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Catching a Glimpse: A Directorial Investigation & Collaboration on PROCEDURE TO EXIT AN ENCLOSED SPACE

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Bard

CATCHING A GLIMPSE

A DIRECTORIAL INVESTIGATION/COLLABORATION ON
PROCEDURE TO EXIT AN ENCLOSED SPACE



Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
JaQuan Beachem

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my amazing family, for loving me unconditionally, allowing me to move, and raising me to believe that I achieve anything I put my mind to — we have much to be thankful for;

To my AIs, ride-or-dies, who have truly been around since the beginning — you know who you are — for being my support system, even through the grey days these last four years;

To the Theater & Performance faculty for the guidance in my academic pursuits as I explored the Avant garde and discovered my artistic interests/trajectory;

To my beloved cast (of course, you were all my residents) — Aniya Picou (for your radiance and realness), Elise Bell Alexander (for your drive and understanding), Leon Gonzalez (for your ability to transform) — for your compassion, dedication, and presence;

To my wonderful collaborators, for trusting me with your words, thoughts, and feelings as well as for your friendship and inspiration;

To all who have supported me in my career thus far — you are the reason.

Thank you to everyone for everything.

AS SOMEONE WHO EXISTS IN A VERY BLACK AND VERY QUEER BODY, I CAN'T
DIFFERENTIATE CONCURRENT MOVEMENTS FOR MY LIBERTY. TO DO SO IS TO
DIVIDE MYSELF INTO TWO PARTS. IS THAT EVER ASKED OF OTHERS?

~ANONYMOUS

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THE PROCESS

To recall the critical events, to cultivate a time of the creative journey of this project, I perused notes taken and entries made throughout the process, chatted with Brigid and Becca, referred to email correspondences and documents in our 'SPROJ THEATER' folder on Google drive, as well as returned my L&T roots by completing a series of free writes -- the Bardian Way. On March 28, 2016, Brigid Boll, Becca Glasbrener and I submitted our Theater & Performance Senior Project proposals. Our group suggested a director - playwright - playwright model to the Theater & Performance department. Within this structure, Boll and Glasbrener would craft, individually, two 10-minute pieces containing a thematic connection that I would then direct. This collaborative system allotted opportunity for Brigid and Becca to advise as dramaturgs as well as for me to devise a 5-minute product with the company. Spoiler: our trio's proposal would be accepted by the department and advised by Jean Wagner. In the beginning, the project would be inspired by Robert Aumann's proof and would incorporate game/agreement theory via sibling relationships and biblical narratives -- this would change. I also remember being very much interested in transformation (space, time, body) onstage live. The company of actors would be the vehicles.

Design (set, lights, costume, and sound) would be created collectively. The summer into early fall would be filled with both casual and formal meetings amongst the three of us. In this time, we, primarily the playwrights, deliberated a bit about whether the project would consist of two plays written by Becca and

Brigid individually and strung together with a piece of devising based on a shared concept or the alternative monster would tackle the alternative monster of crafting one play in collaboration, which may have gone up in the Old Gym. In the end, in consideration of artistic interest and time constraints, it was decided to participate in the festival made up of a play by Boll and Glasbrener, separately.

Fast forward to October, Senior Project festival auditions were held the weekend of the 15th. Auditions presented a chance for me to catch a glimpse of our pieces. In auditions and callbacks, we explored some of the modes, movement and theatrical exercises that we would play with in rehearsal. Commedia style, physical theater exercises like old favorite, *Pass the Food*, were engaged to get the actors warm, acquainted and active. The ensemble collectively navigated modes of bliss, panic, and melancholy, by taking a moment to release their emotion out, via passing/sharing. Chalkboard challenges, most likely inspired by Pictionary, and devising prompts were assigned. The participants, from auditions into callbacks truly made some theater magic, which is exactly what we were looking for. I began to feel the pulse of the plays as we wrapped up the audition process. The voices of Frederick, Jo, Sol and 'A' at the time. In the end, for *Lethe*, we cast Elise Alexander Bell as our old friend that wants to leave, Elise; Aniya Picou as Jo our sick sad cat; and Leon Gonzalez as Frederick, our other old friend that wants to leave as well as our ill sad guy, Sol. They each accepted our offer and we set off for Hollywood!

Our trio would meet as collaborators, as well as with Jean, to discuss progress and discoveries outside of rehearsals. On a typical week, the project

would rehearsal three to four days a week; ideally, *Lethe* and *CAT(S)* would have each have a focused rehearsal, in addition to a couple weekly full company rehearsals. Despite the insanity that is scheduling, it seemed that we had found a groove. The election rolled around in November and, due to the new charged political climate, the possibility of revamping the project was put into question. All we knew was that we were workshoping a couple plays that deal with female protagonists that are not being sincerely heard by their male counterpart. The break would be dedicated to sketching and solidifying our design choices while crossing our fingers that the cast would return off-book as we would return three weeks out from tech. Intersession would have come and gone before we could say: 'procedure to exit an enclosed space' -- this would become the title of the production.

THE DESIGN

One of the greatest advantages or perks of creating a work for the festival is the access to LUMA theater; in addition to this, collaborating with the designers of Richard B. Fisher Center. I was beyond excited for the opportunity to technically bring our piece to life onstage. Although thematically linked, the pieces seem to be antitheses with divergent feels, notwithstanding, that acts complement each other. With lighting, set, and other theatrical devices, our production strove to depict compelling works that would engage and evoke a response, or sentimental sensation from the audience.

SET

A road box is the central set piece for the production. This centerpiece was inspired by a previous work that our trio devised and developed in collaboration for moderation, *ANT HOUSE*, written by Becca. In this piece, Brigid and I performed in a short about a dysfunctional ant couple with a home simply made of a road box and cardboard painted with chalkboard paint. Our trio was very much interested in further exploring the possibilities of this interactive set choice. For the purposes of *Procedure to Exit an Enclosed Space*, the span of the road box operates as the covers of our storybook. The rear was covered with Mylar strips (desired to replicate the color scheme of an oil slick) in a mosaic design, turning the road box into a visually-appealing, iridescent castle to ornament our deep oceanic, underworld for *Lethe*. The inside of the road box was designed to resemble rooms of a studio apartment with all the amenities -- a telephone, bookshelf (with odes by our Bard professors), fridge, kitchen sink, and

a windowsill. The cardboard was painted and installed to create shelves, drawers, and cabinets to store miscellaneous objects. This shelving also supported a couple fish friends. The mobility of the road box is useful in executing a satisfying reveal as we transition in the production. For *CAT(S)*, deciding to use chalk quite literally as well as metaphorically created opportunity to discover varying possibilities with blocking, objects, and design. Moreover, the use of chalk adds a new dimension of reality; being that, in addition to the action happening on stage, the world is also being constructed in real time. The accumulation of chalk dust adds more texture to the setting, and highlights the grotesque quality of the ashy atmosphere inside the apartment of our hoarding agoraphobic dying of cancer.

LIGHTS

Originally for *Lethe*, the dream was to fill a portion of the stage with water. This was denied immediately. Then, the plan was to have wave lighting, created with a potentially homemade gobo, which did not work out either. The final lighting choice, however, remained influenced by a still photo from Luc Besson's 1988 *The Big Blue*¹ (also known as *Le Grand Bleu*). Here, similarly to *Lethe*, we have another plotline that follows childhood friends that grow apart while endeavoring to discover themselves and, the unknown. For *CAT(S)*, we wanted to transport our world from the phantasmagorical liminal space to the living room of our pals Sol and Jo. Contrastingly, to achieve a homely aura with dimmed

¹ APPENDIX A

fluorescent/whites and yellows. In addition to this, a spotlight for theatrics to complete our real, naturalistic atmosphere studio.

COSTUMES

From silk to leather to sequins, we went back and forth on which way to go on costumes. For both, we decided the simpler, more pedestrian route. In *Lethe*, Elise and Frederick sport matching brick, red-orange overalls, pant legs rolled up appropriately, with white t-shirts. The lifetime pals remind folks of the mischievous *The Little Rascals* gang or Nintendo fan favorites, Mario & Luigi. Our minimalistic, yet familiar costume choice fashionably ornaments our sepia-filtered portrait of Frederick and Elise. In *CAT(S)*, Sol lounges in a speckled pajamas suit, a plaid robe and slippers. Jo's base costume consists of a black turtleneck and green yoga pants, which are comfortable and facilitate feasible mobility. Jo opens the show with a denim cardigan and breaks the new in a white lab coat.

SOUND

Majority of the sound cue song choices were written in the play from the beginning, like "Memory" from *CATS the Musical* where *CAT(S)* and "End of the World" by Skeeter Davis. The audio for Interlude was crafted from various procedure to exit a space in case of an emergency. DON'T HURT YOURSELF was a song choice that I suggested to Glasbrener in the rehearsal. The song is on Beyoncé's *Lemonade* album grants black women agency to reclaim power over their bodies, struggles, and lifestyles. Music was used a device often in rehearsal.

CONFETTI

Confetti is tangible. Confetti is visceral. Confetti looks pretty. The choice to use confetti was a bold one. Although suggested facetiously, in the end, granted more wonder that I could have imagined. In *Lethe*, the confetti serve as an external obstacle (weather, blocking), which transforms the moment it hits the stage -- the ending of something. In *CAT(S)*, the confetti serve as a visual of all that is going on internally (tobacco addiction, hoarding, etc.)

THE DISCOVERIES

The director is only the facilitator, the midwife.²

Yes, this collaborative senior project explored the ebbs and flows, as well as exposed the tensions of the director/playwright relationship. The directorial investigation of *Lethe & CAT(S)* was extremely experiential, lots of trial and error. Notwithstanding, in directing, I relied on my personal intuitive and allowed the plays as well as my collaborators, and moreover, the cast – Aniya Picou, Elise Bell Alexander, and Leon Gonzalez, inspired the research and, ultimately, the journey.

I recently stumbled upon *it started with a mountain* scribbled inside a poorly drawn mountain; I suppose I had an idea then of what was ahead. We started at ground zero with these plays; this was thrilling. Per our SPROJ structure, as the director, I ran the rehearsal room. Essentially, this meant that I prepared an agenda of moments in the script to work and sketch of warm-up material. Rehearsals typically began with a check-in and movement around the space. Warm-up included, but were not limited to: energizers, aerobics, timed authentic improvisations, and vocalese. At times the actors would bring in their own warm up to share with the ensemble, or we would flock to songs of their choosing, simply whatever got everyone warm, present and into the room.

During our initial rehearsals, the focus was placed on the text. Speaking the text, whether around in a circle or on our feet, gave the cast time to sink their

² Dan Sullivan's *Playwright Vs. Director: Who Has the Last Word?*

teeth into the words. Scrutinizing the text led to insightful questions for character development. At the same time, we looked to Bard alumna, Anne Bogart, to Viewpoints as it “leads to greater awareness, which leads to greater freedom” (19). Viewpoints, had a multi-faceted impact on the rehearsal process as the techniques in the exercise a valuable tool in establishing character dynamics (i.e. how character crosses stage, modes of physicality Viewpoints also helps develop a vocabulary of sorts for the ensemble. This actor work bled into compelling stage compositions, for both two handers. The constraints of the exercise allow for rediscovery. This would also be a time for us to collect questions as scene partners, a cast, a company as we dig into the plays together. To aid in character development, I would create individual tasks catered to each character, to be performed outside of rehearsal. Elise was to look in the mirror and say, “I’m beautiful” until she believed it as she is playing a Beautiful Thing in *Lethe*. Doodling legible items that can be found in an apartment would be an example of character-building task for Leon for Sol in *CAT(S)*. For Jo, for feminine/feline physicality and/or tracking the moments when you feel the most powerful/sexy would an exercise for Aniya. Any discoveries would be discussed and potentially incorporated into the piece via blocking, devising, or sub-textually.

In addition to yoga-inspired kinesthetic, we would survey acting and movement exercise, catered to the material philosophies of Brecht contemporary, Polish theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski. Grotowski says, “*theatre – through the actor’s technique, his art in which the living organism strives for... a totality of physical and mental reactions*” (241). This idea of *total act* was not the easiest

to explain, nor execute in rehearsal. However, the ensemble must establish trust and develop relationship, so that the working out of those muscles served the piece. Fortunately, from the initial read thru via shared experiences, or lack thereof, with loss, isolation, or the feeling of being “stuck”, and illness, as well as coping mechanisms, the ensemble was well on its way to complete present-ness. Of course, with the addition of technical elements, we move away from Grotowski’s poor theatre philosophy. Exercises such “The Cat” influenced and served as catalysts for raw, physical experimentation. This was pseudo-helpful in finding various movement dynamics, especially with Jo’s character. This proved essential while exploring in *Lethe*. Qualities of the movement were also discovered in rehearsal with authentic movement technique improvisation.

I was very interested in our scope of awareness in our choices, both on the stage and on the page, as we workshopped these new works. Personally, I believe that artists should use any opportunity they receive to reflect and examine the world that we exist in. Theater should be used to engage its audience as well as challenge the viewer to rethink the worlds that surround us. One must take the time to examine their contexts in the hope of catching a glimpse of someone else’s story. We must continue watching and training our empathetic gazes. As Bayard Rustin once said, “the only way to reduce ugly in the world is to reduce it in yourself.” Like everything else, this is a lifelong process.

Early in the process, we began discussing our definitions and ideas of agency. Agency, meaning one’s “capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power.” In other words, which character is in control onstage, in the

relationship, from moment to moment, scene to scene, and, finally, by the end of the play – it all matters. The question of agency must be asked for both pieces, and in my opinion should be on the table in any theatrical venture. The examination of this term made for fruitful discoveries. An example can be found in Glasbrener’s piece *CAT(S)*. To acknowledge our findings within the piece, the line, “*If you think a white 21-year-old girl wrote a play about a black girl as a man’s pet. You’re wrong.*”, was written into Jo’s opening monologue. The modification is significant as the line displays the awareness of the identities of the actors on stage. Stating the identity acknowledges histories of power, in this case of race and gender, that exist in society. Additionally, the change opens the door to negotiate the theatrical relationship of a female-identifying, woman of color is playing a man’s cat. With that, the question of the fetishizing of women as well as folks of color onstage, and how agency is often stripped from them in the roles they play. Also, this character is a cat, a now domesticated mammal that tends to be associated with femininity, with women.

Now, women can certainly hold agency and power whilst playing powerful characters. Even feline, think Eartha Kitt and Halle Berry. I turn to playwright Suzan Lori Parks for an example on how to address issues of agency, specifically to further investigate the black, female bodied context in the theater. A gruesome, yet poignant example is Parks’ *Venus* which explores the nonfictional narrative of Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman (1790-1815) who was abducted from South Africa and caravanned throughout Paris as “The Hottentot Venus”. In her play, Parks seeks to indict, to shed light onto the tragedies of voyeurism and the common

objectification and exploitation of black bodies, in this case for scientific progress. The practice of medicine essentially murder Saartjie Baartman, for the greater good. Scene II of *CAT(S)* takes this this truth and attempts to flip it on its head as our feline companion, Jo, sports a lab coat and tries to doctor Sol's life. The actors developed a companionship between Sol and Jo that allowed our leading player, in even though dependent on her owner for basic survival needs, like food, to maintain control and power. These findings were very important for clarification of our production and were incorporated into rehearsal.

A senior project submitted to the Division of the Arts at Bard College Presented as a part of the 2017 Theater & Performance LUMA Festival

by

JaQuan Beachem, Brigid Boll & Becca Glasbrener

PROCEDURE TO EXIT AN ENCLOSED SPACE: *a play in two parts*

Directed by JaQuan Beachem '17

PART ONE

***LETHE* by Brigid Boll '17**

Girl

Elise Bell Alexander '19

Frederick

Leon Gonzalez '18

PART TWO

***CAT(S)* by Becca Glasbrener '17**

Jo

Aniya Picou '18

Sol Proctor

Leon Gonzalez '18

Jean Wagner, Advisor

Humor is not jokes. It is that attitude towards being alive without which you would long ago have jumped off the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge. Humor is not being funny. It is the coin of exchange between human beings that makes it possible for us to get through the day. Humor exists even in the humorless³.

-- Michael Shurtleff

I can now definitely say that this production contains humor -- we must remember that. These plays are alive and breathe; additionally, these plays were written by my collaborators, therefore, I hesitate to assign too much meaning. Here is an attempt to put words to some of my thoughts and exploration of each play. This is not a final analysis, but more of a reflection.

LETHE, or a BRIEF VISIT TO ETERNITY

~~Lethe, according to Merriam-Webster, is borrowed from the Greek: *lēthē* to mean ‘forgetfulness’, *lanthanein* to mean ‘to escape notice’, and *lanthanesthai* to mean ‘to forget’. Known as one of the five rivers in Hades’ underworld whose water when drunk made the souls of the dead forget their life on earth. Elise, with all her might, goes against the grain and attempts to remember. Elise is different, a Beautiful Thing, if you will. She is also an observer. She believes that there must be a reason or cause for forgetting and is determined to make the discovery, no matter how gruesome. Although she may not always comprehend the things that she sees, she is constantly grasping for understanding. Elise is stuck and wants to leave. She knows that there is more to the life she is currently living. She is a beautiful, brilliant creature with Beautiful Thing status, which is her motor and is what drives her to dream. It is what motivates her to ask questions and inquire the incomprehensible.~~

~~In our world is Frederick, a simple, innocent fellow with lived experience, however is not interested in precariously pursuing the unknown. His main interest is sustaining a relationship with his longtime companion. Frederick introduces the audience to the universe outside of their own, ‘The Out’. Our two entities solely experience The Out via indecipherable mumblings and sporadic silver samplings. While in the oblivion, to the pass the time, Frederick converses with Elise. He~~

³ Excerpt from *AUDITION*

opens with small talk, referring to mundane conversation starters like “the weather” and compliments on Elise’s appearance. Frederick will use just about he can hold onto to hold Elise’s interest, one can imagine that these conversations occur frequently being that we are dramaturgically in the realm of forgetfulness. Floating in complacency and blinded by his fear of the unknown, Frederick initially will not even discuss The Out. Frederick tries to convince Elise that she is hysterical, losing her mind. Frederick believes that The Out is not worth pursuit, that it is not ‘beautiful, or glorious, or magical’, however, would, in fact, lead to the end of her existence.

Our entities, Elise and Frederick, in *Lethé* speak in brief, simple statements. There exists brevity in the simplicity of sentence structure which leads to a tennis match of sorts within the scenes between the two beings. The shortness of breath in their dialogue gives bounce as well as an urgency to the scenes. Within this urgency also exists an enthusiasm that energizes, this vitality is can be noticed in scene three as Elise and Frederick become so enthralled that they construct sentences as a unit. This electricity is displayed visually in the static, charged motions in Elise’s movement onstage. This vibrant chemistry between Frederick and Elise is supported by the familiarity in which they speak. The two converse like an old married couple, despite their age-old, seemingly platonic relationship. Nevertheless, the power of their friendship, Frederick’s love — whether romantic or not — does not appear to be enough. Elise is obsessed with the beyond, referenced in our play as The Out. Although not completely aware of the consequences, Elise is aware of the implications of her thoughts and is willing to take the risk because she knows that she is going places, upwards to be exact. She has trained for this, and, despite Frederick’s suspicions and pleas Elise sets off, thereby leaving her dearest friend behind. Elise takes the plunge, or Leap of Faith into the void abyss.

The plays are connected by an interlude. The plays are connected by the paired casting. The plays are connected by female leads, or dominant characters that lead most of the action. If you believe that Elise and Frederick are fish, then the fishbowls in *CAT(S)* connect the plays as do the set.

THE INTERLUDE (audio text)

BRIGID

In the event of an emergency your regular exit might not be the quickest or safest way out. Take a moment and look around your immediate surrounding area for the nearest emergency exit door. All doors that open directly to the outside must be marked with emergency illuminated ULC 924 listed exit signs.

BECCA

Don't step into the space or you'll have to separate your knees. Step 2: to exit, twist slightly towards the door with your knees touching each other. Open the door, or even better have the driver open it for you and swing your legs out onto the ground keeping your knees together. If you have a scarf or pashmina drape it over your legs until both feet are on the ground outside.

JAQUAN

After surfacing, establish positive buoyancy, move to the edge of the pool and pass up your weights. Next is offing the scuba unit. Be sure to switch from your regulator to your snorkel before slipping out of the VC.

BECCA

When you notice, the bus approaching your destination, you should: press the stop request button.

BRIGID

Here we exit to the right, so that we can go left after, but going left is the second step.

JAQUAN

Prior to reaching jump altitude and opening the door you must conduct your final gear check. Point both knees in the direction of flight.

BECCA

Slowly and smoothly suspend your weight by your arms. Relax your body and keep your knees and legs straight.

BRIGID

Hanging by just the arms, look over your left shoulder and regain eye contact. The third and final command has two parts:

ALL TOGETHER

Look up, go

CAT(S)

~~———Anxiety. Agoraphobia. Cancer. Cats cannot cry. It is hard being alone. Smoking is social. Anti-social. What if you just do not get it? At the top of the show we meet Sol Procter, a sad, agoraphobic gentleman that lives alone with his sad cat, Jo. Sol and Jo live together in a cluttered apartment in Brooklyn — think next episode of hoarders. The studio is covered in a myriad of belongings, knick-knacks and keepsakes. A layer of ash, like film, sits on the surfaces. Jo is strong, wise cat that keeps in real. She wants nothing but the best for her owner, Sol. Sol is dying of cancer, however is unaware. Jo, his cat is aware; she's our narrator, therefore provides the context. Yes, the cat. Ironically, only Jo can communicate with the audience. As far humans go, Jo's audience understands her, unfortunately, her owner, arguably the one human being that needs to hear what Jo is saying, cannot. Sol simply perceives Jo's hints/tactics (telling jokes, playing dead, etc.) as ploys for attention and responds with cat food, dancing, and affectionate rubs. Jo pulls out all the stops and does not spare a single pejorative. The audience sits back and watches Jo attempt to dissect this dilemma in as many ways as she possibly can. Out of negligence and misunderstanding Sol continues to misinterpret Jo's cues. Knowledge is power and Jo knows what is going on. Sol overpowers and ignores Jo via music; he quite literally tunes her out. Jo knows that if Sol does not make it that she may not make it. In the end, we watch Sol fall into his fate and Jo swallow hers with puff to the head.. The dots continue, keep connecting.~~

Lethe

By Brigid Boll

Character List:

FREDERICK- A male; he wants to stay; an old friend

ELISE- A female; she wants to go; an old friend

Setting: A Windowsill

Lethe: (n.) a river in Hades whose water when drunk made the souls of the dead forget their life on earth.

Scene I

(The stage is in black, excerpt of Alan Watts "Dream" speech plays. We let the audience sit with that. Next, a pool of light comes down from above on ELISE.)

ELISE

Sometimes I wish I could close my eyes, just for a moment. I would close them and save certain moments. To feel them instead of constantly watching. All I can do is watch. I just wish I could close my eyes. Someone once told me about darkness. They told me the light went out, and you could feel things you could never see. I wish I could be in darkness. I think I dream sometimes about it. I dream I am not in this place. I don't remember the first time I saw it. I did not know what was happening. It was so- how had I not seen it? I did not know what to do. What are you supposed to feel when you discover your home is- *beat*. Incomprehensible, for me, truly, it was- *beat*. I can't talk about it right now, they are coming, see. They are coming to look at me. Because I am so beautiful, see. So beautiful. They look at me and they think "I need that" They come to me and they think I need that, that that is so beautiful. So Brilliant. So Beautiful I am to all of them.

*(Blackout)***Scene II**

(Two people stand across from each other in two pools of distinct light on opposite sides of the stage. there is an invisible wall between them, they wish they could touch, but they can't)

	FREDERICK
You look so beautiful today	
	ELISE
You do, too	
	FREDERICK
Have they come yet? To see you?	
	ELISE
Once, this morning.	
	FREDERICK
Did you hear them speak	
	ELISE
The normal gibberish	
	FREDERICK
I see	
	ELISE
You see	
	FREDERICK
Wonderful weather we are having, don't you think.	
	ELISE
So funny you don't feel.	
	FREDERICK
Do you think they do?	

ELISE
 It does not matter. I think they will take me away.
 FREDERICK
 Why do you think that.
 ELISE
 I do not think, I know.
 FREDERICK
 You are so beautiful when you know.
 ELISE
 I'm sorry
 FREDERICK
 Silly, to be sorry
 ELISE
 You think?
 FREDERICK
 I *know*.
 ELISE
 Can I ask you something, Fredrick
 FREDERICK
 Of course you can
 ELISE
 Do you think we will ever be in the out
 FREDERICK
 Shhh you can't talk like that
 ELISE
 I am serious
 FREDERICK
 So am I, stop that talk
 ELISE
 What if we could be
 FREDERICK
 Insane
 ELISE
 What if it wasn't
 FREDERICK
 We cannot be in the out
 ELISE
 How do you know
 FREDERICK
 I've seen it, that's why. I've seen it. With my own two eyes. It is not beautiful, or glorious, or magical. It is death, don't you see that? It is going away.
 ELISE
 I cannot accept that.
 FREDERICK
 Do you have a death wish?
 ELISE
 Maybe *winks*

(Blackout)

Scene III

*(Lights up, they both stand in their
respective places)*

	ELISE
Do you remember the first time you forgot?	FREDERICK
Why do ask me these questions	ELISE
I wonder if you'll know	FREDERICK
Do you?	ELISE
I think I do	FREDERICK
That's impossible	ELISE
How do you think we know that we forget? Someone must have remembered, long ago, don't you see?	FREDERICK
When did you forget, the first time	ELISE
It's more of a feeling, see.	FREDERICK
No, I don't see, you're losing your mind	ELISE
I am not. I know what I know. I know we forget.	FREDERICK
Why do we forget, then, if you are so certain	ELISE
I think, that maybe-	FREDERICK
Maybe what?	ELISE
Maybe we forget because something terrible has happened	FREDERICK
What do you mean	ELISE
Maybe something awful happened that we need to forget	FREDERICK
Why would we need to forget it	ELISE
In order to keep living, see	FREDERICK
And when did this terrible thing take place	ELISE
Before we were here, long before	FREDERICK
How long ago	ELISE
Unimaginable, I assume	FREDERICK

So it is in our-
 DNA
 And you think-
 I think,
 You think we can
 I think we can remember, see
 I see you losing your mind
 And if this terrible does exists, why would you want to remember?
 Because maybe I was something else, before
 Something
 Not beautiful
 I thought you loved being a Beautiful Thing.
 I do, I do, I do...
 But-
 But sometimes, I look at all these people staring at me with their big eyes and I think of how small I am, and how little I seem, and I think of how good it would feel to be big. How good it would feel to be in the out.
 Again with the out.
 Anything but this, anything but this.
 Why can't you just be happy
 Like the rest of us
 Like the rest of us, yes.
 I thought you liked that I was different.
 Being different does not mean wishing for-
 Death?
 You make me too angry, don't you see?

(she chuckles)

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

FREDERICK

ELISE

I can't say that I do, Frederick.

FREDERICK

I love you, I love you

ELISE

Yes, that I do see

(Blackout)

Scene IV

(Lights up, ELISE in her pool of light.)

ELISE

I am thinking, and my thinking is going to get me into Trouble. Big. Big. Trouble. I am thinking of going. I am thinking of Taking the Leap. I have heard them say that before. The Leap of Faith. They have called it that, The feeders. I have heard it many times. But I need to, I need to, I need to, I must. The method: that's the hard point. The method, what I need. Wonder if he'll help me, or tell me I am crazed. Wonder if I'll ask, or if I'll just- (pause) I can feel it, starting to happen. Again. And no one believes me when I tell them it's- again. And again, and again. Do they think they are feeders, living some sort of life down here. So small, so meaningless. I am not like them, I know I am not. I do not know where I come from, I do not know where I'll go. I swear, I swear, I'm going upward. Going somewhere. New.

Scene V

(The Two Friends and the pane of glass. Frederick gets increasingly agitated and upset throughout the scene.)

ELISE

Frederick

FREDERICK

No

ELISE

What is it

FREDERICK

I will not hear it. I will not. I will *not*.

ELISE

You do not know what I will say.

FREDERICK

I do, and I can't hear the words-

ELISE

Frederick, my dearest friend, I've trained myself, see. I know the way out.

FREDERICK

How?

ELISE

Will you come with me, if I tell you the way

FREDERICK

No, you are crazed, you have lost your mind

ELISE

I can't live here, anymore

FREDERICK

Yes you can, you must, you have to- don't you see- *(Starting to visibly get quite upset)*

ELISE

It doesn't have to be this way

FREDERICK

How could you do this

ELISE

I should not have told you, I'm sorry

FREDERICK

No. You see nothing. *Imbecile*. Do you have *ANY* - any- I can't believe you. I cannot believe you will do this, you will die, you know that, don't you? Don't you know that you will die in the out? You were not meant to live in the out. You cannot breathe in the out. You cannot close your eyes. You cannot remember. You will die. You'll die. You will stop existing. You'll go away. You'll go away. Please don't go away.

(Frederick sinks to the floor, crying, she reaches out to comfort him, but cannot touch him.)

ELISE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry

(Blackout)

Scene VI

(FREDERICK and ELISE share a dance to excerpt of Heavenly Father by Bon Iver beginning at 1:25. ELISE leaves FREDERICK alone on the stage.)

Scene VII

(The final monologue, she stands soaking wet in her pool of light.)

ELISE

There are things that no one tells you, when you are on the inside. No one tells you about air, or water. No one seems to know the difference. No one seems to understand the particles of dust you see, when the light comes through the window at dusk. No one seems to understand the Other Side. No one seems to recognize the why, the where, the how. I was lifeless, floating, imagining nothing. Lying in wait. Rescue just inches away. I was lifted, breathless. Gasping, I could not imagine what I had done. I saw Frederick below me, as my lungs began to give in, I looked at his panic as I tossed and turned and gasped again, shouting but not finding the air to get the words out "Frederick!" "Frederick" I shouted as I was lifted and lifted further and further away until suddenly I was in a hole, being dragged down, down, down, until I could not see anymore. And there was nothing, all around me. I felt my breath return to me, slowly. And I went for hours onward and found nothing and nothing and nothing again. There was nothing all around me so I smiled. And it all returned. The terrible thing. The thing at the beginning of everything. And I see it, now, I see it.

(Blackout. End of Play.)

CAT(S)

By Becca Glasbrener

JO: A sad cat.

SOL: A sad guy.

They're both dying.

Set: In a Brooklyn apartment.

SCENE 1

SOL is on stage. In a black box, his apartment. He draws his apartment around him. SOL is on the phone as he's creating. The only furniture is a small sofa in the middle of the home, made of black blocks and chalk. On her own block, JO is knitting.

SOL

Hi, yeah, I'm Sol Procter. I just spoke to you, I was put on hold an- oh, it's. *Beat.* It's okay, yep. *Beat.* No it's okay, just my newspaper hasn't been coming lately, and I was wondering if there was maybe a problem with the account? *Beat.* About two weeks. Okay, yes I'll hold.

SOL is put on hold. SOL is the type of guy who paces whilst on the phone. The hold song is "Eye of the Tiger, Instrumental". We probably don't hear it.

JO

Why is yarn so fucking expensive?

SOL coughs. He's in pain. JO looks at SOL for a long time.

JO

I think I'm going to make myself some expensive ass socks. Not like, ass socks. Just socks. *JO looks at SOL for a long time. SOL is fiddling with the phone cord, back faced to the audience.*

JO

I'm feeling pretty sick. Remember, when I saw that mouse poking around? I bet that mouse is sick and ate our food and pooped on our plates and now I'm sick.

SOL gets taken off hold.

JO

SOL?

SOL

Hi, no. No one else lives here. I guess that's possible. Is there any way you can leave a note to the delivery man to knock on my door when it arrives? Okay, that, that's understandable. No, I don't want to- I don't think I'll be able to contac- Okay. That would be wonderful. *Beat.* That's a great idea. Thanks so much, Erin, right? Yeah, ****thanks so much. Bye.

JO

****Sol, I've been thinking a lot about our future.

SOL does not notice...

JO

I think that we might not have a very long one together... Future...

SOL is creating the room.

JO

Like, it's not that we're not good... We are good. I just think something isn't right.

Silence.

I've been thinking about leaving. I know that it's not going to happen if I have you here, so I'm thinking, let's just, pause... And take a day or two. Maybe a week apart. And I, dunno. I don't know. I have cancer.

SOL messes up his work. It is not clear whether his next line is pertaining to the work or to JO.

SOL

Fuck!

Silence. JO looks at SOL confused.

JO

Please, say something.

SOL

Hm. *Beat.* Are you hungry?

JO

Fuck. Sol. Really...

Silence.

JO

Maybe you're right. Maybe let's eat. Maybe we can talk about this later.

SOL

Me too. Let's eat.

SOL starts preparing JO's food. JO goes to her block. This next monologue is entirely addressed to the audience.

JO

Some exposition. Sol's... Um... Sol hasn't left this apartment in 7 years. So I think it scares him to realize that if he wants me to live, he'll have to take his cat to the fucking vet.

Oh, yeah. I'm a cat.

SOL comes to give JO some food. He pulls out a cat food bowl from a compartment which he's drawn.

SOL

Here ya go, Jo.

JO

Well, more specifically, I'm the personification of the cat in this play.

Do you think I'm a boy or girl or neither or both or someone else?

If you think I'm a girl, you're wrong. If you think I'm black. You're wrong. If you think I'm anything besides a kitty cat, you're wrong.

If you think a white 21 year old girl wrote a play about a black girl as a man's pet. You're wrong.

If you'd like, you can imagine a real cat, because that's what Sol sees. I know presentationally it is confusing. I guess we could have done a voiceover and had a real live cat on stage. You would have gotten it. But the predictability of a real live cat on stage isn't dependable.

Beat. I guess we could have gone a little overboard, *****and put me in a cat costume.

******Memory, from CATS the Musical, begins to play softly over the monologue. Light slowly dims on SOL.*

I just need to take a moment and clarify. I'm dying. Which is fine. But I'm trying to live. And Sol doesn't know. Or he just doesn't notice. I've faked my death, many times, but he just thinks I'm sleeping. Cats sleep a lot. I dunno.

But I'm here to provide some narrative. Because it seems that you understand me. *Beat.* Nod if you understand me. Shout FUCK ME MOTHER FUCKER if you understand me. Do something to show me your understanding.

I have cancer. Maybe literal, maybe figurative. I just know that I have cancer. Right here.

Which means that I'm in the process of dying.
 We're all in the process of dying.
 Just my process is quicker than yours.

Points to someone in the audience.

I hope.

*SOL yawns in the background. Not noticeable.
 Speaking to the same person.*

I'm very tired. I think it's the cancer.
 Obviously I'm not a doctor.

*JO goes over to the house, opens a door, to reveal
 her pointer and lab coat. She begins to put on her
 labcoat.*

But I did go on web MD, and type in the symptoms on the symptom checker, cough, body aches and weakness, etc... And the first option was the common cold, but who has the common cold for 4 months? Then there were some other things, like Anemia and Fibrosomething blah... Then there it was. Cancer.

So I did my research.

On the Wikipedia page, weakness is a symptom. The wikipedia page for "Cancer in Cats" I mean. Which exists. In fact, it's a bigger problem for cats than people may think.

*JO, fully clad in her lab coat, and with pointer goes up to SOL.
 Light change to spotlight just on SOL and JO. SOL freezes in
 position. JO uses pointer to point out symptoms using SOL's
 froze body.*

"Similarly to humans, cancer is the leading cause of death among *older cats*." I take offence to that by the way. "It is caused by uncontrolled cell growth, and affects a wide range of cell types and organs in the body. Feline cancer initially manifests as a lump or bump... Lump or bump on any parts of the body. It rapidly grows in the affected cell; attaches itself to the tissue under the skin in that area; and, depending on the tumour, it can spread to other parts of the body." But only if you're lucky. "Although cancer accounts for approximately 50% of feline deaths each year, it can be successfully treated if diagnosed early."

"While the causes of cancer in cats are unknown, feline leukemia virus is suspected to be a prime contributor. Other factors suspected to increase rates of feline cancer include toxins from the environment, second hand smoking, excessive grooming, or licking parts of the body that have been in contact with an environmental toxin." Well fuck.

JO reads the citation aloud.

"Cancer in Cats." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 13 Oct. 2016.

Lights change back to normal. SOL unfreezes.

So. There's the gist. I have cancer. Sol doesn't know. How could he? I'm a cat.

I mean, you're people. I think. And I'm communicating with you. I don't know. Maybe you're just better listeners. Maybe you should tell him what I told you. You know, about cats having cancer.

Blackout. Light from lamp remains.

SCENE 2

Lights up. Time has passed. SOL is unable to breathe. Pain, lots. Struggling to breathe, obviously. Agitated. Gasping for air. He'd feel better sitting up until he eventually loses consciousness.

JO

She has probably been doing this for a long time.

...I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer I have cancer...

JO begins to yell.

I have cancer.

Cancer!

SOL

(To JO.) Shut up. Shut up!

SOL turns on radio to overpower JO's meowing. End of the World by Skeeter Davis blares. We can't hear this monologue.

JO

Sol. SOL. You're dying!! YOU'RE DYING. It's not me dying. It's you. You're dying. You're dying. You know it too. Maybe if you didn't smoke all those fucking cigarettes, maybe if you left the apartment and got some fresh air once in awhile, maybe we wouldn't be in this fucking predicament. Maybe you'd be alive. Maybe. You understand if you die, I might die too. How the hell am I supposed to leave this apartment. Do I have to eat your remains to survive? Because I would. I fucking would. In fact, I'd really fucking like that. So why don't you just fucking DIE Sol?

JO screams.

SOL turns off the music.

SOL turns off the light. He goes to bed. Lights a cigarette.

SCENE 3

SOL is on the couch, face down.

JO is on the ground. She wakes up.

JO

Sol, wake up, I'm very hungry.

Nothing.

Sol, I have cancer and I'm very hungry.

Nothing. JO goes over to SOL and tries to wake him up.

Sol- wake up.

SOL doesn't move. He's dead.

Fuck you Sol. Wake up.

Wake up. Wake up! Sol. Wake up. Wake up. Wake up.

To the audience.

Would you wake him up?

Please, maybe he can't hear me. Please.

Sol wake up.

Sol.

Nothing. Silence. For a while.

JO

Fine.

JO turns on the stereo. Don't Hurt Yourself by Beyonce begins to play, loudly. JO erases all chalk. She destroys what's been made. She's not crying, because cats don't cry. Once she's finished, she looks at the audience. She's smoking.

JO

What? It's catnip.

Blackout.

APPENDIX A | *INSPIRATION*



APPENDIX B | PRODUCTION PHOTOS

Taken by ROWAN DUNFEY '17

LETHE





CAT(S)



AFTERWARD

DREAM.

TRUST YOUR GUT.

EMBRACE ALL THAT YOU ARE.

ROLL ALONG.

TRY AGAIN.

GO WITH THE FLOW.

BE KIND.

TRY AGAIN.

BELIEVE.

WE DID IT! 😊



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