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by

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He Gets Naked for His Thesis: The Uncomfortable in Writing

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He Gets Naked for His Thesis: The Uncomfortable in Writing

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Dedication

For my parents. Always.

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Abstract

He Gets Naked for His Thesis: The Uncomfortable in Writing

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The following thesis explores my use of personal and audience/collaborator discomfort as both a creative engine and an organizing principle in my playwriting. I focus on the writing, developmental journey, and texts of two plays: *She Gets Naked in the End* and *Third Street*.

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SECTION I

Thesis Essay

PROLOGUE

I am in the audition room for my play *Dogfuckers*, and I want to crawl out of my skin. We are auditioning the parts of Boy and Dirt from the undergraduate actor pool for UTNT¹, and I can feel my fingers tightening around the corners of the table, and panic knotting my stomach. I've almost triggered my own fight/flight responses, and the flight response wants to shove me under the table, and the fight response pummels me with the knowledge that I'm the architect of my own discomfort. I have no one to blame but myself.

I've felt this heat, this awful rush before. It frequented me during the workshops and performances for *She Gets Naked in the End*, and during rehearsals and readings of *Third Street*.

I am uncomfortable for a dozen reasons.

I'm uncomfortable because *Dogfuckers* aggressively pursues that which could cause discomfort in the audience.² There's violence, casual misogyny, cursing, racism, ableism, homophobia, gay sex, nudity, alcoholism, impotence, masturbation, an uneasy politics of sex-negativity, cruelty to animals; there are boys who lick each other, dead parents, attacks on Fresno and Elk Grove and LA, and a self-hating Latina Republican who proclaims that she wants to be conquered by a white man. Even the structure of the play leans into the uncomfortable; a character has a phone conversation that last about six times as long as I'd have patience for as an audience member, and the ending breaks the naturalism of the play over its knee and gleefully changes its own storytelling conventions.

¹ University of Texas New Theatre, a festival showcase of new plays by the playwrights graduating from the MFA program, curated by Steven Dietz.

² I can't even tell the title to my grandmother; the title, however, also relieves me as it signals to the audience not to expect the easiest journey.

I'm uncomfortable because the audition scene is about two boys who desire each other, and one is naked. I'm uncomfortable because, although this will result in a fully-clothed enhanced reading, the kissing will, in fact, be staged, and I'm well aware that the auditioning undergraduates may be uncomfortable with same-sex intimacy. Moreover, the power that the director and I have in the eyes of these undergrads may be too great to voice their discomfort. I am uncomfortable because I believe that those auditioning can call me a pervert; I am uncomfortable because a part of me believes that they should call me a pervert.

I am uncomfortable because the pieces that I've carved off myself are all present and visible, if not to everyone in the room, then at least to me – and to my director.

After seeing my visceral reaction manifest through an inability to articulate what I'm looking for in *Dirt*, Jeremy Lee Cudd, my director, asks, "Dirt's you, right?" I am naked. I am more naked in that moment than the character Boy, who is actually naked. No no no, he's not me, my family is not dysfunctional like *Dirt*'s, I have never owned or bred dogs, so he cannot be me. And yet... And yet, I asked for this question, didn't I? A queer, half-Mexican/half-white male with anxieties about intimacy and sexuality writing about a queer, half-Mexican/half-white male with anxieties about intimacy and sexuality.

This could be one of the greatest fears of a writer. Of being mistaken for their creations. Of being found out.

How did I get to this point? I wrote myself into this position. I chased it down, and now I have to live with it.

INTRODUCTION

In my time at the University of Texas at Austin, I've pursued material that makes audiences and/or my collaborators and me uncomfortable. The uncomfortable has been an engine to my work, as both a source of creative energy and as an organizing principle for my playwriting.

I drew a line in the dirt. On one side there was everything that's easy and comfortable, and on the other, there was the uncomfortable. When we are uncomfortable, we reveal ourselves to ourselves. We surprise. Something real happens. In that space we actually live.

Some of the discomfort came from working with subject material that's personal or revealing or crude. Some of this discomfort came from operating with forms that are either unfamiliar or make the familiar strange.

I've tried to put myself in play. Sometimes I failed. Sometimes my failures were what I put into play. I prioritized exploring forms over mastering a single form. I've preferred to view my writing as an ever-evolving journey into the proverbial dark woods instead of a staking of stylistic territory. I've called myself out on my own bullshit, while forming bullshit to protect myself. I wrote a play titled *Dogfuckers*; I wrote a play titled *Dogfuckers* that I censored by letting it be called Or, "*the one with the dogs*" when advertised.

This thesis is about two projects that use discomfort as creative and narrative engines. These projects are *Third Street*, an expansion of a one-act I wrote for a high school theatre group, and *She Gets Naked in the End*, a tragic love story for adults.³ These two plays

³ *Dogfuckers* is not included in this thesis, as it was in too early a draft when I began work on the thesis.

thematically overlap – they are both queer love stories about marginalized people in marginalized spaces.

I wrote both plays during my second year at the University of Texas. For the 2012/2013 year, I focused on the development or revision of work. I spent the first year concentrating on creation, and planned to prioritize production and teaching my third year.

The developmental journeys of these two plays could not have been more different. *Third Street* was built with and for an ensemble of collaborators (including ten actors and a stage manager) using a play creation process facilitated by my DTYC⁴ colleague Benjamn Hardin. While it is still a single-authored piece, we deployed devising⁵ techniques to create the world of the play. It culminated in a staged reading. I wrote *She Gets Naked in the End* in workshop with playwriting professor Steven Dietz, then brought it to the Professional Development Workshop taught by playwriting professor Kirk Lynn. The PDW had MFA graduate directing student Jess Hutchinson as dramaturg and included a staged reading directed by then-Woolly Mammoth Literary Manager John Baker. Later, my company Barnyard Theatre produced *Naked* as a workshop in a week-long whirlwind⁶.

ON THE UNCOMFORTABLE

When I worked as a facilitator in team building “ropes” courses, we called it The Challenge Zone. It is analogous to what education theorist Vygotsky calls the Zone of

⁴ Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities, a graduate program at the University of Texas that trains professionals in theatre education and applied drama.

⁵ Devising uses an ensemble as the source or authority for a play instead of adhering to a single playwright’s text.

⁶ Alicia Hunt directed this piece. She is a high school friend whose parents own the barn in which I did theatre for ten years, and who has become a professional actor.

Proximal Development. I call it “the uncomfortable.” Both Vygotsky and the Team Up! Ropes Course conceptualize a space of comfort from which we must step to change and develop. The Comfort Zone reconfirms our own thoughts and mythologies. When we leave this zone, we’re placed into a state of disequilibrium. We are forced to acknowledge our own limitations. We are in uncharted territory, and we are uncomfortable.

As a writer, I want to operate in this territory to expand my writing and my teaching. I fed myself to a whale when I started the MFA program. I hoped that I’d sacrifice enough of myself to prove my devotion to the art, and the gods of writing would take note, and the gods of writing would make me emerge from the whale a Real Writer. I wanted to get better.

Artistically, the space of discomfort is where we grow art. Change can be painful. Replication of what has been done before is comfort. We can choose to reinforce the audience’s biases and understanding of the possibilities of narrative, to reproduce genre, or we can challenge their expectations and surprise them. In a sense, I am laying traps for my audience.

My aesthetic follows this intention. I want my work to access or reveal the beautiful through the gruesome, grotesque, or semi-profane. I believe that we don’t transcend through the spiritual, but through the terrestrial. When we’re reduced to eating dirt, what do we have left? We have touch, we have the taste of dirt.

There isn’t nobility in this project. I’m not gifting something to an audience by throwing them into the uncomfortable spaces. If I’m laying traps, then I recognize the risk of damage when the trap snaps shut. The uncomfortable is uncomfortable for a reason.

At the ropes course, we conceptualized the “Panic Zone,” a space so far out of the comfort zone that the participant cannot learn, they are in fight or flight mode. While

challenge course philosophy is based on refinement of practice and pop psychology more than scientific studies, I find it useful. The uncomfortable is not the same as shock; it is not the same as trauma. It uses the familiar and makes it unfamiliar; it doesn't detonate the world. It circumscribes another red line, one that it approaches but does not cross.

Comfort Zone | The uncomfortable | "Panic" Zone ⁷

^ HERE is where my writing lives

The "Panic Zone" is personal; it either points to the place where I shut down or where I believe the audience shuts down. I can never declare that I've achieved universal audience discomfort, nor would I want to. Later, when I discuss audience discomfort, the perpetual caveat is *this is what I believe they find uncomfortable*.

I have both a respect and an aesthetic resistance to playwrights such as Sarah Kane and Maria Irene Fornes who find the line between discomfort and panic in order to cross it. When discussing these playwrights with my MFA colleague David Turkel, he describes their work as, "finding that ("Panic Zone") line and crossing it, and then going a mile down the road to show that something else happens in that space." In *Dogfuckers*, none of the characters actually have sex with dogs; nor does the play side with someone morally

⁷ I also recognize that trauma, or the permanent/semi-permanent damage may live on the same spectrum and may not be entirely contained in the "Panic Zone." The negotiation of trauma is a much larger discussion and outside for the parameters of this thesis. A more appropriate model may be something like this:

Comfort Zone | The uncomfortable | "Panic" Zone | Trauma

I recognize, as well, that these are greatly simplified models, and are more useful in understanding my writing impulses than diagnostic.

repugnant⁸. In *She Gets Naked in the End*, despite the fact that so much of the play operates in the violence of a heterosexist, patriarchal world, the female characters avoid sexual assault.

Unlike far too many gay love stories, Otis doesn't actually die in *Third Street*.

I believe there's greater impact to be had by making the familiar unfamiliar, by weirding or queering form or content. Some people will shut off, of course – we all draw different lines – but there's a seduction that happens when we are dared to go as close to our personal lines as we can.

Before I move forward, I also want to articulate what I see to be difference between the uncomfortable, discomfort, and risk.

Although I will continue to use these terms interchangeably, the definition and connotation that I mean is more approximate to **the uncomfortable**. Uncomfortable, being an adjective, describes; the uncomfortable is a momentary state of being. "I am uncomfortable" suggests impermanence: *I will not be uncomfortable forever, merely right now*. Discomfort, by being a noun, connotes something solid, possibly permanent. Shame and humiliation live in the term "discomfort," while embarrassment and vulnerability live in the term "the uncomfortable."

"Risk" is a term associated with the uncomfortable. To take off your clothes risks judgment, and this is uncomfortable. To leave your clothes off for twenty minutes is not a risk, it is uncomfortable. The risk in pursuing audience discomfort is that they may leave, particularly if a play pushes them into the Panic Zone. I don't *risk* audience discomfort, I actively seek audience discomfort.

⁸ Describing *Dogfuckers* as not delivering on a promise, one of my students wrote a short piece in which a blogger vividly describes how to fuck dogs. He was, in effect, showing me the major line that I consciously did not cross.

I am not *risking* being uncomfortable with my writing. I am uncomfortable. I am risking being judged, and that is uncomfortable.

MY RELATIONSHIP TO THE UNCOMFORTABLE AND RISK

I live a boring life. I take few risks. I have anxiety. I follow rules.

My writing is where I break rules. It's where I'm free to explore my own nightmares, where I fuck with form or explore content that others may not like. If I'm not working in that space, I get bored. The writing dies.

This is the place where all that rule breaking I avoid in my life takes over. My struggle is to keep those anxieties away from my writing.

When I pursue the uncomfortable, however, I become excited. I flirt with my own Panic Zones.

Fellow graduate student Jess Hutchinson remarked once that I'd dared myself to write a play with the title *She Gets Naked in the End*, that for me, writing is a game of truth or dare. She is right.

THIRD STREET

BACKGROUND: *SHANE OF THIRD STREET*

Once upon a time, the summer before I entered the MFA Program at UT Austin, and a year and half before I started work on *Third Street*, Acme Theatre Company commissioned me to write a one-act.

Acme Theatre is a Davis, California,-based company that equally prioritizes acting and technical theatre. The company is run by high school students with an adult Artistic Director to oversee and mentor them. They were producing Mary Zimmerman's *Secret in the Wings* as their mainstage summer show, and Emily Henderson, their Artistic Director, felt that it was too short for a full night of theatre. Moreover, she had a number of strong male actors who were not getting parts. The commission had the following components:

- the play should be in conversation aesthetically with *Secret in the Wings*⁹.
- it would be about 25 minutes
- it would contain strong parts for males
- it needed between 8 and 15 roles for the high schoolers.

Nowhere in this commission was the limitation that I subsequently placed on myself: the play needed to be “appropriate” for the high school students. No curse words or nudity.

⁹ *Secret in the Wings* is composed of numerous western fairy tales soldered together by a male storyteller telling tales to distract a young girl. At the end, it's revealed that this storyteller is a little boy dreaming the stories, and the little girl is his mother. For Shane, I drew upon themes of fairy tales, multiple realities, and the imaginary.

No sexual content or violence. An aesthetic adhering to a moral code appropriate for public school.

Acme is independent, unaffiliated with any other institution. Over the years, they've produced such plays as *Joined at the Head*, *God's Country*, *The Laramie Project*, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, *The Water Children*, and *Women of Lockerbie*. They've embraced plays about cancer, hate groups, gay bashing, suicide, abortion, and terrorism. Their motto is "Serious theatre... for the fun of it."

At no point did Emily list a system of values to which the one-act needed to adhere. I imagined the limitations.

Emily and I had worked together for many years, so some of these limitations were what I imagined she was entrusting me with; mainly they were based on the fact that I was writing for young people and for their parents and family, who make up most of the audience. I also censored myself because I was writing for my hometown community – for people I know and work with, including the librarian community and members of the City Council, and not my queer friends and fellow writers.

My sense of the artists I was serving and my audience translated into massive amounts of self-censorship.¹⁰ This set boundaries in which I believed I had to operate, outlining a comfort zone, where the writing would be inoffensive and innocuous.

¹⁰ This self-censorship is interesting given my history with the company. The company is funded by a summer teaching program in which the high schoolers direct younger actors in short plays. One of my formidable theatrical experiences was directing a gender-reversed version of *Tom Sawyer* with junior-high-aged actors, which includes a kissing scene. The (now identifying as genderqueer) actor playing Tom read as male, so the theatre-goers of Davis were treated to a gay, junior high Tom Sawyer kissing "Thatcher." That no one complained may reveal that my concerns about Davis audience discomfort may be exaggerated.

And at first, this choked my creative process. I stared at empty pages for hours, and immediately threw away whatever I came up with. The inoffensive and innocuous was deadly boring at best, largely stupid, and inaccessible and inarticulate at worst. I couldn't for the life of me write a word of the play that I didn't hate.

As the deadline loomed, I started to push against myself. The writing began to subvert my self-censorship. While I still adhered to the boundaries as a sort of no-fly Panic Zone – no explicit curse words, for example – I actively engaged with those boundaries. My creative process found its engine in the space between comfort / complacency and overt rebellion. I could write. I could write well, and quickly. I felt electric. I had both a drive and a structure.

Much of this project seed remained in the full-length version of *Third Street*.

In the one-act *Shane of Third Street*, Shane battles the imaginary Lord Pain as he trains for the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in a crap-filled alley. Otis, one of the neighborhood toughies, shows up in the alley, tweaked out on energy drinks and begging for his help. Otis claims that dinosaurs pursue him. We see the bullies that Shane had previously converted into his imaginary foes; they abuse Otis. Then we meet Otis's younger sibling, who reveals the awful world that Otis actually occupies. As he's about to exit, Otis's sibling appears to be a dinosaur, and Otis's imaginary world enters Shane's. A few beats later, there's a roar as another, massive dinosaur (or possibly dragon) attacks. Shane stabs this dinosaur. Otis knights Shane, and they become friends.

Instead of the curse words that frequent my other plays, I found the so-called acceptable substitutions. I let "crap" and "hell" into the play, despite or possibly because of the fact that people like my mother consider these curse words. Instead of "fucker" or

something similar that would have been in that locus of shock for the parents of the high schoolers, Marie calls her brother a “buttmunch” and Otis’s sibling calls him “buttwad.” Characters chant at Shane, “You suck suck suck suck.” This contains the intent of cursing, but is less likely to be censored. This semi-coarse language became a driving force, forming the tone, which in turn helps to create the world, of the play.

More importantly, I knew that under the surface of a play about imaginary knights and dinosaurs, real and dark things were living. That Shane wants to be a knight is a childish fantasy (which I point to in the full-length version when Shane’s sister Marie tells him to “grow up”); Shane’s fantasies, however, hide his isolation and loneliness. On the surface, Otis is chased by nonexistent dinosaurs, but his situation is much more dire and real; there’s something sinister and terrifying following him around. He hasn’t slept for days. He shoplifts energy drinks from the CVS.

Children’s storybooks, like the ones Otis holds, are often used for escapism and comfort. Children disappear into fantasies of knights like Shane not because they’re thinking about the chamber pots launched from windows and cholera and the Plague, but to escape into the familiar. My project became to make these stories strange and unsettling. This altered intent provided the creative inspiration and energy to write the play. I created an imaginary pool of ‘acceptable’ innocuous subject material, and used it to mask, and the mask to reveal an intense story of two lonely boys dealing with adult issues. I wasn’t hiding from dark issues; rather I was hiding dark issues in plain sight.

Take the following scene, which was used almost verbatim in the full-length version:

YOUNG DINOSAUR: Dude, Otis, you look like crap on crap.

OTIS: Careful. She'll rip your face off.

SHANE: It's a kid. She knows your name --

YOUNG DINOSAUR: Buttwad. The old man wants to know if you stole his smokes.

OTIS: ... I didn't steal nothing.

YOUNG DINOSAUR: If you don't tell me where the smokes are, the old man's gonna put all your stuff out in the yard again.

OTIS: Yeah. So?

YOUNG DINOSAUR: Then he's gonna set it on fire. And mom says she's gonna feed your goldfish to Bruno. She's gonna fry it on the stove until his eyeballs pop and then feed it to bad old Bruno, and you wouldn't like that not at all.

OTIS: Why would I hide the smokes? Let him get cancer.

YOUNG DINOSAUR: Sizzle sizzle pop pop.

OTIS: Check under the sofa. The one in the kitchen.

YOUNG DINOSAUR: Yeah okay.

OTIS: What's the old man say? Can I come home –

YOUNG DINOSAUR: The old one says, “Tell that little punk he can rot out there.” (P. 14-15)

The serious awfulness in his life is accessed through wordplay and hidden behind the lightness of the speech.

In *Shane of Third Street*, there is the story on the surface, then the apparent story under the surface, then one more story, one I kept to myself, a closeted story.

Shane and Otis are secretly gay.

I'd coded it into the play as best I could: a queen character speaks like a drag queen; Shane is called “Princess” and other feminizing terms; Lord Pain is described as “beautiful;” bullies tell Otis, “Don't sit like that. You look like a chick” (P.12); Otis is kicked out and homeless, like many queer youth; I intentionally used the insult, “You suck” (P.2) because it derives from the homophobic, “You suck dick;” and so on.

And the coding also provided me an impulse towards creation. I could write in the excitement of tricking the audience into viewing a gay play. But to bring the queerness out and make it overt, well, I wasn't ready for that.

It's scary to be out when writing a piece for high school students. I was afraid of being called a pervert, or that this would reveal that I'm the pervert the internalized homophobia told me that I am. I was afraid that the cast, particularly the boys playing Shane and Otis, would rebel against the play. I was afraid of disobeying the imaginary constraints I'd placed on myself.

I grew up without gay role models or even gay stories. The only gay stories I saw involved men dying from AIDS or pedophilic priests¹¹. While in recent years, positive portrayals have entered popular media, there are still spaces where gays rarely appear, and theatre for young audiences is one of those spaces.

When you carve off a specific piece of yourself, like your sexual identity, and put it on stage, people may read that specific part of you as the whole you. They may be more inclined to see you, not a character, in that role. They may see an agenda of indoctrination and seduction of young people (which is stupid) or of gay acceptance and queer normality (which is true).

I was afraid that people would see me as acting out wish-fulfillment through the young people in the cast, living a sort of love story that I have never experienced. I was afraid of the audience seeing my narrative wishes and mistaking them for my actual wishes. I was afraid of the audience seeing my narrative wishes and dismissing them as simply narrative wishes, instead of seeing a story. I was afraid of all of this being true, and being judged for it being true.

So I avoided the queerness of the story.

But I wasn't satisfied.

¹¹ Who are generally not gay, but were seen as gay.

I wasn't satisfied because I'd reproduced a closet that I wish to destroy for myself and for society. I want no one to be shamed or to feel ashamed for who they are.

I wanted to out the character. But I also didn't want to out the character. I wasn't comfortable outing the character.

Then I went to grad school, and made it a personal mission to work in territory that wasn't comfortable for me.

So I had to make *Third Street*, and feed that part of myself to the whale.

THE PROCESS FOR *THIRD STREET*

Until *Third Street*, I'd written my plays alone in my room or in a café. I'd many false starts resulting in aborted drafts. After workshops in which I heard these read, the best would go to actors. Few people saw pieces in early gestation. Most work I shared had gone through an extensive, inefficient, and self-protecting culling process. When I hit a point where the play felt like crap, I'd kill it.

I intended for the *Third Street* process to throw me out of this inefficient and overly self-protective habit.

Benajmn the director and I set out to create both a playscript that could be produced elsewhere and a process we could use to build other pieces of theatre. We'd taken a class on Applied Drama and Theatre, an approach that uses theatre in nontheatrical settings or with non-theatrical participants, and we borrowed ADT techniques for our process. We wanted to make a play with a large number of actors where the process of creating it would itself be a) educational b) create community and c) still result in a play with a single artistic vision.

Working on a play with a group of folks provides a certain kind of protection. While discord is possible in collaboration, you have less ownership of failure. Actors become co-writers and dramaturgs.

While this protection insulated me from some of the anxieties of writing, it also created many. Instead of asking myself, for example, what characters belong or don't belong in the world, the process forced me to figure *how* each character would enter the world. A fortune-teller character that emerged during an improvisation exercise needed to earn its place in the play to fulfill our dual mission.

More importantly, the traditional workshop process had protected me from revealing my bad writing. I could throw writing away and pretend it never existed. In the *Third Street* process, I couldn't bring in a third draft pretending it was the first. I had to bring in everything. I had to make things on the fly. A group depended on me, on my abilities to write. For someone who throws away so much material, the demand to write and the requirement that this writing be shared is excruciatingly uncomfortable.

All of this discomfort excited me. I maintained control of the text, certainly, but I was also letting go of control. I was feeding a piece of myself to the whale.

DISCOMFORT AND ACTORS

We selected our cast through a nontraditional audition process, one in which we had those auditioning quickly collaborate to devise a piece based on a monologue. We followed this with the reading of sides.

Although we cast to avoid actors for whom this process was far out of their comfort zone, the fact that we had to select based on nontraditional criteria shows how challenging

our process could be for actors. We were asking them to invent a world, to interpret a script not just for what was there but what could be there. Actors who may have preferred to spend the rehearsal period figuring out a set character, deepening and exploring this person, would be unable to do so (except for the three leads we pre-cast – Shane, Marie, and Otis).

A script can be viewed as a contract, an agreement that “this is the thing that we are making.” We look to the script to find textual support to justify design/tech/direction choices. This places power in the playwright’s hand. A director’s power, in addition to making decisions that interpret the play, is the power to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a script. Similarly much of the actor’s power can come from whether to audition for a piece, and whether to say, ‘yes,’ when a part is offered¹². The script therefore becomes a contract, with an actor agreeing to say the lines and play the action in this play; if the actor finds the play objectionable, the actor declines the role.

With a new work, an actor does not have the play as a contract that outlines what he or she will do. When working in a generative process like the one we used to build *Third Street*, there’s even less foreknowledge of what will be required. Moreover, I retained creative control, so this generative process was not democratic, thus putting the actor in an even more precarious position. *In Third Street, the actors were working without the script as a contract.*

Further complicating this was the then-possibility that the lead characters would be queer, something I did not share with the cast.

We were starting from a closeted script, and I was unprepared to talk about my feelings that the characters were secretly gay. I was afraid for every single reason listed above

¹² Of course, the economic realities of an actor can make it rare to refuse to say ‘yes.’

– that the actors would leave, that they would judge me, that I would judge myself. I was afraid because sexuality makes me uncomfortable.

And not having a finished script meant that I could continue to duck the queerness. I could write a play in which straight audience members – and actors – read the narrative in one manner, and queer audience members read the gay coding and see a different story.

Then the gift happened: *The cast found the queerness of the characters themselves.*

Ben and I had set up an activity to start the conversation on gender in traditional narratives. On that day, half of the cast was missing, and we had only one female member in attendance. I told them, “I think that Shane thinks he’s on a hero’s journey, but he’s actually in a ‘damsels in distress’ narrative.” We created poster dialogues wherein the group identified different stories with hero’s journeys and damsels narratives. We discussed elements in each. Then, we asked the ensemble to devise a piece in which someone thinks they’re going on a hero’s journey, but learns that it’s a damsels narrative.

The group, aware the piece could become part of *Third Street*, cast the play’s leads – Cameron (Shane) and Luke (Otis) – as the questing heroes. Their devised piece: Cameron and Luke are in a tournament, and they tie. A king tells them to go on a quest to defeat a hydra. Along the way, they bicker, sparring back and forth, and then they meet the hydra...

At this point, the ensemble halted and asked themselves if they needed a princess. They realized that they didn’t. They realized that the hydra could injure Luke – Luke would be a metaphorical damsel – and Cameron, as the questing hero, would save him. And why would Cameron’s hero save this damsel? *Because he loved him.*

They rehearsed this scene three times before presenting it to us, and with each rehearsal, Cameron and Luke, Shane and Otis, became more and more comfortable with each other. On the final run, they were in each other's arms.

They'd tackled the task with sincerity, and in doing so, they discovered the queerness of the play, and they had brought it out into the open.

This play wouldn't be closeted.

It wouldn't have a straight audience who thought it was a straight buddy play and a gay audience who suspected that, like *The Importance of Being Ernest*, the play is actually about boys who like boys.

I'd worried that members of the ensemble would quit when they learned that they were in a gay play. The ensemble not only consented, they dragged me into the queerness.

I took this story and built it into the architecture of the play, borrowing a few lines and modeling the quest section on their devised piece. The hydra they'd created became the many-headed dragon, and this many-headed dragon chants all of the awful things that Otis and Shane had heard in their lives. Shane wields his sword, but the play isn't about wielding a sword, the play is about a boy who cares for another boy, it's about embracing that part of yourself that others pick on, and so Shane sings the song he'd been forced to sing at the beginning. He sings *I'm a little teapot*.

Then...

And then...

I realized that Shane needed to wake Otis with a kiss. This corresponded to the climactic moment in the devising activity, and besides, the architecture was already in the play. Otis is like Sleeping Beauty, and Sleeping Beauty is woken with a kiss.

And suddenly, I was uncomfortable in the process again. The ensemble had given me the gift of outing the play, but Cameron and Luke had certainly never signed on to play a part with a gay kiss. It wasn't part of the contract.

I sat down with Cameron and Luke to talk about their characters. I uneasily asked about the kiss. They looked at each other. No hesitation. Of course, they said, they would kiss.

And then, *Third Street* became a play about a kiss. At that moment, in the play, as in the process, all of the fantasies and nightmares fall away. At that moment, the play reveals what it actually is.

And it's a play for high schoolers.

THE PRODUCT

In the same way that *Shane of Third Street* operates, the full-length *Third Street* looks to the boundaries of comfort and panic, and reinvents itself in the in-between.

The initial reading-performance¹³ was for the Cohen New Works Festival, in which mostly UT graduates, undergraduates, faculty, and staff would see it. The use of the word “fuck” and adult material that would have garnered scrutiny and censorship in a high school context were not forbidden, or even spaces of tension. That said, the world of the play remained on the adult side of TYA. *Third Street*, we discovered while devising, didn't want traditional curse words. It wanted the language of “buttmunch,” schoolyard insults, words

¹³ Our process did not demand that the actors get off book. We wanted the flexibility to change the script as long as possible. We also wanted to represent the process, which involved movement and stage pictures and soundscaping, and we didn't want to rely on a traditional music-stand reading. This resulted in a reading-performance hybrid.

weighted the same or similar to cursing. The world would be (in film terms) PG, skittering under, though not quite reaching PG-13.

The reality of *Third Street* is not a safe world. It is not an easy world. Shane lives with a single mother who cries on Valentine's Day. A group of neighborhood bullies – including a football player / son of the landlord – force him to sing *I'm a Little Teapot*. This is a suburb that the housing bubble burst and consumed. Shane is not practicing in a sandlot or local park – he's practicing in a crap-filled alley.

In this world, there should be some danger. A crap-filled alley has sharp edges. People can slip through the cracks and be lost. Money is not there to solve problems. The fantasy into which Shane disappears and the nightmares that chase Otis reveal a hard world. Like the one-act, these are familiar tropes placed in darker contexts.

As the full-length progresses, the two systems of fantasy and nightmare overlap and slip into the real world; Otis's nightmare infects Shane's fantasies, and these in turn affect how the reality appears. By building these multiple systems that collide, I'd hoped to prevent audience foreknowledge of what would happen in the play, I'd hoped to keep the play shifting under the audience's feet.

And then there's the kiss.

Third Street is about that kiss, what it means to the characters and story and how it shifts the perception of the audience. At that moment, every single device – the layers of language, the layers of fantasy and nightmare – all of it falls away. Before that moment, Shane uses language like this:

“when you're begging me, knees on the floor, face the color of rotten eggs, I'll say, no, let my sister go on dialysis. See how beloved she is with a bag of pee strapped to her. And they'll ask, why, why would you be so cruel?” (P.54)

And after that moment, his longest line is, “Let’s get you off the street. You need sleep” (P. 128). The latter line is direct, sans metaphor or ornamentation. It has only nine words. I tried to add fancy words in the early drafts, but the scene never sounded right. When the play reveals the story it’s actually telling, the text hides nothing behind language.

My own journey of outing the characters, as well as the ensemble’s journey in discovering the play, became the central turn in the play.

For many, seeing two males kiss is uncomfortable, so much so that the audience for queer theatre becomes self-selecting. The play is for a mixed audience, both queers/allies and the heteronormative alike, however, and so it creates a double audience.

One audience is those who can spot the coding in the play. They may read the references to “princess” and “rent, rent, rent,” and hear that Shane named his sword, not after a woman, but “Brock,” a name associated with masculinity, and see the gay play. The kiss confirms their suspicions.

Then there’s the other audience, the one for whom the kiss is a surprise, or twist: the predominantly straight audience, accustomed to seeing narrative for and about straight people.

I was conscious that I was taking a familiar form and building certain expectations. Knighthood is associated with masculinity, and that masculinity is iconic in participating in the heterosexual matrix. The quest narrative is associated with the masculine. Traditionally, the heroes on the hero’s journey are male. At the end of the journey, they receive a reward, usually in the form of a female¹⁴.

¹⁴ *The Odyssey* being the prime example.

The play could hide in the closet because many narratives are built through a heteronormative lens, whereby the assumption is that the central character is straight until proven queer. Gay characters are sidekicks in these plays, unless the story tells you right off that he or she is LGBT.

I intend for the play to teach its straight audience to expect what they've been trained is normal at first – two boys becoming friends. This lives in their comfort zone. The kiss pulls this audience back to reveal the larger landscape; they are not in their normal, they are in a queer normal.

Although for this audience, the kiss is a “twist” and therefore a trick, never do the characters express desire for someone of the opposite sex. As mentioned, I worked to code the play as gay. My hope is that the narrative still works, that the kiss is organic to the play even the second time straight folks see it.

Third Street had a handful of readings for the Cohen New Works Festival. We packed the audience in.

The entire ensemble knew that we needed to keep the kiss as secret as we could. We didn't even discuss this narrative need. We knew it.

The Festival provided feedback ‘flystrips,’ in which audience members can jot down their reactions. We de-emphasized these (and requested that they be cleared) for two reasons. One is that we didn't want the kiss revealed. The other is that we were not interested in providing a space for anonymous commentary. *Third Street* is not a YouTube video. If people did not like that boys kiss boys, *we were courting that discomfort.*

This festival included a number of pieces depicting same-sex attraction, including *Colossal*, the ‘gay football play’ by Andrew Hinderaker, two dance pieces with queer themes, and a reading of a play about a young gay man. Only *Third Street* had a same-sex kiss fully staged. In *Colossal*, the male couple sleeps together offstage, but we never see their affection.

This highlights that while gay characters may be entering the mainstream, there is still something unnerving, still something forbidden about seeing them kiss. It wasn’t my imagination or internalized homophobia, but something real.

Or perhaps it wasn’t real, at least not as directly real at UT as we and the other Cohen New Works Festival artists thought. Although we were highly successful in creating the double audience – members of our audience reported that they did not see the kiss coming, which means that we’d used their sense of the familiar to crack their narrative expectations – we only heard or saw a handful of gasps and giggles or other indicators of audience discomfort. We did see them, though.

Six months or so after the Cohen New Works Festival, *Third Street* received a chance for another staged reading: this one at the UIL Conference. UIL brings high school theatremakers from all over Texas to UT. The organizers needed to fill a couple theatres, so we lucked into a reading. As even more luck would have it, *Third Street* was moved into the Payne Theatre, a massive venue, for two readings that reached a total of between five and six hundred students. They had no way of knowing what it was about. Neither their parents nor their teachers knew the content.

When put in front of the audience for which it was hypothetically intended, but not actually created, all of the ways that the play had been in a theoretical zone of discomfort

were thrust upon me. I was extraordinarily uncomfortable with the dick jokes and when Shane refers to his sister as “The Accidental Pregnancy” (P. 56). It was glorious.

When the kiss happened, giggles erupted in the Payne.

Maybe the giggles were a product of anxiety, laughter masking the uncomfortable. I like to think that.

In Texas, a state where I can’t get married, *Third Street* bypassed all of the traditional gatekeepers who may have been even more uncomfortable than the high school students at seeing the kiss. In Texas, five hundred high school students saw two boys kiss, many of them probably for the first time.

I’ve written plays titled *Dogfuckers*, *Dammed*, and *She Gets Naked in the End*. And yet the play that I believe is the most controversial, the play that is most subversive, is *Third Street*, which has not a single ‘fuck’ in it. Controversy depends on audience.

A play that started as a closeted one-act, then became a play about a kiss revealing dual audiences, turned into something else at that moment in the Payne. *Third Street* became about that event itself. Our subversive act was sneaking a gay play with a gay kiss about two gay boys into a theatre full of Texan high school students.

I was in college before I saw two males kiss. I remember when I met an older gay male, how I felt surprised; I had unconsciously believed that all queer men of a certain age were dead of AIDS, pedophilic priests, or at least closeted, as these were the stories I had from the media growing up. We presented an alternative to these narratives to young people. I made myself uncomfortable in doing so, and we leaned into the institutional discomfort that makes queer theatre for youth controversial, and a social discomfort that prevented me from having queer stories growing up, and we may have made a number of straight audience

members uncomfortable. We presented a story about two lonely gay boys finding each other, a story that I needed when I was young, a story I still need.

FAILURES AND WEAKNESSES

I would like to acknowledge some weaknesses of the play.

The script is not impossible to take it apart, and should you judge the dramaturgy of a play based on how unified it feels, this play does not qualify as well made. Shane's sister Marie's journey, for example, can be excised, as can the fortune-teller's scenes.

I am not sure if this play should be in front of *junior* high school audiences, at least in its current form. The kiss is still the heart of the play, and I believe that's valuable for all audiences to experience. There's a great deal of bullying and jokes at Shane's expense, and these scenes are dwarfed in importance compared to the issues of being an LGBTQYA play. I wouldn't want a young audience to leave with new ways of insulting and torturing each other.

The original commission's mission of creating a play with strong roles for boys is still realized in the full-length version. Unfortunately, the women have largely auxiliary roles although *Third Street* concerns itself with gender. I've had to reconcile that this play is largely about those two boys finding each other and vow to write future plays that follow female journeys.

Finally, this play reproduces an aspect of *Sleeping Beauty* that I find problematic: when you kiss a dead person, you're not getting consent.

SUCSESSES AND STRENGTHS

From our process, I have a great sense of the world of the play, and I know that it can be elastic. I can bend the play around to satisfy different needs for individual audiences, and I can cut pieces off without losing the play. I can tighten it. I can lengthen it. What matters to me is simple: there are two boys; one seeks knighthood; the other flees dinosaurs. One is consumed by a dark and metaphysical world, the other hesitates to save him. They fall for each other.

Prior to *Third Street*, I'd largely resisted traditional happy endings. Traditional happy endings represented an optimism that I found heterosexist. I can't stand Shakespeare romances and plays or film/television that operate with the same logic – that two attractive straight people will end up together by virtue of the fact that they are straight people. Rarely, and only recently, could you find mainstream out queer narratives that didn't end with someone heartbroken or dead. I certainly didn't know any growing up.

I was scared to make a traditional happy ending. I didn't trust them. Few things made me more uncomfortable than to risk sentimentality.

And this play risks sentimentality. It has a happy ending. I count that as one of my greatest successes.

SHE GETS NAKED IN THE END

On its surface, it would appear that *She Gets Naked in the End* carves off less of my own life than *Third Street*. After all, *Third Street* is about a queer male, and *She Gets Naked in the End* is about a powerful, closeted woman who (almost preternaturally) controls a bar through the desire of others. I am an out queer male, neither magical, closeted, nor a woman. *Third Street*, however, primarily uses my own narrative desires, that of having had a queer fairy tale with a happy ending. *She Gets Naked* hides me better because SHE is a she, but I am there. In *Third Street*, I expose only my wishes; it is *She Gets Naked in the End* where I expose myself.

BACKGROUND

Once upon a time, MFA actor Liz Kimball sent me an email saying, “I want to work with you.” Soon after, I took the playwriting workshop with Steven Dietz in which I generated a handful of story starters. From these seedlings, I selected *She Gets Naked in the End* to grow into our project, and I got to work.

I started with the title and voice. *She Gets Naked in the End*: a title with an explicit promise that translates into a personal dare to write a play that delivers on that promise. The

voice: a close third person narrated by the protagonist, a convention borrowed from prose fiction¹⁵.

From there, I drafted a play, had several readings with friends, and then put the play through the Professional Development Workshop with Liz Kimball in the leading role.

Later, I had a workshop production with Barnyard Theatre to better understand the world of the play, discover what it looks like, and to collaborate with friends in my artistic home.

In *She Gets Naked in the End*, “She” (whom we later learn is named Elle) goes into a bar called the Copper Hog every night so that men will hit on her. She destroys those who take liberties. One night, a woman from her past shows up. Alex, now a Roseville mom, wants to run away with Elle, taking her from the Copper Hog where she is powerful. Alex’s presence tosses Elle into memories of her intense and terrifying childhood with parents who bickered and eventually killed each other, and her young romance with Alex. Unable to convince Elle to leave the Copper Hog on her own, Alex bashes a pool cue into a table and gets them both kicked out. As Elle is about to stalk off, they see Scott, who’d hit on them all night, killed by a car. The impact of this knocks the narrative into the future – we learn that Elle will make peace with her dead father when she saves a boy, that she’ll witness the burning of the Copper Hog, and that Alex will return home and die. The story returns to the night at the Copper Hog, and Scott’s death has changed Elle. She takes Alex home with her. We learn that Elle will later return to the memory of this night, she will touch herself and discover cancer, and that this discovery will be the great gift that Alex gives him.

¹⁵ Close third person doesn’t always mean an implicit “I,” though it is occasionally used in this manner. I was inspired by Goldberry Long’s *Juniper Tree Burning*, which uses a close third as an implicit first so the protagonist can distance herself from herself.

PERSONAL DISCOMFORT

The generative process was simple: I wanted to write a play that cost me something. I would follow the title and the voice. This provided one of the most fluid first-draft-writing experiences I have ever had. But the kernel of the play was that I'd go where I was most uncomfortable. I was feeding myself to that whale, hoping the gods of writing would take notice. I would make myself naked.

Growing up, I was fat. The stretch marks across my stomach are still visible, like tiger stripes of scar tissue. When I started to write *She Gets Naked*, I wanted my shame to make its way into the play. Remnants of my body shame still live in the text – Elle's mother calling her fat, and the fact that Elle doesn't shower at school. It's a writer's cliché to say that often a play's original image is written out of it, and this is no exception: later drafts largely eliminated Elle's body shame, though the results are still threaded into the play. What lives in the play is the title – *She Gets Naked in the End* because no one sees Brian Oglesby naked. Tiger stripes. It may be invisible, but this play doesn't exist without me having been a fat kid.

I am a queer writer, but I am a minority in the community. As of this writing, I am a virgin. Casual encounters have never interested me – Craigslist, Grindr, and glory holes are cliché and dangerous and sad – and everyone who has seen me naked has rejected me. It makes me uncomfortable to admit this; it is also empowering to take pride in my virginity, as public pride prevents private shame. This complicated ethos informs the plays queerness.

The play generates from my anxieties about sex, the tension between being a sexual being and a lack-of-sexual being. In *She Gets Naked in the End*, empowerment does not come through sexual consummation, as the case with many traditional radical queers, but through the denial of sex. Elle has never had sex because virginity can be empowering.

I use this, my personal discomfort with my body, with my sexuality, with sexuality in general, for *She Gets Naked*. I also use a more specific moment and relationship to structure the play:

When I was in high school, I fell in love with my friend Carl. We had one of those complicated things that queer people have when you add possibly mutual feelings to the fact of being closeted to yourselves and to each other, a painful non-relationship relationship we nearly consummated. He was the first to see me naked, and to reject me, and this happened at the same time. The play comes from that moment in our relationship.

I articulated the feeling of rejection in *Dogfucker*, when the character Dirt says, “They see, like a part of me, a thing. They do not want this thing. There is something wrong with this thing” (*Dogfuckerrrs* 68). Elle shows Alex a part of herself – her family, her desire, her body:

SHE: Let’s say she lets Alex undress her.

(Alex doesn’t undress HER.)

Let’s say that she’s naked.

(ALEX sees HER. ALEX can’t keep going.)

SHE (young): Alex?

ALEX (young): Uh...

SHE (young): Alex? What’s (wrong)?

ALEX (young): I’m sorry. Sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry.

SHE (young): Sorry?

ALEX (young): Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. This isn’t what I want. You’re not what I want.

SHE (young): No. I am. We’re. We’re. Both --

ALEX (young): We’re friends, not -- I’m Alexandra Lopez de Vaca. I’m descended from royalty. I’m supposed to be-- Javier spent \$2500 on the ring. I’m supposed to be—I can’t give that up --

SHE (young): But I’m I’m I’m

ALEX (young): You’re nothing, Elle. I can’t be what you are. I can’t be -- I can’t, I can’t, I can’t -- You’re nothing. Just someone who -- I need to call my family.

SHE (young): Have a good life.

ALEX (young): I love you.

SHE: Fuck you. (P. 201-202)

Any piece of writing is imbedded with both the unconscious and the conscious of the writer. My relationship with my body, virginity, and Carl were not unconscious motivations for *She Gets Naked*; I was fully conscious that these inspired the play.

And I know that there's something uncomfortable about my revealing this source to others. You can judge me not only in the way I was judged and deemed undesirable before, but also for the act of revealing it.

Why did I use it? Why do I admit to using it? Maybe you've felt rejection, too. Maybe you've felt shame about your body (or your past, your family). Here. I wrote a play for you¹⁶.

And if you haven't? Then you feel the awkwardness of holding my rejection in your hands. So long as you hold it, I don't have to.

AUDIENCE DISCOMFORT

In *She Gets Naked in the End*, I lean into the grotesque. I run after harshness. Elle has a hard life. At every turn, the worst happens. The play needed to be relentless and exhausting for the characters and the actors and the audience, with the only lighter moments to be when Elle and Alex are together – a kiss in the house, a touch in a locker room or a car-ride.

The language is coarse. My mother and many members of my theatre company do not like curse words, so the play's language is an aesthetic resistance to what my immediate community finds comfortable. I even based the definition of 'curse word' on what my mother did not allow in the house. When I tally *She Gets Naked's* curse words, I get the

¹⁶ My student, Christopher Tacderas, recently quipped, "It's odd that we find comfort in people's discomfort. It's just nice to know that people can feel shitty, just like we do sometimes. Everybody poops, and everybody can feel poopy."

following: 27 “shits,” 27 “fucks,” 2 “cunts,” 4 “craps,” 5 “hells” (only five?), 1 “cock,” 8 “asses,” 3 “tits,” 9 “bitches,” 1 “pussy,” and 2 “retarded.”

Some words I wield more comfortably than others. “Fuck” and “shit” I am more than happy to toss off by the dozen, as these words are innocuously devoid of a specific target. I don’t mind wielding their power. Words violent against women, mainly, “bitch,” “cunt,” and “pussy,” I want to scrub from casual conversation, so these I use few and far between. They are part of this world, however, and unavoidable.¹⁷

The uncomfortable isn’t reserved for language. Language illustrates a harsher world. Some characters are racist, particularly Elle’s mother, Dee-Dee, a Southern woman fallen from wealth and desires to feel superior. As I revised the play and decided that Alex would be Latina, the Dee-Dee’s racism evolved from a character trait into a force keeping Alex and Elle apart¹⁸.

The project of this play is to reproduce a vile and violent world, one in which people do, indeed, say terrible things, one in which the bad guys are not simply people who fail at being perfect allies (which is often the case in academia), but people with actual demons. These demons may be internal or external, but they are there. Part of the project is the recognition that people who say and do vile things are humans, too.

Scenes veered into the emotionally harshest territory I could find, frequently to the point of being cartoonish. For example, Elle’s mother and father are in an abusive

¹⁷ A related side note: during the rehearsals for *She Gets Naked in the End*, I saw the power of reclaiming language, as the repetition of some words rendered them impotent for the female cast and crew. Alicia would casually refer to a moment as “the cuntlickers” scene, and the violence that that word carries with it vanished. Then, when presented to an audience, the violence of the word returned.

¹⁸ Dee-Dee’s racism results in the following moment of strangeness: a person of color playing a white woman calls a white-bodied actor playing a Latino a “damn spic.”)

relationship, where they say or do the worst thing they think of. Elle's mother screams, "your penis is broken" (P. 140) to her father. Sometimes they may leave these dark places, but they must go there first – Dad (Duke) comforts Dee-Dee when her face has been torn open, but does so after sarcastically saying, "You some brilliant woman" (P. 175) to rub it in. The tone of some of the scenes should be almost comical, scratching at nervous laughter. Take the following scene, when Elle's father has brought her to a bar while she's young:

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX): The fuck are you doing, bringin a kid in here?

FATHER (HE): Nah, she's alright, Addie. She's a midget.

SHE (young): (whispers) Dad.

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX): Go to hell.

FATHER (HE): Nah, she is, she is.

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX): To hell, Duke.

FATHER (HE): Her Momma died, you gonna send her out? I gotta talk a man about a thing, and you gonna throw her out, orphaned and grieving? Look at her, she's sad.

SHE (young): "Please. I'm sad."

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX): I got my eye on you, Duke. Don't try shit. (P. 159)

While some moments should be genuinely scary, and some moments genuinely sincere, many scenes stand in an awkward and uncomfortable space like this where the awful becomes cartoonish. Not only does this keep the play from getting dreary (I hope) and puts it into the heightened 'memory space,' it also allows for greater contrast to the sincere or scary moments.

One scene that I believe illustrates the unnerving swings into uncomfortable territory is below. This scene takes a familiar moment – the stereotypical awkwardness of a dad telling the facts-of-life to his kids – and turns into something much darker.

FATHER (HE): Look, chickadee.

SHE (young): Weird, Dad.

FATHER (HE): You're growing into a, you know, a woman. You have the, you know, period.
SHE (young): Oh god.
FATHER (HE): And your mom, that was her job, but, look. I see the way the men, they look at you, 'cause you're a pretty – you know – and I see – they offer you. "How much for the kid?"
Shit.
How much for the kid? Fuck.
It makes me so
(He punches the ceiling)
Ow.
SHE (young): Dad.
FATHER (HE): I'm going to show you something. Don't tell your mother.
(He looks around. He unzips his pants.)
SHE (young): Dad! This is gross, what is wrong with you?!
FATHER (HE): You're my daughter, and I'm going to show this to you.
SHE (young): Dad. Dad. What are you doing? Wait. Stop STOP!
(He opens his underwear. SHE gasps.)
FATHER (HE): See. See that?
SHE (young): Dad.
Did Mom do that?
FATHER (HE): That's not for you to know.
SHE: Oh. Dad.
FATHER (HE): I got this because I got fresh. I deserved it.
Listen, girly – listen, Elle. Before any man touches you, before anyone anyone anyone so much as SEES YOU, you make 'em pay. And not money. You can't be afraid to do that, understand?
SHE (young): Yes.
FATHER (HE): Good.
(He fixes his pants.)
SHE: Are you crying?
(Snap. We return to the bar.) (P. 164-165)

The scene turns from abuse with a reveal that her father's penis has been disfigured, and he's using this disfigurement to teach Elle a lesson about men – that she cannot be afraid to defend herself. And it turns again when Elle realizes her father is crying. For many, the father who abuses his daughter, of course, is dismissed without the possibility of redemption. A father who cries when he shows his disfigured penis to his daughter to teach

her to protect herself, that's an entirely different, more complicated thing. He may be right, and he's probably wrong, but the fact that it comes from a genuine attempt at being a good father, I hope, unsettles.

Although some people in Elle and Alex's world may be complicated, all still operate in a heterosexist paradigm, one in which both women deal with the worst of the male gaze and rape culture and heteronormativity on a daily basis. They do not occupy some sort of queer utopia, like Marin or Davis or Austin, and only when they are together do they have moments in a world outside of the patriarchy. I believe that this should be uncomfortable, not only because we want the characters to escape the Copper Hog and Orchard County, and they don't, but also because these represent a reality outside of my imagination.

Every one of the thirteen men in the play is played by a single male body – HE. Most of them are different versions of awful. One in particular threads himself throughout the play, Scott, the man who hits on both Elle and Alex in the Copper Hog. Scott is a single male whose casual misogyny manifests as being the kind of guy who blames women for not sleeping with him. He is the embodiment of rape culture, of male entitlement, of the masculine matrix. For many, this should be uncomfortable. Some, however, may identify with him. I hope they do, I hope they recognize themselves in him, or at least recognize that the play is attacking their impulses and privilege. Importantly, the play hits Scott, the most HE of all the 'hes,' with a truck and kills him. After Scott dies, HE is not allowed back into the play except as a voice.

The play is titled *She Gets Naked in the End*, and this title is a dare, but it's also an advertisement that promises female nudity, and that makes me uncomfortable, at first. It's about a woman whose body is an object of desire in a bar, and who destroys those who

presume that they should get what they want. When I staged this play with my company Barnyard Theatre, time after time I heard sexist comments from straight men. The title invited these comments. I heard men hope that we'd cast certain women in these parts. I heard them use the same kind of commodifying rhetoric that Scott and the other male characters deploy.

The play isn't about or for those men. It's about two women who love each other. The avatar of those men, the ones who come to see the show because it's titled *She Gets Naked in the End*, dies and leaves the stage permanently. I am uncomfortable with the sexist behavior from these men, I am uncomfortable with a title that invites sexist comments, and I hope that these men are uncomfortable seeing themselves killed and tossed out of the play. Instead, the play wants to show a kind of female sexuality, the kind that remains closeted until later in life for those who live in worlds in which creating a new world is impossible.

Beyond the uncomfortable content – representing a coarse, harsh, and dangerous world, a heterosexist world that then kills the male representation of rape culture – the play's form makes the familiar unfamiliar.

When Alex enters the bar, the play thrusts Elle into the past. Many plays fold time together, of course, so this isn't a revolutionary collision of a fiction convention into playwriting. I was conscious, however, that to some audience members the past sections may seem like overly-long exposition, or that during either timeline, the audience may be impatiently waiting for what happens in the other timeline. Early in the process, I made peace with this danger, saying to my imaginary audience, "I'm sorry, but we're just going to

spend that time, be patient. I'll try to make each moment be its own mini-play, with its own dramatic tension, but I'm not going to flatten either timeline for the sake of the other.”

I had the sense that any narrative expectation I built, I would need to break. In a play with a title that reveals the ending, particularly one that dares to deliver that very ending, the journey needs to surprise on every level I can make it surprise. We seem to be living in the present that revisits the past; then, a moment of chaos in the form of a car accident breaks the narrative and sends the audience into the future. Rarely do plays do this. In the future, we learn the consequences of this night – that Alex will die – which means that we've spoiled the ending for the audience in terms of the question of what will happen to Elle and Alex. When the narrative breaks its own rules, the audience is, I hope, navigating through uncharted territories in which anything can happen.

The point of view also works in a space that, for many, is uncomfortable. While I found a great delight in writing the play from a close-third-person point-of-view, when the familiar form of fiction enters into a familiar form of theatre, the play becomes unfamiliar. I discovered during the workshops that for many people, it's jarring.

Actors play multiple ages and multiple characters. For an actor, it may be uncomfortable¹⁹ to move from personality to personality, divining many different intentions and points-of-view. After the first reading, the actors remarked that it exhausted them. It may be confusing for the audience to figure out who plays whom at any given time, but that is not an intentional challenge, merely part of the world of the play. Beyond this, the multiple characters in singular bodies carries a beautiful awkwardness when read across scenes: the actor playing Alex, who has a sexual relationship with Elle, also plays Elle's mother.

¹⁹ The actor most successful in this role had no training.

Finally, in as a combination of form and content, the politics of the play may unsettle the audience. Elle sends Alex back to Roseville after learning that Alex has a child, and because Elle misses her dead father. For this turn, I wanted to invoke the trope that ‘nothing is more important than your offspring, genetic family over chosen family’ as if it’s the thesis of the play. We know that Alex, however, subsequently dies from the anxiety of being back in Roseville with her child and husband. Though the play appears to reify the value that family should trump other relationships – this may seem to be the lesson Elle learns from re-living her past – a politics that many share, I believe that the play says the opposite. Alex and Elle should have run off to Marin. Alex should have left her family.

THE WORKSHOP

During the developmental journey for *She Gets Naked in the End*, the project of making myself uncomfortable and of making the audience uncomfortable collided.

The workshops flopped. I had outlined specifically what was non-negotiable, by which I mean the elements of the play to which I was married. These included the voice, the point-of-view, and the multiple storylines. Eventually I outlined a specific kind of feedback I needed; I wanted to focus on character and story. Every time my work was discussed, the things that were crystal clear to me seemed to hit directly in the blind spots of many in the workshop. The element I most enjoyed, the third person voice in a first person, seemed to create a barrier to understanding. I was told this isn’t a feminist play (despite the fact that the literal embodiment of rape culture dies). I was criticized for the portrayal of men. I was repeatedly asked, “What does this play look like?” after I’d explained that I didn’t know – design isn’t my territory. Members of the workshop seemed mystified by my requests to talk

about the characters and the story. The conversation returned again and again to questioning the very things that I'd established as non-negotiable.

Perhaps a key may be in the other pieces in the workshop. Three of the four other plays in process were not only non-traditional, they required us to create our own dramaturgical language to discuss them. Perhaps the issue was that *She Gets Naked in the End* stands next to familiar forms. The play doesn't demand that we invent a language to discuss it, but that we use traditional ways of discussing plays with altered intentions.

Human instinct is to seek comfort. If the play is intended to make the audience uncomfortable, I must be suspicious of feedback that doesn't acknowledge the project, or doesn't seem to come from a place of wanting to encounter the play on its intents and merits. A play that portrays how shitty straight men treat women should encounter resistance from straight men. I should have expected and welcomed their reaction, while disagreeing with it.

What hurt, what threatened the play, was that this play did not fit with my cohort's ideas of what a play does or should do. There was something broken about this play. And from this idea I could not dissuade them.

To make matters worse, while it's easy to defend someone else's work, it's agonizing to stand up for something you wrote. At least, for me. I worry that I'm getting defensive instead of hearing a genuine response. I worry that I'm responding to an implication that they're saying that something is wrong with me. And, with a play that uses my anxieties as an organizing principle, they are, and I am.

What became clear was that the more I risked by using my own discomfort, the more I needed those in workshop to acknowledge this project.

I do not know why a play that was met with confusion and resistance from my PDW workshop was understood by my theatre company. It's possible that I share a politics and sensibility with my company, one that doesn't detonate theatre and cause us to invent our own dramaturgy, but one that stands to the left of traditional forms. We do new work (non-marketable) in a barn (impractical) in the summer (HOT), so we're accustomed to discomfort. We're full of liberal prudes, young single women, and monogamists. We value "stories built like a barn," with clear character intentions, but embrace those that seem off. We're a company driven by designers with creative freedom and vision. We all know the same plays and playwrights.

I was lucky that my Barnyard cohorts understood the play, as they created the visual language that summer to accompany it. What became clear is that in order to understand how these altered forms worked, and that they worked at all, the play needs a theatre.

The play uses Elle's language to create the world. The third person point-of-view and prose-like narration, the magical transformations across time, the instant transformations of actors into different characters, even the heightened almost-comical tone make sense in a nearly-empty theatre space. All the play needs is a pool table, some dollar bills, a stick, a soundscape, and three actors. Take a look:



James Henderson as "He." Tatiana Ray as Alex. Claire Rigsby as Elle/She
Workshop production directed by Alicia Hunt. Photo by Robert Schulz

This is the scene immediately after a car hits Scott (or "HE"). The following section is from that scene:

ALEX: Scott, get out of the street.

SCOTT (HE): Grant my wishes, fairy godfuckers!

(The blare of headlights.)

(HE's hit by a car.)

(The world shatters.)

SHE: Imagine for a moment you could take it apart, put it back together. Undo the scratch. From the pockets emerge red, blue, six, four, and then the eight ball that killed the game. Green returns and halts the eight, and then that one is in turn stopped by the white, which has a moment before the stick stops it, energy returns to the arm of the player. The exhale becomes inhale, air stripped of its oxygen returns to your body, where CO₂ is disassembled, your heart unbeats, blood flows backwards.

HE: We are bags of meat. As he flies through the air, he feels his bones snap, he has three wishes:

ALEX: One

HE: Shit. I wish I knew more about physics.

SHE: Force is equal to mass times acceleration.

ALEX: Two

HE: I wish I knew more about biology.

SHE: This is what happens when an object that weighs 2,500 pounds meets a bag of meat.

ALEX: And the third:

HE: Those poor kids. One more wish.

SHE: What would you like?

HE: Mom. I'm scared. I'm so scared. Mommy. Someone. Catch me. (P. 208-209)

FAILURES and WEAKNESSES

I wonder if the play is too kind to Scott. He dies after a moment of vulnerability. In Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, a racist and god-awful grandmother has a moment of compassion right before The Misfit shoots her, causing him to remark, "She would of been a good woman.... if it had been somebody to shoot her every minute of her life" (22). Scott would be a good man if he were hit by a car every day of his life. I am not sure if what he represents deserves this moment, if he should be saved.

I may write about a woman who never gets naked for anyone, I may write about a woman who eventually takes off her clothes and becomes vulnerable, but I don't have to do it. An actor does it. No matter how much something costs me, someone else has to pay.

That Elle is a woman creates a psychic distance between her body and mine. People may be less inclined to read Elle as me, and even less inclined to read her issues as my own. Instead, her issues may be seen as ungenerous beliefs about people I have observed or experienced. While I see myself in the character, many won't see me as the person who disrobes.

Despite the fact that I carve off pieces of myself for this play, things that some may see as broken, things that I may see as shameful or embarrassing, I don't write to heal, and this play doesn't heal me. I write to make the unavoidable dark things inside of me into stories, to make them worth something to someone. If I don't re-write my issues, I might simply reproduce them in others.

SUCSESSES

Prior to *She Gets Naked in the End*, I'd always felt that the success or failure of one of my plays was obvious to everyone. If I brought a play to workshop that was somehow experimental, then I was just as unsure of whether or not the play worked as the people in the workshop. I hid or eliminated the plays that were failures, only kept and produced the plays for which I was confident of the audience's reaction.

She Gets Naked changed all of that. For the first time, I had a play that I knew worked, a play that I loved, but others did not. I'd never before been in a room when I felt like I was one of the few people who knew that my play worked. Since then, I've had to find language to describe how this play works.

Prior to *She Gets Naked*, I'd never had to deal so directly with the consequences of working in spaces that I and others found uncomfortable.

Here it is. The worst nightmare. To live in things that are uncomfortable, that are dangerous, to make yourself naked, and have people tell you, I don't like that. Put your clothes back on. I want something else. I want someone else.

And from the discomfort of this experience, I move forward. I can defend my work from the uneasy space of my own confidence. I can love it on my own. I can test new spaces of discomfort.

EPILOGUE

Jeremy Lee Cudd and I sit outside of the theatre, discussing *Dogfuckers*. Rehearsals haven't started yet, so we're chatting about where I want to take the play.

I tell him that there's something wrong with the sex scene between the characters Dirt and Boy. I'm sure of it. Something is missing. It happens too quickly. It doesn't seem real. It doesn't seem possible.

Jeremy seems unconvinced. Implicit in our conversation is the question, "Is this a play problem or a playwright problem?"

Then he asks me, "You do know that people have sex, right?"

He's half-joking, but he's also right. It is a playwright problem. It is my discomfort, not a problem with the play. A part of me wants to say, "No, people don't have sex. Sex is not something people have." I acknowledge this. I reveal myself to myself.

Later, when he stages it, he shows me that what I couldn't see in the scene -- that it's playful and awkward, and believable within the context of the play. It may be tweaked a bit here and there, but the essential problem belongs to me, not the play.

I wrote *Dogfuckers* during my last year of graduate school in the active and conscious pursuit of discomfort, and I certainly found it.

Over the year at UT, the department had become embroiled in numerous discussions on race; I'd been told that I wasn't Latino enough because I look Caucasian. I responded by writing a play with a self-hating, non-Spanish speaking Latina character and two half-Mexican, half-white brothers, who pass for white. I knew that representing these realities could invite controversy in the department. But this isn't the only way that I invite discomfort; this play cost me something, more than *Third Street*, and more than *She Gets Naked in the End*. In every category, the play finds the uncomfortable.

I have seen my writing move from a story about two boys whose relationship is closeted to the audience, to a story about these two boys kissing – told in front of an audience of high schoolers – to a story in which a same-sex couple disrobes at the end, to a story about two young men who eventually have sex in *Dogfuckers*. This is a linear trajectory, moving in concentric circles outward as the territory for my personal comfort zone expands, and I redraw and redraw the lines between the uncomfortable and my panic zone.

I decided to avoid getting feedback from my colleagues prior to the public reading of *Dogfuckers*. This can be seen as a failure to make myself uncomfortable; however, it also means that the first time that anyone other than a handful of collaborators and two readers see the play is during a highly public 'enhanced reading,' which is even more uncomfortable, and the absolute opposite of the over-protected place I started.

I also know that I am not going to become comfortable, but I can take ownership of my discomfort. I can write a play that lives in anxiety. I can be secure in my insecurities.

What does it mean about the future of my playwriting? It establishes a project and purpose beyond myself, one not yet defined by a specific aesthetic, but by an approach. It unhinges me and lets me live in a space where I am not pursuing the approval of everyone around – even those like my colleagues whom I love and greatly respect.

It means I can surprise myself in my writing. It means that I can receive a question like, “You do know that people have sex, right?” and not shut down, but find it exciting.

It means that I can reveal myself through my writing, neither hiding nor apologizing.

It means I can be found out.

SECTION II

The Plays

Third Street

CHARACTERS

Shane: 16 or 17

Marie: Shane's younger sister, 13

Otis: 17

Lord Pain/QB: 17 or so

Lug: 16

Herald/Harold

Queen/Queeny

Marla

Cynthia/Guard

Young Dinosaur

Dinosaur/Dragon

Lord Pain's Followers

NOTES

On Credit

Third Street was created for the Cohen New Works Festival, and used ensemble-driven playbuilding techniques to realize the world. Thanks to their hard work, all productions of *Third Street* must credit the following folks in the program:

Ben Hardin (Director)

Cameron Mellin (Shane)

Callie Raynor (Marie)

Luke Gracia (Otis)

Alani Chock (Young Dinosaur)

Thomas Kelleher (QB/Lord Pain)

Audrey Long (Queeny/Queen)
James McMaster (Lug)
Ian Price (Herald/Harold)
Laura Rogers (Marla)
Abigail Vela (Cynthia)
Meredyth Pederson (Stage Manager)
Nellie Kurz (Pre-process Dramaturg)

Third Street was later read at the UIL Superconference for 600 Texan high-schoolers. This version was revised for this reading. The playwright wishes to thank Kevin Hippler, Will Douglas, Chelsea Beth, Izabella Arnold, and Megan Rabuse for their contributions.

Third Street is intended for high school and junior high audiences, and older.

On Production

You are now a collaborator in this project. The setting and references of the play should be modified to fit your production. When produced in Texas, for example, the Ren Faire is set in Lubbock. In California, we change it to Bakerfield. I encourage you to incorporate local jokes for your audience. When we staged it at the Cohen New Works Festival, we referenced other Festival plays.

SCENE 1 **Wednesday**

(We open with a strange sound. We may not know what it is. [We'll later find out that this sound comes from the dragon: it is the WOOSH of the dragon's wings.] This fades.)

(We are in an alley on Third Street, in a part of a suburb that got hit hard when the real estate bubble fizzled. We hear Third Street. Maybe it's the thrum of air conditioners, a garbage truck backing up, a dog barking a couple blocks away.)

(Then slowly, another sound can be heard. Is that a horse galloping? Are those crowds cheering? The clash of swords? A blacksmith? It is. There they are. The land of fairy tales, of knights, of valor appears as if by magic, replacing the mess of Third Street. THE HERALD appears.)

HERALD

Lords and ladies, knights and knaves, serf and peasants, cuckolds and wenches, maids and maidenheads of all ages. Hear ye, hear ye! The Lubbock Renaissance Pleasure Faire presenteth unto thee the daring deeds and completely litigation-free tales of the valiant! The magnificent! The well-scented! Shane of Third Street!

(Trumpets greet SHANE as he enters the Medieval Arena. The Renaissance garb does not hide that he's a bit of a geek. Trotting behind him is his bored-looking squire, MARIE.)

Squire!
SHANE

What??
MARIE

Sword!
SHANE

(MARIE hands him the sword.)

Here you go, buttmunch.
MARIE

Squire, know your place!
SHANE

My apologies, Shane of Third Street.
MARIE
(under her breath)
Buttmunch.

HERALD
Standing at 5'1, Weighing a healthy 116 pounds, this is Shane the Buttmunch's first Lubbock Renaissance Pleasure Faire Tournament of Death. He showers twice a day, takes out the garbage when he remembers, and wields a broadsword he bought all by himself –

SHANE
I named the sword "Brock." Brock the Sword.

HERALD
Yeah, whatever.
Shane of Third Street challenges the undefeated, the evil, the maker of mayhem and all around bloodstained badass, Lord PAIN!

FOLLOWERS
Pain! Pain! Pain! Pain! Pain!

(Fanfare erupts. If this were the time of fireworks, there would be fireworks. LORD PAIN and his FOLLOWERS thunder onstage. LORD PAIN is massive and beautiful,

larger than life. His FOLLOWERS are many and they are one. Sometimes they speak together, sometimes their lines fall over themselves.)

LORD PAIN

PAIN FOR SHANE!

FOLLOWERS

Lord Pain hails from the itchy spot
between your fears
and your bed-wetting nightmares.
No one escapes
The hairy fierceness
And mighty broadsword
Of Lord Pain.

HERALD

Weighing in at an astonishing 1442 pounds and 15 ounces, Lord Pain wields his phallic symbol with the greatest of ease. And let it be known that if Shane defeats the Evil Lord Pain, he will receive

FOLLOWERS

Eternal glory, fame --

SHANE

Knighthood!

HERALD

A gift certificate to Chilis. One warning: No one has ever faced Lord Pain and lived to tell the tale.

FOLLOWERS

He'll tear you to pieces.

MARIE

You got him, Shane!

LORD PAIN

PAIN!

HERALD

If you parked on the Long Side of the Little League Fields, please move your vehicle. The police are ticketing.

FOLLOWERS

You better watch yourself.
Our Lord Pain will eat
the unborn children
you will never have.

SHANE

That's physically impossible.

FOLLOWERS

With Lord Pain,
anything is possible,
freak.
Dungeons and Dragons trembles
in her pretty-pretty Princess boots.

HERALD

Shane of 3rd Street, this is a reminder that you signed a waiver absolving the Lubbock Renaissance Pleasure Faire and its corporate owners of ALL liability. We are not responsible for anything Lord Pain does to you or your unborn children.

LORD PAIN

Pain.

SHANE

Let's start.

HERALD

Shane of 3rd Street. Lord Pain. On my mark.

(HERALD drops a feather. SHANE and LORD PAIN circle each other.)

FOLLOWERS

He'll bake your bones into his bread.
Wimp!
He'll swallow your entrails like spaghetti.
Geek!
He'd drink your brains like scrambled eggs.
Coward!
YOU SUCK SUCK SUCK SUCK SUCK SUCK!

SHANE

I don't suck!

(LORD PAIN strikes him. SHANE falls to the ground.)

LORD PAIN

Pain for Shane. Pain for Shane.

FOLLOWERS

Pain for Shane. Pain for Shane.

(SHANE launches himself back into the battle.)

FOLLOWERS and the crowd

Loser
Buttmunch
Loser
Buttmunch
Loser

MARIE

Buttmunch.

(MARIE stabs him.)

SHANE

Y tu, Marie?

(He falls. A sudden silence, then laughter.)

LORD PAIN

PAIN!

(The crowd fades, their laughter becoming the crackle of grackles. The Renaissance world disappears, and SHANE is in that overgrown alley, surrounded by garbage cans, discarded TVs, broken chairs, and graffiti.)

MARIE

Buttmunch, Momma says to stop playing with your dumb self before you get all hurt.

SHANE

MA-RIE!

MARIE

Or some creeper kidnaps you.

SHANE

Lubbock is Saturday!

MARIE

No-one gives a care, buttmunch.

SHANE

I'm training, Marie!

MARIE

You're waving a sword around a crap-filled alley. If you get tetanus and die, I get your stuff.

SHANE

Go away, Marie. Or so help me, I will vanquish you.

MARIE

You're sixteen. You're like ten years too old for this crap.

SHANE

You should be nice to me. You might need a kidney one day. And when you're begging me, knees on the floor, face the color of rotten eggs, I'll say, no, let my sister go on dialysis. See how beloved she is with a bag of pee strapped to her. And they'll ask, why, why would you be so cruel? Because she wanted me to lose the tourney, and I wanted her to lose her kidney, and my wish came true.

MARIE

This is why no one likes you.

SHANE

That's it! No kidney for Marie!

MARIE

I'll cut it out with your own sword, buttmunch.

SHANE

Just try to take Brock away from m --

(MARIE takes Brock from him)

SHANE

Give him back, Marie. He's mine!

MARIE

Hey BROCK tell my buttmunch brother that Mom says he has ten minutes to get his dumb self inside. She's got work tonight and can't drive him to the hospital when he impales himself --

SHANE

Marie!

MARIE

And you better shower your stinky ass. Cynthia Roseblatt is coming over for dinner. Some of us have friends, and if you embarrass me in front of mine, I'll break Brock into tiny pieces and you won't even have your sword to kiss you goodnight.

SHANE

Marie!

MARIE

Grow up!

(MARIE leaves, dropping the sword.)

SHANE

Wench. WENCH!

(SHANE returns to practicing, muttering to himself.)

SHANE

Wench wench wench wench. The VALIANT Shane of Third Street must face his greatest foe. Marie the Repugnant! Marie the Accidental Pregnancy--

(QB and LUG enter, unseen by SHANE.)

QB

Yo! Geekface!

(SHANE drops his sword.)

QB

You dropped your sword, geekface.

(LUG steps on the sword as SHANE bends down to get it.)

QB

You better watch out, geekface.

LUG

Yeah! Yeah, you could like totally lose an eye! Poke, blind, done.

SHANE

Thank you. I'm careful.

QB

Princesses don't need swords.

LUG

I'm not a princess. How do I look like with a sword?

(LUG models the sword. OTIS enters.)

OTIS

QB! I gotta talk to you.
Who's this?

QB

This is the resident fairy princess. Thinks he's a knight, doesn't he?

LUG

O-ho, a knight.

SHANE

Yes! No! Well, I'm going to be a knight! Positive thinking

LUG

Knight swings his sword like swish swish sah-wish!

OTIS

Careful with that, Lug.

LUG

Isn't this your alley, QB?

QB

Dude, Lug, you know, you're right. This is my alley. Got my name on it.

OTIS

'Cause your dad's a slumlord.

QB

Landlord, OT, Lord of the Land, and shut up.

LUG

Geekface is a trespasser. He should pay rent. Rent rent rent.

QB

How's that sound? A little rent money, and you can stay.

OTIS

Hey, QB, look, I --

QB

Those are the terms.

SHANE

I have four dollars.

QB

Aw, dude. This ain't charity.

LUG

QB charges an arm or a leg.

QB

OT. Do us a fav' and grab our deadbeat tenant here --

(OTIS grabs SHANE.)

OTIS

Hi, I'm Otis.

QB

OT here he snapped that kid, the one with the lazy eye, he snapped his arm in two.

SHANE

Merle J.

OTIS

QB --

QB

OT has got the generous heart. He could have broken his neck, left him in a wheelchair he steers with his tongue. But OT, he's a nice guy, just breaks his arm.

OTIS

Whatever you say, QB.

QB

We should teach you a lesson – like don't be poor. But tell you what. We're men of business. We're not unsympathetic to your plight. So, here's what we'll do.

(With the sword, he outlines a square around SHANE.)

QB

For four dollars, knight, you get this box. Inside this box, you're safe to be a freak.

(A sound in the distance. What is that? [The dragon WOOSH.]

You hear that?
OTIS

Hear what?
QB and LUG

What was that?
SHANE

I don't know.
OTIS

Don't be weird, OT.
QB

Listen.
OTIS

(They listen. The distant sound of a diesel engine, maybe beeping from a truck. OTIS drops SHANE.)

I think they call those things trucks.
QB
(back to SHANE)

Listen, Geekface.

SHANE
My name is Shane, not Geekface, and I think you are on metabolic steroids, and that's why you're angry and compensating.

LUG
Geekface is being all disrespectful. OT, break his arm.

SHANE
No! I need my arms! Both of them! I have a tournament!

QB
That's okay, Lug. See what Shane the want-to-be knight doesn't realize is that he's actually a teapot.

OTIS
59

A teapot.

QB

Teapots got songs, don't they?

LUG

They whistle. Tweet!

QB

Lazy eye didn't sing. And OT, here, he had to – well, snap.

LUG

Snap snap snap! Ah, pain.

QB

Start your singing. Or – OT...

OTIS

I'm a little teapot.

SHANE

I'm a little teapot
Short and stout
Here is my handle
Here is my spout

LUG

If you can find his spout!

SHANE

I don't remember –

OTIS

When you get all steamed –

SHANE

When I get all steamed up
Here me shout!
Tip me over and pour me out!

QB

Well, I don't believe you got a future in singing. OT, Lug, we've done our work here.

SHANE

Can I have my sword?

(QB raises the sword.)

QB

Pain for Shane?

MARIE's voice

Dinner buttmunch! Mom says get your dumb-butt in here right now!

OTIS

What's for dinner?

SHANE

You can't come. Can I have my sword?

QB

No. You could lose an eye.

LUG

It's for your own good.

QB

And with that, we leave.

(as they leave)

OTIS

QB, I need to talk to you!

QB

You talk too much.

OTIS

Can I crash at your place?

(LUG makes a lewd motion with the sword.)

LUG

Teapot.

(They leave. SHANE looks at his empty hands. He sits down.)

SHANE

I'm a teapot.

SCENE 2
Later That Night

(After dinner. CYNTHIA and MARIE are on the steps of MARIE's house. CYNTHIA thumbs her phone; she wears a number of bracelets. MARIE is looking up at the sky, trying to figure out what to say.)

CYNTHIA
Ugh! Courtney is so dumb.

MARIE
Why is she dumb?

CYNTHIA
She keeps doing dumb stuff. Dumb!

MARIE
So, uh, I like your phone.

CYNTHIA
What?

MARIE
Your phone. It's nice.

CYNTHIA

It's dumb. What do you think of my hair?

MARIE

It's nice.

CYNTHIA

I hate it.

MARIE

Me, too. So, we're friends, right? The dinner makes it official, right?

CYNTHIA

I need to thank you, Marie, for inviting me to dinner. Tell your mom the spaghetti didn't suck that much.

MARIE

Yeah it did.

CYNTHIA

It didn't. Really.

MARIE

You can come over any time, Cynthia. Mi casa, your casa.

SHANE's voice

(from inside the house)

Wench wench wench wench.

(a crash)

CYNTHIA

Your brother's a freak, Marie.

MARIE

I know, right? He's embarrassing. We have different Dads, and I think his Dad was, like, a vegetarian. Or maybe a scientologist. Or a Teamster.

CYNTHIA

Your brother drank his milk from a chalice and called it "mead."

MARIE

He sings Greensleaves in the shower. He doesn't know the words or anything. He just sings "Greensleaves" again and again.

CYNTHIA

Freeeeeeeak.

MARIE

Yeah!

So... maybe we can hang out again this week? If you want.

CYNTHIA

We can do our biology homework.

MARIE

It's family life this week, right? We're learning about puberty.

CYNTHIA

Ew.

MARIE

I once saw a cat give birth. Cynthia, are we friends now?

CYNTHIA

Well, I was going to wait until we were in front of the girls to do this:
(She takes a bracelet out of her pocket.)
You're part of the group! Are you excited?

MARIE

I'm part of the group.

CYNTHIA

We're besties now! Doesn't that make you happy?

MARIE

I'm a Bracelet, I'm part of the group.

CYNTHIA

Becoming a Bracelet is the first step to social success. You are part of a dynasty of sisterhood. We're like the Elks.

MARIE

I'm a Bracelet. I'm a success, like the Elks.

CYNTHIA

We talk about teachers and boys. I hate teachers. I love boys.

MARIE

I'm a Bracelet, I'm part of the group and we're talking about boys.

CYNTHIA

You'll figure out what those are when you do this week's homework.

SHANE's voice

Take that.

(Crash.)

MARIE

NOT IN THE HOUSE BUTTMUNCH! I hate him so much.

CYNTHIA

Let's tell each other secrets. What's your secret wish?

MARIE

It's embarrassing!

CYNTHIA

So long as it's not lame. Courtney's secret wish is lame. **(ACTOR improvises Courtney's secret wish)**

MARIE

Okay --

(She leans in – but then a horn honks.)

CYNTHIA

Oh my god he honked. Uh! My Dad is so embarrassing. He's the most embarrassing man on the planet. See you at school, bestie. Welcome to the Bracelets.

(SHE leaves.)

(MARIE looks up. Then looks away and returns to the house.)

SCENE 3
Thursday

(The alley. The sounds of Third Street – early morning.)

HERALD

It's early morning, before school. A dog barks in the distance.

(A dog barks in the distance.)

SHANE (offstage)

I can't eat pancakes, Mom! Pancakes are carbohydrates and sugar. I need protein, Mom. I'm training! Sheesh!

(SHANE enters. He carries a slingshot.)

HERALD

With two days left before the great Festival of Lubbock, Shane of Third Street rises before the sun. Only the most devoted, the most valiant rise before the sun. And he is Shane of Third Street.

SHANE

I want to be a knight.

(He looks at the ground. He gets inside the box QB outlined for him.)

(We start to hear, faintly, the sound of the Renaissance faire,
the hiss of the FOLLOWERS.)

FOLLOWERS

Look at that loser.
Thinks he's a knight.
Couldn't hit the broadside of a barn.

(SHANE raises his slingshot. OTIS enters.)

OTIS

Hey.

(SHANE's shot is off, and we hear a window shatter.)

OTIS

Hey you!

SHANE

I'm leaving. I'm leaving, okay? I got school –

OTIS

It's like six AM.

SHANE

I got school in two hours. You can have the alley -

OTIS

Did I say I wanted you to leave?

SHANE

No. OT. Otis. Sir. No.

OTIS

I don't want you to leave.

SHANE

I don't have money, so you can't rob me or anything, it would be pointless to rob me,
because I don't have money.

OTIS

We're gonna chat.

SHANE

I'm a terrible conversationalist. Ask anyone. They'll tell you, oh that Shane, he just blathers and picks his nose. Look I'm in the box. I paid for the box, it's mine, QB says, you have to leave me alone.

(OTIS grabs him.)

OTIS

Listen to me --

SHANE

Let me go, please. I need my arm for the tournament. It's my sword arm.

OTIS

I saw a dinosaur.

SHANE

Wait. What?

OTIS

A dinosaur. I think it's eating cats.

SHANE

Like a real --

OTIS

A dinosaur, a DINOSAUR, are you deaf? Are you dumb? A dinosaur.

SHANE

Are you screwing with me?

OTIS

And cat-eating leads to Otis-eating, and that's not cool.

SHANE

Have you been drinking?

OTIS

Just these --

(an energy drink)

You want one? I got lots. Stole 'em from the CVS.

SHANE

No. Thank you.

OTIS

Caffeine, taurine, ginseng, it'll keep you awake. It's technology, man, the greatness of the modern age in a can. Keeps you on your toes. And if you're on your toes, you get to keep your toes. No little diplodocus to chew them off, no little nothing.

SHANE

What's a diplodocus?

OTIS

Or whatever, I don't know – it's eating cats.

SHANE

What did it look like?

OTIS

Like a dinosaur. Claws, scales, teeth, feathers. I got these to figure out what it was.
(pulls out children's books from his backpack. He hands them to SHANE.)

SHANE

“How do dinosaurs count to ten.”

OTIS

Tearing off your toes one at a time, that's how. This little piggy had roast beef, rip. This little piggy had none – rip! This little piggy went to the bodega – RAAAAR! This little piggy went wee wee wee all the way –

SHANE

Where'd you get these?

OTIS

They're mine.

SHANE

You stole them, didn't you?

OTIS

Uh. No. They're mine -- Who steals kids books?

SHANE

You?

OTIS

Listen, Teapot. So the other night, I get thrown out again. My bike is busted, so I'm gonna hitch my way downtown, right? And I'm -- I hear this rus'ling --

(Sound of bushes rustling.)

– In the bushes. I think, I think that's a possum or something. Or no, possum's aren't that big, are they? Maybe someone's trying to break in.

(More aggressive sounds.)

So I go to flush it out – and I just, tear through the bushes and bam – there it is – gotta be eight, ten, twenty feet high – staring me right in the face.

(The sound of a dinosaur in the distance. It's the WOOSH we've heard before.)

Beady, bloodshot eyes. It's eating a cat. Smells like gasoline. It looks at me like, I can destroy you, I can tear you into pieces, you little punk. And I know that's it, I'm done. Then it lurches away.

SHANE

The dinosaur – ran away.

OTIS

He's saving me for later. Fall asleep, and he gets you.

SHANE

It smelled like gasoline?

OTIS

Like diesel.

SHANE

Okay. Diesel. A dinosaur that smells like diesel. With feathers.

OTIS

Dinosaurs have feathers, duh. Where do you think birds came from?

SHANE

I dunno. Eggs, maybe?

OTIS

You don't believe me. Of all people, you should.

SHANE

But you're saying that dinosaurs came back to life. There's a brontosaurus –

OTIS

No such thing as brontosaurus.

SHANE

I don't, what?

OTIS

It's an Apatosaurus. Don't you know anything?

SHANE

I'm pretty good at spelling and rock tumbling, and I memorized pi to 32 decimal places, and I know that dinosaurs coming back to life is a scientific impossibility – don't hit me.

OTIS

I'm telling you it happened. A dinosaur resurrected. It's eating tabbies and persians and calicos and it's in the bushes next to my house, and the only reason I'm here is because it's saving me for later. Someone's gotta believe me.

SHANE

You know, just the other day I answered a knock at the front door and whatdoyouknow, a *stegosaurus* was there. He wanted to talk to me about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I asked if he was a Mormon, he said that he preferred "LDS" and then went to talk about the resurrection –

OTIS

You heard it! The –

(he makes the WOOSH sound from the previous scene)

You know? I saw you.

SHANE

I don't know. Why come to me? You're not weak. You broke Merle J's arm. You could have broken his neck.

OTIS

That was QB, not me. I took the blame because QB had a record. He's going around telling everyone that I –

SHANE

You didn't do that? You made me into a teapot.

OTIS

Look -- What's your name?

SHANE

Shane. I told you yesterday.

OTIS

Shane. I come out here and I see Shane dressed like King Arthur. He can help me. At least maybe he'll ... he'll believe me. Because you're... I mean... A knight. Knights – slay things. Wait! Wait! Don't move.

(OTIS exits quickly. What just happened? SHANE picks up a book)

SHANE

“Property of Otis – HANDS OFF”

(leafs through it)

A diplodocus is an herbivore.

(OTIS returns – carrying Shane's sword.)

OTIS

See, look, I got you a present.

SHANE

Brock!

OTIS

I stole it from QB for you.

SHANE

Haha! Brock! You have returned to me, like Excalibur to King Arthur, from a den of villains.

OTIS

I'm not a villain.

SHANE

... Thank you.

I bought it with money from Mom's swear jar.

Lubbock Renaissance Pleasure Faire is Saturday, and now I can be in the tournament. No!

Positive thinking, Shane! I'm going to *win* the tournament.

OTIS

I want to show you something. Follow me.

SHANE

I shouldn't.

OTIS

I gave you back your – Brock.

I got school – SHANE

School is like in two hours. OTIS

I get up early. The early bird catches – uh – worms. SHANE

Please come with me, Shane. Please. OTIS

(A moment. SHANE nods.)

(They exit.)

(QUEENY passes by.)

Petey! Petey! QUEENY

Here Kitty! Petey! (whistles)

(SHE exits.)

(OTIS enters, pulling SHANE.)

Ow, my nipple! SHANE

Sorry – you see that? OTIS

That's a mailbox, Otis SHANE

See that scratch? OTIS

(shows him a book: compares the mailbox scratch to the book)

Claw marks from a – Utahraptor. And there, you see that?

A pothole. SHANE

OTIS

Doesn't it look just like a footprint from a t-rex?

SHANE

Yeah!

(ACTOR PLAYING SHANE sarcastically improvises other things that he sees: That car could be a stegosaurus. Mammoths, Loch Ness...)

OTIS

Follow me, Shane.

(He climbs up a fire escape.)

SHANE

If you fall, you'll break your neck.

OTIS

Don't be such a coward.

(SHANE considers leaving, but climbs up the fire escape. He is unsteady, but OTIS grabs him.)

OTIS

See that?

(What is he showing him?)

What did I tell you?

SHANE

I don't...

OTIS

Over near – that's my house. That's where I saw it – and look.

SHANE

The sunrise.

OTIS

Squint. Do you see it?

SHANE

It's a junkyard.

OTIS

You don't see it?

(SHANE squints. Maybe he almost sees it, but doesn't.)

(SHANE stops suddenly.)

SHANE

I gotta get ready for school.

OTIS

Shane?

SHANE

I take two showers every day and – you can't bring swords to school. And I don't have time for you!

(SHANE leaves.)

SCENE 4
Later That Day

HERALD

Fourth period PE. Dodgeball.

(A whistle blows.)

(We see Shane. He's lined up with the PE class. The captains – QB and HAROLD – pick their teams.)

QB

Lugnut, my man!

HAROLD

Lefty!

QB

Girlfriend!

(They go through the entire class until there are just two left.)

HAROLD

Uh. Merle J.

QB

Know what? You can have geekface.

HAROLD

That's not fair.

QB

I'm doing you a favor.

HAROLD

He's yours, QB! Not mine! You always do this!

QB

I don't want him.

LUG

Geekface!

(A ball flies across and hits SHANE in the head.)

(SHANE rubs his head. A dollar bill flutters by. He starts to follow it into his fantasy. A flag or two from the Ren Faire appears, along with some of the sounds. SHANE's fantasy is reaching into this part of his life.)

(MARLA the FORTUNE TELLER appears. She is sitting at a card table. She sips a Fanta. On the table – "Psychic Reading")

SHANE

Hello, uh,

MARLA

Marla.

SHANE

Hi Marla, hello.

MARLA

You're supposed to be in PE.

SHANE

You are psychic. Or I'm imagining you.

MARLA

My mother drank mescaline and absinthe when she was pregnant, so I can tell the future.

SHANE

Cool. Once I had a dream –

MARLA

I don't read dreams. I do the Tarot (pronouncing the 't'), okay?

SHANE

Magic Cards!

MARLA

Do I look like I play Dungeons and Dragons?

SHANE

You're drinking Fanta. Won't that give you cavities?

MARLA

Do you want to see the future or not? I'm like the Great Marla, and there's something in your heart that you absolutely want to know, and I can tell you.

SHANE

Uh, am I – am I a, one -- Do I win the tourney? Do I get to be a knight?

(MARLA puts out the three cards.)

MARLA

We got a Dark Passage, Upside Down Stranger, and The Death Card. So the dark passage could be a journey like a mission, or a place.

SHANE

But do I get to be a knight?

MARLA

Shut up the cards are talking. The Stranger is upside down – it could be a friend, but you don't have friends do you?

SHANE

No.

MARLA

You should do something about that.

SHANE

That's what the card says?

MARLA

Uh, the cards just say upside down stranger.
That last one is death. Watch out for it.

SHANE

Okay.

MARLA

There you are, Mr. Shane.

SHANE

Did I tell you my name?

MARLA

I am like psychic, duh. Now. Go back to PE.

(MARLA disappears. A ball flies and hits SHANE.)

SCENE 5

Around the Same Time

(MARIE and CYNTHIA enter, mid-conversation.)

MARIE

How about Friday?

CYNTHIA

Friday is when we watch TV.

MARIE

Saturday? My mom's taking my brother to Lubbock. I can come over to your house.

CYNTHIA

No. My brother's going to something called UIL.

MARIE

Sunday?

CYNTHIA

Church day. If God rests, so do the Bracelets.

MARIE

Are we going to meet at all?

CYNTHIA

You're like in love with homework. That's why God made Google.

MARIE

Puberty is important.

CYNTHIA

Ew.

MARIE

Science is important. It's how we have things.

CYNTHIA

Fine, we'll meet, whatever.
So tell me a big secret wish. Something that isn't lame.

MARIE

Um, I –

CYNTHIA

Braceletness is about sharing secret wishes with your sisterfriends. I told you about the time with the thing!

MARIE

I want to leave.

CYNTHIA

Yeah. So?

MARIE

I have it all planned out.

(Actor playing MARIE improvises her secret plan to leave. It should involve science.)

And I'm going to leave my lame brother, the street, the whole city BEHIND!
It's not lame, is it?

CYNTHIA

We are so much alike. We're like twins. I'm going to Hollywood, and I'm going to be an investment banker, and I'm going to destroy the retirement accounts for our teachers. I hate them so much. Marie, we're like the same person.

MARIE

You are like me?

CYNTHIA

Then why don't you leave? Like just run away. I run away at least once a year.

SCENE 6
Thursday Evening

HERALD

That evening, after a day of dodging spitballs and ignoring teachers and sprinting through his homework, SHANE heads out to continue his training. The grackles are starting their early-evening yammering.

(Grackles yammer. HERALD claps to spook them away.)

HERALD

Shane returns to the alley.

(SHANE enters. He carries a lunch box. He looks around. He sets it down.)

HERALD

On his mind all day:

SHANE

What did she mean death?

HERALD

What *did* she mean death?

SHANE

I don't know.

HERALD

There's only so much you can worry about an imaginary Fanta-drinking stranger

SHANE

What's mescaline?

HERALD

when you have more important things on your mind.

SHANE

Lubbock!

HERALD

And someone else –

SHANE

Dinosaurs?

HERALD

He shakes it off.

SHANE

Focus on Lubbock, Shane of Third Street! Positive thinking, Shane of Third Street --

(And he begins to practice.)

SHANE

Parry, thrust, parry thrust
I'm a little teapot
Short and Stout!
Ah yes, you want to see my handle do you?
I shall show you my spout!
Of blood!

OTIS

Hey.

SHANE

Gah!

(SHANE slashes at him.)

OTIS

Hey, hey!

SHANE

Don't startle me like that.

OTIS

Good evening to you, too. Whatever.

(OTIS goes to a place where he hid the dino books.)

SHANE

You're still staying in the alley?

OTIS

No Otis-eating.

SHANE

Is Otis eating?

OTIS

Shhh.

(listens... nothing)

SHANE

That box – it's for you.

(OTIS looks inside it.)

SHANE

It's leftovers. Mom, she works at the diner on K –

OTIS

That's your mom?

SHANE

Yeah. She works nights, then brings leftover pancakes, 'cause that's what they make, pancakes. I don't like pancakes. I need protein – eggs, nuts, uh, lentils.

OTIS

Is she the one with the hair?

SHANE

Yeah!

OTIS

She kicked me out last night.

SHANE

Oh, that's well, just because it's 24 hours doesn't mean you can – sometimes she has to -- anyway, you can have the pancakes so you don't eat out of the garbage.

OTIS

I'm not some stray cat. Cats get eaten.

SHANE

You brought my sword back.

(So OTIS eats. He yawns.)

SHANE

... You going to sleep?

(OTIS opens a can of energy crap.)

OTIS

Who can sleep?

SHANE

Well, Sleeping... Beauty for one. Rip van Winkle.

OTIS

I ain't Sleeping Beauty or a Winkle --

SHANE

How long?

OTIS

I dunno. Long time. Days. Weeks. Months. Millennia maybe, what year is it?

SHANE

3023.

OTIS

No crap.

SHANE

It's 2013. Year of the rabbit. The world didn't come to an end in 2012, and the bones of our ancestors lie ever still. The sun rises in the east, and dead Mormon Stegosauri aren't there to greet it.

OTIS

Don't gotta be mean about it.

SHANE

Mean? Me? Shane of Third Street is never mean. I wouldn't break someone's arm into four pieces.

OTIS

Two pieces, and that wasn't me. QB has a record --

SHANE

QB has a record. And dinosaurs smell like diesel.

OTIS

You think I'm a liar.

SHANE

I didn't say that.

OTIS

Go back to training.

SHANE

Don't tell me what to do.

OTIS

Then don't.

SHANE

I'm not afraid of you anymore.

OTIS

Uh. Good.

SHANE

I'm going to train and you can't stop me.

OTIS

...

Thank you for the dinner.

SHANE

(starts quietly as the alley becomes the Ren Faire world)
The valiant Shane of Third readies his sword.

Lord Pain you coward! Come and face me!

LORD PAIN

Fee. Fi. Fo. Fum.

FOLLOWERS

I smell fear.
Princess better run.

(SHANE turns and runs at LORD PAIN. Their swords
clash.)

FOLLOWERS

He'll tear you into pieces, you little punk.
(a chant!)
Give up. Go home. Go play Dungeons and Dragons with your imaginary friends.

(SHANE and LORD PAIN lock swords.)

FOLLOWERS

Hey freak.
This is your fantasy --
and the best you can come up with is a Ren Faire --
In Lubbock.
You suck.

(SHANE redoubles, and sends LORD PAIN back into his
followers.)

LORD PAIN

Pain. Pain?

FOLLOWERS

Princess beat our Lord.
Princess needs to die.

(The LORD FOLLOWERS launch themselves at SHANE.)

(He defeats them.)

(There's a beat. And then.)

SHANE
I won.
(pause)

Two four six eight

(The defeated FOLLOWERS get up.)

CROWD

Who do we appreciate!?
Shane! Shane! SHANE!

(Trumpets.)

HERALD

Her majesty, the QUEEN!

(The QUEEN enters. She's larger than life.)

QUEEN

Shane of Third Street!

SHANE

Your majesty.

QUEEN

Honeybear. You have fought oh-so-valiantly today.

GUARD

Yay.

QUEEN

By the power vested in me by the Lubbock Renaissance Pleasure Faire Royal Committee – and God – I present you with a certificate to Chilis.

GUARD

It's not expired this time.

SHANE

So I...

QUEEN

Yes?

SHANE

I defeated the evil Lord Pain.... Uh. Do I get to be... knighted?

QUEEN

Knighthood is bequeathed for acts of great bravery and compassion. Not for beating someone at an imaginary Lubbock Renaissance Pleasure Faire.

SHANE

Oh...

QUEEN

Something wrong?

SHANE

No. Yes. I suppose I shouldn't feel so disappointed? Except – this is my fantasy, and usually you get what you want in your fantasies.

QUEEN

Shane of 3rd Street. You have been chosen.

SHANE

Chosen?

QUEEN

The old ones come.

SHANE

There's more?

QUEEN

There's always more 'til you die, darlin'. Now. Honeybear, I got one question for you.

SHANE

Fair queen – whatever you may ask.

QUEEN

Have you seen a black and orange cat?

SHANE

A... cat.

QUEEN

My cat. Black and orange. She answers to the name “Petey”

(The fantasy fades. We're back in the world of Third Street.)

QB

(entering)

It's probably dead.

QUEENY

You're such a jerkoff, QB. Why are you such a jerkoff?

QB

Cat's run off to die. It's a fact, and if that makes me a jerkoff, then I'm a jerkoff. Why are you talking to that freak?

(SHANE starts to protest, but stops –)

QB

What are you looking at, freak?

SHANE

Nothing, QB, just nothing.

QB

Yeah. Keep it that way –

QUEEN

What about you, OT –

QB

Don't talk to him. He's been tripping balls for days. Watch this? Yo! OT!

(slaps at him. OT does nothing)

OT. Tell us about the dinosaurs, OT? Tell us about the dinosaurs.

(Snatches a dinosaur book away from him.)

Getting help from geekface on the big words?

(tosses the book into a trash can)

You're no fun, OT. You're no fun at all.

QUEEN

(calling)

PETEY!

QB

You. Geekface. Have you seen it? Looks like this --

(shows a poster)

SHANE

Like that poster –

QB

Are you stupid or blind? Yes, like this poster, the one with the cat on it.

Don't be such an ass, QB. QUEEN

I'll keep an eye out. SHANE

See, Princess, you better. Hey OT! QB

Sup? OTIS

Don't sit like that, you look like a chick. QB

Hey – SHANE

WHAT? QB

Nothing. SHANE

OT! Keep an eye out for the girlfriend's dumb cat. QB

I got a name. QUEEN

Doesn't mean I use it. QB

Jerkoff. Put up the poster. QUEEN

Fine. QB
(puts up the poster)

You'll get a great reward if you find Petey. QUEEN

Tell you what, toots, I'll fish one out of the garbage for you. Cats are a dime a dozen. QB

QUEEN

My hero.

(as they exit, she turns to SHANE, again the queen for a moment)

Oh, and honeybear. Take heed: the old ones come.

(They're gone. OTIS heads to retrieve his book.)

SHANE

Some friends.

OTIS

They're what I got.

SHANE

QB breaks Merle J's arm in four places and blames you –

OTIS

Go back to training, Shane.

SHANE

They're TERRIBLE people.

OTIS

Yeah, and THAT'S what I got, okay?

SHANE

You can do better.

OTIS

(kicking a trash can)

I CAN'T!

(The trash can trips SHANE, who falls and drops Brock.)

SHANE

Fine whatever. Ow.

OTIS

Sorry. Give me your hand.

(A beat. SHANE accepts, and OTIS helps him up.)

OTIS

Hold on.

(OTIS brushes dirt from him.)

SHANE

I'm okay, I'm okay! You don't need to –

OTIS

Here's Brock.

SHANE

Thank you.

(OTIS watches SHANE swing)

OTIS

What's so big about Lubbock?

SHANE

There's a Ren Faire there.

OTIS

Yeah, I got that.

SHANE

If I win the tourney, I get knighted.

OTIS

Yeah, so?

SHANE

I want to be a knight.

OTIS

But, why?

SHANE

Knights drink at the Faire's Dragon's Lair.

OTIS

That's it?

SHANE

And get a gift certificate to Chiles.

OTIS

Right. Right.

(OTIS mutters and lies down. SHANE looks at him. A beat, then he goes on.)

SHANE

Knights are... brave. Knights go on hero's journeys. They defeat evil, they win battles, rescue damsels, kiss princesses, they defeat demons.

OTIS

Everyone loves a knight.

SHANE

Yeah.

OTIS

And if you're a knight, you're not afraid.

SHANE

I – no.

OTIS

...What about the Queen? About the – you know, the old ones.

SHANE

What?

OTIS

After the, you know, evil -- evil Lord Pain...

SHANE

You saw that?

OTIS

(seems to be drifting to sleep)

I don't... no.

SHANE

How did you --

(OTIS slaps himself.)

SHANE

Otis? Have you thought about the long-term affects of sleep deprivation?

OTIS

Have you thought about the short-term affects of getting eaten by a dinosaur?

SHANE

Well, no.

OTIS

For one thing, you die. And then you get digested. And then you get forgotten.

SHANE

You really should get some sleep.

OTIS

You fall asleep, you get beaten. Eaten. Can't fall asleep. Triceratops. T-Rex.

(rustling)

Pteranodon. Pterodactyl.

(dinosaur sound)

Dinosaur, dinosaur, DINOSAUR!

SHANE

The hell?

OTIS

It's a tiny one, but it spits venom.

(YOUNG DINOSAUR enters. YOUNG DINOSAUR is OTIS's younger sibling, and is human as far as anyone can tell right now. [Can be played by either male or female: adjust language as needed.]

YOUNG DINOSAUR

Dude, Otis, you look like crap on crap.

OTIS

Careful. She'll rip your face off.

SHANE

It's a kid. She knows your name --

YOUNG DINOSAUR

Buttwad. The old man just got off work and wants to know if you stole his smokes.

OTIS

... I didn't steal nothing.

YOUNG DINOSAUR

If you don't tell me where the smokes are, the old man's gonna put all your stuff out in the yard again.

OTIS

Yeah. So?

YOUNG DINOSAUR

Then he's gonna set it on fire. And mom says she's gonna feed your goldfish to Bruno. She's gonna fry it on the stove until his eyeballs pop and then feed it to bad old Bruno, and you wouldn't like that not at all.

OTIS

Why would I hide the smokes? Let him get cancer.

YOUNG DINOSAUR

Sizzle sizzle pop pop.

OTIS

Check under the sofa. The one in the kitchen.

YOUNG DINOSAUR

Yeah okay.

OTIS

What's the old man say? Can I come home –

YOUNG DINOSAUR

The old one says, “Tell that little punk he can rot out there.”

OTIS

Go away. Go away go away.

YOUNG DINOSAUR

(about SHANE)

Who's the freak?

OTIS

He's not a freak. He's not a freak, okay?

YOUNG DINOSAUR

Looks like a freak to me.

OTIS

He's not. He's a – he's a knight of the – abandoned kitchen table.

I'm not a knight.

SHANE

You're the freak.

OTIS

And you -- you just wait.

YOUNG DINOSAUR

For what?

OTIS

The old man's coming. He's gonna. Get. His. Smokes.

YOUNG DINOSAUR

I don't got them!

OTIS

(For a moment, SHANE sees the boy as the dinosaur)

He's coming.

YOUNG DINOSAUR (FULLY DINO)

(YOUNG DINOSAUR leaves.)

That was a, your, a –

SHANE

What did I say? Dinosaur. See!

OTIS

(OTIS hands him the dinosaur book, and sniffs)

You okay?

SHANE

What do you think?

OTIS

I don't know.

SHANE

(Something like a jungle seems to be growing around them.)

SHANE opens up the dinosaur book. He can hear the dinosaurs of Third Street.)

OTIS

Promise you'll help me.

SHANE

You want --

OTIS

I'll help you with your training.

(SHANE slams the book. No more dinosaur sounds.)

SHANE

I don't need help.

OTIS

Lucky you.

SHANE

Knights fight alone...

I should go to bed. I need eight hours of sleep.

Otis.

OTIS

What?

SHANE

Maybe I'll see you tomorrow?

OTIS

Good night, sleeptight, don't let the utahraptor bite.

SHANE

Of course. Same to you.

(He leaves. OTIS sips the energy drink.)

OTIS

Yeah. Right.

SCENE 7
Friday

(SHANE is on the way to school. QUEENY enters, followed by QB.)

HERALD

The next day, on the way to school.

QUEENY

Petey! You! Have you seen Petey?

SHANE

Still no.

QB

Hey! Why didn't you come over last night? Pops made steak. I shaved my back like you asked.

QUEENY

I'm breaking up with you, QB. You're an insensitive stereotype.

QB

Aw, Queeny. You know I love you.

QUEENY

Then find me my Petey.

QB

I'm not magic.

QUEENY

Then find yourself another girlfriend.

QB

Who are you going to run with?

QUEENY

Anyone's better than you, QB.

QB

That one?

SHANE

I'm leaving.

QB

Don't you dare, coward.

QUEENY

He cares about my Petey.

QB

Kiss him.

SHANE

Uh.

QUEENY

What, jerkoff, you going break him like you did that guy's arm?

QB

Go on. Be his princess. You can play his stupid knight in shining whatever games with him.

(QUEENY considers. But, ugh.)

QUEENY

Alright, QB, you win.

QB

Go away, geekface.

Hah! I won.

QUEENY

Yeah, yeah, thank you for shaving your back.

(LUG enters.)

QUEENY

You find Petey, yet?

LUG

What? No. QB, we got a problem.

(QUEENY, QB, and LUG, leave.)

(SHANE stands shellshocked for a moment, then leaves.)

(MARIE and CYNTHIA enter, right on their heels.)

CYNTHIA

What do you think of Lug?

MARIE

He once ate a football. So, are we going to meet?

CYNTHIA

I think he could pick me up. Don't you think so?

MARIE

Cynthia, are going to meet?

CYNTHIA

I see you now.

MARIE

For biology, like science homework.

CYNTHIA

Uh, I don't – well, that's your job?

MARIE

What do you mean it's my job?

CYNTHIA

It's important. Birds and bees. You'll learn things. Like how that cat got pregnant?

MARIE

You don't want to do it together?

CYNTHIA

Like, it's your job to do the homework for the group. You're the lowest.

MARIE

Courtney is the lowest in the group.

CYNTHIA

The second lowest. Now you are the lowest. So you need to do the homework.

MARIE

No one likes Courtney.

CYNTHIA

I'm sure we'll probably like you better.

SCENE 8

Later That Day

(The alley. OTIS is digging. There's pain in his digging.
SHANE appears. He watches for a bit.)

SHANE

You're digging.

OTIS

You noticed. Congratulations, Shane of Third Street.

SHANE

I think you killed a rosebush.

OTIS

Oh. Crap. Should I stop?

SHANE

Roses make mom cry. They remind her of Valentines Day and getting pregnant.
.... Why are you digging?

OTIS

Do you care, Shane? Mr, I don't need anyone, you and your stupid tournament.

SHANE

It's not stupid.

OTIS

Oh no. Ren Faires aren't stupid. Swing a sword, get a kiss from some geek from Austin who smells like weed. Pretend you're in the time of chivalry and chamber pots dumped out of windows -- don't look up. Crap might fall on you.

SHANE

Otis.

OTIS

Go away, Shane. You have no heart. You have a sword, imagination, and no heart.

SHANE

But I.

OTIS

I'll break your arm. I'll shatter it into tiny pieces.

SHANE

No, you won't.

OTIS

I will. I'll -- I'll destroy you, you little punk. I'll.

(He is suddenly alarmed. What's that sound?)

OTIS

Diesel...

SHANE

It's the bus, just the bus.

(This doesn't help.)

OTIS

Go away. Please.

SHANE

I rented here.
Why are you digging?

OTIS

... the hole is a place to hide.
I went back. I saw it.

Was it – a velociraptor? SHANE

What? OTIS

What you saw. A Utahraptor? SHANE

No. Something else. OTIS

(There's a sharp pain as he moves too quickly.)

What's wrong? SHANE

Not like you care. OTIS

What is it? SHANE

(OTIS takes off his jacket. His shirt has rips in it. He exposes three stripes. Are they claw marks?)

The thing got a little closer than I thought. OTIS

It could get infected. SHANE

I'm fine. OTIS

You'll be dripping pus and the dinosaurs will sniff you out. I got a first aid kit. SHANE

Of course you do. OTIS

(SHANE takes it out.)

OTIS

That's not poisonous, is it?

(SHANE looks at the package.)

SHANE

Uh, no.

OTIS

Okay.

(There's a beat before SHANE decides to apply the antiseptic himself.)

(OTIS recoils instinctively at being touched. Fear.)

SHANE

Not going to hurt you.

(OTIS doesn't let his guard down. SHANE applies it.)

SHANE

No dripping pus.

OTIS

I wish I could sleep. You fall asleep, they catch you.

SHANE

And I wish we would go back to a time –

OTIS

To the time of chamber pots.

SHANE

Before knights. Before bullies and tournaments and wars and kings and queens – before swords – before bravery and –

OTIS

Before sisters.

SHANE

Before before before. Everyone and everything would be sucked back into the earth. Buildings would unbuild, and cars would disassemble, streets would unpace. Third Street would be nothing. I wish we would go to a time before people.

OTIS

And I just wish I could sleep.

(SHANE makes a decision.)

SHANE

I got something, it will help.
Uh. Hold this please.

(SHANE hands him Brock the sword, then runs off.)

OTIS

Shane? You always do that.

(OTIS picks up the sword. He swishes it around.)

MARIE the SQUIRE

Fee fie foe fum!

(The alley slips partially into the Ren Faire. OTIS is entering into SHANE's world. MARIE the SQUIRE has appeared.)

OTIS

Who are you?

MARIE the SQUIRE

“Who art thou” buttmunch. We're in Shane's -- whatever.

OTIS

Who art thou? Uh, art thou a squire?

MARIE

'Tis I. Once was I. Want to spar?

OTIS

Uh. Canst thou teacher me?

(MARIE takes out a sword, and they spar a little.
A DRAGON WOOSH.)

OTIS

What's that?

(OTIS is distracted. MARIE strikes him.)

MARIE

Haha, buttmunch. Touchéy (pronouncing it “two-chee”)

OTIS

Did you hear?

(There’s an engine sound – a truck truck?)

MARIE

What?

OTIS

Just Third Street.

MARIE

You know, we used to play games, him and me.

OTIS

You used to play with Shane.

MARIE

Not anymore. He’s too weird.
We used to dress up.

OTIS

What happened?

MARIE

I grew up. I got friends. Shane has no friends. He’s friendless. Also, he smells weird.

OTIS

It’s cologne. Just -- a lot of it.

MARIE

It’s perfume from the dollarstore. And he doesn’t eat meat. Or pie. Just lentils.

OTIS

He’s –

MARIE

What?

OTIS

Like me.

MARIE

And what are you?

OTIS

... Alone.

MARIE

You know, I think you're cute.

OTIS

Thank you?

MARIE

This is a bad thing. A disaster. You know what happens, don't you?

OTIS

No?

MARIE

You'll get me pregnant, then you'll run off and I'll never get away. I'll wind up taking the graveyard shift at 24-Diner on K-Street.

OTIS

I'm... not going to get you pregnant.

MARIE

There are no knights in shining armor. That's what Mom says you know.

(MARIE becomes a dinosaur.)

MARIE (and many voices)

No knights to save you. You're alone. Then you die!

(SHANE enters. He carries a piñata.)

SHANE

Look, what I got, Otis. It's from my birthday years ago.

(MARIE the dinosaur has disappeared.)

OTIS

Oh. Did you see – your --?

SHANE

No one came to my party, so it didn't break.

OTIS

You think that's funny? Making fun –

SHANE

No! No! It's to help you face your fears, Otis, that's what it's for. Like therapy or something.

(SHANE hangs the piñata from something.)

OTIS

Are you sure? It's yours--

SHANE

Stand in the square.

(OTIS stands in the square with SHANE, who preps him.)

SHANE

Choke up on Brock a little. There you go.
Go for it. Think of it like – that's all the dinosaurs and – yeah. Therapy.

(A few moments, swings, and OTIS destroys the piñata. The
WOOSH, which SHANE hears.)

OTIS

There's no candy inside. Is that, like, a metaphor?

SHANE

No.

OTIS

There's never any candy inside?

SHANE

It didn't help?

(OTIS smiles.)

OTIS

Maybe a little.

(Something passes between them. Another sound.)

SHANE

Shhhh.

OTIS

What?

SHANE

Hide.

(They duck. The young dinosaur passes by stalking a cat.)

YOUNG DINOSAUR (voice fully, fully dinosaur:
ALL VOICES)

Heeeeeeeeere kitty kitty.

(When SHANE and OTIS emerge, they are both in full
RenFaire gear.)

SCENE 8

The Brief Exploits of Shane and Otis

(The sounds of the Renaissance Faire. The world appears,
distorted and twisted. The Royal entourage appears with it.)

HERALD

Her majesty, the queen!

QUEEN

Shane of Third Street!

SHANE

Yes, my queen.

QUEEN

Honeybears, an oh-so-awful darkness has descended on the kingdom. And you have been
chosen.

OTIS

The old ones?

QUEEN

One is many, many are one
And they come. They are here -- it is here, terrorizing the kingdom.

SHANE

What are they?

OTIS

Or it. It and they.

QUEEN

Perhaps a brontosaurus.

SHANE

Apatosaurus.

OTIS

Shhh.

QUEEN

Oh darlin's, defeat this, and you will receive a great reward of somesuch!

SHANE

I'll be knighted?

QUEEN

Do you accept this mission?

SHANE

Yes!

OTIS

Absolutely.

QUEEN

Fabulous, honeybears. To send you on your way, I have this to offer –

SHANE

A gift?

QUEEN

Something like that.

(whistles)

Bring out the wench!

(A GUARD brings out MARIE)

QUEEN

Darling honeybear, what fate do you decree for this wench?

Can we remove her kidneys?
GUARD

Shane!
MARIE

Would you like that? We can make her carry around a plastic bag full of pee for the rest of her life?
QUEEN

Please!
GUARD

Dude, Shane.
OTIS

Shane. Don't –
MARIE

Silence!
SHANE

(MARIE quiets. SHANE is tempted.)

I decree...

(pause)

I decree...

(pause)

Let Marie be.

Thank you!
MARIE

You sure? One kidney.
GUARD

I'm sure.
SHANE

As you wish.
QUEEN

(GUARD lets MARIE go.)

OTIS

That would have been totally lame.

SHANE

Your highness, I am prepared to undertake whatever it is I have been chosen for.

OTIS

Positive thinking.

MARIE

Him? That buttmunch?

QUEEN

Silence the whelp.

(GUARD silences her.)

OTIS

And I'm prepared to join him on this journey, your queenliness.

SHANE

Highness.

OTIS

Highness!

QUEEN

Oh, fabulous, darlin's. Now, go, be off. Slay whatever it is with your sword.

SHANE and OTIS

Brock.

QUEEN

Yes. Brock. Whatever. Good-luck. Have fun. Don't die.

(She disappears.)

SHANE

Come on, Otis.

OTIS

I'm coming.

SHANE

To defeat the whatever!

(OTIS gathers his books, the scraps of piñata.)

OTIS

I'm getting the research materials. We should grab some pancakes, too.

SHANE

They're all cold and frozen.

(They exit.)

(The GUARD becomes CYNTHIA.)

(MARIE is MARIE.)

CYNTHIA

Holy *crap*, Marie, Holy *crap*, Marie
My dad is so lame, Marie.
My teachers are so lame, Marie.
The city is so lame, Marie.
Who's your favorite boy, Marie?

MARIE

Uh. Carl Sagan.

CYNTHIA

Who's that?

MARIE

He's a dead scientist.

CYNTHIA

Weird.

MARIE

I did the homework. Family Life, puberty, the, uh, cycle –

(MARIE hands her the homework.)

CYNTHIA

So that's how it works? The moon.

MARIE

I got creative. Next time we should work together.

CYNTHIA

We discussed this. Your job –

MARIE

I know. It's more fun --

CYNTHIA

Your idea of fun is homework? Lame.

MARIE

Two brains, half the time. Plus we hang out.

CYNTHIA

I don't think this is working out, Marie.

MARIE

Because I made up the homework?

CYNTHIA

Last night, the Bracelets went to your mom's diner and she charged us full price, even for soda!

MARIE

You didn't invite me.

CYNTHIA

You never want to talk about boys.

MARIE

Carl Sagan is a boy!

CYNTHIA

Some girls belong to the Bracelets, and some don't. Give me back the bracelet.

MARIE

But –

CYNTHIA

Now, Marie. Don't make this harder for me than it is.

MARIE

You know my secret wishes.

CYNTHIA

Your wishes are stupid, Marie.

Your biggest dream is to leave this city, and that's never ever ever going to happen. Bracelet.

MARIE

We're just alike, and –

CYNTHIA

Bracelet!

MARIE

I can do your homework.

(CYNTHIA rips it off of her.)

MARIE

What? I was going to give it to you.

CYNTHIA

That way was much more dramatic.

(CYNTHIA exits. MARIE is left alone.)

MARIE

I hate this place. I hate this place! I HATE THIS PLACE!

(MARIE kicks and destroys something. She leaves.)

HERALD

We return to Shane and Otis, as they wander the countryside in search of dinosaurs to destroy and hydras to dehydrate.

(They enter, all a-gallivanting.)

SHANE

Gotta keep up, Otis. I'm four steps ahead of you, now I'm five steps ahead of you.

OTIS

Hold up, Shane.

SHANE

Is it your back?

OTIS

Look. The old ones.

(Wreckage. Maybe it's the remnants of a burned cottage, maybe just a mess of crap, a jagged piece of Third Street jutting into the fantasy world. In this wreckage -- ragged boxes, ripped shirts, and other pieces of someone's life. OTIS picks up a handful of feathers. SHANE picks up a tattered shirt.)

I really liked that shirt.

OTIS

This is --

SHANE

(A sound.)

Hold up.

OTIS

(It gets louder.)

The old ones--

SHANE

No.

OTIS

(The sound -- it's barking.)

Bruno.

OTIS

(A many-headed dog-monster and it's barking its head off at SHANE and OTIS. The sound is overwhelming. OTIS stands in front of SHANE.)

GO HOME GO HOME GO HOME!

OTIS

(OTIS picks up a stuffed animal, and hurls it.)

(Ripping, and then an explosion of fur and fluff.)

GO HOME GO HOME GO HOME

OTIS

(SHANE grabs a pancake.)

SHANE

Hey girl, hey girl.

(The barking changes a bit.)

SHANE

Go get it!

(SHANE hurls the pancake like a Frisbee. The dog-monster can be heard chasing after it.)

(The world calms.)

(OTIS looks at the bits and pieces of his stuffed animal.)

SHANE

Bruno is hungry.

OTIS

Yeah. But not the old ones. Let's go.

HERALD

And so Shane and Otis gallivanted across the countryside all day long, seeking and not finding more than a whisper of the –

OTIS

Shhh....

(SHANE and OTIS are back to back.)

(A rumble, a hiss.)

OTIS

There.

(SHANE turns. Nothing.)

OTIS

I'm not screwing with you.

HERALD

The afternoon turned into evening.

SHANE

It could be a hydra. A troll. An orc.

(We hear laughter – a pub. A door to *The Dragon's Lair*.)

OTIS

Better – hey -- How about here? Someone might know.

SHANE

I can't go in there.

OTIS

Yeah we can. Come on.

HERALD

They enter the Dragon's Lair, a pub in the heart of the Land of Pain.
Welcome Otis and Shane of Third Street. What can I get for you?

FOLLOWER

Serve it to him in a sippy cup.

OTIS

Two for us.

SHANE

You've been here before.

OTIS

They don't check IDs.

(OTIS is served an energy drink; SHANE is served something in a sippy cup.)

SHANE

Hilarious.

FOLLOWERS

Now, go away –
This place is not for you.

OTIS

It's cool, he's with me.

SHANE

I'm with him.

FOLLOWERS

The Teapot.

SHANE

We're tracking – well, we're not sure what it is.

OTIS

The old ones.

FOLLOWERS

The old ones, huh?
What's that mean?

SHANE

We're not sure. But we need to slay it. Have you seen it?

FOLLOWER

No! And get your butt out of here? What's this look like, an IHOP?

OTIS

You hungry? Can you get my – can you get my friend here something to eat?

FOLLOWERS

To eat? Sure we can!

(SHANE is hit by a barrage of dodge balls.)

FOLLOWERS

Eat that.

OTIS

Hey!

FOLLOWERS

Hey, Otis, /OT
Is Geekface your squire now?

SHANE

NO!

FOLLOWERS

Don't you have to be at Lubbock tomorrow?

SHANE

I do. I do!

FOLLOWERS

Gotta be off to Lubbock. Gotta go lose.

Go away, Teapot.

Teapots ain't wanted here. / Teapots ain't welcome at the Dragon's Lair –

Go away! Go away! Go away!

(This hurts SHANE)

OTIS

SHUT IT!

Shane's with me –

(he wraps an arm around SHANE.)

and if anyone has anything to say about it.

I'll break your arms into pieces!!!

FOLLOWERS

You and what army? /

He'll never be a knight

Go ahead and try

Go ahead and try

Go ahead and try!

(We return to the 'reality' of Third Street. SHANE's almost in tears.)

OTIS

Into tiny, tiny pieces!

SHANE

It's late. It's very late.

OTIS

We're close. I think, I think I hear it.

SHANE

Look, I got Lubbock tomorrow.

OTIS

What about the – are you okay?

(OTIS goes to touch SHANE, but SHANE shakes him off.)

SHANE

I got Lubbock tomorrow! And I'm still... I've just screwed around all day, I needed to train, I needed to –

OTIS

But the --

SHANE

I need eight hours of sleep, I need my second shower, I need protein, I need lentils, and –

OTIS

Shane! The queen, the dinosaur –

SHANE

I got *Lubbock* in the morning.

OTIS

So?

SHANE

There are no dinosaurs, Otis. Nothing we did was real, we have to be realistic.

OTIS

Realistic? You're going to a Ren Faire tomorrow.

SHANE

I am. And I'll probably lose, and I gotta sleep tonight. You should go home, and sleep.

OTIS

I can't, Shane. I can't.

SHANE

You're not going to get – Look, have a goodnight. Or don't, I don't care. I don't care.

OTIS

Shane.

SHANE

I don't.

OTIS

You're leaving me? Out here. I need you --

SHANE

Why are you such a freak?

OTIS

I don't think I can – Shane, I'm scared. Please. I can't do it alone.

SHANE

That's all we are, Otis. Until we die.

OTIS

I can't be alone.

SHANE

I have the faire. Go home. And grow up.

(He leaves.)

OTIS

Shane? Shane. SHANE!

(The DRAGON WOOSH)

OTIS

It's –

Please?

I need you.

I need you to save me.

(The woosh becomes this sound: “Smooookes”)

OTIS

I'll get eaten. I'll get –

It's cold out here. I need to be warm. I need a place to be –

DRAGON/SAUR

(getting closer)

Ssssssssssmooooookes.

(Suddenly, the biggest claws in the world grab hold of OTIS and take him away.)

SCENE 9
That Night

(Knocking, knocking, knocking.)

HERALD

Later that night, as Shane tries to settle himself into bed, a rattle of knocks on his front door – and no one to answer but him.

(SHANE answers. LUG and QB are there.)

LUG

Geekface. Hey, geekface. We're looking for Otis. You seen Otis?

QB

OT! Where are you? OT! He needs a lesson on not being –

LUG

Shut up, QB.
He missed school all week. He's been

(LUG makes a movement that means “bonkers”)

SHANE

Hiding from imaginary dinosaurs.

LUG

Dinosaurs? Psht. That house, lot more to worry about / than dinosaurs --

QB

You're useless. OT!

LUG

This is your fault, QB.

QB

I didn't do nothing, Lug.

LUG

That's the problem, genius.

SHANE

And you're worried?

LUG

You *are* useless.

QB

OT! It's not my fault you're full of crap!

SHANE

You care about him.

QB

He needs to tell my dad that he broke Lazy-Eye's arm, else I'll get thrown off the team, and then the Colossals will lose. You'd like that wouldn't you?

SHANE

No.

LUG

Let's go --

QB

Crap.

SHANE

Are you --

QB

I'm not going to cry. OT! For the love of crap! OT! OT!

(They leave. SHANE is about to return when he sees MARIE on the porch. SHE is staring up at the sky.)

MARIE

Nice job, buttmunch.

SHANE

Marie. What are you doing outside?

MARIE

I'm running away.

SHANE

You're running away.

MARIE

I think to Los Angeles. Maybe I'll be a movie star. Or an investment banker.

SHANE

You made it to the edge of the porch. Been out here long? It's

MARIE

Three AM.

I bet you can't see the stars in Los Angeles.

A billion things wrong here, but at least we got a few stars.

I thought I'd be an astronaut. You remember when me and my Dad would drive off?

SHANE

Yeah.

MARIE

He'd drive me out to the country. He'd smoke these thin, gas-station cigars, and I'd check a star chart against the sky.

You can kinda see Orion – and that's Cassiopeia.

I wanted to be an astronaut.

Now I'm more realistic.

That's what they call it when you stop dreaming.

SHANE

Are you actually running away?

MARIE

You will cry. Mom will cry.

You lost your squire/

SHANE

He wasn't my –

MARIE

(meaning her)

You lost your squire. Years ago.

And you finally had another playmate, and you lost him, too.

SHANE

Marie!

MARIE

Don't "Marie" me, Shane. I have been your squire since we played princess, since we saw my father drive off in his Buick Skylark.

SHANE

I know.

(MARIE hands him the cover of a dinosaur book)

MARIE

I wish I had someone who got my world. You? You throw him away.

SHANE

I wish we still did. Play.

MARIE

Goodnight, buttmunch.

(MARIE goes inside the house.)

(SHANE equips himself with Brock.)

(He begins to look for Otis.)

SHANE

Otis? Otis –

Where are you?

HERALD

He wasn't in the alley, the sandlot, the burned out barber shop

(The world transforms then, into SHANE's REN FAIRE fantasy, which is now dark and awful.)

(There, in the fantasy, MARLA's table. SHANE slides the cover of Otis's book to her.)

SHANE

"The old one comes."

MARLA

You want to ask the cards?

SHANE

I want to ask you.

(MARLA looks at the cover.)

MARLA

"Otis." I knew a boy named Otis. He loved to read books about dinosaurs. He wanted to grow up to be a dinosaur. Big and strong. He'd hide in whatever he could find, looking for a place to keep him safe.

SHANE

Where is he?

MARLA

Now dinosaurs speed away in Skylarks, Shane, or spend all day driving tow-trucks. If you were going to find him, where would you go?

(MARLA leaves.)

(SHANE sees a crumpled page of the dinosaur book.)

SHANE

Otis?

HERALD

He followed the dinosaur tracks.

(Dinosaur tracks. Up the fire escape.)

(Another crumpled page of the dinosaur book.)

HERALD

He followed the sounds of dinosaurs

(The low moan, growls, rumbling of dinosaurs.)

(Another crumpled page of the dinosaur book.)

HERALD

He followed – (meaning: his heart, but don't say it)

(SHANE squints.)

SHANE

I smell diesel.

(The sound of a dragon.)

SHANE

Hello dragon.

DRAGON (in the distance)

Sssssmoookes.

(The dinosaur is a dragon. It appears, forming from all of the terrible things that OTIS has heard in his life.)

DRAGON

YOU LITTLE PUUUUUUUUUUUNK!

(The voice becomes many)

Sleep in the garage / learn to be a man / rot out there / thief / good-for-nothing / You little punk / worthless / What do you think you're doing? / Boys don't cry / Little princess / What's wrong with you/ Stand against the wall / Where are my smokes? / Don't cross your legs like that you look like a chick / You'd name a boy fish "Sue," what's wrong with you? / Loser! /Don't cross your legs / Buttwad / Put it out in the yard / Don't make me take off my belt. / This is where dreams come to die/ you worthless / just wait 'til Pops comes home / what are you doing / no I don't love you /

(SHANE sings as he fights the dragon. He starts quietly and ends shouting)

SHANE

I'm a little teapot
Short and stout.
Here is my handle
Here is my spout
When I get all steamed up
Here me shout
TIP ME OVER AND POUR ME OUT

(With one final sweep of his sword and the stab of his voice, SHANE defeats the dragon. The dragon falls and feathers rain down.)

(A heavy diesel engine coughs and stops.)

(There's OTIS, curled up as if thrown out.)

(SHANE can't seem to find a breath from him.)

(But what if this is still a time of fantasy?)

(What if this is Sleeping Beauty?)

(What if SHANE figures this out?)

(SHANE kisses OTIS. It is a storybook kiss.)

(The kiss brings OTIS back.)

(They hold each other.)

... I was (dead) OTIS

I know. You're -- SHANE

A little teapot. OTIS

Alive. SHANE
And the --

Ah -- OTIS

A dragon. Now just ... feathers. It's gone. SHANE

(OTIS coughs.)

Not gone. There's always more -- OTIS

Until you die? SHANE

Yeah. OTIS

Let's get you off the street. You need sleep. SHANE

Death is sleep. OTIS

Come inside. SHANE

No. Your mom... you have the Faire. Knighthood. OTIS

I'll keep watch. SHANE

... Give me your sword. OTIS

(SHANE hands him Brock.)

For... Bravery. OTIS
And -- What comes next?

"I knight thee." SHANE

The 'thee's' important? OTIS

Doesn't count unless you say 'thee.' SHANE

I knight thee – Sir Shane. OTIS

(SHANE takes the sword.)

SHANE

I should knight thee as well.

OTIS

I'll save you someday, Shane.

"My hero," you'll say, as I pull you from the edge of the cliff, as the Pterodactyls and screech your name.

SHANE

Maybe you'll donate a kidney.

OTIS

I got other organs I'll give you. A spleen. My brain.

SHANE

Your heart?

(OTIS smiles. Sure. Yes, his heart.)

SHANE

If you don't sleep, your heart will stop

OTIS

I stink and. I can't. I can't. Not yet.

SHANE

Otis.

OTIS

Out here. Out here.

(OTIS looks around. He makes the outline of the box on the ground.)

OTIS

This is yours. You paid for it. It's safe. I'll use this?

SHANE

Out here.

(The ensemble surrounds them. They become Shane's creatures.)

OTIS

I don't know if I can sleep--

SHANE

I'll keep watch, Otis.

(Shane's creatures whisper: "Keep watch")

OTIS

My hero.

SHANE

I'll keep watch.

(A glance. Yeah, okay, OTIS nods)

SHANE

I'll be here. I'll keep them away.

(Maybe a final touch or kiss before OTIS settles. Maybe it's just in their eyes.)

OTIS

Good night, Good Knight.

(SHANE hum-sings Teapot. It's a lullaby.)

(OTIS is asleep. MARIE enters.)

MARIE

Buttmunch! Mom says you got two minutes to get inside if you want her to drive you to Lubbock. And she said that like twenty minutes ago. So you got, like, minus 18 minutes.

SHANE

Shhhh. Marie.

(SHANE's creatures whisper: "Shhh, Marie.")

SHANE

I have to stay.

(Creatures whisper: "He has to stay")

MARIE

What's going on?

SHANE

Can you get some blankets and a pillow?

MARIE

What do I tell Mom?

SHANE

I don't know.

(Creatures whisper: "This year / No Lubbock/ this year.")

MARIE

She took the day off for you, Shane.

SHANE

Have her take you to the Planetarium. She'll like that.

(Creatures whisper: "She'll like that / you'll like that/ so many beautiful stars.")

MARIE

(suspicion gives way to joy)

Really??

SHANE

Yeah.

MARIE

Shane, you're...

SHANE

What, Marie?

MARIE

Something else.

Okay. Okay. I'll figure out something. Pillows, blankets.

(SHANE kneels for her.)

SHANE

Thank you.

MARIE

Ugh.

(A beat, then she kisses his forehead.)

Sir Shane.

(She leaves. The sound of a dragon flying off.)

(Then... meowing.)

SHANE

Petey?

END of PLAY

SHE GETS NAKED IN THE END

CHARACTERS

SHE | Female. White.

Plays multiple ages, but her neutral age is 32. Her name is actually Elle. She controls the world of the Copper Hog – until Alex walks in.

ALEX | Female. Latina.

When younger, high school was her fiefdom. Now 32ish, her anxiety crackles. Actor also plays Elle's Mother, Sugar the waitress, and Addie the Cranky Bartender.

HE | Male.

Actor plays Elle's father, Scott, Mr. L, Javier, and a number of other random men.

SETTING & TIME

We're in the Copper Hog, a bar in the outskirts of a Central Valley town in California, and we're in 1999, except when we snap into the past or future.

NOTES

133

On style: *SHE GETS NAKED* lives a bit to the left of realism. Don't be afraid to make HER power almost supernatural. Until Alex enters, SHE is in control.

Additionally, while it's not required that this be produced with only three actors, it's highly recommended; the instant transformation of the actors is part of the magic.

Although we skip to different times, this play should be produced around a single crappy pool table that transforms like the actors.

“/” means that the next line begin.

**SHE GETS NAKED
IN THE END**

(A spark, and the stage becomes a lake of fire. In the crackling, we hear the screech of tires. A snap, and the fire disappears, leaving a single pool table, a metallic hog's head watching over, and a woman. SHE surveys the space.)

SHE

You know from /looking at her –

(HE appears.)

HE

From looking at her / she's trouble.

SHE

She's the end of the world.

(HE whistles.)

SHE

She'd have it no other way.

HE

You see her, wearing that, / holy shit

SHE

She glides into the bar. Doesn't even look at the bulldog bouncer guarding the door, doesn't have to, she owns the place, it's in her jeans, the leather boots. / This is

HE

This is The Copper Hog /

(SHE creates the world from smoke.)

SHE

Welcome to the Copper Hog. Curls of cigarette smoke hang in the air like Christmas ornaments. The air rings, sounds of merriment scented with alcohol, and a whiff, here and there, of vomit. Dollar bills flutter from the ceiling, pinned by a thousand assholes hoping to thumb the scales of luck by sacrificing to the gods of getting laid. She's not even at the bar when the first / Heya

HE

Heya, sweetie. You're cute.

SHE

Thank you.

HE

Let me buy you a drink.

SHE

A gin, up, rocks. No tonic. Tonic means you get less gin.
She thanks him / with

HE

With a wink.

SHE

A wink that means --

HE

You just got screwed buddy.

SHE

She ain't luck tonight.

The drink in hand, she passes the dart board clinging to a wall scarred as if with track marks, the old arcade games with peeling decals of voluptuous women, and the brokedown men like mounds of dirty laundry who watch her.

They are bloated bodies floating through the Copper Hog, having drowned long ago in beer, liquor, and oil from the deep fryer, and she's a ripple, a snag, and these bodies turn.

(SHE runs her fingers over the table.)

The pool table's felt is cracked and balding.

Hello old friend.

(SHE hangs her purse from the mouth of the Copper Hog)

She racks the balls, twists powder to the end of the cue.

HE

The men --

SHE

Boys

HE

Watch her. All we want --

SHE

All they want

HE

Is a shot.

(Snap.)

SHE

The cue darts from her hand. It snaps at the balls, tells them where she wants them to go.

HE

They do not disobey.

SHE

They know better. She never pretends.

SCOTT (HE)

'Sup!

SHE

Another one.

SCOTT (HE)

What a dump, huh? I know what you're thinking: What's a nice guy like me doing in a place like this? I'm a spy. I think you're a spy, too.

SHE

She leans over the table to line up her next shot.

SCOTT (HE)

Hello? That was a pickup line.

SHE

Really?

SCOTT (HE)

In college, I could rock the pool table. I have a Masters from USC.
Let me show you a couple tricks.

(Snap. SHE sinks a hard shot without his assistance.)

SCOTT (HE)

Oooh. I'm your lucky charm, babe.

SHE

And he leans.

SCOTT (HE)

Hoping.

SHE

All they want –

SCOTT (HE)

Let me see her tits, God, God let me see her tits. I need this.

SHE
He's full of prayers. A good Christian boy, aren't you?

SCOTT (HE)
She starts to line up her next shot, then:

SHE
Do you want to see me naked?

SCOTT (HE)
Yuh-yeah. Is that it?

SHE
He thinks, that was / too damn

SCOTT (HE)
Too damn easy.

SHE
Hope is a terrible thing. In this moment, in his mind, he's / taking her

SCOTT (HE)
He takes her to his apartment, leads her upstairs, it's clean --

SHE
The dirty laundry has disappeared, and the smell too. After all, this is a dream. He / lies

SCOTT (HE)
tosses her down in his bed. The throttle unchoked, pants descend, shirts peel, bra unclasps--

SHE
One try.

SCOTT (HE)
and in this second, he imagines --

SHE
Flesh finds flesh.

SCOTT (HE)
Just a moment, he thinks, let this moment last...

SHE
I'd rather see you dead.

(Snap.)

HE

Her wish will be granted.

(SHE drinks.)

SCOTT (HE)

Fucking bitch.

SHE

The gin is smooth.
He returns to the bar. Maybe he'll play some Journey.
She lines up her next shot.
No one ever ever sees her naked.

(ALEX enters.)

ALEX

Boo.

(The snap is chaos. SHE has dropped to earth)

ALEX

You missed.

(HER silence is marine-layer thick. It hangs over ALEX's
stabs at conversation)

You missed. Is it my turn?

(ALEX takes over.)

Look at all the colors. Some have stripes.

(ALEX knocks one in.)

Plunk.

Some have color.

(ALEX knocks one in.)

Plunk.

I hit the eight one in. Did I win? I think I won.

... Oh, silence.

"Of all the bars in all the world, she walks into mine."

Is that how it goes? "Of all the..." Casablanca?

She walks into the Copper Hog.

You stayed in – or came back to --

You didn't go back to...

Texas, right? Texas.

Land of boots and belt buckles and shucking corn and cattle, boo.

(Knocking.)

SHE

Texas.

(Knocking.)

FATHER (HE)

Let me in.

ALEX

Oh, Boo.

(ALEX becomes Dee-Dee, HER MOTHER)

BOO! Get your stuff, get your stuff, now!

SHE

And in that moment,

(Snap.)

She's in Texas.

In this flashback, he plays her father and Alex plays her mother.

It's cartoonish, but it's not a cartoon.

FATHER (HE)

Please, Dee-Dee. Don't go.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Think you can leave this family for a week, come home drunk? Jackass, I'm putting everything I own into suitcases. Suitcases! Come on, boo.

SHE

Her father is on the front porch --

FATHER (HE)

Please please PLEASE let me in!

I won't hurt you.

SHE

Behind him is Texas, land of porches and junebugs, oils fields pulling ancient death from the ground. She is so young, but she knows -- don't let him in. She knows because the moment she touches the doorknob --

FATHER (HE)

NO! Don't open it!

SHE

Mixed messages were the only kinds she got from him.

MOTHER (ALEX)

I gotta take a Greyhound because the Pontiac is broke, Duke. I caught YOUR DAUGHTER under the Pontiac, trying to fix the damn thing.

FATHER (HE)

Dee-Dee!

MOTHER (ALEX)

The problem with your father is NOTHING WORKS ON HIM!

FATHER (HE)

What's that supposed to mean?

MOTHER (ALEX)

It means your penis is broken. Your daughter's watching you, and what does she see? What does she see, Duke? A nothing --

FATHER (HE)

I'm a man!

MOTHER (ALEX)

So she crawls herself in the grime and tetanus, Duke. What if she got tetanus and died?

FATHER (HE)

I'll fix the damn Pontiac!

MOTHER (ALEX)

Wash yourself, girly-girl. Get your purple makeup kit. She looks like shit on a Triscuit!

FATHER (HE)

Are you going to let me in?

MOTHER (ALEX)

How much you had to drink?

FATHER (HE)

Couple shots. C'mon, knock knock?

SHE (very young)

"Who's there?"

(SHE goes to open the door.)

MOTHER (ALEX) and FATHER (HE)

No. Don't!

SHE (very young)

Why?

FATHER (HE)

Babygirl, just don't.

MOTHER (ALEX)

We're going to leave!

FATHER (HE)

Don't you dare! DON'T! I'll – LET ME IN!

MOTHER (ALEX)

We gotta make the rent.

SHE

When they lived in Texas, they always found houses on the almost good side of town.

FATHER (HE)

Dee-Dee. Don't leave me.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Did I say we were leaving for good? Don't put words in my mouth.

(to HER)

What did I tell you, boo? Put on your makeup, and get into a dress, a DRESS. Shouldn't see your Pops this way.

FATHER (HE)

Be nice, Dee-Dee.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Go get ready. We got acting. Your Pop's going for a walk.

FATHER (HE)

I love you, Dee-Dee.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Duke. You gone a week, come back drunk –

FATHER (HE)

I'm trying.

MOTHER (ALEX)

(softer)

I know. Don't stop trying.

Now, go for a walk. You know the rules.

(calls)

Hurry up, little girl!

SHE

The launch of one memory always collides with another.

The girl's mom is an actress. The stage is, let's say, in front of the post office today. And she is her assistant. Life is a beauty pageant, ladies and gentlemen. And this is the great Dee-Dee's entry to the talent competition.

MOTHER (ALEX)

(crying)

I'm sorry, to bother you -- I was – we were – robbed, this man he was (whispers) black!

SHE (very young)
Mommy, mommy! I want to go home!

THE MARK (HE)
Should I call, you know, someone?

MOTHER (ALEX)
No police! He has friends!

SHE (very young)
Mommy, mommy! Home!

MOTHER (ALEX)
Do you have bus fare? He took all my cash. I'm sorry. Just- GOD!

SHE
Her mother's eyeliner streaking, the helpless maiden can always pull a fiver from some do-good Texas Caucasian.

(MOTHER collects a fiver from THE MARK, who then becomes THE BIG TEXAN.)
For bigger fish, ask them to please, help these two girls start a new life --

MOTHER (ALEX)
I'm sorry to bother you. It's just – I'm scared. He closed all of our accounts. I have three dollars, I don't care about myself. How can I keep her safe on three dollars?

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)
Shhh. It'll be alright, lady.

MOTHER (ALEX)
I can't let him touch her.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)
(to HER)
Howdy, little girl.

MOTHER (ALEX)
It's \$15 to get her to Lubbock. My aunt lives in Lubbock.

SHE (very young)
I want you to come with me, Mommy.

MOTHER (ALEX)
We don't know if even you can go, darling.
Oh God.
No! I won't cry in front of her.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

Sure is pretty.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Please, help me, sir. Please. Don't make me beg.

SHE (very young)

To Auntie Dean's house.

(HE opens his wallet.)

MOTHER (ALEX)

God bless you!

(HE hands her the wad of cash.)

MOTHER (ALEX)

This is. More than \$15. A lot more.

SHE (very young)

You can come with me, Mommy?

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

You do what your mom says, y'hear? That's a good girl. Such a pretty girl.

MOTHER (ALEX)

This is too much. I can't take it.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

Little ladies, y'all might get hungry on the bus.

MOTHER (ALEX)

You're doing God's Work.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

Nah, I'm just a man, lending assist to one of God's fellow creatures.

(Snap. ALEX is again ALEX. We're in the Copper Hog.)

ALEX

You're so quiet, boo. A penny – no.
A dollar for your thoughts.

SHE

The line is "of all the gin joints in all the towns in the world."

ALEX

She speaks!

(As they talk, there are silences you can drive a minivan through. We'll just leave them as white space.)

Hello, Alex.

SHE

Fifteen years.

ALEX

Huh.

A decade and half.

SHE

Time flies.

ALEX

You still suck at pool.

SHE

How've you been?

ALEX

ALEX

... So, I live in Roseville now. You know, Roseville? Up near –

SHE

Heaven?

ALEX

The Automall.

SHE

My mistake.

ALEX

They sell cars. At the Automall.

SHE

I spy with my little eye: church-goers with clotted arteries and ulcers who worship Nordstroms buying Minivans and SUVs. Come on down to the Roseville Automall.

ALEX

So. You look good.

SHE

You don't.

ALEX

You don't mean that.
You don't.

SHE

You sure?

ALEX

Yes. No. Yes.

What happens in fifteen years is – uh – and in fifteen years, you've, well. And me, I've – hey. The city sure has changed. They, wow, you know, Wal-Mart, Target, Costco, new gym at the high school, whole neighborhoods, saw a guy with a sign, homeless, that said, "the end is near," that's new, the city didn't have, well it probably did, and this one, well, you know all

those crazies who think the Y2K bug is going to – with the Millennium coming -- you turn your back and the whole place changes. Wow, fifteen years. A dog could have been born and died of old age.

Have you seen the gym?

And uh um, yeah,

I guess, what I'm trying to say is, you know,

I've missed you.

Now, I've found you.

SHE

Wasn't hiding.

ALEX

You've missed me too.

SHE

Maybe.

(Snap.)

SHE

It's eleventh grade. She's sixteen. After an incident in Texas, her parents take her to California. Land of/

FATHER (HE)

Land of opportunity. Of new beginnings. / Of –

SHE

Wildfires!

FATHER (HE)

Doesn't happen too much.

SHE (young)

Earthquakes!

FATHER (HE)

You're so negative!

SHE (young)

High school!

HE

And now, he is Mr. L, PE teacher, Mantequilla High --

(whistles as MR. L)

Move your asses, heya heya heya. Get the burn on, ladies. The pain makes you pretty.

Hey, new girl!

What? SHE (young)

You didn't shower. MR. L (HE)

Yeah. SHE (young)

That's against the rules, sweetcheeks. Shower. Boom. What do they teach you in Texas? Disobedience? They teach you the alphabet? Know what an F means? MR. L (HE)

I don't -- SHE (young)

Are you questioning my authority? You shower or you flunk, capiche? MR. L (HE)

(He leaves.)

(ALEX appears. SHE shrinks. We're in a locker room. SHE begins to flip quarters.)

You never shower, new girl. ALEX (young)

No. SHE (young)

And you never dress out. ALEX (young)

Guess I'm flunking. Fuck. SHE (young)

I don't like that word. ALEX (young)

Oh Fuck. Sorry. SHE (young)

What are you doing? ALEX (young)

Quarters. If you flip it right, you can always get heads. See. Heads. SHE (young)

ALEX (young)

You smell like vagina.

SHE (young)

Mr. L is a total perv'. I swear, he hid a camera in the wall to take pictures of naked girls. He sells them to jocks and truckers and lesbians.

ALEX (young)

I've looked all over and haven't found a camera.

SHE (young)

It's your pussy on I-5.

(flips)

Heads.

ALEX (young)

You're bearing false witness. I'm Alexandra Lopez de Vaca.

SHE (young)

I know.

ALEX (young)

I'm descended from Aztec Royalty AND wealthy Spanish Conquistadors.

SHE (young)

Impressive.

ALEX (young)

It's like I'm double royalty.

SHE (young)

You're dating Javier Rojas.

ALEX (young)

He's very beautiful, isn't he? Like you can't help but look at him. I see you looking at us.

SHE (young)

(flips)

Heads.

ALEX (young)

You know, vanity isn't a virtue, but the Lord gave you your looks, you should, you know, do something with them.

You could have anyone you want.

SHE (young)

(flips.)

Heads.

ALEX (young)

I've just decided. We're going to be friends.

SHE (young)

Do I have a choice?

ALEX (young)

You'll take me to your house, and show me the secret key to your daddy's liquor cabinet, just to show off, and then you'll take a swig of let's say gin, and hand it to me.

SHE (young)

Will you drink it?

ALEX (young)

No, I will not. You'll shrug, take another swig, then top it off with tap water.

SHE (young)

And you'll crack open the Bible and read me passages from The Book of Jesus.

ALEX (young)

You'll be drunk or moved by the Grace of the Word, and then you'll crumble into convulsions, sobbing into my lap. I'll cradle your head and recite proverbs. We'll glimpse each other's worlds. Next Sunday, I'll bring you to my church.

SHE (young)

We'll be church ladies. Heads.

ALEX (young)

As your new best friend, my first advice is: shower with us. What's your name?

(Flips – the coin falls.)

SHE (young)

Elle.

ALEX (young)

That's a pretty name. Elle. It's a letter.

(ALEX folds the coin into ELLE's hand.)

ALEX (young)

Tails.

SHE (young)

Oh.

ALEX (young)

If you take better care of yourself, I'll let you fuck my boyfriend.

(Snap.)

(We return to the bar. Something has changed in HER, just barely. There's a crack in her defenses. SHE chuckles.)

SHE

Alex, you know, you really really suck at pool.

ALEX

I know. It feels radioactive, like I touch it and something might explode. Sssssss-booom.

SHE

You're terrifying, Mistress of Roseville.

ALEX

You'd hate it. I hate it. Everyone who lives there hates it – we don't have buses or sidewalks because we can't stand each other – it's a city connected by self-loathing – why don't we grab some dinner, the diner across the street, I'll tell you all about it –

SHE

I'm not allowed. They say the manager lets you eat for free if you give him a handjob. He bans you for life if you laugh and spit in his face. You should go.

ALEX

There's a Jack in the B-Jesus Fish down the street. Jack in the Box? It looks like a Jesus fish, you know, the "box."

SHE

We can order the e-coli burgers. Side of food poisoning.

ALEX

We'll ask them to burn the patty. It's on my husband.

(The crack seals.)

SHE

...

How is your husband?

ALEX

Javier doesn't know I'm here.

SHE

You're late for dinner.

ALEX

Very, very late. No one has ever been this late. Dinner is cold.

SHE

Hubby-dear waits at the oak table, is it antique? --

ALEX

It's painted to look antique.

SHE

A glittering chandelier --

ALEX

Plastic.

SHE

-- from the vaulted ceiling above him. Do you see him? A fork in one hand, knife in the other. Cobwebs dripping from his chin. He waits, ulcers churning pearl necklaces in his stomach.

You should get back to him.

ALEX

I am my own -- you know -- and I can -- you know -- it's not -- I'm not -- you know --

SHE

Do you wear an actual apron?

ALEX

It keeps your clothes clean --
Let's go. I'll tell you all about it.

(ALEX fiddles with HER purse.)

SHE

HEY! Is that yours? Put it back.

(ALEX returns the purse. HER tone has shifted.)

ALEX

I'm -- sorry.

We can go for a walk. We can -- we can get something from the 7-Eleven or --
-- Look you -- Can we talk?

SHE

Let me tell you a joke.

ALEX

Tell it to me over an e-coli burger.

SHE

It will make you laugh.
So, every night, this 'fucking bitch' walks into a bar.

ALEX

This woman walks into a bar.

SHE

The Copper Hog. She knows how to walk into a bar. And no one ever leaves with her.

(This is not going to plan, is it, ALEX?)

ALEX

I'll get a drink. I'll get the special. A gin and tonic. We can drink, and play this game, and talk. You want anything?

SHE

No.

(ALEX heads to the bar.)

(SCOTT (HE) sees his opportunity. Uh oh.)

SCOTT (HE)

Heya sweetcheeks!

SHE

Oh good.

SCOTT (HE)

Listen sweetcheeks, I got you this girly-drink, and when a man buys a woman a drink, it's only fair...

SHE

He wants another shot.

SCOTT (HE)

Dig deep through the dirt and bitchyness, I always find the girl with a heart of gold.

SHE

He smells of whiskey and desperation.

SCOTT (HE)

I've had enough Jack Daniels to swallow your bullshit and take aim at your iron twat!

SHE

This place needs a curse jar.

SCOTT (HE)

I don't curse, not in like normal life, like when I'm normal. I'm a nice guy, you know. But sometimes, you know, bar!

SHE

Go away.

SCOTT (HE)

It makes you someone else, like the wolfman, full moon, arooo! Wolfman.

SHE

Go away now.

SCOTT (HE)

I'm all sorts of charming. You should be charming, too.

SHE

Go away. Please.

(ALEX returns.)

SCOTT (HE)

I respect girls, you know, I *worship* them. I put them on the tallest pedestal, like the tallest, like really tall. And a man who loves the ladies knows that he can give her whatever she wants.

ALEX

You have a suitor.

SCOTT (HE)

See I'm an optimist. Glass half-full, that sort of thing.

ALEX

And what does she want?

SCOTT (HE)

Attention. God you're cute.

SHE

Thank you. You're not.

SCOTT (HE)

Hey.

(he produces a dollar bill)

You know what this is for?

SHE

Your haircut?

ALEX

What's it for?

SCOTT (HE)

Yeah, she knows.

(he produces a pen)

This is my correcting pen. It makes things right.

(He scrawls on the dollar bill.)

ALEX

What is it?

SCOTT (HE)

My name. A sacrifice.

(He climbs onto a barstool and pins it to the ceiling.)

SHE

It's bullshit.

SCOTT (HE)

Want to bet?

ALEX

What's the bet?

SCOTT (HE)

By the end of tonight, I'll get you naked. I'm the wolfman, arooo!

SHE

A Zippo could turn these wishes to ash.

ALEX

How many are for you?

SHE

A few. Hundred.

ALEX

And how many – (worked)

SHE

None.

ALEX

None?

No one.

SHE

All these years?

ALEX

All these years, Alex.
She never gets naked.

SHE

It's going to rust shut if you don't use it.

SCOTT (HE)

He thinks it's going to rust shut.

SHE

I call bullshit on you. Hey Carl! I'm calling bullshit on your eye-candy, she says she's never been laid, and I say, BULL-SHIT.

SCOTT (HE)

I knew you'd – but no one?

ALEX

Let me teach you to release the beast in your twat.

SCOTT (HE)

Welcome to the Copper Hog, Alex.

SHE

What's your name?

ALEX

Scott.

SCOTT (HE)

Hello, Scott.

ALEX

Mr. Scott. Chemistry teacher. I teach *really* stupid high schoolers.

HE

Hi Scott. I'm Alex.

ALEX

Hello, Alex.

SCOTT (HE)

ALEX

You seem nice. Look at your arms.

SCOTT (HE)

Yeah, muscles! Punch me in the face. Go on. Punch me in the face. I can take it.

ALEX

You seem – wow.

(she touches his shoulder.)

Wow.

(she takes his arm, has him clench)

Look at that.

(his attention is all on her)

Maybe that dollar was for me?

SCOTT (HE)

Yeah. Maybe.

(HE makes as if to kiss her.)

ALEX

Can you do me a favor? Can you get me a Heineken, please?

SCOTT (HE)

Okay. I'll miss you.

(He leaves.)

ALEX

There we go.

SHE

You should leave before he comes back.

ALEX

Did you see that? Did you see, I just --

You're welcome.

Hey, you're welcome.

SHE

This place is not for you.

ALEX

But –

SHE

It would be a lie to say it was nice to see you, Alex.

It was nice to see you.
Go away now.

(ALEX melts away as the table draws HER back.)

She returns to the pool table.
Hello old friend.
You've been waiting.

(Snap.)

SHE

When she is younger in Texas, her father goes away for days. He has --

FATHER (HE)
Prospects.

SHE

MOTHER (ALEX)

Dreams.

Retardation.

Ideas.

SHE

MOTHER (ALEX)

Another family I bet.

FATHER (HE)

Prospects!

SHE

One time, the set up is normal. No, the set up is cliché.

MOTHER (ALEX)

You're late for dinner.

FATHER (HE)

I got held up.

MOTHER (ALEX)

You're a week late for dinner.

FATHER (HE)

I have returned from far off lands, seeking treasure and other shit like that!

MOTHER (ALEX)

You smell like ass.

FATHER (HE)

It's the smell of cavemen. You don't question the blood on the cavemen's brow, the sweat from his armpits. You thank him for the hunt.

(He sidles up to her. He grabs her.)

Watch yourself. Not in front of --
MOTHER (ALEX)

You missed me.
FATHER (HE)

Duke --
MOTHER (ALEX)
(she melts a bit, but then a harsh)
Parts of you.

Dad?
SHE (young)

I'm going to bed. Don't join me.
MOTHER (ALEX)

(MOTHER (ALEX) leaves.)

That mom of yours.
FATHER (HE)

Dad?
SHE (young)

Your old man's smart, chickadee. He's got prospects. He'll buy your momma a new car.
FATHER (HE)

A blue Mustang!
SHE (young)

I got these ideas, you know? All these ideas, they just buzz. Buzz.
FATHER (HE)

Here's where something different happens.
SHE

I gotta spend time with you, girly-girl. Shit.
Let's go out, girly-girl.
FATHER (HE)

And so that night, when he hits the bar, he takes her. They land at The Tap, a dive in the outskirts of Greywater. Alex will now be playing Addie, the cranky bartender.
SHE

The fuck are you doing, bringin a kid in here?
ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX)

FATHER (HE)

Nah, she's alright, Addie. She's a midget.

SHE (young)

(whispers)

Dad.

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

Go to hell.

FATHER (HE)

Nah, she is, she is.

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

To hell, Duke.

FATHER (HE)

Her Momma died, you gonna send her out? I gotta talk a man about a thing, and you gonna throw her out, orphaned and grieving? Look at her, she's sad.

SHE (young)

"Please. I'm sad."

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

I got my eye on you, Duke. Don't try shit.

FATHER (HE)

What would I do?

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

Hah.

FATHER (HE)

Have you seen John? He owes me. Or Sam. I got an idea for Sam.

ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

See me rolling my eyes and ignoring you?

FATHER (HE)

Shit.

SHE (young)

What's that?

FATHER (HE)

That, girly-girl, is a pool table. Here.

(he hands her the cue)

Go ahead.

(She tries and fails.)

That's alright. It's your first time --
FATHER (HE)

Dad!
SHE (young)

Let's try together.
FATHER (HE)

(HE wraps himself around her.)

You smell!
SHE (young)

Sorry.
FATHER (HE)

No! It's okay.
SHE (young)

Hold tight.
FATHER (HE)

And then
SHE

(Snap.)
It does what they tell it. She has an instinct for physics.

There you go, girly-girl.
FATHER (HE)

Duke. Sam's out back.
ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

You're a doll, Addie.
FATHER (HE)

Shut up.
ADDIE THE CRANKY BARTENDER (ALEX).

Daddy.
SHE (young)

... We'll finish the game, then I gotta see Sam.
FATHER (HE)

SHE (young)

Okay.

(Snap.)

SHE

That night, he teaches her to play pool. He forgets to hustle Sam. She thinks that it will be the only time he takes her, but three months later--

FATHER (HE)

Let's go!

SHE

And they sprint to the Pontiac, slide into the seats, and crank the radio until it howls. Another night, another bar. Four months after that.

FATHER (HE)

Let's go?

SHE

And again. Stubs of trees swing by.

FATHER (HE)

Your old Pops, he has prospects, girly-girl. We'll take Texas by the ears, turn her upside down, shake the quarters out of her pockets. We'll strip her naked and slap her silly.

SHE

These are her fondest memories.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Duke, I need thirty bucks by tomorrow, or we choose between water and electricity. Which one you like more?

FATHER (HE)

Lefty owes me --

MOTHER (ALEX)

Boo, put on the pretty pink dress, we gotta --

FATHER (HE)

I got it, Dee-Dee.

SHE

When Mom is asleep, they head out to bars. Sometimes months pass between trips, sometimes only a single night. Over these years, he teaches her / Everything

FATHER (HE)

Everything I know, little girl.

SHE

He teaches her about cars. In the flickering of gas stations, he opens up the belly of the Pontiac and shows her the guts.

FATHER (HE)

You're always under there. Show you how it works –

SHE

She can change oil, rebuild a brake system, tear open a steering column and ignite an engine. She can bring machines back from the dead.

HE

He teaches her about men. Everything she knows, she learns from her old man.

SHE

This night, the place is *Charlie's*.

FATHER (HE)

Don't move. Just gotta take a leak. Okay?

SHE

She's at the pool table. She's 12. This one, a man who smells like Brylcreme, approaches.

A CREEPER (HE)

How much?

SHE (young)

I can beat you, wanna bet?

A CREEPER (HE)

You don't get it. Heh. How much?

SHE (young)

... I play the pool game.

A CREEPER (HE)

A hundred dollars.

SHE (young)

Rack them up.

A CREEPER (HE)

For a kiss.

SHE (young)

I play pool.

A CREEPER (HE)

\$150 for a kiss. Look. You can buy your momma a gift.

SHE (young)

I play pool.

A CREEPER (HE)

Two hundred dollars – just to see what’s under your shirt. I won’t touch. I’ll be five, ten feet away.

I’m so lonely. Do you know what it is to be lonely?

SHE (young)

Uh.

(SHE glances around. SHE nods.)

(They walk out.)

(A moment.)

(A snap. Yelling. An argument between two men. A crash. The wet thud of flesh meeting, as one man beats another. The violence is terrible.)

SHE (young)

Stop, Daddy, he’s not moving, stop --

(HE appears, again her FATHER, leading her by the arm.)

SHE (young)

Ow, ow, daddy, he was paying me –

FATHER (HE)

Don’t ever let anyone touch you!

SHE (young)

You hurt him.

FATHER (HE)

NEVER EVER EVER!

We’re leaving.

SHE (young)

But I –

FATHER (HE)

We’re leaving *now!* Never again, Elle. Never again!

SHE

They leave. She can see blood on his boots.
Tonight is silent.
She is sure that this is the last time they'll be together. She's lost her father.
But, months later, they take another trip.
On this one, he teaches her to wear boots.

FATHER (HE)

Look, chickadee.

SHE (young)

Weird, Dad.

FATHER (HE)

You're growing into a, you know, a woman. You have the, you know, period.

SHE (young)

Oh god.

FATHER (HE)

And your mom, that was her job, but, look. I see the way the men, they look at you, 'cause you're a pretty – you know – and I see – they offer you. “How much for the kid?”
Shit.

How much for the kid? Fuck.
It makes me so

(he punches the ceiling)

Ow.

SHE (young)

Dad.

FATHER (HE)

I'm going to show you something. Don't tell your mother.

(He looks around. He unzips his pants.)

SHE (young)

Dad! This is gross, what is wrong with you?!

FATHER (HE)

You're my daughter, and I'm going to show this to you.

SHE (young)

Dad. Dad. What are you doing? Wait. Stop STOP!

(He opens his underwear. SHE gasps.)

FATHER (HE)

See. See that?

SHE (young)

Dad.
Did Mom do that?

FATHER (HE)

That's not for you to know.

SHE

Oh. Dad.

FATHER (HE)

I got this because I got fresh. I deserved it.
Listen, girly – listen, Elle. Before any man touches you, before anyone anyone anyone so much as SEES YOU, you make 'em pay. And not money. You can't be afraid to do that, understand?

SHE (young)

Yes.

FATHER (HE)

Good.

(He fixes his pants.)

SHE

Are you crying?

(Snap. We return to the bar.)

ALEX

Hey. Hey! Elle. What's wrong?

SHE

The Copper Hog isn't safe for a girl like you.

ALEX

Elle. What's wrong?

SHE

This place will eat you, Alex.

ALEX

And not you?

SHE

This is an ecosystem. A temple. You're an invader --

ALEX

And you're what, the queen?

SHE

The end of the world. Heads turn, and men who think they have game, who think it is a game, learn for the first time in their lives that they are mortal. Men who believe we owe them something, wither.

So yes, every night, this 'fucking bitch' walks into a bar, she knows how to walk into a bar, and no one leaves here with her, Alex. Not even you. It's time for you to go.

ALEX

I'm not going.

SHE

You've been warned.

Scott, the Chemistry teacher, returns bearing Heineken – he's been gone a few minutes, it feels like an hour.

(He drapes his arms around ALEX like he's claiming her for his own.)

SCOTT (HE)

Heya, Alex. That short for Alexandra? I like that. Alex---zandra. You smell nice, Alex.

ALEX

Scott the Chemistry teacher. You're back.

SCOTT (HE)

The wolfman has returned. Aroo!
I'll find the beast in you.

ALEX

The beast, huh?

SCOTT (HE)

Isn't it nice to be held?

ALEX

I guess.

SCOTT (HE)

Hey, I'm going to kiss you.

ALEX

Uh, no –

SCOTT (HE)

Watch me, I'll kiss you

(SCOTT (HE) kisses ALEX, who doesn't like it.)

SCOTT (HE)

Now I'll kiss you again

(SHE takes a quarter and slides it into the juke.)

SHE

Scott!

SCOTT (HE)

What's going on?

(The juke comes to life. SHE reels SCOTT (HE) away from ALEX, pulling him into a dance.)

SHE

The music stokes high. It burns, and she disappears into the burn. She will bring him with her. Hello, fire.

SCOTT (HE)

Holy crap.

SHE

He can feel her –

SCOTT (HE)

Her tits, both of them.

SHE

And he can feel his / flesh.

SCOTT (HE)

Manhood. Holy crap.

SHE

Here in the old Copper Hog,

SCOTT (HE)

She RULES!

ALEX

One time this woman walked into a bar. She knew how to walk into a bar. He thinks/

SCOTT (HE)

Holy shit, that bitch is coming home with me.

SHE

Scott, enjoy your fantasy.
His grin eats shit, and she feeds it.
Alex is imagining herself back in Susanville.

ALEX

Roseville.

SHE

Or wherever she's living.

ALEX

Roseville.

SHE

Safe in her stucco cube with vaulted ceilings, curled up on a couch, watching Jeopardy, away from the creatures of the Copper Hog.

SCOTT (HE)

We'll have lots of sexual chemistry. HAH! That's funny. I'm a chemistry teacher, so it's funny. I teach chemistry to really stupid high schoolers.

SHE

Atoms, molecules, chemicals.

ALEX

Here's the mistake.

SHE

His –

ALEX

Or hers. Her thoughts are on Alex.

SHE

Alex needs to get home.

ALEX

She's distracted. And Scott says --

SCOTT (HE)

I could teach you chemistry.

ALEX

How about physics?

SCOTT (HE)

Human anatomy?

ALEX

Know how many bones are in a human hand, Scott?

SCOTT (HE)

Let me show you.

(That's when he grabs her breast.)

(Snap. SHE's broken his hand.)

(A beat. Then he howls in pain.)

SCOTT (HE)

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!
Holy fuck! What's wrong with you?

ALEX

Oh my God.

SHE

What?

ALEX

You broke his hand!

SCOTT (HE)

You broke my hand, you broke my hand!

SHE

Never touch me. Learn this, teacher man.

SCOTT (HE)

My hand is broken! I'm a nice guy and my hand is broken!

ALEX

Let's call you a cab, teacher man. Let's get you --

SCOTT (HE)

A drink! I want another drink. It's not that bad, is it? It's not that bad?

(SHE is at the pool table again.)

ALEX

-- to the hospital. Emergency room.

HE

(to ALEX)

Will you go home with me?

ALEX

Wouldn't you prefer a trip to the hospital?

(ALEX and HE leave. SHE looks at the purse.)

SHE

How was that?

(She returns to the game.)

SHE

Exit Alexandra Lopez de Vaca and Scott the crippled teacher who's learned a lesson.

She's alone again.

Physics lesson. Conservation of energy. Muscles contract and the chemical energy becomes mechanical, travels from the wooden dowel to the lacquered ball, which in turn transfers its energy to another, and then another. Energy is never lost, but once you've changed states, you can never return. What's done is done.

Oh Alex.

(MR. L (HE) blows a whistle.)

SHE

She's 16 again.

(Snap.)

MR. L (HE)

Get your butt onto the field! Rojas! Get your hustle on. Heya heya heya!

SHE

After school, she happens by baseball practice where beautiful Javier Rojas battles with his fellow jocks.

MR. L (HE)

What are you, ladies? Come on, ladies!

(MR. L (HE) exits.)

SHE

And there, as if waiting for her, is Alexandra Lopez de Vaca.

ALEX (young)

You showered today.

SHE

She'd worn a bathing suit. Closed her eyes.

ALEX (young)

You wore a bathing suit. You're weird.

SHE (young)

Mr. L didn't get a picture of me naked.

ALEX (young)

You really don't like being, you know –

SHE (young)

We do things different in Texas.

ALEX (young)

In California, we bathe naked. What brought you here?

SHE (young)

My mom's job. She's an actress.

ALEX (young)

An actress! Here? Hollywood's like 400 miles away. That's super retarded. Is your mom retarded? Oh, fiddles!

(slaps at herself)

I wasn't going to use that word.

My mom doesn't work. She doesn't have to. My dad, he's like, well, he's old-fashioned, and besides, he makes enough for everyone to -- and everyone is a lot a lot, because if you come from money, you get to have big big families, you know, and yeah? I have ten brothers and sisters. Ten. That makes thirteen with Mom and Dad. And Mom's pregnant again. So like fourteen. You'd think she'd take a year off, but no, we just need – and anyway, so what's your dad do?

SHE (young)

He... has good days and bad days.

ALEX (young)

What's that mean?

(JAVIER (HE) runs in.)

JAVIER (HE)

Ale, Ale, Ale! Did you see me?

ALEX (young)

Amazing, Javi!

JAVIER (HE)

All for you, baby!

(Kisses her, pounds his chest.)

WHOOO! Chester O'Neill, you better watch your ass, because I'm gonna fuck you with the bat!

(to young ALEX)

Watch me fuck Chester O'Neill.

ALEX (young)

Get to it, Javi!

JAVIER (HE)

HEYA HEYA HEYA!

(HE runs off.)

ALEX (young)

My boyfriend is something, isn't he? Javier Rojas. Doesn't look more than three hairs Mexican. All the Spanish blood. His family owns grocery stores in Mexico City. You're staring at him.

SHE (young)

I'm leaving now.

ALEX (young)

I'm driving you. You can tell me how you ended up here. Like actually, really.

SHE

How she ended up there.

(Snap.)

MOTHER (ALEX)

Hey! Hey you. Boo.

SHE

Texas. Months before that ride in Alex's Dodge Dart. It's her birthday in a day or two, and the last thing she wants to do is *acting*.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Hey! Hey you. Boo.

SHE (young)

What Mom?

MOTHER (ALEX)

You need to do your share.

SHE

Do girls and their mother ever get along?

MOTHER (ALEX)

You think you being born means you've earned your oxygen?

SHE (young)

Yes!

MOTHER (ALEX)

I can't talk with you when you're like this. Look at you. All that greasy bar food and cigarettes. You've got zits on your zits.

SHE (young)

Don't pop them mom, please!

MOTHER (ALEX)

Honey, you take care of your body, it will take care of you. An ugly woman is a dead woman. Ugly woman disappears, no one gives a crap. That ain't you.

SHE (young)

Mom.

MOTHER (ALEX)

You will survive, understand me? The country weeps for Marilyn Monroe. Nobody cries for ugly girls. We're better than that.

SHE (young)

Can we finish? I want to goooooo.

MOTHER (ALEX)

C'mon. You have that potbelly, we're going to use it. Sir!

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

Howdy!

MOTHER (ALEX)

Can you help me? My daughter, see, I'm so scared for her. She's pregnant –

SHE (young)

Mom!

MOTHER (ALEX)

If you made better choices we wouldn't be in this mess! Her boyfriend, he's (whispers) Mexican.

SHE (young)

Mom, please please please/

MOTHER (ALEX)

And when that beaner baby comes out, her father is going to beat her to death, and I need to get her to her aunt's house, can you help us? Look at her.

SHE (young)

Mom!

MOTHER (ALEX)

Help us. \$50 is all it will take.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

Hey!

SHE (young)

Oh, shit.

MOTHER (ALEX)

\$40, I need to get her to Lubbock – her Auntie Dean is there –

SHE

And here, and now, the last possible moment to scramble from the stage coach before the horses pull it over the cliff.

MOTHER (ALEX)

She'll die if she doesn't get to Lubbock.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

You've pulled this before.

SHE (young)

Mom, let's go.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

I gave you \$50. What are you pulling?

MOTHER (ALEX)

Let's go.

THE BIG TEXAN (HE)

Where you goin', bitch? I didn't say you could go.

(HE grabs her. MOTHER (ALEX) shrieks and pulls away.)

SHE

The man's high school ring tears through her mother's cheek like tissue paper.

(A newspaper appears.)

The man is a columnist for the local paper and Mom's performance is reviewed: "The Crying Game." Instantly, her mother is

FATHER (HE)

Famous in Texas. Brilliant, Dee-Dee, you some brilliant woman.

(MOTHER (ALEX) tends to her wound.)

MOTHER (ALEX)

Go to hell.

FATHER (HE)

So what do we do now?

MOTHER (ALEX)

I don't know, you useless -- what do we do now? God, look at me.
Brilliant, Dee-Dee. You're brilliant.

FATHER (HE)

You know what, Dee-Dee? Fuck Texas. Fuck Texas!
We'll go to California. Land of opportunity. Of new beginnings. / Of –

SHE (young)

Earthquakes!

FATHER (HE)

Reagan is from California, and look at him – Actor! President! Come on, Dee-Dee!
California.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Leave me alone, Duke. Shit.
I'm better than this.

SHE

The scar never disappears.

(A beat, then shift to the Copper Hog.)

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)

Heya toots!

SHE

The Copper Hog.
In the corner, Alex comforts a beast with a broken paw. And the bartender claps to get her
attention.

(He claps to get her attention. What an asshole.)

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)

You, yeah you. Get over here.

SHE
What? Me?

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)
“Wha-me?” Yeah, you.

SHE
Look, Carl, he started it.

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)
Do I look like I gives a ratfuck? I don’t gives a rat’s fuck.

SHE
The man grabbed me.

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)
I didn’t see it. All I see is some big-eared Chemistry teacher you messed with, and I can’t have you chasing away business. Understand?

SHE
Yeah.

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)
Hear me, understand me, if you start shit, you will be banned for life. The Copper Hog won’t be your home no more, capiche? That tits and ass don’t work on me, toots, I’m a cocksucker. Now go back to your game, and behave.

(Snap.)

SHE
Alex drives her home to the almost good side town in a Dodge Dart. She’s conscious of the Victorian’s sagging roof, the peeling paint, but she has never had a friend before.

ALEX (young)
You are going to invite me in.

SHE
She checks, and her mother isn’t home, so she invites the Spanish Aztec Princess inside.

ALEX (young)
Thank you.

SHE
And like she predicted, within an hour, they are into her father’s crate of liquor. Or rather, she is. Alex watches her take a shot like a man.

ALEX (young)
You should come to church.

SHE (young)
You should have a drink.

ALEX (young)
What do your parents actually do?

SHE (young)
Mom is a famous actress. Dad is a businessman.

ALEX (young)
Aw, you lie to your best friend?

SHE (young)
It's not a lie.

ALEX (young)
Hmmm. And God said unto Job, "Gird up your loins, man."

(ALEX takes a drink.)

SHE (young)
"Gird up your loins"?

ALEX (young)
Job is my favorite book.
So, smelly girl. Tell me your secret.

SHE
She pretends it's the alcohol. It's not.

ALEX
She has never told anyone this before. Alexandra Lopez de Vaca brings it out of her.

SHE
All of it.

ALEX (young)
Your mother is a con-artist.

SHE (young)
Yeah. And more.

ALEX (young)
And your father is --

He's trying. SHE (young)

Do you hate your parents? ALEX (young)

No. Yes. I don't know. SHE (young)

Someday, when we graduate, we'll take you away from here. I promise. Do you think my boyfriend is beautiful? ALEX (young)

Sure, he's... SHE (young)

You want to fuck him. ALEX (young)

You hate that word. Why would you ask? SHE (young)

No reason! Wouldn't that be -- like wouldn't that be the best gift? Sex, but she gets to keep her virginity until they marry? (ALEX (young) picks up a pool cue and an eight ball)

Strange things to leave lying around a kitchen. ALEX(young)

Dad stole them. SHE (young)

Why? ALEX (young)

To prove a point. SHE (young)

What point? ALEX (young)

I don't know. Some point. SHE (young)

Show me how you play pool. On your kitchen table. ALEX (young)

She shows her. SHE

Like this? ALEX (young)

Alex sucks at pool. SHE
(ALEX sucks at pool.)

Go! You, ball, go! ALEX(young)
Aww. Show me.

She does. SHE

(SHE does.)

(ALEX turns around. They kiss.)

(ALEX pulls away, laughing uncomfortably.)

I thought so. ALEX (young)

Sorry. SHE (young)

Nothing happened. ALEX (young)

(A pause. ALEX disappears.)

(Knocking.)

FATHER (HE)
Hey, hey! Let me in. Let me in Dee-Dee.

(Knocking. Then: We're back in the present. The Copper Hog welcomes everyone back. HE is at the jukebox. He pounds on it.)

SCOTT (HE)
PLAY JOURNEY DUMMY.

(ALEX reenters.)

SHE
Let me tell you something about The Copper Hog. Carl the bartender should have greater fears than someone frightening away one of Orchard County's most industrious alcoholics.

The desperate and depressed will always return to their watering hole, they will burn what little money they have because they need to drink and don't want to drink alone. Carl should thank her for adding to the misery. Carl should fear happiness.

ALEX
Are you talking to me?

SHE
Thought you'd left.

ALEX
No.

SHE
You left our crippled friend alone.

ALEX
I had to make a phone call.

SCOTT (HE)
Journey!

SHE
You couldn't get him to a hospital?

ALEX
He's not going.

SCOTT (HE)
Just a small town girl!
Livin in a lonely world!
Took a midnight train going a-ny-whereee.

SHE
Wolfman has been neutered.

ALEX
I bought him a drink and talked him out of having you arrested.

SHE
Good for you.

ALEX
Have you done that before?

SHE
Done what?

ALEX

Neutered?

(A look that very much means: *Yes.*)

SHE

You're distracting. Messing up the game. Scratch after scratch.

ALEX

They don't usually get that far, huh?

SHE

You know why he's staying.

(points to the dollar bills)

He's still hoping his wish will be granted. That's the problem with desire, isn't it?

But maybe miracles do happen?

You get everything you want, Alex? Your dream life.

ALEX

I don't believe in miracles.

SHE

Of all the shitty bars in all the craptowns in the Golden State she could wander into -- The Copper Hog. That's not a miracle?

ALEX

For my birthday, my husband bought me a minivan. That was the last I saw him.

SHE

You've been away for a month?

ALEX

I knew you'd remember my birthday.

Happy 32nd. So, Javier buys me the Mercury Voyager I'd asked for. It's big and safe unless you flip it and blue and boring and has the biggest bow you've ever seen on top. Thank you for the bow, Javi, now watch me hang myself from the second story. I think - I want a Mustang. Something that's mostly engine, something I shouldn't want.

I get into my blue Mercury Voyager and I drive.

That's what I do, you see, when thoughts start to buzz -- I drive as fast as I can. Sometimes I go for miles. Roseville cops never catch me.

This time, I don't turn around.

Mendocino. The edge of California.

Well, that's it. There's an end to going west. Time to turn around.

Except -- there's an itchy Motel and just as I pass, the sign flips from "no vacancy" to "vacancy."

I don't believe in miracles, but the motel is asking me to stay. Who am I to refuse?

That night I go for a walk. Beach. Hello ocean, how are you tonight? Are you full up on sea lions and dolphins? I hope you are well. You need this more than I do.

I need to call my husband.
The fog rolls in. Look. Neon. A bar, some hole-in-the-wall.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)
(on the phone)

How's your little adventure?

ALEX

I don't think I'm coming back.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)

Sure you are Ale.

ALEX

Nuh-uh.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)

You think I'm having an affair. In my heart, I've always been loyal.

ALEX

You shouldn't be.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)

I'll cancel the credit card. You'll be back.

ALEX

I don't need my pills. I threw them into the ocean. I cured the salmon, tuna, and dolphins of their anxiety.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)

Where are you? It's loud.

ALEX

There's a woman here with the most amazing tattoos. She's wrapped in barbed wire.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)

What an adventure, Ale.

ALEX

I'm going to get a tattoo.

JAVIER THE HUSBAND (HE)

No you're not.

ALEX

I hang up.
The next day, a few more miles. Another bar. Another motel.
I follow the neon beer signs like the north star.

And slowly, I realize what I'm looking for.
So, two days ago, I return to my hometown. Get a room in a motel in a part of town that
didn't exist when I was last here. And I start looking.
Barlight, bar-bright, first bar I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish ...

SHE

What do you want?

(A dollar appears in her hand as if by magic, and ALEX
climbs onto the pool table. She fastens it to the ceiling. She
descends.)

(ALEX goes to kiss HER.)

HE

This is not in the Copper Hog.
But it is not imaginary. Not exactly. They are in the locker room after school. It smells of
sour sweat, acrid deodorant and perfume, and it is several months after the first one.

(ALEX closes her eyes and they kiss.)

In her head, Alex counts down, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

(ALEX pulls away.)

ALEX (young)

Five seconds. That's it.

SHE (young)

Not long enough.

ALEX (young)

Don't get greedy.

(A sound, laughter. They tense. It passes.)

SHE (young)

Thank you for sharing your chapstick.

ALEX (young)

Shut up! I'm not a dike. John 3:16.

SHE (young)

Six seconds.

ALEX (young)

Two.

SHE (young)

Four.

Deal. ALEX (young)

And she recites John 3:16. SHE

Good girl. ALEX (young)

Close your eyes. (SHE leans in.)

(A kiss.)

Four three two one one one one – a noise HE

Time to go. ALEX (young)

(ALEX leaves. HE appears as young JAVIER.)

Heya heya hey. JAVIER (HE)

Javier! SHE (young)

Hola. JAVIER (HE)

Como estas? SHE (young)

What? JAVIER (HE)

Nothing. SHE (young)

You seen Ale? JAVIER (HE)

She's around. SHE (young)

She can feel him looking her over. He has / many thoughts.

Many thoughts. JAVIER (HE)

SHE (young)

You know how you're Ale's friend, right?

JAVIER (HE)

Yeah. Yes.

SHE(young)

You going to break up with her?

JAVIER (HE)

Nah. She's my princess. I'm going to ask her to marry me. I'll get her out of that house, away from -- she has like ten brothers and sisters. That's like a health hazard or something. She basically raised them. It's her dad, it's like "I have money, so I have kids," except he's blown through most of the family, you know, wealth and shit. She used to go to like a private school her dad owned, like on this compound, and then the cops closed it down or maybe the bank. I'm going to marry her, take her from that land of crazy. I bought the ring already. It's a grip of carets. \$2500. What do you think of that?

SHE

She smiles at him.

JAVIER (HE)

Can I tell you more?

SHE (young)

What is it?

JAVIER (HE)

We don't have sex. Like, we start making out, and then, she'll like, almost -- with her hand -- and then I'll -- but then she'll, you know, and I'm like really horny, like crazy horny.

SHE (young)

You should... Do something about that.

JAVIER (HE)

What do you think I should do?

SHE (young)

... Pray.

A few months later. Dad is out of town.

Dad is always out of town.

She never sees him anymore. No bars. Not since Texas.

It's November. Christmas season. Shopping season. Mom is fundraising.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Excuse me, excuse me sir. Hi? Hello? My name is, Claire, hello. What's your name?

JAVIER (HE)
Javier.

MOTHER (ALEX)
Hi, Javier, is that Mexican?

JAVIER (HE)
Uh, duh.

MOTHER (ALEX)
I love the Mexicans. I have a brother-in-law named Javier. Javier -- my car, it has a flat tire, and this nice guy offered to fix it for ten dollars, but I don't have ten dollars on me -- I lost my -- actually it was stolen by a -- it was stolen, my wallet, I lost everything and-
(starting to cry)
I can't survive this world. I just need 12 dollars and I -- get it together Clarissa, get it --

JAVIER (HE)
What are you trying to pull?

MOTHER (ALEX)
I'm sorry, you don't understand me.
(speaking slowly)
My car. It broke. Needs 14\$.

JAVIER (HE)
The hell are you?

SHE (young)
Mom? Oh, shit --

MOTHER (ALEX)
Hey! Watch your mouth. This is my daughter --

SHE (young)
Mom --

JAVIER (HE)
Dude. Your mom's -- I don't know.

SHE (young)
I got you a Fanta, Javier, Alex is still deciding on whatever -- Mom, you should go home.

MOTHER (ALEX)
You know my daughter? If you get her pregnant, I'll cut off your brown balls.

JAVIER (HE)
The fuck?

SHE (young)
Mom!

MOTHER (ALEX)
What is wrong with you? You want a husband who mows lawns for a living?

SHE (young)
Oh my God, Mom – his family owns like three grocery stores.

JAVIER (HE)
Four.

SHE
Her head pounds. The scar on her mother's face seems purple. She wants to tear it open, pull out a better mother.

JAVIER (HE)
You need money?

SHE (young)
Don't scam Javier, Mom. Javier, it's not real. My mother is a criminal.

JAVIER (HE)
Whoa. That's fucked up.
Sorry. Pardon my – you know – language. Maybe you'd like me to say it in Spanish?

SHE (young)
Make this stop.

MOTHER (ALEX)
Don't judge me. Look at you, thinking you're all superior to me.

SHE (young)
Stop.

MOTHER (ALEX)
My people are from this country! You think I'm white trash, you damn spic!

JAVIER (HE)
Nice scar. Dude, Elle, your mom is batshit.

MOTHER (ALEX)
You think you're better than me, you illegal --

JAVIER (HE)
Elle, if you need money, ask.

MOTHER (ALEX)

I ain't white trash!
Hey, boo! Where are you going?
Boo! Boo!

(SHE runs. And runs. And runs.)

SHE

Some worlds shouldn't collide.
Alex finds her on the floor of the school's shower.

ALEX (young)

Hey boo.

SHE (young)

I'm looking for a camera. There's a camera in here somewhere I'm sure of it.

ALEX (young)

Javi told me.

SHE (young)

Mr. L is a pervert.

ALEX (young)

Someday, we'll take you away, boo. Remember?

SHE (young)

I hate her, and I hate --

ALEX (young)

I know. Look, Elle. Look at me. Whenever I'm feeling – I just, I think of, I think: This is my cross. I find the grace, bare the cross. And that was yours, like your cross. Find the grace, Elle.

SHE (young)

Leave me alone, Alexandra Lopez de Vaca.

ALEX (young)

That doesn't work on me.

SHE (young)

Fuck off.

ALEX (young)

What do you want?

SHE (young)

To kill her.

ALEX (young)
Find your grace. What do you want?

SHE (young)
I can't have what --

ALEX (young)
Well. A taste.

SHE (young)
Teasing.

ALEX (young)
No...

(ALEX (young) takes HER hand. She holds it.)

ALEX (young)
Close your eyes.

(ALEX takes HER hand to her body.)

ALEX (young)
Let's go for a drive, Elle.

SHE
A few moments later and she's in Alex's Dodge Dart. She wants Alex to press the accelerator and chase the sunset, but instead Alex drives slowly, calmly, carefully. She's floating, thinking about Alex's promise:

ALEX
Someday, we'll take you away.

SHE
Tonight is not that night. Tonight, they find a parking lot behind the county library. It's dark. Their hands slip under clothing. They find each other blindly.

(They fade out, HE appears.)

FATHER (HE)
Open the door! I'm not kidding! Open the goddamn door, Dee-Dee!
No, don't. Don't you dare unlock that door.
Unlock the door! Listen to me.

(Snap, and we're back in The Copper Hog. ALEX is looking at the dollar she just hung.)

So. SHE

Yeah. ALEX

You've found me. SHE

Yes. ALEX

For a month, you've wandered California. Trying to find yourself or some shit like that? SHE

I have. ALEX

You know, Alex. Finding yourself is easy. It's getting lost that's the problem. SHE

... Let me – take you away from this. ALEX

From what? SHE

The Copper Hog. The city. From this. THIS. This, whatever it is. ALEX

What's your proposal? SHE

I just – ALEX

Your speech, the one you rehearsed to give over e-coli B-Jesus Burgers. SHE

I propose that we run away – ALEX

And? SHE

I don't know. ALEX

SHE

Get a U-Haul. Move to Massachusetts?

ALEX

Yes.

SHE

We'll get two cats and shave our heads.

ALEX

Whatever Elle, yes. Let's move to Marin and go to Farmers Markets and drive pickup trucks with rainbow flags and eat organic kale from a rooftop garden and I don't know I don't know I don't know- listen to those bands and do whatever you do with hemp. I don't know what we're supposed to do --

SHE

And throw away a perfectly good marriage?

ALEX

I'll pawn my wedding ring and trade it for that U-Haul.

SHE

No.

ALEX

Why not?

SHE

Why not?

ALEX

Yeah, why not?

SHE

Because it's -- because fifteen years. Because you -- because we -- because we have our lives.

SCOTT (HE)

Hey Carl, listen to this joke, it's about Hillary Clinton's cunt.

ALEX

You'd rather stay in this? With *that*? Why? Elle, why?

SHE

Let me show you something, Alex.

SCOTT! Come over here. Yeah, you. Not going to hurt you. Promise.

Scott, you don't have --

ALEX

You want an apology, Scott?

SHE

Hey.

SCOTT (HE)

Oh, God. Your hand.

SHE

Yeah.

SCOTT (HE)

I am so sorry about that. I'm on my period. You know how women are, wolfman.

SHE

Nah, I understand. Women, they get hormonal.

SCOTT (HE)

And so emotional.

SHE

That's what makes 'em women. Hormones, you know.

SCOTT (HE)

You know things. About science.

SHE

Women, they, you know, for thousands of years, they, women – like, it was the man's job to protect women, you know –

SCOTT (HE)

From predators?

SHE

Hah! Yeah. Predators.

SCOTT (HE)

I never thought of it that way.

SHE

I got a masters. I'm pretty smart.

SCOTT (HE)

I can tell! I just don't know what came over me.

SHE

SCOTT (HE)
So without like, you know, your hormones just kinda –

SHE
Snap.

SCOTT (HE)
Yeah.

SHE
So I've decided that we should be friends.

SCOTT (HE)
What?

SHE
We're friends.

SCOTT (HE)
Goddamn it.

SHE
You don't want to be friends with me?

SCOTT (HE)
Women got two ladders. You got your friends ladder, and your fuck ladder, and if you get on the friends ladder, you don't get on the fuck ladder.

SHE
You don't want to be my friend?

SCOTT (HE)
Pfff! Bitch, you keep fucking with me. Women are just men with parts missing.

(HE leaves.)

SHE
Bet he wouldn't have left if I'd told him I'm descended from Spanish royalty.

ALEX
Why did you show me that?

SHE
Some of us don't need saving, Alex. We know what we're doing.

ALEX
Are you... here because of your parents?

(ALEX has set off a small bomb.)

SHE

Don't.

ALEX

Because of your father? I tried to get in touch when I (learned)—

SHE

Does your husband come when you have sex? Do you?

ALEX

Elle.

SHE

Do you close your eyes and cry?

ALEX

No.

SHE

Do you think of me?

ALEX

Do you think of me?

SHE

Wrong answer.

ALEX

Do you?

SHE

No.

ALEX

Elle. Are you here because of me?

SHE

Yes. No. Yes. Guess.

ALEX

I don't know.

SHE

Nothing would be different for you if we hadn't met. You'd still be nested in some Roseville McMansion with crappy daytime television keeping you company, the chore of fucking your

husband on his birthday, you'd still be addled with anxiety medication and Prayer-a-Day calendars –

ALEX

I wouldn't be here. I'm here. My name is on the dollar—

SHE

Alex, you were born to destroy yourself. Don't blame me for blowing up your life.

ALEX

Elle, let's – Elle --

SHE

Don't.

ALEX

Elle.

SHE

Don't say my name.

ALEX

Elle.

Elle.

Elle.

Elle

SHE

Shut up.

ALEX

Elle.

Elle.

Your name is a letter, Elle.

SHE

Tell you what. I'll flip this coin. Heads you leave. Tails you stay.

(SHE flips it. ALEX snatches the coin from the air.)

SHE

Let the coin fall.

ALEX

I relive it. Every day.

SHE

You? What do you have to relive?

(The sound of thunder, rain, drizzling.)

ALEX

December. Fifteen years ago.

SHE

You should leave.

(ALEX puts the coin into HER hand.)

ALEX

December. Fifteen years ago. It's raining.

(Snap.)

Alex is pulled from class – her mother is in labor, adding lucky number twelve to the quiver.

(young, and raw with anxiety)

Not another one.

SHE (young)

Excuse me, Mr. L, I think I'm sick. I'll call my Aunt Dean, she'll pick me up.

MR. L (HE)

A good vomit will burn some of those Christmas calories.

SHE (young)

My vagina burns.

MR. L (HE)

That's not healthy. Go to the office and call your Aunt Dean. Gotta take care of yourself.

SHE

She drives Alex's Dart to the hospital. The entire time, Alex mumbles –

ALEX (young)

Not another one.

SHE

And when they enter the maternity, there they are.

ALEX (young)

A flock of Lopez de Vacas.

SHE

All are on their knees, praying, so they haven't seen us yet. Alex stops.

ALEX (young)

I can't. I can't. No more diapers and jaundice and and and. I can't, Elle, I can't.

... Let's leave.

SHE (young)

Against the rules.

ALEX (young)

Let's leave, Alex.

SHE (young)

ALEX
She says again, and Alex nods, and Alex leaves her family. There are plenty of nurses to look after her siblings.

SHE
Outside, as they slide into Alex's Dodge, she realizes, there's so much she doesn't know about Alex—

ALEX
The one thing she does know, it's more important. Again, she says,

SHE (young)
Let's go.

ALEX (young)
Like run away? Elle. I have nothing. I am nothing.

SHE (young)
Let's go to a bar.

(They are at a bar.)

ALEX
"Joe's."
She sidles up to the jukebox. There's a man near it, looking like he'd been hit by the ugly truck. She taps his shoulder.

SHE (young)
Give me a quarter.

UGLY MAN (HE)
What?

SHE (young)
Give me that quarter.

(HE hands it to her.)

SHE (young)
Bet me a dollar that it will be heads.

Nah. UGLY MAN (HE)

I'll give you head if it's heads. SHE (young)

I bet you a dollar. UGLY MAN (HE)

(Flips.)

Tails. Double or nothing. SHE (young)

Hell yeah. UGLY MAN (HE)

(Flips.)

Tails. Quadruple or nothing. SHE (young)

Bring it. UGLY MAN (HE)

(Flips.)

Tails. SHE (young)

Let me see the quarter. UGLY MAN (HE)

It was yours. SHE (young)

Maybe I'm hoping to lose. What are the odds that the next flip will be tails?

A hundred bucks. UGLY MAN (HE)

(She flips it.)

(A long moment.)

Tails. SHE (young)

I don't gotta hundred bucks. UGLY MAN (HE)

What do you got? SHE (young)

Twelve. UGLY MAN (HE)

Twelve? That's it? SHE (young)

(SHE takes the money.)

Go away. SHE (young)

(HE leaves.)

This is how we're going to live. SHE (young)
I will do anything for you.

I kinda figured. ALEX (young)

What do you want? SHE (young)

Not in here. ALEX (young)

Anything. SHE (young)

(ALEX whispers in HER ear. A beat. SHE nods.)

SHE
The Thunderbird Motel rents by the hour. Alex hides so the manager won't know that it's two women in the same room. She pays for two hours. \$12.
The skunk of cigarette is everywhere in the Thunderbird, springing from the bedspread like bad perfume when they sit on this bed.

So. John 3:16? ALEX (young)

Are you – SHE (young)

Joking. Hah!

ALEX (young)

Okay.

SHE (young)

(SHE leans in.)

Elle, are you okay?

ALEX (young)

Never better.
You?

SHE (young)

I'm here. Are you here?

ALEX (young)

I'm here.
Let's say they kiss.

SHE (young)

(They kiss...)

(... ALEX stops the kiss.)

Should I call Javier?

ALEX (young)

Why bring him into this?

SHE (young)

To say goodbye?

ALEX (young)

... If you want.

SHE (young)

(ALEX gets up, then sits down.)

No. He's not here. I am here. I am here.

ALEX (young)

They kiss again.

SHE

(They don't kiss.)

Things get heated.

SHE

(Things stay the same.)

Can I...

ALEX (young)

Let's say she lets Alex undress her.

SHE

(Alex doesn't undress HER.)

Let's say that she's naked.

(ALEX sees HER. ALEX can't keep going.)

Alex?

SHE (young)

Uh...

ALEX (young)

Alex? What's (wrong)?

SHE (young)

I'm sorry. Sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry sorry.

ALEX (young)

Sorry?

SHE (young)

Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.
This isn't what I want.
You're not what I want.

ALEX (young)

No. I am. We're. We're. Both --

SHE (young)

We're friends, not --
I'm Alexandra Lopez de Vaca. I'm descended from royalty. I'm supposed to be-- Javier
spent \$2500 on the ring. I'm supposed to be—I can't give that up --

ALEX (young)

But I'm I'm I'm

SHE (young)

ALEX (young)

You're nothing, Elle. I can't be what you are. I can't be – I can't, I can't, I can't --
You're nothing. Just someone who --
I need to call my family.

SHE (young)

Have a good life.

ALEX (young)

I love you.

SHE

Fuck you.

(ALEX leaves. SHE rebuttons whatever she needs to rebutton.)

SHE

She walks home in the rain. Hundreds of worms have prostrated themselves on the walkway, and she crushes them.

(there's darkness)

As she walks up the steps to the dilapidated Victorian, she doesn't notice the Camry parked in the overhang.

If she were to see it, she would be more careful.

(A groan in the darkness.)

SHE (young)

Mom?

(Ugh!)

SHE (young)

Mom?

MOTHER (ALEX)

Shit!

RANDOM MAN (HE)

Teeth!

(He hits her away from him.)

(Lights come on. He's naked from the bottom on down.

MOTHER (ALEX) huddles in the corner, covering her face.)

MOTHER (ALEX)

Don't leave – don't leave!

SHE

The man is not her father.

RANDOM MAN (HE)

How much for her?

MOTHER (ALEX)

You better leave, like now. Don't kiss me. That's extra.

(HE puts his clothes back on.)

(HE takes a twenty out of his wallet. Drops it on the floor.)

RANDOM MAN (HE)

That was worth twenty.

(HE leaves.)

MOTHER (ALEX)

Don't judge me. You do nothing for this family. You only care about yourself. You run around with those brown gutter shits -- you worthless nothing. Me? I gotta support this family. I don't care about myself.

SHE (young)

Does Dad know you do this?

MOTHER (ALEX)

Like he's around. What does he do? I do everything --

SHE (young)

No. No more. No more pretending, no more lying. We're going to fix this family. Tell him. Or I will, and you know how he gets about me.

(There's knocking at the door.)

FATHER (HE)

Dee-Dee.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Oh, shit.

SHE (young)

I bet you're relieved, mom, that I caught you and he didn't. Don't be relieved.

FATHER (HE)

Let me in, let me in Dee-Dee. What was that car, there was a car, what was it? Let me in. No, don't, don't let me in.

SHE (young)

He's home.

(SHE opens the door. He looks surprised.)

FATHER (HE)

You opened it. You never open it.

SHE (young)

Going for a walk. Mom has something to tell you.

MOTHER (ALEX)

You're a fucking bitch you know that?

SHE

I do.

MOTHER (ALEX)

Don't go.

SHE

She does.

She walks again. She doesn't even feel the rain

To school, the locker-room. The library. Everywhere there's a piece of Alex.

Promises burn, and and and she needed a mother who would – who could – hold her.

So long as she walks, she can imagine when she returns, she'll finally have the mother she needs.

It's the longest walk.

She can't make it home.

There's a fleet of firetrucks, police cars, and an ambulance blocking off the street. The neighbors had called about the smoke.

Maybe it was spontaneous combustion. That's what her mother says to anyone who listens, what is written in newspapers and broadcast on radios, televisions...

Even on her trial, her mother never calls it self-defense. This is one gift she gives him.

It keeps the girl from hating her.

HE

And the girl?

SHE

The girl?

HE

Yes.

SHE

The girl decides that her father is not dead. The ashes they gave her – the bag is too small to hold the entirety of a human. He can't be. He shed his human skin in a wreath of flame and became a phoenix...

HE

She carries him in her purse. Everywhere she goes.

ALEX

She disappears. For a while.

SHE

She drives the old Pontiac, keeping it alive with her bare hands.

HE

Maybe she is looking for what became of her father.

SHE

Sometimes, she even swings through her hometown.

HE

She picks up a paper.

ALEX

A wedding announcement. Javier Rojas and Alexandra Lopez de Vaca.

SHE

Look, they moved to Roseville. A scandal. Local gym teacher arrested for kiddie porn. God, she needs a drink. The bar is on the outskirts of town.

HE

The Copper Hog. The bartender wears cowboy boots, and the place is surrounded by an overgrown field of dry grass. It reminds her of Texas...

SHE

Ah. Here she feels powerful. Here she is desired. She does not desire.

HE

She is what her parents made her.

SHE

She sells the Pontiac for a dollar. The bar, it becomes her home.

HE

Something in her believes that he will appear someday, something deep, something she barely acknowledges. A phoenix. He'll be proud that she's learned his lessons. Her anger will disappear.

SHE

And then, Alex walks into the bar.

ALEX

Can't we make something right? One little thing?

SHE

I don't want Marin or Kale or whatever --

ALEX

I'll give you whatever you want.

SHE

Alex. I want you to leave.

ALEX

I don't care about -- I don't
Look I don't know what someone like us, what it means to be a good --
a good lesbian or whatever, you know.
I know I am so tired --
I'd give my teeth and hair and bones just to --
I want to drive with you next to me.
Please. Please be next to me. Please...

SHE

This is where I belong.

(ALEX picks up the stick. She shatters it on the pool table.)

SHE

Why did you do that?

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE)

OUT! BOTH OF YOU! OUT! You! You're banned!

ALEX

That's why.

(They are outside.)

SHE

Outside of the Copper Hog, there's Scott --

SCOTT (HE)

There they are! Hot ladies! Heart and hand breakers.

SHE

This is where we go separate ways, Alex.

ALEX

You can't go back in.

SCOTT (HE)

Bitches.

(ALEX leans to kiss her.)

SHE

What's wrong with you?

ALEX

Elle --

(Despite SCOTT's efforts in the following rant, the focus is on HER and ALEX. The two women have a conversation in body language. The silent conversation goes something like this: ALEX: You haven't left. SHE: I am going. ALEX: You haven't left. SHE: I am going. ALEX: You haven't left. SHE: I am going. ALEX: Are you sure? SHE: I don't know. ALEX takes her hand and leans in. SHE pulls away, saying, out loud. "I'm going now.")

SCOTT (HE)

LISTEN TO ME CUNTCLICKERS!!!

I'm Mr. Scott! I'm a nice guy. I have a Masters in Education! I teach chemistry to really stupid high schoolers! Like huff paint until it kills all your brain cells stupid like try to give you a blow job because you're flunking and don't know any better stupid like tell Scott what's going on with that funny creepy uncle tell Scott and he calls up the principal, he saves your ass from that house and then work with Mr. Scott every day after school until Mr. Scott falls his ass in love with you, and even though you're 18 and he voooooows he ain't gonna do anything 'til you graduate and he's willing to ruin his career to save you make the baby his stupid like huff paint until you got brain damage because you think it's going to abort the baby you're having with your uncle stupid like stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid.

All Mr. Scott wants to do is be someone not Mr. Scott.

Fuck the world. FUCK it.

I wanted you to help me forget.

ALEX

Scott, get out of the street.

SCOTT (HE)

Grant my wishes, fairy godfuckers!

(The blare of headlights.)

(He's hit by a car.)

(The world shatters.)

SHE

Imagine for a moment you could take it apart, put it back together. Undo the scratch. From the pockets emerge red, blue, six, four, and then the eight ball that killed the game. Green returns and halts the eight, and then that one is in turn stopped by the white, which has a moment before the stick stops it, energy returns to the arm of the player. The exhale becomes inhale, air stripped of its oxygen returns to your body, where CO₂ is disassembled, your heart unbeats, blood flows backwards.

HE

We are bags of meat.

As he flies through the air, he feels his bones snap, he has three wishes:

ALEX

One

HE

Shit. I wish I knew more about physics.

SHE

Force is equal to mass times acceleration.

ALEX

Two

HE

I wish I knew more about biology.

SHE

This is what happens when an object that weighs 2,500 pounds meets a bag of meat.

ALEX

And the third:

HE

Those poor kids. One more wish.

SHE

What would you like?

HE

Mom. I'm scared. I'm so scared. Mommy. Mom. Someone.
Catch me.

ALEX

Train's coming.

(A trainwhistle. Snap.)

SHE

Years later. It's 2010. She's pushing 46.
She's waiting for a train that will take her back to Texas. She's alone.
But she's not alone.
In her hand, in a bag, are the ashes of her father. She's carried them for years in a purse. She
plans to sprinkle them in a cemetery in the outskirts of Greywater.

(The sound of a train.)

A boy approaches. He's crying.

(TEENAGE BOY (HE) enters. Sniffing.)

She thinks of many things.
He's high. He's faking. He's grieving.

ALEX

The train is coming.
Watch the boy.

SHE

She looks at the boy, who does not look at her.
Then, she sees --

(He teeters forward.)

(SHE grabs him, yanks him back as the train screams
through.)

TEENAGE BOY (HE)

The fuck??

(SHE holds him.)

TEENAGE BOY (HE)

Let me go. I wasn't I wasn't I wasn't.

SHE

Hey hot stuff, let me buy you a coffee, she says.
For a moment, she's beautiful, and the boy is a boy who likes girls. So he says

TEENAGE BOY (HE)

Okay.

SHE

She walks him to a diner, are there still diners in 2010? And she orders him a plate of pancakes and coffee.

TEENAGE BOY (HE)

I hate pancakes.

(ALEX appears. As the waitress.)

SHE

The woman looks so much like Alex, she could be Alex, but her nametag says

ALEX

“Sugar.”

SHE

Sugar, who looks achingly like Alex, brings out the pancakes, coffee, and some strawberry pie – 2010 is a good year for strawberries – and the check, or what she thought was a check until she opens it

SUGAR (ALEX)

“Saw what you did. Called the police. They’re outside. Thank you. God bless.”

SHE

The boy, calmed on sugar and strawberries, follows me outside. He looks at me
At her
and Sugar as they drive him away.

SUGAR (ALEX)

Well.

SHE

Thank you, Sugar.

SUGAR (ALEX)

Nuh-ah, thank you.

SHE

There’s a glimmer, something that tells her Sugar is -- what do they call them?
“Family.”

She thinks to ask her number. But then

ALEX

Elle realizes then that she’d dropped the bag when she grabbed the boy.

SHE

She returns to the station and finds it. Ripped open. The ashes have scattered to the wind.
He belongs to the earth now.

And Alex – HE

No. SHE

And Alex – HE

Not yet. SHE

And Alex – HE

NOT YET! SHE
(the voice of god)

(Snap. The next moment is violent. SHE is the end of this world. SHE destroys –)

2007, and WELCOME to the end of the Copper Hog – SHE

Which has been a shell for years. ALEX

A spark of a cigarette ignites grass. SHE

The field lights up. ALEX

Rabbits and burrowing owls race the flames. SHE

With their deaths comes small revenge. ALEX

Hundreds of fiery rabbits, leaping through the grass toward the Copper Hog-- SHE

The dollar bills catch, falling embers, a flurry of snow. ALEX

Fire burns wishes. SHE

ALEX

The fire is not the phoenix. It gives nothing. It is only fire.

(Snap.)

SHE

No.

HE

2001.

SHE

No.

HE

The year is 2001.

SHE

No.

(Snap.)

ALEX

The year is 2001.

(ALEX silences HER. ALEX's voice swallows chaos. It takes oxygen.)

HE

In California, forests burn. Floods flood. And the earth breaks open.

ALEX

In California, we love our cars.

HE

Alex will be driving alone. Sometimes she drives to clear her mind in the early morning. A cross hangs from her mirror. Her coffee is firmly gripped by the Mercury's cup-holder. The drive isn't doing enough, she pushes the van faster.

ALEX

The marine layer. Fog as thick as peanut butter. It may be a coincidence, but a hundred miles away there will be an ever so slight shifting of the San Andreas fault.

(A quiet rumble, the earth unsettles.)

SHE

One that she (*meaning Elle*) feels

wherever she is.

HE

Three wishes. One.

ALEX

Two.

(Gravity turns over.)

Three.
Oh Elle.

(A ribbon of black liquid pulls from the coffee cup and spirals upward.)

(ALEX is falling, slowly. She crumbles with the vehicle)

as the van rolls over and over and over.
And Alex

HE

Alex

SHE

I

ALEX

Will be still.

SHE

(A long moment.)

(ALEX is dead.)

(Snap.)

And then, she's back to that night at the Copper Hog in 1999. Holding the Chemistry teacher who is almost inside out in her arms. Alex is frozen.

SHE

In her head, she has this thought

ALEX

Daddy would know what to do.

SHE

ALEX
As he lies on the ground, he mumbles. The neural fibers still fire. She presses her hand to the wounds, openings in parts of his body that shouldn't have openings. Meet the meat. She wants to scoop him up, put him right side out. He whispers something to her.

What would you like?

SHE

Somebody catch me.

HE

She's there with him.

ALEX

An ambulance, and a firetruck, and four policecars come. All the king's horses and all the king's men, work to put Humpty together again. They see him die.

Twice

SHE

Make it three times.

ALEX

And again and again they bring him back as energy reaches into his body and massages his heart. Science makes Gods, doesn't it?

SHE

Almost.

ALEX

Then they whisk him away. Siren howling into the night.

SHE

And she is left, covered in

ALEX

A bad night. What a shitty night.

SHE

The stars are out.

ALEX

The moon a white slit in the sky. An owl murmurs.

SHE

I love owls.

ALEX

Me, too.

SHE

Hey, ladies.

CARL THE BARTENDER'S VOICE (HE)

ALEX

The bartender calls.

SHE

His voice hoarse, somehow.

CARL THE BARTENDER'S VOICE (HE)

Come inside.

SHE

He says.

ALEX

He pours them gin. A single cube in each. Life is short. Chaos. Hold this moment.

(SHE kisses ALEX. It's good. They almost dissolve.)

ALEX

Make a wish.

SHE

I wish I could come back here, the last possible (moment) --

ALEX

But then she says it --

SHE

Tell me about your home.

ALEX

It's covered in ceramic angels. Welcome to our happy happy home.

SHE

Welcome to God's house. What did you talk about with your husband on the phone?

ALEX

My daughter misses me.

SHE

Your daughter.

ALEX

She left me a note. She understands. She packed her lunchbox for me, wrote me a note. See?

(SHE reads it.)

SHE

"Have a great adventure, Mommy." She'll never see you again.

ALEX

She didn't have a mommy. She had anxiety pills, ceramic angels.

SHE

And that's when she knows.

ALEX

What?

SHE

Sorry.

ALEX

What?

SHE

She'll find the words to make Alex go home. Maybe she'll say, "You need to go back to your daughter." Maybe she'll say,

ALEX

"What's her name?"

SHE

And she'll lie to get her to leave.

ALEX

Elle.

SHE

Or, maybe, maybe it's a promise –

ALEX

Yes. A promise.

SHE

A few more years, maybe when your daughter's off to college, maybe before that, yes, we can be together.

ALEX

She'll also say –

SHE

I forgive you.

ALEX

And tomorrow morning

SHE
that blue minivan will leave the town of Mantequilla,

ALEX
it will return to Susanville

SHE
Roseville.

ALEX
This being California though.

SHE
Promises burn. Earth breaks open.

ALEX
But tonight.

SHE
Tonight.

ALEX
Tonight.

(SHE takes the pen out. SCOTT's pen. She writes her name
on a dollar bill.)

SHE
The gods are watching us.

CARL THE BARTENDER (HE) (voice only)
Last call!

ALEX
She climbs onto the table. Pins it to the ceiling.
(SHE leaps. ALEX catches her.)
Alex will walk her home.

SHE
I live here.

ALEX
She'll say. She won't have to say it.

SHE
I I I I.

ALEX

She'll stutter.

SHE

I want you to come inside.

ALEX

They'll climb the stairs. The door is burgundy, paint cracked, and there are two or three deadbolts she'll lock behind us.

SHE

Here.

ALEX

Upstairs.

SHE

Flesh finds flesh. She will return to this memory.

ALEX

Again and again and again

SHE

She will grow older. She will grow old. But Alex will not. The launch of one memory always collides with another, and another. In a dozen years or so, she will think about this night, she will remember Alex, and she will touch herself -- she will make a discovery. It will almost be too late. Good thing she caught it in time. Too bad it wasn't earlier. Too bad someone wasn't there to find it for her. The doctors will remove her breasts. Use them or lose them, she'll joke.

She will live. This is the gift Alex gives her.

Nights are cold in the Valley, frost is common, yet snow is rare. When the air thickens with smoke, skies turn purple, and ash from forests afire falls from the skies, you may confuse it for snow, but it's ash.

(Snap! Suddenly, instantly as if released, the dollar bills fall.)

When it is cold, she lives in the memory of the night she walks out of a bar, and says, "Stay. Please, stay."

And –

And –

And.

ALEX

Of course.

(ALEX begins to undress her.)

END OF PLAY

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