

Class Anthology

CW205: Introduction to Creative Writing

John Cabot University

Spring Term 2010

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1 May 2010

Table of Contents

Fiction

Jillian Burnickas	“Damaged Youth”	4
Katherine Davern	“The Red Ribbon”	8
Hilary Dorton	“On the Stroke of the Hour”	12

Creative Nonfiction

Katherine Davern	“Salt Water”	16
Kristal Ruiz	“Dishonor”	19

Drama

Dominic Grenga	“Wake Up Walter”	23
Andrew Nelson	“The Life Line”	35
Greg Oxenberg	“The Psychoanalyst’s Wife”	46
Caroline Sweeney	“A Simple Twist”	59

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FICTION

Jillian Burnickas

“Damaged Youth”

My name is Olivia. At fourteen years old I was taken out of school and tutored at home until halfway through my fifteenth year. Then, not long before Christmas my father had sent me to a private boarding facility outside of town. I felt things normal children just didn't seem to understand. And I chose to express those feelings through the words I left in my journal. I never shared much of myself outside of that leather binding. I had better luck with books than I did with people.

My favorite stories were the Shakespearean tragedies. On my better days I felt like Cleopatra. On my not so good days I would say I was more or less Ophelia. Acting as such drove other children and eventually other adults away. Even in my new residence I found myself alone more often than not. I had a roommate but we didn't particularly get along. She talked too much or maybe I cared too little.

I grew so accustomed to being alone that the only time I saw people was when it was required of me. Every now and then I took comfort in a decently sized conversation with Dr. Woodhouse. Dr. Woodhouse worked in the residence. Our conversations always remained shallow; I never liked to share much personal information. One day when I was in a rather upbeat mood Dr. Woodhouse decided to push her luck.

She tried to get me to open up; she thought it would be good for me and encourage me to make friends. She questioned me about my home life, about my past, and about what happened last November. She asked me why I thought I was taken out of school, why I wanted my mother gone, and why I thought my father never visited. I became frustrated with all the questioning and eventually shut down when I decided I heard the word “why” too

many times. I *hated* that word. I felt it was unfair to continually be asked “Why?” Not everything needed a reason; some things just needed to happen.

After that day I stayed in my room. I fell asleep on Thursday and didn’t wake up again until Sunday morning. At least I did not remember Friday or Saturday but when I showered on Sunday I found bruises all over my body. I counted twenty four in total but I had no idea where they came from. There were four on each arm, two on each side of my torso and six on each leg. The only way I made sense of the bruises was I must have tossed and turned a lot in my sleep. I knew when I got upset about something it caused me to thrash in my sleep. It was my unconscious way of releasing aggression.

In my spare time I would write, typically letters to my father begging him to bring me back home. He never responded. I would complain about the pills I was told to take every morning and how I much preferred the vitamins at home, these made me feel different, not myself. I would tell him about how I wished for my birthday he would send me some of my things from home. I especially missed my journal. I even told him about my new found hatred for my once companion Dr. Woodhouse. Nothing sparked a response from him.

Six months into my stay it was late May and nearing my birthday. Although I preferred being detached from people, I had always been taught that no one should be alone on their birthday. So I set out to make a new friend.

His name was Charlie. He was another staff member, a handyman of sorts. Charlie was tall and young, just a few years older than me, with a triangular torso and a ‘Tic Tac’ head. He was *that* kind of boy. My father would call him a Republican, I called him my friend. We both had lost a mother. I felt by befriending the staff, I could develop some stability in my life. The staff won’t leave me. I didn’t want to lose him, unlike Dr. Woodhouse. I told him everything. All my secrets and hidden desires poured out of me on

our third and last afternoon together. Charlie never worked weekends, on the Monday following our last afternoon together Charlie didn't show up to work. I think I scared him away. Maybe my Juliet came off a bit too Desdemona.

That Tuesday, I was switched to a new building. This time I received my own room; no sharing with another girl. At first I was confused but as time wore on I realized Charlie must have said something that it so I couldn't see him anymore. That was when the anger began to grow inside of me. I was done making friends. I was done trying to be social. I just didn't understand how to keep friends. I didn't tell Dr. Woodhouse enough and apparently I told Charlie too much. Making friends is easy, keeping them is not.

Come my birthday I received a package from my father, a box of delicately wrapped chocolate turtles. I was elated to know he still cared and that no matter how busy his job kept him he still had time to acknowledge his only daughter. Although I was a bit confused because he hadn't bought me turtles since I was twelve; they were my favorite until I develop a nut allergy and spent the better part of a month recovering from an intense reaction. I wrote him one last letter thanking him and questioning his gift because he knew better.

Finally, a letter came from my father. It was very brief and read:

"Olivia, I can never forgive you for what you did to her. I had the maid toss out your belongings. I want no memory of you. I sent you the chocolates as the last gift from me to you, the last contact from me to you. Do with them what you will."

I came to realize I was to him as Cordelia was to King Lear.

After reading his note, I needed to think. I asked to spend the afternoon outside. My request was declined on account of weather. I became infuriated; I knew I was being lied to. The weather was flawless. I could see from my window that the sun was out and shining and

there was not a cloud to be found. I threw a fit. I was done with people avoiding me, done with being isolated, done with being here. I yelled at the top of my lungs everything I had kept inside. I didn't stop until I had exhausted myself and cried myself to sleep.

When I awoke I was dressed in a brand new jacket. It was pretty fashion forward but not very functional. I assumed it was a birthday present from Dr. Woodhouse as she had tried many times to reconnect with me. I would have none of that. I ended the night struggling with a short bit of writing that left me breathless and exhausted.

~

The next day the Nurse went to check in on Olivia. Only to find her limp body sprawled on the floor next to the ripped box of birthday chocolate wrappings and just a few feet away a note pinned with a ballpoint pen to the padded walls that read:

“My mother never loved me. So I disposed of her. Now no one loves me. So I'll dispose of myself.

Lady Macbeth”

Katherine Davern

“The Red Ribbon”

John felt as though he could close his eyes and arrive on his apartment stoop in eleven minutes. And thirty four seconds. Approximately. Of course, if Oak Drive was backed up it would take two minutes longer. And if the McKinley’s Doberman was outside he would need to circumvent that block and detour through the alley across the street. Which would add five minutes. John hated Doberman Pinchers. He had always thought they looked like evil detectives dressed in Sherlock Holmes–era garb. But he didn’t close his eyes. Instead, he watched as he passed the sights he viewed every day of his life, twice a day. The red, yellow, green graffiti on the side of the library. The metal wire garbage can that was surrounded by old men at night and Big Mac wrappers during the day. The very old bus stop bench with the picture of the very tan realtor with very dark brown hair smiling at him with very white teeth. A red ribbon stuck in the crack that parted the dark brown hair in a very unnatural way. That was new.

As he made his final turn onto his home street, John strained his eyes for the coffee shop at end of the block. Sure enough, she was there. Having the smoothie that she always drank with her friend on Thursdays. Better yet, she was wearing his favorite dress. She seldom wore it, and only if it was the time of year when the sun heated the pavement enough to make wearing shoes necessary. Though he was still too far away to make out any of the details, he knew that the dress was made of white cotton. That the hem reminded him of the way frosting looks when it dresses up the edges of a birthday cake. His heart accelerated as his feet drew him ever closer to her. Her voice became audible when he was about twenty sidewalk squares away. Her voice. Like when the sunlight streams out of the clouds and looks like spotlights coming out of heaven. Like waves greeting the beach at the lake. Her friend’s voice, and personality, and looks, paled in comparison. Elise, the friend, was one of those “if-we-ever-see-each-other-in-public-I’m-going-to-pretend-I-don’t-know-you” kind of girls. The kind that had a new polish on her nails every other week. The kind that knew how to sweet talk adults, but would eat an innocent child’s dessert when his parents weren’t around. She wore sunglasses, but John could feel her intrusive glare sizing him up, or down, rather, as he passed the friends. Though every part of his body ached to pull up a chair and take a seat next to his heart’s desire; John made sure that his shoulders were back, his gait

was relaxed, and his breath was steady as he passed. He kept his eyes lowered – he knew he would blush if he looked to the right.

Having put more than a couple of feet between himself and the coffee shop, John dared to glance back at the woman who didn't yet know that her soul-mate had just passed her.

And then he saw it. It happened so quickly that John felt as though his brain had sent a message to his legs but had forgotten to let his conscious self know what was going on. The back of that white dress that he loved so much was missing something. Her dress usually had a color, an accent. But today it was absent. Instead, there existed three holes on each side of the seam that begged to be filled. The red ribbon.

It took every ounce of him not to sprint back to the bus bench. He was a very good runner, and he knew that he could get there quickly. But he needed to remain composed. He couldn't be huffing and puffing and red in the face the first time he spoke to his future wife.

Turning back onto the street with the bus stop, John averted his eyes and stared at the horizon. He was too nervous to look at the bench, for fear that the ribbon, his only chance, had somehow found its way out of smiling realtor's hair. But there it was. He pulled it from crack gingerly – if he grabbed it too quickly it would disintegrate, fall apart, and his dream would be lost. He wrapped it around his finger, slid it off, and placed it carefully in his right pocket.

He had never had the courage before. But with the token in his pocket, he felt like he could jump over moon if he really wanted to. He took a deep breath, and headed straight for the white dress. She had her back to him, so he stuck out his index finger and tapped her on the shoulder. Elise practically spit out drink. Her friend turned slowly to face him, he had to do it.

The expected happened.

He had so wanted to be smooth, but he knew that a nonchalant demeanor was too much to ask of himself during his first encounter with the sunshine of his life (to put it in his mother's favorite blind musician's terms). Before he could say anything, his throat had closed up, his lips had locked together and thrown away the key. So he did the only thing he could. He stuffed his hand into his pocket and pulled out his prized possession. And a couple pieces of lint. When he presented it to her, she had to lean back so that his protruding fist would not collide with her nose.

"Sorry," he stuttered, and moved his hand to a more affable position.

After a moment, she realized what was he was holding.

“I can’t believe you found this...”

“John.”

“John. Thank you!”

Red-faced, he nodded, and placed the ribbon in her outstretched hand.

“Do you know how to tie a bow?”

Did he know how to tie a bow. He had learned at least a year before. Again, a nod was the best he could do. She returned the ribbon, rotated her body back toward Elise, whose facial expression reminded him of the way he felt after eating a particularly sour apple. That didn’t matter. He turned his head back toward the auburn hair only inches from his nose. She lifted her shimmering ponytail, gesturing for him to lace up the bow.

He did so meticulously, measuring so that the ribbon was perfectly even on both sides of the holes, making sure that there were no twists, and looping around the tree and through the rabbit hole. He did not need to further embarrass himself by having to start over.

When he finished, she turned back around, thanked him, and presented him with a biscuit from her plate.

“Perfect! Are you allowed to have these,” she questioned, looking from the cookie to him.

No, but he wasn’t going to tell her that.

“Well why don’t you take this? Thank you again, John, that was so sweet of you. I’ll see you soon, okay? I’m Rose, by the way.”

Rose. Of course she was named after the flower that he wished he could bring her every time he saw her. And now she had given him a cookie. And his stupid vocal chords, or lack thereof, apparently, had surely ruined her first impression of him.

All he wanted was to be alone. As he passed the kitchen, his mother interrupted his internal brooding. He stopped short, and slowly reversed to face her. She held out her hand, waiting. John shrugged his backpack off his shoulders and unzipped it. He found the paper with the shiny purple star sticker and placed it in his mother’s open palm. She surveyed the spelling test, smiled, and handed over two Oreos as a reward. He couldn’t think of eating at a time like this. Leaving the backpack on the chair, John made his way toward his bedroom. She called after him to remind him that Elise would be arriving shortly to watch him for the

night. This did not help his mood. She added that Elise would be bringing a friend. At that moment, John decided not to save the Oreos for later.

The day had only just begun.

Hilary Dorton

“On the Stroke of the Hour”

Maurice’s walls quaked twice every 60 minutes—once on the stroke of the hour, once at half past. The faint little suggestion of an apartment stood, small but strong, 96 yards from the train tracks. Years ago, the landlady, obviously exhausted and therefore lying through her coffee-stained teeth, had told him that he would easily “adjust to the schedule” and that despite the noise, the “convenient location should speak for itself.” Whatever the location was saying, though, Maurice was unable to hear over the ornery trains that he never actually got used to.

He was simple, twice married and twice divorced. He kept fish in a tank for company and fish in the freezer for dinner. A retired mechanic, he was already immune to the fetor of old grease that lingered around the train station. But on good days, the smell, which his memory rendered ambrosial, would creep back into his nostrils and he would sort of smile. His bones had worked nicely in tandem for 62 years, and other than when he broke his wrist on the tennis court at 11, had never given him trouble. But sometime after his birthday, April 7th, he noticed that they weren’t getting along quite so well anymore within his slender frame.

He read the newspaper but only for the crossword puzzle. The balcony of his place had one chair and one plastic table, which at 8:15 AM became his sacred crossword workspace.

Maurice’s most pressing task each day was to fill in each letter. First across, then down. He delighted in identifying what he called “pocket words,” usually three letters, that only existed so that longer words could make sense. ____ Maria (3 letters). They were in every puzzle. He was mostly quiet, but he would say pocket words to himself throughout the day, perhaps as reminders that small things preceded bigger ones.

Despite its location, Maurice didn’t mind his tiny apartment. It would have been cramped if he had retained anything that reminded him of anything else. But other than his fish tank, glowing placid purple in the night, the only superfluous things he kept were his hat

from Germany and the ticket stub from the single time he had ever glided down the tracks 96 yards away.

It was 8:24 AM in June and Maurice was carefully placing letters in tiny boxes when the girl ran through the sloppy combination of grass and concrete below his balcony. She was carrying her shoes in her left hand and a piece of paper in her right. He smiled as her head darted back and forth.

“Excuse me!” she yelped, “Do you have the time? I have a new job and a real schedule and my train and I—well, do you know what time it is!?”

He kindly checked his watch, chuckling at how frazzled she was. “Five minutes ‘til the 8:30 train, Miss. Good luck with your real schedule.”

She smiled with bright green eyes in tacit praise to Maurice and hustled barefoot through the mobs of business suits to just make it into her seat. Looking toward the tracks, he saw her wave anxiously from the window.

Every day that summer he saw her sprint by. Though she was always late, she was on better schedule than any of the trains. She had long hair and never wore anything that didn’t have flowers on it. She sometimes wore headphones and hummed, off-key, with whatever she was listening to. He would smile and return to his pocket words.

Maurice awoke early one morning. He looked around his bedroom and the window was giant and tiny and misplaced. His walls could no longer contain his miniature furniture or his enormous body. Something was wrong and he could feel it. His left hand was useless, and he almost laughed until he realized he didn’t understand what “funny” meant anymore. Pain careened, faster than any train he had seen, through his left cheek, his skull, his shoulder blade, his back. He commanded himself to hear whatever he could, which happened to be the horrendous cacophonies of metal screeching down the tracks outside. Never had it sounded uglier.

He reached for his watch and batted it toward his eyes, gray, glossy, pupils widening and contracting; the view from a train hurtling in out of black tunnel openings. What he saw was a line bent once and hooked at the bottom: 5. He fell out of bed onto the old carpet. Another moan of the train, ticking and shooting past outside. He knew there was a schedule and he knew time had elapsed. The lilac glow of the fish tank was fusing with the orange

light of rising sun. Maurice scrambled for comfort. He desperately tried to recite his pocket words. *Ace. Eve. Era. Lop. Ore. Tea. Sin. Woo.* But the list of words he meant came out as only one, the collective mumble of a tongue now too large for its mouth.

He sat and waited there on the floor, surrendering. It had taken mere seconds (or something like seconds) for him to forget everything he knew about the time. He knew nothing about where he was, why he was. But he knew he had somewhere to be, someone to see. He thought of her. *Have I seen her today? Do I even know her name? Will she help me?* He saw himself lifting a shaking right hand with a questionable number of fingers.

Another train. Another and another. They just got louder as the sanguinary lake in Maurice's head was filling up. *She'll miss it. I'll miss it. No time.* He saw crossword boxes all over his walls and his skin. They were dark and small. In his last jolt of consciousness, he jammed his right hand into the pocket of his bathrobe.

Ana (3 letters) scurried into the courtyard and glanced halfway up the cracking apartment wall. She paused, yanked out her headphones, and parted her lips to ask—he wasn't there. She scanned back down the building, peeling and yellow, and let her head continue down in noiseless lament. She dropped her shoes, one at a time, on the ground. Without wiping the grass from the bottoms of her feet, she slipped them into high heels that suddenly seemed too formal. Ana replaced one headphone and turned to watch her 8:30 train disappear. She sighed and felt herself move in an unfamiliar amble towards the station. Fifty cents bought her a newspaper. Slumped on a bench at the platform, Ana peeled open the delicate gray paper and turned to her favorite section. First across, then down, until the 9:00 pulled in and released its breath.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Katherine Davern

“Salt Water”

Should you ever decide to cram yourself into a very large washing machine, I imagine you would experience a similar feeling. However, you would most likely taste soap instead of salt water, which I would consider equally if not more unpleasant. The upside, however, is that you would soon find that you have the pleasure of opening the door to the washing machine to take a breath of air should your body ask for it. Unfortunately for me, the washing machine holding me on spin cycle happened to be the largest on the planet, something also known as the Pacific Ocean.

It's an interesting experience; not knowing which way is up, laughing underwater until you realize that the air bubbles released by the squeals that usually accompany happiness do not behave like boomerangs. That with each somersault joy turns into anxiety, which turns all too quickly into terror. Clawing at a liquid is about as worthless as it sounds. It's not until a piece of coral takes a bit of your shoulder that you can turn yourself around, plant your feet, and propel yourself in the direction of your lungs' desire. Often you take your long awaited breath prematurely, gulping down exorbitant amounts of the enemy salt water, making your arrival to the surface almost as unenjoyable as your stay below it.

The band that penned the famous song, “September,” had it right. We love Earth, Wind & Fire because their name refers to all of nature's forces that we have at least some idea of how to handle. The fourth, water, is the tricky part. Fresh water is necessary for our survival, but the overwhelming majority of water contains salt. This added ingredient invalidates the one real use that we humans can employ. It is estimated that between fifty and eighty percent of life on earth exists beneath the surface of the ocean. The interesting thing is that humans have only explored ten percent of the 140 million square miles that the ocean covers. We do know that the all-encompassing ocean, unlike the land-bound reservoirs called lakes, is filled with salt water. If so much life can exist in this vast hypertonic solution, salt water must have qualities that go beyond its ability to drown us.

A day after the surgeons had finished creating four craters in the back of my mouth, I began my part: keeping the new holes from becoming infected. This required gargling a salt water rinse three times daily. Once inside my mouth, its job would be to reduce swelling and drive away the bacteria so hoping to find their home in the spaces that my wisdom teeth had recently vacated. The first day of this process was a mess. The rinse did not taste like coffee ice cream, and the sink was constantly stained with the stringy red mucus that comes as the child of salt water and blood. The quantities of the gooey muck waned as the number of days using the rinse climbed. By the end of the process, the salt water had succeeded in its mission of preventing my jowls from infection. It healed them.

Salt water can heal us emotionally as well as physically. Not only can it keep bacteria from entering our bodies, it can heal from the inside out.

We may not be able to survive as a part of the ocean, but salt water survives within our beings at all parts of our lives. This fact manifests itself in the drops that issue from the corners of our eyes and slide down our cheeks when extreme emotions require something past emitting sounds.

The first time, I didn't mean it. I didn't think it was my fault. But he certainly did. So I said I was sorry. Maybe it would placate him and we could move on. But it didn't work quite the way I expected. Instead, he took my apology as a confession. By saying sorry, he said, I assumed responsibility. After a lot of words were thrown at me, I started to believe him. Maybe he was right. Maybe it was my fault. Maybe I had more to drink than I remembered; maybe I really was flirting with that boy at the bar. Maybe when Anna assigned him, her friend, to walk me home, maybe I knew what was coming. Maybe my borrowed clothes had a v-neck cut too low. Maybe I was asking for it. I didn't know anymore. I was lost in that wave again; I didn't know which way was up. So I said I was sorry once more. And I meant it. A little salt water could have helped at that moment. My tear glands, unfortunately, were not willing to cooperate. To him, my words were insignificant when unaccompanied by any physical evidence of my remorse. His facial expression didn't change. His arms

remained crossed, his jaw set. His blue eyes that I loved to trace bore no warmth. It felt like an eternity that we stared at each other like that.

I sat on my bed at home, knees pulled into my chest, mind turning over and over every aspect of that night. I didn't know who was right. I didn't have any answers anymore. It seemed all I could do was stare. And then the water came. My eyes burned as it filled my lids. First just one line traced my cheek. And then my face was soaked. I couldn't stop. I was drowning in my own tears. But it wasn't terrifying this time. I hadn't cried since my return from Syracuse. The rush of salt water was the release I had so desperately been seeking.

Dolphins are one type of animal that lives in salt water. They have developed a tough skin that keeps salt water from entering their bodies and drying out organs, and at the same time they spend almost their entire lives beneath the waves. Dolphins, like us, need air to survive. So every couple minutes, they come to the surface to start over. They release old air from their lungs for a fresh supply of oxygen, and with it, they dive back beneath the waves to begin a new underwater adventure.

I tipped the yellow girl with the umbrella upside down, watching her contents pour into the tub and mix with the steaming water. The big toe on my left foot was the first to feel its effects. Almost too hot: just right. I watched as the translucent water climbed up my calves as I slid into the tub. I lowered the rest of my body, knowing that it was going to hurt. It did. It found its way into the places on my legs where the skin had been pulled away by dirty fingernails. Layers of cover-up could not keep the salt from entering the thin, jagged lines on my neck, purple on the outside, still red in the middle. I shut my eyes and lowered my head slowly until the water finally, mercifully, covered my entire being. The salt water that burned into my damaged skin seemed to give me my answer.

For a moment, you can't find the surface. You are reminded of your adventure in Earth's washing machine. But it's there, millimeters away from your burning nostrils. You move upward, this time certain that your sense of direction is correct. Your lungs are replenished with a new breath of that life-sustaining gas, and you rise from the salt water, healed, ready to begin a new adventure.

Kristal Ruiz

“Dishonor”

I remember the sour taste in my mouth as if I had just eaten a whole lemon. The sting hit my nose and everything instantly began to smell like rotten eggs and spoiled milk. Every time my eyes blinked, spots would appear and taunt me, following my gaze. Warm drops ran from my lashes down the hills of my face. The beat of my heart and my exhale were all my ears would hear yet I knew that it was loud because the city is never quiet. I was trapped in my own head. A prisoner of my own thoughts and at some point my own heart beat drove me insane instead of calming me.

The mother-daughter bond that words could do no justice in describing was nothing more than a distant memory now.

I remember the day the sandpaper palm met the left side of my face. The world slowed down and I was able to count the seconds before the imprints of the pinky, ring, middle, pointer and thumb tainted my cheek. The world had slowed and gone silent, again. It was apparent that she was talking her mouth moved, open, tightened and released. But my ears heard nothing, save for the count of my heart beat and the yelp that came in the place of the exhale. The cold tiles beneath me caught my fall, the wall behind me cradling my back as my left hand melted into the imprint: pinky, ring, middle, pointer, and thumb.

I remember the bang, crack, growl, and snap. The face is red with hate, anger, fear and disappointment. The eyes, fighting back tears hold sorrow, forbidden understandings, desperation and love. Sweat drips slightly off of it making the roots of the hair damp. I can smell the heat that radiates off of her. The stench of fire burning from the very core of her being penetrates my own skin causing every inch of my body to tighten. I can feel the power of her force as she squeezes my upper arm and shook it like a rattle. Broken lips are met with the taste of guilt the gush from my eyes. Worn out chocolate brown cushions sit under me, a place where we have sat together laughed together, watched movies and cried together. My eyes

travel past her, and through the windows I can see the dark night and the shining moon slowly creeping into the heights of the sky. Behind me there is a blue wall that embraces a picture of Israel on it, the city that is to be called holy, the land of the chosen people, a people who are forgiving, compassionate and understanding. The gripping hand had released my arm only to grab a thick book, bound in leather, The Holy Bible. She threw it at me; her vocal chords began to vibrate. The sound crept up her throat ripping through her lips creating a sound that echoed far beyond my ears. Every word that fell off her tongue was drenched with poison as they hit my ears.

Dyke!

Butch!

You disgust me!

We once shared secrets, I would lay my head on her lap so she could play with my hair, a sacred space between us where pink dresses, black tap shoes, manicures, pedicures and braided hair were all that mattered. The eyes of a mother that once looked upon her daughter with pride were now piercing through me with shame. She had been robbed of something precious. She no longer had control. Beneath the perplexity was nothing less than a helpless soul being held at knife point by the fruit of her womb; her daughter was ruining everything. I was ruining everything. A face that was once overjoyed was now run down; a heart that once beat with delight was now racing with anxiety and doubt. A body that was once held with strength and confidence became distraught, fatigued, and limp. All traces of life were slipping away. There was raw empty space that was bleeding in agony eager for a strand of hope that the truth would be a lie.

“Tell me about this boyfriend of yours.”

“There is no boyfriend.”

I remember the pain, the embarrassment, the resentment in the depths of her eyes. A sea of blue, green and gray could not hide or disguise the black oil that lay on the surface. Her words were sharp, death by tongue. Her embrace was gentle, her touch full of sympathy and pity. Fury and frustration seemed to be taken back, hovering close by. She kept me close, so close that, we would take each breath together. Inhale. Exhale. A rhythmic play on the power and control that would soon become

my future. She thought keeping me close would fix everything, but there was nothing to fix I knew this to be true.

I remember sitting at the kitchen table wondering what I had done wrong. Had I been stupid for beginning the conversation in the first place? Blank stares came at me like darts flying towards the target across the table. All that was said was that's a joke right? *Arroz con abichuela, pollo y café con leche* on the stove fill the aroma of the room. Things that once brought comfort now have been spoiled with dishonor, eating away at every thought, feeling and dream. Every nerve in my body stood at attention. It wasn't funny, there were no smiles, and no chuckles of laughter, just silence as the word *girlfriend* hung in the air where it obviously should not have been.

.

I remember the first time I saw her and felt like I was in a fairytale. Caramel skin, long chocolate brown hair, brown eyes that sparkled in the sunlight and a captivating smile. I remember the whole world changed colors when we were together even if it was just for a little while. Everything around me was fresh like the first day of spring but comforting like the warmth of fall. Her embrace, her kiss, her love was all I needed. Every part of my body was in unison with hers. Everything about her seemed perfect and I was hopelessly in love. The day I realized that love was real and could not be found in a story book was the world had shifted from under my feet. It was the day I stepped out from behind my mask and told my mother the truth.

“Mom, I have to be honest. There is something I have to tell you. . .”

DRAMA

WAKE UP WALTER

A Play

By

Dominic Grenga

Characters

WALTER GAGEN, 19-year old college student

NICK GAGEN, 21-year old brother of WALTER, loves being in control

MIKE, 19-year old best friend of WALTER

Setting

Bonnaroo Music Festival in Manchester, Tennessee. It's 8:30 am and the temperature is already in the 80s. Early June, 2008.

Lights up to reveal three sleeping bags underneath a large tarp in the middle of the stage. WALTER is in the one on the left; MIKE is in the one in the middle. The right sleeping bag is empty. Both Mike and Walter are asleep.

(Enter NICK, who walks behind the tarp and returns with a mini-grill. He puts the grill down stage left next to a cooler, goes back behind the tent, and returns with charcoal. Nick pours some charcoal in the grill, and leaves the rest on the ground next to the grill. He then lights it, and places the lid on. Nick walks over to Walter and shakes his shoulder.)

NICK

Hey, bro, wake up. Come on, Walt wake up.

(WALTER grumbles and sits up)

NICK (cont.)

Are you done?

WALTER

Am I done what? What time is it?

NICK

Sleeping. You should shower, you smell like shit. And it's 8:30.

WALTER

What the hell? We don't need to be anywhere for another four hours!
I'm going back to sleep.

(Lays back down)

NICK

No you're not. We have to start planning the day. Plus you have to
go get ice for the cooler, the bag from last night melted already.

WALTER

You get ice, I'm going back to sleep. Or ask Mike, it's his turn to
get it anyway.

NICK

Mike's asleep.

WALTER

And?

NICK

(Pauses) I don't wanna wake him up.

WALTER

Seriously!? Just cuz Mom had you first doesn't mean you can boss me around all the time.

NICK

Yes it does. And honestly, you smell awful, so go shower and bring back a couple bags of ice.

WALTER

There's no point in showering when the second you finish you start to sweat again.

NICK

Fine. I'll get the ice *this time*, but you and Mike are paying for all the ice for the rest of today and tomorrow.

WALTER

(mumbles under his breath) Yeah we'll see about that.

NICK

(annoyed) What was that?

WALTER

(raising his voice) I said fine! Geez!

NICK

Yeah whatever Walter. You're just pissed because you haven't eaten anything yet. The grill should be heated up by now so why don't you cook some burgers while I get the ice.

WALTER

I want two dogs.

NICK

Whatever man, you're the one doing the grilling. Just make me a burger, will ya?

(exit NICK. MIKE sits up in his sleeping bag and rubs his eyes.)

MIKE

What was that all about?

WALTER

Ice, can you believe that? That ass woke me up to see if I was done sleeping and tell me to go get ice! You want anything off the grill by the way?

MIKE

(laughs) No way! He's been a jerk to you this whole trip. That drive down here was brutal. And ya, how 'bout a burger? Nothing like waking up to grill-food!

(WALTER walks over to the cooler and pulls out two hot dogs and two hamburgers and places them on the grill.)

WALTER

Tell me about it. Were you awake when he yelled at me about the cigarette in the car?

MIKE

(imitating NICK) Walt, I know you haven't been smoking as long as I have, but you can't be that reckless when you ash your cigarettes or it'll come back in the window and hit me!

WALTER

(laughs) It's like every little mistake I make he has something to say about it.

MIKE

Yeah it's pretty bad. Plus the fact that he doesn't care which bands anyone want to see when he writes up those master plans of his.

WALTER

Yeah I know. At least he kinda listens to you. Maybe I should just tell you who I want to see and you can mention it to him?

MIKE

Yeah that might work. What did you do to piss him off anyways?

WALTER

Nothing! Well, I don't think. (Pauses) Actually, I did sleep with Becky.

MIKE

(raising his voice) You did what?! No wonder why he's so mad.

WALTER

(chuckling) What? There's no way he found out. We were both drunk and Nick hadn't come back from school yet.

MIKE

(half laughing, half serious) Dude, you slept with your brother's girlfriend. What if she told him? Come on man, you know how protective he is.

WALTER

Why would she tell him? It was a drunk mistake on both our parts. Plus they were on a break at the time. Anyway, when she came to say goodbye before we left she wouldn't even look at me, she was so embarrassed.

MIKE

You're insane man. When did this happen?

WALTER

About a month and a half ago. It was right after she thought he cheated on her, so she broke it off with him. Then a few weeks later she found out the truth. She forgave him, and even though he hasn't *really* recovered, they've been spending a lot of time together lately so I think they're getting back together soon.

MIKE

Damn man. Oh, heads up, I think he's coming back.

(WALTER walks over to the grill and flips the food. Enter NICK with two bags of ice. He goes and empties them in the cooler.)

NICK

(looking at MIKE) You're finally up? Good we gotta figure out what bands we want to see today. How's the food coming?

WALTER

It needs a little longer.

NICK

I can't believe this place, I can't walk two feet without people trying to sell me some type of drug. Do either of you guys know what doses are?

MIKE

WALTER

Nope.

No idea.

NICK

(pulling out a schedule) Well, anyway, the first bands go on is at 1, so we have to leave here between noon and 12:15. Widespread Panic is playing then—

WALTER

Nick, I don't—

NICK

(talking over WALTER) and there's no way I'm missing that, and then when they're done we should head over to That Stage and see OAR.

WALTER

Nick!

NICK

(Continuing over WALTER) Then we'll grab a bite to eat and get to This Stage in time to see Iron and Wine, before ending our night with Jack Johnson at 9 and Kanye at midnight.

WALTER

(after repeated attempts to get NICK's attention) Hey, listen a second! What makes you think we want to see all those bands? I thought we were gonna figure this out between the three of us.

NICK

(annoyed) Yeah well, while you guys we're sitting around doing nothing, I was trying to figure out a way to be as efficient as possible. And that's the perfect plan, do you have any better ideas?

WALTER

Um, hello? We have different tastes in music. Just because you like a band doesn't mean I do. It's two against one here *Nicholas*, try thinking of someone else.

MIKE

Nick, your schedule sounds well planned out and everything, but you know we don't care for those kind of bands. We want to see some new faces on stage.

WALTER

You've already seen OAR and Jack Johnson twelve times between the two of them, you said it yourself on the ride down here! What's the point in seeing them again?

NICK

I also said that those two bands put on the best shows out of anyone I've seen, and if you were listening when I said that, maybe you would have heard that part. Why would I want to see some scrub on stage when I can be guaranteed a good show? This is my fourth festival, so I think I know more than most that you have to see the headlines.

WALTER

(getting aggravated) You go to school in New York City, for chrissakes, you can see those bands anytime! And what about people like BB King and Robert Plant? You know, classic rock stars that shaped the music industry that won't be alive much longer let alone touring the country? Like you would know anything about classics would you Nick?

MIKE

Calm down guys, I don't know why everything turns in a fight with you.

WALTER

Alright, you know what? Go see who you want to see. We'll go see who we want to see. There. Life is about compromises, and we just made one. I'm going to the bathroom, you take care of the grill.

(exit Walter. NICK goes over and checks on the grill.)

NICK

I'm really getting sick of his attitude. I try to reason with him and all he does is try to defy me. You're his best friend, you should try talking some sense into him.

MIKE

I don't know, man. I'd rather stay out of this sibling rivalry you guys got going on. You're his brother, why don't you do it?

NICK

I've been trying his whole life. He didn't listen to me when we were younger, and he doesn't listen now. The kid just doesn't understand reason.

MIKE

Well, maybe you should be a little easier on him.

NICK

What are you talking about?

MIKE

Uh, you know. (Pauses and scratches his head) I don't know, you just seem to have a short temper with him, that's all.

NICK

His fuse is even shorter than mine. Trust me, I've tried to be nice, and that doesn't get me anywhere.

NICK (CONT.)

Plus if that kid pulled some of the things he's done to me on you, you'd be just as bitter.

MIKE

(confused) What do you mean?

NICK

Nevermind. Hand me some buns, will you?

(MIKE grabs a package from next to the cooler and tosses it to NICK. NICK puts the hot dogs and burgers in the buns and hands one to MIKE. Enter WALTER)

WALTER
Are my dogs ready yet?

NICK
Yeah here you go.

(Passes two hot dogs to WALTER
and a burger to MIKE)

WALTER
Aw what the hell this one's burnt!

NICK
Yeah, well I didn't wanna undercook it.

WALTER
BS, you probably did it on purpose.

NICK
If I did it on purpose why wouldn't I burn both of them? Just eat
it, it's gonna taste the same either way.

WALTER
(Beat) Whatever.

(The three sit there in
silence eating their food.
They finish after a few
beats.)

NICK
So what are we doing about the bands? Do you really want to split
up? I'm telling you OAR and Jack Johnson are worth seeing.

WALTER
How many times do I have to say that I don't want to see them?

NICK
You're making a mistake, that's all I'm saying. Why are you so short
with me? I'm just asking.

WALTER
(raising his voice) Because you ask the same questions over and over
again. You think that because you are the older one that everything
has to be done your way, and I'm getting really sick of it. I only
came on this trip with you because you had nobody else to go with,
but now I'm really starting to regret it.

NICK
(trying to remain calm) I really don't get you man. You've been
acting really strange the last month or so. I know you've always
felt jealous or whatever of me but I don't know what could have
possibly turned you into such a hostile person, but I don't like it.

WALTER
(Irritated) How can you say I'm the one acting weird? Ever since
Becky—

NICK

(interrupting) That's it! It's Becky isn't it? You're jealous, I can tell. I know you haven't had much success with girls in the past, but that's no reason to hate me just because I can get a girlfriend and you can't.

WALTER

(Yelling and moving towards NICK) What?! First off, me getting a girl is not the issue here. I can get a girlfriend anytime I want. This issue is that you've been a dick to me ever since you got back together and I'm sick of it. Well I got news for you buddy, I--

NICK

(interrupting, moving towards WALTER) You what? You think you had a chance with Becky? Do you *looove* her? There it is, your secret is out. I know plenty of guys think she's hot, but I always knew you would be the one to try and make a move just to spite me.

MIKE

(raising his voice and getting in between NICK and WALTER) What's wrong with you guys? This is fuckin' ridiculous.

WALTER

You know what Mike, you're right. Guess what Nick? I slept with Becky. That's right Nick. I slept with your girlfriend. How does it feel? And you know what else? It was *amazing*!

NICK

(laughs) You really didn't think she would tell me that? I know we're not together right now, but we're still really close. We've been talking a lot lately if you haven't noticed, and mostly about you.

WALTER

(confused, backs off NICK) I...What are you talking about?

NICK

Well as it turns out, Becky hasn't exactly felt herself since you guys got together. And as a matter of fact, she's late, Walter. About a month and a half late.

THE LIFE LINE

A Play

by

Andrew Nelson

Characters

PETER ANDERSON, Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

CYNTHIA CHRYSLER, Assistant Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

VOICE OF SUPER BOWL ANNOUNCER, coming from the TV

Setting

Peter's House. Super Bowl Sunday.

Lights up to reveal PETER speaking to a small group of employees at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in his living room.

PETER

Thank you all for coming to my Super Bowl party. I decided to host this party for many reason. Firstly, so that we can all get to know each other, and interact outside of the work environment. Secondly, because I have an announcement. This Super Bowl, the Philadelphia Museum of Art has a strong reason to cheer on the Eagles. I have made a bet with Director Thompson, at the San Diego Museum of Art, that we are going to win. Go Eagles! Let's watch.

(PETER picks up the remote off of the coffee table and turns up the volume)

SUPER BOWL ANNOUNCER

Welcome back to Super Bowl Forty-Five. This epic game has been one for the history books. The Philadelphia Eagles and the San Diego Charges have both played exceptional games. How about that interception by the Eagles in the 3rd quarter. Right now the game is tied, 14 to 12 with the Chargers leading and 5 minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. Let's see which team wants to win more, which team's fans will be celebrating tonight, which city will have the bragging rights, and which coast has the winning Super Bowl team. San Diego kicks off.

PETER

(Yelling over the TV) Catch it! Catch it! Catch it! Run! Run!

SUPER BOWL ANNOUNCER

(Cont.) And the Eagles receive the kick and make it to the forty-yard line.

(CYNTHIA stands up from the couch and walks over to PETER, she motions to him to follow. They both walk into the kitchen)

CYNTHIA

Peter, do you have a second?

PETER

Of course.

(CYNTHIA stands between PETER and the small TV set up on the kitchen counter)

CYNTHIA

I never understood why the Super Bowl is so important. It's a stupid game without any meaning. People only watch the Super Bowl for the commercials now, and besides-

PETER

(Interrupting) It's not just a stupid game. It's a game that is quintessential to the American spirit. You're right, it's commercialized, but that's part of what makes it American. It's a part of the fabric of our identity. From the very beginning, it distinguished us from those rugby-playing Brits.

CYNTHIA

Please, you make it sound like it is as important to the American identity as the Revolutionary War. I can almost hear Patrick Henry, 'Give me the Super Bowl, or give me death.' Anyway, I wanted to ask you about that bet you made with the San Diego Museum of Art (CYNTHIA waits for PETER to volunteer more information) I wanted to ask why you made the bet. I can't understand what would provoke you to make the bet.

PETER

Well, the bet is mutual. Director Thompson and myself both bet that our teams would win the Super Bowl. I made the bet because -

CYNTHIA

(interruption) And what exactly did you bet with?

PETER

We both bet that the losing team would send an object from their collection to the winning team for a year-long loan.

CYNTHIA

(Shocked) An object from our collection! My God! You bet an object from our collection that Philadelphia would win the Super Bowl. Wait, which object did you bet?

PETER

(Confident) This is the best part. I bet Winslow Homer's painting of the Life Line, and Director Thompson bet Winslow Homer's drawing of the Life Line that Homer created in preparation for the painting. The objects belong together. It will make for a good show because when they are together people will be able to examine the way Homer composed his canvases.

CYNTHIA

(mad) A good show? The Super Bowl is a good show. Losing a valued object of our collection because a Philadelphia football team loses a stupid game is not a good show. It's pathetic. It's something a gambling addict would do. You're the Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, not some high roller at Las Vegas. This is irresponsible. Your reckless behavior will not be tolerated. As soon as I meet with the Board.

PETER

I don't think the Board needs to be brought into this.

CYNTHIA

Of course the Board needs to be told about this. Don't you understand that the painting is worth money? Last time I checked, Winslow Homer's watercolors were selling for around 4 million in the Auction Houses. And you're betting with one of his oil paintings. Of course this is under the jurisdiction of the Board. The Board is in charge of keeping this institution profitable. And, I might add, keeping you in check.

PETER

It's a year-long loan. It's not like we are losing 4 million dollars. Besides, there is a long history of making Super Bowl

bets, mayors of cities do it, Governors do it, and everyone else does it. Hell, they even make Super Bowl odds at Los Vegas.

CYNTHIA

Peter, you can't make bets with objects from our collection without telling anyone. Why did I hear this just today? Don't you think you should have at least told me about it before you finalized it? Telling me would have been the least you should have done. You should have also proposed the wager to the Board.

PETER

Cynthia, I don't need to waste the time of the Board members by asking them permission whether or not I can do my job. Besides, I would be happy to give you a full report of how well the year-long exhibition goes with San Diego's drawing hanging next to our painting in our gallery after we win the Super Bowl.

CYNTHIA

But this has never been done before. We have never had a Director make bets with the museum collection. This is exactly why I am the assistant director, to determine whether or not this type of action is appropriate. Personally, I feel like a year-long loan is too long.

PETER

In comparison to our museum's history of almost a century a year-long loan is fraction of time. It will be over before you know it.

CYNTHIA

Peter, I think you know that we are losing more and more visitors every year. We are losing money from donations every year. Times are tough. The last thing we need is to start losing our collection. I don't think people come here to see empty canvases. It doesn't matter how long the loan is. Removing a painting from our collection is a big deal.

PETER

I think that you are blowing this out of proportion. I don't think you understand some of the reasons why I made the bet, which I would gladly explain. But honestly, this is just a really unimportant bet I made with director Thompson over twitter. It's not the end of our museum.

(CYNTHIA's cell phone rings. She looks to see who it is)

CYNTHIA

Sorry, I have to take this. (on the phone) Hello (beat) Yes, Dave, I'm actually speaking to him right now.

(CYNTHIA walks into the corner of the room and continues talking on her cell phone. PETER focuses his takes the remote and turns up the volume on the TV)

ANNOUNCER

Welcome back to Super Bowl forty-five. We have two and half minutes left and the game is tied at fourteen to fourteen. The ball is switching hands and the Eagles are kicking off.

PETER

Miss it! Miss it! Miss it! Damn! Tackle him!

(CYNTHIA hangs up the phone and walks back her chair and takes a seat. PETER continues to watch the game)

ANNOUNCER

The Charges catch the ball and made it to the thirty-yard line. And now it's time for the Ford Fun Fact of the game, there is more than just city pride on the line this Super Bowl, in an unusual break of formality, the Directors of both the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the San Diego Museum of Art have each bet a painting that their team will win this year's Super Bowl.

(We can hear the employees of the museum cheering in the living Room)

CYNTHIA

Now the whole world knows how reckless you are!

PETER

At least the world knows about us now. You just said it, the number of visitors we have is reducing every year. One of the reasons I made this bet was for the publicity. Yeah, this might be the first time that we have ever done something like this, but at least it draws attention towards us. The bet gives our institution some needed free publicity. You just heard the most far-reaching advertisement for the Philadelphia Museum of Art that has ever been broadcast. And it was free!

CYNTHIA

(stubborn) It still made you look reckless.

CYNTHIA

I was talking to Dave, the accountant for the museum, before the game started. He said that he has finished the monthly budget report. It doesn't look good. The last show took a hit to our budget. Times are tough for museums.

PETER

That's another reason why I made the bet. Times are tough and if museums are going to survive these challenging economic times we have to partner up and work with each other. This bet allowed me to get to know the Director Thompson over at the San Diego Museum of Art. In fact, he already told me that he is looking forward to creating an exhibition between our two museums.

CYNTHIA

Don't you think there was a less embarrassing way to create a relationship with another museum? Why not a traditional show or a simple exchange of objects.

PETER

Why not a traditional show? Because I am also trying to change the perception of the museum. People think that museums are places for stuffy academics. They don't feel welcome or comfortable when they come here. I'm trying to change that. Not only by changing the atmosphere of the building, but also by changing the way that people see what I do. What better way to show people that museums are places for everyman, than to show people the directors of museums making a Super Bowl bet.

CYNTHIA

You think that museums are for everyman. I don't think you want *that* type of person to come into our museum. You know,

the kind of person that watches the Super Bowl, drinking beer and eating nachos. That's the kind of person you want to come to our museum.

PETER

Yes I am talking about that type of person, the everyman, the average Joe, they are the people that I want to visit our museum.

CYNTHIA

But did you have to gamble a piece of high art? It's so low brow.

PETER

I think it creates a popular interest in the art. I made the bet because I think people can identify with the Super Bowl. They know what Super Bowl bets are about. They might not understand Winslow Homer. They might not be familiar with the Life Line. But at least they will have one connection the art in this museum.

CYNTHIA

You have gone over the top, I think you are taking too big of a risk for this well established museum.

PETER

(excited) That's exactly it! I'm taking a risk. Something the Board could never do. I might be making a mistake, but I'm doing something. And I think I am doing something exciting. I'm challenging the status quo. I'm making people rethink what being a museum director is all about and for that matter what museums are all about. We are well established but we are also losing money and the public's interest. It's time to shake things up around here. It's time to change the way we do things. Did you ask me why I didn't ask for the Board's approval? Maybe because you guys never take any risks. You would never take the leap of faith. You never jump out on the life line. We are drowning like the woman in Winslow Homer's painting, we are a drowning institution and the board isn't making the leap of faith onto the life line to save themselves. To save us. (pause, looks right at CYNTHIA) Look, I'm on the same side that you are on. I want the arts to become popular again. I want this institution to succeed. But we need to make some changes. You know as well as I know that our last show was a disaster. What was it? How local artists evoke the art of Van Gogh. How kitsch. No wonder it did not draw big crowds. It was a boring show. It's time that we invite guest curators to do a show. It's time we let some young professionals work here, who have fresh ideas, who want to take risks, can will -

(Suddenly distracted by the TV.
PETER grabs the remote and turns
the volume up)

ANNOUNCER

The ball is intercepted by Philadelphia. He's running. Number thirty-two, Brent Walker is sprinting down field. The path is clear.

PETER

Run! Run! You can make it!

ANNOUNCER

Touchdown Eagles!

(The applause from the employees
in the living room can be heard,
while PETER celebrates the
touchdown. Cynthia watches in
amazement.)

PETER

(yelling) We did it! Oh my god! We won. The Eagles are going to win the Super Bowl!

ANNOUNCER

With thirty seconds left, I don't think I am taking too big a risk and announcing that the Eagles are this year's Super Bowl champions.

(Turns the volume down)

PETER

I knew we were going to win. Philadelphia is a better team than San Diego, anyway.

CYNTHIA

(Slightly smiling) So Homer's drawing of the Life Line is going to come here?

PETER

Yeah, it looks like the San Diego Museum of Art is going to loan us the drawing for a year. We will have to hang it next to our painting. It will look great in our American collection.

CYNTHIA

You know, I think you are right. That will make a good show.

PETER

Now that I know Director Thompson, maybe we can work something out. Maybe a more traditional exchange. Look the game is about it end.

(PETER starts watching the TV again. Turns the Volume up)

ANNOUNCER

Ten seconds left until the Eagles win the Super Bowl. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. And the Eagles win the Lombardi trophy this year.

(PETER's phone buzzes. He looks and holds the phone so that he can read it)

PETER

Look I got a text from Director Thompson. He says, 'Good game and a good bet between two new friends. I look forward to personally delivering our drawing of Winslow Homer's the Life Line and seeing it hanging in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.'

PETER

I'll have to introduce you to him, when he comes. Maybe you can tell him how disgusted you are that two museum directors would ever make a bet.

CYNTHIA

I guess it wasn't that bad of an idea. I bet you won't remember.

PETER

What are you going to bet, one of our Rodin sculpture?

(They both laugh. PETER turns off the TV. CYNTHIA starts to walk off stage, then stops at the sound of the phone ringing. PETER picks it up)

PETER

Hello, this is Peter Anderson (pause) yes, I'm Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (Pause) Oh Charles Wingate, from the BBC? (Pause) You want to do a story about the bet we made? I can tell you all about it.

(EXIT CYNTHIA. BLACKOUT)

THE PSYCHOANALYST'S WIFE

A Play

by

Greg Oxenberg

Characters

LUCY, A slender woman with short dark hair, in her 30's.

THOMAS, A tall, slightly overweight man in his 40's. He is a psychiatrist, and Lucy's husband.

Setting

The kitchen of their apartment in Los Angeles. The present.

Lights up to reveal
LUCY sitting alone
at the kitchen
table. She is
hunched over and
clearly distraught. The
kitchen is nicely
decorated and
furnished.

(LUCY can be heard
softly singing)

LUCY

*"That town will make you crazy
Just give it a little time
You'll be walking 'round in circles
Down at Hollywood and Vine
You'll be waitin' on a phone call
At the wrong end of a broom
Yes, that town'll make you crazy
Crazy as a loon"*

Footsteps can be
heard approaching
the kitchen.

(LUCY stops singing
and looks up at
the entrance to the
kitchen.)

(Enter THOMAS, her
husband. He is
holding some
photographs)

THOMAS

(Hesitantly) I found these in the armoire. I've been looking at them
since we got back. I just can't believe he's gone.

(A brief silence as
THOMAS begins to
flip through the
photographs.)

THOMAS (CONT.)

Here he is on the day we brought him home from the hospital. So
handsome. And here he is with your parents on his first birthday...he
looked just like you. Except for the eyes...he had my eyes.

(THOMAS sits down
across from his
wife, placing the
photographs on the
table)

THOMAS (CONT.)

It's just so hard to fathom. One day I'm holding him in my arms,
singing him lullabies and rocking him to sleep. The next day he's
being lowered into the ground in a wooden box. I can't even—

LUCY

I wanted to be left alone, Tom.

(LUCY is trying
hard to avoid
making eye contact
with THOMAS, as if
doing so would
cause her physical
pain)

THOMAS

How are you holding up?

(There is an
awkward silence.
LUCY clearly
doesn't wish to
talk to THOMAS.)

THOMAS (CONT.)

Lucy, I know how badly you must feel about this, but you have to realize it wasn't your fault. It was an accident. It's unhealthy to keep punishing yourself over this. It's going to drive you mad. Did you call your parents bac-

LUCY

I'm sorry Tom, but I really do wish to be left alone.

THOMAS

I think you should--

LUCY

You're always telling me what I should or shouldn't do. How I should or shouldn't feel. What I should or shouldn't think. It's been a very long day, Tom. Please don't make me ask you again.

(THOMAS reaches to
place his hands on
LUCY'S)

THOMAS

Lucy, I've been a doctor long enough to know that being alone is the opposite of what you need right now. Trust me. You must stop blaming yourself. Grieving is a natural part of the process, but please try to listen to me.

LUCY

I'm tired of listening. You're always treating me like one of your fucking patients. I'm so sick of it. I'm supposed to be your wife, not some case study.

(LUCY stands up and
walks over to the
kitchen counter,
her back to THOMAS)

LUCY (CONT.)

You have absolutely no idea how I'm feeling. I don't care how many diplomas you have or how many awards you've won. When it comes to me, you've always been clueless.

THOMAS

Lucy...I just want to help you. I think you're underestimating my experience with these sorts of things.

(LUCY is staring
out the window)

THOMAS (CONT.)

Everything you are experiencing is completely normal. I've seen so many cases precisely like this one.

(LUCY turns around
to face THOMAS. Her
hands are
trembling.)

LUCY

Have you Tom? Then tell me, since you are clearly so brilliant. What exactly is your assessment? Go ahead. I'm all ears.

THOMAS

Don't raise your voice, Lucy. Projecting your anger and frustration on to me certainly won't solve anything.

(THOMAS pauses and
stares at LUCY
intently. His
gaze reflects a mix
of both pity and
fascination)

THOMAS (CONT.)

You know, Freud said that in order to fully recover after the death of a loved one, we must be able to detach emotionally from the deceased. Only then can we grieve—

LUCY

What is your fucking problem? Do you hear yourself talk? Our only son is dead and you're discussing Freud? Is that really all you think about? All you care about? You will never see your son again. He's gone forever. I don't give a fuck about Freud.

(THOMAS shakes his
head in
disapproval.)

THOMAS

Your immaturity truly amazes me sometimes. Listen to me. It wasn't your fault that he drowned. It was not your fault. Period. You have to let it go.

(LUCY begins to cry
extremely hard.
THOMAS looks around
the room. He
appears almost
satisfied with
himself.)

THOMAS (CONT.)

It could've happened to anyone, Lucy. It was merely an accident. You were bathing him. The phone rang in the hallway...I understand how guilty you feel but it's over and we have to try and move on. Dwelling on the past is unhealthy.

(LUCY slowly gets
herself together.
She sits back down
at the table.
Her makeup is
smeared all over
her face.)

LUCY

You have no idea what it's like, Tom. To wake up every morning knowing what I've done. Everyone at that funeral looked right through me. They weren't looking at a person. They all were staring at some great big monster in the middle of a church. I couldn't look any of them in the eyes. I didn't want to. I am a monster, and the whole town knows it.

(THOMAS now remains
silent, an
inquisitive look on
his face.)

LUCY (CONT.)

I didn't plan for it to happen the way it happened. I loved him so much. And now he's gone. All because of me. I don't know how I'll ever be able to live with myself. He didn't deserve to die. He was just a baby.

(THOMAS carefully
assesses the
situation, waiting
for his opening.)

THOMAS

At the funeral, when you collapsed...er...do you remember what was going through your mind? You kept muttering something over and over again. Something about...hmm. Did you have any strange visions or thoughts that may've provoked it? I know that sometimes this can happen to people who have recently experienced very traumatic events.

LUCY

I only saw what I've seen every second of every day since...since he's been gone. I see his body submerged in water. I see his eyes frozen in his skull, no longer belonging to my beautiful son but now completely hollow and unrecognizable. There is no movement at all. The stillness is unsettling. I want to take his body and shake it as hard as I can, but I know there's no point. He is dead, and I killed him. I...

THOMAS

Don't be ridiculous Lucy. It's normal to feel guilt to some extent but by no means did you kill our son. You can't do this to yourself. I'm going to help you as best I can, but I need you to trust me. Please, try to help me help you.

LUCY

Don't you get it Tom? You can't help me. You're too late to help me, and your help is the last thing that I want. I'm so sick and tired of your help. I can't take it anymore.

(LUCY'S arms are
inadvertently revealed
as her body language
gets more aggressive
and THOMAS notices scars
on the inside of her
forearms)

THOMAS

Oh my God, Lucy...when did you start cutting yourself again? How many times have we had this talk? Don't you remember what happened last time? You ended up in the—

LUCY

Yes, I remember Tom. And you know what? I don't care. I don't care about anything. I don't care about you or Freud or the neighbors and the way they look at me. I simply don't care. Does that make me crazy? Because I have to tell you something Tom, if it does, then so be it.

THOMAS

Lucy, you're really starting to scare me. You need help. This isn't a joke. You can't just cut yourself because you feel guilty about what happened to our son. I'm here for you. We can work through this together. You have to know that things are going to get better, as horrible as they seem right now.

(LUCY begins to
smile in a very
distorted manner.)

LUCY

You still don't get it, do you?

THOMAS

Get what? I feel extremely nervous about your mental state.

LUCY

I'm a monster. I don't deserve to live. I killed our son.

THOMAS

Lucy, I swear to God. I am not going to say this ag-

LUCY

I'm a monster and I killed our son. There's nothing you can do or say that can ever change that.

(LUCY begins to
rise up from her
chair. She looks
increasingly
maniacal. She walks
over to the counter
again)

THOMAS

If you're not going to listen to me, I don't know what else I can say. Keep feeling sorry for yourself, see how far that ge-

LUCY

You moron! Don't you see what I've done? I killed our son! I took him into the bathroom. I took off all of his clothes. I ran the water until the tub was full--

THOMAS

Stop it!

LUCY (CONT.)

I put him in the bath. And I held him under the water. I held him there, completely submerged in water as his little body thrashed around for its life. And I held him there--

THOMAS

You're delusional!

LUCY (CONT.)

And I waited until he gave his last kick and all became still. Until all the ripples on the water subsided, and I was staring down into the dead eyes that once belonged to our son. And you know why I did it? Because every time I looked into those eyes I was reminded of you and everything I absolutely hate about you--

THOMAS

This is all a figment of your imagination!

LUCY (CONT.)

How our entire marriage you've treated me like some experimental subject, there for you to manipulate and analyze and hypothesize and draw conclusions from. How when I had my miscarriage you acted as though you had no vested interest in the baby that never came, but were only concerned with my emotional reactions and responses to the tragic circumstance--

THOMAS

Stop...

LUCY (CONT.)

How when I got fired from my job you told me not to overreact. To put things into perspective. "Don't be so childish," you said. "Don't get carried away."--

THOMAS

Lucy...

LUCY (CONT.)

Throughout our entire relationship you've been putting me down, putting me under your microscope, under your thumb. In your attempts to fix me, look what you've done. Are you happy now? Do you like what you see? I am so unbelievably broken I don't even recognize myself anymore. And I have you to thank. Go ahead, Doctor. What would Freud have to say about this one? Give it your best shot.

(THOMAS is completely flabbergasted. He cautiously stands up and walks over to where LUCY is standing with her back to him)

THOMAS

You poor, poor thing. It all makes perfect sense now. You're showing classic signs of posttraumatic stress disorder and paranoid schizophrenia. I can't believe I let this go undetected for as long as it has. Everything is going to be okay, don't worry about it. I'm going to help you to the best of my ability, Lucy. I promise. I'm going to call for an ambulance. In the mean time, I think we all need to calm down. Let me get you a glass of water.

(THOMAS turns and opens a cabinet. He can be seen pouring the glass of water. Before he gives it to LUCY, he ominously removes a bottle of pills and drops a few into the glass. Lights fade.)

END OF PLAY

A SIMPLE TWIST

A Play

by

Caroline Sweeney

Characters

SARAH, A college student in her early 20's that prefers cleanliness and organization.

JEN, A college student in her early 20's, Sarah's roommate, that is energetic, messy and naïve.

Setting

Sarah and Jen's kitchen in their apartment. The present.

Lights up to reveal SARAH, a college student, wiping down the counter tops, putting a bowl away, and then sitting at the kitchen table, typing on her laptop. There is an empty seat next to her.

A door creaks open in the background.

SARAH glances up.

(Enter JEN, SARAH'S roommate, in pajama pants and a tee with messy hair, yawning.)

SARAH

Good morning.

JEN

Ugh. What time is it?

SARAH

Almost noon.

JEN

Man. I need coffee.

SARAH

I left some in the pot. You might wanna microwave it though.

JEN

Thanks.

(JEN heads toward the counter, pours herself some coffee, spills a little, and puts it in the microwave. Then she sits next to SARAH in the empty chair.)

JEN

What time did you wake up?

SARAH

Uh, about 9.

JEN

Really going for it today, huh?

SARAH

Yeah, well I had to finish that play for my English class.
And I finally did!

JEN

Oh yeah? Congrats. How did you finally decide on a topic?

SARAH

(Looks a little nervous) Um, someone told me to just pick a
simple situation and see where it takes me.

(The microwave beeps. JEN gets
up to get her coffee.)

SARAH (CONT.)

(Breathes a sigh of relief and whispers to herself) Saved by
the bell.

(JEN comes back to the table
with her coffee and sits down.)

JEN

Yeah. So what's the simple sitch?

SARAH

Oh, it's pretty boring.

JEN

No way. You were worried about this play and now I can't
believe you're done. Tell me about it!

SARAH

(Stuttering) Uh, well, it's...

JEN

Oh come on, let me see.

(JEN pulls SARAH's laptop across
the table and reads out loud.
SARAH looks extremely nervous.)

JEN (CONT.)

(Smiling) Ohhhh, it's about two roommates, huh? Sophie and
Jane, that's cute.

SARAH

It's really nothing special.

(SARAH reaches across the table
for her laptop but JEN doesn't
let her take it.)

JEN

(Laughing) What are you freaking out about? You're such a
good writer, I just want to read your little play...

SARAH

(Babbling) It's just that I haven't, like, edited it yet and I
don't know what it'll sound like. Plays are different than
stories, ya know. It's just a bunch of dialogue and—

JEN

(Interrupting SARAH) Oh perfect! I'll help you. We can read the parts out loud to each other!

SARAH

Oh, no. You don't have to do that. I'm sure you have homework and stuff you wanna get done for Monday. But thanks.

(SARAH stands up and grabs her laptop, setting it in front of her again on the table.)

JEN

No, really, it's no big deal. I'd actually rather put off my homework for as long as possible.

SARAH

(Looks confused, then sighs) Well, okay. But know that it's just a rough draft. And it's my first play so it's just random and whatever.

JEN

(Smiling) I knew you'd come around.

(JEN pulls her chair over next To SARAH'S.)

JEN (CONT.)

Okay, I'm Jane!

SARAH

Guess that makes me Sophie.

JEN

Oh, it says Sophie walks in the front door and goes to the kitchen to look for a clean cup. Should you go outside to start?

SARAH

No.

JEN

Fine fine. I'll set the scene.

(JEN puts her hands up to quote the word "scene" with her fingers.)

JEN (CONT.)

(In a dramatic, suspenseful tone) Sophie opens the front door and heads to the kitch-

SARAH

(Interrupts JEN, unimpressed) It's actually not a murder mystery, Jen.

JEN

(Playfully jabs back) Well if somebody would've told me the topic of the play, maybe I would've known that.

SARAH

Whatever. You'll find out soon enough.

JEN

Anyways, Sophie's in the kitchen and going to get a glass of water after her early morning run. Sophie starts talking. Go.

SARAH

Okay. Sophie. Frustrated. Are you serious? Why I just did the dishes yesterday! Where are all of the clean cups?!

JEN

Okay. My turn. Jane walks in, looking like she's been hit by a bus, wearing her clothes from the night before and looks at Sophie. What is the matter, Sophie?

SARAH

Sophie. I am dying of thirst and have no idea where all of our cups have gone.

JEN

Jane. Oh my, can you quit slamming the cabinets so hard? I have a pounding headache.

SARAH

Sophie. Really? From what, Jane?

JEN

(Laughing) I can already tell I like Jane. Okay, she says, 'Somehow I got talked into playing beer pong last night after we went to Joey's...'

SARAH

(Smiles) Doesn't surprise me. Sophie. I thought I heard people in our backyard. But you always play beer pong.

JEN

Yes, I love Jane. She says, 'Well, it was not just the beer pong.'

SARAH

Sophie. It never is.

JEN

Jane. It was the flippy cup and speed quarters that really have gotten to me.

SARAH

Ahhh. Knew it.

JEN

Knew what?

SARAH

That's what Sophie says.

JEN

Oh! I like this, getting into our characters, huh?

SARAH

(Nods knowingly) More than you'd think.

JEN

Hmm, where are we? Okay, Jane says, 'Yes, I am sorry about the cups. I bet there is one or two on the deck that no one used.'

SARAH

Sophie. Um, no thank you.

JEN

Jane. Suit yourself. I need some water to take my Tylenol. Are you sure you do not want me to grab you one while I am out there?

SARAH

Sophie. I'm sure.

JEN

I like this so far, Sar! I didn't know plays could be so modern. I was picturing some Romeo and Juliet action or at least a sword fight between guys in tights.

SARAH

(Laughs) Believe it or not, people do actually write non-Shakespearean plays.

JEN

Who would've thought? Maybe I'll write a play.

SARAH

Go for it. I'm sure it'd be entertaining.

JEN

Maybe later. We're only on Scene 1 of yours. Two more to go.

SARAH

Yeah, we don't have—

JEN

(Interrupts SARAH) Scene 2. It's like in Sophie and Jane's living room—

SARAH

(Interrupts JEN) Yeah, I know. I did actually write the play.

JEN

Whoa, okay. You're vacuuming and I—oh wait!

(JEN leaves the room and comes back a second later with a teddy bear.)

SARAH

(Looks at JEN like she is crazy) Like I said, I did write the play and I know I didn't include any small bears in it...

JEN

(Excited) But you did include a puppy! Bear is perfect for the role.

SARAH

(Rolls her eyes) Alright. Whatever.

JEN

Okay, this time I walk into the living room while Sophie is vacuuming. Jane's so excited and says, 'Guess what, Soph?'

SARAH

Sophie. What is it, Jane?

JEN

Jane opens the door and a yellow lab puppy races inside and jumps on the couch. She says, 'Don't you love him?'

SARAH

Sophie jumps back and puts the vacuum in front of her like a shield. She says, 'Where did you get this thing?'

JEN

Jane. Joey's friend adopted the puppy but they cannot have dogs in their apartment complex so I told them he could stay here until they figure it out.

SARAH

Uhh, it sounds so ridiculous. Why did I make the dialogue so stiff?

JEN

Nah, no way. This is your first play. Take it easy on yourself. (Then whispers under her breath) For once.

SARAH

What?

JEN

Nothing. Go on.

SARAH

Fine. Sophie. Uh and how long is it going to take them to figure this situation out?

JEN

Jane. I do not know, I hope awhile! I love this little guy!

SARAH

Sophie. NO!

JEN

Jane. What?

SARAH

Sophie. Please do not let him pee on our couch, Jane! Get him out of here quickly!

JEN

Jane laughs. 'Oh, it will be alright. We can wash the couch cover. Just do not scare him like that,' she says. Then Jane picks up the puppy and heads out of the room.

SARAH

(Mumbling) You mean I'll wash the couch cover.

JEN

End of scene 2! Nice work, Sophie.

SARAH

Ha. Thanks. I am thinking this is getting a little repetitive. I think I know what I want to change so we can stop now.

JEN

You mean we've come this far and you're not going to let me see how it ends?

SARAH

I hate to break it to you, but it's not that exciting. No drastic Oedipus ending or anything.

JEN

First of all, who's Eddie? And second of all, let's just finish this. I like it.

SARAH

No, you just like doing anything other than your own homework.

JEN

Maybe true, but my coffee's kicking in so I'm ready for the finale.

SARAH

(Sarcastically) Break a leg then, champ.

JEN

Yeah! Scene 3, the final one.

(JEN stands up, pushes her chair in behind SARAH so that she is able to see the computer screen.)

SARAH

What are you doing?

JEN

Oh, just so I can really get into Jane's character.

SARAH

(Rolls her eyes and changes the subject quickly) Did you read the new setting?

JEN

Yeah, we both are at a party, right? Talking in the corner or something.

SARAH

Yeah, with red cups in our hands.

JEN

Maybe that'll make my headache go away if we really get some red cups.

SARAH

I'll pass.

JEN

You're no fun. I have heard that actually really works...

(JEN contemplates the thought for a second.)

SARAH

If you still don't feel well, you can just go lay down or something.

JEN

Yeah, I think I will after this.

SARAH

(Unsure and drawn out) Alright...

JEN

Jane is ready. Start us off, Soph.

SARAH

Okay. I'm, err, Sophie's in the corner of the party, alone until-

JEN

Jane backs into her.

SARAH

Right. Because of that, I, I mean, Sophie spills her whole drink all down the front of her.

JEN

I feel like this happened before.

SARAH

(Nervous) What do you mean? It's just a stupid play.

JEN

(Speaking slowly) Like that one time...

SARAH

(Interrupts JEN and speaks quickly) We've been to so many parties in college. Of course somebody has bumped into somebody and had their drink spilt on them.

JEN

Yeah. Yeah, I guess you're right.

SARAH

Yeah, okay let's—

JEN

(Interrupts SARAH and slams her hand on the table next to the laptop dramatically) Oh, I know what it reminds me of! That one time we were out sophomore year, at that frat house. I finally had convinced you to come out with me because I knew that guy you liked, what was his name? Billy? Brian?

SARAH

(Looking glum but replies immediately) Ben.

JEN

Yeah! Ben! And you wore that white sundress from Urban—

SARAH

(Interrupting) Forever 21.

JEN

Yeah! Forever 21. And I don't really remember the rest of the night, but when I woke up that next morning, you were so pissed cuz some idiot had, like, run into you and spilled their red jungle juice all over that white dress.

SARAH

(Looking sad) Yeah, that sucked.

JEN

And we never found out who the drunk idiot was, did we?

SARAH

(Looking distracted) Uh, nope. I don't think so.

JEN

(Slowly starting to realize what the play is about so speaks gradually) Weird that that's what this made me think of..

SARAH

(Says quickly) Yeah, so weird.

JEN

Was that one night the inspiration for your 3rd scene?

SARAH

(Feeling uncomfortable) Uhh, no. You know what, I really just want to—

JEN

(Interrupting) finish the play? Me too. I am ready to be Jane. So I bump into you and then what?

SARAH

(Nervous to continue the play) Uh, okay. Well, then Sophie is like, 'Are you kidding me? Watch out.' And then she turns around—

JEN

And realizes it's me! I mean, Jane!

SARAH

Yep.

JEN
Jane. I'm so sorry, Soph!

SARAH
Sophie sighs. No big deal.

JEN
Jane. Why are you over here in the corner anyways?!

SARAH
Sophie. Uh, just not in the mood for a crazy night. Since I am soaked now, I will probably just go home anyways.

JEN
Jane. No, that is stupid. Don't leave!

SARAH
Sophie. Yeah, I am going to. I am just not really in the mood anymore.

JEN
Man, Sophie's lame.

SARAH
What do you mean? She got spilled on, I'd want to go home too.

JEN
It's just a college party. No one notices if you've been spilled on. Hell, they're probably surprised if you aren't.

SARAH
Not everyone can just go with the flow like that, Jen.

JEN
Whoa, easy. I just think the play would be more exciting if Sophie stayed at the party. Threw her drink on Jane then or something. Caused a scene.

SARAH
Some people don't like being the center of attention.

JEN
Wait, what?

SARAH
Nevermind.

JEN
(Speaks slowly) Okay. Fine.

Awkward silence fills the room for a beat.

JEN CONT.
You know what? It's not fine.

SARAH
What isn't fine?

JEN
(Getting angry) You. You're not fine. You obviously have a problem with me.

SARAH
What? You're being crazy. I have more important stuff to do than argue over a play. And I'm not really in the mood to finish it.

JEN
Okay, but just tell me what happens.

SARAH

(Sighs dramatically) Um, basically Sophie goes home and sits alone all night while Jane stays at the party and comes home claiming she had the best night of her life.

JEN

So poor (uses her fingers to quote the name, Sophie) Sophie is the victim and (uses her fingers again to quote Jane's name) and Jane ruins everything for her, like always?

SARAH

What? No. Take it easy, Jen.

JEN

(Looks at SARAH, enraged now) No! I won't take it easy, Sarah! You can't just sit here, acting like you're little miss perfect, write a play about me, and expect me to pat you on the freaking back!

SARAH

(Pauses to think before speaking) You have no proof it's about you.

JEN

(Sarcastically) Yeah, you're right. No proof, just a brain to figure it out.

SARAH

(Speaks quickly) Figure what out? You're thinking way too much about this.

JEN

No, actually, you're thinking way too much about this.

SARAH

What do you mean?

JEN

You know what? (Pauses and thinks for a beat.) Nevermind. I'm not gonna go there.

SARAH

No. What?

JEN

Nothing.

SARAH

No, tell me. You're not gonna go where?

JEN

I just can't believe that's how you're gonna remember our last two years of college living together. That your life is always so unlucky and you're the little victim. Like it's my fault that you're not living your perfect fairy tale.

SARAH

What? I can't be annoyed at you sometimes?

JEN

No, of course you can. It's just stuff like that happens to everyone. But they move on. You just can't seem to get over any of it.

SARAH

(Stuttering) I, uh.. it's just...

JEN

It's just that (uses fingers to quote the name Sophie over dramatically) Sophie might actually be happy for once if she just let go and lived her freaking life. (Pauses) I just.. I honestly just feel bad for her.

(SARAH sits in silence for a minute as JEN stands next to her, trying to make eye contact but SARAH refuses it.)

SARAH

(Speaks quietly) I feel bad for Sophie too.

(LIGHTS GO OFF.)

END OF PLAY.