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DIVING INTO ONE'S PAINFUL PAST AND DARKEST INTERNAL FEARS: THE
DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF *THE THREAD THAT SNAPPED*

by

Austin Harrison

M.A., Louisiana Tech University, 2017

B.S., Louisiana Tech University, 2015

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts Degree

Department of Theatre
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2020

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THESIS APPROVAL

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Austin Harrison

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in the field of Theatre

Approved by:

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Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 10, 2020

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Austin Harrison, for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre, presented on April 10, 2020, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: DIVING INTO ONE'S PAINFUL PAST AND DARKEST INTERNAL FEARS: THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF *THE THREAD THAT SNAPPED*

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jacob Juntunen

This thesis details the development of my full-length play *The Thread That Snapped* from its early conception in 2019 to full production at Southern Illinois University Department of Theatre's Christian H. Moe Theatre's space in March 2020.

In writing *The Thread That Snapped*, I was inspired by traumatic chapters within my life that shaped me as a human. This play, therefore, examines the unpredictable ways in which an individual is driven to insanity and the delicate thread that separates sanity and insanity. From this play comes a study into the human condition and how society and relationships shape who we become n life.

Chapter One includes a statement of the project, the origin, and development of the script, initial structure and plot considerations for the script, research that impacted the creation of the script, character development, and tools for self-evaluation. Chapter Two covers the pre-writing process, feedback from my writing partner, notes from my advisor, Jacob Juntunen, and the director, Susan Patrick Benson, about the script's development and an overall description of the play's progression through drafts. Chapter Three describes the design meetings held in preparation for the production of *The Thread That Snapped*. Chapter Four details the audition and casting process as well as rehearsals for the piece. Chapter Five evaluates *The Thread That Snapped's* production, describes ideas for future productions of the piece as well as possible revisions. Chapter Six concludes the thesis by tracking my progression in the playwriting

program over the past three years. It includes my writing growth in terms of structure and developing my artistic voice. It also discusses my professional development over the time in the program, as well as the evolution of my teaching practice. I have also included in the thesis the production script of *The Thread That Snapped*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Jacob Juntunen, who took a chance on a poet and gave me the opportunity to bring my stories to life. For teaching me about “penguins” and “staying on an island”, I thank you. Lastly, thank you for giving me the tool of structure for my writing.

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To Gregory Aldrich, Kelley Jordan, David Dudley, Daniel Bennett, Kalie Scanlan and Angela Duggins, and all my friends now and forever at SIU. To Jefferson Gray, I wish you could have been here with me.

To the entire cast and crew of *The Thread That Snapped*, and to its audience. Thank you for breathing life into my play!

DEDICATION

The script, production, and documentation are dedicated to those who are scared, angry, and feel alone. There is love; there is help, there is warmth... merely reach out your hand.

There is Life Along

There is darkness... There is light.
Men and women.
There's food. Tables and chairs
In restaurants. Ears listening to the laughter
From tables across the room,
...to that of wine trickling from a bottle
...and the clinking of glasses being set and toasted at tables.
Food becomes when tears fall
Sharp ...and pierces
Behind the molars. Senses rouse.
The food becomes spicier...
...saltier...
...sour...
not sweet...
not savory...
...but bitter.

There is life. Hope and disease.
People at tables Staring down red faced
With eyes like puff pastry.
Those overcome with grief. Hit with memories
Of all they've done and those they've lost.
Lovers long departed only to remain in painful scars;
Friends they've hurt and lost.
The feeling of weightlessness sets in
As life stops completely
And interrogation begins.
That's the disease.

Time goes on.
Days. ... months.
There's work. Traffic.
The sound of birds calling in trees.
Slowly things drift back together
And attempts are made to bring back what is normalcy
... for life to begin yet again.
Fishermen leave their ports to cast their lines...
Officers hitting the streets reporting for duty.

Those who believe
That somehow life will go on
... choosing to focus and hold onto
What is most considered important.

In life
There is darkness
That blankets the eyes
And beats the heart till black and level.
But beyond the veil
There is light
And people
And noise.
Places and flowers
And hands to hold.
Those that reach out
To offer warmth...
...compassion...
...forgiveness...
...and love.
Slowly life
Like rain clouds
... moves along.

- A.B. Harrison

PREFACE

During the month of May 2020, the United States was hit by the COVID-19 or Coronavirus pandemic which put the nation at an almost standstill. The SIU campus had just entered spring break and the production crew and cast had left to take a much-needed break. Once the COVID-19 virus was deemed a global pandemic, per the advice of national health and safety and government officials, the president of the SIU campus ordered that all events for the remainder of the spring semester be cancelled and for classes to move to online based platforms. Therefore, *The Thread That Snapped* did not receive a production as planned and ended while in the rehearsal process. I have kept the documentation and writing in the original tense when written.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

This chapter details the project proposal that I undertook, the origin and development, genre consideration, initial structure and plot considerations for the script, research and planned application, character development, and modes of self-evaluation.

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

As an artist, I am transformed by a life balanced in darkness and light.

I am driven to create characters and stories that expose the visceral nature of violence and human weakness, to create dramatic works that create a self-awareness in the audience through vivid, harsh language and action that allows them to connect violence, human weakness, hope, and morality in their social surroundings and therefore question their own place and stature in that paradigm. I want to explore characters and scenarios where crushing weaknesses and subconscious fears and rage propel our everyday lives and affect the ones around us.

I seek to uncover the violent poetry that lives on the edge of weakness and hope and leaves us erupting from within our inner impulse to hurt one other. It is this manifestation of violence that we as humans struggle to suppress.

My desire to create violent poetry and original music is heavily influenced by my own childhood of abuse and neglect through which I was forced to acknowledge my hidden angers, fears, and weakness. Through this experience, my perception of society and humanity altered, and I learned that what truly propels our destructive tendencies are intrapersonal fears, whether of the “unknown” or as a result of having to hide our true selves from the world. By viewing the world around as filled with hidden anger and unforgettable loss, I am driven to expose and investigate relatable yet severely flawed characters who due to their weaknesses choose violence

in order to mask their inner fears, conflicts, and regret.

I want the audience to leave the theatre feeling vulnerable.

STATEMENT OF PROJECT

The title of my thesis play is *The Thread That Snapped*. Like my previous two full-length plays written for my MFA program, this play is a continuation of my artistic exploration into the justifiable weakness of the human condition, a world where fear, loss, regret, and violence plague our daily lives. This play is set in a mental institution and incorporates original music, a chorus that collectively reenacts the protagonist's past, and spoken word poetry. My hope for this script is that audiences will experience the play's structural narrative on all three of these levels. The play is a personal redemption story for each of the mental patients as well as an attempt to incorporate the artist's own history in exploring how our friends and family change our lives... for better or worse.

Over the past two years, I have developed a passion for fusing poetry, song, and dance with dramatic works to create my own style of drama. With this newfound interest in stylized and historical plays, I wrote a play that fuses the line between the choreopoem, a dramatic combination of poetry, dance, music, and song used to tell a story, and traditional dramatic narrative. In creating the world of *The Thread That Snapped* (initially called *Krazy House*), I wished to present the inside of a psychiatric hospital yet deviate from the realistic world of the hospital, embracing my original intention of using an eerie and disjointed tone to create an imaginative and almost surrealistic setting. As poetry has long influenced me, I created original poems and barbershop *trio* songs for the play's cast (a chorus of mental patients and the protagonist) to perform and drive the plot forward while showcasing insight into both their daily lives and the protagonist's past. I chose to use a trio and not a quartet both because I was asked

to limit my cast to six characters and because it added a strange twist to the traditional barbershop feel.

When we examine the environment (time and place) in which an individual is raised in we discover its effect on a person's mental and cultural behavior and social role; the environment forces the individual to become who society mandates they should be, how they should act, how they should behave, etc. Yet what is truly fascinating is that one's environment can also have the opposite effect on an individual's personality; one can see the unfairness, injustice, and unbalanced and insane nature around them and decide to deviate from the prescribed social norm projected onto them.

It is this examination of society's effect on the individual that I wished to explore in *The Thread That Snapped* through the play's protagonist Adam (originally named Jack) who, convinced he murdered his wife, is sent to the fictional psychiatric hospital Sunny Meadows where he struggles with the question of his innocence and sanity. Though my plot is tempted to lean on the more tragic, my main goal, was to write my play as a tragicomedy that takes real-world psychiatric symptoms and brings them on stage in comedic yet respectable fashion.

With the play's world in mind, our play can begin:

Adam's character is meant to be a seemingly pleasant character yet there seems to be something "off" about him, a disconnection to reality. Upon his arrival at the hospital and getting to know his fellow patients (Gus, Dallas, and Willie), Adam meets Nick, a vulgar and chaotic character who also seems off. Through his forced therapy sessions with the other patients, Adam retells his story of how he came to Sunny Meadows: a dysfunctional parental relationship, a struggle to blend in with society, and infertility that leads to his wife's adultery.

My idea of telling Adam's story was heavily influenced by Jacob L. Moreno's concept of

psychodrama in which patients act out events from their past and a mix of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* and *How I Learned to Drive*. In my play, the past is told either through poetry (poetic monologue) or ensemble acting where the patients (a chorus), regardless of gender or race, will play every character from Adam's past. Through these sessions with his group, Adam's mentality starts improving, yet from the background, Nick stands in his way. In truth, Adam suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder (though never explicitly specified), and Nick is Adam's other side that I refer to as The Monster who wanted to kill Adam's wife in order to protect him.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

In my opinion nothing is truer, more magnifying of the human soul than poetry beating in the poet's chest.

The majority of my writing years before coming to SIU was focused on poetry. Never a huge proponent or user of meter, I always preferred free-form and the ability to move through each line free from rules and open to perspective. Since reading *For Colored Girls...* over a year ago, I knew I wanted to write my thesis play (on some level) in poetry, yet what I originally intended to write was about three MFA students dealing with addiction, prostitution, and death.

In preparation for writing the thesis, I took an MFA level poetry class (with the professor's knowledge of me writing my thesis in poetry) where I planned to refine and refresh my skill of verse. In the class I used fragments of the poems I had written for the thesis, but most of the criticism I received from the class was that the poems didn't stand alone enough, have enough heart, and that they wanted me to write more poems about myself and my personal past. So, with this instruction, I wrote a series of poems about my past relationship with my mother. They were graphic and violent and bitter, and the poets loved them. The professor for the class

asked why I wasn't writing my thesis on my own life, a source she thought was worth exploring. She was right. It was these poems that would later end up as part of Adam's lines in my play.

With this idea in mind, I considered "rewriting" a past play of mine, *Bastard Home*, which dealt with my mother, using the knowledge I've gained over my time in the MFA program and poetry as a narrative vehicle; however, I still wanted to include parts of my original thesis idea in this new play. So, I took the protagonist from my original idea, who was already based on me and the theme of mental instability, and decided to include them in my thesis play. I knew I wanted to write a play that dealt with a character's violent past and turn to madness... and then I watched *One Flew Over a Cuckoo's Nest*, a classic film I had been meaning to watch.

From watching the film, I instantly became interested in setting my thesis play in a psychiatric hospital where I could use rich, vibrant characters as a backdrop and use them, like *How I Learned to Drive*, to create an ensemble that becomes every character from Adam's past.

While my initial intent, as my track record indicates, was to write my thesis as a tragedy, I realized that this play can and should be a tragicomedy. While the script does involve serious issues around Adam, it should not take itself too seriously, and instead, visit and explore the insanity of a psychiatric hospital through the eyes of the patients.

GENRE AND ARTISTIC STYLE

As a writer and director, I often seek to balance the scales between what makes a visual vs. language-based writer. In creating my style for this play I planned to examine my past writing to find a pattern.

In *A Rustle Amongst Leaves*, two characters are reunited after a long breakup and ultimately face their inner emotions and the realization that they still love one another. Though the play's concept on its own seems poetic and heartfelt enough, I go a step further and use the

character's deafness and her use of American Sign Language (ASL) as a barrier that the audience must cross in a visual sense. I do not allow the audience for most of the play to know what she is saying when using ASL. The character Victoria must solely use her hands and body language as a way to communicate her story with the audience. As the play ends with the Paul attempting to say he loves her, the stage directions read: "VICTORIA slaps PAUL. As he looks back at her slowly, VICTORIA rushes to him with a passionate kiss. She then goes into his arms in a deep hug. PAUL begins to hum. VICTORIA, feeling the vibrations from his chest, begins to hum along" (Harrison, *A Rustle Amongst Leaves*, 6). It is through the stage direction that poetic meaning is achieved. I could easily have had Victoria sign "I love you too" or have Paul reaffirm for the audience that all is well; however, I wanted there to be a small yet powerful unspoken moment to end the piece. The act of their embrace and humming in unison creates a feeling of revived love.

In writing *Lost, Yet Gentle: A Tango* I set out to create a situation that was genuine and natural to the characters. Through the play, the two characters commit adultery; however, in writing the affair I refused to either glorify or highlight their actions as anything but an affair. The play refuses to be comical or tragic... only realistic. I created a situation that showed how they felt in the exact moments of the act in hopes of presenting a sense of actual human emotion and insight into what really occurs after the events, physically and in thought. One way that I chose to create an active image on stage was to direct the scene as a dance. Through my choreography of a foxtrot-tango fusion, I instill the sense of metaphor for their actions. Though the stage directions dictate the actions of the affair: kissing, undressing, the physical action itself through dialogue and stage directions, it was my directorial approach that added a further level of artistic beauty and finesse to the story in such a way that would not seem vulgar but a direct stab

at one of humanity's faults, its inability to remain monogamous yet still have the ability to feel regret.

My concept of visualization is also present in my poem "Whiskey Glass" that portrays a son reunited with his long-lost half-brothers after learning of his father's passing. Through their stories of their father, the son is lost in thought staring at his father's own whiskey glass in his hands transfixed in the realization that it is through the physical touch of the glass that "after all this time of feeling empty and longing for what I could not have, I am finally with my father." This poem would ultimately be showcased in the play's poem "A Bastard Son in Sonora, KY" which would later be cut due to time and pacing issues.

Both *Bastard Home* and *The House Special* use imagery and the depiction of violence differently compared to the previous two works. In each, the metaphor is absent, yet truth and insight into humanity's tendency to mask fear and inadequacy with violence is present.

Bastard Home, perhaps my darkest and most intense work, uses the visual representation of abuse on stage to present the severity of the situation and the actuality that there is never a moment of rest or a moment that may generate hope in the protagonist. Though this play uses images less for the sake of poetic meaning, there remains a large use of movement in the play that still creates an impact through which the audience becomes affected by witnessing intense abuse.

The House Special, my first play, introduced me to my steady motif of the downfall of mankind. From this piece I learned that it is with the fall of the protagonist that tragic meaning is achieved. Years later in the MFA program I would learn what actually makes a protagonist tragic using the Aristotelian and *Death of a Salesman* models. In the play Joe, a man hellbent on seeking revenge for the murder of his wife and daughter, terrorizes a diner owned by his best

friend, Marty, in hopes of forcing him to admit to murdering (or at least participating in the murder) of Joe's family. It is with rage in his eyes that Joe's faults reveal themselves. Though the murder of his wife and daughter is tragic and unforgivable, their murder was a direct result of allegations that Joe sexually assaulted his students. Therefore, his current actions (though unexcused and unlawful) at the diner are a direct correlation with his inability to accept the consequences of his actions. In the end, Joe accidentally kills Marty without Marty ever answering his questions. This leaves Joe purposeless and empty, resulting in Joe putting the gun in his own mouth and firing. Both Joe's blood and sorrow splatter across the diner.

It is through the staging of images on stage that the collaborative efforts of the playwright and director move away from the simple storytelling to providing meaning through visual metaphor. It is with this concept that I visit the clichéd phrase that rules the lives of all writers: show don't tell. Though in the beginning of my playwriting career, I was apprehensive, I have discovered that showing meaning through images and metaphor can be just as effective if not more so than having the words spill directly from the actors' lips.

In *Near the End*, I wanted to tell the story of a bitter man stricken with loss who, when faced with his own mortality, must find a way to overcome his past in order to truly live again. The play ends bittersweetly with Roger making amends with his daughter yet dying poetically in the play's final scene. In a sense what I set out to do was create a play that provided a realistic depiction of the severity of cancer while exploring loss, forgiveness in the face of one's own mortality, and the chance of redemption of mankind through thought and overcoming the inner regrets and turmoil that have otherwise held one back from happiness and love in life.

Using my "melting pot" style of writing, I planned for *The Thread That Snapped* to exist as a fusion of tragicomedy, poetry, and music. While the play focuses on Adam's stay at the

psychiatric hospital, his past that led him there, and his possible insanity, each a serious subject matter, my goal is to have this play be almost light-hearted and imaginative in such a way that deviates from reality and instead embraces the metaphor of insanity. Though Adam's demise and revelation will be inevitable, I do not wish for this play to be a straight-up tragedy, yet hopefully through the writing process to become a tragicomedy.

Coming from a background in poetry where imagery is vitally important, I find it imperative to create a visual story for both my reader and audience. Too often written words are viewed as flat and uneventful. However, I feel that it is my artistic duty to create language and dialogue that erupts from the page and creates a 3-dimensional presentation of life. To achieve this, I feel that it is imperative to use language that is poetic, vibrant, and sometime genuinely crude yet occasionally lyrical.

Though *The Thread That Snapped* does not focus (intensively) on actual violence like some of my previous works (however at times it could), I still feel the importance of unraveling the inner workings and turmoil of the tormented human condition, even if that means pushing my characters to their limits. I use both violent language that seeks to create intensity and discomfort, as well as genuine poetic language through monologues to showcase the more dramatic elements from Adam's past. Through my attempt at creating both situational dialogue and realistic human emotions to which an audience can relate, *The Thread That Snapped* will provide a candid insight into the human condition and an enlightenment of everyday life. It is through my new, unabashed approach to writing drama that *The Thread That Snapped* centers on presenting a surrealistic interpretation of humanity and illustrates a move from the downfall of mankind to their possible redemption on the theatrical stage.

Another important element of the play's genre is the hope of creating a sense of catharsis

in the play's ending. With Adam's decision to remain in the hospital serving as a release from humanity's suffering in a world that is unforgiving, *The Thread That Snapped* provides the audience with an emotional release as they witness a seemingly good man succumb to his hidden madness with little ability to prevent his inevitable acceptance of his insanity and crime of murder. In essence, I wanted this play to end by making the audience feel vulnerable and thus leave the theatre deep in thought.

The play treats its characters and their corresponding mental illnesses as realistic mental patients and then stretches the limit of reality by having its characters break into poetry and song. The beginning of *The Thread That Snapped* has the chorus greet the audience, prepared to put on a show that tells the story of Adam. One of the key aspects that I plan to use is a stylistic approach to theatricality that creates a presentational narrative. Highlighting the play's acceptance of insanity, the plot and details (like a gun going off only to reveal a flag saying Kaboom!) will not necessarily always make sense and reality may be abandoned. Additionally, I will use a modern-day Chorus to comment on the play itself.

RESEARCH INTEREST, EXPERIENCE, AND PLANNED APPLICATION

In the past I devoted a great deal of my creative energy to ensuring that my plays were historically, religiously, and scientifically realistic. For *Near the End*, I conducted extensive research into pancreatic cancer, psychology, the 1970s and 90s, and hypnotic therapy to encapsulate the truth and sincerity of the human condition and represent it theatrically. For *By The Neck*, I researched religious and satanic lore, African American issues of the 1960s and before, Blues music, the musical myth of Robert Johnson's deal with the devil, devil lore and literature, and worldwide religions including Yoruba traditions and beliefs surrounding their god Eshu. Yet for this play, I denounced my usual dramaturgical approach and need for ultra-realistic

facts.

Since I did not plan on writing *The Thread That Snapped* as a realistic piece, I focused a small amount of my time on researching the psychological disorders that align with my characters. Since I never explicitly mention each character's diagnosis, I found I did not need to rely heavily on hours of academic research, literature, interviews, and medical texts as they would not prove vital to the play's meaning, plot, or outcome. Instead, I studied several plays and movies that have already delved into the world of psychology, mental institutes, and split personalities to gather a sense of which dramatic aspects worked in each script. In preparing for this play I found inspiration from plays *How I Learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel, Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls...*, Joseph Kramm's *The Shrike*, Tom Griffin's *The Boys Next Door*, Quiara Alegría Hudes' *Water by the Spoonful*, Peter Weiss' *Marat Sade*, *Next to Normal*, book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey and music by Tom Kitt, and films including Miloš Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Frank Darabont's *Shawshank Redemption*, David Fincher's *Fight Club*, and James Mangold's *Girl, Interrupted*.

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES AND CHARACTER SUMMARY

The Thread That Snapped is set without time in a fictional mental institute in West Virginia. In deciding the location for the play, I considered many geographic areas of the United States yet was transfixed by the culture of the West Virginia coal mining industry. While none of the characters have exhibited any textual evidence of having worked in the mines, I wanted there to be an overarching landscape behind the play's hospital that unknowingly to the audience would affect the characters' world. Willie's father was injured in the mines, which results in Willie's mother having to take care of the father as opposed to Willie. Gus's father, again known only to me, worked as a miner in his youth yet left the industry when Gus was born to establish a

father and son roofing company. Dallas, the most mysterious of my characters, I believed worked a dissatisfied life in the mines leading him to having the delusion he was a CIA agent. As far as the time to set this play, time is never an issue. The clock in the background of the play runs backwards; the costumes and set are not defined by an era; the characters are stuck in a world without time.

CHARACTERS

ADAM is the protagonist of the play and has been sent to the mental institution for believing he murdered his wife. Adam had a troubled life plagued by childhood abuse from his mother, barely knowing his father or half-brothers, and a troubled marriage with his wife. He believes that his past defines who he is. Once his wife discovered Adam was infertile, she cheated and then left him. It was this act of betrayal that led to The Monster, Nick, being re-born.

NICK seems to be a distant and solitary patient in the mental hospital. While he remains reserved from the rest of the patients, he often acts as an opposing force to Adam, often pushing him to the limit. Once he appears in a 1950s devil costume, Nick is revealed to be the imagined split personality of Adam, nicknamed THE MONSTER. In truth, Nick was first spawned during Adam's childhood. He was the voice inside Adam's head that wanted to kill his abusive mother. Now that Adam is betrayed again by a loved one, Nick is back.

GUS is a patient who suffers from PTSD over the death of his father, an act for which he feels responsible. I wanted Gus to be the voice of reason within the patients. He is the nicest one and generally cares for the others' welfares. Gus is at the hospital because he is unable to forgive himself for not being there for his father when he died.

DALLAS is a patient who believes himself to be a burned CIA agent, now institutionalized. Dallas is the leader of the patients and the most aggressive. He has an element

of being a man's man and overabundance of masculinity. Dallas, I believe, has long been cured of his delusion of grandeur and espionage yet remains at the hospital as it provides him a better life than the outside world could. In truth, Dallas has become fully institutionalized and requires the hospital to feel normal.

WILLIE is a patient who suffers from compulsive masturbation spawned by an unknown childhood incident. Willie is the most childlike of the patients and acts as foil to Gus and Dallas. While Gus is known to be centered in reality, Willie is constantly fixated on pop-culture, movies, and is known to often lie.

DOCTOR is the hospital's psychiatrist and the only authority figure within the play. She is focused on providing her patients with the utmost care yet has a reputation for being strict. Her privacy is often commented on and theorized by the patients.

PROJECT GOALS AND CHALLENGES

For this project, my biggest goal was creating dialogue that was both poetic and violent (digging into the audience's skin) in nature. I wanted *The Thread That Snapped* to be an imaginative take on the lives of the patients in a mental institute. Overall, my main goal in this process was to not be tempted to write this play as a strict tragedy, but instead ensure that the dialogue and situations within the hospital are comedic at times. With the mental institution as my backdrop, my protagonist is lost in a world that is strange, and violently unexpected, facing the possibility that he is in fact insane and unwanted by the world. Through the play's imaginative (with a dive into insanity) spectacle, the audience and Adam himself unravel the mystery of Adam's past and what his future will entail.

While the mental patients are meant to act as a chorus for the play's narrative, I do not wish for the play to solely concentrate on Adam's past, but also delve into their lives, disorders,

and fears. I intended for each of my characters (with the possible exception of the Doctor) to be written fully developed and each have inner motivations that drive them throughout the play. I wanted to create dialogue that fits each character individually and correlates with that of their respected disorders. While I want this play to be intense and push my audience, I also want to take the sincerity and heart that I used in *Near the End* and *By The Neck* and dive into the depths of a comedic (yet tragic) play. While this play only has moments of actual violence, I want the fear of violence to be repeatedly felt throughout the play's performance.

One of my biggest challenges in writing this play was creating actual mentally unstable characters who the audience could believe and support. Because the play deals with an enormous amount of psychology, I wanted my characters to become fully fleshed out, while ensuring that they are not just written as caricatures of real illnesses. However, because mental illness can easily be a dreary issue, I wrote my play with comedic moments to lighten the mood and ease the minds of the audience.

Though a lot of my work focuses on the negative side of the human condition and mankind's fall to destruction, I wrote *The Thread That Snapped* in a way that blends my own violent and harsh artistic style with surrealistic elements of the modern American drama, a style in which I had never yet attempted to write. I wish for this play to reflect the ambiguous yet potentially positive nature of the human condition because, though my patients are trapped seemingly forever in the institution, they have stayed positive through the years and view their insanity as a reflection of an insane world around them.

Lastly and simply, I hope that with *The Thread That Snapped*, I leave my audience shocked, thinking, talking. I want my play to provoke true emotions and even anger if necessary. I have never been a writer who writes plays about butterflies and rainbows; I much prefer to tell

stories about the darker sides of humanity. Call me Poe if you like, but this is who I am. I have never wanted to shy away from pushing the boundaries in my writing. I believe that an audience should be shaken and disturbed within reason in hopes that they leave the theatre talking and emotionally vulnerable to a certain extent. This is a script that by no means is supposed to be pretty. I want my audience to consider how we push those around us—how we hurt them—how our actions result in a chain of effects that lead each other to places that perhaps we do not want to be. Ultimately, I want my play to be about understanding and pain and comradeship—possibly even about love.

I toyed with what style of theatre fits my script best and eventually settled on this play being an Absurdist-Surrealistic hybrid-based tragicomedy. However, I wish to add a certain element that I find theatre often lacks: horror. While I may lack a monster like Freddy Krueger or Bruce, the shark from *Jaws*, I still hope there to a sense of horror in this production, a sense of fear, something that just isn't right. Is this all in Adam's head, or a distorted version skewed by the mental instability of the patients? Or is this all real? And while my story has this sense of unending horror, I hope there is also a large amount of comedy in the script. I find this unusual: a rather serious play with odd moments of comedy. They do not seem to mix, and yet I find that fitting. I hope that will come through clearly.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE

In creating the play, I focused on presenting the structure that I was taught during my time at SIU; therefore, the terms I use in discussing my play's structure are based on Dr. Jacob Juntunen's lessons and terminology. I knew Adam was the protagonist of this play as he had the strongest goal among the cast, which was to get better. In writing the play's chorus I was aware that having them act as the narrator of the story might signify them as the joint protagonist;

however, in crafting the play's structure and plot I made sure to clarify that the plot was about Adam. The Protagonist's Conceptual Goal was initially for Adam to convince the institution, his fellow patients, and himself that he is in fact crazy and deserves to be punished for "his past". As the play continues Adam's goal changes to wanting to figure out what happened in the past before getting better. The Protagonist's On-Stage Manifestation of Concept was for Adam to stay in the hospital, not escape, and go through therapy in order to either convince the Mental Board of his insanity or get better. Adam's Protagonist's Main Obstacle seems to be to convince the Doctor and the Mental Board he is responsible for murdering his wife and needs to be punished, yet on a more crucial level Adam truly seeks for his mental state to be better.

The Protagonist's inciting incident is when Adam enters the psychiatric hospital and meets the patients; he then makes the Protagonist's Moment of Engagement by going to therapy and confessing his crimes, an act he was hesitant to do before. Through therapy Adam slowly begins to unravel his past and what led him to believing he murdered his wife. Up until intermission the audience is led to believe that Adam unequivocally was guilty of murder; however, it is at intermission that the script is given a twist: Adam gets a letter (including pictures of a newborn baby) from Melissa, Adam's ex-wife, wishing him well in his new journey.

While the first half of the play revolves heavily around Adam's relationship with his wife, the second act deals with Adam's relationship with his mother, which led him to feeling isolated and used by the world. Eventually, Adam is given the chance to leave the hospital if he takes his medicine yet, when he loses his medication in a card game, Nick returns in the Protagonist's Climax and confronts Adam. I use a Perception Shift in the script to reveal that Nick is Adam's other side, The Monster, born during his abusive childhood. When Nick reveals

that he will soon kill Melissa and Adam's mother for hurting him, Adam sacrifices his freedom by attempting suicide in the Protagonist's Final Action so Nick will not be released into the world to harm people. I wanted the play's final action to have a thematic meaning that often there is no escape from one's past and that sometimes sacrifice is the only way to protect those we love. The rest of the patients then rejoin as the play's chorus during the play's Denouement to end the play with a song, explain that Adam remains in the hospital until he, like them, dies of old age. Possible Major Dramatic Questions that I considered were: Why is Adam in the institution? Is Adam insane? Did Adam kill his wife? Will Adam be set free? The last is the only question that does not get answered until the end of the play.

MODES OF EVALUATION

Through the writing process and the employment of a strict writing schedule, I would self-evaluate my process and recognize the play's quality in structure, plot, and effectiveness. Through the rehearsal process and feedback discussions, I would determine what areas of the play require alteration, elaboration, or complete rewrite.

This project served as my thesis project to be produced at the SIU Big Muddy New Play Festival near the end of the school year (2020). I would use the play's production, collaboration with the director, actual performance, and audience and respondent feedback as a final form of evaluation for my work, after which I would revise my play one final time for future production and publication opportunities.

Through its production, I, as a language-based writer, would evaluate how the language, both poetic and straight dialogue, flows during the scenes, how the actors are able to use the script to create meaning, and the overall structure as a plot and poetic based play. If given a chance for audience feedback I would ask the audience:

1. How did the usage of poetry alter your experience with the play?
2. Was the use of the mental patients in translating Adam's past clear for you?
3. In what way does Adam's final act of violence reflect his inner struggle as a character?
4. Where do you see these characters being in the future? What happens to them after?

CHAPTER 2

PRE-WRITING AND WRITING PROCESS

This chapter covers *The Thread That Snapped*'s pre-writing process and writing process, feedback from my assigned writing partner, my peers from rehearsal readings, notes from my advisor, Dr. Jacob Juntunen, the dramaturg, Dr. Anne Fletcher, and the director, Susan Patrick Benson, about the script's development and an overall description of the play's progression through several drafts.

PRE-WRITING CONSIDERATIONS

Once my thesis proposal was approved, I knew I needed to clear my head and not jump into the writing process unprepared. When I spoke with my advisor, Jacob Juntunen, he advised me not to spend much time researching the psychiatric field, disorders, or literature and film that are set in a psychiatric hospital (as my goal was to write my play with an imaginative and surrealistic take) and to instead focus on writing my own world of twisted fun and horror. I needed some time to evaluate why I was writing *this play*, why it was important to me, and what I would do to achieve my artistic goal. I also had to define my expectations for my project and what intrapersonal explorations I was willing to take.

I came up with the following explanation:

This play will be an experiment in creating an imaginative take on psychological disorders, as well as the way a story is told. Not all aspects of the play and its action are meant to be realistic. I will write this play using my own life as a basis for the character of Adam, YET I will insure not to use my own biases in crafting the plot; therefore, I will serve the play's needs as best I can regardless of personal history.

Why am I writing this play?

The Thread That Snapped for me came from a life a fear and regret. This play is one of very personal reflection and insight into who I am. At the play's heart, fear lies dormant. A fear of not being accepted, not be normal, an outsider. My characters are themselves outsiders, outcasts from society, the meat and bone sent to live in an asylum, out of sight from normal people.

I wanted to create a play told by the patients in a mental institution. A world that blurs the line between seriousness and a lack of seriousness, sanity and insanity where the story told has the full potential of simply being a string of lies from the play's Chorus, a nod to Aristotle. Furthermore, what would be crazier than using a Chorus of mental patients that sing? Over the past three years here at SIU I have found myself more and more in love with the possibility of writing musicals. This script is a baby-step.

Why is it important to you?

This script is important to me because it tells a personal story: my own fear of the world. An overwhelming anxiety over self-worth and that I too am a monster for my past mistakes. This play perhaps is an answer to my own life in two ways:

1. My mother threatening to send me to the psych-house if I didn't stand perfectly still "in my kitchen tile square". What if my childhood *had* made me insane?
2. The woman I planned to marry unexpectedly leaving me for another man five years into our relationship. What if I *did* go insane? What if I couldn't handle another failure in life.

Prepared to undertake the writing process, I wrote my first draft outline from which I would later change the plot:

INITIAL SYNOPSIS OF ACTION; WORKING TITLE: KRAZY HOUSE

Act I-1

Chorus opens.

Adam enters.

Who are we? We're the Krazies. What did you do?

I'm here because. (I want to explore more of why Adam is here and what he wants from therapy.)

Act I-2

Therapy.

Example session with one of patients. We'll say Gus.

Adam's session with group. Meets the weirdness of psychodrama.

Group stands and is mom. Yells at him.

Act I-3

Dallas says good session. Talks about his Red Test at 15.

Adam meets Nick. Where have you been? I didn't see you in group,

Act I-4

Night scene. Nightmare. Everyone from his past is yelling at him.

Adam wakes up. What's wrong?

Sane. Adam has a nightmare the patients are all around him mocking him. This is a horror scene. It's very loud very chaotic very scary. At the end lights rise and the patients around him concerned basically asking why he's screaming in his sleep

Act I-5

Nick tell a poem to Willie.

Willie thanks Adam, not Nick.

It is beautiful – Adam. Willie looks odd at him. This is first clue.

Act I-6

Let's talk about your girlfriend.

And then...

Killing girlfriend.

Baseball bat. Murder. Blackout Blood on him.

Act I-7

Letter arrives. It's from the girlfriend. Something sad. She's not dead. WTF is this?

INTERMISSION

Act II-1

Return to exact moment of letter.

We have Adam's response.

Group acknowledges that it's okay. They're all crazy. And that they each are self-admitted.

Act II-2

Group therapies continue.

We see someone else's life through the crazies... like Gus and his father. Answer why Gus is there and why he blames himself.

Act II-3

Let's talk about Adam's mother.

Standing in square poem.

How to take a hit poem.

What happened to her? She died.

Act II-4

Group decides to do a prank. Break into the doctor's office and look at the files. ????????

See the patients' disorders including... Adam's D.I.D. about Nick ??????????

Surprise. Nick isn't real.

Act II-5

Confront Doctor.

Explain through the bodies of the crazies what actually occurred

Where is Nick?

Act II-6

"Truth is you've always wanted to be a killer that's the thing when she left you you couldn't handle it so you tried but you failed because you're a wimp. You're pathetic.

And so you came up with this silly little delusion."

Nick antagonizes. Drives Adam.

Adam thinks about suicide.

Act II-7

If Adam survives, maybe he will ignore Nick for the rest of time.

Chorus ends the play.

FIRST DRAFT

While balancing a summer job and my writing responsibilities, I instilled a regime that required me to either write or revise two scenes every week of the summer break. As I began to

write my script, Jack was immediately renamed Adam as I felt Jack was too similar to the actor Jack Nicholson from *One Flew over a Cuckoo's Nest*. I next discovered that it would be more effective if Adam had “murdered” his wife as opposed to girlfriend as it would provide for him a more serious catalyst to “snap”. Initially, Adam was going to be sent to the asylum to evaluate *if* he was insane during his wife’s “murder”, yet this scenario provided too many legal inconsistencies. I thought... what if Adam didn’t murder his wife but only thought he did? This would also allow him a chance to become redeemed not only in his eyes but also in the audiences’.

During my writing, I slowly began to explore the other patients and why they were there in the hospital. I decided to dedicate specific areas of the play’s plot to Gus, Dallas, and Willie: how Gus felt guilty for his father’s death, that Dallas wanted to stay in the hospital because he was scared of the outside world, that Willie wanted his mother’s forgiveness and to go home. I began to discover that there were tremendous amounts of thematic elements of parentage within my script; I ran with it. At first, I planned for Adam to sacrifice his life at the play’s end to illustrate a theme of no escape yet could not bring myself to send Adam to this dark fate like my usual protagonists. To me, Adam did not deserve to die. Instead, I found it more impactful if Adam sacrifices his freedom to ensure that Nick is forever kept at bay inside the walls of psychiatric hospital. While I found this to still be devastating, I also wondered if it sent a bittersweet and often realistic message that sometimes we never get better once we escape our past.

SECOND DRAFT

After revising the play for the first time, I discovered that *Krazy Haus* was no longer a feasible title. It lacked the German sense of Expressionism that I had first been captivated by.

Upon considerable thought, I pondered *Watching Grasshoppers F#@K* after one of Willie's most iconic lines, yet I knew such title would not be realistic in the marketplace as it would limit its chances of future production. I then came up with *The Thread That Snapped* as I thought it had a certain poetic element to it, an element that I used in Adam's monologues. To me, a thread of fabric is a delicate object and like the human mind can easily "snap".

During my second personal draft, I also wanted to create a repeating element that would add a layer of suspense with each repetition. I found my play not haunting enough. I decided on using the intercom that would announce: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?". This would later be deemed effective after hearing from my writing partner, Teresa McKinley.

It was at this stage in the writing process that I was able to finally work with my music collaborator, Deanna Leach. Over the years, I have become increasingly interested in writing musicals. This play, as previously mentioned, serves as a baby-step in my artistic journey. While I played piano and guitar at a young age, my education has greatly lacked in composition theory. While I was able to write the *Thread That Snapped's* lyrics and knew how I wanted the music to go, I was unable to write the notes. This was an issue I had had prior in writing my play *By The Neck*, which used guitar and blues music. For *By The Neck*, I had had trouble finding a guitar composer to collaborate, and I felt the play's reading was diminished because of it. To solve this issue for my thesis show, I decided to find a collaborator immediately in the writing process. So, in May I contacted Deanna Leach, a graduating vocal performance major with whom I previously taken vocal lessons from, to help me write the music. She was unavailable to meet and collaborate until September, but this was acceptable as it gave me time to write the play and finesse the lyrics. Come September, at our meeting, Leach loved my idea of using the barbershop

trio in my play, and we decided to use a lead, baritone, and bass while excluding the usual tenor. Over the next month, we met several times during which I would explain and (rather badly) sing the songs to decide each section's tempo, melody, and other words I still cannot name. In early November, the music was complete.

MEETING WITH WRITING PARTNER

As the departmental playwrights were not able to have our weekly meetings together because our advisor was on a one-semester sabbatical, I was assigned a writing partner, Teresa McKinley, the other thesis playwright, from whom to receive feedback. At our meeting, she provided me her initial thoughts. She found possible MDQs to be: is Adam ill or crazy AND will Adam get better during his time at Sunny Meadows? She noticed that the play's main conflict came between Nick and Adam's interaction. Teresa McKinley's notes specify that "Nick is the imaginary person who appears at the very start of the story and appears throughout. Nick wanted Adam to kill Adam's mother and wife, which Adam thought he did, but he really didn't. Nick is the dark side of Adam" (McKinley). I did not intend on there being a suggestion that Adam thought he killed his mother, only his wife. Teresa McKinley found the protagonist to be Adam as he was trying to figure out if he was crazy or if he really did kill his wife, while Nick was the antagonist as he was Adam's destructive inner self. McKinley thought the turning point or climax was when Nick and Adam come face to face with each other in (what was once) Act II, scene vi. She thought the setting "takes place in an asylum. I can envision such a place on stage. It would be bare, with a table and chairs around it, cards on the table. There's a gray/sick green wall in the background, the light is of the same color as the gray/sick green" (McKinley). McKinley thought that Adam was telling the story, but the play's Chorus often take on other characters' dialogue (The Mother, The Wife, and The Lover). She found it confusing that Willie, Gus, and Dallas did not have assigned roles when reflecting on Adam's past as the trio would

often take on The Mother's lines together. Teresa McKinley thought the play had themes that included child abuse, love, hate, hope, redemption, and symbolism when Adam describes his mother wearing latex gloves, and thought the gloves symbolized cleanliness and purity that opposed Adam's dark side. Lastly, the play made McKinley feel sad for the characters with their individual issues and was glad there were comedic moments that started in the first scene that relieved the doom like tension in the play.

MEETING WITH SUSAN PATRICK BENSON

After the production meeting on November 22, 2019, Susan Patrick Benson and I met privately to discuss my script. This was the first time we had the chance to sit together and talk. Benson stressed the fact that while she was very open to conceptual ideas, her style of directing new plays geared towards focusing her creative attention on the language and story of the play first and foremost. She assured me that while the shared budget between shows is scarce, the limited resources served her vision of making the language most important and everything else was simply a perk. Benson said she was interested in having live sound on stage by having the actors use a bullhorn or microphone as the intercom, ticking of the clock, etc. or simply casting an extra actor to do sound effects off-stage. I knew immediately then that Susan Patrick Benson would be the perfect director for my play's first production.

Benson mentioned that she was considering whether Gus, Dallas, and Willie were among Adam's delusions alongside Nick and if there was a subtle way to hint at that in her direction. She also thought that if the characters all shared a specific costume choice this might further connect each character to Adam. Benson wondered if the clock was running backwards throughout the entire play, and I confirmed that it was. Because the budget was scarce, Benson asked if I had a preference about the clock if the shop couldn't build a clock that goes

backwards. She also mentioned that using a projection might also be out of the question due to time constraints. I suggested that the clock could simply have its glass facing and hands broken; Benson liked this idea. The director addressed the play's use of violence very positively, an area I was nervous about whether she would approve. Benson said that she was considering how to showcase the violence and wondered if we needed a fight director. Nevertheless, my director was interested in having the audience use their imagination when witnessing the play's violence as she did not want actors to hit another actor. I assured her this was never part of my consideration. Benson gave me an example of having Dallas pull out an actual baseball bat from behind his back, but Adam only takes an imaginary bat. Benson was also interested in Adam and Nick fighting on stage, however, having Nick stand off to the side to show Adam's mental illness. Benson suggested that I give Nick a few lines in the beginning of the play as she realized early in the play that Nick wasn't real because he didn't talk soon enough. Lastly, Susan Patrick Benson told me that she really liked my script and the idea of having a Chorus and barbershop trio on stage. I reminded my director that while I wrote the lyrics and worked with a collaborator on the music, I could not neither play music nor sing well enough to teach the actors the music; Susan Patrick Benson assured me she could handle it. Her suggestion for my writing was that the beginning of my script is funny yet dark, but it gets darker as the play goes on and stays dark. She wanted me to see how the first readthrough with the cast would go. To end our meeting, Susan Patrick Benson told me that she did not want me to do any serious re-writes yet.

Email to Jacob Juntunen

After the production meeting on December 2, I felt conflicted about my director stressing the idea that the rest of the cast were all in Adam's head since I only wrote Nick as a figment of Adam's delusion. Before I was to even consider meeting with Susan Patrick Benson to discuss

my concern, I decided to email my advisor who was on sabbatical. The email exchange goes as follows:

Austin Harrison—

[...] During our initial brief discussion, Susan Patrick Benson mentioned that she was interested in subtly giving the audience a feeling that the rest of the patients are all in Adam's head. I wasn't too wild about this idea, but I remained quiet as my role is only the writer. In today's production meeting Susan Patrick Benson told the costume designer that she was wanting to conceptually tie all the patients to Adam with an item of clothing (which as the writer I'm not entirely opposed to); however, was playing with the idea that the Doctor was also a part of Adam's mind. Now as I wrote the script only Nick is in Adam's head. Dallas, Gus, and Willie are simply the story-tellers of the play and the Doctor the caretaker... the evidence of Adam's stay in the hospital. My script justifies this because Nick was BORN from the trauma Adam experienced as a child. Dallas, Gus, and Willie have their own separate stories and arches [sic]. Having the rest of the characters a part of Adam does not make sense to me. I will admit Susan Patrick Benson's idea is really cool and smart, but it isn't what I wrote, nor the story being told. I am convinced that this would be re-writing my script as opposed to creating a concept.

Therefore, I seek your guidance. What do I do? I have not voiced my concern yet to Susan Patrick Benson. I have kept to your instructions to a T about simply being the writer and not voicing my opinion, yet I find myself troubled. At what point does a writer voice their genuine concern? If Susan Patrick Benson were to

insist on (if she indeed does decide to) make the rest of the cast a part of Adam's delusion, then I would accept this... Am I allowed to voice my concern?

Jacob Juntunen —

It sounds like Susan Patrick Benson's idea is interesting, but does change the meaning of what you're going for in the script. You should tell her that. It is good you're thinking carefully about your relationship with the director, but also remember that it is a collaboration, especially when it comes to meaning. You may want to suggest to her your inspirations, like *Fight Club*, to help give her an idea. It may also be useful to think through why Susan Patrick Benson might think all the characters are in Adam's head.

From Jacob Juntunen's email I concluded that since this was both a collaborative process and the development of a new play, the best option to serve my play's story and meaning was to meet with Benson and briefly discuss my concerns over the suggestion that Dallas, Gus, Willie, and Doctor Hart were a part of Adam's delusion as I felt it was important for each character besides Nick to be a separate individual to better respect them as characters.

THIRD DRAFT

As of January 6, I had not yet received feedback from Jacob Juntunen. Therefore, I based my revision goals on the brief feedback from Susan Patrick Benson. Upon re-reading my script, I realized that Benson was accurate in stating that it was too obvious that Nick wasn't real as he did not speak early enough. To combat this, I wrote more dialogue for Nick in the first third of the play that could be incorporated in the discussion of the other characters. Additionally, as I knew the play became tonally too dark in the second half, I gave Willie an obsession with western films and an occasional quote from the movies *Tombstone* and *Wyatt Earp* in hopes that

this will add a bit of humor. Additionally, as I re-read my play, I discovered that Anne Fletcher (from a previous conversation) was accurate in stating that each character shared a piece of my inner personal voice and that Susan Patrick Benson's concept that each of the characters *could* be read as a part of Adam's delusion indeed made sense.

In the first scene, Willie had an overexaggerated line that (at one point) referenced the *Resident Evil* films: "It was at this place in the Fall of... I forgot what year; the zombie apocalypse was in full swing. The Umbrella Corporation had released the T-Virus. Humanity hung on the edge of undead extinction! Blood and guts littered the streets. It was... amazing!" (Harrison, *The Thread That Snapped*, version 1, 7-8). However, after considering that the majority of my audience would be SIU students, I decided to change the line to "It was at this place in the Fall of... I forgot what year; the apocalypse was in full swing. The Necronomicon had released the Deadite Army. Humanity hung on the edge of undead extinction! Blood and guts littered the streets. It was... amazing!" (Harrison, *The Thread That Snapped*, version 3, 7-8) to reference our Fall production of *Evil Dead: The Musical*.

At this point, though I had a title, I still had not yet included a title line within the play. This was rather bothering me; during my reading of the script I discovered a spot in Act II, scene iv during the poker scene to include my title line. I took a throwaway line about a past patient chocking on a poker chip and wrote:

That was a story. A few years back we had this friend, Jack. This was before he got carted away and sent upstate. He was like you. Tired and beaten. His kids kept asking him for gifts. 'Daddy, can I have a Barbie? Daddy, can I have a new GI Joe doll? Daddy! Daddy? Daddy!' Come Christmas morning... no gifts. He gambled away all their Christmas money. His wife's yelling at him; his kids are

crying. Then Bam! His delicate brain snapped like a frayed piece of thread. Drowned his family in the pool right there on Christmas morning. Anyway, one day we're playing, gambling, and he's losing, bad. He takes the poker chips and starts shoving them in his mouth. On purpose. He starts choking. [...] He's inches from dying and in comes the doctor. Doc saves Jack; we lose our poker chips (Harrison, *The Thread That Snapped*, version 3, 86-87).

As of January 14, Susan Patrick Benson and the design team had an updated version of the script for auditions the following day.

MEETING WITH JACOB JUNTUNEN

On Thursday, January 23, Jacob Juntunen and I spoke on the phone about my play for roughly an hour. This was the first time my advisor and I discussed my play since he left for sabbatical in August. Juntunen admitted that since we were speaking so far along the writing process that he would be making more prescriptive suggestions than he would normally make. As he gave me my notes, I for the most part remained silent and on my “deserted island”, a metaphorical island where the playwright is unable to respond to feedback and can only listen, as Jacob Juntunen likes to call it.

Overall, Juntunen thought I had a clear MDQ to track; is Adam crazy?

He noted on page 8 that Gus's line “[Adam] came to Sunny Meadows like most of us here, for one reason” was a good sense of tracking that led him to page 12's line “I think I killed someone” and page 13's line “Yeah, I do. A wife. I mean no. I used to. Not anymore” to wonder if Adam was in the institute for murder and to question if Adam was crazy or not. When Adam “kills” his wife on page 54, Jacob Juntunen felt that Adam wanted to stress that it was an accidental killing, but also felt it wasn't an accident and his tracking of the MDQ was that Adam

was not crazy but instead a murderer. He also suggested that I add more “I didn’t mean to do it lines.”

Jacob Juntunen liked the flow of Act I, scene vii as it started light and the mystery letter had a nice loving feel to it with a slow reveal, which left him pleasantly confused and then suggested that Adam *is* crazy. By the end of the play, Juntunen felt that the MDQ had an obvious yes to the question of if Adam was actually crazy.

Juntunen thought I could trim some of my lines down, especially when characters speak subtext. I thought this was a good note but considered that I wanted my characters to be very prescriptive in their lines to the audience as if they were performing a show. I knew that most of the lines he was referring to were Willie’s lines from movies and considered that perhaps I could shorten them for a simplified effect. He could tell immediately that my play took place in the institution with a narrative chorus with an understandable and good sense of a status quo. Juntunen wondered, “What if people don’t know these movies [I reference in the script]?” (Juntunen, telephone conversation with the author, 1/17/2020). I had considered this issue when writing the play and felt that the movie references were either popular enough or would not distract the audience enough from the play.

Juntunen pointed out that he too shared Susan Patrick Benson’s idea that everyone was in Adam’s mind by citing Adam’s lines on page 11 “Who are you guys talking to?”, page 18 when the Chorus becomes the Mom for the first time and Adam says, “What is this?”, and page 19 when Dallas says “Come on, kid! Don’t be so afraid. None of this is real. It’s all in your head”, which made it seem like everyone is a figment of Adam’s delusion. This made me realize that perhaps I needed to lean into what I had unintentionally wrote as it seemed to work and add a layer of mystery to my play.

Jacob Juntunen noted that *The Thread That Snapped* reminded him of the film *Fight Club*, which also has a character with D.I.D. and a perception shift that one of the characters isn't real. However, Juntunen also said that unlike *Fight Club* my play with its musical numbers, characters playing other characters, and style is not Realism except for maybe the character of Doctor Hart. He felt that the use of the perception shift that Nick isn't real would be easier if my play had more Realism to it. However, when Act II, scene i ends, Juntunen felt that the Chorus's discussion of Adam's actions was a moment of realistic dialogue that differed from the previous feel of the play.

He noted that the stage direction on page 53 "GUS puts his hand on his belly, protecting a fetus" made him wonder if the audience already knew this or if it was subtle foreshadowing. He really enjoyed the theatricality of Willie using ketchup to represent blood and the pantomime of the baseball bat as funny and violent; he also thought Adam finally biting his tongue at the play's climax was an effective use of spectacle.

Juntunen suggested that Act I, scene vi could be cut as it did not add to the story and focused on the Chorus. My idea to combat this was to add more importance to Adam's story. Additionally, Juntunen thought that Act II, scene iii could also be cut as it did not add to Adam's predicament and while the brother and Bukowski poems were good and added specifics on violence, my advisor learned nothing new... just that Adam's childhood was terrible. I decided that I would add more conflict to this scene if I felt the scene needed to stay after the read-through.

Jacob Juntunen stated that he liked how intermission occurred with Willie having to urinate, but that there needs to be an actual reason to cut to intermission; when I begin Act II, He liked how the actors had a moment to refresh the audience's memories on what has occurred so

far in the play but suggested that I cut a few pages so that the scene did not begin exactly where the last one ended. Instead, Juntunen suggested that I start Act II with Doctor Hart already in the room.

Jacob Juntunen liked the gambling scene in Act II, scene iv but thought that I didn't need to explain again why they were gambling with pills. He also suggested that I trim their poker playing to only a few lines. I disagreed as I wanted the feel of an actual poker game, and I thought of instead inserting those lines into when Adam and Dallas are discussing the CIA. In the same scene, he thought that Gus's line on page 100 "You're practically weeks away from getting out of this place. Don't make up stories just to stay here. Don't let Doc hear you say that" was too rushed, and I needed to suggest earlier that Adam had the potential to be released into society.

Jacob Juntunen felt it interesting that Nick, compared to the character of Tyler Durden from *Fight Club*, was not that important of character compared to the chorus and wondered if this still made him an effective antagonist. I considered this thought and wondered if I should make Nick a bigger part of the play and even a part of the Chorus. I knew this would be difficult to do since I can't have my other characters obviously not talk to Nick.

Juntunen liked the suggestion that Adam died at the end of Act II, scene vi only to return comatose-y at the play's final scene. One of my advisor's final notes was that near the end of the play on page 119 Gus and Dallas's lines telling the audience to go away before they settle back into their world makes sense but felt that the audience will actually start to get up, clap, and leave prematurely. I thought this was a terrific note and decided that I would trim these lines down to lessen the effect.

Though Jacob Juntunen's notes were excellent, I decided to wait till the first read-through

with my cast on February 1 to make any changes. I wanted to hear my play read before I made any decisions.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION MEETINGS

This chapter details the design developmental process and the feedback given by my director, Susan Patrick Benson, to the designers in preparation for the production of *The Thread That Snapped*.

PRODUCTION MEETING- 11/4/19

During the first production meeting, my assigned director, Susan Patrick Benson, was away on a one-semester sabbatical. The production manager, Tom Fagerholm, told Teresa McKinley and I that there was a possibility that our productions would not have any stage managers, choreographers, or music directors. He also stated that no designers except for costumes had been assigned as student enrollment was down. Tom Fagerholm and Mark Varns (Professor and Resident Lighting Designer) were to fill in for technical direction and lights respectively. Fagerholm mentioned that the two thesis shows would run in repertory and share a budget of \$800 for scenic, props, paints and \$800 for costumes.

Because this was my first production meeting as a playwright and not the director, I came into this process understanding that my role was to create and refine the text and to answer questions asked. Because I knew that Susan Patrick Benson, upon her return, would be the leader of my production, I wanted to limit my vocal involvement in the meeting immediately so that there would be no confusion of roles later in the design process.

Ryann Willard (costume designer) showed her inspiration board which focused on Nick's devil costume, lobotomy, pills of various colors, the word "Mother", chairs in a circle, and a distorted background that she connected to the playwright's idea of horror. Ryann Willard liked dull colors and some blue-based colors for the patients' "uniforms" and a white coat for the

Doctor. Willard also mentioned that she was pondering that the Doctor may be dressed more modern than the patients. My main reaction to Ryann Willard's design ideas and inspiration board was that she really grasped my play.

With my director away, I led my section of the production meeting by sharing my inspiration summary, which emphasized the play as a personal reflection of my own life with a significance based on fear of being alone. I shared my idea of juxtaposing horror and comedic elements in the script's tone to create a feeling of tense and unusual circumstances. I mentioned that my main two technical focuses were the repetitive use of the intercom and the clock that runs backwards.

PRODUCTION MEETING 11/18/19

Susan Patrick Benson and Tom Fagerholm were absent from the meeting. Nate Mohlman, a second-year technical direction student, joined the meeting as the shared scenic designer for the thesis shows. Nate Mohlman shared his inspiration board that included images of a devil playing with cards, a bleeding heart (representing the broken relationship between Adam and the Mother), a couple holding hands (representing Adam's desire to have a family), an abstract painting he felt represented internal struggling, yellow wallpaper (an allusion to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper"), and an intercom. Mohlman lastly shared his idea of audience arrangement that would include the audience on two adjacent sides with the stage being in the corner of the Christian H. Moe's black box theatre. While the idea of yellow wallpaper or a corner stage did not fit my image of the play's production, I kept my opinions to myself as I felt they were not too big of an issue to mention. However, per Anne Fletcher's suggestion, I shared my interest in the colors of grey and sick green from my writing partner, Teresa McKinley's analysis of my script.

Mark Varns shared his inspirational board of a sterile white room with illuminating sconces and a glowing pattern he found from an episode of *Star Trek*. Ryann Willard shared her inspirational images and sketches of several styles of costumes from different time periods for the Doctor and the patients. She was interested in dressing the Doctor either in a sweater and bowtie if the Doctor was male or a nurse's uniform if female. For the patients, Willard was interested in dressing them in denim coveralls and jackets with small accessories, like hats, to separate their individual characters. Willard was interested in dressing Nick, when he dresses as the devil, in a red cape and mask. I took concern with the red cape and mask as it would block Nick's face. As my director was absent, I, as substitute leader of my play, mentioned to Ryann Willard that my idea when writing Nick was him wearing a red onesie with hood, horns, and tail. I realized at this moment that though I had written Nick in a onesie in my mind, I had not described his costume in the character's description. Willard thanked me for mentioning my concern and mentioned that she would take another look at Nick's costume.

Lastly, Anne Fletcher, the thesis shows' dramaturg suggested that the playwrights could give their show's pre-show lectures. She privately mentioned to me that I should write about which characters act as my personal voice within my thesis.

PRODUCTION MEETING 11/22/19

This production meeting served as a make-up meeting for Susan Patrick Benson, my thesis show's director who was away on sabbatical yet decided to return early, an act I would like to thank her for! In the meeting, Fagerholm brought Susan Patrick Benson up to speed on who currently had a position on the design team; he also mentioned that there was currently one stage manager and no sound designer. Jennifer Caudell, a third year MFA Directing student and Teresa McKinley's director, mentioned that she was going to ask her husband, Jon Alexander, if

he could sound design for our shows; I would like to thank Jon for later agreeing to sound design.

For scenic design, Nate Mohlman told Benson he was most captivated by the script's language. He shared his inspiration board which, to reiterate from previous meetings, contained a repetitive intercom, an abstract painting of internal struggle, the devil with playing cards, a couple holding hands to symbolize Adam's love for his wife, a dripping heart to symbolize the love that Adam feels yet slowly loses, and yellow wallpaper to represent that calming feel in a mental institution. Lastly, Nate Mohlman shared his idea of the set being in the corner of the Moe. Mark Varns showed Benson his inspiration board for Lighting which contained a sterility and colorless palette and fluorescent lights. Susan Patrick Benson mentioned that her idea for lighting the show would be to simply bring the audience into the world of the play yet not distract them with flashy effects. Ryann Willard shared her costume inspiration board with my director, which contained a circle of chairs for group therapy, pills of various colors, a devil face, a painting she felt resembled an abandoned asylum, an image to symbolize a lobotomized mind, and the word "Mommy". Willard discussed her interest in dressing the Doctor in a sweater and bowtie if a male and a nurse's outfit if female. She discussed how she liked denim blue work clothes/ coveralls for "uniforms" and how the costumes from the television show *American Horror Story: Asylum* and a Gucci runway show influenced her design for colorless and simple costumes. Willard showed Benson her thumbnails and emphasized how each of the mental patients would be dressed similarly yet would each have their own unique accessory to individualize them. Example costumes included Adam with plain coverall, Willie with a beanie hat as he is the youngest, Gus with his father's Carhartt jacket, Nick would have coveralls very similar to Adam, etc. Benson liked Ryann Willard's design but was concerned that uniforms

might make it seem like the characters were in prison, a concept Benson did not want the audience to focus on. My director instead suggested scrubs or pajamas with a splash of color to tie them all together.

PRODUCTION MEETING 12/2/19

This production meeting began with Nate Mohlman showing his corner ground plan for the shared thesis shows that incorporated several revolves upstage, a ramp, a clock and two intercom boxes, proscenium style seating, and a raised wooden deck. Tom Fagerholm commented his initial reaction that Mohlman's design was very ambitious and to consider that for accommodating a tight build schedule, simple is better. Nate Mohlman responded that he would check his timing but felt confident he could have the stage and seating built. Susan Patrick Benson liked Mohlman's design and suggested a much bigger clock and only one revolve wall. She also considered an image (unspecified at that moment) to either be projected or painted on the revolve wall. While weary of having a projected or painted image on set, I kept faith that my director's idea would work in production. Mark Varns specified that he could easily light Mohlman's design; due to the constricted build schedule he would meet with Benson outside of the meeting to discuss what was necessary and go from there... any other design elements would be *lagniappe*. Jon Alexander volunteered to assist Varns in hanging and programming lights. Ryann Willard shared her renderings that included a female Doctor Hart in a calming green and tan dress with attached card key and the patients in a variety of outfits (coveralls, overalls, scrubs, and pajamas) to showcase her several ideas. Benson felt that the Doctor's outfit was too young and flowy and wanted more structure with a fitted skirt and possible lab coat but liked the devil onesie in which Ryann Willard dressed Nick. Benson asked that the patients be dressed casually so the audience did not confuse them for prisoners. Instead, she wanted more scrubs,

robes, T-shirts and for all the patients to wear sneakers or slippers. Benson asked that the costume designer tie the patients together with a color (Benson recommended red) and an accessory like a handkerchief or the slippers. Susan Patrick Benson found the tying of the patients and perhaps even Doctor Hart important to stress the possible idea that they were all in Adam's head so that when Adam dies at the end of the play, the rest of the cast, his delusions, dies with him.

PRODUCTION MEETING 1/13/2020

At the beginning of the meeting, auditions were announced to be with *Sweat* and *Dysfunktional* on Wednesday, January 15th at 6pm in the McLeod Theatre with callbacks between Thursday and Saturday and casting decisions complete by Monday. Susan Patrick Benson requested that students auditioning prepare a contemporary monologue under two minutes in length. Benson stated that she planned to begin rehearsals on January 21 and have rehearsals from Monday to Thursdays every week. Nate Mohlman exhibited a rendering of the shared set with a center platform that would rotate to be able to accommodate both shows and their painted images. However, Susan Patrick Benson and Jennifer Caudell, with Tom Fagerholm's advice, requested that the set not rotate and instead have the shows' images projected with either a projector or custom glass gobo; Benson preferred to use a gobo over a projection and asked that Nate Mohlman create a silhouette image. Benson and Mohlman decided that the projected image will be a clock with someone screaming. Benson asked the scenic designer to include intercom speakers into the set drawing and that the clock be the most important part of the image. She, additionally, liked the use of brick in Mohlman's design but suggested if brick was too time consuming that he create stucco. My comment, upon Benson's approval, about the brick was that it be painted a neutral color. Ryann Willard brought new

sketches for the show and used gray as their slipper color. Benson thought Dr. Hart looked too conservative and requested she look a bit sexier to reflect the Chorus' occasional objectified innuendo lines. Jon Alexander requested to have a meeting with both directors to be able to see how the collaboration will work between shows. Susan Patrick Benson mentioned she was willing to do sound live if that was needed.

PRODUCTION MEETING 1/27/2020

At the top of the meeting, Tom Fagerholm had not yet announced crew positions yet announced that each cast would tech each other's show. Nate Mohlman presented a color rendering of the shared set and stated that he decided to use projections to present the clock on stage. Susan Patrick Benson asked for the clock to run backwards with a ticking sound effect. Mohlman planned to build the set from March 2 to March 27 between Spring Break and the SETC conference. Ryann Willard gave us her final renderings which added a bandana to Willie's costume to represent his newly added obsession with western films. Benson requested that Doctor Hart wear a sweater and maybe a scarf instead of a lab coat, which she felt was too surgical. Anne Fletcher stated that she would begin working on my dramaturgical packet soon and asked me to send her my headshot and any additionally information I wanted in the packet. Lastly, I requested to be included in the cast emails and to be sent a rehearsal schedule.

PRODUCTION MEETING 2/10/2020

As of this production meeting, Tom Fagerholm had not yet announced crew positions and Nate Mohlman was still working on his build schedule. To ease Mohlman's burden, Susan Patrick Benson mentioned that she is okay with using the Moe furniture, yet Nate Mohlman stated that he would be able to figure something else out. Mark Varns introduced undergraduate Steven Bognar who would help hang lights and write cues. Anne Fletcher suggested that for

dramaturgy each show either have two dedicated panels or switch all four panels between the shows. Benson insisted on just allowing the shows to have two panels each. When our production stage manager, Michelle Macrito, asked Susan Patrick Benson what she would like for the poster (two separate posters for the shows or a single festival show), she stated that she'd prefer a joint poster that maybe uses a single image for the shows.

CHAPTER 4

AUDITIONS AND REHEARSALS

This chapter details the audition and callback process undertaken by Susan Patrick Benson and me, and the rehearsal process for *The Thread That Snapped*.

PRE-AUDITION MEETING WITH SUSAN PATRICK BENSON

On January 14, I met with Susan Patrick Benson in her office to discuss my responsibilities and expectations for the rehearsal process. Because we both knew that in the professional world the playwright would not naturally be at rehearsals, my director stated that I could come to rehearsals as much or as little as I wished, but that on days where she needed me, I had to come. We also discussed the chain of command with the actors; that if they had any questions, I would send them to Benson who may or may not ask me. We agreed that we liked the minimalization of the set and that the distorted face from Nate Mohlman's rendering should only be on the set once or twice in the play. Benson explained to me why she asked Ryann Willard to make Doctor Hart sexier as it would signify how the male patients see her. She asked that during auditions I take my own casting notes in case she wanted to discuss actors. I clarified that I was open to any race for my play, and that if need be, we can gender bend a role.

Lastly, as this was the first time I was able to meet with Susan Patrick Benson after emailing Jacob Juntunen, I discussed my concern about having all the other character's be a part of Adam's head. I stated that while at first I did not feel the concept made sense as only Nick was a part of Adam's trauma, once I re-read the play in revision I realized that Benson indeed had a point to her concept as all of the other characters seem to each have a glimpse of Adam in them. Susan Patrick Benson reassured me that she was not intending to hammer the idea into the audience's minds, but only to suggest it. I clarified that while my play has elements of

Surrealism, Adam is indeed imagining all this but that the characters (except Nick) are physical characters.

AUDITIONS

Auditions for *The Thread That Snapped* began on Wednesday, January 15 at 6:00 P.M. in the McLeod Theatre. Overall, we saw thirty-nine actors in groups of six at a time. My role consisted of sitting next to Susan Patrick Benson during auditions and writing my own notes.

My audition chart resembled:

Name	Adam	Nick	Gus	Dallas	Willie	Doctor	Notes
First Last	✓						
First Last		✗					
First Last			?				
First Last						#✓	
First Last						#✗	

I used a combination of checkmarks, for actors I liked (double if I really liked them), x-marks for actors I couldn't use, question marks for actors I didn't know about yet, and a hashtag to note all actresses. For each role (in simplified terms) I looked for lead and likeability for Adam, villainy for Nick, innocence and sweetness for Gus, masculinity and gruffness for Dallas, humor and childlike qualities for Willie, and maturity, seriousness, and physical appeal for Doctor Hart.

After the directors released all the actors, I helped Susan Patrick Benson organize her notes, discussed which actors we each liked and wanted to ask to call-backs.

CALLBACKS AND CASTING

Callbacks began on Thursday, January 16 at 6:00 P.M. in the Moe Theatre. The actors for Gus, Dallas, and Willie were called at 6; Nick, Adam, and Doctor Hart at 7:30. For auditions, Susan Patrick Benson and I first arranged the gentlemen into groups of Gus, Willie, and Dallas and had them read the first scene where they were playing cards. Susan Patrick Benson asked the actors to not worry about the musicality of the script, but instead pretend they were doing children's theatre with big and bold gestures. After each group finished their side, Benson rearranged the actors and had them read for different roles. As each group ran through their sides, I wrote down my notes on my chart and was immediately impressed by several actors and actresses. Once all the men had read for the Chorus, Susan Patrick Benson and I had the actors read part of scene three where Nick and Adam first officially meet. Benson asked the actors reading for Adam to be confused and scared while the actors reading for Nick to be sly, smooth, malicious, sneaky, and to physically invade Adam's space. I was very intrigued by two sets of actors for the roles of Adam and Nick.

For the last part of auditions, Benson had the women come in and one by one read the beginning of scene two with the men who she regularly rearranged for roles. She asked the actresses to be a range of different personalities from ambitious, vulnerable, inexperienced, and motherly. For this part of the audition process, I chose to only focus on taking notes on actresses for Doctor Hart. Once Susan Patrick Benson released all the actors and actresses, we briefly discussed who she was considering, and I shared my thoughts on who I saw fit which role.

Upon hearing Susan Patrick Benson's casting considerations, Michelle Macrito, our production stage manager brought up that a few of the actors Susan Patrick Benson wanted would still be in the Spring production of *The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!)* until February

23. Benson thought briefly if she would have enough time with all the actors (since she would need all the men in rehearsals at the same time), and ultimately decided that she needed to talk to the *Musical* director, Daryll Clark, over the weekend to see if joint casting could be arranged.

Susan Patrick Benson and the other semester directors met on Saturday, January 19 to negotiate casting. After the meeting, Benson notified me that though she still had to discuss taking actors out of Daryll Clark's production of *The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!)*. She was planning on casting Garrett O'Brien as Adam, JT Atwood as Nick, Ethan Schmersahl as Gus, Geraldo Martinez as Dallas, Michael Hall as Willie, and an unnamed actress whose name I choose to omit as Doctor Hart. Because casting would not be finalized until the following Tuesday, Susan Patrick Benson asked the stage managers and me not to tell anyone who might get cast. I promised not to discuss the matter with anyone.

On Monday, January 21, Susan Patrick Benson texted me that our cast would be Garrett O'Brien as Adam, JT Atwood as Nick, Ethan Schmersahl as Gus, Geraldo Martinez as Dallas, Michael Hall as Willie, and Paige Fanning as Doctor Hart. Susan Patrick Benson said that it would be too difficult to work around the unnamed actress's schedule. We were set to begin rehearsals February 1.

REHEARSALS – FIRST WEEK

2/1/2020

Before rehearsals began for *The Thread That Snapped*, I gave a general sweep over my play and made minor grammatical adjustments to some of the play's lines. I felt like my director and I, though we had never worked together before and I had never seen her work, would be able to collaborate well together as playwright and director in making the lines and scenes the best they could be. I planned to remain in my role as the playwright and channel communication from

the actors to the director as best I could and embrace the circumstances of a short rehearsal schedule and chaotic events as best as I could.

On the morning of our first rehearsal, Susan Patrick Benson texted me to tell me that Willie's actor, Michael Hall, had dropped the role. While this was a shock and great disappointment to me, I knew that Benson would serve as an exceptional director and would handle the situation immediately. Due to these unexpected circumstances, I came to rehearsal unsure of what steps would need to be taken and internally considered negotiating with Benson on what to do with Willie's line like whether to fuse Nick and Willie's characters or if I needed to step in since I understand the role of Willie best of all my characters. She pulled me aside and informed me that unless she could get Segun Ojewuyi, *Sweat*'s director, to share Michael Radford with us to play Willie she might ask me to—. I assumed she was going to say cut Willie's role as a fellow playwright had to change her play's characters due to casting issues. Susan Patrick Benson texted me later in the day to say that Segun Ojewuyi would allow her to share Michael Radford with the *Sweat* production. A few days later I would find out that what she would have asked me to do was step in and play Willie, a role I would have loved to play and loved writing, yet I felt that giving Michael Radford a chance to have this role was for the best.

At the beginning of rehearsal, I was asked to step in as Willie for the day. I was very excited for this opportunity as I have long missed since my acting days though I knew it might distract me a bit from my playwriting duties. During the read through I put a lot of energy into reading Willie's lines to help the cast better get into the mood of the script, and since the actors had never heard the music before, I led the group in tempo and tune when it came time to sing the play's songs.

Susan Patrick Benson asked me if I wrote the music and lyrics to which I stated that I had indeed written the lyrics yet worked with my music collaborator to write the music. As we read over the play and listened to Deanna Leach's recordings of the music, it seemed that Benson had an issue listening to the recordings of the music and asked if she could tweak the tune as we go to make it easier on the actors; I asked that we work together to create an easier tune.

Overall, I think the readthrough went well, yet because this was the first time I was able to hear my play aloud, I realized a few issues... primarily that the poems, unless delivered a certain way, could slow down the play's pace and that I would need to take a serious look at (what was then) Act II, scene iii as it moved way too slowly and had too much monologue.

Overall Thoughts on Rehearsals 2/2/2020 – 2/11/2020

For the next day's rehearsal, I made minor grammatical adjustments to Act I, scenes i and ii's lines and emailed the updated pages to our stage manager. When I got to rehearsal, the director stated that while she was okay with me making adjustments to the play and cutting sections, she did not want me to add anything and asked that I make no further adjustments after the end of February; I assured her that after we went through each scene separately, I would not make any further adjustments. My director would then clarify a few days later that I was indeed allowed to cut and change my play but asked that I not add a lot of dialogue as my play was long as is. Susan Patrick Benson informed the cast that Michael Radford would be joining the cast shortly and asked me to temporarily step in as Willie again. Additionally, Benson determined that she wanted to work the music with the actors once they were all available.

For each following rehearsal I would edit and revise the two scenes that we would be rehearsing for the day. I would look for grammar, consistency errors, areas that I could cut or tone down, unnecessary lines that I could shorten, bland subtext, etc. and then email the changes

for our stage manager to print out. Benson would then have the actors and me sit in a circle at the beginning of each rehearsal to read through the script. It was during these readings and the remainder of the time blocking that I would call out impromptu line changes.

Within the first couple days I realized my director and I differed in how we saw Nick based on the show's blocking, which severely isolated Nick. Benson believed that not even Adam could see Nick until he officially introduced himself in Act I, scene iii; her blocking reflected this idea by not allowing Adam to even look at Nick. I, on the other hand, felt strongly that Adam needed to see Nick as soon as he enters the hospital. I explained that in much early drafts we never hear Nick speak until scene iii, however, in the draft we were rehearsing, Nick speaks much sooner in the play and interacts unknowingly with the Chorus during the first therapy session. Benson understood and made necessary adjustments to her blocking that allowed Adam to interact with Nick.

Major Edits

During my editing phase, my main two changes to the script were cutting a scene from each act. Since the read through, I knew that I needed to trim some of the poetry in order to make the script's pace quicker, yet I was not wild about cutting poems since I wanted to keep the number of songs and poems symmetrical. However, I knew I had to sacrifice my own ego and need for order to best serve my play. Additionally, I had to take a serious look at what was then Act II, scene iii since it moved too slowly and was too monologue based. Though these issues would inevitably need to be fixed, I decided to take care of them closer to when those scenes were blocked in rehearsals. When reviewing Act I's scene vi and vii, I discovered that there did not need to be a scene break between the two; I then fused the scenes together, reordered a few lines, and cut the poem "Years", which ultimately cut two pages. Similarly, when I worked Act

II's scenes ii and iii, I discovered that by fusing them together and cutting the "A Bastard Son in Sonora, KY" and "Hearing Bukowski's Voice For The First Time in College, I Was Disappointed" poems I could greatly quicken the pace of the scenes.

My main focus in editing Act II was to make sure that the climax and altercation between Adam and Nick would be as effective as possible. I decided to add a few details in the play that the Chorus had been "messing with" Adam's head this entire time, almost playing jokes on him. I found this decision to be effective and organic because Act I already supports this claim and gives the Chorus a bit more depth in their characters that they themselves are not as pure, well-meaning, and innocent as they seemed earlier in the play. By having the Chorus "mess with" Adam, his neuroses would intensify and make the final reveal about Nick's non-existence and Adam's outburst more effective. I additionally added a Rod Serling inspired monologue to open Act II, scene iv to give a comic break to the play's bleakness. When considering the play's final moments, I felt that the lyric "Night, you stupid bitch" was too much and added a misogynistic element that I did not want associated with my play. However, once Susan Patrick Benson was assured me that the lyric was not as offensive as I thought, I decided to keep the lyric but added a humorous "I love you" (a line I previously added earlier in Act I) from Willie to lighten the mood.

Music Rehearsals

When it came time to teach the actors the show's barbershop music on Wednesday the February 5, I took my sheet music and named each note thinking that it was best to be as prepared as possible, however, teaching the actors the music ended up not being as simple as I thought it would be. Benson walked into rehearsal and saw me playing with the opening notes of the first song on the piano and asked me to begin teaching the actors the songs. I then reminded

my director that while I could slowly read sheet music and find notes on the piano, I could not play well enough to teach them. She asked if I could sing well enough and I said no. Therefore, Susan Patrick Benson tried her best to teach the actors how the songs went, yet it was at that point in the rehearsal that I finally realized Benson, as she had previously informed me, had cast the Chorus with actors who had little to no singing experience and were unable to follow the music. Benson justifiably concluded that the music was too advanced for the actors we had, and as the music rehearsal did not go as planned, the cast would have to drop all sense of harmonization and simply worry about the tune. Susan Patrick Benson stated that she wanted to work the music with the actors on Saturday, February 8, after looking at the music more herself. She asked if she could not focus on the music itself but instead keep the lyrics and simply the tune for the actors. During the rehearsal break, I discussed with my director that while I had tried to make my play's set requirements, music, casting specifics, and technical necessities as simple as possible, I felt frustrated that we were not given access to a musical director. Susan Patrick Benson agreed with my frustration, yet like the excellent director she is, calmed my worry and assured me that she had experience working with musicals with actors who couldn't sing and would be able to make my music function to the best of my intentions.

For the rehearsal on Saturday, Benson simplified the music and recorded herself singing on her computer to show the cast. The majority of the songs' tunes, though altered, made sense and encapsulated my intention; however, I was worried that "Ring, Ring, Ring", which was written to be upbeat and fast, was not chipper and was too sing-songy and melodic, and "Away From Home", which was written to be a very slow and melancholy was stylized as a sea-chanty. I attempted to convey my written intentions to Benson as best I could. She revealed that she was simply giving the actors a tune to work with and would do acting alterations to the songs at a

different time. When I went home that night, I realized I needed to fully trust my director and let my show become her product. To support this revelation, the show was already coming together nicely by that point, my director already had 27 years of directing experience under her belt. Additionally, while I felt that this play incapsulates (though also dramatizes and greatly alters for the sake of effect) a very bleak and painful time(s) of my own life, I needed to step back and give away my play in good faith and accept that what I imagined when I wrote the play realistically will never come true. Therefore, I must roll with the alterations.

Conclusion of Week 1

By the end of the week, I decided that once the actors returned to rehearsal following *Musical the Musical of Musicals*' run on the 23rd of February I would no longer attend the rehearsals so that the cast and director could have time to work together without the playwright hovering. I had allowed Benson to change lines she felt needed to be changed for effect and knew that we would continue to do a good job as playwright and director in making the lines and scenes the best they could be.

Between Rehearsals

My only form of communication from my director since I stepping away from rehearsals was a text from the stage manager asking if Gerardo Martinez, who speaks Spanish, could add a Spanish phrase which translates to "God Save us from this witch" to the end of Dallas's line "She's just not the warmest of hands. Don't get me wrong, play along, sit straight, and you'll be on her nice list, but fuck up, like Willie there, and it's straight to the naughty list. No warm cookies, just coal on Christmas morn'" (Harrison, *The Thread That Snapped*, version 4, 7-8). Though I did not see the purpose of adding this line, I agreed to let the phrase be added to then be evaluated during a run through. Susan Patrick Benson then tagged me in a February 26

Facebook posted which said “I’m at that point in rehearsal where I’m falling in love with the play and the cast...I love this part. Austin Harrison The Thread That Snapped.”

CHAPTER 5

PRODUCTION

This chapter evaluates *The Thread That Snapped*'s production and describes ideas for future productions of the piece as well as possible revisions.

A MONKEY WRENCH IS THROWN...

As the cast and crew were released for spring break in early-March, I was very excited to return and watch a full-dress rehearsal and see the hard work that my director and cast had done, yet life, as I learned long ago, is never fair. It was during spring break that the United States was hit heavily with the Coronavirus pandemic. To combat the chance of spreading the virus, government officials, health and safety personnel, and schools issued strict regulations. A hot word arose: “social distancing” where individuals would self-quarantine and physically distance themselves from one another in fear of contagion. The president of SIU’s campus created a mandate that all in-person classes would be moved online and all social and education events with an audience above a certain number would be canceled. This included my thesis show, the culmination of three years of hard work and, honestly, the thing I had most looked forward to these past few years.

DUSTING OFF MY PANTS

While the loss of my production was a remarkably heavy blow and disappointment, the show, as we in the entertainment industry clichély yet accurately say, must go on. Without an actual production to draw feedback from and evaluate my work, and since I never saw an actual run of my show, I must instead internalize and base my play’s value and effect on my intuition. I believe that my script and its production would have been a lot of fun. I think that the show would have pushed my audience, made them laugh, and at times made them uncomfortable, all

the things I wanted to happen. Since none of the cast was trained singers it would have been difficult to gauge the structural and music dynamics of the show's music, yet I believe that the audience would have laughed.

QUESTIONS THAT A PRODUCTION WOULD HAVE ANSWERED

Ultimately, I was not able to answer the evaluation questions from Chapter 1:

1. How did the usage of poetry alter your experience with the play?
2. Was the use of mental patients in translating Adam's past clear for you?
3. In what way does Adam's final act of violence reflect his inner struggle as a character?
4. Where do you see these characters being in the future? What happens to them after?

Months after writing these questions, I honestly find them to be trivial and, after overcoming many obstacles, I am no longer interested in them. Instead, through its production and talkback I would have wanted to know:

1. Is this an effective story, and is the script structurally sound without plot holes or confusion?
2. Does my script carry meaningful messages?
3. Do the combination of humor and darkness work, and if not does the script need to be funnier or instead further embrace the horror?
4. Does the musicality and poetry work for this script or do I need to completely remove the barbershop songs and poems?
5. While the story is a personal one for me based on real-life events and my childhood, is the use of violence too much or could I even go more violent?

- a. Can a modern-day audience handle and visceral and experimental playwright such as myself?
6. Does the Chorus while adding spectacle in the moments of recollecting Adam's past confuse the overall narrative?

HOW WOULD A PRODUCTION HAVE ANSWERED THOSE QUESTIONS?

Production for me would have given my script a platform to play on. While I enjoyed writing the script, and I think it has a high value, the only way to truly absorb my story, message, and style is in production.

To answer the questions mentioned above, both a staged production and post-show talkback would have given the script a chance to leap off the stage and be able to have life. Plays, like poetry, do not belong only on the page; I believe this theory strongly. Without being spoken aloud and performed, both poetry and dramatic literature are mere words on the page and left to be short stories and novels without the use of actual narrative structure seen in stories and novels. Poetry and plays are missing these narrative jigsaw pieces, and it is only through spoken word that the puzzle can be filled in and a whole picture can be seen. However, what separates plays from poems is the use of production: cast, costumes, set, an audience, rehearsal. Simply having a reading is not able to answer or fulfill a play's purpose either. No, in fact, to use a well-taught analogy, a play is merely a blueprint of a house not yet build. We as playwrights are taught to leave gaps in our writings for directors, designers, and actors to fill in. People cannot live inside a piece of paper and be protected from the weather and neither can an audience read a play and have fully experienced the wonders and artistry that only a staged production can do.

To elaborate: my play has sung music that's value and quality can only be answered in production upon hearing it; my play requires staged violence that's effect and outcome can only

be witnessed through actor's acting; my play's balance of humor and horror can only be critiqued upon being performed just as one cannot judge a comic's material just by reading it, it has to have correct and rehearsed... timing; I would have only been able to physically see if my work is suited for a modern-day audience by witnessing if people leave and tell me my work is terrible or if they applauded and cried; my work as a playwright is not complete— without a production, I feel unfinished. Because this script was intended for production, I never actually received the feedback I craved, merely thoughts on a very early draft. My peers and advisor were understandably waiting to see the production before giving any essence of structured feedback.

Lastly, my need for this production of this particular play is rooted in my worry that the written script is not marketable in most areas or to most theatre due to its extreme subject matter and content; while I am aware that many theatre's produce plays with staged domestic violence, I feared that my style could be deemed as too extreme of a case. My first year here I wrote a play that I would deem "safe" for an audience to experience; my second year I wrote a play that's ending became violent yet failed in my eyes due to writing about a topic too racially sensitive; this year's play would have reflected my desire to write visceral and violent plays while also telling a story I am well aware of. For me, this production would have been my chance to see if the craziness, vulnerability, and sheer brutality of the work I have long wanted to create would be feasible. This production at SIU would have been safe-ground for me to be able to experiment with my inner writing desires with little chance of backlash or global criticism.

PREDICTIONS

Without a production or feedback from my peers, I am forced to predict how my play would have gone; due to the unfortunate and rather irritating circumstances and the correlating feelings that have arisen, I choose to answer those predictions with a comedic flair.

First off, I think my play would have made some people very uncomfortable and would have needed a “fat” content warning before the show began. This is good; this would have been important for me. My writing philosophy is centered around a refusal to hold-back or shy away from uncomfortable issues. This play was written about mental health and domestic violence, and it would have only been successful if people were affected by the production’s staged violence and disturbing imagery. I personally believe that my job and purpose as a writer is to push the envelope and make my audience feel shaken. It is then that my work is successful. Additionally, I would have looked forward to two moments in particular: the murder scene and the blood pack. I think Susan Patrick Benson would have done a beautiful job of staging in pantomime the scene when Adam murders his wife, played by the character of Gus. I also think the moment when Adam bites his tongue and the blood pack pours from his mouth would have been a very visceral (and frankly awesome) moment of spectacle.

Though, as I have said previously, my cast was not made up of musically trained singers and the tunes had to be made easier to learn, I feel strongly that my lyrics and Benson’s direction would have fit marvelously and been comedic when they needed to be and horrifying when needed as well. I think my audience would have had a great time listening to the barbershop songs and had a moment to relax from my play’s tense nature.

Though I am not a writer who focuses heavily when creating my concept on what I want my audience to learn, in fact, I rather disagree with the didactic literary philosophy, I hope my play would have made people think about how their actions and choices irrevocably have consequences on those in our lives. Though not all of us end up committing murder or think we had or become sent or institutionalized in a hospital, I wish my play had presented an extreme situation for the audience to then become affected by and consider how they treat others. Maybe

I would have wanted my audience to go home and hug their loved ones, I don't know. Overall, I wish my play had served as entertainment purposes for a few members of the audience; what else can I hope for in a production?

While my advisor taught me that popular plays in today's era are 90 minutes long (thus roughly 90 pages in length), I long ignored this suggestion due to my own stubbornness as I felt my natural writing style is suited for longer narratives. I have had two readings of my full-length plays during my time here and have myself become a tad bored during the readings but only chocked up my reaction to my nervousness and the scripts not being staged and thus not having life. However, before SIU let out for spring break, the playwrights read a script from one of the MFA students whose writing was even longer than my own. Though her writing was fantastic and I enjoyed the subject matter greatly, I became especially uneasy due to the length... and we weren't even able to finish her script due to time constraints. Therefore, I worry that my script even produced might have made the audience bored after a certain point due to it being 116 pages long. This makes me feel that I need to write plays with a lesser page count.

To finalize my predictions, I feel that this play, while it understandably would have had minor notes that I would need to address before sending it out into the world, would have been successful in my overly self-critical eyes while also giving me the chance to see my first full-length work grow from birth to production and therefore give me the confidence to embrace my individuality as a writer and encourage me to continue to write envelope-pushing plays. I however, wish to be confident in myself and take a leap of faith into the world unknown having enjoyed writing this distorted, humorous, and dark play.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the thesis by tracking my progression in the playwriting program over the past three years. It includes my writing growth in terms of both creative structure narrative as well as developing my own artistic voice. It also discusses my professional development over the time in the program, my teaching practice, and my journey into dramaturgy.

THE BEFORE....

I have long been an artist wandering aimlessly, hoping for a grain of success. I have been a writer ever since I wrote my 7th-grade teacher a poem for her retirement, and she cried. It was this pure and powerful moment of affecting another human being that drove me, and ever since then, I have been searching to recreate this feeling. I've been writing stories and poems since I was a child and founded a poetry society during my senior year of my bachelor's degree, yet I have never truly been satisfied as an artist...

I have been a student it feels all my life... after finishing public school, I obtained my Bachelor's degree in English Education and planned on using my Master's from Louisiana Tech University to diversify myself as a high school teaching applicant. Though I always (naively) considered myself the class clown and enjoyed creating characters to perform during my classes, I never stepped on stage. In fact, for a long time, I had a debilitating stutter. However, on a whim, I took an acting class during my senior year of college and was told I'd make a good director. Thus, I applied to graduate school at Louisiana Tech University and got accepted. Once I joined my Master's program, I found myself to be an outsider in theatre, a field in which I had no experience. However, with perseverance and dedication, I rose through the ranks from being a

complete outsider to an artist that was reliable and instrumental in the artistic productions and management of the theatre's seasons. I specialized in theatre direction and stage combat, was cast in each show, learned to fight with swords (and found myself to be quite the fight choreographer), taught classes, and built sets... I felt like an artist finally.

Once my two years at Louisiana Tech University started coming to a close, I was fully expecting to teach high school again, yet I found myself wanted more. It was then that I realized that what I wanted to do was teach college and not high school anymore. Per advice from my faculty advisors, I applied to graduate school again, this time in playwriting and not directing due to my youth. I was nervous, and while I had long considered myself a writer and wrote two plays during my masters, I still felt I had zero background in writing plays. Part of the reason I chose directing as my specialty in my masters was that the playwriting professor recently retired and was never replaced.

I applied to many colleges, and to my surprise, SIU accepted me as a student.

PLAYWRITING

Coming to SIU, I was wide-eyed and determined to get the hang of playwriting as soon as possible. I was impatient. Though I had previously been taught by Louisiana Tech's very patient technical director on why my two plays, *Bastard Home* and *The House Special* lacked depth and story, I was unable to fully change my writing; I was stuck in a creative rut. In truth, I lacked structure as a scriptwriter. Now at SIU, I finally felt I would finally be in the academic hands of a faculty member who was not only an official playwright, but one trained by Edward Albee himself. Dr. Jacob Juntunen was to be this professor.

Green skinned and with a fire burning inside me to impress my advisor and prove I belonged here, I took to Juntunen's lessons immediately and tried to implement them into our

monthly Big Muddy Shorts. While I felt I naturally had talent in story creation and a creative mind, I lacked the fundamentals of storytelling in the aspects of form, style, and plot structure. In other words, I didn't know an MDQ from a CPU. From Juntunen, I learned the importance of basic playwriting elements, such as Major Dramatic Question, character goals, tactics, dramatic arc, etc.

From my first semester in the playwriting program, I learned how structure can be used as a basis to tell a captivating story that could flow naturally. While I was previously never a proponent of writing an outline to tell a story as I felt it diminished the creative flow that writing should have, I immediately leaned into Juntunen's planning style. From this basic structure, my plots could eventually deviate and break expectations. Most of the plays that I wrote from then on were first created by asking the Major Dramatic Question for my audience to then follow. After asking the MDQ in my plays, I then focused on concrete character goals and tactics to achieve the goals. While my previous two plays written at Louisiana Tech relied heavily on precise stage directions, I learned from then Ph.D. playwright Greg Aldrich that I needed to focus less on writing physical descriptions and more on writing descriptive dialogue.

It was during this first semester that my advisor had the privilege of teaching in Poland as an invited Distinguished Guest Professor; we held the first half of that semester's playwriting class in person, like normal, while the second half was taught online. I was frustrated at first because I hungrily sought guidance from a "Jedi master", yet somewhat also enjoyed the freedom of writing the types of plays I wanted to write without the fear of my advisor finding my work unworthy or too extreme. Yet upon my advisor's return, I felt that my advisor served more as a reviewer for my plays, pointing out areas that I needed to strengthen yet rarely suggesting what strategies to use. While I was able to understand that this was a part of my advisor's

teaching style that feared writing my play for me, I did not receive the feedback I truly sought, his approval. I felt that if my advisor did not like my plays then neither would an audience. What I *thought* I needed was his approval, a sign-off or trivial pursuit, one he understandably considered subjective and unnecessary. To my advisor, the feedback I collected from hearing my own writing and hearing my play discussed in structured class discussions was more beneficial. Yet, at the time I did not accept this.

During my second year, my advisor moved out of state while remaining a faculty member at SIU; he taught his scheduled courses and offered his required office hours on the two days per week he was physically on campus. During the fall semester of my third year, my advisor took a one-semester sabbatical yet returned in the spring to coordinate the annual New Play Festival, for which my thesis play was to be a part. While, at first, not seeing my advisor on campus five days a week grew my frustrations of not having my hand held in the learning process, I soon learned that what I *needed* was to stand on my own feet and grow-up as a writer. Truthfully, I had long been a needy writer who needed the “master” to guide the “padawan” every step of the way. However, through my advisor’s physical absence I then began to grow as a writer who, while using the structural platform previously taught, had to think for himself instead of asking for my advisor’s thoughts or permission. This was a godsend.

...

I feel that I have grown tremendously as a writer, perhaps in a far better way than I could have if my advisor had given me his star of approval every step of the way because, as my advisor taught me my first semester, my failures will ultimately be my greatest teacher and they have.

...

In writing, I believe that the truest stories come from within one's self. For my first-year play, I wrote *Near the End* about Roger, a middle-aged man struggling to cope with terminal pancreatic cancer and re-establish a relationship with his neglected daughter. This play was inspired by my own life when an aunt of mine died of lung cancer without having spoken to her mother in years. This play meant a lot to me because it continued my exploration into humanity's faults, this time choosing to explore pride and grief. While my two pre-SIU plays involved a lot of violence, for this play, I chose to not include any violence and simply tell a story about morality and personal weakness. My simple story ended up taking a twist as I conceptually added psychology and inter-exploratory hypnosis into my play. For my play's ending, I wrote a lullaby that symbolized Roger's death; this was my first attempt at songwriting which would eventually become vital for my thesis play. My Major Dramatic Question was: Will Roger call his daughter before he dies, which ultimately is answered when he calls his daughter at the end of the play yet the audience does not hear his daughter's response. Ultimately, I felt that my play told a sweet story, yet conceptually had too many storylines and motivations, needed a stronger plot, and could have done without my attempt at writing psychology.

After taking Black Theatre with Professor Segun Ojewuyi, I felt inspired to write a story without my protagonist being your typical white male; I wanted to help the cause and write roles specifically for African American actors. Because I had long been obsessed with the supernatural, devil-lore, Blues music, and the myth of Robert Johnson's deal with the devil, I decided to write a Blues play. I returned to writing about violence and wrote my play, *By the Neck*, about Henry, an African American man in 1967 Mississippi who is harassed by his white boss and is tempted to make a deal with the devil to take care of his family. My play conceptually dealt with African American history, devil-lore, baseball, racism, and

miscegenation. I was inspired by stories my grandparents would tell of racism in the South and chose to make Henry's wife white, which I thought would add layers. My first draft in the eyes of Teresa McKinley, my African American colleague, had Henry too weak and submissive to his white boss; she felt that if Henry had the guts to marry a white woman, he should also have the guts to stand up for himself. She was right. Additionally, I wrote ten original Blues songs for the play's narrator to sing. Unfortunately, I focused on perfecting the lyrics and waited till around December to try and find a guitar player to write the music for the songs; after many musicians (and actors) signed on and dropped the project due to time commitments, my play's reading had the Bluesman character speak the songs without music. While McKinley and I felt both I had taken the time and consideration in writing my play as a white male myself, my audience reacted in thinking I had not done my research. This taught me to stay inside my box for the near future and write what I know. After the play's reading and much thought, I realized that I had been too ambitious with the project and wanted to take on too many issues, and my secondary characters were only two-dimensional. In my advisor's words, my play was about too much, and he was right. Additionally, my play's MDQ (Will Henry save his family from poverty/Will Henry make the deal with the devil?) was answered too soon in the play and moved on.

For my thesis play, I decided to return to writing about issues I knew; I wanted my play to tell a simple story. Because of my background in poetry, I thought about writing my thesis and poetry—which I discussed in Chapter 1. I would ultimately decide to not write my play entirely in poetry as I was afraid it might distract the audience; I wanted to play it safe. Additionally, I decided to open up a can of worms and write two very difficult experiences in my life. However, for this play, I wanted to make sure I used the lessons I had learned from my previous two

failures. I got a music collaborator immediately in the writing process, and I tried to keep the play's plot simple and singular.

ARTISTIC VOICE

Part of my hunger and unsatisfied nature lingered in the overwhelming presence of uncertainty in my work. I considered myself an outsider in this profession, one who chose to write violent plays that pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable on stage, yet everywhere I looked I usually received backlash from comments saying “nobody would produce this play because of its violent nature”, or “all you went for was shock value”. Frankly, hearing my work was unacceptable was disheartening. I did not feel that my work was immature or senseless... but misunderstood or that the world was just not ready for me. Thus, my past three years have been spent toeing around what I can and cannot do. I found (in my Big Muddy Short plays) that violence had a much more likely chance of being accepted if it was presented as a farce or absurd comedy. This didn't make me happy because I didn't feel true to myself. In truth, I have long been seeking approval from everyone: my advisor, my colleagues and professors, and my audience because of what is “commercially acceptable”. Yet, what I needed to find was approval with myself. I had to embrace my individuality as a writer and cement myself as a unique narrative voice.

I wish I honestly could say that I have fully grown in my artistic voice, yet I haven't yet; and that's okay! I don't think I should have fully found myself within my three years here. Art is fluid; it takes time to perfect, and if I had mastered my art by the end of my three years at SIU, then I'd be bored, and my plays would be stale. Art like life is about learning, and I'm still doing that.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

My previous master's program taught me a lot about professionalism and the job market, and it was their ideology that I still carry with me today. While I already had a website and social media presence, I have made sure to keep my professional presence on the internet current. I have also become a member of the New Play Exchange online to try and spread my work. I have also made sure to keep my former professors updated on my academic career in case they hear of a faculty job opening up.

Most of my professional development while at SIU has been in submitting plays and academic paper proposals to contests and conferences. During my first year at SIU I got my ten-minute play *Venomous* read at the Mid-American Theatre Conference in Milwaukee. While I did not get anything accepted the following year at MATC in Cleveland, I still attended for networking purposes in preparation for the job market. This year at MATC in Chicago, while also networking for job purposes, I presented a paper on my dramaturgical experience for *Evil Dead: The Musical*, chaired an academic panel, and directed the ten-minute play *Musings with Rabelais*. This past Fall I presented a paper called *The Performance of Superheroes: Their Ideology, Reflection, and Influence on American Society* at SIU's yearly SalukiCon as part of the neighboring Communication Department's LGBT themed panel. While I continuously submitted my plays to contests, I was only (yet gratefully) accepted by the Manhattan Repertory Theatre's 2019 Summer Shorts series where they produced an extensively re-worked *Venomous*. Yet, my search for production and publication does not end with my time at SIU.

As my goal has long and pragmatically been to gain employment as a faculty member at a university, I have remained focused on increasing my *Curriculum Vitae's* marketability. Since my dedication to the playwriting program did not give me much time to act on stage and dive

deep into a role, having experience in Big Muddy Shorts as a writer, director, and actor has greatly added in this professional endeavor.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for me, I have developed greatly as a professional by stopping my habit of comparing myself to others. Last year, I grew rather frustrated during the Spring semester because I felt my colleagues who weren't taking their academic responsibilities as seriously and were missing deadlines were receiving better/more academic acknowledgments than I. In truth, I grew frustrated and petty, and this wasn't healthy. Ultimately, after much thought and a few rather strong words from my advisor, I learned that it isn't healthy for me to compare myself to my colleagues. I need to measure my worth and success based on my successes and instead embrace and celebrate others' successes as their own. Ever since I have focused on myself, I feel much happier and more like a professional artist.

TEACHING

My love for teaching grew from how school served as a haven for me as a child, away from the abusive nature of my mother. My mission has long been to aid and to promote my students to their full potential. With my degree in education and my experience teaching and assistant teaching in my master's, I continued my journey and development as a teacher here at SIU.

Because I was assigned to the scenic shop during my first semester, I was unable to teach. While this was frustrating, I actively pursued chances to teach and ended up teaching two creative workshops at the local high school, one on poetry and the other on playwriting. My second semester at SIU allowed me to teach a 101 class. I used my previous skills as a teacher to promote a diverse classroom that used an open environment that encouraged class discussions. I found that my openness in class and use of humor as a teacher established a relatable-ness to my

students that allowed us to get into deeper academic discussions. My philosophy insured that I took an initiative to invest in my students by immediately memorizing their names, asking how each of them is doing, and re-establishing previous conversations to check-up on them. I feel that this allowed my students to know that they weren't just another face or academic statistic but that they mattered.

Perhaps my biggest obstacle during my time teaching was working with other instructors to create a unified lesson plan for each week. Before coming to SIU, I was never required to teach the same lesson and style as my colleagues, yet this experience though often frustrating served in making me a better team player, and together we used group-oriented exercises to teach the course's material. Additionally, the fact that the class was scheduled in a room that was technologically incredibly unreliable, I became more confident in teaching lessons without the use of PowerPoint presentations.

While I was unfortunately unable to teach any playwriting or acting courses at SIU as I had wished, I *was* (thankfully) able to teach a section of play analysis each fall semester of my last two years in the program. This experience allowed me to solely create my lesson plan and assignments to use in the classroom. Because this was an analysis course, I chose plays that I felt encompassed a wide variety of styles and eras. Ultimately, I had my classes read *Antigone*, *Doll's House*, *Trifles*, *Glass Menagerie*, *Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot*, (watch a production of) *Dead Class*, *Ubu Roi*, *Emperor Jones*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Fences*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *The Dumbwaiter*, *True West*, and *Zoo Story*. During my second time teaching the course, upon request from evaluations from the first year's class, I chose for them to watch and analyze a film. While I originally chose for them to watch *Lady in the Water* for its positive and negative qualities, I ultimately showed them Jordan Peele's *Us* as a reward for their good work that

semester. Lastly, while I had my first class's assessments consist of weekly writings and journals, I found that by having them only write two papers and instead allowing them to simply read the plays, the percentage of the class having read the play greatly increased.

DRAMATURGY

In the Spring semester of 2019, I was almost a year away from graduating with my MFA in Playwriting. I had just finished *By the Neck's* reading and was about to start writing *The Thread That Snapped*. While I knew my life was about to become very hectic and filled with nights staring at a blank screen that begged for words... I felt strangely and creatively unfulfilled. Why not try dramaturgy I thought. The Theatre Department was about to begin rehearsals for *Julius Caesar*, and I asked Dr. Anne Fletcher, the faculty dramaturg, if she needed any assistance. She graciously accepted my offer and for the next two months took me under her wing and taught me the ropes. My main responsibility in helping Fletcher was researching images that reflected the director's vision of shining a light on America's sense of racism and prejudice to minorities. From this experience, I greatly strengthened my research and investigative skills.

When *Julius Caesar* closed that May, a question lingered... what now? I asked the faculty dramaturg what shows needed a dramaturg next semester. *Evil Dead: The Musical* and an adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I gave Anne Fletcher my decision, and *Evil Dead* was to be my show. Having just finished a serious-minded production of *Julius Caesar* that tackled police brutality, political corruption, and discrimination against immigrants and minorities, my initial response to taking on the dramaturgical task, after spending the summer unhealthily diving into the Deadite-fanbase, was to act the dignified scholar who could be serious and help the director analyze and translate every line in the musical; this almost

immediately proved fruitless. Once the summer had ended, Tom Kidd, the show's director, and I met in his office; his vision for our musical production was to instantaneously throw out any sense of seriousness and purely immerse us into the history and legacy that the *Evil Dead* film team had created back in 1981. To him, the *Evil Dead* musical could never take itself too seriously; the true meaning of this production was to be inspired by the sense of comradery and family that Sam Raimi created and would pay homage to decades of Deadite mythology. Over the course of serving as dramaturg, I had to learn to cater my style of academic research and writing to the needs of the production. For *Evil Dead: the Musical*, I had to find and present the fun and jovial foundations that would best serve the cast, crew, director, and audience. In essence, I learned not to take my work too seriously.

After I submit this thesis, I will be walking into a whole new set of rehearsals— this time as dramaturg for Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, and I cannot wait for what journey this will bring. I know that this production, like any other, will provide for me its own challenges and its own moments of excitement and unfiltered ingenuity.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND LOOKING FORWARD

After the commencement ceremony in May, my three years at SIU will officially have come to an end. My career goal is to be a university professor, and I hope to have secured employment by May. Because I have tried to train myself as an academic generalist in theatre, I hope to teach a diverse curriculum in Playwriting, Directing, Combat, and History.

Due to my time commitments at SIU and lack of opportunity, my ability as a stage combatant and fight director has deteriorated, though my body is somewhat more in shape than it was coming here. Additionally, my numerous certifications in the Society of American Fight

Directors have expired. I hope to continue my training and recertify in my fields of combat and further grow in the SAFD.

Since starting my three years at SIU, I have halted the majority of my non-dramatic and theatrical writing. While I used to write a few poems a week religiously, I instead chose to dedicate my creative energy to my academic writing and plays. I hope to finish and edit my book of poetry and my children's book and send them off to publishers for possible publication. This year I have begun to write film scripts. I have written a feature-length script and a short film (the latter which I finished directing in March); I hope to continue my venture into screenwriting and submit my work to studios and contests. This will mean writing spec scripts as well.

Looking forward, I am hopeful for the future and grateful for the experiences that I have been through and grown during these last three years as they have grown me as an artist, teacher, and most importantly as a human.

Thank you to everyone who has played a part in this journey.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PRODUCTION SCRIPT

THE THREAD THAT SNAPPED

A PLAY

BY

A.B. HARRISON

CHARACTERS

ADAM MILLER Male, mid-twenties to early thirties.
Believes he murdered his wife.

GUS PETERSON Male, early twenties to early thirties. Has
PTSD over the death of his father. BARITONE.

DALLAS WILLIAMS Male, early forties to fifties. Believes
himself to be a burned CIA agent. BASS.

"WILLIE" DONALD Male, in his twenties. A compulsive
masturbator. TENOR.

NICK Male, mid-twenties to early thirties, same
age as ADAM. Eventually dressed in a 1950s
devil onesie. Nicknamed THE MONSTER.

DOCTOR HART Female, mid-thirties to sixties, the
psychiatrist.

CHORUS

GUS

WILLIE

DALLAS WILLIAMS

SETTING

Sunny Meadows Private Care Facility, the year is unknown.

DIRECTOR NOTES:

CAPS indicate singing.

Bold indicates spoken poetry.

When the Chorus personifies those from ADAM's past, they incorporate the characteristic and tone of voice of said person.

BARBERSHOP NUMBERS

1A.	WELCOME TO OUR SHOW	5
1B.	TAKE THE LIGHT	37
1C.	RING, RING, RING	45
1D.	AWAY FROM HOME	57
1E.	ADAM'S FUNERAL MARCH	110
1F.	GOOD NIGHT PART I	111
1G.	GOOD NIGHT PART II	115

POEMS

2A.	DROWNING MY FATHER'S SON	25
2B.	STANDING NAKED IN THE KITCHEN AT 2 IN THE MORNING	87
2C.	HOW I LEARNED TO TAKE A HIT	83
2D.	THE BAD MAN	103

Act I, scene, i

[Lights brighten on the CHORUS sitting in the common room of Sunny Meadows. GUS and DALLAS sit at a table playing cards. GUS is eating from a package of candy. WILLIE is sitting in a corner with his back to the audience, he is "playing with himself." On the wall there is a broken clock, its hands move backwards. An intercom cries out: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?" The message repeats.]

DALLAS

I hate everyone. I really do. Pair of twos.

WILLIE

I want to go home. I miss my mom.

GUS

You are home.

DALLAS

Filthy. Filthy. Would you stop that?

WILLIE

Five more minutes. I'm almost there.

GUS

Beat that thing harder, it's gonna fall off.

WILLIE

(As DOC HOLLIDAY:) "Nonsense. I've not yet defiled myself."

DALLAS

Quit that western bullshit.

[The intercom repeats its message. GUS looks up, noticing the audience. He nudges DALLAS and points to the audience. DALLAS rises suddenly. GUS does the same. Each talk with a wave,

acting as part of a barbershop
trio.]

(#1A "WELCOME TO OUR SHOW")

HELLO!

GUS

HELLO!

[Silence. They turn to WILLIE,
still playing with himself.]

DALLAS

Willie! Stop it! You want hair on your palm?

WILLIE

[Rises and rushes over to join the
group. He waves.]

HELLO!

CHORUS

WELCOME TO OUR SHOW!

DALLAS

WE SEE...

GUS

WE SEE...

CHORUS

THAT SOON YOU'LL HAVE TO... PEE.

WILLIE

We welcome you—

CHORUS

TO OUR SHOW!

GUS

I'M GUS.

WILLIE

WILLIE.

DALLAS

And I'm Dallas Williams, (turns super serious) ex-CIA, burned by the government, disavowed by his country, by his nation, for doing the one thing they asked him to do. It's not my fault I punched Vladimir Putin... 's cat. I served my country damnit! I-

GUS

Dallas? Sorry about that folks. Can we continue? We talked about this, you know.

[Snaps his finger three times.]

CHORUS

WE WANT TO WELCOME YOU TO

WILLIE

SUNNY MEADOWS

GUS

SUNNY MEADOWS

CHORUS

THE PLACE YOU WANT TO BE!

DALLAS

TO BE.

CHORUS

AND WE'RE ALL FUCKING CRAZYYYYYY!

DALLAS

OH YES,

GUS

YES,

WILLIE

YES, IT IS TRUE.

CHORUS

WE'RE ALL FUCKING LOONIE TUNESSSSS... It's got...

DALLAS

Murder!

GUS

Laughs!

WILLIE

Total insanity!

DALLAS

Now I bet you're wondering... barbershop quartets usually have four members. There's only three of us. Well our tenor... he passed on.

WILLIE

He got released! He's free!

GUS

No, that's not true. He got moved to an upstate facility a few years back. He writes. Sends his drawings. They're not very good to be honest, but you know it's the thought that counts.

DALLAS

We usually don't allow outsiders, normals, in here, but for you all, we'll make an exception. So, what do you want? A performance? A story?

WILLIE

(Chanting:) Story! Story! Story!

DALLAS

Okay! Okay! Our story begins in this very West Virginia crazy house.

GUS

It's called Sunny Meadows Psychiatric Hospital for the Mentally Insane.

WILLIE

(As ASH WILLIAMS:) It was at this place in the Fall of... I forgot what year; the apocalypse was in full swing. The Necronomicon had released the Deadite Army. Humanity hung on the edge of undead extinction! Blood and guts littered the streets. It was... amazing!

GUS

No. No. Again, that's not true. Sorry. Willie really liked those Evil Dead movies.

WILLIE

And westerns.

GUS

And Willie is wrong. It was in the winter when Adam arrived... on a cold December air. He didn't seem like the rest of us. He was different.

WILLIE

(As MORGAN FREEMAN:) Andy Dufresne! "I could see why some of the boys took him for snobby. He had a quiet way about him, a walk and a talk that just wasn't normal around here. He strolled like a man in a park without a care or worry."

GUS

His name... was Adam. Adam Miller. And he came to Sunny Meadows like most of us here, for one reason.

[THEY return to their spots: GUS and DALLAS playing cards, WILLIE in the corner. The intercom repeats its message.]

DALLAS

Didn't mean we couldn't have a little fun with the boy.

[The door opens. ADAM and DOCTOR enter.]

DOCTOR

Right this way, Mr. Miller. Right this way.

ADAM

Please, call me Adam. I'd much prefer if you called me Adam.

DOCTOR

During your stay here, you will be treated with the utmost respect, and you will return to me that same favor. I will be Doctor Hart and you will be Mr. Miller.

[Beat.]

This is the common room where you will be spending most of your time, eating your meals, and will receive your medication. That's given out throughout the day as needed. We give each meal at 7, 12, and 6. Three square meals a day... just like the military. Do not be late; leftovers will not be saved. Any questions?

ADAM

No.

DOCTOR

Very well. These are your fellow patients here at Sunny Meadows. We have Gus and Dallas. Gus is the younger one. And Mr. Donald is... he's over there.

[DOCTOR storms up to WILLIE.]

Mr. Donald! What did I tell you!

WILLIE

Willie. My name's Willie! Willie.

[Continues to repeat himself.]

DOCTOR

I will not call you that!

GUS

Doc, you know he won't let up unless you call him by his name.

DOCTOR

Mr. Donald, you will come with me this instant. I see we need to have another chat.

[Pulls WILLIE up. They go to exit.]

And take that hand out of your pants. Feel free to make yourself comfortable, Mr. Miller. Gus, would you show him the ropes?

[Silence. GUS and DALLAS look up from their game. ADAM looks around; he steps into the middle of the room before approaching the table. GUS extends his hand. ADAM awkwardly shakes his hand.]

GUS

How are you now?

ADAM

Good and you?

GUS

Not so bad. Relax. I'm Gus Peterson. This is Dallas.

DALLAS

Dallas Williams. Ex-CIA. I should tell you about my service. I-

[GUS punches DALLAS's arm.]

GUS

Stop that. Now's not the time.

[Pause.]

DALLAS

If you ever were to hit me, and I was to find out it was you...

GUS

Let's let him settle in first, huh? Go ahead and sit, Adam.
We're just playing cards. I'll deal you in.

[ADAM sits down. GUS addresses
the audience while dealing cards.]

The first time he spoke, I could see the fear in his eyes.
Unsure of himself, his insanity. Afraid of what medicine might
answer.

DALLAS

Nah! Look at him, sitting so nervous. First time I saw him, he
looked a little off. Funny. Or a spook sent to spy on me.

[Draws a water pistol from his
gown.]

ADAM

Who are you guys talking to?

DALLAS

Nobody. Play your cards. The game is fish. Jokers included and
are gambled for 3. First to catch the ace of spades wins three
points. And no repeats even if you catch a fish. Winner gets
this purple mystery pill I've been saving. You'll get it as we
play. Gus, you start.

ADAM

Can we do that? Not to be a cop or anything. But can we trade
pills and gamble?

DALLAS

Gamble? You a cop?

ADAM

No.

[Beat.]

So... what do you guys have? I mean... ailments? Mental disorder?

GUS

Didn't you hear? We're all crazies. Got any twos?

[ADAM hands over a 2.]

DALLAS

Just fucking bananas, kid. You?

ADAM

I don't know. I'm not sure. That's why I'm here.

GUS

How about any threes?

DALLAS

What did I just say? No repeats. Got any threes?

GUS

Shit! Here.

[Hands over a pair of 3s.]

Your turn, Mr. Miller. What got you sent here? They throw you in for running naked in Macy's or something?

ADAM

No. I think I may have done something. Something bad. I know I did it, but nobody believes me. That's the thing. Police say I'm delusional. Got a... joker?

DALLAS

No. Negative five points.

ADAM

I thought you said three points.

DALLAS

New guy tax. Cops, huh? How they get involved?

ADAM

I think I killed someone.

[Silence.]

But nobody believes me. That's the thing.

DALLAS

Murder? I don't see cuffs. You don't seem much the type to me.

[GUS and DALLAS make eye contact.]

GUS

It's okay. We believe you.

DALLAS

Yeah, kid.

GUS

Don't worry. The doctor's going to help you figure everything out in group. We got a couple hours; let's change the subject. Dallas, do you have any queens?

[DALLAS hands over a card.]

So, you got a girl waiting for you?

ADAM

Yeah, I do. A wife. I mean no. I used to. Not anymore.

[Blackout.]

Act I, scene ii

[Lights brighten on the common room. There are now five chairs arranged in a circle in the middle of the room, the card table now placed to the side. DOCTOR, ADAM, GUS, DALLAS, and WILLIE sit in the chairs, DOCTOR and ADAM opposite one another. NICK sits in a corner watching. GUS and WILLIE debate amongst themselves.]

DOCTOR

Gentlemen, I trust you are all ready?

[The men remain unruly.]

NICK

Doc? I got a question... any chance we can change these bulbs? They aint doing me so good for my eyesight.

DOCTOR

Everyone! Settle down. Mr. Donald, do I need to separate you two?

WILLIE

Just talking. No harm.

GUS

We're ready, Doc.

DOCTOR

Very well. Let's see... Dallas, you went last time. Gus, I believe it is your turn. Is there anything in particular you want to start with?

GUS

I uh saw a program on the TV last night. It was about dolphins. I was wondering, Doc, what would it be like to be a dolphin?

DALLAS

(To ADAM:) Get ready, kid. This is where the fun begins.

[WILLIE laughs.]

DOCTOR

What do you mean be a dolphin?

GUS

Did you know that the Orca, *Orcinus orca*, is actually a type of dolphin? I didn't know that. They're part of this family of whales that includes your traditional dolphins and then these pilot whales, whales that look like dolphins but they're black and have a ball-peen hammer for a face. So, like, if we think of dolphins as majestic and innocent, does that make these killer whales innocent too?

DOCTOR

You're thinking about their reputation.

DALLAS

But what movie has Free Willy as the villain?

GUS

I thought Free Willy was scary.

NICK

The whale? The one that jumps...

DALLAS

Yeah, but your scared of everything.

WILLIE

[Raises his hand.]

My name is Willie.

DALLAS

We know, buddy.

WILLIE

Okay... sorry.

GUS

My point is... what if we were all orcas just swimming through the sea and there's a bottlenose over there, is our value less than theirs? They gonna make fun of me?

[DALLAS puts his arm around GUS.]

What if my dad was still here, would I then be a dolphin?

NICK

[As WILLIE laughs:]

That's kinda gay.

[Pause.]

GUS

It's not funny.

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller? You've been quiet. Do you have any thoughts on Gus' topic?

ADAM

Oh... um. I guess it's what's inside that matters. Um... if you think you're a dolphin inside, then that's what matters, not what others think.

DOCTOR

Interesting thought. Mr. Donald? How about you?

WILLIE

No.

NICK

I'll go.

DOCTOR

Did you say no?

WILLIE

No, Nurse Ratched.

DOCTOR

I have asked you several times not to call me that.

WILLIE

(Chants:) Nurse Ratched! Nurse Ratched!

[Stands on his chair.]

NICK

Tell her, Will!

WILLIE

Ratched! Nurse Ratched!

DOCTOR

Sit down, Mr. Donald. Please. Have some curtesy.

WILLIE

Nurse Ratched! Nurse Ratched!

DALLAS

Willie! Sit!

WILLIE

Okay. Okay. (As DOC HOLLIDAY:) I'm your huckleberry.

[WILLIE sits. Pause.]

Sorry.

DOCTOR

Okay. Adam? How about you? Would you like to share anything with the group today? Tell us about yourself.

ADAM

Well hi, I'm Adam Miller.

GUS, DALLAS, WILLIE, NICK

Hi, Adam!

ADAM

You guys already know that. Where do I start? I taught public high school for five years. History. Loved it. Loved my students. Loved my job. I'm originally from a small town. No brothers; no sisters. No dad. I was raised by my mother. She... she was a hard woman to live with I can admit that.

DALLAS

Nothing wrong with that. Puts a little iron in your bones.

ADAM

Yeah... I guess. You know, deep down I think she's the reason why I'm here.

DOCTOR

Why do you believe that?

ADAM

How does a kid waking up to a punch to the face usually feel? Anger... for start. It's just... yeah... I... I don't know if I'm ready, ya know? I want to be here. Believe me. Can't someone else go next?

DOCTOR

It's okay. Just take your time. We're all here for you. Right?

GUS, DALLAS, WILLIE, NICK

Yeah. Of course. We can wait. Whatever you say. I love you.

ADAM

I... maybe she meant well... at first. My childhood was normal enough. Like any other kid. School. Played outside. Birthday parties... then puberty... and then...

[Silence.]

DOCTOR

Then?

ADAM

Then...

[Intercoms whispers: "Are you ready to begin?" GUS, DALLAS, and WILLIE jump from their seats. They each become the MOTHER, yelling.]

WILLIE

Sit straight! Don't slouch! You're eating too loudly. I can hear you chew! What are you an animal?

ADAM

(Unaware this isn't real:) What is this?

DALLAS

Ugh! Mud on your pants, again! Let me see your feet. Disgusting.

WILLIE

You better not be masturbating! Filthy! Filthy boy!

GUS

I should have had an abortion!

[Spits on ADAM.]

NICK

I love this part. Someone got popcorn?

ADAM

What is this? Stop it. Gus? Willie?

DALLAS

[Sits next to ADAM and puts a hand on his leg while the others continue chanting.]

(Normal:) Come on, kid! Don't be so afraid. None of this is real. It's all in your head. You gotta talk about it to get better. Talk it out to get it out. Get up for me, huh? It's therapy.

ADAM

I don't want to do this. This is a lot to begin with. I'm not sure if I-

DALLAS

We can force you to if you resist.

[Intercoms whispers: "Are you ready to begin?" DALLAS erupts out of his chair, becoming ADAM's MOTHER again.]

I said get up!

ADAM

What?

DALLAS

Get up when I tell you to, boy! Don't make me tell you twice.

[Grabs ADAM by his hair, pulling him up.]

ADAM

(Represses to that of a child:) Stop it, stop it, Mommy. You're hurting me.

DALLAS

Shut up! You aint a man... boy. You aint what I raised you. Where is it?

GUS and WILLIE

Where is it?

ADAM

Where is what?

DALLAS

Don't play stupid. Where are my cigarettes?

ADAM

I don't know; I swear

DALLAS

Don't you fucking lie to me! Where are my cigarettes? I need them! I know you took them.

ADAM

I didn't. They're where you left them. On the counter.

[DALLAS releases ADAM. Grabs a cigarette and smokes.]

WILLIE

You're why I need these.

GUS

Why I should have had that abortion.

DALLAS

Why I'm killing myself with these things.

GUS

I should've listened to your father. And he left us.

ADAM

Dad didn't say that. You're lying. He loved me.

GUS

You think I drove him away?

DALLAS

You make me so damn sick. Go! Get out! I'm waiting on my dinner.

ADAM

I'm going.

[Rises and goes to make dinner.
DALLAS kicks him in the back.]

DALLAS

I aint waiting all damn day, boy!

[Beat.]

(The CHORUS returns to normal:) How was that?

ADAM

Good. Not bad at all. Maybe have a little more spit in your mouth next time. Really go for it.

DALLAS

Should I spit on you?

ADAM

Sure. That might help.

DALLAS

That felt good. It did. I think I really got in her head.

ADAM

I was terrified.

GUS

Me too. Willie?

[ALL return to their chairs.]

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller... continue with your recollection. You were saying...

WILLIE

Uh huh. Can I go next?

DOCTOR

My file says the issues with your mother started when you began puberty. Is that true?

NICK

(As the MOTHER:) "You're not the boy I raised." That's what she said.

ADAM

(Looks around.) Yeah. I think. Yeah, it must have been around then.

DOCTOR

Did you ever tell anyone about this?

NICK

"Bring me the belt." And you did.

ADAM

What? No. Not then. I was too afraid. It took me years to find any bravery to leave. And even then... it was by accident. She never worked so I had to earn money for food and the rent.

WILLIE

(As the MOTHER:) What do you mean you got fired? Damn it. Leave it to you to fuck up. We need that money. Well what? What now? What's your plan?

ADAM

I was 17. It was summer. She showed up to my job... (Represses:) Mother, I didn't really get fired. They just don't need me as a waiter right now. I'll still get paid to cook and clean. I'll still have the same hours.

WILLIE

And how much you gonna be paid?

ADAM

I don't know.

WILLIE

You don't know? It won't be tip money. Guess you have to find another job.

ADAM

But I like my job.

WILLIE

You like your job? Who gives a fuck? Liking doesn't pay the bills.

ADAM

It'll work out. I promise. Business will pick up.

WILLIE

Yeah, I'm sure... just don't come home tonight. I won't pick you up. Find somewhere else to stay. That'll teach you.

ADAM

And that was it. I don't know why she thought I didn't have friends or that I'd buckle and give in... but as soon she said, "don't come home," it was over for me. I was free. I never stepped foot in her house again. Two weeks later, I was two states away at a college she had never heard of on a scholarship she never knew about. I never saw her again.

DOCTOR

Is she still alive?

ADAM

No idea. I'd assume she's somewhere. I looked her up from time to time again, but then she was gone. No records of her living anywhere, no phone number. I was sure she was finally out of my

life... but I guess she remained... Her anger, her limit of trust, her everything... was what I became. Bottled up. I know it's not an excuse, Doctor Hart. I know that.

DOCTOR

It's fine, Adam.

ADAM

It's her anger that I carried with me most. I tried my best to hide it from my wife. I never laid a hand to her or spoke a nasty word. But I knew it was there. Lurking. You spend all your life trying to run away from someone just to end up like her. What a fucking joke.

DOCTOR

What about your father...

ADAM

I always knew Mother lied. She pushed him away. Didn't even tell me I had brothers out there.

GUS

How could you not know that?

ADAM

They're older. Father's sons, not hers.

DOCTOR

That must have been difficult. Did you ever meet them?

ADAM

Once. But that was long ago and long after Dad died.

WILLIE

We can be your brothers now. Right?

DALLAS

Sure. It's what we are... in here together.

[GUS puts his hand on ADAM.]

DOCTOR

Gus. Let Adam continue.

ADAM

It's okay. I guess I even have some of Dad in me too.

DOCTOR

Please. Discuss that thought.

ADAM

Well I got the rage from her, and I guess from Dad I got a love for booze.

DALLAS

What was your poison?

ADAM

Poison? Anything.

GUS

Anything?

ADAM

I remember in college, at first, I felt empty.

[Stands slowly and readies himself as if preparing to read a poem. DALLAS hands ADAM a microphone. Lights dim and a circle of light shines on ADAM.]

(#2A "DROWNING MY FATHER'S SON")

**I sink each night
With each sip into a tall glass of liquid gold
And feel closer to my father, the man
Who used to carry a bottle of vodka in his briefcase when he
went door to door.
Ma used to say that's why she fell for him
Yet when she got pregnant didn't want that sort of life for
me.**

I wonder why growing up makes you like your parents.
From my mother I got a temper and a love for ballroom
dancing,
And my father a love for difficult women and the habit that
killed him.

Once a month I act the socialite and descend the steps of a bar
called The Cellar where
My friends count the drinks I order
And time how fast I chug a beer

CHORUS

Go. Go!

GUS

You must be really thirsty.

DALLAS

Don't you want to enjoy that beer?

ADAM

No, I say, not really.

They ask me if each glass makes me warmer. Why I'm not this fun
in the office.
Why I need to take a drink before I step on stage
Yet every day I stand in front a packed class and make my living
with my mouth open
And I say *I was born a salesman; just like my dad.*

Each Christmas I say I'm sober, and as I board the train to go
back to school
My grandfather asks me, his only grandson,

DALLAS

Do you ever think you'll start drinking?

ADAM

I tilt my head, smile, and adjust my glasses as I shake his sandpaper hand.

No, I say, not really.

Why?

[Beat.]

But then I met Melissa. And I wasn't alone.

[Silence. A bell dings. Lights rise again. ADAM realizes he is standing.]

DOCTOR

That's lunch, gentlemen. Wash your hands. Comb your hair and report to the mess hall. Go.

[Everyone exits except NICK who addresses the audience.]

NICK

In a house full of crazies, nothing makes sense.

[Blackout.]

Act I, scene iii

[Lights brighten on the common room. ADAM is sitting alone in a chair reading a magazine. GUS and WILLIE sit at the table playing chess while DALLAS observes them. NICK sits in a far corner watching the other patients.]

WILLIE

No! You can't take my knight like that. That's not the rules.

GUS

What do you mean? I moved my queen and there, queen takes knight.

WILLIE

That's not the rules.

GUS

Willie, yes, it is. Queen can move in any direction.

WILLIE

Just in straight lines.

GUS

Diagonal too.

WILLIE

Then can I have a restart?

GUS

No. Play this game through and then we'll play again.

DALLAS

Play nicely or I'll take all your pawns away.

[DALLAS rises from his chair and approaches ADAM.]

Mind if I sit?

ADAM

No. Go right ahead.

DALLAS

What you reading there?

ADAM

Just an article on migration patterns of the early Natives.

DALLAS

Weird isn't it?

ADAM

Pretty straight forward material I'd say. The Beringia theory has been accepted by most scholars who—

DALLAS

Nah. Being here.

ADAM

It's quiet. I think I need that.

WILLIE

Queen takes knight. Take that!

ADAM

For the most part. It's good to just relax and know I'm in safe hands.

DALLAS

Safe hands? With the Doc?

ADAM

Why? What's wrong with that?

DALLAS

Doc Hart? Nothing.

ADAM

What is it? She doesn't experiment on us, does she? Does she?

DALLAS

She's just not the warmest of hands. Don't get me wrong, play along, sit straight, and you'll be on her nice list, but fuck up, like Willie there, and it's straight to the naughty list. No warm cookies, just coal on Christmas morn'.

ADAM

I don't think I'll be much trouble here.

DALLAS

Nah, I'm sure you won't. Me... and the boys, we got this bet you see... I say she was a military doctor. Got dishonorably discharged and ruined her life. Now she's here.

ADAM

She does seem strict.

DALLAS

Gus! What's your bet on the Doc?

GUS

What bet?

DALLAS

The doc. Where do you think she comes from?

GUS

Oh. Uh, horse training parents. Used to be a rodeo rider.

WILLIE

Outer space.

DALLAS

Only time will tell, Will.

[Makes antennas on his hand with his fingers. ADAM laughs.]

My money is on ex-military. I've seen plenty to know the look.

ADAM

You were in the military?

DALLAS

For a second. Got picked up by the good ol' US government. CIA, I'll have you know.

GUS

Here we go, again! Why don't you quit lying to the new kid?

DALLAS

Shut up, will you? Don't listen to Gus. I was in the CIA. I was one of their top operatives. They'd parachute me down, behind enemy lines, give me a photo and...

[Makes gun motions with his hand.]

Sayonara, Castro! That was in '92.

ADAM

Didn't Castro die in 2016?

DALLAS

That's what the Cuban government wants you to think. They got look-a-likes.

GUS

He's lying to you. Have him tell you about Napoleon.

DALLAS

The governments got the time tech; trust me. Hey! I'll have you know I took my Blood Test at 15! My father made me shoot my dog, point blank, right behind our shed. I was practically bred for the service.

GUS

Didn't she have a broken back though?

WILLIE

Poor, Lassie.

DALLAS

They had me run missions all across the globe. I was a damn patriot, I tell you.

ADAM

What happened?

DALLAS

Made a false move, bad decision... cost me everything.

WILLIE

Like his sanity. Poor kitty cat.

GUS

If he ever was in the CIA.

ADAM

What about you guys? How did you end up here?

WILLIE

Mommy sent me.

DALLAS

You can figure why.

WILLIE

She said I was a bad boy. She got sick and couldn't handle me no more.

ADAM

And you, Gus?

GUS

I chose to be here.

ADAM

I'm sorry.

DALLAS

So, you said you killed somebody?

ADAM

Not on purpose.

DALLAS

What was it like?

ADAM

What do you mean?

DALLAS

For me, not gonna lie, first time I had to look this Commie bastard right in the eyes. Never left me. I can still remember their color. His eyes were grey... like yours.

ADAM

That's terrible.

DALLAS

You? You say you're a killer.

ADAM

I wouldn't say that. I... I didn't mean to kill anyone.

[GUS and WILLIE look up from their game. ADAM plays with his wedding ring.]

WILLIE

You didn't mean to?

ADAM

It was an accident.

DALLAS

Kid...

GUS

Who did you kill?

[GUS and WILLIE rise from their seats and surround ADAM. NICK follows, keeping his distance.]

WILLIE

You still got a wedding ring on. You kill your wife?

ADAM

I loved my wife!

GUS

Jeez.

NICK

That's pretty messed up.

ADAM

It wasn't like I did it on purpose. I loved her. She was my everything. It doesn't matter. Cops said I didn't kill her. They said it's all in my head.

GUS

How can they say that?

[WILLIE gives ADAM a hug.]

WILLIE

Don't murder us in our sleep. Please.

ADAM

I won't.

DALLAS

Let him go, Willie. Come on. Let's sit down. I got next game.

[THEY return to the table. NICK remains, staring at ADAM who reads his magazine. After a few seconds ADAM looks up.]

ADAM

Yeah?

NICK

Nick. I'm Nick. Shake my hand. You're Adam. I know.

ADAM

Hi.

NICK

You did good in group today.

ADAM

Thanks. I... uh... noticed you didn't talk a lot.

NICK

I don't like to be around others much. Everybody says I'm not good with people. Is this seat taken?

[NICK sits down.]

ADAM

What?

NICK

Seat. Can I sit down?

ADAM

Yeah, I guess.

NICK

What are you reading? Native Americans? I love that article.

[Beat.]

You want to know something? Huh? Do you?

ADAM

Go ahead.

NICK

I killed someone too, you know. But I meant to. Not like you. They didn't believe me either. Do you want to know who it was? Who I killed?

ADAM

Not right now. Maybe later...

NICK

You might think me a monster, but I don't agree. I had a fucked-up childhood too. Parents? Huh? Doctor Hart... what you think of her?

ADAM

Doc's okay. I look forward to working together.

NICK

Nice tits too, huh?

ADAM

Sure.

NICK

[Rises and massages ADAM's
shoulders.]

Doctor Hart thinks I have D.I.D. That's Dissociative Identity Disorder if you didn't know. She doesn't tell us what we have... the real names... but I know. I know what I got. I know what you got too. Want to know?

ADAM

I think I'm kind of tired. I'm just going to go to bed. Nick, right? We aren't bunked next to each other, are we?

[ADAM stands and begins to walk
away.]

NICK

You bet we are. You want to sleep? Night, night.

ADAM

Okay. Bye?

GUS

Adam? Where you going?

NICK

Dream about that pretty girl you killed.

ADAM

Dude! Just shut up, okay? Goodnight everyone.

[ADAM exits. NICK sinks
comfortably into his chair. The
CHORUS looks to one another
confused.]

GUS

Did I say something?

NICK

It's my fault.

DALLAS

Give him some air. It's his first night.

NICK

He's okay. He's okay. Just gotta give him time. He'll adjust.
He'll come around. Say! Anyone up for some bingo?

[Blackout.]

Act I, scene iv

[Lights brighten dimly. Everyone is in bed except for NICK who looks at ADAM asleep. He brushes ADAM's hair with his hand while humming. Intercoms whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

[The CHORUS rises from their beds as if under a spell and begin to sing a lullaby.]

(#1B "TAKE THE LIGHT")

CHORUS

SLEEP MY PRINCE, IN HEAVENLY BLISS. LOOK FOR SHEEP WITHIN YOUR DREAMS. SAIL THE SEAS ALONG THE WAY. MEET THE PRINCESS AND GET LAID!

[Beat.]

(Turning dark:) TAKE THE LIGHT FROM HER EYES. BEAT HER TILL THE BLOOD FLIES.

DALLAS

MURDER. MURDER.

DALLAS and GUS

MURDER.

CHORUS

MURDER. STAB THAT BITCH, IN THE EYES.

[ADAM turns restlessly in his bed.]

GUS

(As the WIFE:) Please. Stop! Don't do this. You're killing me.

NICK

Make the blood pour!

DALLAS

(As the MOTHER:) No one will ever love you, boy.

NICK

Dream, my monster. Think of all you've done. Look into her eyes. See them die. See the light dim and glaze over.

DALLAS

(The CHORUS becomes the MOTHER.) Look at what you've done.

WILLIE

How could you... to that poor girl!?

GUS

I never expected anything else.

ADAM

(Breathing heavily:) Stop. Stop it. I didn't. I didn't. Melissa, I love you.

WILLIE

(The CHORUS becomes the WIFE.) Let go of me. Let go.

DALLAS

You're hurting me.

WILLIE

Just let me leave. I don't love you anymore.

DALLAS

I'm sorry.

GUS

(As a PRIEST:) Do you, Adam, take this whore to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do you part.

WILLIE

Stop this. Please. You're hurting me.

CHORUS

(As the MOTHER:) You ruin everything. That's why we can't have nice things. You ruin them. (Returning to normal.) Adam! Adam! Adam! Adam! Adam! ADAM!

[ADAM wakes up.]

ADAM

Go away!!!

GUS

We're here! Calm down.

DALLAS

Are you okay?

WILLIE

You screamed in your sleep. You're so noisy. Shut up for me.

NICK

Just a little nightmare, boys. He's alright. He's fine.

ADAM

What did I say?

GUS

Just screaming. Were you having a nightmare?

NICK

That's what I said!

ADAM

Yeah. I think. Jesus! I just want them to go away. They feel so real.

DALLAS

Yeah?

WILLIE

That's cause you're crazy.

ADAM

I saw my wife kneeling on the floor. She looked so scared.

GUS

It's not real, Adam. Not anymore. Give it time, and it'll get better. I promise.

ADAM

Yeah?

GUS

Promise.

DALLAS

You need anything, kid? Water?

ADAM

No. I'm fine. Thanks.

DALLAS

Alright. Let's go to bed, guys. Sun will be up soon.

WILLIE

Coming.

[DALLAS and WILLIE rise and get in bed.]

DALLAS

You going to bed?

GUS and WILLIE

In a minute.

GUS

I'll stay with Adam for a minute. Go to sleep.

[Pause.]

You're reliving your trauma. That's good... I do too, you know.

ADAM

[Sits up.]

You do?

[WILLIE begins to play with himself. NICK backs away.]

GUS

It's only normal. Used to be every night for me a few years back. Now... not so much. So, I know how it feels.

DALLAS

William?!

WILLIE

Yeah?

DALLAS

Stop it. Hands to your side, soldier.

WILLIE

Right. Sorry.

ADAM

I'm a little embarrassed. Grown man screaming in his sleep like a child.

GUS

That's nothing to be— my dad died a few years back. Ma died when I was still a baby. Car crash. It was just me and the old man growing up. (Laughs.) He used to want me to be a baseball player so bad when I was younger. My earliest memory was him buying me my first mitt on Christmas. I must have been like five. Even

decorated my whole room Yankees. I hated the Yankees. He was a good man. Named me after his favorite player, Gus Triandos. I was a good kid for the most part. I used to want to be an oceanographer. Explore the seas... map the bottom... find Atlantis...

ADAM

[Smiles:]

What happened?

GUS

He owned this roofing company. Umpire and Son's Roofing and Siding. One day... I'm seventeen. Summertime. It's hot out there. Like hot like you never believed it. I'm talking a million degrees hot. He calls me up on the house phone. "Gus, I need you to come out. Boys called in sick." I told him, "Oh, Pops. I can't. I got a call from the coach at Vanderbilt. Tommy's driving me up right now." Really, I just wanted to go swimming a few hours away. I knew my crush Brandi Johnson would be there. Thought that was my shot. My old man... what does he do? Goes out to work... alone... gets on the roof. Bamm! Heart attack. Twenty feet up in the air. Owner doesn't find him for three hours. I come home from my trip prepared to tell him I got cut from tryouts. Cops are parked outside our home waiting for me. They say I got what is called PTSD now and OCD. Really, I'm just too uptight. I think it's punishment, you know. Old man needed me... and I just lied. He gave me everything.

[Stands.]

We're all cursed here, man. It's what you make of it that matters. All our mistakes... they make us... us. You know?

ADAM

You think you'll ever forgive yourself?

[Silence. GUS turns and walks away.]

GUS

Goodnight, Adam.

[Blackout.]

Act I, scene v

[Lights rise on the common room. Chairs are prepared as before. NICK sits closer to the group than before, but still not with the group.]

ADAM

I don't remember what day she left; it might have been a Tuesday. We didn't have a perfect marriage, but I loved her. No, I worshipped her. All my drinking, trying to drown myself in the bottle... it all stopped the second I met Melissa. I knew she was the one, but I guess I wasn't hers. One day I come home from work, open the door, see the couch is missing, the bookshelf is missing, and I know somethings not right. I call my wife's name cause she's usually working from home. She's a painter... was a painter. We had put her car in the shop three days before, so I her car not being there wasn't strange to me. I race to our bedroom and open the door, and the bed's not there, and the dresser is not there, and again I know somethings not right.

DALLAS

Dude, come on. It takes a dense man to not-

ADAM

I know. I know you would've picked up on the clues pretty fast, but not me. I was hoping for the best.

GUS

Where was she?

ADAM

She went to go sit on another man's penis.

[WILLIE scoffs.]

What? You got to say what it really is. You can't just be like she went upstate to go live on some big, old magical farm. The farmer and her could just run around in the fields all day with the baby ducks and the baby cows and the baby goats. I have to be realistic. She left me. And it broke my heart. But that's life you know; just got to move on.

DOCTOR

And she just left without a word?

ADAM

Only a voicemail. She even took the dog.

NICK

Bitch.

GUS

Male or female? You know, I had a boxer when I was a boy. Pops let me name him Mohamed Ali. You know after... the boxer.

DALLAS

He knows. And Ali wasn't even that great a fighter. Now you take Tyson... now that was a machine.

ADAM

Her name was Popcorn, a chihuahua. We had got her from the pound.

DALLAS

Yappy dog. Aint that a chick's dog?

WILLIE

Yap! Yap! Yap!

DALLAS

See, even Will agrees.

DOCTOR

And she left you with nothing?

ADAM

The place was empty. She took the bed, dishes, everything.

DALLAS

Didn't you have anything of your own?

ADAM

Her parents were rich. Called it a wedding present. They thought I couldn't provide for their daughter, so they did instead.

DALLAS

No wonder she left you.

DOCTOR

Mr. Williams. That's enough. She took everything. Okay. What did the message say?

[ADAM thinks a moment while the CHORUS rises and stands behind him, reprising the barbershop trio for what should sound like a joyous manner.]

ADAM

Give me a second. I hardly remember...

(#1C "Ring, Ring, Ring")

DALLAS

RING.

GUS

RING.

WILLIE

RING...

CHORUS

SO HERE'S THE THING,

WILLIE

YOU SUCK!

WILLIE and GUS

YOU SUCK!

GUS and DALLAS

YOU SUCK!

WILLIE

OH YES YOU DO.

GUS and DALLAS

LA! LA! LA!

WILLIE

IT'S NOT ME!

GUS AND DALLAS

HELL NO, IT'S YOU!

WILLIE

IT'S YOU!

CHORUS

AND ALL THE WHACKED-UP SHIT YOU DOOOOOO.

WILLIE

WE'RE SPLITTING UP.

GUS AND DALLAS

SPLITTING UP.

WILLIE

AND I ALREADY FOUND A MAN THAT'S NOT YOUUUUU. SO PLEASE DON'T CALL!

GUS AND DALLAS

NO! NO!

GUS

PLEASE DON'T CALL!

DALLAS

DON'T CALL.

CHORUS

BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO BE YOUR WIFE... AT ALL!

DALLAS

ANDDDD I KNOW IT HURTS. BUT HERE'S THE NEWS...

GUS and WILLIE

I REALLY NEED A MAN WITH A BETTER COCK THAN YOU.

DALLAS

BETTER COCK!

GUS

BETTER COCK!

WILLIE

BETTER COCK!

CHORUS

BETTER COCK! THAN YOU!

[Beat.]

DALLAS

OH!

GUS

OH!

WILLIE

OH!

CHORUS

SO PLEASE DON'T CALL. I'D. LIKE. TO. SAY. GOOD. BYE. ONCE. AND.
FOR ALL.

[Beat.]

FUCCKKKKKK YOU!

DALLAS

Oh, and by the way... I'M TAKING THE DOG.

[They bow.]

ADAM

Yeah. That's pretty much what happened. It's what I can remember.

DOCTOR

And how did her message make you feel?

ADAM

I... was okay with it. Felt maybe I even deserved it.

GUS

(To the audience:) He was lying. For a man who came here willingly, he was in denial a lot.

ADAM

No. I'm lying. I know I wasn't the best husband, but I'd like to believe I tried. I loved her. I truly did.

[Looks at GUS.]

But I guess I was being punished.

DALLAS

Bad at sex, weren't you? That can make a good woman leave.

WILLIE

Tiny willie?

ADAM

No. No. Not like that.

DALLAS

How often you go the ten-minute mile? Feet to Jesus? Calling the Lord's name?

WILLIE

I've had sex.

DALLAS

That's nice.

WILLIE

In a Home Depot shed. At the Home Depot. It was romantic.

DALLAS

And my dick killed Osama Bin Laden.

GUS

I'm a virgin.

DALLAS

Still? Wait... that makes sense. You always sleep in the same bed or she send you to the couch?

ADAM

No. She always insisted we slept in one bed, even when we fought. But that rarely happened. The anger, drinking... she never saw that. I thought we had a good marriage.

NICK

That's the thing about love. You'll always end up alone.

DOCTOR

Adam, what made Melissa leave?

ADAM

We always dreamed of the perfect life. Small, tasteful house in the suburbs. Popcorn snuggled on the couch. Two and a half kids, smart, talented children. And when we did get married, that's when we found out. I shoot blanks. Duds. Fire smoke but no ammo.

DALLAS

Wacked up seed. I think my sister has that.

DOCTOR

But she did come back to the house to see you? Melissa.

[Pause.]

ADAM

She did.

[Pause.]

I had asked her. Begged her. Told her I needed to say goodbye to my dog one last time. Anything to see my her again.

WILLIE

The dog or her?

ADAM

Both. My wife.

[Pause.]

I didn't mean to kill my wife. It's hard to remember really. I... she walked in the door, set down the dog, told me to say goodbye. I remember Melissa was crying. She wasn't over the threshold for five seconds before her hand goes back on the doorknob. She says she has to go. I freaked out. Every worry, every act of desperation just came out of me. I panicked. I grabbed her arm.

[Pause.]

Don't look at me like that! I had never hit my wife. I didn't want to be like my mother. We had fought before, but I never hit her. And in that moment, all I could hear was my mother...

DALLAS

(As the MOTHER:) No one's ever going to love you. You'll be alone. You'll die alone. No one is ever going to love someone like you. You ruin everything.

ADAM

She pulled... trying to get away and she fell.

[GUS lies on the ground, ADAM standing over him. An intercom cries out: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?"]

DOCTOR

How did you feel in that moment, Adam?

ADAM

Angry. So angry. Like I hadn't been in years.

DOCTOR

Tell us. What did you feel?

ADAM

Betrayed. Like I had spent all that time on someone who didn't even love me, who just wanted to use me till she found someone better. I looked into her eyes... and nothing. All I could see was my mother.

DOCTOR

What else, Adam? What did you do?

ADAM

Yes... So, I stand over her. She tries to get up, but I won't let her get up.

[WILLIE begins yapping as the DOG.]

The dog is barking in the next room.

DALLAS

You didn't hurt the dog, did you?

ADAM

What? No! I'm not a monster! I loved Popcorn. I would never... no!

[Beat.]

We're at the door, and I see the bat resting against the wall, and I pick it up. I didn't know what I was doing. I just felt so weak.

NICK

Do it. Show her you're a man and not a boy like Mother says you are.

DALLAS

Here you go.

[Hands ADAM an invisible aluminum baseball bat out of nowhere.]

ADAM

(Relives that moment.) I look at her, tears in both our eyes. I ask... why? What did I do? I didn't deserve this. I devoted myself to you. Why couldn't you have just loved me? I thought we were perfect.

GUS

(As the WIFE:) Please! Don't! I'm sorry. Baby, listen!

ADAM

No! Don't baby me. Don't. I would have died for you. I loved you.

GUS

I still love you. I do. Please put down the bat.

ADAM

No! No, you don't! How could you do this? I would have done anything for you.

GUS

Adam, it's not that simple.

NICK

It is that simple!

ADAM

We could have talked if you weren't happy. You should have just come to me. We could have fixed this.

GUS

There was nothing to talk about. I wasn't happy.

ADAM

We could have talked. So what? Tell me everything I need to know. Everything. Have you fucked him yet? You just... you could have just left me. I could have lived with that. I would have accepted that.

GUS

No, you wouldn't have.

ADAM

Yes, I would. I don't want you to be with me if you're not happy. I would have accepted it. I love you.

GUS

Then let me go.

ADAM

No. We need to talk this through.

GUS

Please. Let me go. I want to go home.

ADAM

You are home. It's not too late for us. What do you want? I'll change. I'll do anything.

GUS

You can't. Please. I can't do this. I've moved on.

ADAM

No, you left me.

GUS

I can't. It's too late.

[ADAM steps forward.]

Baby... I do love you. I do.

NICK

She doesn't love you. You're weak. And pathetic.

GUS

But I made my mistake. I know you can't see it now, but I'm doing you a favor.

ADAM

I don't care. I'll do anything. I'll forgive you. Just come home. Don't leave me.

NICK

Why would she want to be with you when you can't even give her what she wants most?

GUS

I can't. I love him now, and I have to do what's right for all of us.

ADAM

Why are you abandoning me?

NICK

You know why, Adam.

GUS

Please let me go.

NICK

The whore finally got what she always wanted.

[GUS tries to get up. ADAM pushes him back down.]

ADAM

I said don't leave me.

NICK

Show her you're not a boy. Do what needs to be done.

[GUS puts his hand on his belly,
protecting a fetus.]

GUS

I want to go, Adam. Let me go. You can't keep me here.

ADAM

Why can't you see we're meant to be together?

NICK

Do it, Adam.

GUS

You'll find someone else.

NICK

No, you won't.

ADAM

No, I won't.

GUS

Let us go. I want to go home.

NICK

(As the MOTHER:) Do it, boy!

[GUS tries to get up. ADAM pushes
him back down again.]

ADAM

I said stop. I'll take care of you. Both of you.

NICK

I said do it!

[GUS stands.]

GUS

(Yells:) I said let me go!

NICK

Do it!

ADAM

No!!!

[ADAM beats the WIFE with the bat.]

You don't love me. You couldn't have.

[WILLIE sprays ketchup from a bottle onto GUS' head. ADAM falls to the floor and begins to sob while holding the WIFE.]

(Back to reality:) Mother was right. I ruined everything.

NICK

You deserve this, boy. You deserve to be alone. Alone is what you'll always be.

ADAM

I panicked. I got scared. I lost control.

DOCTOR

Adam, it's important to know in your case that each time you...

[ADAM stares across the room at NICK who waves. NICK pantomimes using a bat.]

Mr. Miller. Are you listening to me?

ADAM

Yeah, doc. Sure.

[Blackout.]

Act I, scene vi

[Lights brighten on the common room. GUS and WILLIE each sit at the table. WILLIE is writing a letter while GUS watches DALLAS doing pushups. ADAM and NICK are sitting separately in chairs. NICK is watching ADAM.]

GUS

121. 122. 123. 124. One more. You got this. 125. I think that's a new record for you.

DALLAS

(Exhausted:) I know I can do better.

GUS

Give yourself a breather. We can try again later.

DALLAS

Sure.

[Stands and stretches his limbs.]

WILLIE

How do you spell "concentration"?

DALLAS

C-O-N-S-

ADAM

C. No S. C-O-N-C-E-N-T-R-A-T-I-O-N. Concentration.

WILLIE

Thanks.

DALLAS

You writing your momma a letter?

WILLIE

Uh huh. This time she's going to right back. I know it.

GUS

Yeah, buddy. I'm sure.

[Beat.]

(#1D "AWAY FROM HOME")

WILLIE

AWAY FROM HOME.

GUS

AWAY FROM HOME.

WILLIE

AWAY FROM HOME.

[ADAM looks over.]

DALLAS

AWAY FROM HOME.

WILLIE

I HAVE TO WAIT. TO SEE MY KIN. TILL I GET HOME. AWAY FROM HOME.

DALLAS

AWAY FROM HOME.

GUS and DALLAS

IS WHERE I'LL BE.

WILLIE

TILL THE GOOD DOC SETS ME FREE.

GUS and DALLAS

I LOOK FOR YOU, WITHIN MY DREAMS.

WILLIE

MOMMA'S HOME, WAITING FOR ME. AWAY FROM HOME.

GUS

AWAY FROM HOME.

WILLIE

AWAY FROM HOME.

DALLAS

AWAY FROM HOME.

WILLIE

I HAVE TO WAIT. TO SEE MY KIN. TILL I GET HOME.

[Folds the letter, kisses the page, and places it in an envelope.]

ADAM

How long's it been for you?

GUS

Seven years.

DALLAS

Five.

WILLIE

Ten years.

ADAM

When's the last time you heard from her?

WILLIE

I only get Christmas and birthday cards now.

NICK

Waste of time if you ask me.

[Looks at ADAM.]

I say all we need is each other.

[Pause.]

ADAM

What are you guys going to do when you get out?

WILLIE

Hug my momma.

DALLAS

When I'm far too old and grey... settle down, marry a farmer's pretty widow. Raise some cattle.

NICK

Cause a little chaos.

ADAM

What about you, Gus?

GUS

I don't think I'll ever let myself out. But if I did... sail.

ADAM

Sail?

GUS

Yeah. Like on a boat. Buy her... name her Redemption. Set off to the depths, first to the Gulf, visit Jamaica. Haiti. Then maybe visit Australia. See the sting rays. Find a mermaid. What about you?

ADAM

I don't honestly know. Prison. Unless I am crazy. I doubt I'll find much happiness out there. Not with how I let me life go.

GUS

Did you know that the seahorse mates for life? They meet, wrap their tails together like they're holding hands... and that's it. Forever.

ADAM

Yeah. Everyone knows that.

GUS

Yeah, but maybe you haven't found her yet. Maybe none of us have. She's out there, somewhere. Named Happiness. She's a beauty I bet.

ADAM

I wonder how old I'll be if I ever leave here.

GUS

Time. It's all you've got. Look at it this way. You're here. Healthy... for the most part. Crazy... for the most part. That's what we've all got. Time.

[DOCTOR enters.]

DOCTOR

Morning, gentleman. How are we feeling today?

GUS

Morning, Doc.

DOCTOR

Here are your meds.

[Hands out their pills from a tray. When she turns her back, the MEN spit out their pills and pocket them.]

WILLIE

Anyone want to trade?

DALLAS

I'll take a Klonopin if anyone has it.

WILLIE

I do. I've been hiding mine in my shoes.

DOCTOR

Mr. Donald, do we need to search you again.

WILLIE

No...

[Takes his pill from his pocket
and puts it in his mouth.]

DALLAS

That's disgusting.

DOCTOR

Swallow.

[WILLIE obeys. DOCTOR checks their
mouths.]

WILLIE

When we going to get bacon for breakfast? It's been weeks since
I had a decent meal. I'm practically starving.

DOCTOR

Unfortunately, that is a matter you will have to take up with
the kitchen. But look on the bright side, the sun is shining out
the window.

DALLAS

What window? You mean the square of glass covered in slime?

[ADAM and NICK gaze at the
window.]

DOCTOR

And today promises to be special. I come with gifts.

WILLIE

Mail?

DOCTOR

That is correct.

NICK

Looks like a storm is coming.

WILLIE

Did anything come for me?

DOCTOR

I'm afraid not. Maybe next time.

DALLAS

It's okay, Will.

DOCTOR

Another letter to send, Mr. Donald?

[WILLIE hands the DOCTOR his letter.]

WILLIE

Yeah. Will that go out in today's mail?

DOCTOR

Tomorrow. But in the meantime: Dallas, a package. Gus, National Geographic.

[Hands the mail over. DALLAS opens his.]

DALLAS

Mine's already open. Reading glasses? This must be from my niece. She's always buying things off the Web.

[Tries them on.]

Well at least I can read the paper now. Doc?

DOCTOR

I'll have an orderly bring you one after lunch. Finally, Mr. Miller. This came for you. From your lawyer.

[Hands over the letter.]

WILLIE

Ouhhhhhh! Adam's got a letter.

DOCTOR

I'll be back in a few minutes, gentlemen. Forgot my coffee. Gus, when I come back, I expect that magazine to not be in your hands. Are we understood?

GUS

Yes, Doc.

[DOCTOR exits.]

DALLAS

What you got there?

ADAM

I don't know.

WILLIE

Let me see!

[Snatches the letter. The patients play keep away from ADAM.]

What a daisy.

ADAM

Give it back... I don't even know what it is.

NICK

Maybe it's a fan letter.

DALLAS

Hope it's not for jury duty.

GUS

Or you forgot your water bill.

WILLIE

"We're trying to reach you to discuss your vehicle's extended warranty."

ADAM

Give it back. Guys.

WILLIE

Not so fast. Don't be so secretive.

DALLAS

(With the letter:) Letter's been forwarded to the crazy house. I know what this is! "Adam Miller. You have been selected for the draft. Please report to Virginia to begin defending your country. Sincerely, good 'ol Uncle Sam."

ADAM

Dallas, please.

[DALLAS salutes as he gives the letter to WILLIE.]

NICK

Well come on. Open it up already.

WILLIE

"Dear Adam, I hope this letter reaches you safely." How dreamy. Oh, Adam. Will you be my huckleberry? Signed Doc Holliday.

ADAM

What does it say? Really?

GUS

Give it to me.

[Takes the letter from WILLIE.]

"Dear Adam, I hope this letter reaches you safely. I can only imagine what you must think of me and what I've put you through."

DALLAS

Talk about sentimental.

GUS

"Please, understand I had no intention on hurting you. I know we loved each other."

DALLAS

You kiss your lawyer too?

WILLIE

How old is this letter?

GUS

"I simply want you to know that I am thinking of you and that you will always be in my heart. In this envelope you will find, what we both know to be necessary. I just don't want to drag out what we both know needs to happen. A year is long enough. I want us both to be happy, and deep down we both know waiting won't help. Thank you for being so understanding about all this. I hope you can forgive me and can move on as well."

DALLAS

Adam? What is this?

GUS

"Love, Melissa." Adam? These are divorce papers. "P.S. Please know you will always have a place in my heart." Adam?

[DALLAS grabs the envelope and dumps out its contents onto the floor.]

ADAM

I don't understand.

DALLAS

It's post-marked three days ago.

ADAM

Just hand it back. Please!

DALLAS

[Picks a photo off the ground.]

Adam? You don't have a kid, do you? A newborn with a pink hat?

ADAM

No! Of course not!

WILLIE

I don't think this baby is yours. It looks nothing like you.

ADAM

Shut up. Please shut up.

[Falls into a chair.]

GUS

Adam! It's okay! It's okay.

ADAM

Get away from me!

[WILLIE begins to wiggle in his pants.]

WILLIE

Guys, I know this might not be the best moment, but I kinda have to pee.

DALLAS

This was forwarded here by your lawyer's office.

WILLIE

Got to pee. I drank too much juice at breakfast.

GUS

Can you explain, Adam?

[Pause. Off to the side, NICK is laughing hysterically. He grabs a devil's costume from under ADAM's bed and puts it on.]

Adam, talk at me.

WILLIE

Pee.

DALLAS

Gus, stop it. Kid, look at us. You didn't, did you? She's still alive, isn't she? Melissa.

ADAM

Don't say her name. Please.

WILLIE

Pee. I can't hold it all meeting.

NICK

Choo-Choo. Crazy! Crazy!

ADAM

Shut up!

DALLAS

Adam, I'm not-

WILLIE

Pee. It's about to come out.

NICK

[Vogues in his costume.]

Craaaaazy! Ding-dong. Screw loose. Crazy!

ADAM

[Jumps to his feet and pushes NICK to the wall, punching him in the stomach.]

SHUT UP!!! Shut up! Leave me alone!

[Silence. DALLAS looks at the audience.]

WILLIE

I have to take a piss!

DALLAS

Then go!

[An intercom whispers "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?"]

[Blackout.]

[Intermission.]

Act II, scene i

[Lights brighten on the same room. The DOCTOR is now with ADAM. An intercom cries out: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?"]

[ADAM and NICK are frozen in place. The CHORUS repeats what just occurred in dramatic fashion.]

WILLIE

Opens the letter. Oh, look... words.

GUS

I'm divorcing you.

DALLAS

What?

GUS

She's alive!

WILLIE

(As a SHAKESPEAREAN ACTOR:) Will this dagger ever be pulled from my heart!

DALLAS

Will the torture ever end?

GUS

(To the audience:) Are we in our seats now? Pottied? Ready to continue with the show?

DALLAS

That means shut it! No noises. No photography. No eating too loudly or blowing your chewing gum. You! Who sent you? The CIA?

WILLIE

(As the MAD HATTER:) Switch places!

[The CHORUS returns to their original places. Time unfreezes.]

(To the audience:) Doc's with Adam now. Who knew a little letter could make someone so upset? Oh well. I still think he's crazy.

DOCTOR

I am here to help you, Mr. Miller. You have to let me help you.

ADAM

...I didn't do it. I didn't kill her? Doc, did I? What's wrong with me?

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller, this is why you're here with me. So we can discover what happened... together. You're here to get better. You want that, right?

[Beat.]

Mr. Miller, I need you to stand up for me. Come on.

ADAM

I don't want to be here. I want to go home.

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller.

ADAM

Can I please just go home?

DOCTOR

Adam. Stand up.

[ADAM stands.]

Breathe for me. In and out. Nice, solid breaths.

ADAM

I don't want to. I want to leave.

DOCTOR

I'm not asking. Breathe.

[ADAM slowly obeys.]

You've been through a lot over the past year. And you went through a lot before that too. That's why you're here.

ADAM

It's not fair. I don't belong here.

DOCTOR

It's not fair; you're right. Nothing has been fair. But you're here all the same, under my care.

ADAM

I didn't do it, did I? I didn't kill Melissa.

DOCTOR

No, you didn't. She's the one who sent you here. She's the one paying. You lost everything, Mr. Miller; and for that I am sorry. What you need to know is this isn't uncommon.

ADAM

But why do I think I killed her? I don't understand.

DOCTOR

I don't know.

NICK

Because you wanted to! That bitch took years away from you.

ADAM

I trusted her. I loved her.

NICK

That didn't stop her from getting knocked up and leaving you. You wanted her to pay!

DOCTOR

I know you did.

NICK

You wanted that bitch dead!

ADAM

No, I didn't.

NICK

To death do you part, right? You did right by my book.

GUS

Adam, we're here for you.

[Kneels down to comfort ADAM who pushes him away.]

ADAM

Shut up! All of you. Leave me alone! I don't need this. I don't need any of you. I just want to go home. I want to see my wife.

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller. That isn't smart.

ADAM

I want to see Melissa.

DOCTOR

That isn't safe for you now.

NICK

Yes! Finish the job! Kill her.

ADAM

Shut up!

NICK

Or maybe your mother was right about you. Maybe you aint a man. Maybe she should have killed you.

[ADAM attacks NICK again.]

I'll kill you instead.

DOCTOR

Stop this! Mr. Miller, please.

[DALLAS pulls ADAM from the floor.]

DALLAS

Get a hold of yourself. You're hurting yourself. Look at your hands.

DOCTOR

I've got this, Mr. Williams. Thank you. I'll have an orderly come by shortly with the TV. Mr. Miller... if you'll come with me.

[Takes ADAM by the shoulders. She leads him to the door. NICK slowly follows but stays at the door.]

ADAM

I don't want to. I'm fine, Doc. I'm sorry. I really am. I'm calm now.

NICK

Calm? You should be angry. Furious! You should escape. Kill that bitch for abandoning—

ADAM

I hate you!

DOCTOR

We need to dress your hands. And talk.

[The CHORUS exits.]

NICK

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

ADAM

(Offstage:) Leave me alone! You're a monster.

NICK

Look in the mirror, buddy!

[Silence.]

WILLIE

(As DOC HOLLIDAY:) "What an ugly thing to say... does this mean we're not friends anymore? You know... if I thought you weren't my friend, I just don't think I could bear it."

DALLAS

Guys...

GUS

I know.

DALLAS

What was that? ... I didn't think he had it in him.

GUS

He's scared. That's all.

WILLIE

Adam seems different. I like him better this way. I still need to pee.

GUS

He attacked the floor. Twice.

DALLAS

It isn't right.

WILLIE

I know, too much juice and-

GUS

We need to watch him. It's our responsibility. He's one of us.
Come on, let's go.

[WILLIE begins to whistle a tune.
They exit.]

[Blackout.]

Act II, scene ii

[Lights brighten on the group room again. ADAM sits in the middle of the room; his hand is bandaged.]

[The CHORUS enters alone.]

DALLAS

Buddy! Look at you. How do you feel?

ADAM

Fine.

DALLAS

You took quite the beating. Your hands must hurt like hell.

ADAM

I'm sorry for what happened.

DALLAS

It's our fault for teasing you with the mail.

ADAM

I still feel bad for causing a scene.

WILLIE

(As DOC HOLLIDAY:) "I know it's not always easy being my friend, but I'll be there when you need me." *Wyatt Earp*, 1994.

GUS

Don't sweat it, man. What did the Doc do to you? You didn't come home the other night. We thought they carted you away. Or did weird experiments on you.

ADAM

I know. No. Doc and I talked. She got me bandaged up; gave me some more meds to take.

WILLIE

That happens. Feels great, doesn't it.

ADAM

Strange.

DALLAS

That's what happens to you. Remember when Willie punched the orderly for taking his hands out of his pants?

WILLIE

I remember. They strapped me to the bed. Couldn't move my hands. Poor, Willie.

ADAM

I'm just ready for the day. I know I need to be here. What kind of man just imagines he murdered someone? Is this all of us?

GUS

Yep.

ADAM

Where's—

[DOCTOR enters.]

GUS

Here's the shrink.

WILLIE

(As BUGS BUNNY:) Eh... what's up, Doc? Circa 1940.

DOCTOR

Hilarious, Mr. Donald. Mr. Miller, I trust you are feeling better?

ADAM

Yes. I'm sorry. For what I said and did and all.

DOCTOR

It's okay. Sit down, gentlemen.

[They obey.]

ADAM

I feel guilty.

DOCTOR

And quite talkative today. Gus, I'm sure you can relate. Would you mind if we returned to you today?

GUS

No. Sure.

[Pause.]

I've been thinking a lot lately. At night. I've got some insight now, thanks to Adam's debacle; so, thank you.

ADAM

Sure.

GUS

Well... if he didn't even kill his wife but felt guilty enough to come here, well then what does that say about us? Doc?

DOCTOR

Go on. I'm interested in this new development of yours.

GUS

Fine. Well if he could feel so guilty for something he didn't even do, then why should I feel guilty for something... I don't know.

DOCTOR

That you didn't actually do?

GUS

Yeah. I loved my Pops. He was the best thing that ever happened to me, and I know he loved me. He wouldn't want me to blame myself for what happened. I didn't go up on that roof and give him that heart attack. God did.

DOCTOR

Are you saying God is responsible?

GUS

Of course, but that's okay. Dad died doing what he loved most... providing for me. Trying to give me the best he never had. He wouldn't want me to be sitting here blaming myself or ruining my life. He'd want me to be out there taking a chance like him.

DOCTOR

Are you saying you don't blame yourself anymore?

GUS

No. I do. I'm always going to feel guilty. No matter how long I stay here. But what I know is... I'm not truly to blame. I didn't kill him. None of us are guilty here.

DALLAS

I am. Christopher Columbus. Spain, 1506. Tore out his jugular... with this hand!

ADAM

Um... he died of heart failure.

DALLAS

That's what the Wikipedia wants you to believe. In truth-

DOCTOR

In truth, as Gus has said... sometimes we blame ourselves for our deepest insecurities, our fears. It's what keeps us up at night or causes us to act out in ways we shouldn't.

WILLIE

Drives our parents away.

DOCTOR

Yet your mother still pays for you to be here in the hospital. Could that mean something?

WILLIE

No. She doesn't write. Doesn't visit.

DOCTOR

Yet she still loves you. People sometimes struggle to show their feelings. Parents often blame themselves when their children suffer and have trouble reaching out. It doesn't mean that she doesn't love you.

WILLIE

And Adam's mommy beat on him. No offence. Does that mean she loved him too?

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller isn't what we're discussing at this moment.

ADAM

It's okay. I don't think she did. That's okay to me.

DOCTOR

You're okay with your mother sending you here to us?

WILLIE

I don't blame her. I did this.

DOCTOR

Adam? What about you?

ADAM

I'm angry, but she's not my problem anymore. She didn't send me here like Willie's mom, but they're different people. Willie's mom loves him. I think that's something.

WILLIE

I don't blame my mom. I never did. Three brothers, four sisters. I'm only the second oldest. Dad's in a wheelchair. She has to work three jobs. Momma did what she had to do when she got sick.

DOCTOR

And what would you say to her if you could?

WILLIE

What I've always written. I'm sorry. I want to come home to my family. But I'm not better. I'm never going to get better.

DOCTOR

That isn't true though. Not for any of you.

WILLIE

How many pills am I on, Doc? Or Gus? Or Dallas? How long have we been here? Even right now I'm trying to concentrate... focus on my words... what I want to say... but all I really want is to shove this hand right down my underwear and think about watching grasshoppers fuck from outside a window this morning.

DALLAS

That's disgusting.

WILLIE

It is! I know it's disgusting, but I can't help it. I just want to look out the window and jack off as the leaves blow.

GUS

I know you've made progress, Will.

WILLIE

I've already nutted two times today. Once in the shower, once while watching Dallas eat his cereal with a very curvy spoon. My cornflakes didn't work.

DALLAS

Jesus, man! I told you not to do that. I told you to stop looking.

WILLIE

I know... but I didn't. I couldn't help myself.

[Silence.]

DOCTOR

But you aren't now, are you? That's what's important. You're sitting there straight, legs down, hands to your side. Nothing. The urge is still there, but there you are. Sitting. William Donald sitting in a chair holding a conversation.

[Beat.]

Who wants to go next? Dallas?

DALLAS

Not today.

DOCTOR

Should we call it a day?

[ADAM raises his hand.]

Yes?

ADAM

Can I go?

DOCTOR

If you're sure you are ready, then yes, please.

ADAM

Melissa leaving wasn't the first time I felt abandoned. I think deep down I've always felt alone. First was my mom. Then with my wife, I couldn't take it. I understand now why she left. Our marriage wasn't perfect, and she needed kids. But so did I. I wanted to feel like I belonged somewhere, to someone. I remember hating not having a father growing up. I went searching for father in ever book I read. I even thought I found him once.

[Beat.]

But hearing the great poet Charles Bukowski's voice for the first time in college, I was disappointed..

[Pause.]

And like Bukowski, I never outran my past. I let my worth be defined by the love of another.

DOCTOR

And your mother never gave you the love you craved.

ADAM

I wonder if Melissa and I even had a chance.

DOCTOR

Tell us about your mother. You never seem to go into details when discussing her.

ADAM

She never gave up on me. She always seemed to be coming up with new way to make me feel unwanted.

GUS

(As the MOTHER:) I never loved you.

ADAM

But I knew that wasn't always true.

DALLAS

(As the MOTHER:) No one could ever love you.

ADAM

And I believed her.

WILLIE

(As the MOTHER:) You will always be nothing without me.

DOCTOR

It's very common for children of broken homes to stay for so long. They feel like it's in their best interests, or that they are responsible. You were nineteen when you left?

ADAM

But that's the thing. I never felt responsible. She was the bad one, not me. It was like she took pride in torturing me. I remember when I was in high school. I slept on a strip of paper towels on the carpet. I had a bed but wasn't allowed to use it. The nights when she said I didn't deserve the floor... I am 16.

[ADAM sighs before standing. He looks very stiff as if he is not allowed to move a single muscle. Pauses. Talks through his teeth.]

(#2B "STANDING NAKED IN THE KITCHEN AT 2 IN THE MORNING")

I stand naked, legs straight as I can manage having to pee yet know

If Mother sees my feet have moved an inch outside my tile square I will spend the rest of the night outside, door locked, wishing for death

With wind as my blanket as bones shake and toes turn blue, again.

I imagine I'm a soldier being punished for breaking a dish Thinking

This will prepare me for bootcamp if I ever make it out from nights like this.

I watch the stove clock

Flicker orange each passing minute.

2:00 AM.

The wind outside roars December from coastal waves.

The grass grows frost as pipes freeze and owls hunt mice.

I can feel my eyes droop, my muscles begging, Pleading to kneel on the floor and rest my eyes.

No! I must stay; I must hold my position like the night before when I burnt her eggs.

I grab my dick and go to work till I grow hard and the feeling

Of a bursting bladder subsides. My eyes stare at the clock: 2:01 AM.

I think about Cynthia Nixon from Sex and the City. Julia Roberts.

Nashley from 10th grade English, how her hair smells like strawberries.

I think about the kitchen knife two feet away in a drawer. How quietly I could step,

My feet tiptoeing across the living room tarp careful not to stick and create a noise.
I would control my breath and wait for her snore to grow loud
Before slipping steel into Mother's neck.
How good it would feel to end this night and finally fall asleep.

2:02 AM.

I count the leaves shaking from trees outside.
The minutes till the alarm rings 6 o'clock. Anything to distract me.
I try to remember what it felt like to be six again when everything was normal.
When I had a bed, a teddy under my arm. A gentle kiss upon my head.

GUS

Goodnight, my sweet prince. I'll wake you up for school tomorrow.

ADAM

Okay. Night, Mommy.

2:03 AM. Snoring ends, her light turns on. She whispers rooms away:

DALLAS

You better not be moving. If you want to go to school tomorrow Your ass better not have moved an inch.

ADAM

She knows I hear her. No need for a response. Her light turns off.

2:04 AM. I wait.

DOCTOR

Was that the first time you thought about violence?

ADAM

No. But I think that was when I was the closest to having the guts to stand up for myself. Truth is I learned a lot from my mother. I owe her.

[Indicates his bandaged hands.]

DOCTOR

Tell us about that.

ADAM

(#2C "HOW I LEARNED TO TAKE A HIT")

Step One:

[WILLIE stands up, punches ADAM
in the stomach. He becomes the
MOTHER.]

WILLIE

Stand still, boy.
I don't want to see you move.

ADAM

Mother will say before every hit
Every slap, every punch to the gut.

WILLIE

*Do you see how pathetic you are?
You're supposed to be a man; men don't cry. Pussies cry.*

ADAM

Step Two:

Plant feet. Stiffen core. Relax jaw so teeth don't break.
Look her in the eyes, show no fear yet give out a cry with each
hit.
That's what she wants. That's what she craves. Dominance.

Step Three:

Breathe. Hold breath. Don't exhale; never exhale.
The pain will only be worse.

Step Four:

At the moment of impact
As her latex gloved hand comes straight on,

DALLAS

Wait! Wait! Why latex? Like for doctors?

DOCTOR

It's not that strange, Dallas. Plenty of those with compulsive issues have little quirks.

WILLIE

Like me?

DOCTOR

Like you. Please continue, Mr. Miller. You are on step four I believe.

ADAM

Step Four:

At the moment of impact
As her latex gloved hand comes straight on,
Quickly puff cheeks up so braces don't catch inner mouth.
But don't let her see; never let her see me prepare for a hit.

Step Five:

When braces catch on lips, which they will, let the blood
flow but don't let it drip.
Blood can be swallowed. Mouth will swell, and it will hurt to
eat,
But I learned early to take small bites and swallow whole.

Step Six:

Don't scream.
Don't give her another reason to grab the whip, the one thing I
fear beyond anything else.
The way the leather wraps my bottom with each lash or strikes my
nose.
The way it sends a jolt like burning fire through my body
And tears the air from my lungs.

WILLIE

Don't scream.

ADAM

Step Seven:

Stand straight. Blink away tears.

WILLIE

Men don't cry. You deserve this. You deserve this and so much more

ADAM

Yet what I did, I do not know. And I remember with each passing strike that
One of us will have to die before the other, and I've learned to be patient.

[Pause.]

DOCTOR

But you finally left...

ADAM

I did. I was tired of feeling unloved.

DOCTOR

And you met Melissa. What would you tell Melissa right now if you could?

ADAM

I would say...

[Long pause.]

I can't even remember what really happened. What do you say to someone when you have no idea what you actually did?

[Beat.]

DOCTOR

Let's return to this thought later, okay? We did good today, gentlemen.

[Blackout.]

Act II, scene iii

[Lights brighten on the common room. DALLAS, GUS, WILLIE, and ADAM sit at the table ready to play cards. An intercom cries out: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?"]

DALLAS

Alright, boys. The game is poker.

ADAM

Is this all you do here? Play cards? Imagine life out there.

GUS

For the moment. Why? You don't like cards?

WILLIE

(As DOC HOLLIDAY:) "Maybe poker just isn't your game. I've got an idea let's have a spelling contest." *Tombstone*, 1993.

ADAM

No, I do. Okay, what are the rules this time?

DALLAS

Standard rules.

ADAM

But we don't have chips.

GUS

We used to.

DALLAS

[Deals out cards.]

That was a story. A few years back we had this friend, Jack. This was before he got carted away and sent upstate. He was like you. Tired and beaten. His kids kept asking him for gifts. "Daddy, can I have a Barbie? Daddy, can I have a new GI Joe doll? Daddy! Daddy? Daddy!" Come Christmas morning... no gifts. He gambled away all their Christmas money. His wife's yelling at him; his kids are crying. Then Bam! His delicate brain snapped-

[Snaps his fingers.]

Like a frayed piece of thread. Drowned his family in the pool right there on Christmas morning. Anyway, one day we're playing, gambling, and he's losing, bad. He takes the poker chips and starts shoving them in his mouth. On purpose. He starts choking.

WILLIE

Blue as a cucumber.

DALLAS

He's inches from dying and in comes the doctor. Doc saves Jack; we lose our poker chips.

ADAM

Then what are we going to gamble with?

DALLAS

You remember what I asked you to do?

ADAM

Yeah.

DALLAS

Well let me see them.

[ADAM pulls out a few pills from his pocket.]

Get them out boys. It's card playing time.

[The CHORUS pulls out their pills and places them on the table.]

ADAM

Wait. Isn't the whole point of pills to take them?

GUS

We've been taking them for years.

WILLIE

And I don't feel any different.

DALLAS

Why? You a cop now? Have some fun kid. Besides, you didn't kill your wife. Probably just a simple nervous breakdown. I bet you'll be out of here in no time. What's the risk? Few pills you don't take. You'll take some tomorrow.

ADAM

Alright. Fine. Flip the cards.

WILLIE

This is going to be fun. I think I have an anti-boner pill in there.

GUS

Is that even a thing?

WILLIE

Win and find out.

DALLAS

Few rounds. Winner takes the pot. Call or fold. Call or fold, boys. Gus?

GUS

I'll fold.

WILLIE

Call. I take your white pill and raise you a green.

ADAM

I'll call. I warn you, I used to play hard.

DALLAS

And we have a fibber on our hands. I'm not buying it. The flop.

WILLIE

Check.

ADAM

Check.

DALLAS

I will check as well. The turn. A four. William, you have a four in your hand, don't you? Fess up.

WILLIE

No.

DALLAS

You know I can tell when you're lying, right? And I'll say the other card is what? A five?

WILLIE

No.

DALLAS

Willie?

WILLIE

Shit. Fine. I fold. How do you do that?

DALLAS

Atta boy. Adam? Let me guess—

ADAM

I can play that game. You act all strong and confident, but I'll bet that's just an overcompensation for a lousy hand.

WILLIE

Or tiny willie.

DALLAS

Then raise the bet.

ADAM

Maybe I will.

DALLAS

Then do it.

ADAM

Fine. I'll raise you my two last pills.

DALLAS

Going all in this early? Risky move.

ADAM

Or a brave one.

DALLAS

I'll see your two pills. The river. Since you're all in, lay 'em down.

ADAM

Pair of jacks. Ace high.

DALLAS

You got them. But... a flush. All hearts. That's you. Thanks for playing. Next hand, gentlemen. Keep them coming.

ADAM

Can I ask you something?

[The CHORUS continues playing.]

DALLAS

Sure. Go ahead.

ADAM

The CIA. Is it real?

DALLAS

Of course, it's real. They make movies about it too much for it to just be some fairy tale.

ADAM

No. You. Doctor Hart's not here. It's just us crazies here. Were you really in it?

DALLAS

That is the question. CIA or not, I have an awful scar on my left shoulder.

WILLIE

It's gnarly. I've seen it.

DALLAS

You know, sometimes I question it. Was I really a soldier of the USA, or am I just an old, sad crook wishing I had a purpose? Who knows? The government sure doesn't remember me.

ADAM

Yeah. But what about Castro? Napoleon? Columbus? Columbus died hundreds of years ago.

GUS

Aint you heard?

ADAM

What?

GUS

Time travel. They got the time tech.

[DALLAS and GUS laugh.]

DALLAS

Call Area 51. We got a leak.

ADAM

No, but really. Come on.

DALLAS

Do you think I killed Columbus? Napoleon?

ADAM

Well... no to be fair. I really don't. To me it's impossible.

DALLAS

Yet love, the atomic bomb, angels, they're impossible? Do you believe in none of them?

ADAM

I have my beliefs.

DALLAS

Then there you go. I believe deep down in my cholesterol filled heart that yes, I am former CIA, and yes, I was burned by my country. But Gus here believes in hidden mermaids, and Willie thinks Hilary Clinton is a supermodel.

WILLIE

But she is. Have you seen her ankles?

DALLAS

Point is, I do. Now I could easily, probably, walk right out that very door and never see Gus drool again or Willie yanking it for dear life, but why should I? What's out there for me? A loving mother for Willie? A sailboat for Gus to sail off with to find Atlantis.

GUS

That's real.

DALLAS

I'm perfectly fine here. I have my cards. I have these two numbskulls. Castro? Napoleon? I'll keep my story, thank you. So yes.

[Pulls out his water gun and
squirts WILLIE and GUS.]

Santa stopped giving you presents when you were eleven? That's
cause he met me on a bad, bad day.

[Squirts ADAM.]

ADAM

Fine. Fine.

[Pause.]

Well what about Nick? What's his deal?

DALLAS

Hmmm?

[The intercom whispers: "You are
safe. You are loved."]

ADAM

Nick.

DALLAS

Who's that?

[The intercom whispers: "Are you
ready to begin?"]

ADAM

Come on. Nick. Dressed like the devil? Rude as all hell?

DALLAS

Nick? You guys know a Nick?

GUS and WILLIE

No. Not me.

ADAM

Guys. Stop. Nick. I haven't seen him around here in a few days.
He get shipped off somewhere else?

GUS

There is a lot of people here. We get used to keeping to our group.

WILLIE

Wait. I know a Nick.

GUS

You do?

WILLIE

Yeah. He's that blind dude bound to his bed for biting his tongue off. I heard Doc had to lobotomize him.

DALLAS

Doc didn't lobotomize anyone.

ADAM

No. The dude. This tall. Wears a costume. He's been to our group therapy sessions! He sleeps right next to me!

DALLAS

Son, I sleep next to you.

GUS

And I'm on the other side.

ADAM

I punched him the other day in group. He kept calling me a murderer. Told me I wanted to kill my wife.

GUS

Alright, Adam. Just stop it. Listen to yourself. Nick? Don't make up stories just to stay here longer. Don't let Doc hear you say that.

ADAM

[Stands up and pushes the cards to the floor.]

Nick! He's in a fucking devil onesie! Nick!

[Pause.]

I had a fight with him the other day. I busted my knuckles. Doctor Hart had to bandage me up.

GUS

Adam, we thought you were angry.

DALLAS

You attacked the walls and the floor like a lil' bitch.

GUS

This is a psych house. That's what you do here. I assumed you were just overwhelmed because... you know...

[The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?" ADAM grabs GUS by the collar, pulling me up.]

Adam! What are you doing?

ADAM

Stop lying to me. Please!

GUS

Buddy! We're not lying. I promise.

ADAM

Willie? Back me up, pal. What do you want?

WILLIE

Fingernails.

ADAM

Gus...

GUS

I'm sorry, good buddy.

ADAM

He was here the other day! Nick! Why are you guys lying to me? I thought we were friends.

[Exits. WILLIE tries to pursue but is held back by DALLAS.]

DALLAS

Let him go. I don't think we can help him.

[Blackout.]

Act II, scene iv

[Lights rise on the common room. The DOCTOR is with ADAM.]

WILLIE

[Pulls out a cigarette. He readies himself to address the audience.]

(As ROD SERLING:) The time: three minutes before twelve o'clock noon. Submitted for your approval, one Adam Miller, age I don't know. If this were anywhere else, Adam would be three minutes away from have a nice lunch consisting of roast beef and salted potatoes, but not here. In here, time, his mind is his enemy. A devil works in the shadows, in an area which we call... the Twilight Zone.

[Rejoins the CHORUS.]

DOCTOR

What's the issue here, gentlemen? Our therapy group meeting isn't for another hour. Nurse Philips had to grab me from the cafeteria.

[Pause.]

Well? Mr. Peterson? Williams? Mr. Donald?

DALLAS

I don't know what we did, Doc. The kid was asking questions.

WILLIE

He's crazy.

ADAM

Don't call me crazy. I may not have killed my wife, but I know what I've seen. Nick was here!

DOCTOR

And Nick is?

ADAM

[Stands.]

Nick! Stop lying to me!

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller, you will sit down. Restraints can be arranged if necessary.

ADAM

Dallas, why are you doing this? Sure, Nick's an ass, but he doesn't deserve to be experimented on.

DALLAS

Kid, we was fibbing before. Yanking your chain.

GUS

Adam, I'm sorry. Buddy, it gets so boring here. We just wanted to have some fun. Honest. You understand, right?

[ADAM grabs GUS' neck. DOCTOR jumps to her feet.]

DOCTOR

Adam, release Gus.

ADAM

Please, Doc. Just tell me where Nick is.

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller, I need you to release Gus. Look at me. Look at me. Let him go.

[ADAM releases GUS who falls. DALLAS picks him up.]

ADAM

I don't understand. He was here. I know it. I'm not crazy.

DOCTOR

Who was here? What does he look like?

ADAM

Nick! Doc, you know him. Nick. Where is he?

DOCTOR

I want to help you. It's okay. You can trust me.

ADAM

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Gus. I didn't mean to hurt you.

GUS

It's okay. I'm fine.

DOCTOR

What did you do this time?

DALLAS

We didn't do anything. We was just trying to welcome him into the group before. We didn't mean to upset him.

DOCTOR

We talked about this. No lying to the other patients. I can only imagine what stories you've been feeding him. I thought you learned your lesson last time.

WILLIE

We promise we did. He asked us where Nick was, and we told him we don't know a Nick. He got real mad, Doc. We didn't lie about Nick.

DOCTOR

You should have gotten me immediately when this happened.

GUS

We thought we could deal with him. We're sorry. Right, guys?

DALLAS and WILLIE

Yeah. We're sorry.

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller, will you please come with me.

ADAM

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you, Gus. I swear.

DOCTOR

Gus is fine. He isn't hurt. Come with me to my office.

ADAM

I just want answers. I want to know what's wrong with me.

DOCTOR

If you come to my office, we can talk.

ADAM

No! I want to know now. Please, tell me. Am I crazy?

WILLIE

It's okay to be crazy. We're all crazy here.

DOCTOR

Let me help you, Mr. Miller. Come with me. I want to help.

ADAM

So, you can lock me up? No. No. Is this some sick joke? Where is Nick?

DOCTOR

Adam, there is no Nick. There's no Nick. It's just us.

ADAM

I don't believe you. He's here somewhere. Where have you taken him?

DOCTOR

Come with me.

ADAM

No!

DOCTOR

Mr. Miller. If you insist on this I will be forced to—

[GUS smashes a book onto ADAM's head. ADAM falls to the floor.]

ADAM

(Stunned:) Owww!

GUS

I'm sorry.

DOCTOR

Mr. Peterson, sit down. We will discuss this later. Dallas, help me walk Mr. Miller to my office.

[DALLAS and DOCTOR carry ADAM out.]

[Blackout.]

Act II, scene v

[Lights brighten on the common room. The CHORUS is hanging around. NICK sits alone in a corner.]

[DOCTOR enters rolling ADAM in in a wheelchair. ADAM's hands are strapped to his side.]

DOCTOR

Look who's back.

GUS

Three weeks! Welcome back, buddy. No hard feelings.

DOCTOR

Now please, give him some space. He needs rest.

DALLAS

They pop you full of nice pills?

WILLIE

Lobotomize you? Did they take your innocence away?

DOCTOR

You know we don't do that. Mr. Miller, if you need me, just let me know, okay?

[ADAM nods.]

Okay. See you later, gentlemen. Group will be in an hour.

[DOCTOR exits. Pause.]

GUS

So... what happened? Are you okay?

DALLAS

What pills did they give you?

WILLIE

Did you bring me a present? Fingernails?

GUS

How do you feel?

ADAM

[Spits out his pills on the
floor.]

Not so bad, how about yourself?

GUS

Adam! Jesus Christ!

WILLIE

Score. Thanks, man. I knew you wouldn't let me down.

[WILLIE kneels on the floor and
puts the pills in his mouth.
DALLAS smacks his head.]

DALLAS

Spit those out! Not the time! Adam, so what?

ADAM

I didn't take them.

DALLAS

We see that. Want to tell us why?

ADAM

I had to be sure.

DALLAS

Of what?

GUS

Tell us.

ADAM

Of him.

GUS

What do you mean?

ADAM

Him... Nick.

DALLAS

Nick? Here? Where is he?

ADAM

There.

[Gestures with his head. The CHORUS looks over to see nothing. The intercom whispers: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?"]

[Long silence.]

WILLIE

Yeah, I still don't see anything.

NICK

Hello, Adam.

ADAM

Hello... Nick.

NICK

It's been a minute. Scared?

ADAM

No.

NICK

You should be. You abandoned me.

ADAM

No, I didn't.

[The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

NICK

You left me. Left me all alone. You abandoned me just like Mother. Just like Melissa. You're just like them.

ADAM

No, I'm not.

GUS

Adam, you got to relax. Let me get Doctor Hart in here.

ADAM

No!

GUS

Adam, please. Let us help you. Let me get help.

ADAM and NICK

Sit down!

DALLAS

Kid, listen to him. This isn't right.

ADAM and NICK

Leave me alone.

DALLAS

Adam...

ADAM

It's okay. Please. Just stay here.

NICK

It's not okay. You abandoned me!

[Attacks ADAM. Sits on top of him and punches ADAM. To everyone else, ADAM's head moves on its own.]

How dare you abandon me! You need me!

ADAM

No, I don't! I don't want you.

NICK

Look at me. We could have been great. We could have stood up for you. We could have killed her. This is your fault.

ADAM

No. It's yours. The truth is—

NICK

Truth is you've always wanted to be a killer that's the thing! You wanted to kill your mother. You could have! You could have ended all that pain! You think you were alone all those nights naked and afraid? I felt every beating she gave us. You could have been a man.

[The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

ADAM

I am a man. I loved her.

NICK

(As the MOTHER:) No, you're nothing. A pissant. No one is every going to love you. You'll die alone. You'll be unknown. You're worthless.

ADAM

Get off of me!

[NICK rises and goes behind ADAM,
pulling his head in his arms.]

(#2D "THE BAD MAN")

NICK

One night when I was about ten,
I woke up from a bad dream
And called out for my mother.
"Mommy. Mommy! I need help!"
Terrified. Sweat covering my body
As I lay, trembling in the dark.
"Mommy. The bad man's here! Save me!"
Mother came into my room, hands holding me.
I feel a sense of safety blanket me.
I think I'm safe.
My pace of breath returns to normal
As she holds me in her arms. For a moment
She sits upon my bed and asks

ADAM and NICK

"What's wrong? Why did you call out, little one?"

NICK

I leaned back to look her in her eyes.
"The bad man is going to get me,"
I said as I cried to her my nightmare.
She breathes. Kisses my forehead.
My mouth dry.
She smiles as she slowly brushed
The tears from my face, saying

ADAM and NICK

"O honey, my sweet baby boy,
Don't be foolish, it's just you and me.
I am the bad man."

NICK

Thus, I was born. In fear. Sent by the angels themselves to protect you. Whisper in your ear. Kill her. Put the knife into her chest. But you never listened.

ADAM

Stop it. Let me go.

NICK

When Melissa left you, you couldn't handle it! You tried to teach her a lesson, but you couldn't.

GUS

(As the WIFE:) Adam, what are you doing here?

DALLAS

(AS ADAM) I need to talk to you.

GUS

There isn't anything to talk about. I'm sorry.

DALLAS

Please, I love you.

[Drops to his knees. The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

GUS

I know you do. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. It was a mistake. You don't deserve this.

DALLAS

I do. I do. I love you. I'll do anything.

[WILLIE coughs.]

Is he here?

GUS

Adam, you should leave. Please.

DALLAS

He's here, isn't he!

[Stands up and pushes past GUS.]

GUS

Adam, don't.

WILLIE

(As the OTHER MAN:) Hello.

DALLAS

You! You did this.

[Punches WILLIE.]

GUS

Adam! Leave! Now!

DALLAS

I don't care. I don't care if the baby's not mine. It's mine if you'll still have me. I love you.

GUS

Adam, I'm sorry. Please understand.

DALLAS

You're abandoning me? Please don't. I love you.

WILLIE

I think you should leave, buddy.

NICK

Hence, my rebirth. Pathetic. Course you went back, didn't you?

[Pulls a baseball bat from under a chair. GUS stands with his back to DALLAS. The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

Do it! Do it! Kill the bitch.

DALLAS and ADAM

No. I can't. It's not right.

NICK

Think what she put you through. She left you. She's Mother. She's a disease! Kill the disease!

ADAM

You're a disease.

NICK

Then kill me. But you can't. Because you're a disease too.

[Beat.]

I've listened to you whine and cry for too long. This is my time. I hope your own name poisons your tongue every time you hear it spilled. Adam Nicholas Miller! Every time you think of your name. In the second you kill that bitch. I'll make you. I'll make you. Then it'll be just us. I know what's best for you. I always have.

ADAM

I won't do anything you want. I never have!

NICK

Oh, but you will, Adam Miller. You think you can just change! You can't. You won't. It's the way you dress, the way we comb our hair. I'll always be deep inside that head of yours. Whispering sweet nothings. If you ever get out of here, if they ever release you, I'm going to make sure you pay for abandoning me. Nobody abandons me!

[Beat.]

GUS

(The CHORUS returns to normal.) Adam, talk to us. Please.

NICK

Boys, it's okay. Just a little talk. He's almost there. He's almost mine.

DALLAS

Let us help you.

WILLIE

Stop this.

[ADAM and NICK turn abruptly to the CHORUS.]

ADAM and NICK

Shut up! You will listen to me! Everything you ever loved, everything that hurt us, I will destroy. And it's going to feel so good!

ADAM

No! I won't let you. I'll get better. I don't need you.

ADAM and NICK

Yes, you do! Doctor Hart's gonna help you? Make them pay! Make the blood flow!

[The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

WILLIE

Please. Stop it. You're scaring me.

ADAM

Let me go!

NICK

Don't fight it. No. Don't fight me, my sweet prince. Let me help you.

GUS

Fight it, Adam. Fight it. He's not real.

[The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

NICK

Oh, but I am.

ADAM

I can't do this, guys. I'm scared. I want to go home.

ADAM and NICK

I'll take you home. I'll make them all pay.

ADAM

I'm sick of being afraid.

GUS

Then don't be. We're here.

ADAM

I'm so tired. This has to stop.

GUS

Fight him, Adam. Don't let him win.

[Silence.]

ADAM

I just want to be free. I want to be free from all of this.

GUS

Let us. Let us help you. Let us get the doc.

NICK

No. Only death will be your freedom. Listen to me!

[Grabs ADAM's chin.]

You're mine. You won't abandon me again.

[NICK slaps ADAM. The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?"]

(As the MOTHER:) All you will do is hurt. Everything you will do you will destroy. Heed my words! You're nothing.

ADAM

I want to go home.

GUS

It's okay, Adam. We're here. You're safe.

[The intercom whispers: "Are you ready to begin?" ADAM bites his tongue. Blood begins to pour from his mouth.]

NICK

You idiot!

GUS

Adam! Jesus! Go get help!

[WILLIE exits in a hurry yelling for the DOCTOR.]

Help me!

DALLAS

You got to stop, buddy. This aint worth it. Please.

NICK

You think you can stop this. I am inevitable. You can't get rid of me!

GUS

Adam! Stop this! You'll kill yourself!

DALLAS

You got to stop! Let go.

[WILLIE rushes in, DOCTOR follows.]

DOCTOR

Step aside! Go get an orderly.

[WILLIE exits again.]

Not on me. Not like this. Adam, do you hear me? He's going into shock. Step aside. Go!

[Beat.]

Adam! Can you hear me! ADAM!

[Blackout.]

Act II, scene vi

[Lights brighten on the common room. The CHORUS stands in a straight line with their heads down. Chopin's "Piano Sonata No.2 3rd movement" begins to play.]

[The CHORUS begins to move, gazing at the audience. They seem to glide across the stage in their hospital gowns, appearing almost as reapers. They make ADAM's bed. GUS takes out the Ace from his deck of cards and sets it on the pillow.]

(#1E "ADAM'S FUNERAL MARCH")

WILLIE and DALLAS

DID. HE. DIE? DID HE REALLY FUCKING DIE?

[Beat.]

YES. HE. DID. WHY WOULD WE LIE TO YOU?

GUS

But we are lying.

WILLIE and DALLAS

THAT DOES NOT MATTER.

GUS

Sure, it does.

WILLIE and DALLAS

NO IT DOES NOT. HE REALLY DID. HE JUST REALLY FUCKING DIED.

GUS

All that happened like ten years ago. Adam's fine. He is.

WILLIE and DALLAS

WOULD YOU CALL THAT FINE?

GUS

No.

WILLIE AND DALLAS

THEN NEITHER WOULD WE. HE JUST REALLY FUCKING DIED.

[DOCTOR rolls ADAM in with a wheelchair to his bed. Chopin's "Funeral March" continues playing quietly in the background.]

DOCTOR

Here we go. Up you go, Adam. Take your time.

[NICK enters, sitting on a bench.]

You got it? Okay.

[ADAM lays in bed, facing away from the audience.]

WILLIE

What you do to him this time, Doc?

DOCTOR

Let him rest. I'll have a nurse come in in a bit with the TV for movie night.

WILLIE

Yeah? What we watching? I hope it's a western.

DOCTOR

That's up to the nurse. My shift... just ended. Night boys.

(#1F "GOOD NIGHT PART I")

CHORUS

NIGHT, YOU FUCKING BITCH!

[DOCTOR exits.]

WILLIE

I love you.

GUS

That's how he is most days now. Look at him. He just lays there. Doesn't talk no more.

DALLAS

Doesn't smile or play cards no more.

WILLIE

He doesn't give me his fingernail clippings either.

DALLAS

He never did that. Nobody ever gives you those.

WILLIE

It be nice. All I'm saying.

GUS

Nick's here too... somewhere I assume... still lurking around I imagine. But Adam hasn't spoken a word to him... not since that day. Nothings ever gotten him out of that head. No matter how much Doctor Hart's worked Adam.

DALLAS

He tried once more few years back to end it all, but it didn't work. Got sent to the real crazy house for a while before coming back. Some of us wondered if they lobotomized him, but not me. I know he's still cooking in there. Just waiting for his turn.

WILLIE

For when the reaper come.

DALLAS

For when the reaper come. And when he did come, he come for Adam last.

WILLIE

I die first! Tell them that!

GUS

Autoerotic asphyxiation. Doc Hart... cancer.

DALLAS

The CIA would finish the job burning me one final time. A single bullet to the head. Right in the ol' temple...

[GUS stares.]

Heart disease.

GUS

Then it would be just us, Adam and me. We'd grow old and frail. Shit in our pants. Lose our teeth. It will be perfect. The last thing I'll see... Adam smiling again... one final time. Perfect.

DALLAS

Perfect.

WILLIE

A true daisy.

[Long pause. Reflection.]

GUS

(To the audience:) Okay. Well that's all. That's our show, folks. The show is over. We're done.

WILLIE

Thanks for coming! Turn off the music... I said off!

[Chopin's "Piano Sonata No.2 3rd movement" stops playing.]

DALLAS

Next performance will be tomorrow. Tell your friends you seen the boys. Unless you're a spy!

[Stands. Pulls out his water
pistol.]

Then run!

[Beat.]

GUS

So, what do you boys want to do till we die? Spades? Rummy?

[CHORUS returns to their
activities.]

DALLAS

Deal out some fish. What's the score?

GUS

Last time was... 30 to 26.

DALLAS

Alright. Willie, you want to make this a three-way?

WILLIE

No. I'll just go..

[Returns to his corner. Begins
"working." GUS and DALLAS play.]

DALLAS

Got some fours for me?

WILLIE

I miss my mom.

DALLAS

I really just hate everyone. I really do.

WILLIE

I want to go home.

GUS

You are home.

DALLAS

Filthy. Filthy. Would you stop doing that?

WILLIE

Just a few more minutes. I'm almost there.

GUS

Beat that thing harder, it's gonna fall off.

WILLIE

(As DOC HOLLIDAY:) "Nonsense. I've not yet defiled myself."

DALLAS

Quit that western bullshit.

[The CHORUS turns to address the audience.]

(#1G "GOOD NIGHT PART II")

CHORUS

THANK YOU FOR COMING TO OUR SHOW. GOOD NIGHT!!!!

[Blackout.]

[An intercom cries out: "You are safe. You are loved. Are you ready to begin?" The message repeats.]

[End of play.]

APPENDIX B
SHEET MUSIC

The Thread That Snapped

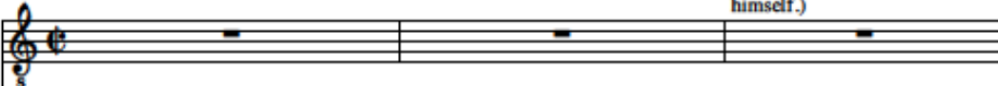
A. B. Harrison


Act 1 Scene 1: Welcome to Our Show!

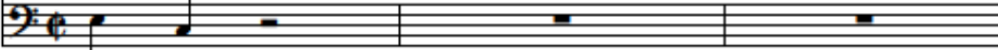
Deanna Leach

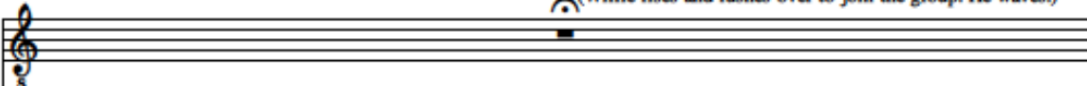
(Silence, they all turn to Willie, still playing with himself.)

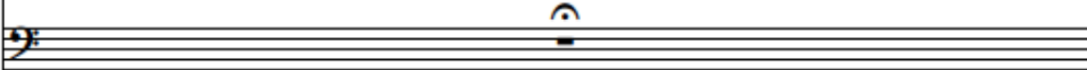
$\text{♩} = 100$

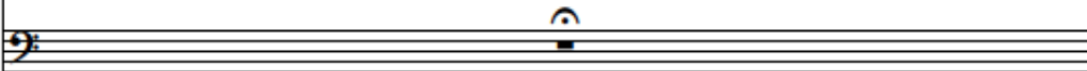
Tenor/Willie 

Baritone/Gus 
He - llo

Bass/Dallas 
He - llo

4  (Willie rises and rushes over to join the group. He waves.)

Bar. 

B. 

Willie! Stop it! You'll grow hair on your palm if you keep doing that.

5

T. 
He - llo Wel - come to our show.

Bar. 
Wel - come to our show.

B. 
Wel - come to our show.

8

T. *Willie: We welcome you-*
 that soon you'll have to pee!

Bar.
 We see, that soon you'll have to pee!

B.
 We see, that soon you'll have to pee!

13

T.
 to our show. Wil - lie

Bar.
 to our show. Im Gus

B.
 to our show.

16


T.

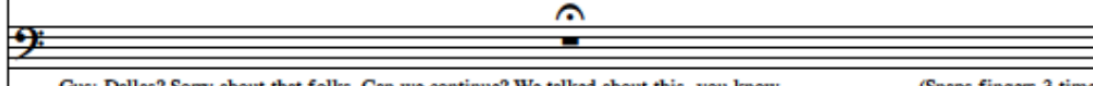
Bar.

B.


Dallas: And Im Dallas Williams, ex CIA, burned by the government, disavowed by his country, by his nation, for doing the one thing they asked him to do. It's not my fault I punched Vladimir Putin's cat. I served my coutry dammit! L...

17

T. 

Bar. 

Gus: Dallas? Sorry about that folks. Can we continue? We talked about this, you know. (Snaps fingers 3 times)

B. 

18 $\text{♩} = 120$

T. 

We want to welcome you to sunny meadows the

Bar. 

We want to welcome you to sunny meadows the

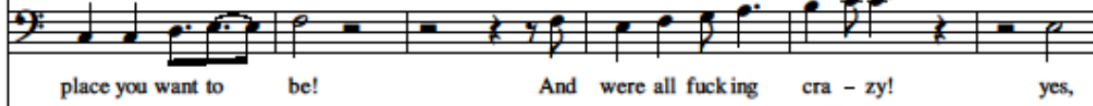
B. 

We want to welcome you to sunny meadows the

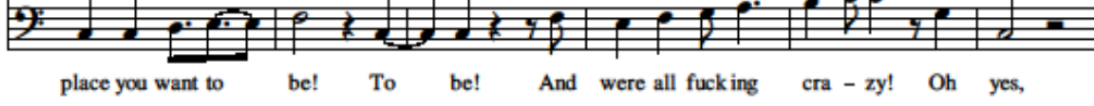
24

T. 

place you want to be! And were all fucking crazy!


Bar. 


place you want to be! And were all fucking crazy! yes,


B. 

place you want to be! To be! And were all fucking crazy! Oh yes,


30

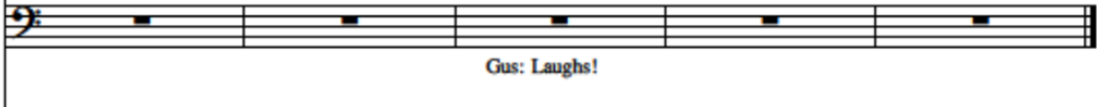
T.  yes, it's true. We're all fuck ing loo - nie too - oo - oones!


Bar.  We're all fuck ing loo nie too - oo - oones!

B.  We're all fuck ing loo - nie too - oo - oones!

34 All: It's got...

T.  Willie: Total insanity!

Bar.  Gus: Laughs!

B.  Dallas: Murder. Dallas: Now I bet you're wondering...

The Thread That Snapped

A. B. Harrison

Act 1 Scene 4: Take the Light

Deanna Leach

$\text{♩} = 96$

Tenor

Baritone

Bass

Sleep myprince, in heav - nlybliss Look for sheep with-in your dreams.

7

T.

Bar.

B.

Sail the seas, a-long the way. Meet the prin - cess and get laid!

13

T.

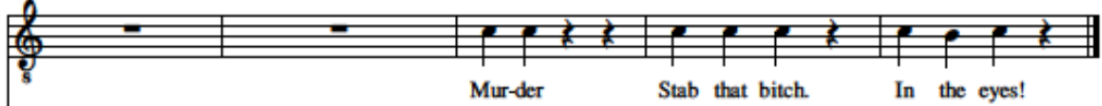
Bar.


B.

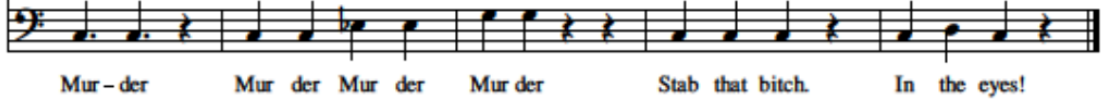
Take the light, from her eyes, beat her till the blood flies!

p *accel.*

19 $J = 140$ $J = 160$

T. 

Bar. 

B. 

The Thread That Snapped

A. B. Harrison

Act 1 Scene 5- Ring, Ring, Ring

Deanna Leach

$\text{♩} = 160$

Tenor

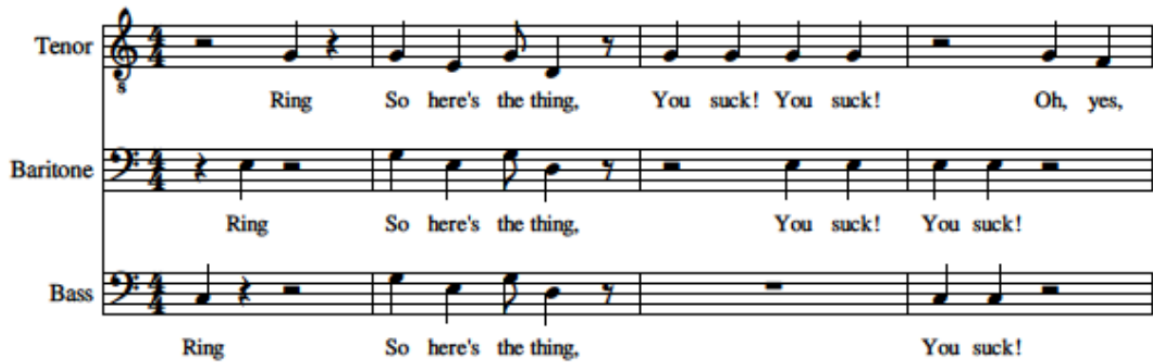
Ring So here's the thing, You suck! You suck! Oh, yes,

Baritone

Ring So here's the thing, You suck! You suck!

Bass

Ring So here's the thing, You suck!



5

T.

you do. Its not me! Its you! And

Bar.

La La La! Hell no, it's you! And

B.

La La La! Hell no, it's you! And



8

T.

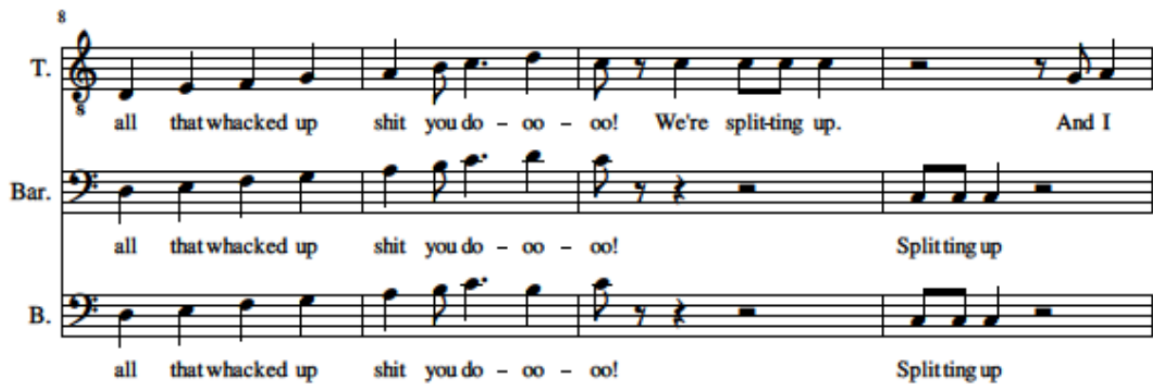
all that whacked up shit you do - oo - oo! We're split-ting up. And I

Bar.


all that whacked up shit you do - oo - oo! Splitting up


B.


all that whacked up shit you do - oo - oo! Splitting up




12


T.  al-rea-dy found a man that not you-oo-oo! So please dont call!


Bar.  No! No! Please dont call!

B.  No! No! Don't

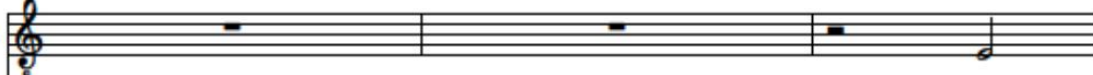
16

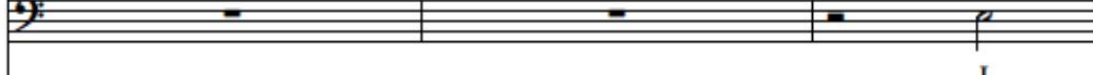
T.  Because I don't want to be your wife at all!

Bar.  Because I don't want to be your wife at all!

B.  call. Because I don't want to be your wife at all! And

20


T.  I


Bar.  I

B.  I know it hurts, but here's the news ...


23


T.  rea-ly need a man with a bet-ter cock than you!

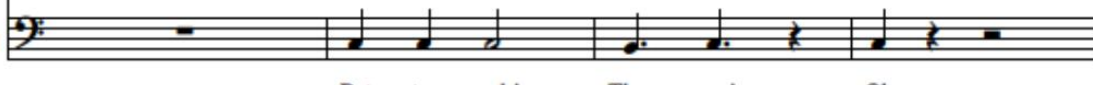
Bar.  rea lly need a man with a bet-ter cock than you! Bet - ter cock!

B.  Bet - ter cock!

27

T.  Bet - ter cock! Bet - ter cock! Than you! Oh


Bar.  Bet - ter cock! Than you! Oh

B.  Bet - ter cock! Than you! Oh

31

T.  So please don't call! I'd Like. To Say. Good. Bye. Once. And. For All!

Bar.  So please don't call! I'd Like. To Say. Good. Bye. Once. And. For All!

B.  So please don't call! I'd Like. To Say. Good. Bye. Once. And. For All!

The Thread That Snapped

A. B. Harrison

Act 1 Scene 6- Away From Home

Deanna Leach

$\downarrow = 70$

Tenor

A way from home A way from home

Baritone

A way from home

Bass

A way from home

$\downarrow = 60$

$\downarrow = 70$

5

T. I have to wait to see my kin till I get home

Bar.

B.


9

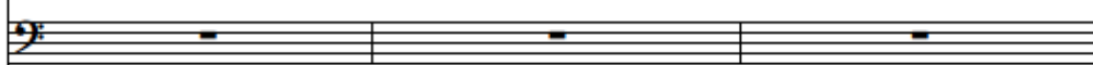
T. A way from home


Bar. Is where I'll be.

B. A way from home Is where I'll be.

12 $\text{♩} = 60$


T. 


Bar. 

B. 


15

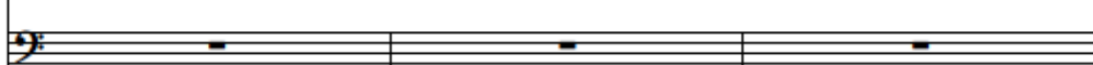
T. 


Bar. 

B. 

19 $\text{♩} = 50$

T. 

Bar. 

B. 

22

T. A way from home

Bar. A way from home

B. A way from home

25

T. I have to wait to see my kin, till I get home.

Bar.

B.

(Willie folds the letter,
kisses the page and
places it in an envelope)

The Thread that Snapped

Lyrics: A. B. Harrison

Act 2 Scene 7- Adam's Funeral March

F. Chopin
Arr. Deanna Leach

Lento

Willie Dallas

Did. He. Die? Did he

(Recording of Chopin's funeral march)



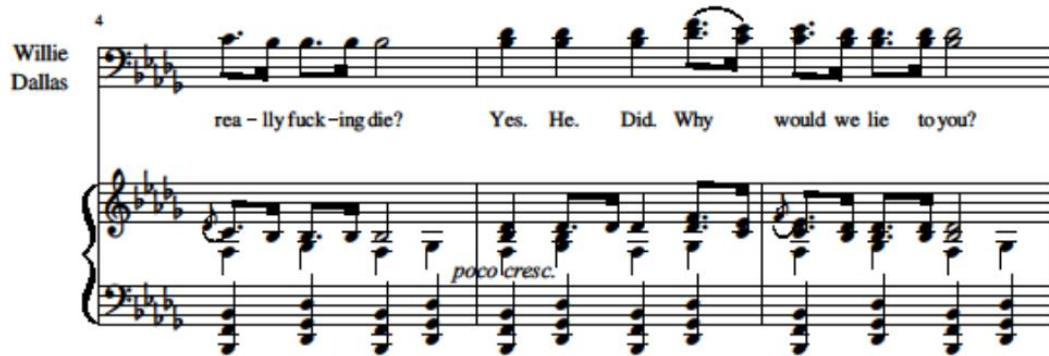
Gus: But we are lying?

4

Willie Dallas

rea - lly fuck - ing die? Yes. He. Did. Why would we lie to you?

poco cresc.



Gus: Sure, it does.

7

Willie Dallas

That does not mat-ter. No it does not. He rea - lly did. He just

cresc.



10

Gus: All that happened like ten years ago. Adams fine. He is. Gus: No.

Willie Dallas

rea - lly fuck - ing died. Would you call that fine?

13

Willie Dallas

Then nei - ther would we. He just rea - lly fuck - ing died.

più cresc.

Chopin's Funeral March continues playing quietly in the background

The Thread That Snapped

A. B. Harrison

Act 2 Scene 7- Good Night!

Deanna Leach

Pg. 112 $\text{♩} = 200$

Musical score for page 112, measures 112-114. The score is for Tenor, Baritone, and Bass voices. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 200$. The lyrics are: "Night you fuck - ing bitch!". The music is in 4/4 time and features a simple harmonic accompaniment with a bass line and a treble line.

Pg. 115 $\text{♩} = 200$

Musical score for page 115, measures 115-117. The score is for Tenor, Baritone, and Bass voices. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 200$. The lyrics are: "Thank you for com - ing to our show Good Ni - ght!". The music is in 4/4 time and features a simple harmonic accompaniment with a bass line and a treble line.

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DIVING INTO ONE'S PAINFUL PAST AND DARKEST INTERNAL FEARS: THE
DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF *THE THREAD THAT SNAPPED*

Major Professor: Dr. Jacob Juntunen