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## String Theory

Rachel A. Baird  
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STRING THEORY

RACHEL A. BAIRD

Bachelor of Arts in English

Youngstown State University

May, 2007

submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2010

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This thesis has been approved  
for the Department of English  
and the College of Graduate Studies by

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Thesis Chairperson, Professor Michael Geither, MFA

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Department & Date

This is dedicated to every crappy job I've ever had, including every megalomaniacal manager, every weekend-eating schedule, and especially every abusive customer who I've had to smile and take it from. I never would have had the motivation to finish graduate school without you.

Also, thank you to Mike Geither for giving me the confidence that only comes when somebody other than your mom and dad thinks that your scripts are good.

## STRING THEORY

RACHEL A. BAIRD

### ABSTRACT

DEE struggles to uphold her political ideals in the face of her very proper mother, THERESA, and her long-time, over-achieving friend, LEENA. She makes stands that shock and antagonize both women, including becoming a case worker for bad neighborhoods, and having lesbian romantic relationships rather than heterosexual ones. Her friend GABRIEL, a cynical gay man, is her one ally in these choices. When DEE falls in love with a man, however, these relationships are inverted, and GABRIEL feels betrayed by her cavalier attitude towards sexual orientation. GABRIEL stops speaking to DEE, and DEE and ALLEN get married. When ALLEN dies, DEE is left isolated, to explore the natures of friendship and loss.

## CHARACTERS

DEE, *mid 30's*

THERESA, *mid 60's*

ALLEN, *mid 30's*

LEENA, *mid to late 30's*

MEGAN, *mid to late 30's*

GABRIEL, *mid 30's*

## TIME

The Present.

## PLACE

A café.

THERESA's kitchen.

A living room.

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*(There is a small table at center stage, like a café or bistro-type table, where DEE will sit. There are three chairs at her table; she will always occupy the one in the center, unless otherwise specified. She is going to be both character and narrator, in a sense, and her space separates the two spaces of the other actors. Directly stage right is a kitchen table, where THERESA will be spending her time. Other kitchen accoutrements may be present along with the table, preferably in a 1970's décor style, but these are not ultimately necessary. A breakfast bar or other high countertop to the front of her area would be helpful, so that she could be partially obscured from view at times. Directly stage left is a sofa, where ALLEN will sit. Again, the appearance of a surrounding living room, coffee table, lamps, so forth, is fine, but not necessary. Any living room accessories should look clean, simple, and contemporary. The café table should give the impression of somewhat bridging the gap between the two spaces, but also existing in its own separate sphere, not really part of either area.)*

*(DEE sits on the sofa, in total darkness. The kitchen table area is dimly lit, only the center chair is lit brightly. DEE walks to the chair from the couch, a trim, put-together woman who looks like she may verge on yuppie-dom; her clothes are casual but not sloppy, with comfortable shoes (possibly even Tevas or Birkenstocks). She does not, however, look dowdy or unattractive. She may, for instance, wear Capri pants and a half-sleeved tee-shirt. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail. Whether or not she wears glasses is unimportant. On her way, she retrieves a largish piece of paper from behind the sofa, but it is not yet clear to the audience what it contains. She takes her place in the chair, and settles in for a moment before she begins speaking. She turns the paper around so it faces the audience, holds it in front of her for everyone to see. It is a young child's crayon drawing. )*

DEE

I made this in the second grade. We were all making pictures about what we wanted to be when we grew up; mine was of a police officer. I remember making this because of the reaction that I got, first from the teacher, and then from my mother. It's not that the girls were all supposed to make pictures of mommies, or anything like that; it's just that I was the only one whose picture had a gun in it. The teacher, a very kind, church-going woman, asked me if my daddy or my uncle was a policeman. I said no, I just wanted to be one. Her smile stretched really tight just then, and I'm pretty sure she assumed that the police were the nice men who came to my house when mommy and daddy hit the bottle. When my mom mysteriously asked me the next night to see the drawings I'd been doing at school, I was more than happy to show them to her—until she didn't really pay attention to any of them until she got to this one.

*(DEE flips the picture back around to face herself, and looks down at it as THERESA walks in from stage right, around from behind the kitchen table. The lights brighten over the table as she enters. She walks over and stands over*

*DEE's shoulder, placing one hand on her back as she looks down at the drawing with her daughter. The following is understood to be the conversation had with a second-grade DEE, but she does not speak overly child-like or exaggerated, just differently enough to convey a change.)*

THERESA

So why did you draw this one, honey?

DEE

I want to be the police.

THERESA

*(trying to hide a stricken look)*

You want to be a policeman?

DEE

*(looks up at THERESA, wrinkles her brow)*

I want to be a police girl.

THERESA

What gave you that idea, honey?

DEE

*(looks back down, confused)*

I don't know.

THERESA

Did you see something about the police on TV?

DEE

All the time. And on the news. And real ones, in cars.

THERESA

And you liked them?

DEE

They seem nice, they help people.

THERESA

But in this picture, you're holding a gun.

DEE

Don't the police have guns?

THERESA

Of course they do, sweetie. But why do you want to have a gun?

DEE

I don't know, mom.

THERESA

Did the TV show you saw show somebody getting shot?

DEE

*(child's lie)* No.

*(THERESA gently takes the picture out of DEE's hands, which DEE then folds in front of her. THERESA walks over to the kitchen table with the picture; if there is other furniture in the kitchen, perhaps she magnets it to the fridge or tapes it to a cupboard. Otherwise, she simply places it on the table, off to the side. She takes a seat at the table facing the audience, and thumbs through a women's magazine as she sips a cup of coffee. The lights are still somewhat dim over THERESA, and brighter over DEE. DEE stands and starts to move about, perhaps pacing a little.)*

DEE

Women.

*(she pauses, faraway for a moment, then looks up, makes a mock swaggery face, eyes rolling, in a good-old-boy way)*

Women. Heh. They'll cut your heart out and feed it to their cat.' I used to say it myself. I thought it was cute, real witty, clever. I'd turn to one of my friends,

especially one of my guy friends, nudge ‘em with my elbow, and roll my eyes like that. ‘Women.’ And they’d laugh, because they knew.

What I never would have admitted, to anyone, ever, was that I prized being on the other side of that. I would have been blacklisted by... just about everyone I knew, really. But I did. I felt like I was part of some romantic version of the Masons, that I had a secret kinship with Isolde and Scarlett and even wrinkly Maude, that all of those bitter poems and wistful song lyrics about soft hands and warm eyes and sometimes cold hearts were singing to a club that I belonged to. I loved buying into the idea that there’s something that we have, that women have, that makes love and yearning happen.

But of course, it’s crap. I have spent hours, that have somehow turned into months, yearning and missing and lyricizing every tiny facet of ALLEN, trying as hard as I can not to forget any part of any of him. I’ve become Bogey instead of Bacall, and I’m stuck here. There’s nothing I can do to reverse it, now.

ALLEN and I, we were kind of nerdy people. Obviously. And we had friends, our group of nerdy friends, and we’d amuse ourselves by sitting around and trying to outsmart one another. It was a general consensus among us—including me and ALLEN, especially me and ALLEN—that death is necessary, not just from an environmental over-population standpoint but in the existential sense. How, after all, can life ever be appreciated if it doesn’t end? If it went on forever, it would be the ultimate thing to be taken for granted.

*(On the next sentence, ALLEN begins to enter, walking slowly and as silently as possible, from directly behind DEE’s chair. He is dressed in all black, and has black and white makeup covering his face and hands, as the skeletal costume that DEE is describing. The effect should be somewhat creepy, as the white makeup becomes visible before the rest of him from the dark parts of the stage. He carries black cloth with him, trailing a bit from his hands, such as black silk scarves or similar material. He stops just before he reaches DEE’s chair, and stands just behind her, not moving or touching her.)*

We went, one year, as Dia de los Muertos skeletons for Halloween, to show how alive we were, how much we valued life with each other. Everybody just thought that we were zombies, but that was okay. We just laughed.

*(she looks off into the distance)*

We kept the makeup on, that night, after we got home.

*(ALLEN looks down at DEE and caresses her collarbone gently, from where he stands behind her. She does not notice or acknowledge the touch. During her next paragraph, he slides his hand slowly, gradually down from her collarbone down along her arm, stretching the fabric along her arm from the shoulder as*

*though caressing her and leaving a trail. When his hand reaches her wrist, he gently takes hold of it, ties the cloth around it, and pulls her hand behind her back, holding it there so that she no longer has it available to her. Still, she takes no notice, acts as though she cannot detect a thing.)*

But you never realize how it works. You never realize HOW it makes you feel alive, how it constantly reminds you that you're the one still here, how it's like a phantom limb that you have to work around, not knowing if you should compensate with crutches, or learn to ignore it, or pretend that maybe you never had one there in the first place, even though you still trip and fall sometimes when you lean on it, because you could swear that it was still there.

*(ALLEN pulls her wrist up behind her to the point that it looks like it almost pains her. She leans forward a bit to alleviate the pressure; ALLEN ties the cloth off so that she has a sort of sling tying her hand behind her back, and reaches his other hand down in front of her and wraps it around her, drawing her in to him. He holds her like this, curled over her for a few moments, until she squeezes her face shut and looks away from him, trying to remain composed. At the sight of her upset, he looks saddened, kisses her gently on the cheek, gives one last squeeze, and exits upstage center. DEE leaves her hand behind her, but otherwise draws herself together and tries to look normal.)*

*(LEENA enters, crossing to the center table from THERESA's kitchen area. She is dressed more attractively than DEE. She should look kind of like the cougar/MILF type—perhaps pedal-pushers and a cleavage-revealing sweater. Her fabrics, unlike DEE's organic cotton, should appear to be shiny poly-blends straight from the mall. She sits down at the table, in the chair that is on the same side of the stage as THERESA. She is also carrying a paper, in better shape and better condition than DEE's was. She pushes herself into view, dominating the space of the café table, holding the picture up across the center as a focal point, practically obscuring DEE from view.)*

LEENA

My picture was of an astronaut. I was going to be just like Sally Ride. That's me in the middle, in my space skirt.

*(DEE looks annoyed.)*

That's my astronaut husband, and over there is our space baby. I was going to have a whole moon family.

*(As soon as DEE speaks, she moves her hand from behind her back. The crepe paper tears almost effortlessly; her hand is free, but a bit of streamer still trails from it.)*

DEE

Of course you were.

LEENA

I had a strong concept of work-life balance early.

DEE

Not to mention how to pick the cutest spacewear.

LEENA

Well, you can't just have space babies by yourself.

DEE

One would think that a test-tube baby would be perfectly appropriate for the modern rocket set.

LEENA

Lack of gravity; messes with the insemination process.

DEE

There's always adoption.

LEENA

I wasn't exactly considering how to fill out paperwork for an inter-planetary adoption, okay?

DEE

No, you were considering sucking up to Mrs. McGinley.

LEENA

Well, which one of us avoided the difficult talk with our mother?

DEE

Yeah, you had an early grasp on risk-factor calculation as well.

LEENA

I certainly never had to face up to how strong my convictions were on the pro-choice issue.

DEE

*(sharp)* Hey, I never had to make that choice, either, and you know it.

LEENA

Oh, that's right, because not getting laid takes no skill at all.

DEE

Neither does learning how to be a cocktease.

LEENA

Which is obviously why you don't know how to do it. It's actually a highly nuanced art form.

DEE

I'm sorry, I never passed How to Pick The Right Stiletto Heels to Nab Your Man 101.

LEENA

Girl, you still can't pick out shoes to save your life.

DEE

But, my shoes are orthopedically sound and made from only cruelty-free materials.

LEENA

My shoes make my calves look fantastic.

DEE

Your shoes were made by Vietnamese third-graders.

LEENA

So you're telling me that your one pair of ugly shoes single-handedly stopped child labor?

DEE

Well, they helped!

*(beat)*

And they're not ugly!

*(LEENA just cocks an eyebrow and waits, an "oh, really, now" moment.)*

DEE

*(almost pouty)* I like my shoes.

LEENA

*(pats her hand, condescending)* I know. Hey, I gotta run, I'll catch up with you later. We still on for lunch Wednesday?

DEE

Uh, yeah, sure, just give me a call.

LEENA

Okay. Talk to you then, Deedee.

*(She gets up and rushes out.)*

DEE

Well, I might not have ended up becoming a cop, but I don't see you wearing a space-skirt, either.

*(DEE stands and begins walking into THERESA's kitchen, where she ends up sitting at the table, THERESA alternately sitting next to her and standing over her. THERESA absent-mindedly removes the streamers from her arms as she fusses about her daughter.)*

THERESA

So you're telling me you racked up four years' worth of debt in order to spend your life traipsing through the ghetto?



DEE

I told you three years ago I was majoring in social work.

THERESA

But that can mean a lot of things! I thought you'd be working with, I don't know, kids or something.

DEE

Kids? How many times—I don't even like kids!

THERESA

Oh, so these people you'll be helping, you'll refuse to work with them if they have children?

DEE

You know that's not what I meant.

THERESA

I don't, apparently. I didn't know what you meant when you said social worker. If you don't like kids, how about old people? You don't want to help old people?

DEE

I have nothing against old people.

THERESA

But they're not exciting enough for you, is that it?

DEE

No, no, that is not "it," nothing's "it," there is no it, I wanted to help people who need help, and people need help in the ghetto (*realizes that she tries not to use this word, and has used it accidentally*) as YOU like to call it—God, Mom, I found a good job making people's lives better, can't you just be happy for me? I'm doing better than a lot of people out there. You know, some people have to LIVE in those areas you're afraid to let me visit in broad daylight. Some people don't get to leave the bad neighborhoods just because it's time to clock out for the day.

THERESA

Have you told your father about this?

DEE

No. Not yet. (*tired, annoyed, defeated*)

THERESA

Well, what are you waiting for?

DEE

Wha... I'm not "waiting" for anything. I just told you first, that's all.

THERESA

Well, let's tell him now. (*puts hand up to side of mouth, exaggerating to irritate DEE*) Lester!

DEE

No, what are you doing??

THERESA

What, you don't see anything wrong with what you're doing, so what's the big harm in telling him?

DEE

There's no harm, I just don't know why you're reacting this way!

THERESA

Oh, please, Deirdre, you know full well why, and you know that if you tell your father, he'll have kittens.

DEE

I think you're "having kittens" enough for the both of you.

THERESA

Well, I'm the one who's going to be paying for your funeral, I have a right to—

DEE

Oh, stop it, you—

THERESA

No, you stop. That's fine, I can't keep you from doing this job you've found for yourself, and I'll go ahead and tell your father, take the flak for you, like I always do.

DEE

*(rising)* No, that's fine, I'll tell him. I'm not afraid, and it's my big news.

THERESA

*(puts hand on her arm)* Come on, sit down.

DEE

I said I'll tell him.

THERESA

No, Deirdre, let me tell him. He'll take it so much better from me. I know how to say these things.

*(DEE hesitates.)*

THERESA

Don't worry, I won't make you sound bad, I know how to be diplomatic.

*(She turns away from table, not focused on DEE anymore, as though she knows she's won)*

Come on, coffee's done.

DEE

It's okay, I have to run. Thanks, Mom.

*(DEE walks back to her center table. LEENA enters again, carrying a cup of coffee, and when she sits at DEE's table, she slips off one of her high heels and rubs her foot as she talks.)*

LEENA

You know, it doesn't matter what you do, everything becomes a business, one way or the other.

DEE

It's...well, of course we have a budget and so forth, but I still wouldn't necessarily call it a business. We're a government agency.

LEENA

So you're a badly run business.

DEE

Ha. We're a non-profit.

LEENA

Non-profit's still a business.

DEE

Well, in the technical sense, sure, but we're not out to, you know, see how many people we can screw and how many dress-down days we have to have in order for people to work like hell for low wages.

LEENA

Yeah, I know how social workers are known for being over-paid.

DEE

At least they're not underpaid to line someone's pockets—well, except for possibly congresspeople, but that's totally out of all of our control—they're underpaid because they want to do what they're doing.

LEENA

I don't hold a gun to people's heads to make them work for us.

DEE

It's not fulfilling.

LEENA

It has better 401K matching.

DEE

We make people's lives better.

LEENA

A good 401K plan doesn't improve your life?

DEE

You know, people *other* than ourselves.

LEENA

The people I hire get paid. And please, when is the last time you saw the face of somebody who really needs help?

DEE

Hey, that's not fair, you know as well as I do that without people in administration, the people working in the field wouldn't be able to do their own jobs.

LEENA

DEE, honey, I am not trying to make you feel guilty for getting where you are. Quite the opposite, I am trying to make you feel *better* about yourself. You should be proud.

DEE

I'm not ashamed.

LEENA

It's a start. But I just stopped for a second to fix myself, here. I'll catch up with you later.

*(Shoe back on, LEENA exits. GABRIEL enters from stage left, crossing in front of the couch. His appearance may seem surprising, given that the couch is still not really lit. He is gay but should not be played up as stereotypical. This is a man who TiVo's the Food Network so that he can watch football.)*

GABRIEL

Oh my God, that girl.

DEE

I know. She can't help herself.

GABRIEL

I swear, if you peeled her skin back, there would be metal underneath.

DEE

Oh, she's a good person.

GABRIEL

And possibly a stock-market ticker.

DEE

Well, she was the only girl in the seventh grade who paid attention to the NASDAQ.

GABRIEL

See, I'm telling you. That girl was made for corporate management.

DEE

Well, somebody has to do it.

GABRIEL

Do they? Really? Or did people like her happen and create cubicles? Which came first, the automaton or the egg?

DEE

She is not that bad. You love your exaggeration.

GABRIEL

How many sports are her kids in?

DEE

What?

GABRIEL

How many sports? What practices does she complain about juggling the schedules for?

DEE

Well, I know that Jenna—

GABRIEL

Jenna?

DEE

Yes. Jenna is the older one.

GABRIEL

What's the other one's name? Bree? Britney?

DEE

Chelsea.

GABRIEL

My point. Anyhow, continue with the sports.

DEE

Anyway. Jenna does softball—

GABRIEL

Really? What with the rampant lesbianism?

DEE

She's EIGHT.

GABRIEL

That's when it starts. I bet she's smacking Barbies together with Ken stuffed under the bed as we speak.

DEE

How do you know about smacking Barbie crotches together?

GABRIEL

You think I don't know you people's secrets? Please. Yes, you're so hard to read.

DEE

ANYhow. Jenna does softball and basketball, and Chelsea plays soccer—

*(GABRIEL gleams like a vulture spotting roadkill on the word "soccer," seizing on it as obvious proof of his point. DEE glares at him as she continues speaking.)*

DEE

—on a pee-wee league and—well, that's not a sport.

GABRIEL

Oh, no, by all means, what other extracurriculars do these kids do?

DEE

Well, they're both in dance, they both do ballet and Jenna has some other kind, too, jazz tap or some such nonsense. Oh, come on, she's a good mom. I'm sure they'll get into good colleges.

GABRIEL

Oh, I have no doubt. Because she's been preparing them both for it since age FOUR. She's a manager. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm sure she loves them very much, but I guarantee she could fix you up a flow-chart of her kids lives in ten minutes flat. The woman was made to live under fluorescent lighting.



DEE

Hey, now, I'm becoming a desk jockey these days, too.

GABRIEL

Yes, but that's because your youthful ideals have just been broken by the wearing down of years of cold capitalistic reality. It's the American way. You two are different like Diet Coke and a carrot smoothie.

DEE

Well, we've been friends for a really long time. It's weird, granted, but we kind of give each other a break.

GABRIEL

No, I know, balance and all that. It's just hard not to talk to her and not be totally exhausted. Or, you know, hear her talk.

DEE

Trust me. I know. I mean, it's a nice break from talking to people who aren't sure what constitutes safe housing for their kids, and from talking to the people who are talking to them, but... It's weird, too. It's hard, sometimes, after seeing another case report of some woman who may or may not have been molested by her father but definitely slept with two cousins and an uncle, trying to get off the crackpipe so she can keep her own kids relatively safe, to sit and talk to Leena about whether a private school with a music program is more or less important than the private school with higher test score averages. I mean, I know she's conscious of the kind of stuff I work with, she's active in her church

*(GABRIEL groans)*

and whatnot, does charity events at work, but... I don't know. Sometimes I look at her and it's hard not to think about it.

GABRIEL

I'm sure. But, and this is only half devil's advocate here, you can't blame her for being successful and wanting the best for her own kids. I mean, that is kind of the goal.

DEE

I know. I do. And that's why I don't hold it against her. I just wonder sometimes if it bothers her.

GABRIEL

Well, she doesn't see it every day. How long until you are out of the projects and into the cube, by the way?

DEE

As soon as the new case worker is done with her first hundred field hours. Another two weeks tops. I'm already spending half my days in the new office.

GABRIEL

At the new pay grade?

DEE

Hell yeah.

GABRIEL

Selling your soul has a certain appeal, doesn't it?

DEE

Hey! That's not why... I mean... You know that I didn't put in for this. They offered it to me.

GABRIEL

Hey, hey, you don't have to apologize to me. I wish that I had the chance for promotion. Or a raise. Or better benefits. Or any type of improvement at all.

DEE

You have the chance to become management.

GABRIEL

Yeah, me and forty other people.

DEE

Well, you didn't want to stay there forever anyhow...

GABRIEL

No, it's not my dream, but it pays the bills. Unlike you, none of my aspirations are particularly profitable.

DEE

That doesn't mean that you have to give up on life.

GABRIEL

Give up on... DEE, what exactly do you expect me to do, here? Have some "Blues Brothers" style reunion of my band? Try to tour all of the finest bars in the area again, just one last time? It didn't make me money then, and it's not going to make me money now.

DEE

I didn't think you did it for the money in the first place.

GABRIEL

I didn't. And at the time, I could afford to do things not for money. I lived with my mother. Now, I can't, unless I want to go back with her.

DEE

We could always room together again, split rent and whatnot. It would cut your bills way down.

GABRIEL

DEE, you're missing the point. I do not want to live with you again.

DEE

I thought we got along together fine.

GABRIEL

Yes. It was fine. You're splitting hairs. Needy, needy hairs. I'm just not at a point in my life where I can go backwards.

DEE

So doing what makes you happy is going backwards?

GABRIEL

It's not about what makes you happy! It's about meeting the practical goals in life!

DEE

Oh, I'm sorry, I thought that life was about pursuing happiness.

GABRIEL

What, sitting around being inspired by the founding fathers lately? Taking a visit to planet Oprah? Happiness doesn't just happen.

DEE

No, you have to work for it.

GABRIEL

And the operative word there is "work." You have to work. If you manage to squeeze happiness out of there somewhere, bully for you. My work doesn't have a lot there to squeeze. Yours does. You're doing what you aimed to do. I'm happy for you. It worked out. For most of us, it doesn't. I just want enough money that they can stick me in a halfway-decent raisin ranch when I'm too old to put in the eight hours anymore.

DEE

God, that's depressing.

GABRIEL

Really? Were you not just complaining to me about the fact that you're facing decades behind a desk in order to make a living?

DEE

You just said I was lucky to be happy!

GABRIEL

Yes. And I also think that you're deluding yourself into thinking that you are.

DEE

I'm still helping people!

GABRIEL

And you're still behind a desk.

DEE

I'm fine!

GABRIEL

So am I.

DEE

I don't understand how you live sometimes, thinking the way that you do.

GABRIEL

You're just being overdramatic. Honestly, it's not that bad, because once you accept reality, it can't disappoint you anymore. If you don't expect life to bring you some mystic happiness, you won't be upset when it never arrives. The band thing, I think I knew it would never work out; it's why I started applying for day jobs in the first place. You know what I expect out of my life? I expect to put in eight hours a day, come home, take my dog for a walk, eat dinner in front of my television, and talk to my mother on the phone every other day so she doesn't get obsessive. If I want companionship, albeit filthy slutty companionship, there's always bars and Craigslist. And you know what? I get exactly what I expect. And my life is a lot easier that way.

DEE

Wow. Where the hell did all this come from?

GABRIEL

I'm always like this, you know that.

DEE

Not to this extent. It's coming from somewhere.

GABRIEL

Brandon's guilt has swallowed him again. Or maybe his bovine wife herself did, I'm not sure. All I know is that I can count on about one returned text message out of all three that I send a week. Apparently, I no longer merit over sixty seconds of thought on a weekly basis.

DEE

Aw, that really sucks.

GABRIEL

Yep. It sucks. It's sucked since the beginning, though, I knew what I was getting myself into, so no use indulging and feeling bad about it.

DEE

It's still gotta hurt.

GABRIEL

Only if I let it.

DEE

I don't know how you can put yourself through this.

GABRIEL

Well, if I had other options, I'd certainly exercise them.

DEE

You could meet someone else. I mean, there's more than the bar scene, there's online...

GABRIEL

Yes. Filled with the same guys who populate the bars. Maybe I should clarify: if I had any other VIABLE options, I'd certainly exercise them. You know that I've looked. I just have to accept the fact that the one other guy I've found in my geographical area who actually matches me is too afraid of his family to not marry his beard.

DEE

I can't believe the woman hasn't figured it out.

GABRIEL

She's a total and utter narcissist, you've met her. Once everybody looked at her in the big lacy dress she stopped giving a shit. The only other thing that would faze her is if he stopped paying the bills.

DEE

Have you ever thought of just telling her, so he can't get out of it anymore?

GABRIEL

Yeah, because that would certainly end well.

DEE

If you guys really love each other, there has to be—

GABRIEL

Oh, please spare me. Yes. The U.S. divorce rate just PROVES how love conquers all. Love is suffering. Haven't you ever seen "Moonstruck?" (*mocks-up Nicolas Cage doing a Brooklyn accent*) "Love don't make things nice. It ruins your life, yadda yadda... We're here to love the wrong people and break our hearts." So if I want love, well, this is it.

DEE

All of this has something to do with your Catholic upbringing. I'm convinced of it.

GABRIEL

Oh, I'm sure you're right on that one. We are a people who are just waiting slowly for the end. But in the meantime, we expect a lot of suffering. And guilt. Because if you DO end up doing something that makes you happy, it's more than likely something you should feel incredibly guilty about.

DEE

Charming. Speaking of, I have to go talk to my mother one of these days.

GABRIEL

Yeah, you'll have to tell me how that goes.

DEE

Trust me, you'll be the first to know.

GABRIEL

Like a band-aid, I'm telling you. Treat it like a band-aid.

DEE

You treat life like a band-aid.

GABRIEL

Hey, it works.

DEE

I'm not convinced.

GABRIEL

Which is exactly why I spend half of my time telling you I-told-you-so.

DEE

Oh, you'd tell me about something anyway.

GABRIEL

Yeah, you're probably right on that one, too. Alright. Well, let me know what happens, I'm gonna get out of here.

DEE

Alright. See you later.

*(DEE sits for a moment, sipping at her coffee and swirling it around in her cup, going through some complicated facial expressions. Finally she stands up with purpose and stomps over into her mother's kitchen. Her mother stands up brightly as she enters, greeting her. She takes DEE's cup and throws it away after DEE slams it down onto the table.)*

THERESA



Hello, dear.

DEE

Mom, I think I'm a lesbian.

THERESA

Oh, for Christ's sake, honey, I know you don't want kids, but there are other ways to avoid them than that.

DEE

It's not about—that. Plenty of lesbians have kids, you know. Have them, or adopt them.

THERESA

But you certainly can't get pregnant.

DEE

Well, no, of course not, but that's not why—I mean, there IS no why. I just am.

THERESA

So you think you are, or you are?

DEE

What?

THERESA

You come in here first saying you think you are, now you say you just are. So which is it, young lady? You think you are, or you are?

DEE

I don't... Mom, I just want you to be prepared, that there's a good chance I'll be coming home one day with a woman.

THERESA

A good chance? Deirdre? If you're giving me this many gray hairs, there had better be a good reason.

DEE

I'm so glad that you don't think this is a good reason.

THERESA

Have you already met someone? Is that what you're trying to tell me?

DEE

No, no, it's not that there's anyone serious, right now at least.

THERESA

Women, they'll try to make it serious, from the first day you meet them, they'll be trying to move in.

DEE

*(half-muttered)* How do you know about that?

THERESA

What do you mean, how do I know about that? Women, you mean? I know because I am one. So you have to be a lesbian now to know anything about women?

DEE

Never mind.

THERESA

*(weird, accusing)* You haven't told your father yet, have you?

DEE

*(confused)* No, no, not yet.

THERESA

Well, you'd better be damn sure before you do.

DEE

What?

THERESA

Oh, you didn't think that I was going to tell him this one, did you?

DEE

*(flustered)* Wait—no—I didn't—

THERESA

Because I always do. But not this time. Oh, no. you made this bed, you are most definitely going to be the one to sleep in it. But you're not going to ruin my life doing it. You are going to wait until you have some nice girl to bring home that you're ready to settle down with. Hell (*DEE looks surprised at the word; for Mom, this is pretty strong language*), you two had better have your china patterns picked out and have a down payment on a starter home before you march in that living room in front of Lester with this gem.

DEE

Okay. You do have a point. This will be a lot easier for Dad to swallow if—

THERESA

No. Because it will be permanent. Because it won't create continued agitation, it will be SETTLED, and too late for discussion.

DEE

Mom, this isn't something I'm going to—

THERESA

I don't CARE, Deirdre. The why does not matter to me. If you think now you're a lesbian, fine. But your father does not need to hear about it until you know.

DEE

Well, I hardly think it's fair to my future wife to have to use her to come out to Dad.

THERESA

Fine. So don't bring her with you. In fact, I'm sure you can agree that it would be easier on everyone involved if you didn't. I just want this hypothetical woman to be real and fixed and making monthly payments on the living room set that you keep your butt sitting on before you come back into your father's house and make some big announcement to him.

DEE

Okay. Okay. But I just want you to know, it will still be important to me that you meet her.

THERESA

Well, I'm sure that by the time she exists, I'll be prepared to do that.

*(DEE walks slowly over to the central table, dumbfounded. She sits in her customary seat, the one at center. GABRIEL walks over. He sits down, holding two coffees in Starbucks-type paper cups, and sits one down in front of DEE.)*

GABRIEL

You did want two percent, right?

DEE

Right.

GABRIEL

That's what I thought, I almost picked skim, though.

DEE

Nah, no flavor. I like a happy medium: not too much animal fat, but just enough that I can taste it.

GABRIEL

I forget that you're one of those girls who's never had to watch fat grams.

DEE

What do you mean by that phrase "had to," buddy?

GABRIEL

I know, I know, calories and pounds, gender prison, fitting the standards of a man's world. Yes. I've been briefed.

DEE

*(smiles, quiet)* I've always been on the thin side, just naturally. Comes from my dad's side. Drove my mom nuts.

GABRIEL

Oh, and you never enjoyed that, I'm sure.

DEE

Hey, it's not my fault. *(fake, smarmy)* It's just the gifts that nature gave me.

GABRIEL

You know, I would be pissed if my body birthed something that looked better than me.

DEE

Yeah? I'm pretty sure that's the basis of Freudian theory.

GABRIEL

I thought you hated Freud. Dirty old man and all that.

DEE

I do hate Freud, and he was a dirty old man. Not to mention the fact that he's the reason that I'm going to have to drag "penis envy" around with me like a rusty dog-tag for the rest of my existence. Unfortunately, though, a lot of the time he was right.

GABRIEL

Speaking of hate, what about your mom?

DEE

What, hate me, or follow the father of psychoanalysis?

GABRIEL

Both.

DEE

The woman is a walking superego.

GABRIEL

There's gotta be an id in there somewhere. You were conceived, weren't you?

DEE

I think she just lied back quietly and thought of England. And thank you of making me have to think about that process, by the way.

GABRIEL

Anytime. So, did you do it?

DEE

I did it.

GABRIEL

How did they take it? Were they angry?

DEE

Just she.

GABRIEL

What, you mean not they?

DEE

No, just she.

GABRIEL

You never listen to me. DEE, I know how hard it is, trust me, and that's why I tried to tell you to just do it all at once, like a Band-Aid. Now you're just going to have to go through this whole process, all over again. I mean, I suppose the good thing is, that she didn't scream and let half the block know about it like my

mother did. *(dry)* That was wonderful, because you know how much I love big, dramatic Springer scenes.

DEE

Nah, Springer's not my mom's style, she's more into guilt and passive-aggressive character assassinations. She knows full well that if she threw plates around, she'd be the only one willing to sweep it up, so she just didn't bother in the first place.

GABRIEL

She owns a string of pearls, doesn't she?

DEE

What, do you mean the for-church set, or the evening set? *(pause, laugh)* You know, it's terrible, but I was actually hoping to use that to my advantage.

GABRIEL

What, you were going to choke her with them?

DEE

Yes. And my father with the evening set.

GABRIEL

You'd have to kill him first, so she could watch just how gauche it all was.

DEE

I probably wouldn't even have to use them on her. *(laugh)* She'd have heart failure simply from the tackiness of it all.

GABRIEL

No, seriously, though. Use them how?

DEE

Ah, it doesn't matter.

GABRIEL

No, really.

DEE

Well... I just, I was kind of hoping she would do this thing that she always does, where she decides to be the big matriarchal peacekeeper, puts on her martyr hat, and says no, no, please, let me tell your father. I know how to talk to him. And it usually pisses me off in about seven different ways, but with this I was kind of hoping for it. And of all times, this time she didn't do it.

GABRIEL

It's okay, it's not terrible, it was a hard thing that you did. It's just a shame that you have to do it again.

DEE

She told me not to. Or actually, to wait.

GABRIEL

What do you mean, wait? Wait for what?

DEE

She wants me to wait to tell my father until.... Until after I find a nice girl and settle down, basically.

GABRIEL

That's... new. So she's okay with it as long as you're making some girl into an honest woman?

DEE

Kind of? She told me not to say anything unless it was permanent. That she doesn't want to have to deal with my father's reaction unless there's no other option, basically. Kind of like guilt, but with a twist.

GABRIEL

Oh my god, that's almost diabolically polite. Does your mother also happen to own a pair of white gloves?

DEE



You know, I'm beginning to think that she does.

*(There is a lull in the conversation as both of them stare off into space, drift off a bit, thinking. GABRIEL looks amused; DEE, moody.)*

DEE

So your mother threw a fit, huh?

GABRIEL

More like a tantrum. She even broke a plate. It's still my brothers' and sisters' favorite Mom story. I even managed to top the time Sonia told her she was pregnant.

DEE

Is she still mad at you?

GABRIEL

Nah, it was rough for a while, but it's been over two years, she's had plenty of time to get over it. She still throws a little guilt at me whenever she gets near a baby, though. It's funny how the presence of my nephew was bringing shame -on the family until he became a way to try to make me feel guilty for letting potential grandchildren die on my boyfriend's face.

DEE

You know, I almost wish she'd just throw a fit; get it out of her system and get it over with. Then everything could be done, and better.

GABRIEL

Yeah... so when are you going to make an honest woman out of some nice girl?

DEE

I don't know, I'm just working on making a dishonest woman out of a few of them to start with.

GABRIEL

Honestly, have you ever had a relationship that lasted longer than your hangover? With a woman, at least?

DEE

Not...not really.

GABRIEL

Way to fight for equality.

DEE

Whatever.

*(GABRIEL laughs, and puts a friendly hand on her shoulder as he gets up from the table and exits. DEE takes a few moments to gather herself, stands, and starts to march back over to her mother's kitchen. She stops short of it, pauses, reconsiders, starts again, stops, and also exits, rushing to catch up with GABRIEL. LEENA then walks over to the table, in the same outfit but sneakers this time, maybe with a gym bag and different hair. She sits down in her customary SR seat and waits, maybe playing with her smartphone. DEE does not re-enter. THERESA, from the kitchen, notices her sitting and waiting. She looks out for a few moments, watching carefully for DEE. When she does not appear, THERESA steals over to DEE's usual seat.)*

LEENA

Oh, hi, THERESA.

THERESA

Hello, dear. Are you waiting for Deirdre?

LEENA

Yeah, I texted her a little bit ago, but I don't know where she's at.

THERESA

Probably to tell you her big news, I suppose.

LEENA

Oh, really?

THERESA

So you haven't heard? I'm surprised. I always assumed I was the last to know everything, apparently not. I suppose I should be happy about that, but I'm not so sure. I'm sure that other friend of hers already knows, though, I have no doubt about that.

LEENA

Who, Gabriel?

THERESA

Yes. Him.

LEENA

They have become pretty inseparable.

THERESA

So are you two. At least, you used to be. I wish she'd follow more of your examples, though.

LEENA

Oh, you know nobody's ever been able to tell DEE anything. That's one of the things that her and I have always had in common, we make our own way and nobody can tell us otherwise, even if we stub our noses in the process.

THERESA

Well. She's got her nose full well in something this time.

LEENA

Why? Is everything okay?

THERESA

Oh, sure, everything's fine, she just decided to waltz right in and tell me she's decided to ruin her life like it was nothing.

LEENA

Ohhhh. No wonder she wanted to talk.

THERESA

Oh, I'm sure she does. You know, the fact that she hasn't told you makes it almost certain in my mind that she just came up with this to test me.

LEENA

Maybe she just wanted to tell you first.

THERESA

Hmph. Maybe she was afraid to tell you, too.

LEENA

Oh, it couldn't have been that bad.

THERESA

She's decided she wants to be a lesbian.

LEENA

What, now?

THERESA

She told me today that she *thinks* she's a lesbian.

LEENA

What do you mean, she thinks? Like she hasn't gotten a chance to test it out yet?

THERESA

I don't know what she means. That's what she told me, she *thinks*. Like it's a new outfit she's trying on today. As though she were choosing the ham instead of the turkey for lunch today.

LEENA

Well, you know she doesn't want to have children.

THERESA

I know! That's what I told her, that she didn't have to go to these lengths not to have children, she can full well have a husband and use (*whispered, like a dirty word*) birth control like the rest of the world.

LEENA

That's not what I meant. I mean, she's not running out of time if she doesn't have to worry about her biological clock ticking down.

THERESA

Well, do you think a man is going to want some middle-aged, washed-up former lesbian as a wife?

LEENA

Maybe she doesn't want a husband, either.

THERESA

You're her friend, I know you want to see her happy as much as I do.

LEENA

She apparently thinks that this is what's going to make her happy.

THERESA

It's not going to, and you know it as well as I do, but I'm afraid of what's going to happen once she figures that out.

*(DEE re-enters from upstage as LEENA speaks this next.)*

LEENA

Well, you never know. Maybe this phase will pass fairly quickly and she'll end up finding a husband sooner rather than later.

THERESA

I should hope so. I've got enough—

DEE

Mother, what are you doing here?

THERESA

Mother? Since when do you refer to me as “mother?”

DEE

Since you’re coming around and talking behind my back, that’s about when.  
What are you doing here?

THERESA

I’m not allowed to talk to your friends?

DEE

Not ABOUT ME.

THERESA

Well, pardon me for trying to have a rational concerned conversation with  
someone else who cares about you.

DEE

So you’re spying on me and I’m supposed to feel guilty about it?

LEENA

She wasn’t exactly *spying* on—

DEE

Yes! And you were in on it!

THERESA

Don’t blame this on your friend.

DEE

Mother. Would you please leave us to talk.

THERESA

Talk! I’m not stopping you.

DEE

I would like the chance to talk to my friend alone. I do not have anything else to say to you right now.

THERESA

You have not changed since high school, Deirdre. Yes. You and your friend can have some alone time to chat over boys. Or girls. Or whatever it is you want to talk about. Trust me, I am more than happy to leave.

*(She walks with irritation back to her kitchen, where she proceeds to slam pots, pans, cupboard doors, and things around as they speak, the noise of which can be heard during DEE and LEENA's conversation. It should begin by sounding like the normal clatter of cooking, but as it soon becomes clear that THERESA is lashing out, by getting louder and using bangs to punctuate their speech.)*

DEE

Well, I guess I don't need to tell you my news. It's pretty clear that my mother took care of that for me. *(bang! Etc.)* In fact, it didn't look like you two needed me here at all.

LEENA

Dee, how can this really be news? Isn't this the sort of thing that you need to think about for years? Or that you've already known about for years? Though I've got to say, I'm pretty well surprised...

DEE

I'm sure you are. And I have known for a long time. I just didn't know how to tell you, because I didn't know how you'd take it. Apparently my instincts were right in waiting.

LEENA

That's not fair. Your mother was talking to me, because she's worried about you.

DEE

So was it necessary for you to conspire with her on how to get DEE to change her silly little mind? Or did that just come naturally to you?

LEENA

You're being a drama queen. I was not "conspiring against you."

DEE

Drama queen?

LEENA

Yes! Your mother is concerned, and she has every right to be, so she came to one of your long-time trusted friends with this concern. I do not understand why you're having such a problem with this.

DEE

I don't understand how you DON'T understand why I'm having such a problem with this. And what exactly do you mean by "every right to be concerned?" I'm not taking drugs, I'm not harming myself, I simply would prefer relationships with women to relationships with men.

LEENA

Dee, you are not that naïve. You know the problems that this will cause for you and your family. It might not be right, but it's not all that easy to be a gay person in this world.

DEE

Trust me, I'm full well aware that my life will not be the most accepted thing in society. But that is MY problem, not my mother's.

LEENA

But it affects your mother! Your lifestyle affects your mother, the fact that you will never have a husband, that people at your job might turn against you when they find out—

DEE

I'm a social worker. They're not exactly unfamiliar with this sort of thing.

LEENA

You still work for the county. There are still plenty of older men there who don't approve of this sort of thing. Your mother is worrying about that—

DEE



Oh, trust me, she is NOT worrying about that.

LEENA

—she’s worried that you’ll most likely be trying to bring women to Christmas dinner, that—

DEE

THAT is what she is worried about. That. Right there. Screw all this crap about my safety, my quality of life, A. none of that is really threatened, and B. that is not the primary fear on my mother’s mind.

LEENA

Just because YOU’RE only thinking about yourself here, doesn’t mean that she doesn’t have your best interests in mind.

*(THERESA’s banging stops.)*

DEE

Only thinking about myself? Yes, I’m sorry that I didn’t consider my mother before allowing myself to realize that I’m not straight.

LEENA

You can’t even say it, can you?

DEE

What?

LEENA

You know full well how this affects her. Because even you can’t say it.

DEE

What the hell are you talking about?

LEENA

Lesbian. You can't call yourself a lesbian, because you're as uncomfortable with it as your mother is. Oh my God, you really are just doing this to toy with everyone, aren't you?

DEE

No! Typical that you would think that, though.

LEENA

I'll take you up on that cheap shot in a minute, but first, I want you to say it.

DEE

This is ridiculous.

LEENA

No. It isn't. Say it.

DEE

Lesbian.

LEENA

No. Own it. Say, "I'm a lesbian."

DEE

Why? This is ridiculous. I don't need to justify who I am.

LEENA

Well, I don't know who you are, because really, you haven't told me.

DEE

I'm a lesbian. There. How do you feel? How does it sound? Are you *concerned*?

LEENA

Of course I am. I'm worried about how this is going to go for you, and for God's sake, I've known you long enough that I'm worried about the effect that this is going to have on your family.

*(GABRIEL walks over and sits down in the SL chair. Upon his entrance, DEE and LEENA are uncomfortably silent for a bit, kind of glaring at one another and/or looking worried, hesitant to speak. GABRIEL waits for a moment, then speaks.)*

GABRIEL

So, what are you kids up to today?

DEE

*(icy)* Oh, just the usual. Talking. Shooting the shit. Sharing some *news*.

GABRIEL

*Ah.* Okay.

*(pause)*

LEENA

Oh, so I see that she told you already.

GABRIEL

Well, yeah, I mean, we went out for coffee a bit ago and—

DEE

Concerned.

GABRIEL

What?

DEE

She told me that she's "concerned."

GABRIEL

Okay, well, it can be a hard thing to—

DEE

About my FAMILY.

GABRIEL

Yes. Well, it's definitely hard to, ah, come out to your family. You never know how they're going to react to the—

DEE

No, no, concerned about THEM. That I'm making THEIR lives difficult. Yes, God forbid I leave a fingerprint on the china.

GABRIEL

Well... That may be a little harsh.

*(LEENA starts to speak, but GABRIEL continues and doesn't allow her to.)*

But you know, it is hard on them, too.

LEENA

That's all I was trying to say! I just—

DEE

*(to GABRIEL, cutting her off)* What? How can you say that?

GABRIEL

Uh, because it is. I have done this before, you know. You think I didn't feel bad for my mom, sitting there clutching her chest and sighing all the time?

LEENA

See? This man has some compassion for his mother.

DEE

But weren't you angry with her?

GABRIEL

Well, yeah, of course... I mean, honestly, not that much, though. I'd seen her do the over-dramatic reaction thing so many times before, I kind of just expected it. I was kind of just generally mad that it had to be difficult. But I still felt bad.

DEE

You shouldn't have to feel bad for just telling people something about yourself. It's a FACT, it's not a scandal.

LEENA

Of course you shouldn't HAVE to. But the reality is, this is going to stress the hell out of your family, your friends—

DEE

Oh, so this is really just about you.

LEENA

No, for Christ's sake, DEE—

GABRIEL

She's right.

DEE

What??

GABRIEL

*(to LEENA)* You're right. Of course you shouldn't have to feel bad. But reality dictates that you kind of do. Hell, my family's so good at denial, I usually wish that I just would have never told them, they could have convinced themselves that I was just a life-long bachelor. Would have been easier that way.

LEENA

Well, you shouldn't have to do that, either.

GABRIEL

No, but it would have worked. But hell, if my mom got over it, yours will, too.

DEE

Mmmm-hmmm.

LEENA

She will. Your mom's a tougher old broad than you think.

*(Lights dim over the table, DEE walks over to the sofa and leans against it, where the lights brighten over her. LEENA and GABRIEL exit.)*

DEE

So I'm at this party, where I have no real desire to be.

*(ALLEN, walks over to her center table, leans up against the chair that is on his side of the stage.)*

ALLEN

Hi, I'm Allen. You're a friend of Megan's, right?

DEE

I'm sorry, which one's Megan?

ALLEN

Ah. Well, I guess not. I'm sorry, I thought you were someone else.

DEE

It's okay, I get that a lot. My name's Dee.

ALLEN

D? Like the letter?

DEE

Like, short for Deirdre. Which is also my name.

ALLEN

Ah. Oh. I just—I wondered. I guess I know a lot of odd people.

DEE

It's okay. I like odd people.

ALLEN

Mmmm, then you probably wouldn't be a friend of Megan's.

DEE

*(smiles)* A little strait-laced, is she?

ALLEN

Well, I wouldn't say anything...

DEE

Why, is she your girlfriend?

ALLEN

No, no, nothing like that.

DEE

Then I'll never tell. Walk with me, come grab a drink.

*(ALLEN wanders towards the couch, where he eventually sits. Perhaps there is a coffee table with drinks sitting on it. DEE walks briefly out of view, and LEENA walks in, appearing as MEGAN. Perhaps glasses or a hat have been added, and a different style of clothing entirely should be used. MEGAN and ALLEN sit on the sofa, chatting and laughing lightly. ALLEN sits near one arm, MEGAN more towards the center. Because there is no space beside ALLEN, DEE sits just close enough to MEGAN to make her uncomfortable. She is witty, engaging, but also with an undertone of ferocity. ALLEN brightens slightly as she sits.)*

DEE

Hi! I finally found you again! Is this *(gestures towards MEGAN)* the one who you were talking about earlier?

MEGAN

You two were talking earlier?

ALLEN

Oh, Dee, I'm sorry, yeah, this is Megan. Megan, this is Dee.

DEE

Nice to meet you.

MEGAN

You, too. So you two know each other?

DEE

We just met earlier. Actually, I think that Allen thought I was you.

MEGAN

Ah, so that's how I became a topic of conversation.

DEE

Yes. You, and super-string theory.

MEGAN

And what, now?

DEE

You know, string theory. The idea that time and space are not only multi-dimensional, but that the energy that holds all atomic particles together exists in its own theoretical dimension?

MEGAN

Oh, sure.

*(She looks to ALLEN, trying to give him a conspiratorial eye-roll, but he has already been sucked back into DEE's conversation and talks right past her.)*

ALLEN

Well, of course, it's not that the energy itself specifically *exists* in that dimension. It's that the super-strings holding the atoms together *vibrate* in that dimension.

DEE

Oh, sure, because if the energy wasn't multi-dimensional, then you and I would currently pouf off into atomic dust.



ALLEN

*(grinning)* Pouf? Is that the scientific term?

DEE

Yes. You'll find it in the results section in any peer-reviewed journal article.  
"The subject matter poufed, while the control group failed to pouf as predicted."

ALLEN

It's an acronym, I'm sure.

DEE

Oh, yes, absolutely... Protons Obfuscating Upward Friction.

MEGAN

*(smug, trying to get one in)*

Pouf is spelled with two O's.

ALLEN

*(not looking at MEGAN as he speaks, eyes alight and grinning like an idiot by this point)*

It's the British spelling.

DEE

*(also as though she's practically about to ignite by this time)*

Especially when applied to men in dresses.

ALLEN

Like lumberjacks?

DEE

Only the kind who collect flowers and wear high heels.

ALLEN

Oh, but I thought your nuclear physics theories were so *rugged!*

*(As DEE and ALLEN burst into peals of laughter together, MEGAN gets up and stalks off, huffy. ALLEN gives a slightly “uh-oh” look, but doesn’t go to move. DEE scoots in a little closer to him.)*

DEE

Maybe she’s offended by the Brits and their nasty habit of colonialism?

ALLEN

Nah, the only IRA she’s ever heard of is the kind with Roth in front of it.

DEE

That’s odd, Roth sounds Protestant to me.

ALLEN

Well, of course he had to change his name after he moved to the States. Had to protect his identity, of course.

*(As they laugh again, DEE puts her hand over ALLEN’s. Their respective grins are goofy, delighted. Then the lights dim over the couch and shift to the café table once again. ALLEN freezes in the darkness, DEE walks over towards the light. She does not walk entirely over to the table, just far enough into the pool of light that she is visible. One of her hands extends far out to her side and strokes the frozen ALLEN’s hair as she speaks.)*

DEE

I don’t know to this day how I managed to trample that poor unsuspecting woman. I said things I don’t even think that I knew. I was downright dazzling. All I remember is how the room faded out around this beautiful man, that I got this sudden magic tunnel where all light and sound faded the nearer that they got to his face. He was the only person in the room, and time just froze around him. But then, that’s old hat to anyone who’s ever fallen in love.

*(she looks over towards ALLEN’s still head, soft and thinking.)*

I guess it would be disingenuous to say that I fell in love with him that first night, because of course it’s always richer and deeper than that. But that night was all it took for me to know that I could. That I would. I knew that it wouldn’t take

much more time with him for me to be at his total mercy, and I was more than willing to throw myself into it.

*(The lights shift again, back over the sofa, but differently this time, more soft, low, shadowy, indicating a room in mostly darkness. DEE sits back on the sofa with ALLEN and kisses him. They get gradually more impassioned—and horizontal. Crazy monkey-love should eventually be implied. It would be helpful to have a blanket or quilt on the back of the couch for the couple to pull over themselves at some point, to help create the illusion. After a couple minutes, DEE emerges, propped on ALLEN's chest, over him.)*

DEE

Do you want a cigarette?

ALLEN

I don't smoke.

DEE

I don't either. I was trying to find out if you did. I really don't know what I was going to do if you said yes.

*(ALLEN laughs and strokes her hair, charmed.)*

DEE

I know that I'm breaking about nine different rules right now, but I just want you to know that this isn't my normal M.O. My end goal at a party isn't usually to steal some poor girl's date so I can go home with him.

ALLEN

Well, she wasn't technically my date.

DEE

I don't know if she'd agree with you.

ALLEN

Yeah, Megan's probably pretty pissed right now.

DEE

*(can't resist a little amusement)* Well, I'm not sure if it would be better to apologize to her, or to just never mention it.

ALLEN

Yeah, I don't know that I really think it's necessary to have that conversation.

DEE

I wonder if Hallmark makes a card for this kind of thing.

ALLEN

Aw, don't worry about it. I'm sure she'll find somebody who's more into investment banking than jokes about the Northern Irish conflicts.

DEE

You guys weren't close?

ALLEN

Nah. She was a friend's cousin's friend who I was supposed to hit it off with, or something.

DEE

Oh, I hate those kind of setups. But you can't say no, because the people who are doing the setting think they're being so helpful.

ALLEN

Exactly. You don't want to disappoint anybody.

DEE

Funny how it becomes about them and not you.

ALLEN

Ironic, no?

DEE

Yeah. *(pause)* Wow, I'm sleepy. I didn't even drink that much at the party, I'm just tired.

ALLEN

Me, too. Unexpected evening.

DEE

Yeah, you could say that.

*(There are a few moments of idle silence. It is both tense AND comfortable.)*

DEE

So, do you mind too much if I crash here?

ALLEN

Mind? God, I hope I don't seem like the kind of guy who would just kick you out.

DEE

No, no. Well, I mean, I really don't think so... But I don't want to, ah, cramp your style, either.

*(ALLEN looks confused for a moment, not sure exactly how to answer.)*

ALLEN

I wasn't planning on losing your phone number tomorrow, if that's what you're worried about.

DEE

Oh, no—I mean, yeah, of course I am, but... I just don't want you to get the wrong impression. About me. In general.

ALLEN

I think it's been pretty good so far.

DEE

Yeah. Well, you'll have to try meeting me again with clothes on sometime.

ALLEN

Well, we can chat over breakfast in the morning, if you want.

DEE

You sure?

ALLEN

I hope so. I didn't expect you to go. Or even want you to.

DEE

Okay. *(pause)* So do you cook?

ALLEN

Yeah, I'm not too bad.

DEE

Even better.

*(The next time they get together. ALLEN sits on couch, waiting. DEE comes over and sits, close but tense. ALLEN puts an easy arm around her shoulders.)*

DEE

What are we watching?

ALLEN

A banned film. Or, it used to be. It's called "The Lovers," it's French.

*(DEE smiles, then gets a determined look on her face, frowning a little. She puts a hand on ALLEN's chin and turns his face towards her. She intends to tell him something, but he misinterprets the gesture and kisses her. She is a bit surprised at first, but then gives in. This lasts for a couple of minutes, then they pull back, looking into one another's eyes for a moment until DEE speaks.)*

DEE

I'm usually a lesbian.

ALLEN

*(bemused)* What, are you on a spy mission from the other side?

DEE

No, really.

ALLEN

*(leans back a little)* What? Really?

DEE

I thought that I should let you know now, better sooner than later.

ALLEN

*(an almost non-reaction)* So you're bi?

DEE

*(taken aback. She expected something more)* Well, yeah, I guess I am.

ALLEN

Oh. *(pause)* My last girlfriend was, too.

DEE

Yeah?

ALLEN

Sure.

DEE

Did it... bother you?

ALLEN

Nah. Ex-boyfriends are worse things to deal with than ex-girlfriends, from my end, at least.

DEE

Well. *(pause)* How did you find out?

ALLEN

Not like this. It, ah, I dunno, it just came up in conversation one day.

DEE

What, over coffee? 'Gee, the pasta was fantastic. Oh, and I like girls.'??

ALLEN

Well, yeah, kind of. I think she started the sentence with 'Hey, did you know.' Or maybe it was, 'Did I ever tell you.' I don't really remember. You've been with guys before too, though, I assume. I mean you didn't seem, you know, new.

DEE

*(still kind of at a loss)* Yeah, I have.

*(pause)*

Had she?

ALLEN

Oh yeah, sure.

*(Pause. ALLEN's arm is still around DEE; she is still a bit confused, but trying to regain.)*

DEE

So what's this movie about again?

ALLEN

A beautiful, spirited woman... who gives it up to a guy who she just met.

DEE

Oh.

ALLEN

She also leaves her husband and runs away with him. It was big, controversial stuff back in its day.



DEE

Yeah, I still feel a little guilty about the whole Megan thing.

ALLEN

It happens, I guess. *(pause. Smiling)* You know, if you get bored with the subtitles, Jeanne Moreau was pretty hot, for her time.

*(DEE smiles back, wry and smitten, undone, and finally relaxes and leans into him. Lights fade over the couch, brighten over the center table. DEE wanders back to her seat at the café table, eyes faraway and giddy. Let her have a few moments to kind of sit and space out, lost in the happy-bubble, before LEENA walks in, carrying two cups of coffee. She takes a seat, as always, on the SR side of the table.)*

LEENA

Here, I grabbed yours.

DEE

Thanks. Two percent?

LEENA

Yeah. *(pause)* No, it's full-fat. You're skinny. Call it my revenge.

DEE

Hey, it's my blood on your hands when I die from clogged arteries.

LEENA

I have seen you down bacon cheeseburgers like a starved frat boy. Seen it. You don't even blink.

DEE

Yeah, that whole vegetarianism thing always sounded way better in my head than it did in reality. I think I tried it for three whole days. In three different years.

LEENA

I wish I could blame it on you never having kids, but I can't tell you how pissed I'd be if you DID have children and still didn't have a problem...

DEE

Ha. Yeah, well, you really will be the one with the healthy arteries in a few years. So you can shake your fat old butt at my skinny casket and say "I told you so..."

LEENA

Keep calling my ass fat, and I'll dance on your grave.

DEE

Ah, I think I'll go grab a brownie to go with this latte...

LEENA

Pure evil. So anyhow, what's up?

DEE

Not a lot...

LEENA

How's your mom?

DEE

Fine. Her usual self. Polishing silver as we speak. (*pause*) I should get over there soon, actually.

LEENA

Yeah, I know what you mean. Me and Reg need to get out to my mother's AND his mother's. It's not that I ever really mind it once I'm over there, you know? It's just the actual getting there, packing up the kids... seems like there's always something better to do. Or at least something else to do.

DEE

Yeah, I understand. I've gotten to the point where I know exactly how many of my mother's calls I can ignore before she gets angry with me.

LEENA

Makes you feel terrible, doesn't it?

DEE

Yeah. It does. I mean, it's not like I hate her, she's just... hard to incorporate into my daily life.

LEENA

You've been working for a government agency too long.

DEE

Why?

LEENA

Hard to incorporate, makes it sound like you're writing her into a case report.

DEE

Look who's talking, miss Corporate America.

LEENA

Yeah, whatever. No, I do, I know what you mean. Hell, half our marketing department's profits probably come from manipulating people's guilt over not spending more time with their families.

DEE

That's creepy. Really. But then, all I can ever think about is how bad I'd feel if something happened to her. I don't spend that much time over there, but if Mom died, I don't know how I could deal with it. She's the first person I'd go to talk to if anybody else died, so who the hell do I go to if something were to happen to her? But then, I just feel bad about even thinking about that.

LEENA

Where do you think the guilt comes from? See, now you see how marketing works.

DEE

Eeek.

LEENA

I know, it seems a little horrible. But hey, at least we help guilt people into calling their moms more often.

DEE

I see. So you're providing a passive-aggressive service to the nation.

LEENA

Works for me. And your mother.

DEE

Well, she might not be so unhappy about my unreturned calls if she knew how I'd be spending my time lately.

LEENA

What do you mean?

DEE

I met somebody.

LEENA

You think it's the real thing this time? Theresa's finally going to see her wayward child at least settle down?

DEE

I don't know, it's kind of early to tell, but I sure as hell hope so. I think this one has promise.

LEENA

Do you think she'll really be happy once you're in a long-term relationship, or do you think that was just her being a good mother? I... oh, don't get me wrong, DEE, but you know she still has a hard time with this. I'm a mom, and I know that as a mother she'll be happy just to see you getting stable and settled, but I just wonder HOW happy.

DEE

Speaking of guilt.

LEENA

Oh, you know I don't really mean it that way, and I'm not even saying that I think it's right, I just wonder how she's going to FEEL.

DEE

What, preparing yourself in case one of your own comes home a homo?

LEENA

Dee, stop it. You know damn well I'd love either of my kids no matter who they decide to be. It's a legitimate question, and you know it.

DEE

It's not a woman.

LEENA

What?

DEE

She's not a woman. He's not a woman, rather.

LEENA

What?

DEE

The person. Who I met.

LEENA

Wait. What? So what... does that mean for you now?

DEE

Hell if I know.

LEENA

Well, Jesus, tell me something, fill in some of the blanks for me, would you?

DEE

I don't know, it happened the usual way, we met at a party, got to talking...

LEENA

I'm sure you've met and talked to a lot of men who didn't even faze you. Men didn't stop existing when you decided to be a lesbian.

DEE

Well, I wasn't attracted to any of them.

LEENA

ANY of them?

DEE

Any. Of them.

LEENA

So this must have been one hell of a guy to make you entirely re-think your lot in life.

DEE

It didn't even happen like that. He just... was different. We talked for what must have been almost three hours without even blinking. I didn't know what hit me.

LEENA

You talk to Gabriel for three hours all the time.

DEE

Yeah, as a friend, all cozy and full of gossip. Comfortable. You're a woman, and I've talked with you for hours, too. Besides, Gabe happens to also be gay.

LEENA

Looks like you can't say "also" anymore.

DEE

Yeah. Well. At least for right now.

LEENA

You wouldn't be telling me this yet if you didn't think it was going somewhere. You think I'm this out of touch corporate citizen, but you forget that I know you.

DEE

No. I know.

LEENA

Your mother will be happy. Hell, she'll be thrilled. Or she'll kill you for putting her through all that for no reason, one of the two.

*(Pause.)*

LEENA

So, did you sleep with him yet?

*(DEE is speechless. Even a spit-take might not be out of line.)*

DEE

I... We... yeah.

LEENA

First night?

*(Pause.)*

LEENA

Wow, when you get back into something, you really jump in feet-first, don't you? Don't worry, I slept with Reggie our second date, and we still ended up married.

DEE

I'm not... Okay, I was worried, but we've been out since then, so I think it's okay.

LEENA

Well, at least you haven't lost your touch.

DEE

I... I guess not...

LEENA

Oh, this is going to be fun. I'm so excited. I have to run, though, sweetie, but of course. Keep me posted with updates.

DEE

I will.

*(LEENA gets up and walks out, still entertained. DEE stays where she is, still holding her coffee, alone on the stage. GABRIEL walks in with his own cup of coffee, and takes a seat on the sofa-side of the table.)*

DEE

Hey, how's it going?

GABRIEL

Fine, woman, how are you?

DEE

Not bad.

GABRIEL

I left as soon as you texted me. What's going on?

DEE

Oh, I have one hell of a story, trust me.

GABRIEL



Okay?

DEE

I met somebody.

GABRIEL

This is news? You've met five people in the past two years. I mean, probably more, those are just the ones that stuck for more than seventeen minutes and a cigarette.

DEE

Seventeen minutes? Speak for yourself. Some of us aren't bound by a long refractory period.

GABRIEL

Oh, sweet Jesus, yes, I know, I know ALL about the superior powers of the vagina. Yes. It's great. I'm missing out. I've heard. So what the hell is the name of the womyn-with-a-y that's attached to this particular vagina you're so excited about?

DEE

Oh, sweetie, you just have no idea.

GABRIEL

No! I do not, that is my point.

DEE

Well... Oh, Gabe, I'm so sorry, but I have to drag out the suspense on this one.

GABRIEL

You couldn't have gotten that out of your system while you were waiting for me to get here?

DEE

Oh, please, that is not how this works and you know it. What exactly were you doing that was so important, anyhow?

GABRIEL

What is that supposed to mean? I got stuff. I always have stuff.

DEE

Oh, yes, I'm so sure you were in the middle of something crucial.

GABRIEL

See, it never ceases to amaze me just how little you really know me. You always assume.

DEE

Am I really making an ass out of you right now? Seriously? What were you in the middle of, catching up on reading the classics? Were you in the middle of disentangling the metaphorical connection between bullfighting and potency in the works of Hemingway?

GABRIEL

You know very well that the last book I read was a Saul Bellow.

DEE

Yes. The last book you read. Which was five years ago.

GABRIEL

*(amused despite himself)* Hey, it was not.

DEE

Ooh, snappy comeback.

GABRIEL

It wasn't! I finished that just before Christmas of... Well, I guess it has been almost two—that is not the point. I'm clearly a fan of quality over quantity.

DEE

Well, clearly. You're here.

GABRIEL

You think you're quite the clever girl, don't you?

DEE

Think, señor?

GABRIEL

Oh, Jesus, you are going to make me have to break out the chicken-neck and the told-you finger, and you know how I hate to do that faggy shit out in public.

DEE

But you do such a hilarious Rosie Perez when you really get going.

GABRIEL

Seriously?

DEE

What?

GABRIEL

Did you just trot me out here for some cheap shots?

DEE

No, no. Don't get me wrong, it's always icing on the cake, but no, I do have actual news.

GABRIEL

Besides, you know that I'm more of a math-minded person than I am all right-brained and literary. How many other people do you know scored higher on the math on their SATs?

DEE

Man, I really hit a nerve with that one, didn't I? Feeling a little uncultured lately?

GABRIEL

I—No, I just don't like people picking on my intelligence, woman.

DEE

A bit of dust gathering on your old bookshelf? Have you been letting yourself watch reality television again?

GABRIEL

You know I only ever watch the cooking shows.

DEE

Yeah, until that day I walked in on you watching *American Idol*.

GABRIEL

That was one time! I was channel-surfing and they were doing a song that I liked!

DEE

Uh-huh. One time that *I* know of.

GABRIEL

Whatever. I do not have to explain myself to you.

DEE

Okay, okay. So what *were* you doing when I called you, by the way?

GABRIEL

Cleaning my bathroom.

DEE

What?

GABRIEL

Well, I know that cleaning is a foreign concept to you, or beneath you, or something, but sometimes, people do this thing called scrubbing out their bathrooms.

DEE

You just pitched that big of a fit over me interrupting you cleaning your bathroom?

GABRIEL

It was dirty.

DEE

You have got to be kidding me.

GABRIEL

Hey, you know how irritable I get when I'm interrupted. I left it all half-cleaned.

DEE

Seriously. Wow, it's good to know where I rank.

GABRIEL

Oh, so you can give me shit but you can't take it? Ah-hah, I see...

DEE

Alright, alright, let me tell you what's going on before you lose all interest.

GABRIEL

Too late.

DEE

Just listen.

GABRIEL

I'm waiting.

DEE

Okay. Well...

*(Long pause, DEE looks odd. The next short exchange, until she stops beating around the bush, should make it clear that they are kind of on two different wavelengths, that DEE is not exactly reciprocating the usual banter.)*

GABRIEL

What??

DEE

Wow, it's weird, now I'm not really sure how to tell you.

GABRIEL

I do not get you sometimes.

DEE

I know... It's okay, I don't get me either.

GABRIEL

Well, that's good then.

DEE

So I told you that this is about meeting somebody, right?

GABRIEL

Yes. This much I got.

DEE

Well, it's different this time.

GABRIEL

*(in the tone friends get when they become concerned that you're doing something stupid again)*

Dee, I have heard this story from you before. I don't know if your brain can take another round of insanity.

DEE

No, no, not different in the way that you're thinking.

GABRIEL

I don't know what you mean.

DEE

I know. That's why I called you out here. And trust me, when I tell you this, it wasn't something that I was expecting, either.

GABRIEL

Okay...

DEE

It's not that I think this person is different because it's going to last—I mean, no, I do think it's going to last, it has that written all over it, but it's different because of the person, too.

GABRIEL

*(severe)* DEE?

DEE

It's different in a way that's totally new and weird to me—

GABRIEL

Dee, are you playing the pronoun game with me?

DEE

I...

GABRIEL

You are, aren't you? No, no, oh no, *please* tell me. Don't let me ruin the surprise. I want to hear this story that you have to tell.

DEE

*(with trepidation)* Yeah, actually, I am. I met... I've been dating a man.

GABRIEL

A man.

DEE

Yes. A man. Complete with penis and chest hair. Like you.

GABRIEL

Oh, I'm assuming not like me...

DEE

Well, no, this is true.

GABRIEL

*(biting. DEE doesn't notice tone, or pretends not to.)*

So did you tell your mother yet? All is well? Never have to hurt your father's virgin ears with a homo tale of woe?

DEE

No, I haven't told her yet.

GABRIEL

Ah, wanted to tell me first, huh? Just like always. Practice dazzling me with your presto-change-o straight conversion?

DEE

Well, I did talk to Leena already.

GABRIEL

Oh, I'm sure she was dazzled.

DEE

Well, I—

*(The temperature between them should drop subtly but definitively. DEE should react to this with a bit of shock and confusion before the realization of her error.)*

GABRIEL



How did it happen?

DEE

At a party. We met out of nowhere, he thought I was somebody else, it was random, just like you meet anybody. We just started talking, and hit it off.

GABRIEL

That is not what I meant. And you should know it.

DEE

Gabe, I don't know. It just did. Love doesn't make sense, it's messy, it only just happens.

GABRIEL

Oh, well, how very *Moonstruck* of you.

DEE

Come on, it's true, though, you know this.

GABRIEL

Yes, I do. I certainly do. And I know how lopsided it is. I know how quickly and easily it happens for some people, how you just seem to find "the One" around every corner, even though you're working with ten percent of half of the population, five percent of people and somehow you're STILL never without, and yet despite this track record of overwhelming success, now you're telling me that you now feel the need to draw from the pool of both genders, because a steady stream of adoration from only one just isn't enough. What, is the latest trend from *Feminist Weekly* to go out and conquer the menfolk?

DEE

But... I couldn't wait to tell you, because now I understand what the appeal is, I can kind of see where you're coming from—

GABRIEL

No. Don't. Don't you even. You do NOT understand where I am coming from. I used to think that you did, a little bit. I mean, I knew that you never entirely got it, because of that exact success rate. I thought maybe, though, that your endless FAILED relationships would allow you to at least sympathize with me in my

constant search for SOMEBODY that I could actually get along with, one other fairly intelligent, reserved gay man who would rather actually get to know me than fuck endlessly to Lady GaGa. I thought that maybe you were just more optimistic than me, that you decided to give them all the benefit of the doubt and date them for a while just to make sure they weren't your type, while I saw through people more quickly and just rejected them outright. I thought. But no, no, now I see that in fact all of your heartbreak and disappointment was CRAP, it was just you practicing and pretending and getting ready for the real thing, like some little teenaged twat practicing making out with her friends at a sleepover. Or even worse, apparently, like some sorority bar slut making out with girls to make the guys like her more.

DEE

That is not fair! It is not true, and it is definitely not fair, and you know it.

GABRIEL

I do. I do know that it is not fair. As easily as they have all come to you, your naïve ass probably did believe that you were honestly just really a lesbian, and that it had nothing to do with your uptight mother and your quiet, stern father. You can joke about paging Dr. Freud, but four years of school didn't really give you any incentive to look at yourself, now did it?

DEE

Gabe, come on. You know that if I knew that this was going to upset you, I wouldn't have told you.

GABRIEL

Why? Why bother? I would have eventually found out anyway. Better to do it this way, like a Band-Aid.

DEE

Please, that wasn't how I intended it. I didn't think—

GABRIEL

Oh, I know you didn't, and that is EXACTLY why it pisses me off. It doesn't just kill me that you did it—although trust me, I died a little inside thinking about it—it kills me that you thought I'd be just jumping happy to share your news.

DEE

I'm sorry.

GABRIEL

Do not apologize to me.

DEE

I— Well, what am I supposed to do, exactly? First I'm not supposed to tell you, then I'm not allowed to apologize?

GABRIEL

You should know by now that I hate apologies. They don't mean anything. And they certainly don't DO anything. But then, apparently, maybe I shouldn't be surprised that you didn't know...

DEE

I know! I do! But what am I supposed to do? I made a mistake, and now I want to apologize. It's all I can do, it's not like I can throw time in reverse.

GABRIEL

Yes, yes, you make a mess and then expect it just to be okay because it's too late. Sweet, silly Dee did it again and whoops! Already done! Too late now!

DEE

I'm not trying to make you clean up my mess.

GABRIEL

Well, you're sure as hell not doing a great job of it.

DEE

I don't know what you want me to do!

GABRIEL

See, there it is again—what *I* want you to do. Why is it my job to figure out what you need to do? This is all about your actions, not mine.

DEE

But... I didn't even know that this was how you would... that this would happen. I really thought... It just all worked so much differently in my head.

GABRIEL

Did it? Did you really work it out in your head? Or did you just kind of rush ahead and assume? You know, because that's how you *wanted* it to work? Did you really stop and think about me in this equation at all, or were you only thinking about yourself?

DEE

You were the first person I wanted to tell. I really wanted to share this with you.

GABRIEL

You. You wanted. And it kills me, I want to forgive you and get on with life like we usually do. Hell, some idiot part of me even wants to be happy for you. But I can't.

*(He stands up from the table, gives a long and complicated look at DEE.)*

GABRIEL

*(condescending)* I'm sorry.

*(He turns and exits. Black.)*

*(Lights up on DEE, sitting on the sofa in the living room, with her jacket lying beside her. ALLEN enters.)*

DEE

Isn't tonight our anniversary?

ALLEN

Yep. And it cracks me up that you're the one who doesn't remember. I should by all rights be insulted by that.

DEE

Well, it's a little embarrassing on my part to try to remember when we got together by when I first slept with you. The fact that "when we started dating" and "when we first slept together" are one and the same makes me look a little bad... You ready?

ALLEN

Yep. Let's go.

*(DEE stands and puts her jacket on, and begins walking towards the center table. ALLEN grabs a vase of roses from behind the couch. He holds them down to his side and slightly behind him, and walks half a pace behind as they head to the table. As she starts to take her jacket off when they get there, he spins to place them in the table's center while her back is turned, then takes the jacket from her and hangs it over the chair on the SL side of the table, which he pulls out for her to sit. He takes her usual chair in the center.)*

DEE

Aw, the flowers are beautiful. Thank you.

ALLEN

That's not your present.

DEE

Well, I kind of figured you'd be buying me dinner, too.

ALLEN

Heh. Quite the traditionalist when you want to be.

DEE

Well, you know, living in our mercenary capitalist society and all, of course.

ALLEN

Of course. You know, you're not afraid of what you want. That's one of the things I love about you. And it's why it never bothered me that you took advantage of me on our first date.

DEE

On the night that we first met, you mean?

ALLEN

Yes. Then. It's okay, I would have gone after you anyway. Just maybe not as forcefully as you came after me. Which is why I'm glad you did.

DEE

I'm glad you're glad.

ALLEN

Ah, Jesus, I have to give you the rest of your gift now, if I wait until after dinner I'll either chicken out or have so much wine I'll mess it up.

DEE

What do you mean, mess it up? Are you going to recite something for me?

ALLEN

Not exactly.

*(He fumbles in his pocket for a moment and produces, unsurprisingly, a ring box. He slides down off the chair and does the whole one-knee thing.)*

ALLEN

Dee... Deirdre... I've been thinking about this since it would have been way too soon and scared you right the hell away, but I think that this is a good night for it... Dee, I'm in love with you, I'm pretty confident you love me, and I can't see one good, sensible reason why we shouldn't make it official and spend our lives together. Will you marry me?

DEE

Oh, my God, Allen, I had no idea... Of course I'll marry you.

*(He puts the ring on her, she takes his hands, there is much smooching and other such violence for a moment. They end up standing, holding one another.)*

DEE

I love you. *(pause)* I'm not changing my name.

ALLEN

Gee, thanks.

DEE

No, it's not about you, or your name, but I'm not. I decided that a long time ago. It's an archaic tradition that dates back to when you purchased women with goats and grain sacks.

ALLEN

You want me to give your dad a goat?

DEE

No, Allen. Seriously. I'm not changing it. I'll be glad to tell your family why if you want me to, I can be the bad guy, but I'm not doing it.

ALLEN

It's okay. I kind of figured you wouldn't, anyhow.

DEE

It's not even that I'm attached to my family's name, it's more the point of the thing. I wouldn't respect myself.

ALLEN

Dee. I don't care what your name is. Really. It's fine.

DEE

Are you sure?

ALLEN

No. That's it. Deal's off. You have my name, or nothing.

*(holds her out at arm's length for a moment)*

Do I seem like the kind of guy who'd care about that?

DEE

No. No, I guess I do know you better than that by now. *(pause)* You know, let's just go home.

ALLEN

Yeah?

DEE

Yeah. C'mon.

*(They walk arm-in-arm back into the living room and sit canoodling on the sofa under dim light. Once their backs are to the table, as they walk away, GABRIEL emerges from the shadows upstage, where he had been standing unbeknownst to them. It should be unclear if he was "really" there or not. He walks down and sits in DEE's usual seat in the center, and caresses the petals of the flowers she's left sitting behind. He feels them sadly, slides one from the vase, then slides from the seat to the floor. He holds it up before him, towards the ceiling, hopeful, then slides up into the SL seat and holds it to himself, looking more bitter and hopeless than actually play-acting or pretending. He looks from the SL chair over to the sofa, where DEE and ALLEN still murmur and giggle to one another, foreheads together, a complex, despondent expression on his face. With a slight look of disgust and resignation, he stands, taking the vase of flowers with him, and creeps as silently as possible over into the living room and places them before the couple, on their coffee table. They do not notice. He exits, still carrying the single flower with him.)*

*(Lights full up over DEE and ALLEN. They bring a box of envelopes, stamps, and mail detritus onto the coffee table. They seal and stamp things for a bit, in silence. DEE stares at an envelope for a moment, pensive.)*

ALLEN

So are you going to send him one?

DEE

I don't know. I think so. I don't know.

ALLEN

I wish that there was something I could do.

DEE

It's not your fault, honestly. You're sweet to feel bad, but you were only a bystander. A catalyst at best.

ALLEN

I know, but—



DEE

I just don't know if he'll see this as an olive branch, or as a slap in the face. I'm thinking it will be the latter, but then, if he finds out that I got married and he wasn't invited, then he might be even more offended.

ALLEN

You can't kill yourself trying to predict someone else's reaction.

DEE

A good friend wouldn't have to try.

ALLEN

A good friend wouldn't make you. Just do what *you* think is right, you'll feel better.

DEE

I'm not even sure that he's at the same address.

ALLEN

You'd think it would at least still be forwarded. It hasn't been all that long.

DEE

Yeah. And he never has been a big fan of change.

*(DEE stands, and takes one of the flowers from the vase. She carries it with her to her center chair. The lights over ALLEN's sofa go black.)*

DEE

But then, he died. The straight man who made my punchlines work just...stopped. He ended. The book on his nightstand was never opened past page thirty-four, he never found out if the Dr. Pepper stain came out of his favorite tan pants. He never got to put stink into another pair of socks. There was a car, and another car, and broken glass, and hospital rooms, and machines, and bandages, and attempts, and all kinds of things that wake me up at night that aren't really important anymore. *(pause)* He died, and it was hard. That's all that really matters, isn't it? It's the only thing that needs said. He died, and it was hard. The details are always terrible and excruciating and horrifying, but it all comes back down to one thing: He died, and it was hard.

The one thing, the one thing that everybody gets wrong, though? The noise. The sound. Everybody assumes metallic screeches, and screaming ambulances, and bustling ERs, but what I remember most is the silence. I remember waiting rooms, and thinking, and watching, and wishing he would just talk to me again, tell me what he needed. It was the quiet that was worst of all. Even when I have the dreams, even when I dream about the parts that I wasn't there for, the parts with the cars, and the gurney, and the sirens, and things hurtling along and I can't make them stop, it's always dead silent, as though I were in a movie with the sound on mute. I try to talk, or even just to listen, and I can't. I can't hear what's going on.

He died, and it was hard.

*(DEE stands and walks dazedly towards her mother's kitchen table. She holds some black fabric in her hands, which she is working between her fingers, strained. She sits as her mother bustles about a bit; as they speak, DEE attempts to tie the cloth around her own wrist and rig up a sling for herself. She may eventually get it tied, but the sling never fully materializes. THERESA takes no notice of this.)*

DEE

I, uh, yeah. I found the outfit, the one that I think he wanted to use.

THERESA

Okay, dear, do you want to take it to them, or would you like me to do that for you? I would be glad to run down there with it.

DEE

Um. Sure. I won't be going past before, so that would be good.

THERESA

Sure, honey. I'd be glad to stop by. That way you won't have to be there any more than you have to.

DEE

Oh, well, that's fine. It's a nice place.

THERESA

Yes, honey. It is. And I'm sure everything will be just fine.

DEE

You think it's a nice place?

THERESA

It is a very nice place.

DEE

Would that be where you want—do you think it's comfortable there?

THERESA

I can't think of a more comfortable place to have picked. Honey, what about what you're going to wear?

DEE

I'll be fine.

THERESA

Do you know what you're going to wear on Tuesday?

DEE

No.

THERESA

Do you still have that nice dress that you wore last Christmas?

DEE

I'm sure.

THERESA

You could wear that dress. Would you like me to go pick it up for you?

DEE

Will we be in a church?

THERESA

Well, not really. There will be a chapel, but we'll be in... the home, and then outside, mostly. As long as the sun holds up.

DEE

There shouldn't be sun.

THERESA

Well, I did see the forecast yesterday was clear, but God knows that dice are more reliable than weathermen.

DEE

No. It should rain. It should rain, and storm, hail, sleet, and wind, and blow, and toss it all away. I can't stand out there in the sun with that big gaping hole in front of me... Why do I have to stand there in the front? I'm the one who wants him to be there the least! The least the weather could do is make sense!

*(THERESA, who had up until this point tried to be matter-of-fact and thus calming, walks over to DEE and tries to comfort her. She finally does notice the black cloth, but pretends that she does not, so as to not startle her daughter. DEE pays little notice; what she is saying is not specifically aimed at her mother.)*

THERESA

Oh, honey, it's not going to make sense.

DEE

I was thinking that I should wear my wedding dress. I still have it, of course, I'll always have it, it will just keep hanging there like a beautiful reminder with nothing in it. I should put something in it again. Like you always say, that's the only time I ever set foot in a church, right? Weddings and funerals. Weddings and funerals. So why not both? Why not let that dress have something in it one last time, huh? Put me in a church and put something in it!

THERESA

You can't—wear white. You couldn't wear that, because it's white. Don't you—

DEE

The Chinese wear white.

THERESA

I'm sorry, dear?

DEE

Don't say you're sorry. Doesn't change anything. The Chinese wear white. We always liked Buddhism more anyhow. Allen would be happy if I came as a Buddhist. He seemed really happy the last time he saw me in that dress.

THERESA

Dee. Honey. Have you eaten anything today? I know that you don't feel much like eating, but I know that it would help if you ate something.

DEE

They wear red for weddings, though. Missed the boat on that one. Maybe it brought me some bad karma, ha-ha, should have worn red, boy everybody would have loved that one. It is a love color. Washes me out, though, never could pull off red. Shame to think I brought this karmic retribution on myself because of my complexion. So shallow, only learned to know better too late.

THERESA

Deirdre. This is not your fault.

DEE

It's nobody else's fault.

THERESA

It's nobody's fault.

DEE

You don't know. I don't know, you don't know. You don't know.

THERESA

Come on, how about a toasted cheese sandwich? Remember how I always used to make them for you when you were a little girl?

DEE

Not hungry.

THERESA

No matter how sick you were, you would always eat a grilled cheese sandwich. Could you eat some just to make me feel better? I'll make it however you like—

*(DEE slides off the chair and onto the floor, her face in her hands. Perhaps she keens, perhaps she is silent, staring. She folds herself up a bit as she sits on the floor. THERESA comes and puts an arm around DEE and leans over her. The effect is that DEE should be almost entirely enclosed, like furlled flower petals.)*

*(Blackout.)*

*(DEE should start speaking almost the instant the lights are down; she speaks from the living room, not on but in front of the couch. Lights should be cued by her speech, rather than vice versa. They should not come up entirely, but remain shadowy. Once we see her again, we see that there are again black streamers tied around and trailing from her wrists. It may be effective to watch her attach them herself.)*

DEE

Those bastards “they” love to say to be grateful about what you have had in life, no matter how fleeting. *(increasingly bitter)* Happiness is fleeting. Everything is temporary. We are only borrowing, so be happy with something while you have it, you can't expect to keep anything forever, give it back with grace, look back fondly on the memories. At least you have the memories. Cherish your memories. Those are something that nobody can ever take away from you.

*(She should start moving somewhat on this next, either pacing or going about motions of straightening up living room, fussing with the afghan on the back of the sofa, pillows, whatever. She probably moves things from one place to another and then back, and her neatening gets savage as she goes on. Random things to be put into boxes, or boxes to move around, may be helpful as props for this scene. Invisible boxes that she is moving as though they are there may also be a nice touch.)*

Yeah, all that crap may be true, but that's all it ever feels like to me. Crap. Of course I spend most of my time wishing that I had more than the memories, that I was left with something with a little more substance than some cold synapses in my brain. But that's beyond pointless, isn't it? Futile. And what I've found has started to creep in, in it's place, is a different wish, one that I try to keep quiet even from myself most of the time: I wish that I never had that damn limb at all. You know how they also say it's easier to be blind, or to be deaf, if you're that

way since birth? It's only logical, because you would have spent your entire life living with that absence, coping with it, almost evolving because of it. You know how you turn the radio down in your car when you're looking for an address, how it helps you concentrate? Imagine being deaf, it would be like having the radio turned all the way down, all the time. If you had only one leg, it would be so strong. It would have no choice. But cut one off, and how weak does it feel? Your leg strength is suddenly cut in half. If you're going to have one leg, it's almost surely better to have never had two. But then, nobody ever looks down at their right leg and says, 'well, it's time to make the big sacrifice for lefty over here. It's getting soft, so you're going to have to go.' Nobody, probably not even if they knew that they were going to lose one eventually, makes that decision just to hack it off from day one. See? 'Enjoy it while you have it.' That gem of crap. Because as soon as you don't have it any more, you wish you would have gotten rid of it in the first place. Hindsight. Another pointless human function.

*(Pause.)*

And then I feel guilty, because I wonder if maybe I'm NOT appreciating it. Or I didn't. Because how could I wish that I never had it if I really enjoyed myself? Maybe it got taken back because it was wasted on me.

*(She sits on her manically neat sofa and stares outwards.)*

*(The lights brighten over THERESA's kitchen area. She is also fussing around nervously, though not manically. She is clearly distressed and trying to make up her mind about something. After a few moments of her neatening, straightening, and making obviously pointless nervous actions that echo those of her daughter, she gathers herself and walks out of her area for the first time in the show. She reaches the midpoint, in line with DEE's center chair at the café table, and slows. She has visible difficulty making her way past this line, and from there onwards she sort of drags her feet and hesitates. She gets about halfway between the table and the couch where DEE sits, and stops, calling over to DEE as though from another room.)*

THERESA

Dee? Dee? Honey?

*(When there is no response, she walks over a bit closer. She never, however, makes her way quite into the "living room.")*

THERESA

Honey, I just wanted to look in on you, see how you were doing, check and see if you need anything. Do you need anything from the store? When's the last time you've been to the store? Come on, I'll go with you.

*(LEENA walks over to the sofa, where DEE sits in semi-darkness, staring out at nothing. She walks tentatively, as though she knows/feels that it's a place she shouldn't be. She sits beside DEE and tries to reach out, hug her or rub her shoulder, then stops short. She eventually just rests her hand near her.)*

LEENA

Hey.

*(No response, DEE merely moves her head slightly towards the sound of her friend's voice.)*

LEENA

Dee. Hi.

*(DEE merely waits for her to speak.)*

LEENA

Hey, that's okay. Just stay. I came here to let you know... I wanted to see if you need anything. I'm... God, Dee, I can't imagine how hard this is, but I do know that you probably need to talk. And... I just didn't think it was right, I didn't feel comfortable leaving you alone.

*(DEE looks at her, faraway but suspicious.)*

LEENA

And no, your mother didn't send me. Believe it or not, I just came by to be a friend. We have always been that.

*(She puts her hand over one of DEE's, then removes it again.)*

It's okay if you don't want to talk yet. I understand, I probably wouldn't want to either. I wouldn't want to for years. But if you don't mind too much, I am going to talk, because I've never been very good at just sitting in silence.

*(They do sit in silence, for a moment.)*

I wouldn't either, you know. Want to talk. For God knows how long. If anything happened to Glen, I... Oh, God, sweetie, you probably don't want to talk about that, either.



Oh, come on, just be *angry* with me! I know you're mad! You have to be mad, that I pushed you towards this, that I assume that my pushing had anything to do with what you did, that my husband is alive and yours is gone, something. Please, Deedee, just say something. For God's sake, just get mad that I'm calling you Deedee.

*(She purses her lips and thinks for a moment, then puts her hands over DEE's.)*

I have been so jealous of you.

*(DEE rolls her head towards LEENA, foggy.)*

DEE

What?

LEENA

For dating women.

DEE

Wait... why?

LEENA

For that pregnancy scare, when I was first with Glen... We weren't engaged yet, we hadn't even been dating for all that long. I panicked, I thought he'd think I did it on purpose to keep him, or that we would get married but then he'd resent me because he felt like he had to, or... It just wasn't supposed to happen yet, and I was so afraid that it was going to ruin everything. And then all the trouble we had when we DID try, ironic, right? That's why I was so upset about you being a lesbian, at first, because it seemed—I know this sounds contradictory, but it seemed like it would be so much easier.

DEE

It was, a little.

LEENA

Oh, no, I'm so sorry.

DEE

You didn't make me stop being a lesbian.

LEENA

I know that. I think I do know that. But I... Part of me was happy for you and ALLEN for the wrong reasons, is all I'm saying, and now I'm very sorry for that. If I would have known... I wish I would have known that your hard parts were going to be harder.

DEE

Wouldn't have changed anything.

LEENA

If you knew? If you knew... You wouldn't have just stuck with the life you had? It seemed to work so well.

DEE

Stop talking.

LEENA

I know it hurts. But the talking is good, you need to talk.

DEE

All I have left to do is talk. Or don't. Forever.

LEENA

Dee, trust me, it will help you. Please talk. You were doing so well for a second there.

DEE

Please stop talking.

LEENA

I can stay if you want, as long as you need. Reggie definitely understands.

DEE

Stop. Talking.

LEENA

Okay.

*(LEENA sits for a while, looking concerned, as DEE sits with her eyes closed, weary. LEENA eventually seems to be satisfied that she is asleep, and exits. Once she is gone, DEE gets up and paces for a moment, undoing some of the neatening that she had done earlier, taking some time to yank blankets out of place and toss some pillows around fruitlessly, yanking and throwing things in frustration.)*

*(As she does this, GABRIEL enters as ALLEN did, from the shadows behind the table. His hands are tied behind his back with black cloth. He takes a seat in his usual chair, staring straight ahead, unmoving. Eventually, DEE tires herself and stumbles over towards the table. She addresses GABRIEL's back.)*

DEE

It's done. Are you happy? You can talk to me again now. That hope that I had, the optimism that you were convinced was impossible, well, you were right. That was the one thing that I had that made me feel better about you and the whole deal, is that I thought I'd proven myself right and, of course, you wrong. I consoled myself that we had irreconcilable differences, as it were.

Well, turns out that you were right. And if this is how you've felt all along, well, I'm sorry.

I need you. God, do I need you now.

GABRIEL

Do you hear yourself? Even now, even after everything, it's "I, I, I." You need me. How surprising.

DEE

I do, I do, more than anything. More than I ever have. I can't tell you how important you have—

GABRIEL

Important? Yes, now that you need me, I'm important.

*(DEE walks forward so that she's nearly beside him, as though she's heading to her usual chair.)*

DEE

God, there's no such thing as water under the bridge with you, is there? The thing you got pissed about, the person, the relationship that made you so upset with me, is GONE. With interest. You would think that this would have more than made up for anything I said or did. I'm not saying that I'm sorry; now I have something that I'm actually sorry for.

*(He keeps his head turned so that it's not facing her, his eyes averted, so that he's never actually looking at her.)*

GABRIEL

It's not... you don't... What kind of a person would I be if I wanted you to BE sorry? That's not why... oh, sweet Jesus, it doesn't matter. THAT is why I stopped talking to you, because it just. Doesn't. Matter.

DEE

*(Dee tries to come around to his other side so that he'll face her)*

I don't understand.

GABRIEL

I know. And that is also the point.

DEE

Can you at least...

*(GABRIEL stands up from the table, jerky, and stalks a bit upstage. He keeps his back turned to DEE, who should try to approach him again when she speaks; tentative at first, then frustrated, trying to outstep him. He may occasionally shift from facing one way to the other, but he never turns to face her. It should be understood that he is not actually there. As she reasons and pleads with him, she should attempt to walk around to his face, making him "there," but he should always thwart her and successfully keep his back turned, never giving her satisfaction or succor.)*

GABRIEL

Humor you? Sure. I always have, haven't I? Spent years doing exactly that. And I didn't mind, always, but... Well, anyhow. Here's the deal: I know that I've explained this to you before, but I don't like the words "I'm sorry" because

they neither mean anything nor do anything. It's just something you say when you don't like the outcome of your actions. The fact that you apologized to me after fucking up only said to me, "Aw, I wish I didn't fuck up just now." I didn't care one way or the other about the apology. I cared about the fuck-up. And that one was just too big for me to let go. It said you didn't really know thing one about me or my feelings, and moreover, probably didn't care.

DEE

That's not true. You should *know* that.

GABRIEL

No, that's low. I know you care. Cared. Thought you did, at least. But Dee, you never really saw me past the end of your nose.

DEE

What does that even mean?

GABRIEL

You only ever saw me in the context of you, of being *your* friend, not of being a person who is your friend. It's like whenever I walked out of your view or hung up the phone, I ceased to exist. Why do you think I refused to talk to you online? Even your IMs sounded different, because it was like you were talking to a magic internet person instead of me, because you couldn't see me.

DEE

Really?

GABRIEL

Yeah. Actually, it was kind of disturbing. I brushed it off for a while, but it always kind of stuck in the back of my mind.

DEE

So you're telling me that you dumped me as a friend because I had a weird IM style.

GABRIEL

That's just like you, isn't it, to twist and turn and skew things around so that it seems as though you're the completely rational one, that any problem that could

have to do with YOU is minor and obviously overblown by the other person, who even more obviously is to blame for any issue that they might have with you. Did you ever think that maybe something could be your fault?

DEE

Yeah. Every day. My husband died, didn't I mention that fact to you? The guy you love dies in what people so charmingly refer to as an accident, you spend all of your lonely, lonely, echoing time wondering how it could have been prevented. Not if, but how, because accident means that things could have gone differently.

GABRIEL

Oh, isn't that convenient. The one person who you don't have to face anymore, THAT is the one who you're willing to admit fault to.

DEE

What??

GABRIEL

Oh, wait, I'm sorry, I was supposed to tell you 'no, no, it's not your fault, how could you have prevented it,' right? Yeah? Well, that's masturbation. You know damn well that it's pointless to try to find some way that you could have known and prevented a goddamn car accident, you just feel bad and you need a place to put that feeling bad, so you put it there. Even if you could have prevented it by straightening his tie one last time—

DEE

Allen didn't wear a tie.

GABRIEL

One more of those and I stop talking.

DEE

I'm sorry. Go on.

GABRIEL

Even if you could have prevented it by some random happenstance, there's no way you can put any real fault on yourself for not being fucking psychic and knowing to do that. So it's the ultimate in comfortable blame, because deep

down, you know the blame isn't real. You don't own it. And you have the added bonus benefit of people consoling you and *telling* you that it's not your fault every time you bring it up. No, Dee, *Deirdre*, I am talking about actual blame. That you face. By actually letting a person be pissed at you and admitting to their face that you're wrong and you deserve every drop of anger that they're throwing on you, and then taking it, without some weird kind of backpedaling or evasive arguing twisting-around bullshit so you can make yourself feel better. Sometimes you don't get to feel better.

DEE

You think I feel better now? You think this is fun?

GABRIEL

Boy, that's going to be your trump card for a long time, isn't it? You never have to admit responsibility for anything again, you can get out of jail free with the magic reusable But Don't You Remember that Allen Died card.

DEE

Jesus! Can't you muster up ANY sympathy? It just happened!

GABRIEL

And right there, you admit it. 'It just happened.' Not 'I'm not using it as my trump card,' but 'it just happened.' So using it as the trump card must be okay as long as the wound's fresh, then, right?

DEE

I'm not using—

GABRIEL

No, no. It's too late, now. You have always been good for saying the best shit when you didn't realize you were saying it. Like when you built up suspense and dragged me out of my house to tell me how well you *didn't* know me.

DEE

Yes. That was my fault, I'm admitting it now, I will gladly face up to any anger you have, because I know now that I deserve it, if you would just let me face you.

GABRIEL

Sure, now that you need something, you're all rubber spines to bend over backwards with. Still convenient.

DEE

Yes! I need something! I need you, I said that right away, and I know that there is selfishness in that, but good God, don't you think that an eensy bit of that selfishness is warranted, given the circumstances? Can't you take the context into account for me? That was something I definitely knew about you, you always loved talking about the context, I'm taking things out of context, that only makes sense in the context...

GABRIEL

But you also know that sympathy has never been my strong suit. That kind of thing is only slightly less hollow than an apology. Or did you never really know that about me, either?

DEE

I knew. I just... wanted... I don't know what I expected, but this wasn't it.

GABRIEL

Didn't you used to tell me that you loved me for my honesty?

DEE

I said I appreciated your honesty. There's a difference.

GABRIEL

*(snorts)* Again with the saying more than you realize you're saying. Which, with that one, is everything. What you *wanted* was a big dramatic reunion scene, maybe hard-won, granted, but won nonetheless, because you played your trump card. And the trump card, after all, trumps. But what you have continuously failed to understand is that I'm not playing the game.

DEE

I've aged. I've gone through things. Can't I... can't you... Jesus, just look at me!

GABRIEL



No. You need just one moment in your life when the only person you have to face is yourself.

DEE

That's all I have now! I'm so alone!

GABRIEL

Really? You haven't run back to that old stand-by of Mommy, the most long-term problem-washer you have?

*(DEE's next few lines should be half-muttered, as though partially to herself.)*

DEE

No. But not for lack of trying.

GABRIEL

Really? She's finally started telling you no?

DEE

Not my trying. Her trying.

*(GABRIEL, who had had his full back to her, turns to the side, staring straight out into space but turning the side of his face to her in order to listen, piqued.)*

GABRIEL

What, now?

DEE

She's not the right one anymore.

GABRIEL

You're being cryptic, sweetie.

DEE

She wants to clean things. But it's not working. I wish she could, but this one, she can't.

GABRIEL

*(softly, considering)* Really?

DEE

Not anymore. It's too late. ALLEN took that place.

GABRIEL

He replaced her?

DEE

Oh, that's not fair, nobody replaces your mother.

GABRIEL

Not as your mother, no, of course, don't be obtuse. But he replaced her spot. He was actually your first-stringer. Your first line of defense.

DEE

Yeah. He was. I couldn't help it.

GABRIEL

Well, she can still be your second line, you know.

DEE

I know. But it's not the same.

GABRIEL

No. It won't be. You can't expect that.

DEE

I don't. I don't expect that. Can you please just look at me?

GABRIEL

I... I can't. Just yet. I wouldn't replace him either, you know that, right?

DEE

I know. But it would still be nice to have you back again.

GABRIEL

I thought you were my best friend, you know that?

DEE

I think I did know that.

GABRIEL

Are you looking for a do-over?

DEE

No.

GABRIEL

Okay.

*(GABRIEL exits, without turning to look at her. DEE stumbles zombie-like over to the couch and lies on it, her face to the back of the sofa. She stays where she falls, regardless of where blankets and pillows may be, and sleeps. After a few moments, LEENA enters, creeping in slowly with a duffel or overnight bag in hand. She gathers two blankets and a pillow from the mess as silently as she can, tucking one blanket over DEE's shoulders, then placing a pillow on the floor by the sofa beside her. She lies down and wraps herself in the other blanket, tucking herself in for the night. Lights dim over them, and rise over the kitchen. GABRIEL approaches the kitchen with his head held artificially high, being very formal and polite, and stops at the outside edge of the room. THERESA walks over to him, stiff and defensive.)*

GABRIEL

Hello. I don't know if you remember me, or if you ever actually knew me in the first place.

THERESA

Of course, Gabriel. I know my daughter's life.

GABRIEL

Well. I know that this is unexpected, so I'm sorry if I'm interr—

THERESA

Why are you here?

GABRIEL

Well, since you haven't invited me in, I'm sure you also know what happened a few years ago.

THERESA

Yes?

GABRIEL

That your daughter and I had a sort of falling-out.

THERESA

I'm aware. I know my child.

GABRIEL

Yes. Well, I knew her pretty well, too.

THERESA

Yes.

GABRIEL

I heard what happened... to her husband.

THERESA

To Allen.

GABRIEL

Yes. To Allen. *(pause)* Well, I just wanted to know how she was doing. If Dee is okay.

THERESA

You're a little late to deliver your condolences.

GABRIEL

I know. I saw the calling hours listed in the paper. I didn't—

THERESA

And you didn't think to come?

GABRIEL

I thought—I didn't come for condolences. Not specifically. I didn't really know Allen.

THERESA

You certainly knew Deirdre.

GABRIEL

Yes. I did. And that's why I'm here. I want to know if she's okay.

THERESA

Her husband died. How do you think she is?

GABRIEL

Maybe I put that badly.

THERESA

Mmmm.

GABRIEL

Well, I guess I got the answer that I came for.

THERESA

She loved him, and lost him in an accident. She is not okay. I'm sure she will be, eventually. But she is not okay. Please do not cause her any problems.

GABRIEL

That's why I didn't come to the funeral.

THERESA

But you do intend on causing her difficulties now, then?

GABRIEL

No. You misunderstand.

THERESA

I don't know that I do. Please don't cause any more hurt to my daughter.

GABRIEL

I don't intend to.

THERESA

What exactly is it that you intend to do?

GABRIEL

I don't know. Have a good day.

*(As GABRIEL turns and begins to walk away, THERESA exits. He pauses as he walks past the café table, and rights the chair that was formerly his. He then walks softly into the living room where DEE and LEENA sleep. He looks down at both of them, frowns slightly, and gently strokes the black paper that hangs from DEE's arms, not trying to remove it, only curious. He then produces the flower he'd taken from the vase on the café table, lies it on the couch beside DEE, and exits.)*

*(Black.)*

When I set out to write “String Theory,” the original idea behind this play was to write something that addressed issues of gender and sexuality. By its completion, the other elements that emerged took precedence over this political ideal, but the underpinnings of the play still stem from these issues. I have seen and read multiple plays that carry out political themes, plays with deliberate, hammering agendas, plays that preach, and those that deliver their message with subtlety, like the parsley garnish left sprouting from a dinner plate once the meal is done. The audience isn't necessarily sure whether to eat it or leave it behind, but they are certain to consider it. I was hoping to approach the issues with my own version of that last, to make gender and sexuality as unavoidable as it is in reality, without giving it the weight of direct address.

Of all of the plays that I have read and seen, I have learned as much or more from the ones that I disliked as the ones that have influenced me positively. This is especially true of politically-themed or centered works. I believe that one of the most important functions of the arts is to examine, reflect, and suggest new approaches to social and cultural issues; history records the stories of kings and wars, while the arts show the experience of common people. I can understand and appreciate works that do not take on social issues, but I have a difficult time forgiving those who attempt this work and do it very badly. Generally, "badly" means that the playwright is wielding their social or political issue of choice like a club, insulting the audience's intelligence and thus causing them to become disinterested, killing any good intention the playwright may have had. Agendas test the audience's suspension of disbelief; the average social issue does not take

dominance in an individual's life, but rather exists as a shaping component of it. This mis-handling of social topics was exemplified by a play that I saw as a requirement of one of my playwriting workshops. The play, "The Aperture" by Sean Christopher Lewis, took on the subject of African war children, interplayed with media exploitation of tragic events. The concept reeked of social import. The execution, however, was clumsy and heavy-handed, and made assumptions about the situation that seemed condescending to individuals involved in the situation in reality. The writer (and director) portrayed African people as savanna-dwellers, unaccustomed to cities, portrayed the police as bumbling, small-minded, racist idiots, and juxtaposed all of this with graceless lines that could all have easily been replaced with characters shouting back and forth: "MY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE. IT WAS HORRIBLE." "YOUR CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE. IT WAS HORRIBLE." I did not leave moved and reflective on the genuinely horrific lives of war children; I left questioning the decisions made by the writer, actors, and director.

I desired to address gender and sexuality not only because they are issues that I have a personal interest in, but also because I felt that I had something to contribute by approaching them in a different manner. Traditionally feminist works tend never to allow the audience to forget that they are approaching things from a feminist standpoint; similarly, works dealing with sexual orientation often lack subtlety in their approach. Gay civil rights is still a subject that is turbulent and emerging in our society, and as such, most writing and art on the subject is overt in its message. This does not necessarily mean that these works commit the



writing sins of “The Aperture” in the delivery of their message; especially when a political movement is struggling to gain a foothold in society, writings that are blunt and explicit can be useful—as well as beautiful—tools in educating the public about the struggle of those within the movement. For example, Moises Kaufman’s play “The Laramie Project” certainly never allows its audience to forget that it is a play about a gay man who suffered for his sexuality. In fact, few of the words of the script are devoted to anything else. However, both the subject matter and the collaborative writing approach to the script were so new that the play was incredibly effective. Most plays that are agenda-driven miss one or both of these elements; either they re-tread an area that has already gotten plenty of attention and awareness, and do it heavily, or they approach the agenda in a tired style that leaves the play feeling preachy or lecturing. In order to stay relevant, a writer needs to pay attention to the works that have come before them on a subject in addition to where the movement is politically.

One playwright who had a definite positive influence on my writing in this arena is Lanford Wilson. His play “Fifth of July” addresses the political issues of the gay community in the most deft, subtle way: by not addressing them at all. The play is often referred to as primarily dealing with the passing and effects of Vietnam-era politics and idealism; its protagonist, Ken Talley, is a Vietnam War veteran whose battle injuries have left a huge impact on his life. He is also gay. He is gay without fanfare, and nearly without mention. His partner, who is described in the script merely as his “lover,” is a botanist. Not a “gay botanist,” carrying the conditioning tag of homosexuality around like a millstone, but a

botanist. He is a botanist who is in a relationship with a war veteran, who happens also to be a man. The fact that they are gay is not avoided, and does get addressed occasionally by other characters, but not in a manner that is any different than the references to the straight characters' relationships. When I read the play, it seemed practically revolutionary. Presenting his gay characters as people with complex circumstances that are not overshadowed by nor symbiotic with their gayness, and only showing their gay relationship as a simple matter of fact in their lives—in other words, writing his gay characters as one would write straight ones—is probably a more progressive way of writing on the subject than any agenda-driven writing on the gay community could be. His craft decisions prompt the audience to wonder if he intended to highlight the essential normalcy of "the homosexual lifestyle," especially since one of the play's straight couples, Gwen and John, exhibit a flamboyant, perhaps deviant sexual lifestyle that contrasts sharply with Ken and Jed. A graphic, animated discussion of Gwen and John's oral sex habits takes place fairly early in the play, while Ken and Jed's physical interactions are described in terms of affectionate gestures. This also creates the question of whether Wilson actually did set out with an intended political purpose for his gay characters, or if their homosexuality simply organically suited the characters themselves. In other words, there is a chance that Wilson portrayed Ken and Jed's gayness as a normal non-issue because he genuinely feels that homosexuality is normal and a non-issue. This passivity in his character depiction, whether deliberate or not, carries out the ultimate goal of the gay rights movement: unconditional acceptance of gay people. Portraying this

type of acceptance serves an important function within the role of literature, as well; often, bookstores, literature courses, and other outlets break writers down into “gay writers,” “Latin-American writers,” and so forth, perennially spurring the debate between marginalization and recognition of the writing of minorities. Wilson seems to care little for this, and allows his play and its characters to stand on their own merit rather than speaking through the experience of his minority.

The original idea behind my protagonist, Dee, was that she also would be a character who allows her behaviors and personality speak for her rather than her gender and sexuality. The other women in her life, the characters of her mother, Theresa, and her friend Leena, provided contrasts to this, in that they not only allowed but embraced traditional gender roles. They provide different sorts of contrasts, in that Leena is concerned with media-driven appearances of success rather than Theresa's traditional feminine roles, but this merely acts as an updated version of striving to fulfill gender roles. This idea, however, has been seen by audiences before, so I intended on bringing forth a unique perspective by also having Dee “switch” her sexuality, but not any qualitative part of her character. This would serve two functions: first, it would of course serve the idea that sexuality and gender do not define a person, that they are an aspect of life rather than a screen through which essential personality is filtered. Theresa and Leena's reactions to this would illuminate the idea, by their not understanding the concept that falling in love with a man rather than another woman did not mean that Dee immediately embraced traditional gender roles. Second, it would pose the question to the audience of whether sexuality is a fixed or mutable social concept,

something rigid based on biology or formed and shaped with social conditioning—the contentious issue of whether being gay is a choice. Gabriel, a character who emerged after the play’s original concept was formed, provided a bit of a foil to this second function, in that he seems to not necessarily prefer his own sexual identity but is also not able to change it in the same facile manner as Dee. Naturally, I did not want to hand the audience some easily-swallowed, concrete response to gender and sexuality issues, and desired complexity in my characters and their experiences.

A role model that I have in this approach to politically-influenced writing is Naomi Wallace. She is deft and subtle in her political messages, and does not leave her audience comfortable and appeased in providing a solution to the problems that she depicts. An excellent example of this is her triptych of short plays, “The Fever Chart.” In them, she takes on the Israel/Palestine conflicts, in a way that is obvious but not propaganda. She does take a clear stance, but not an inflamed or militant one; while she does highlight the particular injustices perpetrated upon Palestinians, she is fair and equitable to her Israeli characters, painting them as full and well-rounded rather than flat antagonists. She focuses on politics on the micro-level, through the clichéd but appropriate notion of the personal as political. Her characters are genuinely affected by the conflicted society around them, altered both in their pragmatic, daily lives as well as in their emotional states. They are people who had other lives that they wanted to live, calm and happy existences that are not possible given their sociopolitical context. The characters of “The Fever Chart” are not on a mission, nor archetypal stand-

ins for a larger component of their situation. Rather, these were just people who had compelling personal stories to tell, two grieving parents and one somewhat broken man, whose stories had been formed and emerged via the political situation that Wallace wanted to portray. Since I am primarily a character-driven rather than story or plot-driven writer, I sought out Wallace's style as I did Wilson's, and attempted to create vivid, compelling characters through whom a political message could speak—but not speak louder than the voices of the characters themselves.

In order to avoid the type of bad politically-motivated writing that I have witnessed, I made a deliberate choice to allow the characters' stories emerge organically. One of the first elements that began to take precedence over the political themes in *String Theory* was one that emerged from the relationships between the characters. The original central relationship was between Dee and her mother, as they were the relationship with the most obvious contrast. However, as the script progressed and I introduced the character of Gabriel, I found that the friendships were actually more significant to the story. Given that I was dealing with issues of sexuality, there is logic to this. Friendships are an important component of gay and lesbian literature, perhaps moreso than in dealing with traditional, straight characters, since the lack of acceptance of homosexuality from family members spurs gay and lesbian individuals to place more significance on friends and non-relatives. That is, families often reject or do not understand their gay relatives, leading these individuals to seek out stronger friendships as a sort of replacement. When familial relationships are strained, friend relationships

become the place where someone seeks solace and intimacy. In writing about this type of situation, family members become peripheral in the way that friends are peripheral characters in many works; the importance of the friendships allows for a greater examination of them than may occur in a more traditional storyline. A number of plays deal primarily with family or romantic relationships, with friends either not present or only present as minor characters. When friendships are a focal point, they are generally same-sex, and often contain an undercurrent of homosexuality in and of themselves. "Fifth of July" has characters in all categories, romantic partners, relatives, and friends. Each seems to share equal significance, without the idea that one type of relationship should automatically take precedence over the other. In fact, the friendship interactions in the play are barely distinguishable from the interactions between family members. Perhaps this is meant to communicate the informal attitudes characteristic of the Vietnam War era, but it also serves to equalize the relationships in the play. I wanted to communicate this same notion in my play, that the type of relationship that someone has with another person does not necessarily dictate the strength of that relationship, whether it be from bonds of gender, blood, or neither.

Naturally, Lanford Wilson and Naomi Wallace have also influenced me in the sheer strengths of their characters. While they certainly do not overlook storylines, the characters of "Fifth of July" and "The Fever Chart" are definitely one of the plays' strongest elements. It is difficult to convince an audience to care about a political message, or any other type of message, if they do not care about the characters involved in the play. Often when an audience is disengaged by a

strongly agenda-driven play, what they are responding to is archetypal, unrealistic or unsympathetic characters, or an overly didactic storyline. A major reason that Wilson and Wallace's plays work, and why their sociopolitical messages resonate with readers or audience members, is that they have strong, vibrant, well-crafted characters. By wrapping up their audiences in the experiences of the characters, the audience is automatically also wrapped up in their sociopolitical contexts. Much of the political situations themselves in both "Fifth of July" and "The Fever Chart" are contained in the plays' subtext; the audience is compelled to consider that subtext because they are drawn in by the characters themselves.

Not only is this an effective writing strategy, it also conveys an element of realism to these plays. In day-to-day existence, interpersonal relationships and an individual's emotional state take the forefront, while pressures from social and political contexts exist in the background, a kind of shaping and conditioning presence behind the issues which take immediacy in life. By structuring their plays in this same manner, and having their characters reflect the same priorities and influences, Wallace and Wilson give a greater sense of realism than a preachier, more didactic play would. This echoes the often-repeated creative writing class lesson: show, don't tell. When a social or political message is delivered through characters living out a social or political situation, they are essentially showing the organic source of the conflict. Having characters simply tell the audience of their situation could just as easily be achieved through an essay or lecture as through creative expression.

While strict realism was not my primary concern, I did want to utilize a relative amount of realism in order to keep my characters compelling and believable. I do, however, believe that one of the most valuable aspects of live theatre is the unique ability to have real people performing unreal acts, so I wanted to also incorporate at least some elements of the fantastic, as well. Sarah Ruhl's plays in the collection "The Clean House" could practically serve as a guidebook on magical realism as applied to playwriting. The title play offers characters who fulfill very mundane, traditional roles; doctor, spouse in loveless marriage, housekeeper. They exist, however, in a world where the rules of reality are malleable and somewhat suspended. In his article "Surreal Life," John Lahr said that "Ruhl wants to project the delights of pretense, 'the interplay between the actual and the magical.'" In "The Clean House," fruit rains down from one home's balcony into another's living room, without a break in the space. A man falls in love with a woman, utterly and completely, at their first meeting. And a woman folds her sister's laundry. Ruhl has a way of seamlessly imitating the real and the fantastic, and I attempted to bring elements of this into my own work. This appears primarily in three ways: Allen's appearance in death, connecting himself with the living through binding his wife's arm, the bleeding of sound from Theresa's kitchen into Dee and Leena's conversation at a coffee shop, and the conversation that Gabriel has with Dee when he is not actually present. I wanted to make literal the emotional effects that the characters had on one another, to have their emotional states affect their physical realities. I also wanted the idea of someone's presence to be malleable, which is why both Allen and



Gabriel appear to Dee without “actually” being there. Ruhl’s “Eurydice” is an excellent example of how plays set their own rules for their worlds. In hers, it is perfectly acceptable for rocks to speak and sing in the underworld, but the living can not speak directly with the dead. In mine, Dee is able to speak with the living who are not there, but the present dead can merely appear and affect, but not be known or directly communicate with the living. Sarah Kane is another playwright who blurred the lines between dead characters and living, and did not see death as a reason to stop character interaction. In her play "Blasted," "the stage directions tell us that Ian has died: 'He dies with relief. / It starts to rain on him, coming through the roof. / Eventually. / Ian: Shit (28)' but then he continues to exist and interact with Cate. The proposition that Ian has apparently died problematizes any theory that he has suffered and learnt something from his pain" (Gritzner 335) In this manner, Kane illustrated the concept that death does not change a person or their life, and removed the mysticism and sentimentality that tends to surround the recently deceased. I attempted to apply these concepts to my characters by having them interact physically without “actual” physical presence, which allowed me to bridge the gap between literal and emotional presence in another person’s life. It also allowed me to show the level of presence seamlessly, eliminating the need for living characters to "tell" about the experience of missing an absent character; making the absent present gave me the opportunity to show the effect that their absence had directly.

Something that I also tried to be very conscious of during the writing of String Theory was space. Space is an important consideration of any playwright,

as space is one of the dimensions that the play is both crafted in and limited by. Also, since the space that the writer is working with is again a literal one that is being used for unreal things, the way that space is used in a play is important for the audience's suspension of disbelief. I desired to create a space that included all of the important relationships in my protagonist's life, and give each relationship its own space to inhabit while also allowing them to blend over into one another. At first glance, without characters present, the stage for String Theory would probably appear to be a fairly typical household setting, given the inclusion of a kitchen and living room area. However, the space is actually bisected as to where the characters fit into the protagonist's life. Both female characters occupy space stage right; both male characters stage left. Those lost to Dee are also both from the left-hand side of the stage, that which becomes hers in her isolation by the end of the script. Sarah Ruhl is highly inventive and adept with her use of space in order to communicate concepts or emotions in her plays. "Ruhl writes with space, sound, and image as well as words. Her stage directions often challenge her directors' scenic imagination as well. In "Eurydice," the dead Father builds Eurydice a room of string in the underworld. The stage directions read, "He makes four walls and a door out of string. / Time passes. / It takes time to build a room out of string." Ruhl's goal is to make the audience live in the moment, to make the known world unfamiliar in order to reanimate it. Here the essential nature of the underworld - its sense of absence - is made visceral by the volumes of meticulously constructed empty space that the string defines" (Lahr). Ruhl's words are spare and clear in creating her characters and their worlds, and the

attention that she brings to the space in her plays is the same. In the sole production of "Eurydice" that I have seen performed, the father simply unfurled a roll of string around set pieces to form a blocked-off space for the title character to inhabit. The set was also spare and relatively stripped-down, but this addition of a thin, simple boundary line called attention to the space within it in a remarkable way, unignorable but not distracting. I hoped to also use space effectively as well, in such a way that it simply became another element of what my play is communicating.

Ultimately, what I found as I neared completion of the script was that the element that connects my script as a whole is that of loss. My original conception of the script only contained one loss, that of Allen's death. With the introduction of Gabriel, however, the loss of his friendship then became a significant component as well, not overshadowing that of Allen in any way, but certainly rivaling it. The main difference in the two is the implication of responsibility involved; Dee's loss of Allen was unexpected and tragic. Her loss of Gabriel was due to her own actions, and is something for which she has no closure or resolution, as evidenced by her hope to the end of the piece that she will be able to get him back. I wanted to show the interplay of the pain of loss for the sake of the loss, and the pain of a loss that is self-inflicted, where there is fault and blame and the inevitable, nagging knowledge that the loss could have been avoided. The ache of a prematurely lost love is one that is terrible, but also one that is familiar to audiences. I knew that depicting this type of loss would elicit sympathy, but sympathy is a far less complex and thought-provoking reaction

than discomfort. The thought of causing one's own problems, of not only being miserable but bearing regret and responsibility for that misery, is an unpleasant one. The implication of fault in a situation that is already emotionally difficult amplifies the feelings of loss and steers them in a different direction, adding the burden of existential anguish onto the weight of the loss itself. It also opens up audience members to consider the duties of responsibility to one's self versus responsibility to others, and what the true balance is between the two.

Sarah Ruhl and Naomi Wallace also deal heavily in loss, but the interplay between loss and fault or responsibility varies much between the two writers. Ruhl's version of the Eurydice myth naturally has an element of responsibility for loss, in that the classic character of Eurydice first falls for the trick of the Lord of the Underworld, then is unable to contain herself in order to follow his instructions, and her husband, out. Though her love for both Orpheus and her father is strong, it is unable to triumph over the character's own personal failings. In "The Clean House," however, loss seems to appear mainly as a matter of course of life; Lane does lose her husband by not being loving, but it would never have happened had he not happened to meet his *bashert*. Mathilde lost her parents unexpectedly as a child, and Ana's death actually comes from her own mercy in the face of valiant effort, rather than negligence. Ruhl deals in lightness, and for the most part avoids the angst involved with implicating existential responsibility. "Ruhl, in her plays, contends with the pressing existential issues; her stoical comic posture is a means of killing gravity, of taking the heaviness out of her words in order to better contend with life. 'Lightness isn't stupidity,' she said. 'It's

actually a philosophical and aesthetic viewpoint, deeply serious, and has a kind of wisdom - stepping back to be able to laugh at horrible things even as you're experiencing them." (Lahr) Wallace, however, addresses loss in the context of war, where the question of responsibility and necessity is ever-present. In the first of the triptych of plays in "The Fever Chart," a Palestinian woman meets the Israeli soldier whom she held as he died. While of course she did not sympathize with his ideals, as a mother who had lost a child, she agreed to console him out of sympathy with his situation. This brings the notion of loss and responsibility full-circle, posing the question of where responsibilities should begin and end, where ideals and causes interplay with ethics and essential humanity. While Ruhl's philosophy is, "bad things happen--why not laugh at them?" Wallace seems more concerned with letting people know that bad things happen because of people's willful decisions to bring about suffering--and to make the audience question their own potential responsibility. Ruhl's approach is clean and lovely, but Wallace's is a little less eager to let her characters, or her audience, off the hook.

While I admire and understand Ruhl's craft decisions and find her plays aesthetically pleasing, I tend to prefer methods that leave an audience a bit unsettled. An extension of live theatre's unique form of suspension of disbelief, given that the audience is experiencing the actions of actual people before them, is a unique ability to create audience discomfort. While someone may be able to be unsettled by a movie or a well-written scene in a novel just as well, it is easier to disconnect on the basis that what the viewer is seeing is fiction. That knowledge

is of course still there with theatre, but it is more difficult to disconnect and dissociate from the actions of live people. There is often personal responsibility, even fault, involved in the bad things that happen in people's lives, and I want my characters to feel the full effect of that, to communicate to the audience the agonized desperation of someone who is not only miserable, but has brought about their own misery. If that misery was brought about through the conscious actions of another, if one person has inflicted suffering upon someone, I want that communicated and fully felt as well. Sarah Kane is a master at creating discomfort and disturbance in her audience, in communicating a very genuine agony. In her play "Cleansed," Kane addresses personal responsibility, human interaction, and loss in a number of ways. She holds her characters responsible not only for their actions and behaviors towards one another, but also for their emotions for one another. Significantly, a pair of lovers named Rod and Carl are made to suffer for their relationship, not necessarily for their homosexuality (as may be expected), but for the very fact of the declarations of their emotions. At their first appearance, Rod is dismissive of Carl's claims that he loves him, will continue to love him, and would in fact die for him. Through the character of Tinker, Carl's claims are tested when he is placed in an actual life-or-death situation, and ultimately chooses his own life over his lover's. He is held responsible for his falsehood by Tinker cutting out his tongue. When he later tries to communicate with Rod through writing, opening himself up to the potential of communicating more falsehoods, Tinker severs his hands. Ultimately, after Carl has been reduced to a being only capable of expressing truth, Rod decides that he

would be willing to instead die for Carl; Tinker naturally holds him responsible for this claim by killing him. Each loss that these characters experience is directly linked to a decision that they've made or action that they've taken, hammering the concept of self-inflicted loss home. Kane takes the idea of communicating the agony of responsibility to an extreme, using cruelty and brutality to get the point across, but she also makes it incredibly clear. I wanted to communicate a much more muted version of the same concept, that through friendships and relationships, people bear some of the responsibility for the experiences of others. The responsibility, however, tends to be mutual, which is why the issue between Dee and Gabriel is not clean-cut. Most of the burden for the loss of the friendship lies with Dee for not realizing how her actions affected her friend, but I did not want Gabriel's reaction to necessarily be precise and equitable; naturally, his own subjectivity skews the balance of responsibility in the situation. In leaving Gabriel with a certain level of desire for closure or continuance of the friendship as well, I was able to increase the sense of urgency and frustration between the two characters.

One of my biggest concerns as I consider the prospect of showing this script to directors, actors, and eventually to audiences boils down to one simple, maddening question: so, what is this play about? The answer, "relationships, loss, interpersonal responsibility, and the sociopolitical context that they occur in," does not make the script sound particularly interesting, or particularly unique. Hopefully, however, my craft decisions as I merged these elements together have resulted in a script less eye-roll eliciting than its summary description. The

contemporary playwrights who have influenced me have been crucial in guiding my craft decisions, both through examples of effective writing as well as examples of what to avoid. Good theatre is a powerful thing, and my ultimate aim is to contribute to it.



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