fucking love drinking. I do. I want to hate it, trust me, it ruined my Dad’s life and my Aunt’s life - it ruined my relationship. It ruined everything. And I want to hate it. But I can’t. Because I love it. Something inside me loves it. Or hate me. One or the other.

Everybody has bad drinking stories, but you only focus on those once you get the label. Once drinking is a problem then all the bad stories get pushed to the front.Seriously. Before then all you remember is being happy drunk, weddings, nights out with your friends, concerts, random shit, fun shit. Seriously, everyone in here has an amazing drinking story. Tell me one. Seriously.
Tell me one, someone has to have one.

Cook searches for someone in the audience, finds someone willing to share, and wills them to the podium (unless they’d rather sit, which is fine).

They tell their story.

SEE. That’s the point. Look I know we’re at this meeting and everything and yeah we got an issue to work through, but it’s not all bad. Sometimes it’s a positive solution. Sometimes it’s just what you need. It’s not the drinking, it’s the why. It’s the why for everything. If you’re gonna get blackout drunk cause your wife left you then yeah, don’t fucking do that. But if you just had a kid get FUCKING PLASTERED. Do that shit. Enjoy it. I dunno.

I’m sorry.

I have a tendency to ramble and shit. I think I’m ok. I do.

Recently, I lost someone I love. Loved? Love.

They found her on the kitchen floor. She’d overdosed on heroin. I didn’t even know she did drugs outside of smoking a blunt in the bathroom and then turning the fan on and opening the window trying to hide it from me. When I was little she took care of me and I shoulda been there for her but I wasn’t. She died. I dunno if it’s my fault but I feel like it is, and then after I got pissed and started drinking more than I ever had and I almost - I was mad. I have a bad temper I think. My dad had a bad temper. That’s what they tell me at least. Jesus Christ I should just slit my wrists now I’m fucking buming you all out, I’m sorry.

Really. They tell you come up here and just say what you need to say so that’s what I’m doing.

…….You can only say you wanna kill yourself so many times before it starts to make sense. Look, don’t get me wrong I’m not saying I’m gonna do it or anything I’m just saying when you say something or think something enough it starts to make sense you know? It starts to seem like the right answer. It’s like drinking - I guess. You wake up in your own vomit enough times and you realize you have a fucking problem. You fuck up enough people’s lives and you start to realize maybe they really are better off without you.

Is there a time limit on these things?

What does it cost? All of it. What do we put people through? What have I put people through? When I go, all that’ll be left is fist shaped holes in apartment walls and people scraping to find a memory of me that isn’t miserable. That’s fucking depressing.

I’m sorry, I don’t really know how to end this. Can I just, sit down or?

END OF EXCERPT.
VII. MISMATCHED PARTS | DRAMATIC STRUCTURES AND THE PLAY

“A play has to move. It has to go where it says it’s going. Like a flight to Chicago. If you buy a ticket for Chicago, when the plane lands, you better damn well be in Chicago.”
- Marsha Norman

My father waxes poetic. He is a storyteller utilizing all the tools garnered growing up on Taylor Street to paint a picture, induce laughter, and educate. His stories span decade and circle a moral center but never hit it pointedly. I find at times he grows frustrated with his inability to convey life lessons through stories, and resorts to speaking them plainly. Having not grown up in a space welcoming to vulnerability, this can be hard for him. Stories are significantly less personal.

I myself have grown to value structure. Similarly to my father, I use stories as a way to find grains of enlightenment within my past in the hopes of a less ignorant future. The dramatic structures I have chiseled are now an endless list to help me to do so far more successfully than ever before.

A handful of characters in a defined space — like a specific slab of marble or pallet of neatly chosen and poured paint — are capable of becoming anything. If several artists are given the same characters and setting, they will each return with a unique work representative of their theatrical voice. Often, one of the first exercises young playwrights do as a cohort is just that: the experimentation with similar stimuli and given circumstances. It is at this fresh, untarnished place that the aforementioned tools (purpose, character, setting, etc.) collide with technical playwriting to create a complete work of art.
I should probably warn the casual reader (if they exist at the 28th page of a thesis paper) that this section will be far more technical than the previous — filled with writing terminology that I employ, but find a bit exhausting to address. Alas, learning the language and proper use of established theatrical tools is a good portion of the academic and artistic battle — so, here we go.

Time: It has been moving since our inception and will continue until after we burn the planet bare. When discussing theater, we are discussing two separate kinds of time: real time and performance time. Real time (perhaps also called run time), is the literal time in minutes our play takes to be performed, while performance time (or perceived time) is the time that passes throughout the narrative. A play may land in the two hour range real time, but cover several generations of life in performance time. These two forms of time deliberately compliment or clash with one another depending on the goal of the work.

As a younger writer, I found it tiresome to consider real time when working. The idea that a piece needed to fit within a frame of time often resulted in more frustration than perceived worth. If someone is a novice and takes four hours to tell a story, so be it. The goal at this stage is to commit to the habit of writing — so write, then write more. It will be too long or short and no one will produce it, but that is not of concern. However, as they grow as writers, real time becomes an incredible tool in getting work out into the world.

On average, my plays run an hour and thirty minutes real time or less. Partially, because I often delay the denouncement to relish in hearing myself talk, and partially,
because as playwrights we need to adapt to our audiences. There exists the sentiment of past generations that audiences’ “attention spans are shorter,” but I tend to believe this is not the case. I would rephrase and say audiences are more in-tune to storytelling than ever before due to an over saturation of the art form; youtube and streaming services are available on every device (if desired, someone could watch an entire film and return to this very sentence at their convenience). Today’s average film or theater audience member has experienced enough storytelling (of varying mediums) to know when it is not being done well.

If I were someone trying to write thirty character, five hour epics, I might view this change as a negative; I myself find it refreshing and empowering. Unique writer voices are amplified not only by their own work, but by everything that echoes their sentiments in popular culture. I was approached by two teenage basketball players after my last production, raving that the play reminded them of Spike Lee’s, *Do The Right Thing*. Having never seen theater before, they still had the ability to dive head first into the work, thanks to a film that came out years before they were born. I imagine without the advances in technology this would have been much harder. Considering this, I encourage artists to look at the work and be truthful of its real time requirement. Does it really need to be three hundred pages long and four hours? Can that story be told in fifteen minutes? A true epic will hold an audience for the duration; they are used to *Marvel* movies, *Breaking Bad*, and high budget productions of *The Odyssey* doing just that. Likewise, a short indie or play can hold a moment in time forever if not embellished or exhausted.
Performance time is another animal altogether. There are numerous time forms to be used as tools in getting the most out of a narrative. The terms I use for the various structural times are sequential, diffused, circular, episodic, and denied. (Others will use different terms, but that is a common occurrence in the arts.) *Sequential Time* is linear (you may also identify it as chronological time). Events happen in sequence and affect one another accordingly. Time goes by with the measured and never changing tick-tick-tick of the clock. *Diffused Time* is known to jump and still when necessary. The form brings with it the opportunity to utilize flashbacks and cut aways. *Circular Time*, as the name implies, repeats itself either throughout the sequence or once the sequence is completed. My first note taken on circular time read, “time passes, stuff happens, nothing changes, we’re back where we started.” I find myself more articulate now, but still believe that to be a relatively accurate explanation. *Episodic Time* is perhaps most familiar to the layman today, as it is the form used by most television shows. One might even say a single portion of a television show could be called an episode, a short separated period of time amongst similar episodic sections of the narrative. In playwriting, the same frame of the televised episode is utilized, but within a single work. We will see an entire act of a play made up of short, relatively separated periods of time. Finally, we have *Denied Time*: I often simplify and say non-time or dream time. Denied Time is the lack of formal structured time, as if the frame of time itself is non-existent.

A writer may choose the form of time that best serves the work, or the form of time may choose the work itself. Further, a writer may experiment with combinations of time. I often find my work to land in a gray area between sequential and circular time.
theorize this is because of the nature of the work. As previously mentioned, I focus on working through experienced trauma through dramatic narratives. There is room for denied, episodic, and diffused time in this work, but the desire to work through things with a sense of immediacy draws me to the sequential and circular times. I want to see the conversations and thought processes develop on stage as they do in my own head. My characters and the space they occupy serve as a glimpse into my actively working through past experiences. Subject matter decides whether this work slips back into a circular structure or not. In some cases, too much has changed to return to the place where the piece started, other times, characters find themselves stuck in patterns for better or worse.

While incredibly important in a script’s development, time is yet another small part of crafting a complete, functioning narrative. The next noteworthy component of a work’s overall dramatic structure is the structure of its plot, influencing its narrative. While often used interchangeably, plot and narrative can be viewed as very different things. I consider the narrative to be the larger overarching story, a general statement of what happens; the plot is how the intricacies of the narrative are arranged (beats, scenes, the kairos [point of no return]).

With the understanding that a narrative is often easy to convey out loud, I will focus on unique ways to arrange a work’s plot. Overall, as with time, there are a handful of terms I use in relation to certain plot arrangements: classical, epic, circular, pattern, generic, and synthetic fragment. It is worth noting that while terms are often learned from academic reading assignments or in class exercises, it becomes incredibly difficult to cite
due to the nature of definition. The terms to be defined may have been used by other writers, but the definitions given are my own. In that way, they are merely a part of my process and approach, not a steadfast title or definition for any tack. These forms of plot will serve to help define your individual works.

Classical is the the most straighforward: one character, one goal, one place, one giant scene. It is often the arrangement used in one-person shows, driven by monologue and linear character development. Perhaps the best modern practitioner of the classical work in my humble, yet ecstatic opinion, is John Leguizamo. Someone reading this will fight me on it, and I understand why. Mr. Lequizamo often references or allows other characters to embody him during his performance; but ultimately, what we are watching as an audience is a character portraying characters. Mr. Lequizamo is a master impersonator within his own performance body, resulting in one character taking the audience through a giant all encompassing scene with a singular denouement. In layman terms, a one-person show.

Epic is the way of the ancient Greeks, countless modern writers, and more often than not, myself: the writer utilizes scene breaks, act breaks, sub plots, spectacle, and nuance of character. The modern playwright and his ancestors adopted and enhanced the form with technology and access to material. Where ancient Greeks utilized the form to comment on societal and religious dilemmas with public performances, today we use the epic form as a tool to cover more ground. We find act breaks and the often accompanying intermission a welcome reprieve from the emotional work of an audience member. Spectacle is widely embraced and utilized on Broadway as a way to appeal to a larger
audience. Sub-plots have given birth to some of our greatest recurring characters and added immeasurable depth to the worlds of theater and film. The epic form embraces the tools of the craft more fully. Where classical is relegated to one character, one goal, one place, one giant scene — epic broadens the possibilities of the work.

*Circular* is a mirror image of circular time, the play’s narrative ending without anything having changed; the pattern is repetition in a very specific, rhythmic way. The form can be seen in mainstream media in works like *Groundhog Day* and *Russian Doll*, where a character relives the same exact time frame and moment almost identically. Most would argue because dialogue and circumstance begin to change in these works that it cannot possibly be a pattern, but I would disagree. I believe there is a need to give language to structures and continue conversations about what they can be. A work can be both pattern and circular or pattern and classical. These are merely terms to define (what I hope) are new forms artists find as new works and great minds arise. *Generic* is easiest defined by its sitcom nature. Generic is a form already in existence in which we plug the narrative. Perhaps, the entire show takes place during a wedding (an already established frame for an event) or a funeral. Finally, there is synthetic fragment: all space and time in existence all at once. As the pattern has clearly emerged, this is a mirror of denied time. All the above plot arrangements allow us to better articulate what is done within the work. Does the application of time in our piece compliment the structure chosen as we found in the repetitive nature of *Groundhog Day*, or do the two conflict to garner a different energy entirely? More so, what can be gained from complimentary or conflicting structures overall?
Time and plot broken down slightly, the focus is shifted to individual narrative. There are individuals in a very specific room, existing in a time and structure chosen for the piece (all of this open to change if the work requires). Now these people have to do something — something has to happen. Each character needs to get from A to beyond Z in the most successful way for the piece. Joseph Campbell and every screenwriting professor will be thrilled to know even my most jaded self cannot find a better way to accomplish that feat than *The Hero’s Journey*.

I would tell any student writer to buy Joseph Campbell’s book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Let me begin there: I can sit and write a novel about the Hero’s Journey, or the actual work can be read. (Full disclosure, it is four hundred and ninety seven pages, but worth every page.) *The Hero’s Journey* is a guide for getting a character from page one to “End of ______”; it sets tried and true points in a character’s development that help a writer earn the characters ultimate goal (or earn an equally satisfying failure). *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and every episode of *The Office* and *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* have used it. Of course, countless plays do as well (but who reads plays, right?). To refrain from a heavily worded three page rant, below is a diagram of a simplified version (coached by screenwriter Matthew McDuffie, edited by myself).

**ANIELLO FONTANO WRITES JOSEPH CAMPBELL’s THE HERO’S JOURNEY**

**ACT I | The Departure**

**a. The Call to Adventure**

Our hero sits in the *ordinary world*, when they are called to a higher purpose!
b. Refusal of the Call
   Our hero refuses this strange new call/opportunity.

c. Meeting with the Mentor / Supernatural Aid
   A mentor or unexpected force aids in our hero’s decision to accept the call
to
greatness!

d. The Crossing of the Threshold
   “We’re not in Kansas anymore”…or whatever the ordinary world was.
   Our hero
   begins their quest into the unknown.

ACT II | The Initiation

e. Trials, Allies, and Enemies
   Our hero is tested mercilessly in the unknown world.

f. The Approach to the Inmost Cave
   The lowest point for our hero, where all hope might be lost.

g. The Ordeal (Death, Betrayal, Loss)
   In escaping the inmost cave, our hero loses something precious.

h. The Boon, Reward, Apotheosis
   Our hero achieves their goal and destroys a literal or metaphorical Death
   Star.

ACT III | The Transformation

i. The Road Back
   More trials, more tribulations, but our end is in sight.

j. The Resurrection
   Our hero is reborn, a hero.

k. The Return with the Elixir
   Our hero returns to the ordinary world, changed.

There are other ways to organize a character’s journey, but I find Joseph
Campbell’s to be the most productive, efficient, and inclusive. I say that with the
understanding that most characters are not classical archetypes like Luke Skywalker or
Darth Vader, but often contain more depth like Hamlet or Iago. The key is understanding
the beats within the journey are a tool. If one can understand how something works, they
can understand how to subvert or break it. For example, often in a successful work, the
form of our “Return with the Elixir” is something unexpected. Our audience is given the reward of their time, energy, and effort — but not in the way they expected. Part of the craft is fulfilling our promises to our audience in ways that subvert their expectations. The form is tried and true, but how one embraces and utilizes it is up for interpretation.

This leads to my most crucial point: Do not hold any one lesson, structure, frame, process, approach, etc., as holy word. These are all tools; tools to be used or discarded as an artist sees fit. Further, these are just the tools one artist (myself) deems worthy of talking about in this particular academic paper. These approaches to character, setting, narrative, and plot are necessary for me to better engage with my own shortcomings, pain, trauma, and grief.

As we have traversed the land of dramatic structure, one might find themselves asking to what end we do so. How do these structures point to one singular, centralizing cause? To that, I refer back to memory and purpose. Having isolated my sense of purpose and my desire to explore past traumas through the art, I consider which of the aforementioned dramatic structures would benefit a narrative the most. I would love to provide the tried and true method of doing so, but the nature of narrative does not allow for that. Each story, character, setting, etc., can benefit from every dramatic structure. Ultimately, it depends on what the writer wants at the given moment. Perhaps, the writer remembers the trauma vividly in mind, almost like a picture. In that case, there is a benefit to leaning more heavily on the abstract, allowing for some distance from these visual memories. Of course, it could also be argued that there is an internal reward for engaging directly with those visuals on stage or screen. I realize I am essentially saying
after providing a myriad of rules — there are no rules; this is art — not science. We write papers and lead classrooms in the hopes participants can gleam something from our words and lessons, not live by them. To that end, I hope you have learned something about my own process, and only take and utilize whatever helps your own.

My process consists of a series of small, intricate, detailed steps. I need to know my characters intimately; their movements, breathe, ticks, and vocal performance allowing me to work fluidly. I have to feel as if I am in the room with them: understanding how its humidity affects their vocal cords; knowing how the temperature stretches or relaxes their skin. I need to fit it all in a neat enough box as to not spin wildly out of control while dealing with highly personal material. That is not to say others are not or that it is necessary to do so — it is just essential for me. The tools of the trade are ever changing, as is the form itself. While the lessons of our artistic fore-parents will always be of benefit, it is increasingly important we grow beyond them and develop them further for our own practice. The world changes, we need to change with it.
When I was twenty-four, I was taught by a world renowned Shakespeare director. This particular director was of the old, punishing mentality that acting is pain. They assigned me Henry V’s St. Crispin’s Day monologue for our final senior undergraduate showcase. The showcase was not designed as an informal bow to the masses, but a final test of our ability as performers. It was graded thoroughly and we could fail and lose everything — at least, that is how we were made to feel.

This visiting professor assigned me St. Crispin’s because I “had an attitude.” I was too boisterous and vocal against certain types of academic advisement. It is not that I did not value Shakespeare, in fact, I am devoted exhaustingly to Greek and Shakespearean plays; but I have seen enough of it as it was written, and this director’s approach was not ideal. I distinctly remember being stopped at the end of the first line, every time, for roughly a half hour in front of our cohort and being corrected on my delivery. I was told I was wrong every day for months. I am a worker, so I worked. I lost sleep and obsessed over this monologue, in the hopes of delivering it the way the professor wanted.

After performing my portion of the showcase and letting loose my resounding, “And gentleman in England now a-bed, Shall think themselves accursed they were not here, And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks, That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s Day” (Henry V) I collapsed on the floor and cried. It was like a weight had
been lifted off my shoulders. I finally felt the slightest bit of self-worth creep back into my body and mind. . . I got a B minus.

I am tired of St. Crispin’s Day. I am tired of the thought artists need to be well versed in Shakespeare (or any number of classic writers) to legitimize ourselves. Theater, of all the forms, seems the most regulated to suit and tie blue hairs who want to feel fancy. Companies reproduce the same plays by older (often white male) playwrights because they know the wealthy will pay to see them. It is a heartbreaking reality my generation is trying desperately to overcome. These once relevant, truly great works are a masterclass on technique, but have (as all things will) grown stale. Of course, one day our stories will seem irrelevant to the next generation, but that day is not today. Today we hope our work feels like our world, lived in by the folx who create it.

This is to say, I enjoy theater with a bleeding heart and feisty soul, energized by today’s human experience. Shakespeare was once that, and in certain lights still can be, but what about everyone else? What about Antoinette Nwandu mashing together the *Exodus Story* and *Waiting for Godot* for her brilliant play *Passover* and it sounding like it belongs in the space? **Hell yeah, right?** I want country plays that feel like a bourbon soaked bar. I want Bronx stories that echo the energy of the borough. These stories have existed forever, but for whatever reason in academia we regulate our lessons to old men who all had the same person paint their stale portrait. Yes, the language of Shakespeare was colloquial at one point, but no more. We move on. We need to talk about language in our world now.
Every writer in history sounds different. We can emulate and influence one another, but at the end of the day we have lived different lives, experienced different losses, and are different writers. Our work, in so many ways, is a reflection of the world we inhabit, separating us in the most nuanced ways from even our strongest influences.

My work sounds a bit like the urban poet Stephen Adly Guirgis. I was told recently I will haunt Irishman Martin McDonagh the same way he haunted the legendary blue-collar playwright Sam Shepard. Someday, I hope a heavy fisted writer with a foul mouth makes me realize I need to hang it up. There is a long line of blue collar white men who say fuck and genuinely care about the plight of the lower class; however, we are not the same writer. To people who understand our words, we are a world away from each other — which is the point. We are in conversation with one another, but each holding our own. When it is our turn to talk, our plays speak for us. The way they lay on the page, the way they read out loud, how they can be staged, who laughs at their jokes and cries at their pain. A script in hand is a conversation with an artist. To that end, we each need to find who we are in life and how to best transcribe it on the page. As this paper is about my work, I will continue to talk about myself.

In the world of my work, words cannot be choreographed and planned. They fall out covered in dirt, gold, regret, and joy. My plays are music; their dialogue, monologue, stage directions, and arrangement providing a soundtrack to their world. They live, breathe, grow, and die. I employ tools garnered from my many influences — and some I have carved out myself — to accomplish this.
The first of which is freedom of language. I was once told I use the word “fuck” too much in my plays because “nobody talks like that.” Come to my fucking neighborhood and tell them that. This is my world — the world of my plays — and I intend on reflecting it in an honest light on stage. Only with the knowledge of character, space, dramatic structure, and honesty of language can I do that. I need to consider what the noted elements of the world allow for in terms of dialogue, monologue, and stage directions. Further, I need to examine how it is best transcribed in the building of the world and narrative.

The collaboration between the aforementioned theatrical elements brings us even closer to the answer to my thesis question. In the honest, thorough, skilled, bleeding heart reflection of my world and experience, I find a way to engage with my own past. It is impossible for me to do this without continuing to develop and honor my process and the voices of my culture, home, family, friends, and world. I must honor this.

I realize this is yet another thing I get to say because I am a straight, white man, but since that is the case — I must say it and stand by it. That said, freedom and honesty of dialogue is arguably the easiest lesson to learn. Often, it is a matter of building confidence in one’s self as a writer and comfort in one’s own ability. For me, it was understanding I will always be ignorant, but never willfully. Ignorance is a necessary and unavoidable part of life. We as human beings cannot move through the world expecting to be comfortable and correct all the time. We need to understand we are innately ignorant, and fight to grow out of it. Of course, this sparks a much larger conversation, but for the purpose of this paper and section, I will continue on and limit my scope to
language within artistic work. It is understanding our own ignorance, differences, and a passionate desire to grow, that we are able to spread our metaphorical wings and embrace the furthest reaches of our language.

My family is aggressively Chicago, Irish Italian. Our dialect and grasp of the English language is reflective of three generations of working class hustlers — and I sound like it. These vocal ticks are a character in my own life, of which I need to be aware. The way I am aware I cannot write this paper in my daily tone or language, I need to find the benefit and shortcomings of both within my work. That being the case, there are times I embrace my own voice in my work, and times I fight it for a specific purpose. Regardless, my voice is a part of me and in it I find freedom. There is power in the familiar and even greater strength in gaining new knowledge and experience. As writers, we must strive for both, while staying readily aware of our own ignorance.

We must care are enough to be respectful and know our boundaries, yet be skilled enough to build a world in which we can be honest. This brings us back to what is absolutely necessary. Often in the world of my plays, characters are blue collar and speak in a manner reflective of a neighborhood, not an institution. This is necessary for the narratives I am presenting, and in achieving success, I must ensure characters speak as if they inhabit these places. I cannot pretend they are something they are not or force myself to have some unearned knowledge of a place or language I do not. I need to embrace who I am, and find power in it — and above all, if I make a mistake, correct it.

One will find in time a line was written poorly. At times, words will read like cardboard, cut the ear like grammar school Shakespeare, or justifiably anger folx for any
number of reasons. A writer will unknowingly write a line ignorant to the plight or experience of another person or people. A writer will write something blatantly offensive based on their own limited life experience. These things happen and will always happen until the writer shows and acts on a desire to change. Mistakes will be made; make them once, learn from them, alter your tactics and practice, and grow as an artist and person. Ignorance is only bliss if you are comfortable being ignorant. Find your voice and explore the depth beyond it, knowing full well you will make mistakes along the way.

To summarize dialogue: be honest, let it flow, make mistakes, and learn. We all have our own process and voice, and no one has a right to tell you how your characters speak. But in that, do not be too prideful to admit your own ignorance. Know you will make mistakes and heartily correct them. Find the soul within your dialogue and embrace it, allowing it to stretch your worlds to their furthest reaches. Again — straight white man; but hopefully when you read this, my generation and those that follow have righted the ship a bit. Hopefully, we are on the right side history.

Our final bit of discussion around “the conversation” revolves around stage directions. The stumping nature of my Father’s voice blended with my love for long winded tall tales is important in my stage directions. They contribute heavily to the energy and flow of my plays. There are “maybes” included often, so not to limit how things can be staged; but I’ll be damned if I am not going to say “If loud noises bother you, this is when you leave the theater.” I want my plays to read like a story told around a garbage can fire. I want my stage directions to feel vocally necessary. They never will be,
but I want a reader to feel that way. I am telling a story, not writing a novel. If I wanted
silence during the process, I would have done something else.

I am partial to informal, verbal storytelling. This love is reflected heavily in my
scattered, visually slanting stage directions — often reading like a bed time story or
drunked tall tale. I find this to be a stylistic preference, as some of the most beautiful
works I have read have minimal to no stage directions at all. For my own work, these
expletive ridden conversations with the reader help to build the experience I desire for my
work. I want readers to feel unencumbered by the visualization required in the reading
process. They should not struggle to envision what is taking place on screen or stage, but
find it pleasant to do this work. I hope through stage directions written in my own
speaking voice, my readers find a sense of comfort and collaboration, not by separating
the writer from reader, but welcoming them warmly into the world without ever meeting
them.

This does not work for everyone. Some of my favorite writers have non-existent
stage directions or gorgeous three page spanning poetry that inspires tears before a reader
even gets to the first line of dialogue. It is all relative. In an undergraduate program,
maybe we spend time dissecting a young writer’s stage directions for purpose, relevance,
and necessity. However, beyond earning a piece of paper, why stifle what they feel? Why
set standards? Film is a business; there is money to be made. I understand the necessity
for an industry standard in this case, and appreciate knowing how to follow it; but theater
is all heart — so follow yours.
IX. AN EXCERPT FROM “summertime | an interlude”  
(MFA YEAR THREE)

I imagine as summertime is the companion piece to this dissertation, I should avoid spoiling any of the narrative. Instead, I will share a secret about the monologue below. Within the racing rhythm of summertime is a momentary stillness. A singular, uninterrupted period where one of our characters addresses the world with a monologue. A monologue about love, appreciation, effort, and legacy. A monologue I wrote for my father — on behalf of so many people.

KYRI| When I was thirteen I went into Red's for the first time.

My older brother used to go in after school and steal candy bars and beers with his friends. Then they’d go sit at Sheridan Park and drink and eat and bullshit and what not. You know Sheridan, with the dirt baseball field. So they’d go sit there wit girls and mack on them and you know they didn’t get any, so they’d just listen to music til everything cut to black and they hadda go home. Then they’d head back toward the apartments and sit on someones stoop.

Cause even though they thought they were badasses, everybody’s Moms would grab that belt if they stayed out past when the streetlights came on. But my my older brother did that shit every night in the summertime, and I wished more than anything I could too.

But one day...

One day after school me and my friend went to Red’s. I’d never been and walking in was like walking into a pawn shop or junk store. That dirty ass yellow linoleum floor. The dark red, chipped countertop. Those coolers that either worked too well or not at all, so the glass was either steaming hot or frozen solid at any given time.

I didn’t get it.

I go in and my friend is keeping watch, right? And I pocket a king size chocolate bar. And I don’t even like chocolate, shits too sweet for me, but my little ass
knew I wasn’t sneaking beer out of there, so I figured chocolate would work just
fine.

I stick that giant fucking bar down my pant leg but I realize my pants are too
big cause they’re those nineties wide leg joints, and the bar’s gonna fall right the
fuck out of them. So now I’m holding this bar in my drawers while I’m walking
around like I got this massive fucking dick right? I’m on my full John Wayne
cowboy shit like “yeeeeeheahwwwwww” walking around this bitch like I’m
ready to draw.

And Red’s watching me. The whole fuckin time. Just watching me. But he
doesn’t say anything. At all. My little ass is sweating cause I know if I get caught
my Ma is gonna beat my ass.

But Red lets me walk out without saying a word. And I go to the park and meet
my brother and his friends. And I drink a bit, eat that big ass chocolate bar, and
go back and sit on the stoop with them. And I loved it. I fuckin loved that shit.
Hangin with the grown kids and my Brother.

So the next day after school I go back to Red's to jack another chocolate bar. And
I’m walking to get it all sly with my chest out to Red and my big ass nineties
pants and this time just when I get to the chocolate bars Red says, “Hey kid, you
want a job?”

My little ass froze.

“NO MOTHER FUCKER. I DON’T WANT A DAMN JOB.”

But I couldn’t say that. I was frozen. And short. I didn’t want his attention on me
at all. I wanted to be a fuckin invisible ninja right? Fuckin stealth. But I wasn’t.
He saw me clear as day and was asking me if I wanted a job. And I didn’t know
what to say. So I said yes.

My lil dumbass said yes.

Red told me to show up the next day right after school. And I did. He gave me a
broom and said to sweep the back room. And I did. He gave me a rag and said
wipe the counters. And I did. He gave me a pop and candy bar and even made me
some dinner to take home. I went back every day that week. And he gave me
twenty dollars every day. Twenty whole dollars for a couple hours work every
day after school.
So I went back every day that summer. Every fuckin day I was in Red's sweeping and cleaning for a couple hours and gettin ten dollars an hour and all the pop and candy I could eat at thirteen years old.

By the end of the summer I had enough money to buy my lunch at school every day and get a cd or two when I wanted. I don’t think I asked my Mom for a dollar that whole school year. Not that she had it.

So I went back every summer. And Red had me. And I worked. And he paid me. And when high school ended and I needed a letter to apply to college saying I wasn’t a dumbass, he wrote me one. And when I needed a summer job between college semesters, he hired me again. That old bastard listens to this god damn show twice a week. He’s got a swear jar in the store but he sits listens to me say fuck for two hours straight twice a week.

That’s love.

I wish I could say I was special. But I wasn’t. He does that for every kid. Every kid that was willing to sweep or scrub. Every kid willing to give him an hour or two. I know it’s not much. Shit, it’s just a job. But for a kid from the neighborhood, a job where you feel like you belong is a special thing. Where you feel like nobody is lookin at you funny. Windy, Vince, David, Syd. All them from right across the street here. We all worked there. Summer, fall, winter, spring. And new kids every season. Hustlin’ our asses off.

Between the money and food Red gave us all, I dunno if he ever made a penny.

I guess all this is to say if you’ve set foot on the corner of Polk and Carpenter, Red's been a part of your life. If any one of the kids from the neighborhood held a door open for you or waited on you at a restaurant or cut you off on their bike rushing to class, you can thank Red.

He’s family.

A good friend and a better man.

Get well soon Red.

END OF EXCERPT.
“(My students) felt like they were inside of the world they were writing; they felt like they were ‘channelling’ something; They heard voices and saw images unfold faster than they could type; they felt like moving around; time disappeared; they experienced flow.”

-Carlos Murillo

I arrived at the University of New Mexico with countless stories. Stories about family, friends, painful night, and beautiful mornings. Stories about my father, this unbreakable force of good and hard work. Since then, I have been trying to find a way to rip my heart from my chest and smash it on paper so I might get some of those stories out. I have searched for unique ways of telling these stories and transcribing them on paper. Somewhere along the line, I developed a performance rooted in the development of my particular style of dialogue and the process by which it is written. I imagine if I am going to talk about my process I should include the cornerstone of my dialogue development: My friend, Thelonius.

In the Spring of 2014, I attended an untitled performance in a black box theater at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The piece was the collegiate culmination of a dear friend and colleague, Daniel. Having known Daniel for some time and grown very close as friends, I waited with anticipation for what I was sure would be a carefully crafted variety showcase of his many talents. After a bit of silence and audience mumbles, he entered the space with a bottle of wine, sat in one of two chairs center stage, and pulled a small tangerine out of his pocket. After setting the tangerine on the second chair across from him he rotated it revealing a tiny smiley face.
“This is Thelonius” he started, “He’s shy.”

Daniel uncorked the wine, took a swig, and launched into how he had grown up shy but was slowly working through it in his art. Focusing on Thelonius (but acknowledging the audience when possible), what followed was a devastating epic combing through Daniel’s life from his first real memory to his breakfast that morning. The improvised rant was a raw narrative that uncovered moments from Daniel’s past he had not thought about in years. It was gorgeous and life giving. There was pain and joy in the performance; pain that had been buried inside himself and joy that resonated long after the moments passed. This performance felt alive in a way I had never experienced before. It was both lived in and new. It was ancient stories uncovered in real time for an unsuspecting audience. The tools Daniel employed to create the work were carefully chosen and implemented in a way that contributed to the unique energy in the room.

This thing was shamelessly raw. The slowly emptying bottle of wine, the tangerine grabbed out of the fridge, the half-dry Sharpie used to draw Thelonius’ face, and the story that had never been given script. I think back to this performance often. It changed my life and aligned my artistic focus — I wanted this. I wanted shamelessly broken and brilliantly flawed. I wanted to get in a fist fight with my personal narrative and uncover things about myself I never could. Years have passed since Daniel sat across from a tangerine and told us his life’s story, but this theatrical performance is the inspiration for my work, *Thelonius | My Brother’s Keeper*, and the practice attached to the piece.
In their 1986 study and complimentary journal, *Confronting a Traumatic Event: Toward an Understanding of Inhibition and Disease*, James W. Pennebaker and Sandra Klihr Beall measured the effects of writing and its correlation to medical visits. Two select groups from the Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, were instructed to keep a daily journal. The first group was to write about a trivial event for fifteen minutes daily, while the second was told to write about traumatic experiences for the allotted time. Further, the second group was divided into three sub groups with three distinct focuses: emotional venting, describing without emotion, and combining both unfiltered emotion and description.

Throughout the four days of journaling, the group writing about trivial experiences showed no discernible changes. However, through this same time, group two (traumatic experiences with an allotted time) began to show signs of sadness and dismay accompanied with other minor reactions. During a four month follow up with participants, they learned the sub-group writing about traumatic events with both unfiltered emotion and detailed description reported they felt their relationship with these narratives had grown positively. These participants felt even this brief exercise of writing while acknowledging their emotions and the details of the event had helped them resolve some emotional issues they previously had with the memory. This pioneering study contributed highly to Louise Desavlo’s widely read and well regarded, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives.*

In her book, Desalvo explains her theory that, “repressing thoughts and feelings about traumatic or distressing events might be linked to illness and that expressing
thoughts and feelings through writing about traumatic or distressing events might prompt significant improvements in health.” (Desalvo 24) In conversation with Pennebaker and Beall, Desalvo concludes that one’s counteracting repression by active engagement in the re-presenting of scenes from the past allows for a more full understanding of the past, present, and future effects these scenes have on an individual. While these are beneficial and contributing factors to my chosen practice, it is not just the health benefits of expression with which I am concerned.

Carrie Crisman Oorlog’s 2016 thesis, Within and Without: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the Healing Narrative, explores the ways in which re-stating might aid in one’s taking ownership of past experiences by trying on different perspectives, recasting timelines, and re-examining the significant moments and symbols that may not currently be part of the natural remembered narrative. Oorlog believes that only by developing a new narrative through exploration and experimentation can we fully engage with our past for the benefit of our future. One might explore how events from their past might be retold from a different perspective or within a different framework. It is as much the details of the event and the way in which the narrative is delivered as it is simply expressing the event that benefits us.

This is all to say, the practice of multiple presentations and repeating stories from our past allows us to better engage with them. Through the act of repetitive and developmental storytelling we are able to uncover truths within ourselves and our past, further informing our future. As I set out to develop a storytelling practice that would function as a means of healing, education in self, and positive engagement with trauma,
grief, loss, and pain, I found myself in line with one of our greatest storytellers, Spalding Gray.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest American storytellers, Spalding Gray wrote autobiographical monologues that he performed in theaters and on film. Known for his quiet manic sensibility, Gray used the art of storytelling as a live journal of sorts. In developing this study, theory, and practice, it is Gray’s work that aligns closest with my own. Here is where the road forks: My goal is to develop a practice that allows for an individual to more positively engage with their past, present, and future; yet, one of my closest theatrical relatives was found floating face down in the East River (his death ruled a suicide). At this point, I should express my desire is not to emulate the process by which Mr. Gray developed his own work, but to utilize the performance style with slight alteration for my own practice.

With Beall and Pennebaker’s study fresh in mind, I developed the first phase in my practice which I have affectionately called “liquid writing.” Each day, the person is to write a journal entry under no specified time constraint or specified subject matter. Where Beall and Pennebaker pushed their participants to focus on traumatic events and write with both emotion and detail, my practice allows for the participant to actively relax and write. This is where liquid writing differs from many of the aforementioned practices. They should write about anything for however long they want. This focus and time will change daily. It may be the extra cup of coffee they needed that morning, the step they tripped over while walking to work, or it might be a traumatic event from the past. These are completely unstructured journal entries designed to interrupt a hectic work day with
habitual writing. Over time, this habitual writing becomes second nature allowing for a more free and open internal conversation through journaling.

While participating in this portion of my practice, I found it to be a welcome distraction from my day. I would feel the stress of work weigh down on me and make an active choice to write at that very moment. Some days, the writing was pointedly about my frustrations, and others it was about trivial momentary thoughts and memories; but throughout this part of my practice, I consistently felt relieved to have this time to myself. I slowly began to use these journal entries as a tool to get through my day. Liquid writing is enjoyable. The only rule is you have to write every day. That’s it.

3.04.19

I’m exhausted.
I don’t ever remember being this tired consistently. Which is probably a lie. It just seems like I’m more tired than I have been. I blame asthma and altitude. I actively forget I have asthma because I didn’t until my early twenties. When I was younger I was a solid football player and ran track and didn’t die when I walked up a set of stairs. Also I have gray in my beard now. I couldn’t run a mile now if you paid me. Which is insane. Because I’ve run so much in my life. Everyone has though. When we were kids we all ran everywhere. or biked. There are zero bikes on front lawns in my parents neighborhood. When I was little we biked everywhere sun up to sun down and if you didn’t have a bike you rode on someone’s pegs or handlebars and if you couldn’t balance you fell off and we all laughed at you. I remember once JJ and me were riding bikes and Michael was trying to balance on JJ’s pegs
and he was wobbling around
and I turned to look and laughed
but because I was looking at them
I didn’t see this guy open his car door
and I got doored and flipped over the car door
and it was fucking hilarious.
I’m pretty sure it wasn’t even my bike.
I didn’t have friends in Vegas where I lived
so I spent summers back by JJ and Michael
and borrowed Michael’s bike.
Because he was littler than me he didn’t say anything.
Age wise little not size.
I was not a big kid at all.
I’m also not a big adult.
And I have asthma now.
And need a breather after walking up stairs.
AND I’m in good shape.
If I ever stop working out I might just die.
Or not.

Generate — the key to creating is constant generation. Liquid writing provided
me with months worth of journals notated in numerous mediums (handwritten, typed,
post-it-noted, recorded, etcetera). This wealth of material with no discernible framework
brought me sprinting into the next phase of my practice, self-analyzation.

I began to revisit journals sporadically. I did not choose five from the same week
or even two from the same month, I deliberately chose at random to get a wider scope of
my thought process. The goal of this analyzation was to identify through-lines and
reoccurring themes, events, ideas, thoughts, and emotions in my daily liquid writings. I
quickly began to highlight small sections of my entries and build connections in my
mind.

2.26.19 - Michael is doing well. Which is good. He calls weekly. It’s
kind of nice to have him and Jo and me be so close again.
2.29.19 - FaceBook says I should be friends with Anthony. He died four years ago and he’ll probably be in the “People you Might Know” section for the rest of my life.

3.07.19 - If they change the date of my car shipping back again I’m gonna lose my god damn mind.

3.12.19 - my dad doesn’t have any scars at all. just the one where he had knee surgery.and now he has to have this neck thing, which is gonna leave him with this huge one on his neck.

3.13.19 - It’s weird to talk to JJ and be reminded he has no knowledge of anything that’s happening. Then you have to be careful how you deliver bad news which I hate. And there’s a time crunch so it’s basically just a watered down version of whatever I wanna say. “My dad got hurt and needs to have surgery but he’s fine”.

At this point in my practice, I have a wealth of freeform liquid writing and a list of energized reoccurring themes found in them. The third phase of my practice utilizes both the journal and list of themes to isolate an autobiographical narrative from the subjects life that engages with as many of the themes as possible.

In looking at my list, I found myself fixated on my relationship with my family and the idea of scars. On the surface, I seemed to be discussing literal scars, but after revisiting those journals in their entirety, I began to realize it was the idea of a scar for which I was obsessed: a scar is both momentary and permanent. While it is lasting, it can be traced to a singular event or moment that one cannot change. This got me thinking about my family and events that have “scarred” us over time.

I honed in on my relationship with my cousin, JJ. Closest in age to myself, we spent our entire childhood inseparable. Most of my memories from my youth are a direct result of an adventure we had together, many of those leaving literal scars. My desire to
continue finding connections lead me further down my thematic list to the idea of death.

It seems as though the finality of a thing is a concern of mine on a macro and micro level.

It was at this point I realized death seemed to loom just next to my cousin and I our entire lives. Both of us now turning thirty, the majority of our friends from our youth have already passed away.

This isolation phase is where the synapses fire. I found myself enamored with the connections I could make between events in my life and these small unstructured journal entries. What was my Spalding Gray autobiographical performance? Somewhere between these journal entries and my past were a series of events that when told aloud would serve to allow me to engage with my past in a new and thrilling way. These questions and others propelled me to notate in detail the memories I shared with my cousin in the hopes of rediscovering them and building a narrative to share with an audience.

4.04.19

For the past ten years I could’ve sworn I got hit over the head with a bottle. SWORE.
I was certain that’s what happened.
But it wasn’t.
It was a can.
Someone drunkenly threw a can at my head and then tried to fight me.
With a wheelbarrow.
This guy chased me around a yard with a wheelbarrow.
While I was bleeding from this huge gash in my head.
WHICH is why I have a huge scar on my forehead.
That looks like a wrinkle.
But I took good care of it when it happened.
Now I wanna know why I thought it was a bottle this whole time.
Or maybe why I blocked out that it was?
I guess a bottle is just easier to say than the entire story.
“I got hit with a bottle” is so much easier than someone mistaking me for JJ
and throwing a can at me
and splitting my head open
and then chasing me through a yard with a wheelbarrow.
There’s definitely more to this story.
Cause we ended up fighting that kid like a week later in this huge brawl.
Which in itself is another crazy story.

Now that I had chosen this epic saga of how my relationship with my cousin and
our countless memories together shaped the person I am today, I needed to iron out the
framework of the performance of said epic. Spalding Gray spoke to a camera; Daniel
Kyri spoke to Thelonius. Just as with an inanimate machine used to record video for later
playback, Thelonius did not interrupt or comment on the stories Daniel told. Thelonius
gives the storyteller a focal point, but does not impede on the performance, a tool integral
to the success of my practice. It is as if if the storyteller is talking to the most respectful
listening ear possible, allowing them to live within the narrative as they tell it. In this
work such a listener is of the upmost importance, remembering the goal of the work is
not to necessarily tell an enthralling story, but work through one’s own personal narrative
more thoroughly. Keeping Thelonius in the piece was the first in a series of decisions that
led me to finally engaging with a story that continually breaks my heart.

For my performance, I decided not to script the narrative and to rely on raw
storytelling and memory to propel the piece. However, while I did not write a script, I did
find it helpful to visit my notes in the days before the performance. This habit kept the
stories fresh in my mind and pushed me to find even more connective tissue between
these events.

The notation and analyze of the journals proved to a testament to the work of
Pennebaker and Beall, while the improvised (re)storytelling of an autobiographical
narrative furthered the work of Desalvo and Oorlog. These theorists and their work in trauma and the retelling of stories helped to fuel the development of my practice and propel me through a performance of a personal trauma I had not openly discussed in detail before. This final phase of my practice resulted in the undeniable personal success of my study, I have absolutely better engaged with trauma, grief, loss, and pain through storytelling.

Retroactively viewing the individual steps of this practice, I believe each step is beneficial both as a singular exercise and as one phase of a four phase methodology. As many have discovered, the expression of trauma is a determining factor in one’s comfort with their past. Regardless of the medium, taking the time to acknowledge trauma, grief, loss, pain and give voice to one’s own personal narrative is an immeasurable benefit to all aspects of an individual’s health. Each phase of this practice brings with it a unique level of understanding of self. Whether that be through daily liquid journaling, the analyzation of one’s own writing (recordings, notations, etcetera), the isolation of a personal narrative that exemplifies powerful themes in one’s life, or simply telling an autobiographical story to a friend; each of these exercises is in itself a practice that exist without the others. However, I did find a one-of-a-kind benefit to committing to each phase of this practice wholly.

After my work on “Thelonius” I found myself more comfortable than ever. Starting from a wide lens, liquid journaling daily, and slowly zooming in on those journals to create a narrative has been a rewarding writing methodology and form of self-care. I have discovered within myself stories of which I now have ownership.
I have chosen to leave this page mostly blank for a reason…

*A shift happens here.*

Up until this point, this paper has been the work of an artist with a thrift store suit on, happily engaging with the academic and theoretical side of dramatic writing. These last seventy pages have been heavily combed through for grammar and removal of contractions. Hours have been spent preparing this work for uploading to the University of New Mexico’s digital repository. All of this done so I might finally earn my MFA in Dramatic Writing.

However this last section — *is for me.*
I begin my conclusion sitting in a hotel room in Abilene, Texas. It is 2:47 in the morning and exhaustingly hot. I return to the thermostat every so often to make sure the air conditioning is running, but regardless, the room is not getting much cooler. The heat and the length of the day are wearing on me. My eyelids are growing heavier with each thud of my fingers on the keyboard. This paper is due in six hours. My flight back to Albuquerque is in three.

Hours ago, I was called down onto a stage at the Kennedy Center American College Theater festival to accept awards for playwriting. I have forgotten the specifics of the accolades, but I know with them comes memberships to some great organizations that represent professional playwrights. I was also informed I have been nominated for a specific award that is given out days after I will defend this thesis; I am not sure the specifics of that either. For someone who has such an innate fear of failing or feeling less than, I do not care at all. Frankly, none of that feels like it matters right now.

I returned back to the empty hotel room and looked at myself in the mirror for a bit. My beard is much grayer than I remember and my skin is cracking because I forgot to bring lotion with me to Texas — which I realize is common sense. I notice the tattoo I got when I started the program is fading, which is probably another cause of my cracking skin; I need to invest more in lotion. I am visibly tired, but I feel like I wear it well — call it narcissism.
I am thinking about my relationship with myself and this art form. I am remembering the student and professional reaction this week upon taking my workshop. There was some discussion amongst them about “real language” and a freedom in form and function of dramatic writing found in the room with my exercises. I wonder if this is because we have all been stuck in the mud of academia and competition, or if we rip apart who we really are because we want to be; either way, I understand.

Imposter syndrome is a symptom of a bigger problem, one I fell head first into prior to the trials of my MFA Candidacy. The quality of one’s work is impossible to weigh or measure. Awards are given and reviews are written, but why? To please blue hairs who buy season tickets, want to feel integral to the system, and refuse to see anything not written by a playwright who’s name they can recognize? Yes — the answer is yes. I understand that answer. Theaters need to keep the lights on, and the blue hairs do just that. For every one overdone play that sells out an entire run, larger companies can do a lesser known artist’s work and try to chip away at the systematic bias present in this industry. For every play by _____ _____, we get one by Nick Kiandoo. For every remount of _____ __________, we get a production of a christopher oscar pena play. Hopefully one day that will change, but that day is not today.

Which leads me to thinking, which side do I want to be on? Assuming one is fortunate enough to choose, would I prefer to be the blank space I cannot fill in in this paper (for fear of being ostracized by companies feeling personally attacked, the side that is produced constantly and can pay bills easily) or the outlaw forcing their way into the space and burning it down? I have the systematic privilege of considering this. I am
fortunate.

For an answer, I look to my influences, read my own work, and revisit the previous sections of this paper. Frankly, I think I say “fuck” too much for any large company to bet a season on producing my work right now; but more than that, I am influenced by legends, not celebrities. I am influenced by my Gods of dramatic writing, each passing down time, energy, knowledge, skill, and endless heart to the next generation of writers. Those who have had the largest impact on me are fighters. No one has handed them anything and that has seemingly made them the stuff of legend in this art form. However, my biggest draw to them is their humanity. These people who seem so far beyond my reach have actively given time to countless artists in their career. I have explored variations of the same exercise in three different workshops now; each leader attributing the core of their version to Irene Fornes by way of Migdalia Cruz.

That is the legacy where I hope to earn a place. Not to continue the legacy of any one particular artist, but the heart of many. The heart of those that live their lives as outlaws: bleeding onto the page so they can get the most out of life and themselves. Asking themselves big questions and sifting through their own insecurities to find the answers. I hope to devote my life to this craft and continue to grow daily so that one day years from now I reread this and say, “what the hell was I thinking?” Otherwise, what is the point? If I am going to regurgitate the same thing every other person before me has without developing the ideas and practices further, or cut my work off at its knees so it is more produceable or crowd pleasing — why bother? That would be an insult to everyone who has given me their time, consideration, and care.
This is my life. Fuck awards, reviews, pandering, the status quo and censorship. Once upon a time, a bunch of old white men (a lot of which looked like me) decided that this industry worked a certain way. They were wrong then, and are even more wrong now. It is a privilege that I get to say, “fuck awards, reviews, pandering, the status quo, and censorship.” Having that opportunity, I have a responsibility to do so. Hopefully, one day that will not be the case — and it will take outlaws. It will take young writers with the technical skill, emotional capability, drive, and giant fucking hearts to infiltrate the system in place and destroy it from the inside.

It is not political. It is healthy. It is the purpose of art. It is an army of people growing and learning with the goal of bettering not only themselves, but those that follow in their footsteps. It is the idea that fine is not enough — for individuals or the community at large. I have finally crawled out of fine. I am better than fine; I am a student of the thing I love most.

I will not be awake at dawn tomorrow using an impact driver. I am certain no one will be screaming a lunch order at me and complaining I put too much mayonnaise on their sandwich in the afternoon. My back is not throbbing and my hands are not callused. My hair has a solid bounce to it as I have not run greasy, dirt plagued hands through it all day. At least for tonight, I will not lose sleep wishing I had done things differently. I will finish this paper, sleep soundly for a half hour, and board a plane to close out my last two weeks in Albuquerque. I am in a peaceful place. I am happy, and learning how to continue being so.
I think that is it. I think it is knowing I have given myself a real shot at happiness; a shot at becoming better than I was when I arrived here. I know I will not wake up tomorrow to the same slanted floor and cracked window frames I did back in the neighborhood. I know I did not let people down. I know I have not let myself down. Perhaps most of all, I no longer fear waking up at sixty years old feeling like my father: one who treated everyone as if they deserved the world, but never got the world he deserved.

At thirty years old preparing to leave with a master’s degree, I hope to be his mirror image. Yes, my father is flawed. He moves through the world an imperfect person, always growing and changing. He shows no fear in admitting his own faults and strives to better his life and that of his family with unwavering vigor. He asks for help. He wants to learn. He is powerful, loving, empathetic, passionate, hard working, and flawed. He is not perfect — none of us are. The best we can do is try. It is not ignorance, but willful ignorance that plagues our world and stunts our artistic growth. The lack of desire to better one’s self: the weight of pride, the fear of change.

My father is like all of the artists I admire: a fighter. In my life, I have watched him succeed and fail. I have witnessed him grow, learn, and address his own insecurities. He has cried and divulged deep regret to me directly. He has been joyful in the moments that allow it, and encouraged those around him to do the same. He has never shied away from expressing his emotions and thoughts in an honest and open way. He has done all this, and so much more.
He does not practice art of any kind, but he is a passionate artist. He lives and moves through the world the way only the greats do, taking in every millisecond for all it’s worth. After he has experienced all life has to offer and grown to be the best version of himself, he will be gone — dirt or ash — he will not be here; but his lessons will. His energy, outlook, and openness have left a lasting effect on countless people. I know with absolute certainty he will leave the world better than it was when he arrived. His legacy will be one of love: broken, pained, and flawed — yet, joyous. The tools of his legacy are verbal stories and giant heart; mine are words strung together on paper.

In this dimly lit room, I am remembering spending my first few months in Albuquerque throwing things at a wall and knowing they would not stick. I had never done this before. I was never in a writer’s room and had never written for others’ consumption. I was so incredibly grateful to feel overwhelmed and insecure. I felt like a blank slate — I was not, but it felt that way. Which is the key to my artistic growth. I have never been a blank slate; this other half of me has always been there. Since I was twelve and held up at knifepoint, I have had something to say. Since watching my best friend struggle with heroine addiction, I have had a story to tell. After the first bottle I took to the head and the following migraine, I had some semblance of experience. I just never had the tools or knowledge that would allow me to turn any of this into proper story. People always say, “you have a story to tell,” but no one ever really believes that. It is a truth you find in time.

In my time here, I have had the unique opportunity to reflect on my life from a distance. I now see the beauty in my stories and have the tools to engage with them in a
healthy way. The things that make other people wince make me smile the biggest. Not because I am a cynic (although, it could be argued I am), but because I am blessed by Dorothy Zbornak to still be here. I, like everyone else, am familiar with pain, and pain is revealing. It is beautiful if you let it be. That is what I write.

The acknowledgment of a conscious goal only gets me part of the way, the rest of the battle is building an arsenal of technical skills that aid me in accomplishing that goal. Greg Moss, Dominika Laster, Amanda Hamp, Erik Ehn, Matthew McDuffie, Leonard Madrid, Daniel Mueller, my cohort, and an army of capable guest artists have armed me with enough technical skill and jargon to combat impostor syndrome. I am familiar with the terms, have done the exercises religiously, and read the books twice over. I will continue to learn and adapt to a my changing process and desire. Everything from identifying and manipulating dramatic structure to the way the words sit on the page is a moving target waiting to be hit from a new angle. What is right for one work is completely wrong for another. In that sense, the best I can hope for is to acknowledge I am always learning and be grateful to have the opportunity.

Around now is when I begin to talk about my goals for the future. With that in mind, I thought it might be interesting to revisit my comprehensive exam for this conclusion. I was asked by my board what my goals for my final year of MFA candidacy are, my response was as follows:

Currently, I’ve three full length works and a large file of shorts and one act plays to accompany me as I leave. Most recently, I’ve begun a piece affectionally titled, “summertime | an interlude,” that takes place on a back porch and revolves around the
shooting of a local business owner in a small unspecified neighborhood. As I’ve been working my way through this piece, I am fleshing out of the ripple effect the event had on the neighborhood. So, as it sits now, my ambitious goal is to have “summertime” serve as the second piece in a trilogy revolving around this one event. Each piece will function and exist on its own, but together they will show vastly different perspectives on the event. As of now, the first piece will be a two-hander centering on the Defense Attorney assigned to the suspect and the days leading up to sentencing; the second in the series being “summertime,” which shows the ramifications on the neighborhood just after the shooting; and the third play will be set in the business and show the hours leading up to the shooting (but not the event itself). One of my goals before graduation is to complete the trilogy — one piece for each of my remaining semesters.

A second goal would be to polish my one hour pilot, “blackbird” co-written with Jay Muskett. Our hope is to eventually get in a room where we can pitch the show to a network, and this process begins with us continuing to work on the now complete script and have it ready for when the moment arises. With regard to my solo screen work, I hope to complete even more episodes of my series, “kingdom come,” and to complete a script for a feature film.

All of this work leading to my graduation with an MFA and the continuation of my career outside of Albuquerque. After graduation, I will continue taking meetings in the hopes of finding a work of mine worthy of a company's time and money. I will also put a great portion of my effort toward finding representation for my work as a playwright and
screenwriter. Theatrically, I will continue to apply for fellowships and residencies, as well as send my work to as many companies as will have me.

Academically, I hope to keep an eye out for openings at Chicago Universities, so I might be close to the community I love and contribute to the positive changes we are slowly seeing in arts in the country. I will continue study and grow as an artist so that, when given the opportunity, I can surpass expectations as an educator. Teaching at the collegiate level is a goal, one I will attain.

My goals are lofty, but I prefer it that way. I have never been the type to undersell myself, and in preparing to earn my MFA, I would like to continue that habit. With dedication, enthusiasm, and appreciation I will surpass even my own expectations and earn a future for myself in which I find comfort. My ultimate goal is one day to earn a place among my mentors, where they view me as a colleague; I want to earn — to earn a place...

After rereading my own words, I am proud to say I have accomplished all of these goals — every one. Through the insanity of one singular fall semester, I surpassed my own expectations and then some. I am no longer the person I was when I drove into New Mexico, I am something different entirely. The fire in my chest burns hotter and more acutely now. I am a well oiled machine. I find myself fearless of my past, present, and future now having the tools and know-how to face them head on. Being that I have accomplished my goals from last year, I will set one all encompassing new one. This one will be far more difficult to achieve and maintain.
I am stubborn. Far too stubborn and headstrong to be as impulsive as I am. My own shortcomings cripple me in a way that will surely hurt my career in the long run. I cry far too easily about trivial things. I repeat myself too often (exemplified in this paper). I feel undeserving of love and respect. I am in constant battle with the thought of addiction and fear one day I might succumb to it. I don’t trust people. I hide how I feel because I am scared to let anyone in. I have trouble looking at myself in the mirror. My own ignorance makes me hate myself. I am terrified of failure. The thought of being an old man and having regrets keeps me awake at night. The knowledge that at any point my life can end and no one would remember me breaks my heart. I don’t feel good enough, and never have; but by the time anyone outside my board reads this paper — I will be better. I will be better writer, a better person, just — better. I will engage with these and so many other internal struggles, and I will overcome them. That is my goal. The standing goal that will dictate my “success” as a writer.

There is a version of this paper where I attempt to give detail on how I might engage with and overcome these issues I have with myself. I imagine I could pinpoint within my work how I have already attempted to do so, going line-by-line through my scripts to find where I’ve dredged up a personal trauma. That might complete the narrative promise and leave you, the reader, with some semblance of comfort in conclusion. But the truth is, as of now, I cannot sit and write a manual on how I intend on becoming a more complete person. That’s not how it works.

That being said, I can write a paper dissecting the tools of my trade and how I utilize them. I can wax poetic about my family, friends, and various life experiences. I
can even tell you some of my shortcomings and my desire to overcome them. In this small hotel room, I’ve no idea if I will be successful in doing so, or how. All I know, is I will try. I will give it everything I have.

And when I look back at my life and work I won’t measure my success in numbers, accolades, or paychecks. These things are necessary, but not all powerful. They do not accurately represent what this art form has given me. Writing gave me life. Writing gave me a way out of my own head. It makes me happy. I am a better person because of my process, art, and desire to grow.

So, I will continue to measure my life in joy and comfort. I will measure my days in the strength of the sunshine and lightness of my shoulders. I will fight being angry, violent, or possessing of any alarming quality that would inspire fear — but I will be certain. I will be determined and focused in a way I never thought I could be. I will work more hours than I could count, doing something I truly love. Others will go to sleep to me arriving home and wake up to me having left for work an hour or two prior. I will take care of my family, friends, and community the way you only see in Hallmark movies. Others will think I do this with ease. It will be astonishing. I will be just like my father: flawed, but always trying. Someday, someone will think I am perfect, and as they grow, they will see how flawed I really am. And they will learn and grow from my mistakes. They will reach heights I never could, and I will feel proud.

After all, the worst thing in life is wasted talent.

End of ____.
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summertime
an interlude

written by | aniello fontano
First Public Presentation

Second Public Presentation
Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. February 2020.

Southwest Premiere

Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival | Full Length Winner | 2020

*National Partners of the American Theatre Playwriting Award | Nominee | 2020
*winner not yet announced
For my Father, and as always

- James.
EVERYBODY |

VINCE | 25 - 30 | Male
Vince is a single father. His nine year old daughter Rosie has spent most of her life in Chicago Children’s Cancer Center. He was a musician at one point, but with a sick daughter there’s no time for pipe dreams. He works three or four jobs at a time to try and catch up on past due bills...
But he’s not working today. Today he’s drinking and bullshitting with his best friend (more like a brother) David. Cause family is more important than anything.

DAVID | 25 - 30 | Male/Masc
Muscle and worn. Did ten years in county, and looks like it. Got two years for marijuana possession as a teenager. Developed a bad temper and heroin problem inside, and caught eight more years. But now he’s out, sober, and trying to figure out who he is. His arms are covered in scarred track marks and shitty prison tattoos. He’s got a huge heart. He’s an older brother too... which always feels like an afterthought. But his sister Windy didn’t visit or call when he was in prison. So it’s on her they’re basically strangers.

WINDY | 20 - 25 | Female/Femme
David’s younger sister, but she’s never felt like it. He’s always cared more about Vince than her anyway. Tough as nails and independent. The only person born in the neighborhood that’s getting out, and thank God for that. Not actual God though. If there’s one thing her life’s taught her, it’s that God doesn’t exist. Or he’s a prick. Either way, she takes care of things herself. And she’d prefer it that way. She’s typing up loose ends, getting out of the neighborhood, and never coming back. The end.

SYD | 20 - 25 | Female/Femme/Enby
Syd’s blind in one eye. Maybe wears an eyepatch. Maybe fuck that. A hard worker and wise far beyond their years. Muscled from lugging boxes around their Uncle Red’s store. Someone always knows what to say. Hides pain well. Impressive yet kind. There’s no one else like Syd in the neighborhood. Except maybe Red. But he might be gone soon. And he’s all Syd has.
**In this script, characters use they/them/their's pronouns when speaking to Syd. Know that these characters would make the effort to use any pronouns Syd wants. Change pronouns in dialogue to reflect your casting if necessary.

TRIGG and KYRI | 25 - 30 | Any or No Gender
YOOOOO. Two dope, royal, people of color. Kings, Queens, or anything in between. Trigg and Kyri host the dopest radio show on the fuckin planet. They know everything and everyone. They got eyes and ears every where. They’re the rhythm of the city. Stupid fast with belly laughs. They fly through improvised dialogue with wild disregard for the FCC. A Greek chorus with misdemeanors. A modern day Abbot and Costello - but they use “fuck” as a filler word.

An important note |
These characters are from a small, close knit neighborhood, in a crevice of a big city.
They are urban. They are working class. They aren’t from nuclear families.
Their ethnic background, sexuality, and gender identity varies.
The cast must reflect this.
These characters are not pasty ass, culturally whitewashed suburbanites.

a|fontano
WHERE AND WHEN |

CHICAGO.
Sunday. The hottest day of summer.

THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.
A large wooden porch on the back of a three flat.
This is the THE THIRD FLOOR, where we see Windy and Vince’s apartment.
Each apartment has a window and door to it, characters use both for entrances and exits.
We can’t see the second floor or street level, but we see the outside stairwell that goes down them.
Outside each apartment window, Windy and Vince have their own set up.
Folding chairs, plants, ashtrays, maybe a grill, whatever else.

BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.
A small recording studio in an apartment across the street from the porch.
Shitty mics and makeshift sound proofing.
The tiny space is filled with liquor bottles and blunt roaches.
Smoke in the air at all times.

RHYTHM |

- | a line is interrupted.

. or ? | a full stop before a response.

No punctuation | fast, rhythmic, immediate response

Beats | marked by blank space on the page.

Silences | marked by the word.
BLACKOUT.

The sounds of the city at play. All at once -
   Laughter. Gossip. The “cshhh” of a beer can opening. Dice
   hitting cement. Somebody yells down to the street from an upper
   floor. A bus stops and opens its door. Some kids sprint down the
   sidewalk. A car passes playing 90’s rap. A fist fight breaks out.
   Laughter and hugs follow. The bus pulls away. The city is alive.

Suddenly - a GUNSHOT echoes through the space.

The gunshot brings blue lights up on
   THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.
   Midnight.
       Saturday.

SYD rushes up the stairwell panicked, surveys the area below, and
spots someone sprinting away from the building.

SYD

YO!!! YO!!!! mother fucker FUCK FUCK fuck fuck -

Syd pulls out a cell phone, dials, and sprints down the stairs to
street level. We hear their footsteps stomp against the pavement as
they chase someone. The moon on the porch fades.

BLACKOUT.

Bass and rhythm burst into the space. Something hard.
   Maybe trap. Migos, Future, Travis Scott, Designer, whoever.
   Maybe something classic. Maybe something with horns and
   lyrics. Whatever it is, takes over the space in darkness.
   If loud noises bother you, this is when you leave the theater.

Light up on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.
   Morning.
       Sunday.
           A scorcher.

Drenched in summer sun through dirty windows,
   TRIGG and KYRI roar into the space.
   They dance, drink, and smoke to the music.
After a bit, Trigg switches the backing music it to an instrumental. Something less aggressive and more rhythmic.
The two belly laugh at their own jokes, smoke, drink, and use a dumpster-found sound board for effects throughout their interludes.

TRIGG
YOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO what the fuck’s up -

KYRI
Fucks up Chicago -

TRIGG
You know what it is -

KYRI
You’re listening to -

TRIGG & KYRI
BROAD MUTHA FUCKING SHOULDERS -

KYRI
Broad Shoulders Chicago

TRIGG
GUERRILLA RADIO -

KYRI
The Second City shitty -

TRIGG
Bringin you everything you need to get chu through this
HOT AS FUCK-ED UP DAY

KYRI
Ninety eight billion fuckin degrees

TRIGG
So walk around naked

KYRI
Let your dick hang out
TRIGG
Titties all out gettin sun

KYRI
Let the body breath

TRIGG
That’s indecent exposure

KYRI
Only if you don’t got the meat

TRIGG
As ya’ll know

KYRI
Fuck a segue

TRIGG
AS YA’LL KNOW last night some bitch mother fucker ran
up in Red's Deli

KYRI
FUCKIN CLOWN

TRIGG
Ran up in Red’s deli and shot my man in the gut

KYRI
That’s not all

TRIGG
This mother fucker had the nerve to step over Red

KYRI
Bleeding out and everything

TRIGG
To STEP OVER RED and empty the damn safe and
register

KYRI
While my dude Red is layin on that old ass yellow linoleum
floor bleeding out
TRIGG
And then this bitch ass mother fucker ran away

KYRI
RAN THE FUCK AWAY

TRIGG
Leaving him there to die

KYRI
But we’re not gonna fixate on some asshole

TRIGG
Bitch mother fucker

KYRI
We’re gonna pump out the tunes and PREACH

TRIGG
Cause that’s what Red would want

KYRI
We’ll keep ya’ll updated on Red

TRIGG
And the punk ass bitch who shot him

KYRI
Between the main stream hits and underground shiiiiiiiiiiit

TRIGG
SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO -

Even more rapid fire.

TRIGG
IT’S HOT AS FUCK OUT CHICAGO

KYRI
GO OUTSIDE

TRIGG
FUCKIN PARTY
KYRI
ON THE BLOCK

TRIGG
WIT CHA BODY OUT

KYRI
ALL BODIES

TRIGG
EVERY BODY

KYRI
WHETHER YOU SLIM THICK

TRIGG
THICK SLIM

KYRI
THICK THICK

TRIGG
THICK MUSCLEY

KYRI
FLUFFY THICK

TRIGG
GET OUTSIDE

KYRI
DON’T FORGET THE SUN SCREEN

TRIGG
AND DON’T GET ME STARTED ON NOT NEEDING NO SUN SCREEN

KYRI
ALL YOUR PROBLEMATIC ASSES OUT THERE

TRIGG
We got our eyes on you

KYRI
To all our loyal “JUMP OFF A ROOF IF WE GET CANCELLED” fans -
TRIGG
BLESS YOU

KYRI
YOUR MAMA

TRIGG
YOUR AUNTIE THAT DRINKS TOO MUCH

KYRI
YOUR DAD YOUR SISTER

TRIGG
YOUR NIECES YOUR NEPHEWS

KYRI
YOUR WHOLE FUCKIN FAMILY

TRIGG
And bless everybody in Red’s building

KYRI
Our girl Windy, the bro bro Vince -

TRIGG
Vince’s daughter Rosie -

KYRI
Little thug in the hospital kickin’ cancers ass

TRIGG
My man DAVID, WHO’S BACK

KYRI
Shout out to David -

TRIGG
And of course, the homie Syd

KYRI
Red’s second in command and only blood family left

TRIGG
We’re thinkin of you Syd
KYRI
We love you

TRIGG
And lastly -

KYRI
But not least-ly

TRIGG
*That ain’t a word*

KYRI
Shout out to Anthony Michael, Dom Dom, Joey, Corinne, James, John Boy, Margaret, Lower Case Peña, Uncle Rambo, Neff Neff, Celeste, Torn Ass ACL Nick, Jimmy, Crazy Mary, Nicole, Mark-ito, Dan-O, Air Max, Lil Frankie, Richie, Big Rick, Smashly Banks, Brian, **Abel and his fifty five fuckin’ kids** -

TRIGG
**MY MAN, INVEST IN CONDOMS** -

KYRI
*Everybody* in the neighborhood -

TRIGG
Shout out to everybody -

KYRI
We see you out this dirty ass window -

*They wave out the window to the audience.*

KYRI
From our **secret fuckin lair** -

TRIGG
Keep your heads up

KYRI
We’ll get through it together

TRIGG
It’s gonna be a long fuckin day
Lights down on **BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO**.

Lights up on **THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR**.

On the porch we see a few shitty chairs, a garbage bag, an old ass cooler with ice, and a stolen speaker. Maybe there’s other stuff.

“Broad Shoulders” blares out of the speaker as **VINCE** enters through his apartment door with supplies.

A blunt in his lips and a wet towel over his head, he brings out plastic cups, a gallon or two of water, some beer for the cooler, a liquor bottle, an acoustic guitar, and a duffle bag to hold it all.

From the speaker we hear Kyri and Trigg sign off.

**KYRI**
In honor of my man Red fighting in the hospital we’re gonna kick it off with **that hot shit**

**TRIGG**
Those juke jams

**KYRI**
Those “get naked and rub on somebody consensually” hits

**TRIGG**
Those “grandpa’s vinyl and auntie’s 8 track” joints, and we’ll be updating you on our guy Red ALL DAY

**KYRI**
Keepin ya’ll in the loop

**TRIGG**
So to start us off

**KYRI**
This one goes out to you Red

**TRIGG**
Everybody’s Grandpa

**KYRI**
We love you

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An air horn sounds and they crank something by Mykele Deville, Calboy, Vic Mensa, Lester Rey, Jess(e), Mán Cub, or somebody else local and dope.

Vince grooves as he finishes organizing the supplies and gets himself a drink.

From behind the other window we hear a door open and slam shut.
   In the moments that follow, whomever is in the apartment starts having loud sex.
   Comically loud.
      It continues until noted.

They’re fucking up Vince’s groove.
   He turns up the speaker to drown out the noise.
      It barely works.
         He tries to ignore it, but can’t.
            He bangs on the sex noise window.

VINCE
YO WINDY.

He slams on the window again.

YO WINDY, CUT THE SHIT.

It gets louder.

I’M TRYING TO FUCKIN RELAX OUT HERE AND YOU’RE LOUD AS HELL.

Vince looks in through the window and his eyes widen.
   A shoe hits the glass from the inside.

DAMN IT I DIDN’T GET ANY SLEEP LAST NIGHT
AND I’M TRYING TO SIT OUT HERE AND FUCKIN CHILL AND I CAN’T WITH ALL THIS NOISE. COME ON WINDY CUT THE SHIT -

Someone moans.
   The sex noises drop to a dull roar.
      Vince lowers the speaker.
Vince’s window slides open and DAVID climbs out.
He wears a way too tight, worn long sleeve t-shirt.
His not-dominant hand is wrapped in gauze.

He carries a steel frame work fan,
it’s already plugged in inside and whirls fast.
He points the fan at Vince.

VINCE
Use the fucking door -

DAVID
I got the fan plugged in and the cord won’t reach -

VINCE
You wouldn’t need the damn fan if you took that shirt off -

DAVID
Don’t start -

VINCE
You look like a bunch of marshmallows stuffed in a sausage casing -

DAVID
Why you gotta be a dick?

VINCE
Cause it’s a thousand degree outside and you’re wearing long sleeves -

DAVID
I’m not trying to get looked at funny by people today -

VINCE
They’re just scars man, nobody gives a shit (out to the neighborhood) HEY EVERYBODY DAVID’S GOT BUNCH OF SCARS ON HIS ARMS CAUSE -

DAVID
God damn it Vince -

VINCE
See, nobody gives a fuck -
DAVID
Don’t start already, please.

...

Vince
Aight, well if you pass out I’m not giving you mouth to mouth. I’m just gonna let you die in that baby gap shirt you got on -

* A moan from Windy’s apartment. 

Vince
And please tell your sister to stop fucking so loud

David
I’m not trying to see what’s happening in there

Vince
She’s got this chick bent over the kitchen table -

* Vince mimes it. 

David
Come on man -

Vince
The dildo she’s got is big as fuck -

* He’s a weirdly good mime. 

Vince

DAVID

* VIC S -

Vince
It looks fucking painful -

* A crash from inside Windy’s apartment. 

Vince stops.

Vince
She’s gonna blow out that chicks back -

* Another crash from inside. 

a|fontano
VINCE
She needs to start goin back to church, she needs Jesus -

*We hear Windy moan “JESUSSSS FUCKKK” from inside.*
David and Vince share an ironic grin.
*Vince starts putting shit in the duffle bag.*
The moaning dies down again.

VINCE
You bringing other clothes or you goin like that?

DAVID
We’re not goin anywhere

VINCE
My ass we’re not we had this planned -

DAVID
We’re not goin to get drunk on the beach while Red is in the hospital -

VINCE
*We been planning this for two weeks, it’s my only day off* -

DAVID
How’s it gonna look if I run away the morning after somebody shoots him?

VINCE
It ain’t running away we’re taking the train twenty minutes we’ll be back before the street lights come on just like when we were little -

DAVID
You know they’re gonna come around questioning everybody today, right?

VINCE
Nobodies gonna think you did anything

DAVID
I’m not taking any chances -

VINCE
Let’s at least go for a few hours -

a|fontano
DAVID
You don’t know how this works

Vince
They’re not gonna think you did it -

David
Go by your self then.

Vince
I been waiting for you to get out of prison ten fuckin years
and I’m gonna go to the beach by myself?

David
If that’s what you wanna do, yeah -

Vince
Fuck that -

David
I’m stayin here and telling them exactly where I was
last night. I’m not taking any chances, man.
I’m not.

One, LOUD orgasmic moan from inside.

Vince
It’s gonna be a long fuckin day if we’re sitting here -

David
You wanna leave so bad, go to the hospital and see him
then -

Vince
I don’t do hospitals

David
Nobody “does” hospitals

Vince
I spend too much time at the hospital with Rosie as it is.
I’m not goin there if I don’t have to -

David
You’re a pain in the ass you know that
VINCE
I just don’t wanna sit around all day waiting for Red to die

DAVID
He’s not gonna die

VINCE
And how do you know that?

DAVID
He’s just not, alright?

Silence.
David tries to pour liquor in a cup.
but it hurts his hand too much.
Vince does it for him.
They Drink.
The sex noises start to get louder again.

VINCE
Hurts huh?

DAVID
They use a laser to burn out the ink and it’s just bone there.

VINCE
Fuckkkkkkk that.

DAVID
Better than doing it inside.

VINCE
How do they do that?

DAVID
Heat a piece of steel and melt it off. It looks like melting
cheese -

VINCE
That’s disgusting

DAVID
You’re lucky you don’t have to see it
VINCE
I seen worse trust me. I’m telling you, the image of
Windy fucking the shit out of that chick -

From the stairwell bursts SYD.
Multi-tasking as they put on clothes and talk into a cheap
cell phone, Syd slams on Windy’s window.

SYD
SOME PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO DO SHIT TODAY
WINDY. I GOT FUCKING SHIT TO DO AND I’M ON
THIS DAMN PHONE AND (into the phone) no, no not
you. No It’s my neighbor, yes, no she’s (back to Windy) I
CAN’T HEAR ANYTHING WITH THE TWO OF YOU
SCREAMING EVERY TWO SECONDS. (into the phone)
sorry just give me a minute I can’t hear you. Yes, last night
around midnight. Sorry just one second. (back to Windy)
NOBODY NEEDS TO CUM THAT MUCH. YOU’RE
GONNA HAVE A FUCKING HEART ATTACK. STOP
THE DAMN YELLING. GOD DAMN IT WINDY CUT
THE SHIT -

The noises stop.
Syd heads past Vince and David,
Vince moves out of Syd’s good line of sight.
Syd notices and flips him off.

David watches fuckin smitten.
Vince talks shit about it - with just his eyes.

SYD
(into the phone) Yeah last night around midnight. He’s in
the ICU now. Can you work Monday? I’m gonna be around
here today prepping for the week but I’m headed to the
hospital later and I’m gonna stay there. So if you could
open tomorrow - Yeah. Yeah that’d be great.

Syd goes down to their apartment, flipping off Vince all the way.
Vince grins at David.

VINCE
I’m just sayin -
DAVID
Shut up.

VINCE
You’re gonna burn a hole starin like that -

DAVID
Keep talkin

VINCE
You should say something next time

DAVID
I wouldn’t know what to say

VINCE
It’s Syd.

DAVID
Little Sydney?

VINCE
Right?

DAVID
Fuck

VINCE
They grew up cute right?

DAVID
That’s why you moved to the left?

Vince laughs and covers one of his eyes.

DAVID
You’re a dick you know that -

VINCE
You should say hi.

DAVID
I dunno -
VINCE
Grow a pair.

DAVID
Keep talkin shit

VINCE
Whatchu gonna do with that bandaged ass hand -

DAVID
I'll whoop your little ass

VINCE
Not my fault you got chunky -

DAVID
Oh I’m chunky -

VINCE
Yeah you’re chunky -

DAVID
Oh I’M chunky -

VINCE
You’re built like a shrink wrapped bag of potatoes -

DAVID
I forgot how annoying you are -

VINCE
You’re the one posted up on the couch every minute of the damn day -

DAVID
That’s my bedroom

VINCE
It's the living room

DAVID
It's a living room until somebody moves in -

VINCE
You wanna go somewhere else?
They love each other:

DAVID
Don’t start -

Vince
Nah nah nah you go live with Windy

DAVID
If she wasn’t moving out of the neighborhood I would

Vince
You can videotape her fucking all day and night, make a pretty penny off it -

DAVID
Watch your mouth

Vince
Whatchu gonna do thickness?

DAVID
You don’t know

Vince
Just cause you’re prison big don’t make you prison big -

DAVID
That doesn’t even make sense -

Vince
You look like a bunch of bowling balls stuffed in a children’s sleeping bag -

DAVID
You’re gonna get slapped -

Vince
Do somethin

Windy opens her window.

DAVID
No no you do somethin
VINCE
Go on

DAVID
You first big man

VINCE
Don’t call me big man big man -

DAVID
You don’t call me big man big man -

WINDY
WHAT THE FUCK

DAVID & VINCE
Hey Windy

*WINDY* crawls out of her window and onto the porch.
She has a half empty case of beer, a bunch of plastic cups, and a bag of chips in a plastic bowl.

Windy slaps Vince’s head.

VINCE
Why you gotta be so violent?

WINDY
Why you gotta spy on me through my window?

VINCE
What the fuck is with the window, why’s everybody crawlin’ out of windows -

WINDY
Chick’s asleep in the living room -

VINCE
We got perfectly good doors -

WINDY
Blow me.

VINCE
So you just left her there?
WINDY
She’ll leave when she gets up, and I don’t have to say an awkward goodbye

VINCE
Who was it this time?

WINDY
The girl from the coffee shop

VINCE
With the shaved, bleached hair?

WINDY
Yeah

VINCE
Her head looks like a tennis ball.

WINDY
Syd leave?

VINCE
Think so

WINDY
Did they go to the hospital?

VINCE
Nope. Downstairs prepping for the week at the shop then they’re gonna head to the hospital later.

WINDY
Ga Luang walk by yet?

(Pronounced Gah - Lawng)

VINCE
He isn’t giving you the money

WINDY
Did he walk by yet?
VINCE
He left the building a half hour ago

DAVID
Who?

WINDY
He lives on the forth floor -

VINCE
He owes her a whole thirty dollars -

WINDY
So you’re gonna help me move all the way to Indiana then? You’re gonna pack your car with my shit so I don’t have to rent a truck?

VINCE
My back hurts

*David shows off his hand.*

WINDY
So I gotta pay people.

VINCE
Or wait -

WINDY
I got my brother and your dumbass here and I gotta pay strangers to help me move, I want you to think about that -

VINCE
Maybe if you planned -

WINDY
Yeah yeah yeah, just wait til one of you needs me

DAVID
If you give me a date I can ask if I can go

WINDY
I don’t have one yet

VINCE
Exactly
WINDY
Don’t even start -

VINCE
I’m just saying if you planned around your brother getting out, he could’ve -

WINDY
He didn’t tell me -

DAVID
You know I didn’t tell her, don’t start this shit again -

VINCE
Fine fine

WINDY
**And you shoulda said something**

DAVID
Here we go, thanks Vince -

WINDY
You shoulda said something and you wouldn’t have had to stay with this idiot

VINCE
You’re real hostile today

DAVID
I thought it’d be a good surprise

WINDY
And now you get out after ten years and I’m leaving. We don’t even get to spend time together -

DAVID
Don’t feel too bad, he’s right behind you

VINCE
I got a while -

DAVID
You’re gonna leave the minute you can -
VINCE
Not before you’re settled in

DAVID
My ass, if they called tomorrow and said Rosie was in remission, you’d be in the car so damn fast and I’d have to stay in a halfway house til parole is up.

Fuckin alone, again.

Silence.

VINCE
Look -

DAVID
I don’t wanna talk about it. It’s fine.

Silence.

WINDY
You hear Syd was the one who called the cops?

VINCE
Yeah.

WINDY
Saw the guy run away from the shop and up the street.

DAVID
They know it was a guy?

WINDY
Apparently.

VINCE
Trigg and Kyri’ve been talking about it all morning. I guess Red’s doin ok so far.

WINDY
Ambulance got him to the hospital fast.
VINCE
The bullet hit that thick chunk of meat right on his side

WINDY
How do you know?

VINCE
News travels fast

DAVID
Gossipy mother fuckers

WINDY
Police’ll catch who shot him soon.

DAVID
They’ll catch someone

WINDY
When Red wakes up he’ll say who it was

DAVID
No he won’t

WINDY
Yes he will

DAVID
You know how the old heads are

VINCE
“Loyalty” and shit

DAVID
“Never rat on your friends”

VINCE
“And always keep your mouth shut”

WINDY
Fuckin archaic

DAVID
Unless they get a confession they’re not catching him
WINDY
You watch -

VINCE
The cops don’t give a fuck about what happens here so it
don’t matter -

DAVID
They don’t give a fuck about what actually happens here -

VINCE
They’ll blast it on the news like an epidemic and show a
fucked up photo to scare the people in the suburbs, but they
don’t care -

DAVID
They’ll toss someone in prison just to shut the city up,
whether the person did it or not -

VINCE
Or forget about it entirely -

DAVID
They don’t pass up shit like this -

VINCE
I told you you’re fine -

WINDY
What’re you worried about?

DAVID
Again, you don’t know how the shit works -

VINCE
I’ve seen it fifty fucking times and you know it -

DAVID
But you weren’t with me last night were you?

WINDY
Where were you last night?

DAVID
N.A. meeting -
VINCE
And everyone at the meeting saw you -

DAVID
That shit won’t matter -

VINCE
You gotta relax, we need to get off the damn porch and go
relax somewhere -

DAVID
**Red got shot.** You get that right? The man is in the hospital
right now bleeding out. He may fuckin die today. And
somebodies goin down for that -

VINCE
Nothing is gonna happen -

DAVID
**Fine** then they can pretend the shit didn’t happen or warp it
however they want - but **we’re** not going anywhere. He’s
family. End of story.  Got it?

*Silence. Yeah.*
*David pours water over his neck.*
*His hand hurts.*

WINDY
Vin just cause they don’t care doesn’t mean we can’t give a -

VINCE
I care, alright? I do. But I’m sick of sitting around and
being sad every time something shitty happens. Shitty stuffhappens. It always happens. What’s one more thing.

If something happened to me, I wouldn’t want that.
If I die and you two sit around crying about me while the
rest of the world moves on I’ll haunt the shit out of you.

I want you both day drunk and singing *Cielo Dorado* by
noon **every** Sunday.

Let me find out your asses are sitting around wallowing in
your own tears cause I’m gone -
Windy spots Ga Luang walking by on the street

WINDY
GA!!!!  GA LUANG!!!!

They all follow Ga Luang below with their eyes.

WINDY
I KNOW YOU HEAR ME GA! DON’T WALK BY AND
PRETEND LIKE YOU DON’T HEAR ME -

VINCE
(to David) Watch, now he’s gonna start walking faster

WINDY
DON’T COVER YOUR FUCKIN EARS GOD DAMN IT.
WITH YOUR TINY ASS FUCKIN HANDS I KNOW
YOU CAN HEAR ME.

I SEE YOU!!!! DON’T SPEED UP YOU DAFFY
DONALD RUNNIN MOTHER FUCKER!!

嘿 仆街 我知道你有我嘅錢啊。 我會等你成日。
屌你老母

In Traditional Cantonese.

OH YOU’RE FINNA FLIP ME OFF NOW? YOU’RE
FINNA FLIP ME OFF? OOOOOO MOTHER FUCKER -

Windy tears down to street level.

VINCE
(through laughter) He runs like a duck

DAVID
What the fuck was that?

VINCE
Cantonese. She can shake people down in like six
languages.
David and Vince laugh.

Vince swigs his drink and starts to pluck Richard Juarez’ “Cielo Dorado”. David stops him before he gets to lyrics.

DAVID
Don’t, ok?

Vince stops.

DAVID
I don’t remember that fucking song, and I don’t want to.

A look.

David means it.

Lights down on THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.

Lights up on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.

Instrumental behind them, sound effects lay over the improv.

KYRI
We got some news

TRIGG
That insider info

KYRI
My cousins girlfriends aunties nephews neighborssssss
auntie  works at the hospital

TRIGG
WE KNOW EVERYONE

KYRI
WE GOT EYES EVERYWHERE

TRIGG
And we got some news

KYRI
Red’s fightin’
TRIGG
MUTHA FUCKIN ALI IN THIS BITCH

KYRI
They got all these tubes and shit

TRIGG
I.V.’s, breathing tubes, got him on the monitors

KYRI
He’s outta the O.R, but not outta the woods

TRIGG
That’s a dark ass saying

KYRI
So we’re gonna keep taking calls

TRIGG
Reading posts

KYRI
Blogging blogs

TRIGG
We don’t have a blog

KYRI
FUCKIN FUCK A BLOG

TRIGG
FUCK YOUR VLOG TOO

KYRI
NOBODY WANTS TO WATCH YOUR ASS DO MAKEUP

TRIGG
LOOKIN LIKE RONALD MC-SPEAK TO THE MANAGER

KYRI
WE DON’T EVEN KNOW WHAT A BLOG IS

TRIGG
Yeah we do
KYRI
YEAH WE DO BUT THESE ARE CHARACTER FACADES FOR RADIO AND WE’RE TOO FUCKIN TOUGH FOR BLOGS

TRIGG
YEAH

KYRI
YEAHHHHHH

TRIGG
SUCK MY DICK

KYRI
AWWWWWWW YEAHHHHHHHHHH

TRIGG
We’re stupid

KYRI
How does anyone let us make this show

TRIGG
DUNNO, BUT THEY DO

KYRI
So hang in there ya’ll

TRIGG
Cause word is Red’s fighting

*Kyri sees something across the street and bursts out laughing.*

KYRI
YO YO YOOOO

*Trigg sees it too.*

TRIGG
In neighborhood news

KYRI
Windy’s about to kick Ga Luang’s ass right now across the street
Kyri yells out the window -

KYRI
WINDY GIVE HIM A BREAK

TRIGG
HE’S LIKE A BILL TWENTY SOAKING WET

KYRI
She’s gonna snap him in half

TRIGG
You can’t fuck with Windy like that

KYRI
She’s violent

They see someone else.

TRIGG
Oh shit look at this mother fucker -

KYRI
God fucking damn it

TRIGG
Looks like we got a couple cops rummaging around the first floor over there too

KYRI
They’re talkin to Crazy Mary right now

TRIGG
Here we fuckin go

KYRI
It’s about to get even hotter out here

TRIGG
They’ll be fucking with people all day now

KYRI
But we got you covered

TRIGG
We’ll be here ALL DAY TOO
KYRI
Keepin’ an eye on shit

TRIGG
And staying by the phones

KYRI
We’ll keep taking your calls

TRIGG
And making our own to the hospital

KYRI
Keeping an eye out across the street

TRIGG
And keepin you updated

KYRI
So stay cold

TRIGG
Stay hot

KYRI
Be easy

TRIGG
And we’ll be back with more soon

Lights down on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.

Lights up on THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.

Moments later.
Vince rolls a blunt.

DAVID
Make sure you’re drinking water

VINCE
Water’s for the weak -
DAVID
You can’t get all fucked up when it’s this hot out -

VINCE
You’re dressed for winter right now -

DAVID
We’ve been over this.

VINCE
I just want you to sit out here and chill with me -

DAVID
That’s what I’m doin

VINCE
No, no, you’re fucking anxious and shit -

DAVID
I’m just not good with it yet.

VINCE
I’m not saying you have to be good with it right now but -

Windy returns from street level.

WINDY
He had twelve in coins and dollars -

VINCE
You chased him down for twelve dollars?

WINDY
Twelve dollars is twelve dollars

VINCE
Twelve dollars isn’t getting you out of an assault charge

WINDY
I barely touched him -

VINCE
You slapped him on the titty, I saw it

WINDY
I lightly grazed him
VINCE
He’s gonna have your hand print on his left titty for a week.
Big old red Windy hand right on his fuckin titty -

_Syd enters from the stairwell._

SYD
YOU COULDN’T PUT A BALL GAG IN HER MOUTH
OR SOMETHING -

WINDY
I mean -

SYD
Don’t start -

WINDY
I didn’t realize you’re so fragile -

SYD
That you were screaming at 10am on a Sunday

WINDY
I was not screaming at all

VINCE
It was the tennis ball girl -

DAVID

VINCE -

VINCE
You’re lucky you didn’t see it -

WINDY
He spies on me

VINCE
Dildo’s twice the size of my dick

WINDY
Isn’t everything?

SYD
You’re trying to get slapped today huh?
VINCE
If you’re good at something -

WINDY
Like peeping through windows -

VINCE
Look, I wanted to go to the beach today -

DAVID
We’re not goin to the damn beach -

VINCE
I know I know

WINDY
Get Syd a chair

VINCE
Why do I gotta get the chair?

WINDY
Stop mouthing off and get the college kid a chair.

Fine.

VINCE
College kid?

SYD
Apparently.

WINDY
Full scholarship -

SYD
I need to work at the University, but -

WINDY
But they’re paying for you to play with paints all day

SYD
I’m not playing with paints

VINCE
So what do you have to do?
SYD
Whatever. Work at the library or somethin.

VINCE
I hate books

WINDY
You don’t mind books, it’s the words in the books

VINCE
You need a roommate?

SYD
Like I need a hole in the head

VINCE
What school?

SYD
NYU?

SYD
New York University.

*Traitor*

VINCE
HOW DARE YOU

SYD
Shut up

VINCE
You fuckin Judas

SYD
It’s a nice city!

VINCE
They got rats you know
SYD
We have rats

VINCe
Nah man, they’re rats are the size of a dog

SYD
I’ve always wanted to adopt

VINCe
So when do you leave?

SYD
Figure I’ll hang around here til the end of summer

VINCe
We could have like ten going away parties

SYD
Or one -

VINCe
Or ten

WINDY
Well I’m proud of you

VINCe
You’re just glad you’re not the only traitor anymore

WINDY
Having dreams doesn’t make you a traitor

VINCe
You’re goin to fuckin Indiana

Syd’s phone rings, they look at it.

SYD
Fuck. Can one of you gimme a hand downstairs? We’ve got deliveries coming in all day. The first guy just dropped off boxes on the sidewalk and just kinda left. I could use a hand downstairs getting the boxes in the coolers before everything goes bad.

David gets up, but Windy stops him.
WINDY
Sit your ass down, Vince’ll do it

DAVID
I can help too -

WINDY
Look at your hand, you can’t do shit.

DAVID
I can do stuff -

VINCE
No you can’t -

DAVID
Yeah huh -

VINCE
You’re gonna have blue balls for a month

WINDY
What else is new.

DAVID
Assholes

VINCE
And what about you?

WINDY
I’m gonna stay here and figure out how I’m moving
without your damn help

SYD
It’s not that much, really. If you don’t mind we’ll be done
quick Vince.

VINCE
Of course not. I’m a nice person.

Vince gets up and follows Syd down to street level.
David watches Syd leave.
David and Windy drink in silence.
It’s awkward.
Tense.
A match waiting to be struck.

WINDY
They grew up huh?

Yeah.

WINDY
Syd was like....10 when you got locked up

DAVID
Yeah.

WINDY
You remember when they lost the sight in their eye?

WINDY
One in a million shot.
DAVID
Kids fucked with them for months about it.

WINDY
Did you see Rosie this week?

DAVID
Friday for a little bit.

WINDY
Vince says she’s doin better.

DAVID
Just waiting on the biopsy results. If they come back good, she can leave.

WINDY
Good.

WINDY
How’s he doin on her bills?

DAVID
Behind.

WINDY
How far?

DAVID
If he doesn’t catch up he’s gotta move out.
WINDY
Where’s he gonna go?

DAVID
No idea.

WINDY
I guess if Rosie’s healthy, who gives a shit.

WINDY
I’m gonna throw that little girl the biggest fuckin party when she gets out.

WINDY
Just like when we were little and we’d have those block parties. Invite everybody out. Have Cook over at the bar donate a shit ton of beer. Red’ll bring barbecue. Drink, eat, and smoke all day.

DAVID
We could open the hydrants
WINDY
They’ll arrest you for that now

DAVID
Really?

WINDY
I think you can call and ask the fire department to open it
but you can’t do it yourself

DAVID
Damn.

*Regarding his knuckle tattoo.*

WINDY
Glad you got that removed.

DAVID
Shouldn’t have got it in the first place.

WINDY
Why did you?

WINDY
It’s not exactly a tattoo you just get.
WINDY
Especially if they’re jabbing at you with a pen and it’s not
an actual machine -

DAVID
I was angry. That’s all.

WINDY
Why?

DAVID
I was in prison -

WINDY
For ten years. And you didn’t get that tattoo til you were
what? Eight years in?

WINDY
It’s not a girlfriends name or something. You had to have a
reason -

DAVID
You wouldn’t know

WINDY
That’s why I’m asking -

DAVID
It’s not worth talking about
WINDY
Of course it is

DAVID
I don’t want to

WINDY
You should -

DAVID
I don’t want to Windy -

WINDY
You gotta talk about it sometime -

DAVID
No I don’t -

WINDY
You’re just gonna -

DAVID
There was a time where I needed to talk about it, but you weren’t around. And I’m not gonna go back into it just to make you feel better.

WINDY
I had my reasons.

DAVID
They weren’t good enough.

WINDY
You don’t get to say that
DAVID
Yes, I do

WINDY
No, you don’t

DAVID
You didn’t even call or write. You didn’t do anything Win. You just did what was best for you -

WINDY
How many of our friends died while you were inside? How many od’d, shot themselves, fuckin Joey took a pile of sleeping pills and killed her self -

DAVID
What’s that have to do with me -

WINDY
Once you started shooting heroin I wasn’t gonna write you letters and wait to get one back saying you were gone too.

DAVID
And what about before that?

WINDY
I was a kid -

DAVID
And I was alone.

DAVID
If it wasn’t for Vince -
WINDY
It's always Vince -

DAVID
Yeah, it is.

WINDY
You know you’re my older brother right? All the shit that happened to me. You were my older brother.

WINDY
You never acted like it.

It’s always Vince. Vince does the right thing by me. Vince does the right thing by you. Vince takes care of his daughter, and his mother, and whoever the fuck else.

When are you gonna do the right thing?

I’m trying to fix this here.

...

.....

........

You spent all that time with Vince growing up you’d think you’d have learned something from him -

David’s fuckin done.

Vince enters.

He heads toward Vince’s apartment.
VINCE
Fifteen fucking boxes - where the fuck are you going?

David exits.
Here we go.

VINCE
What’d you do to him?

WINDY
Nothing.

VINCE
What happened?

WINDY
I don’t know who he is anymore -

VINCE
Of course you don’t.

WINDY
Not you too -

VINCE
I’m not blaming anybody. Both of you fucked up. You didn’t call, he didn’t write. Get over it and move on -

WINDY
I’m trying -

VINCE
You’ve talked to him three times since he’s been out -

WINDY
And I try to pry him open every time -
VINCE
It’s gonna take time

WINDY
I don’t have time.

?

WINDY
I’m moving in two weeks.

VINCE
What?

WINDY
I have the money. I just wanna leave.

VINCE
How’d you get the money so fast?

WINDY
Picked up extra hours. I’ve been working all week and most weekends - 

VINCE
You can’t just leave you have to tell him - 

WINDY
It’s too much all at once

VINCE
So you just disappear?

WINDY
I don’t want to but -

VINCE
He deserves to know

WINDY
And what if it just makes things worse? What if me telling him ends things for good -
VINCE
At least if you tell him you made an effort -

WINDY
And what if he goes fucking crazy and ends up back in prison or dead -

VINCE
Don’t say shit like that -

WINDY
I’m serious. I’m leaving. You’re next. If we both get what we want, he’s alone. You trust that?

VINCE
I trust him.

VINCE
Things are changing for all of us. You don’t know what’s gonna happen. One day you’re bullshitting with us up here and the next you’re in a hospital bed.

*Waiting is a luxury for rich people who can afford it.*

WINDY
I’ll tell him -

VINCE
You’ll tell him today. Telling me doesn’t make a damn difference, I have other people to talk to I don’t need -
WINDY
Ok. I’ll tell him today.

VINCE
Oh I am, don’t worry. We all got our place.

WINDY
Not me. Not anymore.

Vince raises a beer and drinks.

VINCE
Two fuckin weeks.... You ready to leave?

WINDY
Absolutely.

VINCE
How big’s the place?

WINDY
Twice the size of my apartment here, big ass bathroom and kitchen, a back yard -

VINCE
With grass and shit?

WINDY
Yeah.

VINCE
Fuck that.
WINDY
I like grass.

Vince
You gotta mow it all the damn time and you could be allergic to it. Do you even know?

WINDY
Sheridan Park is right there if I was allergic -

Vince
That parks all dirt, you know it too. Watch. You’re gonna love this backyard and go to mow it and get hives all over your body.

WINDY
Pinche guey, loco.

Vince
Pendeja.

WINDY
No saves nada de las mujeres.

Vince
I know shit -

WINDY
Cabrón.

A smile.

WINDY
You wanna leave too, dummy.

Vince
You know I do

WINDY
One day
VINCE
As soon as I get the call, me and Rosie are gonna start over somewhere new. Fuck the rent. Fuck the utilities. Pay everything that’s past due and get the fuck out of here. Take a vacation, see some of the country.

WINDY
You wanna go anywhere specific?

VINCE
You’re gonna laugh -

WINDY
Nah

VINCE
Really -

WINDY
Come on.

VINCE
She’s got this weird - not an obsession

WINDY
So an obsession

VINCE
Not an obsession. But she’s really into Dolly Parton.

Who?

VINCE
Dolly Parton -- um -- she’s this tiny country lady who sings really huge and dresses in wild colorful clothes and is always loud and laughing and confident. And one morning Rosie was sitting watching tv in the hospital bed and this old movie with Dolly Parton in it comes on. And her eyes lit up. Cause Dolly is small and happy and loud and singing and just into it you know?
And soon she wants to listen to Dolly Parton and dress in wild colorful clothes and she’s laughing and singing and just happy despite being in a hospital bed.

Rosie loves her. She listens to her music constantly.

And Dolly Parton has this amusement park. Dollywood. And you can go there and everything is about Dolly. And I wanna take Rosie.

Wanna hear something?

WINDY
Sure.

Vince pulls out his phone and searches.

VINCE
She’s probably obsessed. She listens to this old record I found in a shop. Dolly sings it with some dude with a big slick pompadour haircut. She sings it all the time she called one time here

Vince plays a voicemail.
His daughter’s voice squeaks as she sings -

[VICEMAIL ROSIE SINGS]
No more crying
tears leave tracks
and memories find their way back
Tomorrow's waking
let's journey there together
Yesterday is gone
but tomorrow is forever

We linger in this moment.
VINCE
I don’t want her to be stuck here Windy. I don’t. I need her
to have more. Opportunity. Hope. Whatever. As long
as she’s not stuck here.

WINDY
You’re a good dad Vince.

Lights down on THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.

Lights up on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.

Instrumental layover.

TRIGG
WE   GOT   NEWS

Airhorn.

KYRI
Last we heard our guy Red hit a little snag

TRIGG
He’s on breathing machines in the ICU

KYRI
His lab work’s back

TRIGG
And it doesn’t look great
KYRI
But they’re still trying

TRIGG
Getting those x-rays

KYRI
Scanning the fuck out of his cat

TRIGG
He’s getting a cat scan

KYRI
And he’s got other shit comin’ his way after that

TRIGG
But you know

KYRI
YOU KNOW

TRIGG
He’s not giving up

KYRI
His vitals are decent

TRIGG
And his balls are fuckin huge

KYRI
So we’re keeping our heads up

TRIGG
Onto some shit we can do something about

KYRI
The neighborhood is talkin

TRIGG
The police are poking around over there

KYRI
WE SEE YOU

a|fontano
TRIGG
And there’s some fucked up theories about who did this

KYRI
Some of you know, I got a cousin that’s -

TRIGG
Don’t put her on blast like that -

KYRI
Well now they know it’s a her -

TRIGG
What’d I just say?

KYRI
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO SAID “HER”, AND I
ONLY GOT LIKE THREE GIRL COUSINS!

TRIGG
ONE OF US HAS A COUSIN who’s getting insider info
about the case the cops got goin

KYRI
And everybody in the damn neighborhood got a big mouth
anyway

TRIGG
Except us

KYRI
We won’t get real housewives gossipy just yet

TRIGG
We’re keeping cool heads

KYRI
For now

TRIGG
But lets just say it’s starting to look like we may need to
handle this shit in house

Kyri storms around the tiny studio.
KYRI
IN FUCKIN HOUSE

TRIGG
Ohhhhhhhhh shit

KYRI
SOMEBODY’S GETTING THEIR ASS KICKED

TRIGG
Yuuuuuuuuuuuuup

*Kyri grabs a glass bottle and chugs it.*

KYRI
YOU BETTER RUN MOTHER Fucker

TRIGG
Yuupppppppppppp

KYRI
Gonna get FUCKED up

TRIGG
I’m tellin you -

KYRI
GONNA BREAK SOME SKULLS -

TRIGG
Aight, relax -

KYRI
NONSENSE -

TRIGG
Don’t do it -

KYRI
CLOWN ASS MOTHER Fucker

TRIGG
Here we go -

KYRI
BACK OF THE YARDS
TRIGG
What “yards”

KYRI

SIX PM

TRIGG
You have work tonight

KYRI
BARE KNUCKLES AND BOTTLES

TRIGG
But you moisturize -

Kyri launches the glass bottle across the room.
Louder than ever before -

KYRI
KOBE!!!!!!!!!

The bottle smashes somewhere.
Trigg stares at Kyri.
Beat.

TRIGG
...why you gotta do that?

KYRI
...The...the garbage can -

TRIGG
Is all the damn way over there.

They look at the glass on the desk.

TRIGG
You feel good about that?
No...

TRIGG
You feel good about what you did there? Not a damn camera in sight. Nobody saw you do that.

No.....

TRIGG
Now you gotta clean that shit.

They look at the broken glass.

KYRI
I got a lot of energy

TRIGG
Dumb ass.

KYRI
I’m passionate.

Kyri starts to clean.
They get back in rhythm.

TRIGG
Bottom line, we may needa take care of this ourselves

TRIGG
We’re gonna keep our mouths shut

KYRI
Until we get solid word

TRIGG
So stay breezy

KYRI
Be easy
TRIGG
We’ll be back in a few

KYRI
With an update on Red

TRIGG
And more info about who got him

KYRI
In just a bit

*Lights down on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO -*

*Lights up on THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.*

Vince is plucking the guitar, Windy drinks.
Davids exits Vince’s window with a bucket and ice.
He puts the beers and such in the bucket.

VINCE
Done pouting?

DAVID
Shut the fuck up.

VINCE
Touchie touchie.

DAVID
Stupid ass.

*David offers beers, they take them.*

David struggles to open his, Windy offers to help, he lets her.
They’re gonna try.

VINCE
That’s cute -

*David punches Vince with his good hand, it hurts.*

VINCE
FUCKKKKK, *dick*
Windy and David share a smile.
  Syd enters from street level.

SYD
Two more deliveries and I’m done.

Windy tosses Syd a beer.
  David stares awkwardly.
  Syd notices.

SYD
You gonna say hi David?

Laughter.

DAVID
Fuck. Yeah. Sorry -

SYD
It’s ok

DAVID
You just look different

SYD
You too

DAVID
You got bigger

VINCE
“You got bigger”

DAVID
Shut up

David punches Vince again.

VINCE
Why you both so fuckin violent -

Windy hits him too.

VINCE
This is the type of shit I’m talkin about.
WINDY
What’s goin on down there?

VINCE
We need group therapy

SYD
Police are questioning everyone in the building.

VINCE
Talk about our feelings and shit

WINDY
They find out anything yet?

SYD
They won’t give me specifics but there’s rumors going around.

VINCE
Saying?

SYD
Nothing good. But I know it was someone who knew the store. That fire extinguisher Red keeps against the back door was moved so they wouldn’t make noise when they came in.

DAVID
Fuck.

SYD
It doesn’t make any sense.

WINDY
You can head to the hospital if you want and we’ll watch for the deliveries

VINCE
Watch?
SYD
Shut up -

VINCE
Do three d glasses work if you can only see in one lens -

*Syd hits Vince too.*

VINCE
Ow, damn -

SYD
Nah, I’m good. You know how he is with the store. Anybody but me does it and when he wakes up I’ll never hear the end of it.

WINDY
He’s nothing if not predictable

VINCE
Do you want something to eat or drink? Lemme get you something.

SYD
You know how much food we have in the store?

VINCE
You don’t wanna eat that same shit every day

SYD
I’m fine

VINCE
Let me get you something. It’s been a long day -

SYD
Vince, I’m ok -

VINCE
Ok. Fine. Then I’ll get *me* food. And if there’s extra and you happen to have some of it - good.

*A smile.*

WINDY
Where you goin’?
VINCE
What do you want Syd?

SYD
What do you want?

VINCE
I could do... cubans from 18th?

SYD
Sounds good.

WINDY
Get me something

VINCE
Bite me

WINDY
Come on, I’m hungry too

VINCE
Your legs broken?

WINDY
Keep it up -

VINCE
Then your ass can get up and walk with me then

WINDY
You’re gonna make me walk

VINCE
Looks like it

Vince and Windy head toward the stairs.

WINDY
I hate you

VINCE
I hate you too

WINDY
David you want something?
DAVID
I’m alright

WINDY
I know you’re alright, I asked if you want something

VINCE
Good one

WINDY
Fuck off

VINCE
That wasn’t funny -

WINDY
I’m getting you something

DAVID
I’m not hungry

VINCE
But you will be, and I’m not cooking later. We’ll get you a big ass sandwich to go with your big ass head.

Windy and Vince exits to street level.  
David and Syd sit awkwardly.

Silence.

DAVID
It’s hot.

It is.  
David offers Syd a water, they take it.
SYD
What happened?

He shows Syd his hand.

DAVID
I’m having a tattoo removed.

SYD
What was it?

DAVID
It’s dumb

SYD
It’s ok -

DAVID
Really, it is -

SYD
You don’t have to tell me

DAVID
It’s just not something I like to explain, ya know?

SYD
I do.

A smile.

SYD
I have a clementine.

DAVID
A clementine?
SYD
A tattoo of a clementine.

DAVID
What’s that?

SYD
You know those little oranges?

DAVID
*The little ones that come in the orange bag*

SYD
Yeah

DAVID
*I had one of those for the first time the week I got out*

SYD
For the first time?

DAVID
Vince keeps a bag in the fridge cause Rosie really likes them. And I had one and then ate the whole bag they’re so fucking good. I smelled like orange for like three days.

*David takes off and climbs into Vince’s apartment.*

SYD
Where are you going?

*We hear him rummage around inside.*

*Syd drinks.*

*David returns with a bag of clementines and tosses Syd one.*

*They peel them.*

SYD
I love this smell -

DAVID
Right?
SYD
It reminds me of something. But I don’t know what.

DAVID
That’s great.

SYD
I wish I could remember -

DAVID
Nah.

SYD
?

DAVID
If you don’t remember it just takes you back to a good time, you know? It reminds you of something and you know it was good but without knowing exactly what it was, it could be any memory. Like when you hear a song and it takes you back to someplace, but you don’t exactly know where. You just know you were happy when you heard it. That’s pretty cool.

SYD
I guess so.

DAVID
So why a little orange?

SYD
It was my Mom’s middle name.

DAVID
Little Orange.

SYD
Clementine, smart ass.
DAVID
That’s pretty.

SYD
Thank you. Anything else you’ve loved since you got back?

DAVID
Vince cooked calamari the other night

SYD
That’s squid right?

DAVID
Yeah

SYD
How was it?

DAVID
I think still alive

SYD
I’ve eaten some weird shit, but I dunno about live squid

DAVID
I was picky when I was a kid, but not now

SYD
When I was little I would eat anything you put in front of me. And if I really liked it I’d devour a crate in a sitting. I ate anything and everything -

DAVID
What’s the wildest thing you ate as a kid?
SYD
I ate an entire can of dog food once -

DAVID
Get the fuck outta here

SYD
You ate a whole bag of clementines -

DAVID
That’s a food -

SYD
It was bacon flavored and I love bacon.

DAVID
Was it in a can or?

SYD
One of those pop top cans -

DAVID
Oh so that’s easy access -

SYD
- yuppp -

DAVID
- exactly -

SYD
- and it was bacon flavored.

DAVID
Did it taste good?

SYD
It tasted like bacon.

DAVID
And if you like it -

SYD
- you just keep eating it.

*Laughter.*
SYD
I did so much stupid shit when I was a kid.

DAVID
I can top that

SYD
Go ahead

DAVID
When I was eleven I saw my Dad smoking a cigar out here on the porch, and when he went inside I ran out here to take a puff -

SYD
- cause you were really cool -

DAVID
- yuuppp. And so I get out here and take a huge inhale -

SYD
- that’s terrible -

DAVID
- oh no no that’s not the bad part.

SYD
Ok

DAVID
It wasn’t a cigar

Laughter grows.

I was so fucking high.

SYD
Holy shit

DAVID
I was a little kid but that shit rocked me
SYD
You were a thick little kid too

DAVID
And you were tiny as hell

SYD
I don’t think I gained a pound til I was 16

DAVID
Fat kids are always sweaty.

SYD
What?

DAVID
Doesn’t matter the weather, fat kids are always sweaty.

Undeniable chemistry.

I’m telling you. Dead of winter, negative five, and my chunky little ass was dry heaving and covered in sweat walking up those stairs, right there. Same creaky step halfway up has been there since I was born. I’d get half way up and needa stop, like I just ran a marathon.

SYD
I ran marathons

DAVID
No way

SYD
Oh yeah, through college

DAVID
I’d die

SYD
Well I don’t run anymore

DAVID
No one should
SYD
They’re the worst

DAVID
No one should run for fun

SYD
Agreed

DAVID
It’s not a hobby

SYD & DAVID
It’s a punishment

_Laughter._

_They look out at the city._

_Syd finds a good memory._

SYD
I remember when I was little I could hear you sing out here every night.

Every night the same song in Spanish. I don’t speak Spanish so I never knew what you were singing. But it was beautiful.

_But it’s not a good memory._

DAVID
That wasn’t me.

?
DAVID
It was my Dad’s favorite song. This old Mexican guy in the neighborhood Richard Juarez used to sing it when my Dad was a kid. He had this huge elephant tattoo on his back. I remember him sitting out on his porch over there all the time. He lived next to us right there. So my Dad listed and learned. When me and Vince were growing up my Dad taught him the song. Every night. Just the two of them. Out here playing guitar, going over chords and shit and - My Dad loved Vince. It -

My Dad would come home and drink and -

*He’s not gonna say.*

My Dad would get home and drink. Vince would come here after working at Red’s. And my Dad would teach him the same song out here on the porch. Every night. “Cielo Dorado”. They’d sit out here and sing til my Dad passed out.

---

SYD
Did you ever learn the song?

---

DAVID
My Dad died while I was inside. But. He didn’t like me much anyways, I don’t think. So I wouldn’t have -

*He doesn’t wanna cross that threshold right now.*

No.
I never learned it.

_Something is Syd cracks._

SYD
I’m scared Red’s gonna die.

I know he’d be sitting here telling me toughen up and run things, but I’m scared. He’s the closest thing to a father I’ve had and I don’t know what I’d do if I lost him

He’s the only person that’s been there through everything. I don’t think I can handle all this without him -

DAVID
You can

SYD
You don’t know me. I’m not him. I don’t know how to do any of this. He’s run the shop for sixty years. Sixty years. His entire life and - I’m supposed to do it now? I’m supposed to do all of it, alone. Forever?

I’m supposed to leave David. I _want_ to leave. I did everything I could to get out, and now I can, and I can’t.

_David’s never comforted anyone before, but he’ll try._

DAVID
It’ll be ok -

SYD
I killed myself for this. Read big fucking books and went to shitty classes where old men told me what they thought was right. And I shut up and listened.
And now I get to go to school and they’re paying for it.

But I can’t. I can’t leave. And I feel like shit for saying it because I should be worried about him, not me. I should be worried about him in that fucking bed and all I can think about is being stuck behind that counter forever.

DAVID
I understand.

SYD
He’s the only family I have. He worked his entire life and put me through high school and community college and now I get to leave. When I told him he lit up David. He cried. He was so happy And now -

If he lives, I’m supposed to leave him here? Broken? In a bed with a nurse taking care of him? He’s old. He isn’t coming back from this and being ok. He’s gonna need me.

And if - if he’s gone. Then I’m stuck here and I don’t know if that’s what he’d want. Or if he’d be disappointed or - I don’t know.

DAVID
He loves you. And when you love somebody, you just love them. Situations are complicated or confusing, but the love isn’t.

SYD
I don’t know how someone could do this. He’s never done anything to anyone. He’s never hurt anyone. He’s my family.

What if he dies David?
What if he dies?

What if he dies and it’s just me?

    David gets close.
    He wants to put his arm around Syd.
    He wants to comfort.
    But he doesn’t know how.
    So he sits close and inches his hand towards Syd’s.
    Before it gets there -

    Windy returns with a bag of sandwiches.
    She smiles at David, who returns it.

WINDY

Hungry?

    Syd wipes her eyes.
    Windy hands Syd a sandwich.

WINDY

It’s gonna be ok.

SYD

I hope so.

    Syd bites into the sandwich.
    Syd’s phone rings, they answer.

SYD

Yeah. Yeah I’ll come down. Just give me five minutes and
I’ll be right down.

    Syd hangs up.
WINDY
I’ll get the delivery, don’t worry -

SYD
It’s fine -

Vince enters from street level.

WINDY
Eat, drink some water. I’ll take care of it.

Windy gets the keys from Syd and exits down the stairs.
Syd wipes her eyes.
David offers Syd a sweat soaked towel, Syd laughs.

DAVID
It’s - yeah I -

VINCE
It’s soaked, genius -

DAVID
I know, I’m sorry -

VINCE
It’s fuckin dripping -

SYD
It’s fine.

David gets up -

SYD
It’s fine. I’ll be back.

Syd heads down to her place.
Vince and David sit.

VINCE
Syd alright?
DAVID
I hope so.

VINCE
Red better live.

Vince fills two cups with liquor and gives David one.
They both take a sandwich out and eat.

VINCE
It’s a nice day all things considered.

DAVID
Yeah.

David turns up the speaker.
They sit in the moment, listen to music, and drink in silence.

Vince slowly pulls some bills out of his pocket and tries to hand them to David.

DAVID
No.

VINCE
Come on -
DAVID
No -

VINCE
They don’t pay you shit at the warehouse you need to let me pay you back -

DAVID
I’m staying in your apartment, I’m gonna pay rent -

VINCE
We been over this -

DAVID
You don’t get a say

VINCE
I don’t need the money -

DAVID
If you get kicked out of the apartment, the state takes away my Goddaughter. Keep the fucking money. Pay your bills.

Vince puts the money in his pocket.

VINCE
Windy said she tried to talk to you earlier -

DAVID
She doesn’t get it -

VINCE
You’re like the same person

DAVID
Yeah, ok -

VINCE
You are. You’re both stubborn as hell.
You need to talk to her. Tell her what happened -
DAVID
I’m not telling anybody

VINCE
You have to tell someone. You can’t bury what happened. Shit like that fucking haunts you -

DAVID
I don’t even know how I feel about it. I’m not gonna let other people decide for me

VINCE
Then you have to figure that shit out. Cause you only have one sister. That’s it. And if you two lose touch this time, it’s over. We’re not kids anymore. We don’t have any kinda obligation to each other.

If Windy wants to leave she’s fucking leaving. And if I wanna go I’m going too. Fuck, you wanna leave go right ahead.

DAVID
I can’t go anywhere -

VINCE
After parole, you know what I mean. Figure out how you feel. You’re out now. This is all new. New opportunities new people new everything.

DAVID
I don’t even know if I wanna be out Vince.

VINCE
?
DAVID
I mean it. I’m terrified of being out here. Everything’s different. I don’t recognize shit and I can’t do anything. I feel like a five year old all the time. At least inside I knew what to expect.

It’s scarier out here.

VINCE
I get that. I haven’t felt ok in a long time. Before you got out I felt lost. That whole time I felt this huge part of me missing.

Without you I’m barely held together, and now you’re here and I’m gonna make sure you stay here -

I hated getting used to not having you around and I’m not doing it again. It was like someone ripped out a lung.

DAVID
You know you have two -

VINCE
You know what I mean. It’s just - one morning you were there, the next you were gone. Then things started to pile up, I got desperate. But. I did what I had to do to get through it and I don’t feel that now.
I feel good.

Right after you got locked up I used to cry when those stupid fucking R&B songs came on the radio.

DAVID
Yeahhhhh

VINCE
Cause every time I’d hear em I picture us sitting on the stoop

a|fontano
DAVID
Drinking those dollar fruit coolers from Red’s

VINCE
Singing all shitty

DAVID
And Windy dancing around in the hydrant

VINCE
Wet shoes squishing under our feet

DAVID
And then running inside the apartment all wet

VINCE
And your Pops yelling at her for soaking the place -

Vince hit a nerve.

I’m sorry, man I didn’t -

DAVID
I never thanked you. For what you did.

VINCE
I didn’t do anything.

DAVID
You knew what you were doing.

If you didn’t come by and distract him with that fucking guitar, that drunk bastard might’ve killed Windy -

VINCE
Your dad was a violent piece of shit David.

You guys didn’t deserve that.

No one does.

David starts singing something lightly.
One of those vintage 90’s R&B or Rap songs.
Ms. Lauryn Hill, Wu-Tang, 702, Outkast, Blackstreet, Bel Biv DeVoe, Montell, Boyz II Men, whoever. Soon Vince joins in. Just like when they were kids.

It's a pretty great moment. They finish singing and settle.

VINCE
That's what the fuck I'm talkin about.

I wanna see you smile more.

Really smile. Like just then.

You have to let yourself be happy.

DAVID
I'm trying.

VINCE
I know. You're hard on yourself, so I gotta remind you once in a while. You're a good person David. You deserve this.

DAVID
I hope so.

VINCE
At the very least you can sit out here with me a while longer, drink, listen to music, and bullshit about nothing.

DAVID
 Doesn't sound bad at all.

VINCE
Throw on some of the old jams, mix in some new ones, get you up to speed. Every once in a while break out some vintage country Dolly so Rosie can chill with us -
DAVID
Who?

VINCE
Not you too -

DAVID
What the fuck are you sayin now?

VINCE
You never heard of Dolly Parton!?

DAVID
Look at me mother fucker

VINCE
Shit, Rosie’s got a lot to teach you Uncle David.

DAVID
“Uncle David”

VINCE
Right?

VINCE
I missed you a lot, man.

DAVID
I missed you too, Vin.

They waited forever to say that.
VINCE
I almost proposed to Rosie’s mom

DAVID
Get the fuck outta here

VINCE
Oh yeah. The year after Rosie was born. Windy said I’d regret if you weren’t there. Honestly she was right.

DAVID
What happened?

VINCE
I screwed it up. You were always the put together one.

DAVID
We were young -

VINCE
Nah, see I kept fucking up. Everything that happened with your Dad and then you getting locked up. The guilt ate at me.

DAVID
It was just weed, who woulda thought they’d give me that long -

VINCE
But it was mine.

DAVID
And I was smoking it. It was my choice.
There’s no way we coulda known what was gonna happen. It was just weed.

VINCE
How many people lost their lives over weed?

DAVID
I didn’t lose my life. I’m just starting later than everybody else -

VINCE
All that time -

DAVID
Look, man, I got locked up for weed. It’s fucked. But the mistakes I made that kept me inside are on me.

VINCE
And how’d you make those mistakes? How’d you get heroin in a place where you don’t even get edible food? How’d you get to a place where shooting up seemed like a real solution? Prison didn’t “rehabilitate” you. It stepped on your neck and choked you while you were down.

DAVID
But it didn’t beat me.

VINCE
Good. That’s you. One person. What about everybody else? The color of your skin, neighborhood you came from, how broke you are, what you do to survive. It’s not just drugs or drinking or any of that bullshit it’s - keeping money off the books, falling behind on your bills, getting paid in cash under the table - all that shit that they throw broke people in prison for. Not to mention everybody working three jobs, working somewhere they hate cause it’s the only way they get insurance. It’s millions of people hustling just to fucking survive. We spend our lives at the bottom just - trying.

I’m fucking sick of it.

But rich pieces of trash are buying and selling little girls and they run the fucking country.
The system is broken.

DAVID
The system isn’t broken.

It does exactly what they want it to do.

VINCE
Can I ask you a favor?

DAVID
Anything.

VINCE
If anything ever happens to me. Take care of Rosie.

DAVID
That’s fuckin dramatic -

VINCE
I don’t mean it to be. I just mean... Windy’s moving, my Mom’s too old to take care of a kid.

I’m not saying anything’s going to happen. It’s just that she could have a future. A good one. And if I’m gone I wanna make -

Vince’s cell phone rings, he looks at the screen.
His eyes widen, he answers.

VINCE
Hello? Yes. Yes gimme a second.

Vince breathes deep, looks at David, and heads down the stairwell.
Lights stay up on THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.
During the following monologue David cleans up the porch.
He picks up empties, cigarette butts, etc and tosses them
in a garbage bag.

Lights also up on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.

Trigg switches the beat to something appropriate.
Or plays an instrument.
...or maybe there’s no music.

Silence for a bit.
Kyri waxes poetic.

KYRI
When I was thirteen I went into Red's for the first time.

My older brother used to go in after school and steal
candy bars and beers with his friends. Then they’d go sit at
Sheridan Park and drink and eat and bullshit til those
orange ass lights kicked on at sundown. You know
Sheridan, with the dirt baseball field. So they’d go sit there
wit girls and mack on them and you know they didn’t get
any, so they’d just listen to music. Then they’d head back
toward the apartments and sit on someones stoop.

Cause even though they thought they were badasses,
everybody’s Moms would grab that belt if they stayed out
past when the streetlights came on. But my older brother
did that shit every night in the summertime, and I wished
more than anything I could too. But one day...

One day after school me and my friend went to Red's. I’d
never been and walking in was like walking into a pawn
shop or junk store. That dirty ass yellow linoleum floor.
The dark red, chipped countertop. Those coolers that either
worked too well or not at all, so the glass was either
steaming hot or frozen solid at any given time. I didn’t get
it.

I go in and my friend is keeping watch, right? And I pocket
a king size chocolate bar.
And I don’t even like chocolate, shits too sweet for me, but my little ass knew I wasn’t sneaking beer out of there, so I figured chocolate would work just fine.

I stick that giant fucking bar down my pant leg but I realize my pants are too big cause they’re those nineties wide leg joints, and the bar’s gonna fall right the fuck out of them. So now I’m holding this bar in my drawers while I’m walking around like I got this massive fucking dick right? I’m on my full John Wayne cowboy shit like “yeeeeeheawwwwwwww” walking around this bitch like I’m ready to draw.

And Red’s watching me. The whole fuckin time. Just watching me. But he doesn’t say anything. At all. My little ass is sweating cause I know if I get caught my Ma is gonna beat my ass.

But Red lets me walk out without saying a word. And I go to the park and meet my brother and his friends. And I drink a bit, eat that big ass chocolate bar, and go back and sit on the stoop with them. And I loved it. I fuckin loved that shit. Hangin with the grown kids and my Brother.

So the next day after school I go back to Red's to jack another chocolate bar. And I’m walking to get it all sly with my chest out to Red and my big ass nineties pants and this time just when I get to the chocolate bars Red says, “Hey kid, you want a job?”

My little ass froze.

“NO MOTHER FUCKER. I DON’T WANT A DAMN JOB.”

But I couldn’t say that. I was frozen. And short. I didn’t want his attention on me at all. I wanted to be a fuckin invisible ninja right? Fuckin stealth. But I wasn’t. He saw me clear as day and was asking me if I wanted a job. And I didn’t know what to say. So I said yes.

My lil dumbass said yes.
David exits into Vince’s apartment, leaving the garbage bag on the porch.

Red told me to show up the next day right after school. And I did. He gave me a broom and said to sweep the back room. And I did. He gave me a rag and said wipe the counters. And I did. He gave me a pop and candy bar and even made me some dinner to take home. I went back every day that week. And he gave me twenty dollars every day. Twenty whole dollars for a couple hours work every day after school.

So I went back every day that summer. Every fuckin day I was in Red's sweeping and cleaning for a couple hours and gettin ten dollars an hour and all the pop and candy I could eat at thirteen years old.

By the end of the summer I had enough money to buy my lunch at school every day and get a cd or two when I wanted. I don’t think I asked my Mom for a dollar that whole school year. Not that she had it.

So I went back every summer. And Red had me. And I worked. And he paid me. And when high school ended and I needed a letter to apply to college saying I wasn’t a dumbass, he wrote me one. And when I needed a summer job between college semesters, he hired me again. That old bastard listens to this god damn show twice a week. He’s got a swear jar in the store but he sits listens to me say fuck for two hours straight twice a week. That’s love.

I wish I could say I was special. But I wasn’t. He does that for every kid. Every kid that was willing to sweep or scrub. Every kid willing to give him an hour or two. I know it’s not much. Shit, it’s just a job. But for a kid from the neighborhood, a job where you feel like you belong is a special thing. Where you feel like nobody is lookin at you funny.

Windy, Vince, David, Syd. All them from right across the street here. We all worked there. Summer, fall, winter, spring. And new kids every season. Hustlin’ our asses off.
Between the money and food Red gave us all, I dunno if he ever made a penny.

I guess all this is to say if you’ve set foot on the corner of Polk and Carpenter, Red's been a part of your life. If any one of the kids from the neighborhood held a door open for you or waited on you at a restaurant or cut you off on their bike rushing to class, you can thank Red.

He’s family.

A good friend and a better man.

Get well soon Red.

*Kyri and Trig exit the studio.*

*Lights down on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.*

*Lights still up on THE THIRD FLOOR.*

*Sounds of the city.*

Stillness for just a bit.

*David peers out of Vince’s window.*

He looks across the street, Trigg and Kyri are gone.

Once the coast is clear, he enters onto the porch.

*David carries an armful of blood stained clothes.*

He stuffs the clothes into the garbage bag, then wipes his bloody hands on his shirt.

He takes the shirt off and stuffs it in the bag with the clothes.

*We see he has a handgun tucked in his waist.*

David’s forearms are covered in (healed over) heroin track marks.

*Syd enters.*

*David hears the footsteps.*

Panicked, David shoves the gun in the bag too.

*Tension.*
SYD
You ok?

DAVID
Yeah, yea I am.

David’s blood runs cold.
He tries to hide his arms but before he can -
Syd checks in with him, then touches his forearm.

SYD
It’s ok.

Syd examines them.
They’re deep.

DAVID
They’re healed it’s been a while

Syd continues.

SYD
You shouldn’t hide them.

The bag’s still on the porch.

SYD
Scars are just abridged versions of really important stories.

Syd smiles and examines David’s hands.

SYD
You’re more than one thing. One mistake, two, ten, fifty -
doesn’t mean you’re a bad person. You shouldn’t be
ashamed. There’s a lot more to you than any one thing.

Silence.

Syd holds his hands.
It doesn’t seem to hurt as much
or maybe David just doesn’t care that it does.

The first time he’s told someone -
DAVID
It said “hate”
?
DAVID
The tattoo on my hand. It said “hate”.

Silence.
I was angry. I did things.
I’m not anymore.
I’m not that person anymore.

I couldn’t hurt anyone.

I need you to know that.

SYD
I do.

DAVID
I’m scared
I don’t -
I don’t know who I am here -

Syd ambushed David with a hug.
He doesn’t know what to do.

He hugs Syd back.

I don’t want to be out here.
I don’t belong anymore.

Syd slowly lets go.
SYD
You belong wherever you want.
Nobody has any say in that but you.

*They stare at one another.*

DAVID
So you belong in New York.

*Syd smiles.*

DAVID
You need to go. No matter what.

SYD
I know. Never hurts to hear it from someone else though. Half the people here think I’m crazy. The other half don’t get it. But it’s good to hear it from someone good.

DAVID
Oh I’m good now?

SYD

DAVID
I’m soft now?

SYD
Like a teddy bear.

DAVID
A teddy bear.
SYD
You know you’re just repeating what I say right?

DAVID
I do.

This is really nice.

DAVID
You got the whole summer here huh?

SYD
What’s left of it.

DAVID
That’s a lot of time.

SYD
Yeah.

Maybe we feel a kiss coming. Maybe not.
But we’re not gonna get it.
Either because it would be David’s first kiss, and he
doesn’t have a clue where to start or because -

VINCE STORMS ONTO THE ROOF ECSTATIC.

VINCE
ROSIE IS CANCER FREE. SHE’S GONNA LIVE. I’M
GETTING DRUNK. I’M GETTING DRUNK AND
NAKED RIGHT THE FUCK NOW MY DICKS
COMING OUT COVER YOUR EYES IF YOU NEED TO
-
SYD
Vince that’s amazing -

VINCE
They just called she’s - she’s ok and there’s no sign of the cancer and she’s gonna be alright -

DAVID
Thank God -

VINCE
It’s fucking over David. All of it. We can leave -

DAVID
Yeah.

VINCE
We can leave and do shit. Not sit in a fucking hospital room and watch tv -

DAVID
Fuck.

VINCE
It’s been burying me. The bills. The time. She cries all the fucking time - Vacations, music, family dinners, and then we can fucking leave. She can get out of here. She’ll have a better future. It’s done. All of it. I finally got ahead of it all -

Windy enters.

WINDY
Listen, David, you need to go -

VINCE
Rosie’s ok.

WINDY
REALLY?

VINCE
Yeah
WINDY
Don’t fuck with me Vince

DAVID
She is.

*A celebration.*

SYD
So what’s the plan?

VINCE
Get the fuck out of town -

WINDY
You know you’re still poor right?

VINCE
I’m broke, not poor

*Syd’s phone rings, they answer.*

VINCE
FUCK, I gotta call my mother

WINDY
You need to breath you’re gonna give her a heart attack

VINCE
Fuck breathing

WINDY
You know you *need* to breath right?

*Vince chugs a beer and pulls out his phone.*

  *Syd, panicked, waves off the group and hustles down to street level on the phone.*

DAVID
Syd I was wondering -

*But Syd is gone.*
Windy makes herself a drink or opens a beer. Vince is waiting for his Mom to pick up.

VINCE
She never answers. I pay for the damn phone and she never answers.

WINDY
In her defense I don’t answer when you call either.

Vince storms to the garbage bag (containing bloody clothes and a gun) and throws the beer in it. He lingers looking inside the bag for a moment, then locks eyes with David.

WINDY
David. While I was downstairs the cops grabbed me to ask some questions. You need to go talk to them.

Silence.

You should go.

Vince looks back to David.
Vince ties a purposeful knot in the garbage bag.

An agreement.

David exits to street level.

Vince puts himself between the bag and Windy

WINDY
I’m really happy for you.

VINCE
Us. She’s you and David’s Goddaughter you know. I expect Christmas and birthday presents -

WINDY
Why would I not send her presents?

VINCE
I meant me. Fuck her. She can get a job -
WINDY
You’re terrible.

VINCE
You know how long I’ve wanted to make jokes at her expense? You can’t make jokes about kids with cancer. *But she doesn’t have cancer anymore.* I can make fun of her and her huge adorable fuckin ears whenever I want now. Lookin like she’s gonna fly away with a light breeze. Lookin like she can hear smells. Lookin like Mickey Mouse and Dumbo had a baby and all she did was inherit those ears -

*Windy hits him.*
*They laugh.*
*Silence.*

WINDY
She does have huge ears.

*More laughter.*

VINCE
**Fuck** this feels good.

WINDY
Don’t get ahead of yourself

VINCE
She’s good, they said she’s good -

WINDY
We still got a lot goin on today

VINCE
It’ll pass

WINDY
“It’ll pass”

VINCE
The same way everything else does. Everybody gets up in arms when shit like this happens, then as soon as Red gets out they’ll all forget about it.
WINDY
No they don’t -

VINCE
Maybe *we* don’t. But *they* do. The mass you know?

WINDY
Fuck “the mass”.

VINCE
Really?

WINDY
Yeah, fuck them. All of em. If they don’t give a fuck about
us they can suck my dick, I don’t need em.

VINCE
Then why become one of them?

WINDY
I’m not “becoming one of them”

VINCE
Yeah you are. You’re gonna leave and be drinking
frappuccinos in a week

WINDY
Too much sugar

VINCE
You say that now

WINDY
This is always gonna be my home. What built me. Even I
can’t run away from that.

VINCE
And you’re good with that?

WINDY
I got a strong back.
WINDY
I can carry immense weight.

VINCE
?

WINDY
The world fucks you. It beats you down til you can’t take it. You with Rosie. David with prison. Syd with being blind in one eye and being the only openly queer person in the neighborhood growing up. And now Red getting shot. And Syd’s possibly gonna be stuck in the store forever...fuck...

The world keeps piling shit on top of you until you collapse under the weight.

Being from here, we can carry immense weight.

I’ve felt alone forever Vince.

VINCE
I meannnn you know -

WINDY
Yeah yeah. Aside from you, I’ve felt alone.

But I’m still here. I made it. Wrap a few things up and I’m out. Because I’m strong. This place made me strong. I made me strong.

I’m thankful for that.
VINCE
I know you been on your own forever and I really haven’t been able to be there for you. But thanks.

WINDY
For what?

VINCE
Just being here. Sitting on the porch with me when you can. Asking me questions. Making me think. Being here when David couldn’t. And if you weren’t next to me, *fucking really loud* so I know you’re there.

* A laugh.

I just know this has all been hard for you. With David getting home and you leaving and now this shit with Red.

I just appreciate you.

WINDY
I appreciate you too Vince.

*David enters from street level.*

WINDY
You ok?

DAVID
*(to Vince)* You’re up.
Vince finishes his drink and starts out, but -

Keep it short. Fuckin cops’ll talk all day if you let them.

A look.

Vince goes downstairs.

Lights down on **THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.**

Lights up on **BROAD SHOULDER STUDIO.**

*Instrumental behind them.*

TRIGG

Here’s the thing ya’ll

KYRI

*HERE’S THE MUTHA FUCKIN THING*

TRIGG

Here’s the thing ya’ll

KYRI

We been here all morning

TRIGG

Taking calls and playing hits

KYRI

And all ya’ll

TRIGG

*EVERY ONE OF YA’LL*

KYRI

Just been bull shittin

TRIGG

BULL SHITTIN

KYRI

Sitting your ass there sending out your
TRIGG
“Thoughts and Prayers”

KYRI
“Thoughts and Prayers”

TRIGG
Like that shits gonna do somethin

KYRI
You know what that’s worth?

TRIGG
Tell em

KYRI
Do you

TRIGG
Know what that’s worth?

KYRI
Tell em Trigg

JACK

KYRI

JACKK

TRIGG

FUCKIN

KYRI
MUTHA FUCKIN

TRIGG

SHIT

KYRI
Yupppp yuppppppp

TRIGG
You wanna dedicate a song?
KYRI
Gohead

TRIGG
You wanna give a shout out

KYRI
Gohead

TRIGG
But not one of you

KYRI
NOT ONE

TRIGG
Been to that hospital to see my dude

KYRI
Not one

TRIGG
Now we know

KYRI
We know it’s hot out

TRIGG
But you know where it ain’t hot?

KYRI
Where?

TRIGG
THE FUCKIN HOSPITAL

KYRI
That’s the thing

TRIGG
You can think

KYRI
You can pray
TRIGG
Hell, you can think and pray

KYRI
But when this shit is over

TRIGG
OOOOOOOOOVER

KYRI
It’s gonna be the legwork that gets us back on track

TRIGG
And you know what that legwork gets us?

KYRI
What’s that get us Trigg?

TRIGG
I’m hearing that the mother fucker that shot Red LIVES IN THE FUCKING BUILDING ABOVE RED’S DELI

KYRI
Word has it somebody in the neighborhood was hard up and thought Red’s was easy money

TRIGG
And that son of a bitch is still around

KYRI
So keep your eyes peeled over there across the street

Lights down on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.

Lights up on THE BACK PORCH - THIRD FLOOR.

“Broad Shoulders” plays out of the speaker.
David paces.
Windy listens.

KYRI
Keep your heads on a swivel ya’ll
TRIGG
Cause that mother fucker’s been right under our noses
the whole time

KYRI
Grimey two faced bastard

TRIGG
But don’t worry

KYRI
It’s just a matter of time before the cops catch him

TRIGG
Or we do

KYRI
So STAY TUNED.

David turns down the speaker.

Silence.

WINDY
You think it’s true?

David checks his phone.

Do you think was someone in the building?

David -

DAVID

No
WINDY
Did they ask you about anybody?

DAVID
Of course.

WINDY
Who?

DAVID
*Who do you think Windy?*

WINDY
I don’t know that’s why I asked -

DAVID
Me, Vince, you, fucking SYD. They asked about everybody.

WINDY
It makes no sense

DAVID
Syd wasn’t the only person who saw the shooter. It doesn’t sound like they have enough to release a name, but they definitely have a suspect.

WINDY
If it was someone who knew him? Someone he considered family -

DAVID
Nobody that knew him would hurt him -

WINDY
If Trigg and Kyri heard it *and* the cops are asking about people in the building -

DAVID
That doesn’t mean shit -

WINDY
It means something -
DAVID
It means they’re harassing everyone for no fucking reason -

WINDY
As long as they catch him -

DAVID
And then what happens? They lock him in a cage forever?

WINDY
Or they disappear.

DAVID
You’re gonna end someone’s life because of a mistake?

WINDY
It’s not a fucking mistake -

DAVID
We don’t know that -

WINDY
Bringing a gun into a store to rob somebody isn’t a mistake -

DAVID
Not everybody has the life you do -

WINDY
You’re excusing murder now?

DAVID
Don’t talk like Red’s dead. He’s not dead -

WINDY
He might be. In an hour he might be. In ten minutes he might be -

DAVID
But he’s not right now.

David checks his phone again.
WINDY
I don’t see where you get all this sympathy for people -

DAVID
I don’t see where you don’t -

WINDY
People make choices nobody is forced into anything -

DAVID
You’re gonna say that?

WINDY
Who has ever forced me to do anything?

DAVID
Nevermind

WINDY
**Nobody controls my life but me.** I’m leaving. *I worked hard and I’m getting out* -

DAVID
That’s as much circumstance, as it is choice -

WINDY
Bullshit -

DAVID
You say two different things -

WINDY
I say you don’t have sympathy for people who do fucked up things and make excuses

DAVID
I’m not making an excuse

WINDY
You’re saying forgive and forget
DAVID
I’m saying fucking up is fucking up. You can’t crucify people for mistakes they made if they want to be better -

WINDY
And what about while they make those mistakes? What about right now? What if dude who shot Red walked out here right now with the gun in hand and said “I’m sorry”?

You’re gonna let that fly?

You’re gonna tell them it’s ok -

DAVID
No, but I’m not gonna let myself waste energy on him. Being angry and hating people takes a lot out of you -

WINDY
And pushes you to be better -

DAVID
But for how long? How long can you keep up hating everybody before it eats away at who you are -

WINDY
Forever if I need to -

DAVID
Then waste your life. Go ahead.

Waste your life being angry. Angry at me, angry at dad, angry at the neighborhood, angry at the apartment and the cracked windows and dirty water, angry at every fucking thing that made you the person you are.

Waste your life being angry and watch what happens.

Watch what happens when you wake up at 80 years old and you’re alone because nobody lived up to the expectations you had for them.

People aren’t perfect.

Nobody is ever gonna be perfect.
I am not perfect.

A stare down.
David starts to dial on his phone and leave -

WINDY
Don’t you leave don’t you fucking leave -

He continues out but Windy stops him.

WINDY
You’re gonna stay here and you’re gonna fight with me.

They stare.

You’re my brother. And we need to fight.
Don’t run in the apartment.
Don’t call Vince.
We both have shit to say and we’re gonna say it now.

DAVID
I don’t wanna talk -

WINDY
Then shut the fuck up and listen.

He does.

I didn’t visit you because I hated you. I hated that you were so weak. I hated that you crumbled. I hated that I always had to be strong. I hated everything you were then, and I’m having a hard time not hating you now.

I hate how you wrote to Vince and not me. I hate how he knew you were getting out and I -

DAVID
You abandoned me. Every fucking one of you left me there to rot but Vince -

WINDY
He knew everything that was -
DAVID
You pretended like I didn’t exist for ten years, because I had an issue you didn’t understand -

WINDY
Because you didn’t talk to me. You didn’t call me -

DAVID
Don’t fucking lie -

WINDY
Not once -

DAVID
I called once a fucking week Windy. Once a week -

WINDY
And I couldn’t call back -

DAVID
Or write a letter -

WINDY
You never wrote me either. I didn’t know anything about you, other than whatever I could get Vince to tell me. I didn’t know who you were, and every connection I had to you was ripped away by a fucking needle, or a bottle, or whatever else people here use to pretend their lives aren’t shit. And then you started using too -

DAVID
I know Windy. They were my friends too. And they all fucking died. Every one. They’re dead. Everybody’s fucking gone except us. Every month I was inside somebody I grew up with died. And I kept thinking you’d be next. I kept thinking the world would crush you, and I wouldn’t be there. That I let you down. So I waited. I waited to hear you were ok. I waited to hear it from you. I waited to hear I didn’t let you down and you were ok and you loved me and you wanted me out and you wanted me with you.

But it never happened.
You were never on the phone.

You were never on the visitor list.

You disappeared.

WINDY
Only after you did.

Silence.

DAVID
I was wrong.

And so were you.

DAVID
It’s not a choice, Windy, it’s a disease. It’s a cancer. And it was killing me. I shot up because it’s all I had. I wanted a way to pretend like...it wasn’t happening.

And when I finally woke up and could see it was killing me I fought it. I fought it and hoped the people I loved would be there.

And you weren’t.
And I started to hate you and everyone else.

And it consumed my life, and ate at me from the inside, until I couldn’t do it anymore -

    WINDY
I needed to take care of myself -

    DAVID
And you still do -

    WINDY
I’m here talking to you aren’t I?

    DAVID
Because you’re leaving, and you want me to tell you it’s ok. Because at some point you’re gonna disappear again -

    WINDY
You should’ve told me you were getting out -

    DAVID
If I would’ve told you, would you have asked me to move in with you? Would you have stayed here? Would you have been alright with me moving in? Your ex junkie felon brother.

Would you have been alright with that?

Don’t lie to yourself.

    No.

You don’t think about other people Windy. You don’t.

    WINDY
Because I can’t afford to. Because I’ve been alone forever. And look what it’s got me? Look at what’s in front of me now. I got a real future. A fresh start. My own place with a back yard and grass and a porch and there’s not a fucking streetlight in sight. And I did that.
I can’t think about anyone else. Because no one else thinks about me. I don’t need anyone David. I’m free. To do whatever I want, whenever I want. And I love that. I love that about my life.

DAVID
I know you don’t need me. I know.

But I thought about you every day. I wanted to be there. I wanted you to need me. I want you to need me now.

I want anyone to need me now.

I just want to help.

I just want to do the right thing.

For someone.

For once.

WINDY
I’m never gonna need you around. That’s not who I am.

But that doesn’t mean I don’t want you around. That doesn’t mean I don’t want to be ok with you and love you and do holidays and be an actual family and -

David ambushes Windy with a hug.
The hug lasts long enough.

Windy breaks it, and finally -

WINDY
I’m leaving in two weeks.
The news sinks into David.

WINDY
I should have said something sooner.

He sits with it.

I know I should’ve told you I -

DAVID
That’s soon.

WINDY
I got the money and after everything that’s happened, and
now Red - I just think I have to go now.

DAVID
Is it gonna take a while to move? Will you be back and
forth?

WINDY
I can do it all in one trip if I rent a moving truck and pay
some guys to help me -

DAVID
I can help.

WINDY
Your hand -

DAVID
We can make a few trips.

WINDY
What about your parole?
DAVID
They can give me permission to go out of state for the day.
I just have to ask in advance and explain why.

WINDY
That’d be great -

DAVID
It might take a few trips with just your car and my hand
being messed up, but you’ll save the money and -

*They get to spend time together.*

WINDY
I’d like that.

DAVID
Me too.

*Smiles.*

*Windy wipes tears.*

WINDY
Vince would have a field day with this.

*A forced laugh from David.*

He yelled at me earlier for not talking to you.

DAVID
He’s good with stuff like that.

WINDY
He’s good for a surprise

DAVID
Yeah.
WINDY
Earlier he was telling me about this theme park that’s all about a country singer. That’s where he wants to take Rosie first.

DAVID
That’s the whitest shit I’ve ever heard.

Laughter.

WINDY
Can you imagine being Rosie’s age and having spent your entirely life in and out of hospitals?

DAVID
That’s not a life

WINDY
They’ll both have one now though. I can already see he’s happier just having you back.

He changed when you went away. He was quieter. He wouldn’t talk about what happened. I think he felt guilty -

DAVID
For what?

WINDY
He blamed himself I think. It tore him apart. For a while it didn’t look like we’d get him back, but then Rosie was born. He’s a great Dad.

DAVID
Yeah.

WINDY
It’s like everything he’s ever wanted, is that little girl.

Windy looks down at the street, then checks her cell phone.
Vince hasn’t called.
WINDY
He’s not down there. Has he texted you?

David takes out his cell phone, but struggles to unlock it.
Windy helps.
David checks texts messages.

DAVID
No. He’s probably running around the neighborhood telling everybody Rosie’s ok

WINDY
Or by his mother

What?

DAVID
He wouldn’t drive all the way out there

WINDY
You know he’s gonna tell her in person

DAVID
But with everything going on today?

WINDY
He’s been wanting to leave since this morning, I wouldn’t put it past him.

Fuck.

DAVID
Yeah.

David calls Vince.

WINDY
He’ll come back, don’t worry.

David waits for Vince to answer.
Windy checks her own text messages, maybe responds to one or two.

Windy’s eyes get big. David notices and hangs up.

DAVID
What?

Windy can’t talk.

DAVID
What happened?

Windy hurries to the speaker and turns up the volume.

Lights also up on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO. No backing beat.
Kyri’s head is dug into his hands.

TRIGG
-died on the operating table five minutes ago.

A long silence.

They tried everything they could. But his heart wasn’t strong enough -

KYRI
Don’t say it like that -

TRIGG
What do you want me to say then?

KYRI
It’s got nothing to do with his heart -

TRIGG
I know, but -
KYRI
- Red died five minutes ago on the operating table.
They tried to save him
but it didn’t work.

Silence.

TRIGG
FUCK.

TRIGG
It’s been a long day ya’ll

TRIGG
And, um, it didn’t -

It didn’t turn out how we wanted

KYRI
It never fuckin does.
TRIGG
But, listen

We have to try to -
We have to try and think about it in the grand scheme right?
Try to learn something from it -

KYRI
There’s nothing to fucking learn from it -

TRIGG
*(dropping the act for a second)* Keep it together

KYRI
There’s nothing to learn from more senseless violence
that shoulda never fucking happened -

TRIGG
You gotta breathe -

KYRI
*I’m tired Trigey. I’m so fucking tired of this shit -

TRIGG
We’re gonna take just a second everybody -

KYRI
Fuck that shit. Fuck that -

TRIGG
Kyri -

KYRI
There’s never a reason for this shit. Doesn’t matter who it is - We gotta give a fuck. We have to. We have to give a fuck about each other.

We have to give a fuck cause nobody else does.
We have to think about kids, grandparents, auntie’s, uncle’s, cousins, everybody. We have to.

What happens now? Who fills in? Who’s daughter fills in?
Who’s son? Who’s brother? Who?

Syd gets locked in there forever? Stuck behind that fucking counter the rest of their life right?

Or does it all die with Red?

There’s no fucking reason for this and we let it happen -

Cause we -

Cause we didn’t -

*Kyri can’t continue. He cuts the mic.  
Lights out on **BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIOS.***

*David and Windy are stunned.  
Windy cries.  
David comforts her.*

**WINDY**  
**Everything good here, dies here.**

*She struggles.  
Silence.*

**DAVID**  
But you won’t.

*A moment.*

**WINDY**  
We should find Syd. They’ve gotta be downstairs or at the hospital -

*Windy and David head toward the stairs, but are met by Vince.*

**DAVID**  
Where’ve you been -

**WINDY**  
Is Syd downstairs?
VINCE
No -

WINDY
Fuck -

*Windy gets out her cell and calls Syd.*

VINCE
What happened?

DAVID
Red died at the hospital.

*Silenec.*

WINDY
No answer.

DAVID
Maybe Syd’s already there -

WINDY
I’m gonna find them -

VINCE
I’ll go with you -

DAVID
We’ll stay here just in case.

VINCE
I’m not gonna sit here and -
DAVID
*We* will wait here, in case Syd comes back.

WINDY
It’s better that way. People’ll be crowding them if they come back. Call me and let me know if they do.

DAVID
Ok.

*Windy heads downstairs.*

DAVID
Windy, before you go …

*He can’t get the words out.*

WINDY
Yeah?

*Still nothing.*

WINDY
*The fucking cops are gonna be all over here now and Syd needs somebody I gotta -*

DAVID
Go.
I’ll tell you when I see you.
I’ll wait here in case Syd comes back.

*Windy exits to street level.*

David and Vince take one another in.

*One of them killed Red.*

Silence.
*A stand off.*
Something David’s been hiding bleeds out.
*He’s terrifying.*
VINCE
I got rid of the bag. No one’ll find it.

VINCE
I swear to God David no one’s gonna find it.

DAVID
They know it was someone in the building, and he’s dead. It’s murder Vince, they’re coming now -

VINCE
Everything’s gone, the clothes, the gun -

DAVID
It doesn’t matter anymore -
VINCE
They can’t pin it on anyone -

DAVID
People saw -

VINCE
Who saw? Syd? It’s just Syd, they’ve got one fucking eye -

DAVID
Watch your mouth -

VINCE
*No one saw David* and nobody outside the neighborhood is gonna give a fuck. What’s gonna happen? A two minute story on the news and then it’s done? Nobody else’s life has to end from this.

It was a mistake. Nobody cares. I’m not gonna say anything and neither are you so -

David is between Vince and the stairwell.

VINCE
David -

Neither of us is gonna say anything.

Finally.

DAVID
Why’d you do it?
Answer me.

Silence.

VINCE
How many times did he tell us when we were working there? “If someone comes in to rob the place just let them take whatever they want. It’s not worth your life.” He told us every fucking day David. “Just give them whatever they want don’t do anything stupid”.

And he did something stupid -

DAVID
Don’t you fucking put this on him -

VINCE
He went for a gun and he would’ve killed me -

DAVID
Don’t -

VINCE
I didn’t know he had one -

David stalks toward Vince.

VINCE
I swear to god David I didn’t know he had one, I figured he’d just -

DAVID
You killed him Vince -

VINCE
I didn’t mean to -

DAVID
But you did.
Panicked, Vince speeds toward his window.  
David throws the speaker next to the window, it breaks.  
Vince freezes.

VINCE  
I need to go -

DAVID  
Go where?

VINCE  
Anywhere.

DAVID  
There's no where for you to go.

VINCE  
This can't happen. Not now -

DAVID  
You did this -

VINCE  
I made a mistake -

DAVID  
After everything we've been through. After everybody we  
lost. You brought this shit here -

VINCE  
I didn't mean to -
DAVID
How could you do this?

VINCE
I can’t lose the apartment. I can’t. I can’t lose Rosie, and you know they’ll take her. I’ll never see her again -

DAVID
So ask for help -

VINCE
From who? None of us have anything. What’re you gonna, get me through a month David? Two months? With your minimum wage job and my extra tips?

DAVID
If that’s what I have to do -

VINCE
Do you know how much it costs every time Rosie’s goes to the hospital-

DAVID
That’s not an excuse -

VINCE
Thirty seven thousand dollars. Thirty seven thousand, five hundred, and thirty six dollars every time she slept in a hospital bed. Every fucking time. Just to keep her alive.

Just to keep her alive, man. While the fucking cancer ate her insides I needed to pay to have a fucking child kept alive.

Now my daughter is healthy and they’re gonna kick us out of the apartment and take her away from me.

If I can’t pay the rent I’m gonna lose my daughter David.

You said it yourself.

And I can pay it now.

You’re not gonna tell them are you?
You always talk about the right thing. “Do the right thing.”

I fucked up, I know.

What’s the right thing David? You tell me.

Silence.

VINCE
I’m sorry. I am. For everything. For what happened to you -

DAVID
Fuck you -

VINCE
I’m trying to apologize -

DAVID
You’re trying to bullshit me into thinking that -

VINCE
I fucked up. I’m stupid. I never said I was perfect or didn’t make mistakes. I didn’t ask for any of this. I been who I am since we were kids. I never said I was anything else. I never pretended to be anything -

DAVID
That’s a fucking weak excuse -

VINCE
I work David. Every fucking day I work. I work three jobs and take care of my mother, and Rosie, and Windy, and whoever the fuck needs me. I do that. Every day. And I can’t get ahead. The world is built to keep people down -

DAVID
That doesn’t mean you lower yourself to the -
VINCE
You lost your life for a mistake you made when you were a kid. You were a **fucking kid** David. And they took half your life. Ripped you from us.

I’m done staying down. I want more. For me. For Rosie. I want to leave her something. **I want to be better** -

DAVID
So you stoop down to the level everybody expects us to be at. I’M PISSED OFF TOO. I’M MAD TOO. But I’m not giving the world the satisfaction of bein the piece of shit they wish I was. I won’t do it. I’M **better than them**.

*And I’m better than you.*

VINCE
I just want to give my daughter a better life. And I can’t do that the way things are. I can’t do that playing by the rules -

DAVID
That’s just what the world wants man. That’s just what everybody wants out of you. Another fucked up father who can’t rise above the shit -

VINCE
**Fuck you and you’re holier than thou bullshit David.**
I’m not you. You can’t expect me to be you.

I’m proud of you. I’m glad you reached this fucking place where you can be the bigger person. But you haven’t been out here. You didn’t sit in the room with Rosie. You didn’t drown in bills. You didn’t lose sleep. You didn’t watch *your* father rot away covered in booze. You didn’t support Windy however and whenever she needed it. You didn’t watch my Dad die broke and exhausted.
You didn’t watch everybody in the neighborhood fucking kill themselves slowly.

You just heard about it in a phone call. From me.

_Cause I was there for all of it._

If we don’t take drastic measures, we don’t get out.

DAVID
Drastic is goin to college, or starting a company, or fucking, just, supporting our people. Supporting the people who need it. _Do something._ Don’t make fucking excuses to be -

VINCE
_Fuck you David -_

David is trying _real hard not to level_ Vince.

DAVID
What’re you giving her now? It’s all for Rosie right? What’re you giving her now -

VINCE
A better life, far the fuck away from all this -

DAVID
_You’re going to prison._ You need to let that sink in.

Six by eight.

Six feet by eight feet surrounded by steel.

That’s your future now.

And your daughter’s alone. Just like me and Windy. Just like you. And now just like Syd. _Because of you._
VINCE
You said you’d take care of her -

DAVID
I’m not her father, Vince. I’m nobodies father. I’m barely a person. Why can’t any of you see that? I been trying to say it and I dunno how. You think this is a life? I’m half a fucking person, man. I don’t know how to do anything, and nobody is gonna let a fucking felon have a kid. I’m just starting my life now.

FUCK VINCE.

You did all this for her and she’s gone anyways.

They’re coming for you, and she’s gone.

VINCE
You can’t let that happen -

DAVID
They’re coming now and they’re coming for you -

VINCE
You don’t know. Maybe they think it was someone else.

DAVID
So someone else goes to prison for your bullshit.

A final plea.
VINCE

*If that's what it takes, yes.*

You don’t understand -

...

I thought about you every day for ten years, David. Every day... Everything I could remember. Laughing on the porch. Playing ball in the dirt field. That fight in the park where that kid split your head open with the bottle. We laughed all the way home.

My daughter was born, and you weren’t there. We christened her in a church and you weren’t there. First steps. First words. We went through everything, and you weren’t there. And I cried.

You are my best friend. My brother. My person, man. That’s real. And I love you. This shit right here means more to me than almost anything... but now I have somebody I love and need *more than you.*

_Vince pulls out his cell phone._

_He searches for the voicemail,_

_and makes a last plea through his daughters squeaking voice._

_[VOICEMAIL ROSIE SINGS]_

No more crying
tears leave tracks
and memories find their way back
Tomorrow's waking
let's journey there together
Yesterday is gone
but tomorrow is forever

_Silence._

VINCE

She’s all I’ve ever wanted David. She has my whole heart. Everything I’ve ever done or will do is for her.
I will die for her.

And I need you to help me keep her. To help me stick around and keep being the type of father we both wanted and never had.

I’m not leaving my daughter.

I need you. Please.

Silence.

I don’t know what to do.

Tell me what to do.

They stare at one another.
David thinks.
He makes a painful decision.

DAVID
Leave.

...

Get in the car and leave now.

Vince is confused.
David looks over the railing to the street below.

Go, before I change my mind.

Slowly, Vince starts toward the stairs.

VINCE
I don’t know where to go.
Vince really sees David for the first time.
Vince forces a hug on him, giving David his weight.
This is the last one, no matter what happens.

DAVID
We don’t have time. Go through the apartment and out side by the alley.

Vince takes a last look at David.

DAVID
NOW.

Vince bolts down the stairs.
David is alone.

For a long while.

The world moves around him, but David is still.

He picks up the guitar and starts to strum.
He either struggles through it, or is flawless.
He plucks and (eventually) sings his Father’s song - “Cielo Dorado” by Richard Juarez.

DAVID
(sings)
Atardecer
Tu me mientes
De mundos aquellos
Cuando fuimos pequeños

Windy enters, David doesn’t notice.

Siento que
El mundo me quiere
Invierte luz
Roba el tiempo, quedas tu
Cuando no me encuentro, yo grito
Si miles de corazasitos
Palpitán a la misma vez
Si me encontrarías bien

La oscuridad me encuentra cada vez que
Rezo donde nadie me ve
Me levantarías tal vez?
Me levantarías tal vez?

Yo no creo y así de fácil quiebro
Yo no creo que tu apagas tu fuego
Tu hablas sin decírmelo todo

David quietly finishes,
wipe tears from his eyes,
and settles into himself.

He sees Windy.

DAVID
Is Syd ok?

WINDY
I got them on the phone. They’re at the hospital. Broken up, but ok.

DAVID
Good.

WINDY
Where’d Vince go?
DAVID
I don’t know.

*They look out at the city together.*
*Something they haven’t done before today,*
*but are starting to grow attached to.*

WINDY
I’m gonna go to the hospital and be with Syd. You should come, they’d probably like to see you -

DAVID
You go ahead, I’ll be right behind you.

...

WINDY
You sure?

DAVID
Yeah.

*Silence.*

WINDY
I didn’t know you speak Spanish.

DAVID
I don’t.

*A smile.*

WINDY
I can tell you what it’s about if you want -

DAVID
I don’t think I wanna know actually. I’d rather just know how it makes me feel.
Another smile.

WINDY
Any guesses?

David thinks.

DAVID
I think it’s about somebody in pain.

WINDY
What’s it called?

DAVID
Cielo Dorado.

It makes me think of you.

A smile.

WINDY
You sure you don’t want to come with me?

DAVID
Not now.

WINDY
Ok, I’ll see you there later.

Windy starts toward the stairs.
David’s voice stops her.
DAVID
I’ve made a lot of mistakes. I’ll make more. I just need you
to know no matter what happens to me -

I love you.

No matter where I am or
what I do
or what you hear,

I love you.

Something’s wrong.

WINDY
What’s going on?

He can’t tell her.
He won’t tell her.

WINDY
David -

DAVID
I’m just thinking about everything.

I don’t want us to end up back
not being able to talk or

you know.

WINDY
I do. It’s been a tough day. We’ll be ok.

DAVID
Do me a favor?
WINDY
?

DAVID
Tell Syd they should go.

WINDY
You know after all this, I don’t think anyone has to.

DAVID
Well we got one good thing out of all of it then.

A smile.
Windy starts out, but before she goes -

WINDY
I love you too.

Maybe she hugs him. Maybe she kisses him on the cheek.
It’s important for her and final for David.

Call me when you get close to the hospital I’ll come down and meet you.

DAVID
(a lie) Ok.

Windy exits.

Lights also up on BROAD SHOULDERS STUDIO.
Trigg, completely off rhythm, struggles to speak as -

David is alone. Again.
Maybe he cleans.
Maybe he drinks.
Maybe he just breathes fresh air.
TRIGG
The world is built to make us forget people.


Sometimes it hurts and sometimes it makes life easier.
But that doesn’t matter. Either way you can’t forget. The feeling of a person, or place, or time.

Then, blue and red lights flash over the worn brick.
David looks over the rail and sees police below.

TRIGG
Red is dead. Doesn’t matter what we say or do now. He’s gone. And there’s a good chance everything we remember about him will be gone one day too. That’s what happens. Years from now, there’ll be nobody to remember free lunches or summertime jobs.

That’s why it can’t stop.

David takes a last, long drink out of a liquor bottle.
His body having been massaged into some softened version of his former self, he straightens up and tenses the solid mass of muscle in him.

TRIGG
We need to keep caring. Loving. Bleeding. Wearing our hearts on our sleeve. Wanting to be better. Speaking out. Screaming at the top of our lungs. Standing our ground. Holding each other up. Growing together. Leave the world a little brighter than it was before. And pass that desire down to the kids. And hope they do the same.

David finds something familiar, and once again necessary.
He slowly walks down the stairs, each step more painful than the last.

TRIGG
Cause it’s not about individuals. It never has been. It’s about all of us. Together. The “we”.
David disappears from view.

TRIGG
It’s about what we can give to each other.


Do it all. Do it all too much. Our lessons matter. Our stories matter. Our lives matter. Our hearts matter - every moment matters. Cause you can’t kill the heart of a place or person, if it beats forever.

.....This is a fucking mess.

I’m sorry ya’ll. I’m not great

at this type of thing.

I’ll just...

lead with love.

This has been Broad Shoulders Chicago.

The second city shitty.

Bringing you everything you need to get chu through this fucked up day.

We’ll be back Wednesday. Same time. Same place.

But before we go...

This one’s for Red.

Everybody’s grandpa.

We love you.
With a knowing smile, Trigg puts on something...
Joyous. Or profound. Or painful. Something that resonates.
Maybe by Bill Withers, Stevie Wonder, Dean Martin,
Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, Dolly Parton, Ella Fitzgerald,
or someone equally classic.
Something Red would like.

Fade into black on BROAD SHOULDER STUDIO.

Stillness on the porch.
Slowly, the song creeps out of the broken speaker.
It crackles as it plays.
Beautiful but broken.
Then - the sounds of the city, the same sounds, echo out.
Laughter. Gossip. The “cshhh” of a beer can opening. Dice
hitting cement. Somebody yells down to the street from an upper
floor. A bus stops and opens its door. Some kids sprint down the
sidewalk. A car passes playing 90’s rap. A fist fight breaks out.
Laughter and hugs follow. The bus pulls away.

The city is alive again.

This time - no gunshot.
No pain.
End of interlude.
Back to summertime.

Then all at once - BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY.