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in defense of Grass Grows: a play about mental illness

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in defense of
Grass Grows
a play about mental illness

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I: Why

“Most people never need to know. Most of the time I’m not very different.”

Jess, I.11

As I write this, I am on the verge of graduating from college with honors in two majors; I have worked on and backstage in theatres around the globe; I’ve released two original EPs, trained at a world-class conservatory, and developed and produced an improvisational format for the world’s oldest theatre festival. I am living a life rich in growth, joy, and love.

I am the last person one would expect to be mentally ill.

When friends, family, coworkers, colleagues, and so forth discover I have obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), they often voice a level of surprise at the idea that someone who is as functional and successful as I have been—let alone someone in their own circle—could have a mental disorder. Even those “enlightened” by knowledge of famously “troubled” artists see mental illness as something that coexists in the rare savant and fosters genius only at the cost of health and happiness.

People possess an image of what mental illness is... and I, for all my lucidity, positivity, and endurance, do not line up.

The archetype of the mentally ill person (what I refer to, for brevity, as the MIP) has been constructed by an endless current of messages from an incalculable number of non-mentally-ill sources, while terminology created to refer to the MIP has been generalized and bastardized to refer to the everyday disdained. The world receives a wealth of concerning, conflicting, and inaccurate information about what it means to be mentally ill; meanwhile, anyone whose actions we don’t comprehend can be deemed “psychotic”, “spastic”, or “crazy”. These two interacting means have the same end: to rob the MIP of their own voice.

No wonder people who know me intimately have trouble swallowing my diagnosis—how could they understand it? No wonder my younger years were spent feeling alien and irredeemable—how could I have known better? In the absence of truthful messages, people are forced to credit the rumors they receive.

And though I was diagnosed as obsessive-compulsive at 13 years old, it wasn’t until three years later that I heard a story that sounded like mine.

Seeing

In 2013, a poet named Neil Hilborn performed a slam poetry piece titled, simply, “OCD”. I doubt he knew his single performance at the Rustbelt Regional Poetry Slam in Madison, Wisconsin, would be viewed nearly 15 million times around the world. He certainly didn’t know there was a teenager watching on the Button Poetry channel from Orlando, Florida, convinced she had finally seen someone who talked, felt, and lived like her.

I cannot explain what that poem meant and still means to me. It’s like having the world handed to you. Here was a man who walked the same plane I did, sharing his pain and, more surprisingly, his humour about it all.

The only thing more moving than Hilborn’s writing was the voracity with which those in attendance at Rustbelt and those who would watch online in the days, months, and years to come received it. The intrinsic, intangible experiences I’d thought no one but I could understand were being felt—laughed at, sighed at, honored in silence—by the audience.

This poem, and its subsequent viral journey across the World Wide Web, was the first time I knew someone like me could be seen by someone else. I treasured the moment, and then tucked it away, not thinking it would be the impetus to my college thesis half a decade later.

Meeting Halfway

I knew, coming into college, that I would get my bachelor's in both Theatre Studies and Psychology. In four years of scholarship, I have never questioned my choice. The combination strikes many who probe about the pairing as mismatched, but in my opinion, my two chosen disciplines are as interrelated as any could be. A background in the art of listening to and portraying other people gives me access to the empathy and tolerance for uncertainty necessary in approaching the study of the mind; comprehending the scientific underpinnings of personality and behaviour allows me to analyze and accurately embody characters from the page.

My first attempt to merge these two specialties in a production for the public premiered in 2017, when I developed a short-form improvised show that utilized techniques from psychologists and theatre artists to retell audience stories. Creating *Improv Therapy* exposed me to a new model of socially driven theatre-making which established its roots long before me. Theatre of the Oppressed was first established by Augusto Boal in the 1980s as a platform for the disadvantaged populace of Brazil to act out real-life challenges in an environment that encouraged conversation as a means to resolve conflict (Boal, 1993). This prizing of individuals sharing their own stories bled into later genres such as Playback Theatre, where improvisers helped audiences attain catharsis by allowing them to observe moments from their lives that were particularly salient (Salas, 2013).

Of course, a great deal of theatre history has been charged by the need to express: symbolism, surrealism, Dada, Workers Theatre, and countless other movements evolved as responses to trying and traumatizing experiences that otherwise evaded transcription. So many artists through so many centuries used theatre as an exercise in Theory of Mind (Carlson, Koenig, & Harms, 2013) without having heard or studied the term before. The converse is true as well; therapists and psychiatrists have mastered the art of cultivating specific responses in session that promote healing in their clients—most of them without any knowledge of Stanislavski's "tasks" (Benedetti, 1982) or any acting instruction whatsoever.

I would argue that psychology and theatre are both arts, insofar as they require disciplined training from more knowledgeable others (Vgotsky, 1978) and aim to use this training to bring wholeness to the other, whomever that other should be. Theatre and psychology are simply different ways of practicing empathy. Used together to supplement and inform each other, their art becomes immeasurably more effective.

Making it Personal

The enthusiastic response from audiences of *Improv Therapy* convinced me that I was on the right track in seeking to produce psychologically-informed theatre. It was a niche I fell into naturally. It allowed me to be of service to others. I was and remain profoundly grateful to have found this unique avenue of expressing empathy.

It occurred to me somewhere along the way that if the most profound moment of empathy I had experienced—Hilborn's *OCD*—was nothing more and nothing less than a real person telling their real story through their own lens, that the best way I could be of service to those like me was to tell my own story. This realization was terrifying: for the first time in my life, I would be on display. I wouldn't be mediating the expression of someone else's lens, as I

do when acting; I would be sharing the world through my own. Because the most cathartic moments of theatre occur when we see in others what we hesitate to see in ourselves, I couldn't obstruct parts of my lens I believed to be too difficult to see through or too elusive of comprehension. I had to be honest.

II: The Research

“You have single-handedly forced me to do the formerly impossible—to bring someone else into my plane of existence. Or, try to.”

Jess, II.5

The entirety of writing, directing, sharing, and evaluating *Grass Grows* was emotionally and energetically taxing precisely because it required me to completely surrender my personal lens—the way I experience the world—to my company and our audience. I had no way of knowing that anyone else would see as I do through the piece I created.

It would have been much less painful to glean a plot and characters from the stories of other people, or from the objective symptoms of OCD described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM, American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013b). An entirety of life experiences, however, led me to believe that exposing my personal reality was of the utmost importance to avoid allowing OCD to be reduced to stereotype or fact alone.

Of course, anecdote does not evidence make, so I took to the work done thus far in the arts of theatre and psychology, asking whether personal vulnerability is necessary for the accurate representation of mental illness. Did I really need to do the heavy emotional labor of reliving my private moments of loss and growth?

The answer, from both sides, was an emphatic *yes*. Poring through the dramatic canon, I discovered that tales involving mental illness were often overtly negative, with little to no redemption for the typically self-aware MIP, and overwhelmingly constructed by those outside the disordered community. The scientific literature relays the consequences of such distorted storytelling and echoes the need for the involvement of the MIP in conversations involving their condition and treatment.

The arguments drawn from each discipline in favor of the mentally ill sharing their own stories are further laid out below.

II.1: The Dramatic Canon

The history of theatre is expansive and evades total segmentation, but can be generally broken down into eras where certain genres and themes were proliferated. In approaching such a massive body of work, I utilized the categorization within which my first theatre history professor, Michael Punter, taught me. They are: Greek, Medieval, Victorian, Melodrama, Naturalism, and Post-Naturalist Genres.*

From each of these eras, I selected a play featuring a character who suffered from a diagnosed or implied mental illness; where the specific mental illness was not explicitly stated, the character’s symptomology is compiled and compared to a specific disorder identified in the fifth edition of the DSM (DSM-5, APA, 2013). Every line spoken by the MIP or another character that described the direct or secondhand experience of mental illness was then coded for theme. Overall, the existing portrayals of mental illness in the dramatic canon as revealed through this small sample paint the MIP, who is usually aware of their troubles but unable to

*These categories largely exclude simultaneous trends of Eastern Theatre, but are the most influential on our Western styles today and thus are the best sources for isolating the origin of messages about mental illness in our theatre.

combat them, as broken or burdensome; the nuanced messages found in each play are explored in the following pages.

GREEK: Ajax by Sophocles

Ajax, a once-revered Atreidan soldier, has come to take vengeance on Odysseus, his Greek enemy. Athena, goddess of wisdom, judges in favor of Odysseus' camp, and enchants Ajax to slaughter the opposing camp's sheep in place of their soldiers. Athena explicitly establishes in Sophocles' opening scene that Ajax, "once a man", now has "dark [orbs]" for eyes—that his perception of reality is completely at her mercy.

Ajax enters covered in the blood of his bovine victims slaughtered in a haze, but moves through the play with awareness of his departure from reality:

But the irresistible fierce-eyed goddess, even
As I was arming my right hand to slay them,
Foiled me, smiting me with a maddening plague...
...who manifestly
To Heaven am hateful... (Sophocles, trans. 1924).

His wife, Tecmessa, relates his reactions upon returning to lucidity as uncharacteristic; Ajax cries to hear what he has done, though he had always held that sobbing "[b]efitted cowards only, and low-souled men". Even still, throughout the text, Ajax owns that his hand was that which did the killing.

The behaviour exhibited by Ajax meets the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Brief Psychotic Disorder (APA, 2013d). His murderous rampage qualifies as what the APA deems "grossly disorganized... behavior"; his perception of the sheep as people could be deemed a hallucination. However, unlike schizophrenic or delusional individuals, Ajax experienced only one single break with reality. The DSM-5 specifies that Brief Psychotic Disorder in response to a culturally-sanctioned distressing event—e.g., being targeted for persecution by an almighty goddess—can be deemed "brief reactive psychosis".

Although Ajax's disordered behaviour has a uniquely self-professed etiology, his disorder in itself is considered a punishment for a crime. This is important. Even today, society often blames the MIP himself for his disorder, but the blameful attitude behind current prejudice is as old as the Greek classics. Though the cause of mental illness is outside the individual's control—in the hands of gods, circumstance, or nature—the MIP is expected to pay the price with her soundness of mind.

Beyond establishing the troubling concept that the mentally ill are deserving of their illness, the culture that produced *Ajax* set the precedent of the MIP's death as resolution of unrest for the rest of dramatic canon. In Sophocles' tragedy, the title character himself only lives through the first half of the play; the second sees friend and foe clash over his past goodness and right to proper burial. Though his brother, Teucer, wins the right from Agamemnon to lay Ajax to rest, the insistence of the Chorus remains throughout the denouement that Ajax was "fatally named", or that "a malign demon of fate / Claims him" (Sophocles, trans. 1924). Not only is Ajax's illness merited, his death is inescapable. Even after her husband's death, Tecmessa echoes the popular belief that "[n]e'er had it come to this save by heaven's will".

Ajax and his mental health are reduced to playthings of the powers that be. By making his end inescapable, *Ajax* removes any semblance of personal agency the MIP has. The self-aware MIP is stuck without recourse to end the suffering they intelligibly endure—it is no wonder, then, that Ajax' lines are riddled with feelings of abandonment and suicidal intent. The

Chorus, always present in the Greek tradition, shows him empathy and honors his pain, but offers no avenue by way of which to alleviate his suffering. Tecmessa becomes self-pitying as Ajax's despair plays out, and Odysseus offers one of the most overplayed but unhelpful reactions to suffering: "I pity him / In his misery".

The pity felt by supporting characters in the tragedy (and often by the loved ones of MIPs) may be well-intentioned, but it does nothing to *help* Ajax or empower him to save his own life. The once-proud soldier kills himself to alleviate what he perceives as his dishonor because society, quite simply, offers him no other option.

MEDIEVAL: York Cycle no. 41

The York Cycle is the only cluster of mystery plays that we possess in completion (Davidson, 2011). The Cycle was written when the church controlled most forms of creative expression, including theatre. Mystery play cycles were concerned with relaying stories from the Bible for the citizens of Britain, and each cycle was written and performed by people within its namesake town (McConachie, Nellhaus, Sorgenfrei, & Underiner, 2016). Number 41 is the story of Doubting Thomas.

Thomas is the only one of his brothers to hesitate when a man approaches the mourning disciples and claims to be the resurrected Jesus Christ. While his doubt might seem reasonable to audiences today—having seen his dear friend crucified firsthand—disorder is always defined in part as deviance from the norm, and the norm of Thomas' community was to take the Word of God at face-value. The case for diagnosing the character Thomas with Paranoid Personality Disorder today is admittedly weak, given that the DSM-5 requires an individual to suspect deceit "without sufficient basis" (APA, 2013c). However, the characters interacting with him do equate his suspicion to paranoia, as illustrated by Johannes' insistence that the man who visited them was indeed the Son of God:

Nay, Thomas, thou haste misgone*
Forwhy he bad us everilkon
To grope hym grathely†, bloode and bone
And flessch to feele.

Such thingis, Thomas, hase sperite none... (Davidson, 2011, 151-155)

When Deus appears, He uses Thomas' unbelief as an example of immorality while praising the brothers who expressed no misgivings about His veracity at all:

Blissed be thou evere,
That trowis‡ haly in my rising right
And saw it nevere. (Davidson, 2011, 190-192).

As he insists on basic proof that Deus truly is his departed friend, Thomas lashes out at his dearest loved ones (167-168). He attributes his anger to being made a fool of by those closest to him (135-136). Today, audiences would likely feel that Thomas' frustrations are justified, particularly as he is in a new and quite prescient time of grief, to which even he attributes his being "madde" (102). However, the townspeople of York knew the Bible story from years of retellings, and so would have eagerly awaited what they saw as Deus' righteous confrontation of

* mistaken (Davidson, 2011)

† directly (Davidson, 2011)

‡ believes (Davidson, 2011)

Thomas. The former disciple had to be forgiven for asking for evidence. Being wary, in Thomas' society, was a sin.

Although Number 41, and indeed medieval plays in general, does not deal directly with a diagnosable disorder, it does uphold historical precedent for shaming and attacking deviance of mindset. When it was written, to doubt—a hallmark of many mental illnesses by today's standards—was then to trespass against God.

VICTORIAN: Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, loses his father and watches his mother remarry to his uncle within the span of two months (Shakespeare, 1623, I.2.322). Such a short delay between grave personal blows would leave anyone in a place of deep grief, but Hamlet is left to cope with the added discomfort of avenging the “foule and most vnnaturall Murther”^{*} of the late King, so charged by his father's ghost (I.5.710).

Hamlet describes his suffering via soliloquies to the audience in great detail. Although his moods at first appear to be crafted to throw off his uncle, the now-King Claudius—“As I perchance heereafter shall thinke meet / To put an Anticke disposition on”—he grows to claim the title others lay upon him, professing, “I am but mad” (I.5.867-868, II.2.1425). His mother, Gertrude's, fretting over his “nightly colour” marks Hamlet's very first appearance in the tragedy (I.2.248), and from the beginning of the first act, he shows suicidal ideation, if not intent:

Oh that this too too solid Flesh, would melt,
Thaw, and resolve it selfe into a Dew:
Or that the Euerlasting had not fixt
His Cannon 'gainst Selfe-slaughter: O God, O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and vnprofitable
Seemes to me all the vses of this world? (I.2.313-318)

Polonius, father to Hamlet's love, Ophelia, believes that Hamlet has fallen “Into the Madnesse whereon now he raues”, while Claudius remains wary, arguing Hamlet's behaviour “Was not like Madnesse. There's something in his soule? / O're which his Melancholly sits on brood” (II.2.1179, III.1.1821-1822).

Hamlet's pathology becomes a matter of indiscreet public debate. From what we know today, his symptomology throughout Shakespeare's text—manic, chaotic activity driven by the avenging of his father, rampant self-flagellation, fanciful and frequent vocal outbursts, fascination with suicide, and perseveration on death—would qualify him as an individual with Bipolar I disorder (APA, 2013a). The immediacy of his father's death would be taken into account upon diagnosis, but the severity of his dysfunction could not likely be attributed to grief alone.

In the undiscerning society of Hamlet's Denmark, characters speculate on the causes of his suffering; it is traced to his father's death, Hamlet's own design, even simple lovesickness for Ophelia. Like Ajax, Hamlet eventually attributes his tragic destiny to some power above him: The lines, “I do repent: but heauen hath pleas'd it so, / To punish me with this, and this with me” (III.4.2549-2550) and “There's a Diuinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will” (V.2.3509-3510) are testament to his conviction that God Himself has made him a monster.

^{*}The text of *Hamlet* is quoted in the spelling of the first Folio as compiled from individual actors' roles by Shakespeare's colleagues Henry Condell and John Heminge seven years after his death (“Shakespeare's first folio”).

The response to Hamlet's so-called "Madnesse" is mixed. Shakespeare was intentional to provide a balanced, supportive lens in Hamlet's tale through the voice of his best friend, Horatio. Horatio makes no pretense with his friend; he warns Hamlet when his behaviour gets out of hand (I.5.825), and maintains—even after Hamlet sends Rozencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, and Ophelia's brother Laertes to their deaths—that his friend was "a Noble heart" (V.2.3848). Though he condemns it, Horatio exhibits great empathy towards the destructiveness Hamlet's mental illness engenders, and offers to shelter him from provoking situations, promising, "If your minde dislike any thing, obey. I will forestall their repaire hither, and say you are not fit" (V.2.3666-3667).

The rest of the cast are not so forgiving. Claudius makes constant reference to Hamlet's "Lunacie", and is the first to suggest to the Danish court that Hamlet is, in fact, dangerous.* Hamlet later adopts violence as a personality trait himself (V.1.3457-3459), but the degree to which his menacing is simply a self-fulfilling prophecy elicited by the common expectation of him remains to be seen.

Gertrude chastises her son (III.4.2388) or else calls him to feel guilty for voicing the anguish her recent marriage has brought to him (III.4.2540). Ophelia, like many loved ones of a MIP, calls Hamlet "pitious" throughout, and while she prays for his healing (III.1.1789), her desire for a cure is largely driven by self-pity: "Oh woe is me, / T'haue seene what I haue seene" (III.1.1816-1817).

The other characters' loathing of Hamlet even in his disordered state manifests in how he refers to himself. Throughout the play, Hamlet claims to be "Pigeon-Liver'd", "ass-cowardly", and "like a whore"†. In the moment he exposes his old companions Rozencrantz and Guildenstern as double agents, Hamlet offers the audience a glimpse into the compounded suffering created by his loved ones' reactions to his justified pain:

Why looke you now, how vnworthy a thing
you make of me: you would play vpon mee; you would
seeme to know my stops: you would pluck out the heart
of my Mysterie; you would sound mee from my
lowest Note, to the top of my Compasse: and there is much Mu-
sicke, excellent Voice, in this little Organe, yet cannot
you make it. (III.2.2234-2240)‡

* It is worth noting that Hamlet's condemnation of Rozencrantz and Guildenstern was a reaction to their betrayal of his trust, spying at the behest of Claudius who is known by Hamlet to be a killer; Laertes, too, owes his death ultimately to the King, as the battle he was killed in was a plot orchestrated by Claudius to murder Hamlet. Hamlet's violence is always driven by some self-protective instinct in a world that refuses to protect him.

† Mental illness, under the name of madness, is equated with weakness and femininity throughout the play. This is particularly salient in the characters' treatment of Ophelia, who drowns herself after Hamlet murders her father in a panic upon discovering him spying in his mother's apartment. While both characters are said to be deserving of pity (IV.5.2747), Hamlet's pathology is treated with scorn, where Ophelia's very public descent into disorder is answered with understanding sorrow (IV.5.2821-2823). The differing media interpretations of male and female pathology are expanded upon in II.2.

‡ For this speech, Shakespeare abandons the iambic pentameter used through the rest of the play in favor of free verse. It has been argued that, as form is typically rigid in Shakespeare's writing,

Hamlet, like many MIPs, is acutely aware of being misunderstood and misrepresented by those closest to him. While others debate his sanity and plan his life without his input, Hamlet experiences his poor treatment with incredible lucidity and without any power to put an end to it.

Hamlet—particularly his portrayal by Andrew Scott in Robert Icke’s 2017 production at the Almeida Theatre—has been a rarely affirming representation of the MIP’s capacity for self-awareness in the dramatic canon. However, his story remains inherently a tragic one. Shakespeare’s unflinching portrayal of society’s distaste for the MIP is based on real-world interactions, but is not necessarily realistic in its tragedy: just as Hamlet argues himself to be capable of a range of experiences, all of those interacting with mental illness from the outside are capable of offering empathy. In a world growing increasingly aware of the prevalence of pathology, the empathy only given by Horatio becomes an increasingly likely response.

While revolutionary for its time, *Hamlet* leaves in its stead space for a more optimistic, but just as pragmatic, portrayal of mental illness—one where its experience, while difficult, is not the end of life as we know it.

MELODRAMA: The Bells by Leopold Davis Lewis

The Bells opened in Covent Garden’s Lyceum Theatre with the formalistic genius of Henry Irving, its “leading actor and principal attraction”, in the starring role (Dickens, 1879, p. 137). Matthias is a wealthy but widowed hotelier and Burgomaster* of Alsace, widely respected in his small community of guests and townspeople. At the opening of the play, everyone is enjoying a snowy Christmas Eve shielded by the walls of Matthias’ inn; his daughter, Annette, is about to be married to the Quartermaster†, Christian (Lewis, 1904, p.13); his brother, Wilhelm, and locals Hans and Father Walter aid in the upkeep of the inn. Everything is right in the world—for a time.

This period of domestic bliss is ended when Matthias’ past comes back to haunt him: as he prepares Annette’s dowry for the wedding, his friends recall the mysterious death of a Jewish lodger some years ago whose body was found in dismal circumstances (p. 21). Little do the inn’s guests know that Matthias, poor and desperate to pay his rent, killed the Polish Jew, stole his purse, and buried him and his horse under a blanket of snow (p. 22).‡

Matthias initially responds to mentions of the Jew with guilt and avoidance; soon enough, however, he begins to hear the sound of the Polish traveler’s sleigh bells, which haunt him without respite through the rest of the play (p. 22). The curtain drops on Act I as Matthias faints (p. 23); though a Doctor Zimmer is called to check on him, Matthias brushes off aid at the top of Act II and rushes to sign Annette’s marriage contract, hoping that passing off his estate of 30,000

alterations to it are intended to draw focus to the otherwise invisible chaos in a character’s life (e.g. Wright, 1983).

* Mayor

† “[The] chief magistrate of a... town... may be chairman of the city council, or he may preside over an administrative board elected by the city council” (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010)

‡ Matthias’ pathology presents as part of a guilt response to his past crime, rather than a cause the crime, as in Ajax’s case. Both of these constructions have the ultimate effect of associating the MIP with extreme actions; whether the MIP is a terrible society member who “deserved” their pathology as punishment, or a danger to society in their pathological rampages is ultimately unimportant.

francs to the innocent Christian will absolve his crimes (p. 32). It doesn't. In Act III, Matthias finds himself in a courtroom dreamscape, convicted for the Jew's murder and sentenced to death. In this nightmare, he is hanged; his friends enter the room just as Matthias gasps his last breath, dead for his crime in the waking world, too (p. 45).

This brings our death-by-psycho pathology count to 3.

Before his demise, Matthias' symptomology as described by Lewis includes an agitated, defiant disposition, headaches, troubled dreams, overwhelming sensations of darkness and giddiness, thirst and fever, visual and auditory hallucinations, and paranoia. Doctor Zimmer attributes Matthias' fainting spell to overindulgence in alcohol and a bad reaction to the weather (p. 25), but today his presentation could be deemed evidence of Brief Psychotic Disorder (APA, 2013d).

Matthias' pathology is, as Ajax's, a consequence of breaking the moral code of his time, and his badness is contrasted with the goodness of the remaining characters. Wilhelm shows his brother respect and implements Doctor Zimmer's recommendations even when Matthias shirks any treatment (p. 26); Walter holds Matthias in good faith, saying, "he deserves all the success he has achieved" (p. 21). All the while, the Burgomaster is using his daughter as a bargaining chip with which to purchase the Quartermaster's witness to his character, anticipating that his past will soon catch up with him (p. 41).

The Bells is the first of the plays to employ stage directions in dictating how a character should be perceived by the audience; because stage directions are given as fact within scripts, the characterizations they contain should be read as objective. Matthias is described by the impartial voice of the stage directions to be emotionally volatile, ranging from humble to proud, and is painted in his final scene as an aggressor with such directives as "with rage" (p. 44), "with force" (p. 40), "furiously" (p. 38), and, most affectedly, "in a terrible voice" (p. 41).

Matthias' etiology furthers the commonplace notion that the MIP is responsible for their suffering, and the novel stage directions in Lewis' play set a precedent for reading the mentally ill protagonist as objectively bad. Matthias' wickedness is heightened by his abuse of innocent characters' trust, transforming Rogers' (1959) concept of unconditional positive regard—used by today's Humanist therapists to show their clients empathy (Frankel, Rachlin, & Yip-Bannicq, 2012)—into a foil that, rather than helping Matthias, amplifies his guilt and incriminates him in the trial for his life. As portrayed in *The Bells*, mental illness is simply the natural evolution of violent souls, and in this, the MIP is not a solitary sufferer: he takes anyone who takes the chance of showing him unconditional care down with him.

NATURALISM: A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

Blanche DuBois is the woman theatre-goers love to hate. She arrives at the step of her sister, Stella's, New Orleans walk-up dressed to the nines and running from her past. The storyline of Tennessee Williams' classic follows the havoc her presence wreaks in the home of Stanley, Stella's husband, in the heart of Mitch, her latest beau, and in the relationship she shares with her last remaining relative.

Naturalism carried on the precedent set by melodrama of asserting character traits within stage directions; before Blanche's first line is delivered, Williams alerts the company that Blanche's "delicate beauty must avoid a strong light" (Williams, 1947, scene 1). This dogmatic preoccupation with appearances guides her behaviour throughout the play, as she tries to redeem the reputation lost alongside her former estate of Belle Reve at the incongruously named Elysian

Fields. Poor, fresh from being dismissed as a teacher due to poor conduct, and utterly alone, Blanche spends the entire play striving to appear rich, above the working life, and beloved by all.

Blanche is certainly an affronting personality. She makes frequent remarks about her weight (and the weight of those around her), steals liquor from hidden bottles, attacks others in paranoid attempts at self-preservation, manipulates those close to her to keep herself in power, fishes for compliments and attention even as she puts herself down, antagonizes those nearest her, cries, lies, and generally stays one outburst away from complete distress. Blanche, like many of the mentally ill characters before her, is very lucid about the way she uses others, evidenced in such statements as, “I was fishing for a compliment” and “I know I fib a good deal” (scene 2). When confronted about the loss of Belle Reve, she accuses Stella of abandoning her (scene 1), and often anticipates criticisms before they are spoken, literally saying, “You’re going to reproach me” (scene 1).

Instead of utilizing her awareness to the benefit of managing her behaviour, however, Williams opted to have Blanche weaponize her perspective to disarm others. Her alternations between self-deprecation—calling herself an “old maid schoolteacher” (scene 3)—and self-aggrandizement—“In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning” (scene 4)—are frequent and calculated. In spite of having failed in her career, relationships, and family business, she believes she is destined for greatness, saying, “I’m going to do something. Get hold of myself and make myself a new life” (scene 4).

Blanche, as a result of her reactionary nature, offers some insights into the emotional life of the MIP. She often tells her sister that she’s willing to leave to make life easier for her, guiltling Stella into believing she’s made Blanche feel a burden. In these cases, Blanche is very direct: “I can leave here and not be anyone’s problem” (scene 5). Lashing out after Stanley insinuates her lengthy beauty routines are disturbing his home life, Blanche quite tellingly accuses, “of course you don’t know what anxiety feels like” (scene 8).

In scene 8, Stanley not-so-generously gifts Blanche with a one-way Greyhound ticket back to her hometown. The prospect of being back in a place where Blanche cannot craft a beautiful character for herself seems to break her; by scene 9, she’s having auditory hallucinations of the music that played when her one true love affair killed himself. When these emerge during an argument with Mitch, he callously remarks, “Are you boxed out of your mind?” Blanche’s one comfort in life are her paper lanterns, with which she shades the harsh filament bulbs in her room in the pursuit of beauty. Mitch rips these security blankets to pieces, and with them, the last glue holding Blanche together:

I don’t want realism. I want magic! ... Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don’t tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!—Don’t turn the light on!
(Williams, 1947, scene 9)

As Blanche erupts, she tells Mitch her entire sad story, from discovering her flame, Alan, in bed with a man, to his suicide after she confronted him about the incident, to the “intimacies with strangers [that were] all [she] seemed to able to fill” her life with, to the fling with a student that lost her position and income. When Mitch only answers, “You lied to me”, Blanche offers us a glimpse into her motivations: “Never inside, I didn’t lie in my heart”.

Blanche could be the reference listed alongside DSM-5 criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder—she exhibits “[f]rantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment”, charged by alternating praise and shaming of others, an unstable perception of herself, alcoholism, and “a marked reactivity of mood”, as well as sudden spouts of rage and hallucinations triggered by

feelings of abandonment (APA, 2013c). The destruction her behaviour brings to others' lives is never downplayed, but it is also never attributed to a medical cause—even grief—and so remains her own malicious choice.

Because Blanche's pathology is experienced outside the context of a diagnosis, she is seen as a nuisance to some and a villain to others, but never as a MIP deserving of empathetic treatment. She is only taken to a psychiatric ward at the end of the play—Stanley's doing—to rid Elysian Fields of her increasingly unstable presence. *Streetcar* offers a realistic view of the pain the MIP can cause others while testifying to the pain of the MIP; audiences feel for Blanche. She is *Streetcar*'s protagonist—but she is never redeemed, and so Williams' otherwise-honest coverage of mental illness becomes yet another drop in the bucket telling the story of the doomed MIP.*

POST-NATURALISM: 4:48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane

After the decline of naturalism, many alternative genres of theatre began to emerge. The 19th and 20th centuries burst with “isms”—symbolism, futurism, surrealism, expressionism—forms that retaliated against the oppressions of capitalist society and war. These genres, with varying degrees of success, began the work of sharing the voices of the subjugated. Approaching the turn of the 21st century, new forms like Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1993) and Theatre of War (Doerries, 2015) invited those subject to tyrannical systems to share their own voices on the stage.

Still, no movement emerged with the purpose of elevating the mentally ill perspective. Playwright Sarah Kane came the closest to beginning such a conversation. As an open MIP, Kane imbued her often-abstract work with the unfiltered experiences of her own life. One of her most influential plays, *4:48 Psychosis*, contains no characters, no blocking, no stage directions—nothing but her truth. I can personally testify to the impact of *4:48 Psychosis* on the mentally ill community; one colleague, also a mentally ill theatre artist, described to me the validation she received directing Kane's play as her university capstone. Her experience revealed to me that Kane's form is a double-edged sword: it offers the companies producing the play complete freedom to portray the mentally ill experience without implementing any one person's own biases, but it also runs the risk of being difficult in its dis-structure to stage in a way audiences understand. My colleague, a gifted director, chose to group sections of the manuscript into line sets and assign each grouping to a character with a particular pathological presentation in an attempt to make Kane's radical and much-needed perspective more palatable to an audience unaccustomed to experimental styles.

Aside from the difficulties of transferring intentionally-spaced, literally illustrative text from the page to the stage, Kane's legacy presents additional problems. Her words have been

* A wonderful essay on the growth of Tennessee Williams' relationship with mental illness, which evolved alongside his sister, Rose, was written by Clay Morton. Rose was diagnosed with “dementia praecox, mixed type, paranoid predominating”, and was eventually institutionalized before being lobotomized. Morton covers Williams' journey of conceptualizing mental illness alongside the production of his anthology; *Streetcar* was written thirteen years before the 1960s ushered Williams into a complex appreciation of the MIP's value. For more, see *Not Like All the Other Horses: Neurodiversity and the Case of Rose Williams*.

powerful for many, myself included, portraying the unique kind of isolation the MIP is intimately familiar with:

I don't imagine
 (clearly)
that a single soul
 could
 would
 should
 or will

and if they did
I don't think
 (clearly)
that another soul
a soul like mine
 could
 would
 should
 or will

(Kane, 2000, p. 20).

They also put the factual symptoms of disorder into context. Kane's work narrates feelings of longing, documents fights with a therapist, discusses the trauma of connecting with the non-mentally-ill, and details thoughts of suicide. The text ends after the demise of its source—"watch me vanish... watch" (p. 42). This recognition of suicide as a possible ending to a MIP's story is less troubling because of its telling than because Kane completed her own suicide in February of 1999 (Hoge, 1999). *4:48 Psychosis* was, in fact, published and staged for the first time over a year later, without Kane's final word or seal of approval (Kane, 2000).

The literature consistently shows that suicides increase after the suicide of a well-known individual (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2012). In staging *4:48 Psychosis*, artists run the risk of bringing the headlines of Kane's death back to the forefront for others at risk of self-harm. Those who chose to run this risk in the name of telling the truth—still a noble cause—also must wrestle with the ethics of presenting Kane's very true experiences in a way in which she had no license.

4:48 Psychosis is certainly a victory in the fight to uplift the voice of the MIP in theatres, but it exists as the story of a MIP who ultimately had no voice in her own story's sharing. The mentally ill community has been given a gift in Kane's play, but celebrates this gift at the cost of a mentally ill artist's consent. We MIPs still left to await work that offers agency in the sharing of our own stories as we would have them be shared.

Granting its small victories in pragmatism, Western Theatre has perpetuated the stereotypes of the broken MIP—someone who has been made less-than for having a disorder—and the burdensome MIP—someone who drains others of care without offering anything in return—in countless, often insidious, ways. MIPs are allowed to be conscious of their suffering, but only if they are incapable of ending it. In spite of the pride theatre artists tend to take in fostering values like realism and equality, Theatre as a whole has done the mentally ill population a disservice by passing on largely outdated, out-of-touch, and unfounded information about what it means to be or love someone who is mentally ill, or else only playing the

tantalizingly tragic aspects of the mentally ill experience. Actors and audiences alike read these plays, see them staged, and learn that personality and pathology are mutually exclusive: that one cannot be a human capable of communication and community and be mentally ill... and that one's illness is one's own fault.

Even these few selections from the most prolific works of our canon make it clear that we, as theatre artists, must prioritize replacing broken and burdensome lenses of mental illness with a balanced lens in a new theatre movement—a Theatre of Sanity. Specifically, my research clarifies the necessity of a narrative play that remains honest without prescribing doom and that stays true to the lens of the MIP while being as accessible as possible to those who need to see through that lens most.

II.2: The Scientific Literature

There exists a wealth of research supporting the need for a more nuanced narrative of the mentally ill experience. As society's contact with mental illness has evolved with increased study, deinstitutionalization, and the proliferation of MIPs in the main community, many people—myself included—have become more comfortable being open with their diagnosis. There has also grown, alongside increased conversation about the mentally ill experience, an affinity for what are often poorly-regulated depictions of the MIP in media.

Representations in Media

A common criticism of MIP portrayals designed to attract an audience (i.e. for box office success) is that they sensationalize mental illness. Even in the cases of so-called “documentaries”, pathology can be illustrated in a way that perpetuates the narrative of the violent or dangerous MIP (Cross, 2004). These depictions only lean into one lens of the mentally ill experience—one that, while reductive, can be easily observed by audiences. Cross (p. 200) traces the need to project psychopathology visibly to the time psychologists were striving to be accepted alongside their hard-science counterparts; science, after all, tends to exclude the un-observable as un-confirmable. In critiquing one film that purports to educate viewers on the phenomenon of schizophrenia, Cross asserts that the MIP's interview is only spliced in ways that support external narratives of the illness: “we never come close to knowing what it is actually like to be a schizophrenic living in the community” (p. 209).

The extreme of misinformation opposite sensationalism is what can only be described as “palatable truth”. Harper (2005) offers insight into the tendency of what he deems “liberal psychiatry” (p. 461) to promote discourse aimed at reducing stigma that unintentionally perpetuates other generalizations in the process. Harper attributes the difficulties involved in adequately representing mental illness, in part, to visual media's limitations on perspective, astutely differentiating between the level of clarity possible to achieve in manuscript versus film narratives (p.464).^{*} Cinema's stylistic standards may not permit the audience to experience the

^{*} Harper argues here that written narrative can uphold first-person narrations in a way that film cannot; it is the opinion of the author that theatre offers a vehicle for direct experience in a way that even film fails to recreate, as the art of theatre is in creating a specific experience in a specific moment in time, shared without delay or transmutation beyond the process of sight with a specific group of people, who each bring their own lives and understandings to the foot of the stage to be challenged and reshaped.

intimate thought behaviours of the MIP, so filmmakers do their best to show the *consequences* of these thoughts in external behaviour.

Films that attempt to illustrate the mentally ill experience in fits of rage and terror are easy to come by—*Fight Club* and *Silence of the Lambs* are staples in my own cinematic collection—of course, as flights of fantasy rather than educational narratives. However, in avoiding propagating these kinds of stories centered on the *violent* MIP, Harper (2005) argues, some artists go so far as to claim that any violence perpetuated on the part of the MIP is imagined or misunderstood. To limit what we constitute as violence to physical aggression, or to ignore the higher probability of violence among the mentally ill community, he equally condemns (p. 469)—alongside ignoring such likely causes of this aggression as social inequality and suppression of MIP agency (p. 471).

Much of my journey through therapy has involved me coming to terms with my own destructive behaviour. Pathology, in many DSM-5 (APA, 2013b) entries, is in part distinguishable by strife in maintaining interpersonal relationships. To say that my history of manipulation and overprotectiveness of others is unrelated to my mental illness disserves not only those who endure my sometimes-difficult companionship; it is a disservice to my own understanding of my condition. I was only able to cultivate relationships once I recognized the ways my obsessions and compulsions pushed me to be violent* and practiced implementing prosocial behaviours in these moments instead. If I refused to acknowledge the negative character aspects associated with my pathology, I would have sacrificed the power to change them, and I would have lost out on the immense achievement of learning to control them in favor of expressing behaviors that show my loved ones the amount of value I place in them. Ideas shrouded in progressivism often become a new form of oppression; treating all MIPs as helpless victims is just as destructive a schematic approach as making us all monsters.

Effects of Misinformation

Stigma, whatever its form, has negative impacts on the MIP herself; in a study of clients of a psychological care center in Sao Paulo, Salles and Barros (2013) found that the misconception of MIPs as incapable leads to their exclusion from social circles. For some individuals, this social isolation is compounded by symptoms severe enough to limit their participation in the workplace or the degree to which they can live independently. Salles and Barros are careful to point out that, as with physical illness, mental illness “does not mean [the MIP] can no longer contribute as a friend, colleague, [partner] or parent”. Even the perception of mental illness as something “purely negative” is in itself reductionist; many symptoms associated with a specific diagnosis may lead to maladaptive behaviours, but can just as certainly contribute to constructive ones that build a stronger sense of self. The obsessive thinking that exists as a hallmark of OCD has caused me an unfortunate amount of trauma, inasmuch as it has been focused on unpleasant topics. But this obsessiveness also reveals itself in the care with which I listen to, observe, and comprehend people. My obsession is precisely what makes acquaintances trust they “can tell me anything” and makes loved ones feel seen.

* Violence, in my conception, is any form of relating to another that is rooted in manipulation and control above mutual support and growth. My concept of violence has been greatly informed by bell hooks’ *All About Love* (2001); hooks describes what many people know today as maladaptive love as “cathecting”, a dynamic seen between Michael and Jess in Act I of *Grass Grows*.

There is also research to suggest that self-stigma influences the probability of improvement in pathology. Chan and Mak (2016) found that those who scored highly on the Self-Stigma Scale scored worse on measures of clinical (symptomatic) and personal (ideational) recovery. This means passing on the myth of the one-dimensional MIP actually increases the likelihood that mentally ill people will live less healthy lives. Stigma is a self-perpetuating cycle.

Aside from the MIP, this stigmatic chain reaction affects society at large. As discussed, misinformation about what exactly mental illness *is* can come in a variety of forms; thus, the construct tends to elude identification. In an attempt to discover what society as a whole deems pathological, Dixit (2005), analyzed essays written on psychopathology for content. She found that the MIP was associated with “social deviance and criminal behaviour”, as well as with homosexuality, political dishonesty, and other antisocial traits (p. 9). Violence was not seen as a possible symptom of pathology so much as its presence indicated pathology, meaning that participants upheld the traditional stigmatic belief that those who are violent—or otherwise aberrant—and those who are mentally ill are one population. The community adopted the messages they saw portrayed in the media without considering their sources or their accuracy.

Negative views of MIPs were cited by practitioners interviewed by Morant (2006) as a core reason for the lack of funding given to, public support for, and subsequent success of community care programs. In a post-institutional world, the fogged lens with which the public views the mentally ill community prevents the success of programs designed to replace institutions the public once thought cruel enough to close entirely. Society has replaced one flawed treatment for MIPs with another—only, rather than being a result of lacking research, the ineffectiveness of community care today is directly caused by society’s uncritical ignorance.

It is important to add that this ignorance is observed even in those close to the experience of mental illness; psychologists follow in the footsteps of artists who fall into the trap of misrepresenting MIPs. Cheref (2013) noted that those treating the wave of refugees and migrants in Paris had a responsibility to work outside of their own prejudices involved with those they were serving, particularly because these individuals often could not communicate in the same language as their therapist. This unique set of circumstances reveals a universal truth: mental illness is often just one difficulty a person faces, and never the sum total of their experience; even practitioners must be on guard that they avoid their own flat characterizations of patients as sufferers in order to meet each MIP’s unique needs, which will always be augmented by situations beyond their pathology.

The Case for Firsthand Narratives

There are several narratives of mental illness we can dismiss as dangerous and dishonest, but the need to find more truthful and constructive narratives remains. Recent literature offers a few places with which to start.

Just as self-stigma can encourage worse health outcomes, a cognitive perspective that fosters a sense of control over one’s own treatment contributes to feelings of satisfaction among those studied by Rassakazova, Spivakovskaya, & Tkhostov (2017). The MIP’s beliefs about the duration of their illness also had influence; those with mood disorders responded positively to the conception of less enduring illness, while those with personality disorders found satisfaction believing in long-term, “but not cyclic”, disorders. This last result illustrates that pragmatism, if employed as part of an honest but hopeful take on treatment, can elevate the MIP. One can believe that their illness is present and pervasive without believing that they will forever cope with it in the same way or that it ruins their chances of life satisfaction entirely.

The self-views of the MIP obviously carry great weight. But Campbell (2001) argues that recent interest in the thoughts of the mentally ill care user has not always aroused serious concern with their criticisms of treatment efficacy, nor incorporation of their suggestions to improve upon it, as evidenced by the 15-year wait some users endured to gain all-day emergency services (p. 88). Campbell, like Harper (2005), attributes the hesitancy of professionals to credit their clients to psychology's insistence on unbiased evidence; failures in care services then beg the question, why is the first-hand experience of the MIP not considered to be expert enough? Who could be more of an expert of qualitative, invisible experiences than those experiencing them?

The flouting of mentally ill voices in favor of more "objective" ones is a problem in artistic representations of mental illness, too. Even offering neurotypical creators factual information on what mental disorders are truly like can fail to result in unbiased art; when Dale, Richards, Bradburn, Tadros, & Salama (2014) devised informative sessions about psychopathy meant to increase sensitivity among student filmmakers, participant reactions reflected an enthusiasm for the knowledge gained even alongside such disheartening comments as, "...but narrative/entertainment [sic] comes first for me" (p. 6). In their discussion, Dale et al. suggested that participant sensitivity might see further increase if study members were faced with "direct or filmed... social contact with those with lived experience of mental illness" (p. 7).

Ciszek and Gallicano (2013) investigated the effects of sharing such firsthand stories on those contacted by awareness groups after releasing incendiary products or advertisements and found that narrative strategies constituted the first intervention against media perpetuation of stigmatic messages. Statistics and facts regarding the danger of misinformation were administered only when the initial narrative was unable to incite change in the offending creators; even researchers know that firsthand narratives speak a truth that is moving to its human audiences in ways cold data cannot match.

The knowledge gained from my studies indicated to me that it was crucial to tell a balanced story about mental illness, one that was grounded in a singular character's self-aware experience. It became of the utmost importance that this play portray the difficulties associated with the character's pathology truthfully while asserting her prosocial qualities in equal measure. The positive traits of the character would not be "redeeming" because her pathology would not be her fault; still, the damage wrought by mental illness on her life and the lives of those around deserved adequate recognition.*

My personal experience with interpretive media's portrayals of mental illness has left me less-than-satisfied in its generic and often pessimistic portrayal of the MIP. In spite of the canon's failures thus far, I also chose to tell this story through the medium of theatre precisely because of its capacity for abstraction—my pathology is not an entity separate from myself, but the very lens through which I see and interact with the world. My compromise became to tell as distinct a story as possible in a way that illustrated just how much the mentally ill experience evades definition.

A gut conviction to write my play around a specific diagnosis was supported by an article written by Robert Ohlsson (2016) on the benefits of assigning specific diagnoses to instances of

* In the words of *Saturday Night Live* featured player Pete Davidson, "Being mentally ill is not an excuse to act like a jackass" ([Saturday Night Live]) Understanding the source of destructive behaviour is equally as important as making amends for its destructiveness.

pathology. Many researchers argue that psychopathology is a scale that every person places on, and to assign a person's unique experience to a category is to restrict their experience and self-definition. Ohlsson argues that diagnosis is in actuality a tool that allows the mentally ill to make sense of their "abstract, subjective, and often elusive" symptomology (p. 4) and classify experiences mediated by their illness "as a certain kind of phenomenon" (p. 7). His thesis, essentially, is that having a name to call this group of non-transmutable experiences offers the MIP a language to communicate with; it does *not* tell them how they must use that language. It also allows the MIP to distinguish themselves from the illness, which enables them to work towards its alleviation without diminishing their sense of self, and "provid[es] a basis to claim... expert knowledge in matters regarding a certain kind of condition" (p. 14). My own diagnosis certainly gave me the power I needed to speak my own truth without fearing others could discount me. It seemed evident that the protagonist of my play would also be empowered by a specific diagnosis.

Since I am only experienced in my own cluster of symptoms (as mental illness is a constellation of so many personalities and behaviours), it seemed that I would only be capable of doing justice to a protagonist who shared my diagnosis and symptoms. It occurred to me that to be as truthful as possible, my protagonist should be as close to me as possible, with my life and my experiences. I took liberties, of course, in the timeline, order, and topography of the heroine's behaviours. With the benefit of hindsight, a degree in psychology with a focus in psychopathology, and the knowledge I've gained from my own treatment, I rewrote some of my past experiences to be healthier—as they could have been had I relived them today.

Jess was to be a girl with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Because she was not a carbon-copy of me, I gave her another name and another life, including a different venue of artistic expression to enable Jess to express her abstract experiences of OCD without permitting my own history to overshadow hers.*

Whitley, Adeponle, & Miller (2015) found that female MIPs were more likely than their male counterparts to be coded as "sad" (p. 331); while they retain the privilege of context explaining the presence of their condition, this context is often used to incite pity.† Where empathy inspires understanding, pity denotes a distancing from its target. It was crucial to ensure that Jess was never read as pitiful, either by her counterparts onstage or the audience off.

With these directives in mind, I set to work creating Jess' story. It underwent several revisions over many months as I filtered my dreams for Jess through the facets her story needed as prescribed by my research. The final play is printed in its entirety in Part IV.

* One of many happy accidents in the production of *Grass Grows* was the recruitment of our choreographer, who also carried an OCD diagnosis. The events leading up to this sublime working relationship are detailed in Part III: How.

† Ophelia from *Hamlet* is a prime example of this dynamic; see Part II: The Research.

III: How

“And I’m not sadistic enough to believe absolutely everything happens for a reason but I do think some things do.”

Grace, II.3

Curating the *Risk Yourself* Season

On June 11th, 2018, I took a seat at the desk in my one-room flat in Kensington, looked out my wall-length window onto the garden between Normandy Court and the buildings behind, and prepared for a call from America. I was stuck waiting in the London summer with little more than a half-finished script and blind faith in the power to create that flows into the universe when smart women artists come together.

I knew, even before finishing *Grass Grows*, that it was a show that needed to be seen; no good would come of spilling my soul if Jess’ story remained simple words on a page. The purpose of telling this tale from its inception was to offer those who *aren’t* connected to the mentally ill experience a taste of its complexity. If Jess, Michael, and Grace were to educate, they needed an audience.

Corrigan’s assertion that people respond to stories from sources that are “targeted, local, credible, [and in] continuous contact” (2012, p. 8) dashed any hopes of getting away with staging the play for an audience far removed from my life. The familiarity of any issue’s spokesperson appeals to our senses of pathos and ethos; we place stock in a story’s importance because of its teller’s importance to us. Knowing that the ideal audience for *Grass Grows* would be one close to home, I contacted the committee in charge of scheduling the Second Stage Series* to propose their first original work in several seasons. As the committee selected shows a year in advance, the rough outline I offered for initial critique was vastly different than the first draft of *Grass Grows*. Anticipating the changes inherent in producing a new piece, the faculty and students sitting on the committee offered me a compromise: in exchange for accepting a limited one-night-only staged reading of *Grass Grows*, I would be granted artistic license to change the script as my research deemed necessary up until its casting in January 2019.

Thus, it was with more than I had given the playreading committee, but immensely less than a full play, that I answered a call with Rollins’ 2019 Second Stage production team. Annabelle Cuitino, our producer from Rollins Players, and Fiona Campbell, a longtime colleague and our season’s second director, heard my ideas for staging the budding script with enthusiasm. Carmen Cheng, our publicity designer, created marketing materials inspired by my words that might as easily have been pulled straight from my imagination. Even from halfway across the world, these women encouraged my vision for *Grass Grows* with a problem-solving disposition unrivaled by many professional production teams I served on during my time in the West End.

When the time came for us to decide the theme for the season, I was struck by the fact that both plays we were preparing to stage—*Grass Grows* and Tanya Barfield’s *Bright Half Life*—were concerned with connecting across boundaries. *Grass Grows* would be the story of Jess

* In addition to the faculty-directed season staged at the Annie Russell Theatre, undergraduates at Rollins College have the opportunity to participate in the completely student-designed, -produced, and -acted series of plays funded by Rollins Players. This season is affectionately known as the Second Stage Series.

attempting to illustrate the inexplicable experience of her pathology; *Bright Half Life* would stage moments through the life and death of a romance shared by textbook compilers Vicky and Erica (Barfield, 2015). Both shows featured characters striving to nurture meaningful relationships in the face of prejudice and ignorance.* Fresh from struggling to fit my worldview into a series of acts and scenes, I knew exactly what this season was about. It was what we were doing as minority directors and producers and playwrights: the risking of one’s entire world for the sake of being understood.

And so, *Grass Grows* was set to open on February 9th, 2019 as the first of two completely revolutionary plays in the “Risk Yourself” season of the Second Stage Series.

Some Things Happen for a Reason

Grass Grows didn’t go up without a fight. When the first draft of the play was approved for Players production, the Second Stage Series was still housed in the Fred Stone Theatre. Built in its final form in the 1970s, the structure contained a minimal lighting grid, built-in speakers, backstage space, a technical control booth, and the capacity to stage most small-cast dramas. Unfortunately, as “Freddy” also contained holes, mold, and small-scale vermin, his demolition was swiftly ordered and executed in late 2018.

At the request of Rollins Players, I had finished a new draft of the play whilst in London to be more technically suited to the unique capabilities of the Fred Stone when I was contacted from overseas and notified that Fred was “dead”. The most pressing problem this presented to me as playwright was the now-impossibility of any complex LX plan. I had devised the use of specific lighting effects to give the audience a sense of each person’s specific presence through Jess’ lens; one of the most salient—and most difficult to express—symptoms of OCD in my life has been interacting with others. Because every thought in life becomes “obsessing”, my knowledge of a loved one’s likes, dislikes, habits, hobbies, hopes, fears, and so on constructs an incommensurably vivid perception of each person. I had faith from my experience as an electrician on the West End that using carefully-crafted lighting effects live would allow the audience to experience, in some form, what Jess was experiencing in real time. Any chance at accomplishing this feat died with Freddy.

Still, in pondering the possible futures of my play, and in consideration of my OCD-diagnosed colleague’s enthusiastic response to the capability of LX directives to translate an experience that was otherwise lost to outsiders, I opted to keep these in the final script. Since our production was to be a staged reading, I reasoned it would be easy enough to have these stage directions that were necessary to conveying these lost moments read by an additional actor. And it was.

...Until that actor’s schedule led them to drop the show. It was around this point, awash in the kind of panic only a fast-approaching opening night can bring, that I finished compiling the research analyzed in Section II. The answer my insecurity leant the furthest away from—to

* It occurred to us early on in planning sessions that every romantic connection portrayed in the Second Stage Series would be between two women. I wondered aloud whether we should “tell anybody” until my fellow female creatives pointed out no one had been required to give notice for any Series comprised exclusively of heterosexual romances. We decided to celebrate our increased demand for female actors in Rollins’ heavily gender-imbalanced department and keep the excitement we felt at producing the queerest Series yet to ourselves. It was a season only an all-female production team could dream up.

read the stage directions myself—seemed the right one; after all, having constructed an argument in favor of promoting the mentally ill voice as directly as possible, it felt more than hypocritical to pass *my* description of *my* experience of mental illness to someone else’s voice. To do so would be to give up the agency I fought to win others, in the name of what? Striving not to seem self-centered?

It emerged, after a decent amount of obsessing, that sitting on stage with my actors would not seem any more ego-centric than inviting my community to a play I directed and wrote, in part about my own life. I reminded myself that testimony is the most effective education one can give, put my pride in my back pocket, and climbed onstage.

Being in the playing space without the armor operating as an actor affords was a new kind of vulnerable I had never before had to be, but it paid off. One guest of our invited preview even raved that she “couldn’t imagine [the show] without [the narration]”. What had been an inconvenience had grown into a gift to the story. The ability I had to model my response to situations created by the presence of OCD in Jess’ story gave the audience permission to laugh or cry where they weren’t otherwise certain of “the rules”*. It also allowed me to direct focus to the actors in the classroom-turned-makeshift-theatre and away from those of us remaining behind them, unobscured by a targeted lighting plan. Most importantly, unifying the stage directions into the spoken lines of the Author allowed future productions to give a literal voice to other MIPs who may find validation in the ways my experiences express their own.†

As a foil to the LX cues to share Jess’ covert perceptions, I wrote moments for short dances into scenes where Jess was emotionally engaged to offer an illustration of a MIP overtly communicating their perceptions. Dance—similar to lighting—is a mode of expression that circumvents the inadequacies of language, and so would be of great use as an outlet for Jess, just as creating theatre is for me. Because our production was only a staged reading, because my knowledge of dance is limited to elementary school ballet classes, and because the actress who read best for Jess had similarly little dance experience, I did not plan on having choreography in the final reading, though staged.

However, with LX out of the picture, Jess’ ability to express her incommunicable thoughts and feelings became even more crucial. I feared the addition of the Author alone would fail to do justice to Jess’ world.

Enter Jo Ann Wood.

When I approached Rollins’ Director of Dance, Robin Gerchman, with my desire to include choreography in the production in some form, she recommended I speak to a student of hers. Jo Ann had already been at auditions, and so knew the story; moreover, Jo Ann shares my diagnosis of OCD. It was a creative partnership so perfect it couldn’t have been planned. When I would try and inevitably fail to describe what a particular dance was meant to relate, Jo Ann would fill in the gaps I left. She understood what I could not linguistically explain, and translated

* I’ve found that even close friends are hesitant to join in when I poke fun at these sorts of situations; worried that to laugh would be to devalue my experience. I’ve always felt that just as my life is as serious as anyone else’s, it is also as humorous—just in a uniquely OCD way.

† My colleague and I are currently in talks with a producer to bring *Grass Grows* to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

our shared experiences into choreography I could not have directed.* All of her pieces were approved on-sight—not out of principle, but because they always related the exact moment they served from the first step.

Jo Ann professed to me on several of our walks home after rehearsals about the validation she found in working on *Grass Grows*, but the production truly wouldn't have been complete without her input. Where words failed me, where the temporary black box on Lyman Street couldn't serve our story, Jo Ann gave Jess a voice. Her presence onstage alongside mine served as testimony to the objective reality of such a subjective life as Jess'.

Being Seen

I had no way of knowing how our audience would react to *Grass Grows*, but I was decently certain it would have the same effect on me as every show I work on: a sequence of validation, a melancholy goodbye, and a short-standing sense of catharsis. I was wrong.

My directing style has garnered a variety of feedback spanning from “weird” to “the best experience I’ve ever had”; it is dedicated to the pursuit of an ideal shared with me by Melanie Jessop (Personal communication, August 2018), co-founder of Women@RADA:

I don't want to you to ‘show me what you can do’. I want you to bring integrity and vitality to the character... They are more important than you. ...That's liberty.

It's my firm belief that if every other element of a play is taken away, the characters and their story should stand on their own. The company strength needed to accomplish this can only come from an intimate knowledge of the others with whom you are telling your tale.

Before creating any kind of believable rapport onstage, the actor must believe in her own entity. This task even more difficult to come by when compounded by the stress a limited rehearsal schedule. In the attempt of offering my actors a shortcut to their characters—particularly the actress playing Jess, who may have felt added pressure to portray her director's personal experiences—I collected stories from their lives that mirrored the conflicts of their characters and wove threads from them into the script during final rewrites.

I was fortunate to have actors who were open to exposing pieces of themselves onstage and sharing these pieces with posterity in the final script.†

By the premiere of *Grass Grows*, the company was able to enter and exit the playing space without gaining or losing any sense of reality because each character was simply a selectively magnified version of their respective actor. Sabrina Bergen, Chase Walker, and Hannah Gonzalez were able to treat my play—which, in its original written form, tended to elicit confusion with the presumed complexity involved in its staging—with an authenticity I could not have been prouder of.

The faith my company had in the story we told moved me in a way I cannot quantify and certainly hadn't anticipated. By buying into the lives of Jess, Michael, and Grace, the artists

* Appendix A contains the very brief written notes Jo Ann was given to supplement the script's stage directions; these evolved straight into the dances documented in the premiere's recording. To watch, follow the link in Part IV: The Play.

† Part of my callback process involved actors telling such stories, real or imagined; even the actors who were not cast had influence over the final version of the play by offering non-mentally-ill perspectives on the relationship dynamics involved in the play.

behind *Grass Grows* bought into the delicate life lens that had escaped my attempts at explanation for 21 years.

The most difficult part of the play to write was its dénouement. I have found that my pathology eventually contributes, if not directly leads to, the dissolution of most connections, including the deeply parasitic relationship I had with my own “Michael”. But I was wary to leave Jess alone in the world—not only because to do so would be to give credit to the gospel of the doomed MIP, but also because I truly believe, had I been able to adequately explain my experience at the time, that this relationship would have ended differently, or not at all. I gave Jess the (pragmatic) happy ending I didn’t get; in doing this, I testified to my own hope that someday, someone would get just a glimpse of the world through my lens.

My actors’ commitment to their own honesty onstage led to their conviction of mine as a playwright, director, and MIP. And so it happened that, in writing a play that could be boiled down to a mentally ill girl looking for someone who can understand her, I had the great privilege of watching a company who understood me—who gave their time and talent as testimony to the truth of my experience.

I wrote *Grass Grows* to bring an unseen lens to an audience in the name of all those MIPs whose stories informed the literature and inspired the scripts that constituted my research. As counterintuitive as it may seem, though my journey with mental illness informed my studies and my work, I never anticipated that my own lens would be find understanding in the process.

Every moment of the creation of *Grass Grows* led to my being seen. At one point in my life, I would have thought to sit before my community while others recreated my perspective under my own eye impossible—but it happened. In arguing the validation that is the consequence of supporting MIPs in sharing their stories through drama, I was, quite unintentionally, validated. My struggle, success, peculiarities, challenges, talents, and truth—all of me—were, for the first time, truly seen. My hypothesis was proven credible alongside my entire life, and that—at least in my experience—means absolutely everything.

No Sorries

Alongside exercises meant to cultivate connection and listening, a rehearsal rule I stole from my training with Brigid Panet (2015) was “No Sorries”. In the moments that do not play out as planned—a line is forgotten; a choice reads poorly; an objective is missed—actors, myself included, have a tendency to apologize. To do so is to place blame on oneself for trying to solve a problem in telling the story and so eliminate the will to continue trying to solve it. Unwarranted guilt is a prominent symptom of OCD and a feeling I was distinctly against in the creation of *Grass Grows*. My proudest moment as a director was watching one cast member apologize for a moment that didn’t have the effect she had hoped; her scene partner, without my intervention, echoed our one rehearsal rule: “No sorries!” Telling a tender story is difficult enough without it being centered around as fraught a topic as mental illness, and *especially* without feeling the author of the words one’s character now needs to own evaluating one’s every move. My actors got to come into a rehearsal space without carrying the fear of being wrong, and as a result, they developed the resilience and trust in themselves to get the show absolutely perfect.

On that note: If my actors’ lesson was in the uselessness of the word “sorry”, mine was in the nuance of the word “perfect”.

I know what it’s like to do a run of a show where everything goes right. The audience feels it; I feel it. But if I attempt to hold on to that feeling with a new audience on a new night, it crumbles. I watched my actors suffer through this during their invited preview. The show before

had gone exactly as we'd hoped it would, but with audience members in for the first time, cues were missed; tensions rose; connections were dropped. The more the cast tried to correct the situation, the more they took themselves out of the world in front of them.

In our final circle, armed with the only wisdom I've gained from conservatory training, meditation, and a lot of therapy, I told the company, "Tomorrow night something *will* go wrong. But that doesn't mean it will be any less perfect." It's something I couldn't have said before the process.

OCD has always driven me to reach for a singular idea of perfection: if I work hard enough and do everything right, I will get there. *Grass Grows* drove me to work with what is within in around me right now—the people, the place, and the possibilities—in order to reveal what already is perfection.

I am profoundly grateful.

IV: The Play

“Thank you. For seeing me.”

Jess, II.4

Reception

Grass Grows premiered to a sold-out house on February 9th, 2019. Audience members called the story “authentic”, responding positively to the show’s unique style—as one patron put it, “the combination of the real-world and the metaphysical, [which] worked to help people understand something different” from their own experience.

Most profoundly, the show’s house manager, a MIP herself, revealed to me that her father felt better equipped to understand parts of her life he was previously insensitive to after seeing the show. Even if just in one instance, *Grass Grows* had the effect I set out to create: it brought to light “the importance of disability awareness in a relationship” (Anonymous audience member, personal communication, March 31st, 2019).

Real Change

In a culture of showing support for causes with likes and comments, Corrigan’s concern with “slackeracy” (2012, p.7) remains particularly prescient. It is easier to propagate discourse about injustice than ever before; however, when the contribution of an online “share” (or even a full-length play) replaces contributions of time and money focused on rectifying the issue being communicated, advocacy actually prevents change. Expressionist theatre artists brought this risk—along with the dangers of being defeatist in the guise of realism—to the forefront of the problems sociological drama attempted to resolve:

We, as revolutionary Marxists, cannot consider our task complete if we produce an uncritical copy of reality, conceiving the theatre as a mirror of the times. We can no more consider this our task than we can overcome this state of affairs by theatrical means alone. (Erwin Piscator, 1929)

It was important to me that people attending *Grass Grows* had an easily-accessible opportunity to improve the lives of those in their own neighborhoods who were struggling with mental illness. Audience members who had no knowledge of how to support healthcare bills concerning MIPs in Congress, or even start a conversation on mental illness among their loved ones, may have taken the first steps in those directions by dropping their spare change in our collection jar for the Mental Health Association of Central Florida. Just as being educated by local, credible sources in their own lives was more likely to persuade our audience that MIPs possess unique experiences that present unique challenges, it was my hope that the small gifts given by the audience would become the cornerstones for their own relationship with an organization that does the real work of reaching MIPs in need in their own backyard.

Services funded by the Mental Health Association of Central Florida (MHACF) include public awareness campaigns, community training for friends and loved ones of MIPs, and free counseling for those affected by the June 2016 massacre at Pulse nightclub, no questions asked (Mental Health Association of Central Florida, 2019a). Uninsured MIPs who visit Florida Hospital for comorbid conditions also qualify for no-cost therapy at the MHACF’s Outlook Clinic. In cases where an individual is admitted to behavioural hospital without any family backing, the MHACF supplies a “Guardian Advocate” trained to support the MIP’s agency in

treatment. Since 1946, the MHACF has upheld the dignity of 17,000 of our mentally ill neighbors, making real change in real lives.

Our audience members donated \$37 out-of-pocket on the night of the show. Those who did not have cash with them during the premiere had the opportunity to donate via a link to the MHACF's donation webpage. There is therefore no way to know exactly how much those who attended *Grass Grows* contributed, but for an organization that gains the capacity "to see 4 patients per hour, and 1 new patient per hour" from the private donation of a single iPad, every dollar truly does count (Mental Health Association of Central Florida, 2019b).

Beyond a simple quantity of coins, it is my hope that our company's support of the MHACF may have planted the seed for audience members' ongoing dedication to finding avenues they connect with through which they can use their specific gifts—monetary or otherwise—to be of service to the MIPs in their lives.

Posterity

Rollins Players supplied us with a videographer for the benefit of family and friends who could not attend the sold-out show. The premiere performance of *Grass Grows* can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/2FpD09K>

Grass Grows
by Amanda Grace

written for production in the Lyman Black Box
February 9th, 2019

for Jess Corner:
I'm so lucky to share the journey with you.

setting

A black box theatre and surrounding areas. Recent.

cast

JESS (20s, F): an abrasive, intelligent, passionate dancer with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

MICHAEL (20s, M): a sardonic but well-meaning stage technician; best friend to JESS.

GRACE (20s, F): a genuine and warm-hearted artist.

Grass Grows premiered as a staged reading on February 9th, 2019 in the Lyman Black Box theatre at Rollins College. The production was directed by Amanda Grace and stage managed by Jordan Lewis. Choreography was directed and performed by JoAnn Wood. The cast was as follows:

JESS	Sabrina Bergen
MICHAEL	Chase Walker
GRACE	Hannah Gonzalez

from the playwright

This play aims to bring the experience of the mentally ill into the world of the neurotypical.

Stage directions are limited to technical demands, except where a moment is significantly charged by Jess’ experience of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Where possible, roles in the company should be filled by the mentally ill to preserve a balanced perspective; that being said, with the goal of educating broad audiences in mind, these stage directions are given to fill in for experience an actor or director might lack.

Grass Grows premiered as a staged reading, and it was a happy accident that I ended up reading my own stage directions from an unobtrusive corner of the stage. Having a mentally ill person oversee the action of the play and offer commentary—essentially, *maintain the integrity of their story*—had a profound effect on the audience. Although the play was originally written to be completely representational (and can still be performed in this style by removing the AUTHOR’s lines), I believe the AUTHOR’s presence can be of immense value in drawing the audience into Jess’ world.

The choreography prescribed to Jess can be performed by the actress herself. However, in the premiere production, utilizing Jo Ann Wood as a separate dancer offered an opportunity for Jess’ outer mask to show awareness of her inner self. Both presentations have merit; the implementation of dance should be executed in service of the director’s vision.

“UNDERLINED AND BOLDED TITLES” indicate a dance number.

ACT I

I.1

“TAKE YOUR TIME”

AUTHOR: We are in an empty theatre, but it feels like we're Somewhere Else. Onto the empty stage steps Jess. She stands for a moment, then begins to move. With every turn, the cool colors pooling around her shift. This is what it is to feel. Jess dances for some time with her eyes closed. All at once, she stumbles. The lights begin to fade.

JESS: STOP!

(The music stops abruptly. MICHAEL shouts from the booth.)

MICHAEL: Are you sure?

JESS: Stop.

MICHAEL: We've got 20 minutes left—

JESS: It's not happening.

(MICHAEL descends from the booth.)

MICHAEL: Are you trying?

JESS: Of course I'm trying. Excuse you—

MICHAEL: —Just had to ask—

JESS: —It's just the turn—

MICHAEL: —It looks fine—

JESS: —I can't get it perfect.

MICHAEL: Does it have to be perfect? I mean, is anything ever perfect?

JESS: Yes.

MICHAEL: Fine.

JESS: It has to be.

MICHAEL: I get that. But what's the difference between that turn and a “perfect” turn?

JESS: Ankle inversion. We're talking the difference between this (*she demonstrates*) and this (*the moves are exactly the same*).

MICHAEL: Well, you're right. That makes all the difference.

JESS: Fuck off.

MICHAEL: Jess, come on.

JESS: It has to be perfect.

MICHAEL: I know you. And it will be. But we've only got eigh—seventeen minutes left before I have to shut down and you can either sit on the floor crying about ankle inflection, or finish the first act, which you haven't. Run. Until. Today. Your choice.

JESS: You're right.

MICHAEL: (*Taking out his phone.*) Come again? Come on, I need a new ringtone.

JESS: You're right. Now get back to work. I'm paying you to push those buttons.

MICHAEL: (*Climbing back to the booth.*) Barely.

JESS: Ready.

MICHAEL: Focus up! (*The music begins again.*)

AUTHOR: Jess begins to dance. Slowly, the lights return. She sees each one as it flares. The turn; it's perfect.

I.2

AUTHOR: After a while, we notice a girl standing to the side. She edges closer until she crosses an unseen line.

MICHAEL: (*from the booth.*) GET OFF THE STAGE! (*JESS falls.*)

AUTHOR: The lights run bright red.

(*The lights disappear. MICHAEL comes down from the booth.*)

MICHAEL: Can't you see we're in the middle of rehearsal?

GIRL: I'm sorry!

MICHAEL: This is a private call.

GIRL: I'm so sorry, I just—I couldn't find an office, I mean—I'm looking for a Mike?

(MICHAEL offers his arm to JESS, who hesitates, then takes it.)

MICHAEL: I'm Michael. Who are you?

GRACE: Grace. Hanratty. *(She digs through a bag, spilling things.)* I'm, uh, the designer for your Fringe show? *(She offers MICHAEL a CV.)*

MICHAEL: Well, since you've settled down, we'll call this a five?

JESS: Fine.

GRACE: I'm sorry! It's nice to meet you!

AUTHOR: She offers her hand.

JESS: I don't do that. *(EXITS backstage.)*

I.3

GRACE: Um.

MICHAEL: That's Jess. This is her show. You should stay out of her way.

GRACE: Yeah, she seems—

MICHAEL: What?

GRACE: No, I just mean.

MICHAEL: What people are is often entirely different from what they seem.

GRACE: Right.

MICHAEL: If you find the need to share unsolicited feedback—

GRACE: No.

MICHAEL: Well. If you ran in on my rehearsal, which you did, I'd feel justified in giving you the cold shoulder, too.

GRACE: I'm sorry.

MICHAEL: You said. (*Re: GRACE's CV.*) I don't have time to sort through your credentials.

GRACE: Aren't you in charge?

MICHAEL: No, I'm the stage manager. I just make what Jess wants happen.

GRACE: She's directing herself?

MICHAEL: It wouldn't be the first time. She knows what she wants. And if she hired you, she must want your work.

GRACE: Right.

MICHAEL: This is, however, my theatre, so do try to keep it clean.

GRACE: Absolutely. —You own the space?

MICHAEL: I inherited it from my father.

GRACE: I'm sorry.

MICHAEL: Don't be. I'm not. This place was the best thing he ever gave anyone. The dressing rooms are that way, in the back; the box office is out front; paint, tools, spare wood are stored with everything else in the cupboards behind you, where the booth is. If you need anything else, keep the cost low and keep the receipts.

GRACE: Um—

MICHAEL: What?

GRACE: What is it I'm meant to be creating?

MICHAEL: Hasn't Jess told you?

GRACE: Well, she sent an e-mail, last week, it said— “do grass”.

MICHAEL: Then I suggest you do grass. Not drugs, I hate the smell. But, you can paint on the walls. Do. Grass.

GRACE: A certain kind of grass?

MICHAEL: Above my pay grade.

GRACE: But—

MICHAEL: Darling, I'd love to have a chat, but I have press agents to contact, lighting cues to patch, subscribers to call, an entire Fringe board to schmooze into switching our time slot and a show to run. You'll do great. (*MICHAEL exits to the booth.*)

GRACE: Thanks.

I.4

MICHAEL: (*From the booth:*) That's five! You have seven minutes!

JESS: (*Entering the stage.*)-What needs the most work?

MICHAEL: Let's see "Monster".

JESS: Perfect. (*To GRACE:*) You might want to move.

GRACE: Right.

"THE MONSTER"

AUTHOR: A war of motion. As Jess dances, the walls melt to show the beginnings of Grace's painting. [*AN: This can be accomplished by removing layers of transfer paper, which can be done by GRACE or stagehands, or both.*] We're at the end of another rehearsal.

(*The music FADES out as JESS rests. MICHAEL packs up his things and exits.*)

GRACE: If you're leaving, I can stop.

JESS: No, it's fine. I need to stretch.

GRACE: Right.

(*JESS grabs a cassette player and pops in a tape.*)

GRACE: Um, why?

JESS: Why what?

GRACE: You don't seem like an opera kind of girl.

JESS: It's not opera, it's Tchaikovsky.

GRACE: Oh.

JESS: ...My first ballet teacher always played *Swan Lake* when we stretched. It calms me down.

GRACE: That's cool.

JESS: *(Turning off the tape.)* It looks nice.

GRACE: Thank you.

JESS: Really, it does. Thank you.

GRACE: I wasn't quite sure what you were going for, with the show, so I focused on color.

JESS: Color's perfect.

GRACE: Yeah, I usually get more information before starting a project.

JESS: I used to make lists for the designers, but Michael said they were "fucking ridiculous" and that professionals can make their own to-do lists.

GRACE: I guess that's fair.

JESS: Is there something else you need to know?

GRACE: Well, maybe, like, what's the show about?

JESS: It's dance.

GRACE: No, yeah, but what are you dancing about?

JESS: *(After a moment.)*-Feelings.

GRACE: Interesting.

JESS: Mmhmm.

GRACE: Well, you look great, so.

JESS: Thank you.

GRACE: I could never do that.

JESS: Dance?

GRACE: Yeah, I've always had two left feet.

JESS: Everyone can dance.

GRACE: That is supremely untrue.

JESS: Supremely untrue. *(She presses play.)* Dance, it isn't always— *(She does a series of priouettes.)* Sometimes, it's just... *(She sways a little.)*

GRACE: I doubt anyone would pay to see my swaying.

JESS: Me too. But—everyone's got something. You can do art.

GRACE: "Do art." Yes, I suppose I can.

JESS: Your detail work is amazing.

GRACE: Detail work?

JESS: The veins in the blades. It's really something special.

GRACE: I'm surprised you found time to notice that, directing your own Fringe début.

JESS: It's my fourth year.

GRACE: Oh.

JESS: And besides. I notice everything. People have a lot more time than they give themselves credit for.

GRACE: I'm sure that's probably true for some people.

JESS: All people.

GRACE: How can you be sure?

JESS: Come with me.

AUTHOR: She doesn't offer her arm, and GRACE doesn't wait for it.

GRACE: Yes, ma'am.

JESS: What?

GRACE: Nothing.

I.5

(GRACE and JESS walk through the middle of a field. Birds and insects can be heard around them. GRACE sits on the grass. JESS spreads a blanket to sit on.)

JESS: What's happening here?

GRACE: Uh.

JESS: In the space, around us?

GRACE: Nothing.

JESS: Supremely untrue!

GRACE: We're sitting. And talking. And. There are birds?

JESS: And? Think smaller.

GRACE: And there are ants?

JESS: Think simpler.

GRACE: I don't think I'm good at this game.

JESS: No game. Simpler.

GRACE: We're in a field. It's summer. The, um— it's warm. The sun is shining. And, we're sitting in the grass. Obviously.

JESS: What is happening in this moment?

GRACE: Tell me.

JESS: It *is* summer. And the sun that's warming your skin, and the birds, and the ants, is soaking into the grass, which is growing imperceptibly every single second.

GRACE: Slowly.

JESS: To you. But to the sun, it's growing at the speed of light—just on a different scale. To you, “grass” is this big singular thing, covering immense space. But to an ant, each blade is a monument. Each cell is a cornerstone—significant.

GRACE: You have a very intense perspective on grass.

JESS: Well- I've always seen things much bigger—time much longer—felt more—than it seemed like anyone else did. But sitting in a place like this reminds me that you can't quantify anything as important, or not, without perspective. That the world is always changing. That I am always changing. The show is a little bit about that.

GRACE: You're crazy.

AUTHOR: This stings.

JESS: Yeah. *(Abruptly, she gets up and folds her blanket.)* Listen, I've got to go.

GRACE: Are you okay?

JESS: Lock the doors before you leave. Michael gets testy.

(She leaves. GRACE sits for a while, searching for motion in the grass. Finally, she gets up and walks back to the theatre, swaying as she goes.)

I.6

AUTHOR: It's a new day. Painted grass runs further up the walls of the theatre.

(GRACE sits on the floor, brush in hand. A door opens; GRACE scrambles through her bag and produces a CD just as MICHAEL enters.)

GRACE: Oh, it's you.

MICHAEL: A joy to see you, too.

GRACE: Have you seen Jess? She's late.

MICHAEL: It's Sunday. She's at Mass.

GRACE: Is she Catholic?

MICHAEL: Her family is.

GRACE: That's not the same thing. *(MICHAEL sets up a ladder. GRACE sets the CD down.)*

MICHAEL: "Music From the Ballet"?

GRACE: It's for Jess. I've been meaning to give it to her but I haven't seen her since last week.

MICHAEL: Special occasion?

GRACE: I think I said something. She won't answer any of my messages.

MICHAEL: What do you think you said?

GRACE: She was talking about, like, perception and detail and grass, and it was just the craziest—

MICHAEL: Ah.

GRACE: What?

MICHAEL: She hates that word.

GRACE: I didn't say it was stupid, just that—

MICHAEL: Jess is crazy. In her own mind. Jess has obsessive-compulsive disorder.

GRACE: That's the germ thing—

MICHAEL: No. I mean, yes. Obsessive means she obsesses about germs, and people, and places, and problems, and. Everything's more. Anything that has to do with Jess is more important than— The whole of it, is that Jess is mentally ill. And the only person allowed to call Jess crazy is Jess.

GRACE: She just doesn't seem...

MICHAEL: It used to be worse. She used to be textbook. Unlocking and re-locking doors, knocking on walls when she entered a room, she—used to eat her dinner in a certain way.

GRACE: Why?

MICHAEL: She thought something bad would happen if she didn't.

GRACE: Bad like what?

MICHAEL: It doesn't matter. She doesn't like to talk about it, and I don't think she'd appreciate me talking about it, to someone she's not currently talking to.

GRACE: Right. But she did tell you about it.

MICHAEL: She didn't have to. I was there when she was diagnosed. I drove to the—

AUTHOR: This is something.

MICHAEL: —I've known Jess since we were in middle school. She was always very particular and I was always very... agreeable.

GRACE: There's a joke.

MICHAEL: Ha ha. I'm not an asshole, you know. I just know how Jess likes things. It's my job to make sure she gets everything just how she wants it.

GRACE: Perfect. I think I'm with you. I don't think perfect's possible.

MICHAEL: Don't let her hear you say that.

GRACE: So... since middle school?

MICHAEL: We were the first two out in dodge ball every time. But you probably know something about that.

GRACE: Excuse me?

MICHAEL: You just don't strike as the social butterfly—no offense.

GRACE: Offense!

MICHAEL: You were one of those kids who colored during recess, right?

GRACE: ...I always knew what I wanted to do with my time.

MICHAEL: This?

GRACE: Eh. This is a lot of sitting. I like to do more immersive stuff. Use art to engage people.

MICHAEL: Well, that sounds wildly social.

GRACE: Right.

MICHAEL: Don't ask her about it.

GRACE: I won't.

MICHAEL: Good.

(MICHAEL climbs down from the ladder and EXITS to the booth. GRACE grabs her things and runs to the dressing room, then exits.)

I.7

(JESS enters the theatre and slams her bag down.)

JESS: Shit!

MICHAEL: *(From the booth:)* Lovely morning to you too.

JESS: Fuck off.

MICHAEL: I'm great, thanks for asking.

JESS: I just got an e-mail that they aren't sending my ballet slippers.

MICHAEL: They aren't sending your shoes?

JESS: I told them not to send them.

MICHAEL: That's different.

JESS: Well *they* called first and said they didn't have the black ones in an 8.

MICHAEL: You have black shoes. (*GRACE walks in behind JESS.*)

JESS: Yes, but the band is starting to split.

MICHAEL: So sew it back up.

JESS: But once it splits, it's permanently weaker, and I could be in the middle of a jump and my shoe just flies off, and when I land, I land in the one spot on stage that has a—nail! in it.

MICHAEL: So get new shoes.

JESS: But they don't have them in black!

MICHAEL: So get white ones!

JESS: That would ruin the whole color scheme! (*She storms to the dressing rooms.*) If I get white shoes with a black costume I'll look like a fucking— (*She walks out, CD in hand.*) What is this?

GRACE: It's for you. If you don't already have it.

JESS: Why?

GRACE: I just thought of you.

AUTHOR: This strikes Jess.

GRACE: And if you order the white shoes, I can spray them black with this special flexible paint.

MICHAEL: That sounds resolved to me. (*He stalks back to the booth.*)

JESS: Were you here for all that?

GRACE: I was.

JESS: Sorry, I—just get a little nervous sometimes.

GRACE: Me too.

JESS: Thank you, for remembering.

GRACE: It's nothing.

JESS: It's something.

AUTHOR: She awkwardly reaches out, resting a hand on Grace's shoulder.

MICHAEL: (*Over VOG mic:*) Hi, I just wanted to remind you that we open in two weeks. In case that's, I don't know, important to you.

JESS: Fuck off.

GRACE: That wasn't me!

JESS: No, he needs to hear it. Fuck off!

GRACE: Fuck off!

JESS: It's a start. I'm gonna need you to—

GRACE: Oh! Right. (*GRACE scurries to the upstage wall.*)

JESS: Can we try "Evelyn" ?

MICHAEL: Sure, one minute. (*GRACE is watching JESS intently.*)

JESS: What?

GRACE: You've got a—. (*she motions to JESS' back.*)

MICHAEL: Here's your track!

"EVELYN"

AUTHOR: Jess dances as if she's in a trance—going through motions of daily life. It's bittersweet in a familiar, warm way.

(*Just as GRACE is on the verge of falling completely into it, the lights BLACK OUT.*)

MICHAEL: Fuck!

JESS: Fuck! Some warning?

MICHAEL: Goddamn!

GRACE: Nice lighting plan.

JESS: I so wouldn't.

MICHAEL: Shit. It's got to be the breaker. Shit!

JESS: I can go.

MICHAEL: No, I'll go. Hang on. (*MICHAEL stomps down the stairs; a door slams.*)

JESS: The breaker's at the end of the drive with the rest of the complex's.

GRACE: Right.

JESS: Why were you staring at me?

GRACE: Was I staring at you?

JESS: I know you were.

GRACE: Um.

JESS: I'm not crazy.

GRACE: You're not. I've just never really been a dance person, but you had me—it's special.

JESS: Anyone can do it. You could do it.

GRACE: I couldn't.

JESS: I bet you could.

GRACE: If you saw me try, you'd laugh.

JESS: I wouldn't.

GRACE: You would!

JESS: I can't see, so I wouldn't.

GRACE: Still.

JESS: Where are you?

AUTHOR: Jess backs into Grae, who falls over.

GRACE: Sorry!

JESS: Oh!

AUTHOR: She reaches to help Grace up, then freezes. She's holding Grace's hands.

GRACE: *(Pulling them away:)* Sorry.

JESS: No.

AUTHOR: Jess holds on.

JESS: See, it's like— *(She sways, singing quietly to alleviate the silence.)*

GRACE: This is so bad.

JESS: Try on your own.

GRACE: Wait, how do I do the—

JESS: An “attitude”? You just—here, hold on.

AUTHOR: She steadies Grace's arm on her own.

JESS: And then lean. *(GRACE leans into the position. Suddenly, the lights come on. GRACE loses her balance and falls.)*

GRACE: Shit!

JESS: Are you okay?

MICHAEL: What's happened here?

GRACE: I was just dancing. I'm not very good.

JESS: Don't say that.

MICHAEL: I'll say.

MICHAEL: Now that we have some illumination, I don't suppose you'd mind finishing our set, Miss Hanratty?

GRACE: Yes, of course. *(She goes back to the wall. MICHAEL gives JESS a look.)*

MICHAEL: One more time? (*He EXITS; music starts.*)

AUTHOR: Jess remains frozen. Blue and green lights swim around her. A red blaze over Grace fades into a deep pink as Jess studies. The lights fade as Grace exits.

I.8

(*JESS hums as she approaches the FIELD. She sits on a blanket. Soon, a trail of smoke catches her eye. MICHAEL enters, fingers twisted around a cigarette.*)

JESS: Again?

MICHAEL: I know.

JESS: Don't do that.

MICHAEL: Don't tell me what to do.

JESS: (*Singsong:*) Hydrogen cyanide, nicotine, tar, carbon monoxide, DDT, formaldehyde, ammonia—

MICHAEL: I close every night this week, which is after I finish here, and— (*JESS grabs the cigarette and throws it far, far away.*) Fuck! I'm an adult, Jess.

JESS: (*Pulling a nicotine patch from her bag and placing it on MICHAEL's arm:*) We all need someone to take care of us. (*She offers him a stick of gum.*) Studies say that nicotine replacements up your likelihood of quitting by a factor of 2.27.

MICHAEL: (*He takes it.*) You're like a fucking cereal box.

JESS: It's part of my charm. I'm sorry you're so busy.

MICHAEL: It's worth it.

JESS: Is it?

MICHAEL: It's great.

JESS: Just great?

MICHAEL: "Just" great?

JESS: As opposed to—

MICHAEL: It's not the Russian Ballet.

JESS: I just mean—

MICHAEL: But it's good.

JESS: Okay.

MICHAEL: You shouldn't worry so much.

JESS: Gee, thanks.

MICHAEL: I know, but.

JESS: I'll give that a shot.

MICHAEL: Sorry.

JESS: But. What if nobody comes... except for like one person, because there's always one person, and that person is of course a reviewer for some C-list paper, and she hates it, and she tells everyone how much she hates it, and there's no good news that day because the serial killer thing is out of vogue so the editor *has* to run this piece on a shit dance show, and then my show is THE shit dance show, and I'm THE shit dancer.

MICHAEL: I've never heard anyone say "out of vogue" in real life.

JESS: Michael.

MICHAEL: You're doing it, and that's what matters, Jess. *(He takes her hand.)*

JESS: Right. At least the stage will be pretty.

MICHAEL: She is pretty.

JESS: Who?

MICHAEL: *(Mocking.)* Who? And she likes you.

JESS: ...I don't think so.

MICHAEL: She's all over you.

JESS: Women are just more touchy-feely than— *(MICHAEL holds up their intertwined hands)* men.

MICHAEL: She looks at you like that chick from *Casablanca*.

JESS: Ingrid Bergman.

MICHAEL: You're deflecting.

JESS: I know.

MICHAEL: Do you like her?

JESS: I—

AUTHOR: She's helpless.

MICHAEL: I know. But she's pretty.

JESS: Mm.

MICHAEL: Baby steps. *(He leaves JESS in the grass.)*

AUTHOR: The light surrounding Jess goes orange; we hear buzzing. Jess struggles to breathe and shifts uncomfortably. She empties her bag and finds the tape player. As the *Swan Lake Suite* plays, Jess regains herself. This experience is deeply upsetting for her.

(As she packs her bag back, JESS winds a rosary between her fingers before shoving it into the sack.)

I.9

AUTHOR: It is a new day.

(JESS approaches the theatre. We hear music. GRACE is dancing inside, holding her paintbrush. She has no technique but flows from one blade of grass to the next as she paints. JESS admires GRACE's spinning. GRACE starts upon seeing JESS, spraying paint across JESS' face.)

GRACE: Oh my god!

JESS: Oh my god.

GRACE: I'm so sorry!

JESS: Um.

GRACE: Here, I'll go get— *(She runs off to the dressing room.)*

AUTHOR: Jess stays frozen in space.

GRACE: *(Returning with a bag of wet wipes.)* I'm so, so sorry. Are you okay? *(JESS nods.)* I'm sorry. *(She scrubs at JESS' face.)*

JESS: Is that it?

GRACE: Yeah—no—yes.

JESS: Thank you.

GRACE: I'm sorry.

JESS: It's not your fault. The space was supposed to be yours today.

GRACE: Yeah, I just didn't expect to see you.

JESS: Right.

GRACE: But I'm glad to.

JESS: I'm glad to see you've been practicing.

GRACE: Yikes.

JESS: It was nice.

GRACE: Please.

JESS: Everyone can dance. I told you.

GRACE: Everyone *shouldn't* dance.

JESS: You should. What were you listening to?

GRACE: It's a song by Flannel Graph?

JESS: Never heard of her.

GRACE: Them.

JESS: Oh.

GRACE: But that makes sense. They're really small. I only know the song from my ex.

JESS: Oh.

GRACE: It's called "Five Foot Three". He was like six-two and I'm—not—so he thought it was funny.

JESS: He sounds nice.

GRACE: He was... conflicted.

JESS: Oh?

GRACE: He fucked my best friend.

JESS: Oh. God. I'm sorry.

GRACE: I mean it was high school, so. I'm over it.

JESS: Sure.

GRACE: But I still like the song.

JESS: Tell me more about your life.

GRACE: Like what?

JESS: Everything.

GRACE: Everything? Um... I don't know. It's pretty boring.

JESS: Everyone says that! That is the number one worst way to open an autobiography.

GRACE: Do you have many people tell you their life stories?

JESS: The ones I care about.

AUTHOR: Whoops.

GRACE: Um... I lived all my life in Massachusetts, in the snow, kind of in the middle of nowhere. My mom was a real estate broker and my dad was a historian, so I grew up knowing it was very possible for a woman to make bank and men to be sensitive so that was just really nice. I had a dog, Shoeshine, until I was sixteen.

JESS: I'm sorry.

GRACE: Oh, no, he didn't die. The bingo-hall owner lady down the street got a girl dog and they ran away together.

JESS: Oh.

GRACE: I mean, they're probably dead by now.

JESS: Sorry.

GRACE: But at least they died together.

JESS: Is this a sad story or a happy story?

GRACE: Um. I think it might be sad. About halfway through high school I realized that all my friends were actually the worst people on the planet. And like none of them cared about, not just me, but like anything? And I wanted to. Care about things. And the only thing I really cared about was this theatre that my dad used to take me to in the city—he would do all the research for the plays there—and I loved seeing how many different places I could be except in this city that made me want to crawl out of my skin. So I started working there and painting things for them. And one day—there wasn't even anything special about it, I was just tired—I took all the money I'd gotten from work and I got in my car and I drove as far away from that place as I could. And my car broke down here. And I've lived here for three years now.

JESS: You moved here because that's where your car stopped?

GRACE: Yeah.

JESS: That's just so outside anything I could ever do.

GRACE: Yeah?

JESS: I'm a planner. I like plans.

GRACE: I just think... some things are meant to be.

AUTHOR: A yellow light glows around Grace. Then, the light shifts through orange to bright red. Red everywhere. Jess starts to breathe harder, then, she's gulping for air.

GRACE: Jess?!

JESS: Don't touch me!

AUTHOR: Jess is shaking. She curls in on herself, falling to a seat on the floor.

GRACE: What do you need?

JESS: Michael.

GRACE: What?

JESS: Michael. (*GRACE pulls out her phone.*)

GRACE: ...Hi, Mike? Michael, whatever. Jess, um. You need to come—*(click. He's hung up.)*
Um, I think he's on his way.

AUTHOR: Jess rocks in place.

GRACE: Can you breathe?

AUTHOR: Jess nods.

GRACE: Should I stay?

AUTHOR: She doesn't move.

GRACE: Can I stay? *(JESS breathes hard, then nods.)* Okay... *(She dives for JESS' bag.)* I'm so sorry, I won't touch anything else, okay? *(She produces the tape player and turns it to top volume.)*

AUTHOR: Jess' breathing slows. The world around her moves from red to purple. Suddenly, Michael runs in, blue light trailing.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

AUTHOR: MICHAEL puts his hand over JESS' and brings it to her chest. A heartbeat.
MICHAEL: It's still going. Feel it? *(JESS nods.)* Slower. Breathe in. Hold it. *(JESS begins to relax.)* You're okay. *(He holds her like this—not closely, but steadily. The world around her is entirely blue now.)*

JESS: I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry—

MICHAEL: Go home. I'll call you in the morning.

JESS: I'm sorry.

MICHAEL: It's not your fault.

(JESS grabs her things and runs out. The lights flicker to a wash.)

I.10

GRACE: Thank y—

MICHAEL: That happens. It's—uh, called a panic attack.

GRACE: I read about that. I found some stuff on OCD online. I just didn't think it'd be like... that.

MICHAEL: Like what?

GRACE: Like she was dying.

MICHAEL: That's what it feels like. To her. Of course, she never does die.

GRACE: Good.

MICHAEL: Yeah.

GRACE: I didn't know what to do, so I put on the tape—

MICHAEL: You did that?

GRACE: It calms her down.

MICHAEL: How'd you know?

GRACE: She told me. Earlier. *(MICHAEL lights a cigarette.)* Um.

MICHAEL: No alarm. This place breaks sixteen fire codes.

GRACE: Okay.

(MICHAEL takes a drag. Coughs. Puts it out.)

MICHAEL: GODDAMNIT! She's even ruined my fucking cigarettes. It's like, you can have her, or you can have a life. God. I didn't—

GRACE: It's okay.

MICHAEL: I don't I really— God, I love her. I do.

GRACE: I know.

MICHAEL: I'm just. Every time she needs something I do it. And it's not like I don't want to. But—I was on a date. For the first time in a really long time. And I liked them! But Jess comes first. And she knows that. And she does, it's just that... things like this aren't even the problem. It's a thousand little things. Did I call her today? Did I check she took her medicine? If she didn't, can she now? If she can't, what's she doing to stay busy until she can? What isn't she saying? Why? Why won't she tell me? And I'm not a fucking therapist! I'm just.

GRACE: I'm sure she feels bad about it.

MICHAEL: Not as bad as I do.

(MICHAEL's phone lights up; "You're right! You're right! You're right!" He doesn't answer it. GRACE picks up the phone.)

GRACE: Hi! No, it's Grace. Yeah, Michael just stepped outside for a minute. I think the breaker is—collapsing? again. No, no, it's fine. It's. Really. Are you okay? No, don't be. It wasn't that bad. Really. Really. I've made worse exits. Really. You're fine. I promise. *(MICHAEL reaches for the phone.)* Hey, look, Mike's just come back.

MICHAEL: Michael. *(To the phone:)* Hey. You'll be okay until tomorrow? I've got a thing. No, I just need to get back. Yeah. Okay. Love you. *(He hangs up.)*

I.11

(MICHAEL exits. GRACE follows, turning off the worker lights.)

AUTHOR: A deep purple glows into being, illuminating Jess. She does not dance, but instead does the sign of the cross. *(After a moment, JESS leaves; the workers turn on. JESS pulls out a ladder and begins to hang a lamp on the lighting rail. GRACE enters.)* The room glows purple once more; Jess feels this before she sees Grace. On sight, purple gives way to gold.

GRACE: Morning.

JESS: Hi.

GRACE: Where's Michael?

JESS: I gave him the day off.

GRACE: Right. How was your weekend?

JESS: Okay. How was yours?

GRACE: Fine.

JESS: Thanks for asking.

GRACE: I wanted to know.

JESS: I know. Michael told you about—.

GRACE: Yeah.

JESS: Most people never need to know. Most of the time I'm not very different.

GRACE: I'm different. All the time. Everyone's kind of different.

JESS: That's tacky.

GRACE: The truth usually is. Do you need help?

JESS: No.

GRACE: I meant with the— (*gesturing to the instruments on the floor.*)

JESS: Oh. Could you pass me the short one? It looks like—yeah, that—thanks. (*As she reaches behind her for the lamp, JESS grasps GRACE's fingers.*)

AUTHOR: Gold, everywhere.

JESS: Thank you.

GRACE: No problem.

JESS: You've got— (*rotating GRACE's paint-covered hands.*)

GRACE: Oh, I know. I was working on a piece this morning. Does it bother you?

JESS: No, you're—You're golden.

GRACE: You are. (*Beat.*) Your hands are really cold.

JESS: Yeah, M— Michael says that a lot.

AUTHOR: A flash of blue. (*JESS' hands withdraw.*)

GRACE: He loves you.

AUTHOR: All blue.

JESS: I know. I haven't heard from him since.

GRACE: It's just a... moment. It's not the end of the world.

JESS: It feels like it.

GRACE: Don't think about it like that.

JESS: Gee, thanks.

GRACE: Sorry.

JESS: Sorry. I should practice. Is this how you want the stage tomorrow? The Fringe people are

having the opening night party here.

GRACE: I need to do some touch-ups, but I'll stay out of your way.

JESS: Okay.

(JESS begins to dance in the absence of music. GRACE works on the opposite side of the stage.)

AUTHOR: Ever so softly, GRACE begins to hum. *(It's the Swan Lake Suite. JESS watches her EXIT, then walks off to the dressing rooms.)*

I.12

(GRACE returns with a paintbrush. She moves across the stage, swiping paint here and there until the last blade of grass is finished. MICHAEL roams in, dressed smartly.)

MICHAEL: *(To someone offstage)* Shut up! *(He sees GRACE.)* Shut up. Is this what you wear to all parties?

GRACE: Um. I wasn't going to the—

MICHAEL: Unacceptable. *(He takes off his jacket and wraps it around GRACE.)* It's not worse. *(He removes his tie and tosses it around GRACE's neck.)* You're not exactly Avril, but you'd do any butch proud.

GRACE: Thanks.

MICHAEL: And! *(He takes out a lip gloss and smears some on GRACE's general mouth area.)*

GRACE: Where did you—

MICHAEL: Just in case.

GRACE: Thanks, Mike.

MICHAEL: Michael. Dear God. *(He walks away. VOICES rise. People are here.)*

GRACE: *(Attempting to make conversation.)* Oh, hi! Nice to meet— Yeah, it's kind of. Well, I think the artist wanted to— Well, I made it. And I like it, so. *(She recovers in a corner. JESS enters from the dressing room; she's show-stopping.)*

JESS: Hi! Hey—It's been a while! Oh—

AUTHOR: She awkwardly leans in for a hug.

JESS: I can't wait to see it. *(Seeing MICHAEL)* Excuse me.

MICHAEL: Give us a spin.

JESS: I'm so sorry.

MICHAEL: Stop.

JESS: Okay. How was your date?

MICHAEL: Well, I thought it went a bit shit after my less-than-graceful exit, but it must have been fine because they asked to accompany me here tonight!

JESS: Really? Which one are they?

MICHAEL: They're— damn, they're still out there taking pictures with the car. Jo never went to prom and they were all excited to dress up and do the flowers and everything.

JESS: Jo is probably waiting for you to come relive the Rizzo-Kenickie scene in *Grease*.

MICHAEL: Ha ha... Do you think?

JESS: Go! Go!

MICHAEL: Don't you need help schmoozing the fancy producer people?

JESS: I'll manage. *(She turns and collides with GRACE, who's been standing behind her.)*

MICHAEL I bet you will.

GRACE: I'm sorry!

MICHAEL: Don't be. *(He scampers off, leaving JESS and GRACE alone in the crowd.)*

JESS: Um.

GRACE: I'm sorry!

JESS: You apologize a lot.

GRACE: Sorry.

JESS: Stop it!

GRACE: My biggest talent is being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

JESS: No.

GRACE: It's true. How was he?

JESS: He seemed okay, for the whole two minutes I saw him.

GRACE: I don't think Michael could ever really be upset with you.

JESS: I think you're wrong.

GRACE: Well, let's think about something else.

JESS: Like what?

GRACE: Like... How amazing you look.

JESS: Stop.

GRACE: Earth-shattering.

JESS: *(She grins.)* You look—

GRACE: Like Avril? Michael gave me his clothes.

JESS: That's uncharacteristically generous of him.

GRACE: Well he doesn't need them at the moment.

JESS: Yikes.

GRACE: It was really nice. I didn't know I was invited to the party—

JESS: Of course you're invited.

GRACE: I don't exactly fit with the crowd.

JESS: You're doing fine.

GRACE: Well, I thought I took it particularly well as Mr. Uppity tore apart my design to my face.

JESS: No. Which one? *(GRACE points subtly.)* The guy doing a remarkably realistic performance of "Man With Stick in Ass"?

GRACE: I'm sure he's lovely.

JESS: He's not. He gave my first Fringe show a ZERO-star review.

GRACE: I didn't know you could get a zero-star review.

JESS: I mean, I choreographed it to, like, exclusively Glee covers, so I deserved it.

GRACE: You, master of taste, listener of classical music, at any point in time ever watched Glee?

JESS: We're never discussing it again. ... That guy ended up marrying this really nice man on the board, he's in charge of fundraising.

GRACE: So he dated up! Good for him.

JESS: Is that the goal?

GRACE: It's the dream.

JESS: That never made sense to me.

GRACE: Dating up?

JESS: I just think it's about finding someone you understand. I never thought about "levels".

GRACE: That's because you're the higher person. *(A familiar song drifts in.)*

"SHE'S SO HIGH"

JESS: Stop.

GRACE: I'm psychic.

JESS: That's a throwback. *(She sways a bit.)*

GRACE: Dance!

JESS: No!

GRACE: Why not?

JESS: No one else is dancing!

GRACE: That's fair. *(GRACE begins to dance, wildly, freely.)* SHE'S SO HI-I-I-I-IGH! HIGH ABOVE ME—

JESS: —SHE'S SO LOVELY. *(JESS joins in the dance. It's not beautiful, but it's joyful.)*

GRACE & JESS: SHE'S SO HI-I-I-I-IGH, LIKE CLEOPATRA, JOAN OF ARC, OR APHRODITE... *(Their hands clasp. They are no longer dancing, so much as belting lyrics. The song hits its gentle bridge, and both girls catch their breath.)*

JESS is laughing, wiping tears from her eyes. GRACE tucks back a hair from JESS' face... but her hand doesn't fall away. JESS freezes. GRACE moves forward, slowly, until there is just a hair between the two.

GRACE closes the last space between them. The room explodes in gold. The kiss deepens as GRACE and JESS hold each other, carefully. Suddenly, the gold around them fades to yellow, then orange, then burning red. JESS pulls away.)

JESS: Stop.

GRACE: Are you okay? *(JESS is frozen. She looks at GRACE, then turns and flies from the theatre.)*

AUTHOR: The music cuts out, the worker lights replace the red, and the voices through the room cease. Grace is left in the center of the room, alone.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

II.1

AUTHOR: We're in the field. The grass hasn't been cut in some time; it wraps around Jess' ankles as she runs through it.

(The sound of a car driving away; headlights. MICHAEL wanders in, disheveled but enraptured. He and JESS collide.)

JESS: GET OFF ME!

MICHAEL: Hey!

JESS: MOVE!

MICHAEL: Babe, it's me! Hey. Hey. Hey. *(JESS ceases hitting MICHAEL's chest.)*

JESS: You. *(She hits him again.)*

MICHAEL: Hey!

JESS: You! You!

MICHAEL: Me?!

JESS: This is your fault!

MICHAEL: What is?

JESS: YOU LEFT ME WITH HER!

MICHAEL: What happened?

JESS: You knew what would happen.

MICHAEL: Jess—

JESS: You knew!

MICHAEL: I can't fucking read minds, Jess.

JESS: YOU LEFT ME THERE! YOU KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN! YOU KNEW I LIKED HER!

MICHAEL: She likes you!

JESS: We danced.

MICHAEL: That's good!

JESS: And then—(*She touches her face.*) And you were out here FUCKING SOMEBODY?

MICHAEL: Whoa!

JESS: That's just like you!

MICHAEL: In what way is that “just like me”? I haven't been laid in ages. I haven't had time to be because I'm too busy BABYSITTING.

JESS: You're so fucking selfish.

MICHAEL: Selfish? Sel—how about, what's selfish is, every time I get close to someone I get a phone call, or a text, or a fucking carrier pigeon from you and I have to stop what—who—I'm doing and come to your rescue!

JESS: That's not fair.

MICHAEL: No! It's not! I can't fix you, Jess!

JESS: I don't want you to fix me!

MICHAEL: No? What do you want, then?

JESS: I want.

MICHAEL: What do you want from me? Huh, Jess?

JESS: I.

MICHAEL: SAY SOMETHING.

JESS: I want you to be there—

MICHAEL: I am ALWAYS there. And it's fucking exhausting. My life is not about you, Jess! I have a real job, and real aspirations, that don't revolve around being your protector or your backbone or—

JESS: My person.

MICHAEL: I can't do this.

JESS: Why, are you shy all of the sudden?

MICHAEL: Do you know what it's like to want to say something to someone, but you can't, because they're already on the deep end and if you say the true thing, it might push them in?

JESS: Say it. No protecting.

MICHAEL: I took one evening. To have a nice night with someone who really, really, likes me. For the first time, since I've known you, I took a night off. And yeah, I saw you falling for someone who likes you just as much as you like them, so I figured you'd have a nice night too, if you let yourself. But you're not capable of pursuing any feeling other than misery. And you've dragged me into it, too. And you know what? It's not my fucking fault. I'm not your babysitter, or your therapist, or your boyfriend, okay? I'm just not.

JESS: Got it. *(In an instant, she's gone. MICHAEL doesn't run after her.)*

II.2

(Back in the theatre; the dance is over and the guests have left. GRACE is sitting alone in the middle of the stage, MICHAEL's coat and tie next to her. He wanders in.)

GRACE: Have you seen Jess?

MICHAEL: Goddamnit! (*Beat.*) Yeah, I saw her.

GRACE: How is she?

MICHAEL: She's Jess.

GRACE: Was she angry?

MICHAEL: Grace, you've gotta understand, this is not about you.

GRACE: My kiss made a girl do 0-60 in .2 seconds, you'll forgive me if I take that personally.

MICHAEL: I can't believe—

GRACE: Excuse me?

MICHAEL: I can't believe I'm having this conversation!

GRACE: Have I done something to insult you?

MICHAEL: This isn't about YOU! It's about Jess. Everything is about Jess.

GRACE: But you're not an asshole.

MICHAEL: I have spent the last eight years of my life talking about Jess. I have nothing left.
(*It's the truth. GRACE offers him his things.*)

GRACE: I know you aren't an asshole. I'm just feeling a little sensitive right now.

MICHAEL: Tell me about it.

GRACE: When I was younger, my dad would watch me at parties and school things and say I was too invested in my friends. And I didn't see it until they all turned out to be shit.

MICHAEL: That's not what I'm s—

GRACE: You have got to learn to take turns. They all turned out to be shit, like the most garbage people on the planet all in my backyard. So I cut them out of my life. And I thought my life would get better... but there was just this hole. For a really long time. I mean, these people made me miserable, but once they were gone, I didn't even have a "me" to be miserable about. And the night of my high school graduation, my father came in my room; I was on my second pint of Ben and Jerry's, just sobbing. And he looked at me and said, "You have to put on your own mask first." You have to do you first, and everyone else after. Even when they deserve all the care and love and—you want to give them. It's just the truth.

MICHAEL: I'm very out of practice.

GRACE: Well, let me take this one.

MICHAEL: Taking turns?

GRACE: Do you know where she might have run off to?

MICHAEL: Yeah. Can you call me when you've seen her?

GRACE: Yeah.

MICHAEL: It's a drive.

GRACE: I have quite a bit of experience.

MICHAEL: A mile or so from the coast in St. Augustine, there's a very old church. It was the one she grew up in, but it was condemned a long time ago. I don't know how she gets in. You can see it from the I-95 coming into the city—there's a huge window facing the ocean.

GRACE: Have you been there?

MICHAEL: Once, right after she was diagnosed. She just drove off and didn't stop. I didn't even have my permit yet—I just followed her, because—she was my person. (*GRACE hugs MICHAEL close. He accepts it.*) Jess, was at the altar—this small child, all alone. It was the worst thing I've ever seen.

GRACE: I'll call you. I promise.

(*MICHAEL nods. GRACE exits.*)

II.3

AUTHOR: Jess is kneeling in the glow of a great stained-glass window. She prays, but there's no answer. Grace enters. Jess' gaze fixes on her; the light through the stained-glass window explodes into a galaxy of color.

GRACE: Well, I found the right place. Is this the right time?

JESS: Nothing about me is right.

GRACE: Well can it just be an okay time?

JESS: Why did you come here?

GRACE: I wasn't finished dancing.

JESS: That's a poor joke.

GRACE: I wasn't finished with you.

JESS: I'm sorry.

GRACE: I'm not finished with you.

JESS: Not yet. It takes time. (*GRACE starts to interject—*) Michael told you I was crazy. He didn't tell you how I make other people crazy. It's slow, insidious. It takes years. Michael was the longest. But I always felt it was coming.

GRACE: I don't think you're crazy.

JESS: That's nice. So what am I?

GRACE: Different.

JESS: Rainbow hair is different, Grace. I'm sick. People always get so fucking scared when I say that, like it's their fault that I'm so fucked up. It's no one's fault. But I am sick. I can't do things the same way everyone else can. I used to pretend I wasn't sick and then I'd get frustrated when I would break down, or had to do things in these complicated, roundabout ways, I didn't know why I was so exhausted, I couldn't justify it, unless I was sick.

GRACE: I just realized. I never asked you for your life story. (*She pulls out the Swan Lake tape; presses play.*)

JESS: I don't even know where to start.

GRACE: Simple. Small. At the beginning.

JESS: I was born here. Well, I was born down the street, but my parents brought me here the next day. From my first full day on this planet, it was made very clear to me that I was broken. That a beautiful, loving God knew everything about how broken his people were. There was nowhere to hide. We were sinners and yet he thrust us into this world, of more broken people. And I was always more troubled about that than anybody else. A man would stand right there every week and tell us all that we should be ashamed, that we were filthy, we needed to be cleansed. And I seemed to be the only one that was bothered by this. I can remember, even before I was diagnosed, the confessional priest would actually ask me to leave because I'd come in with these two, three-page lists of what I'd done wrong, every day. I prayed every night that I would wake up and be washed clean.

But I would wake up, the same broken person. So I stopped coming here. I just couldn't. But I couldn't stop seeing all the ways in which I was broken. And as if I couldn't count enough fractures, I started imagining new ones—that I was a monster, that I would hurt somebody—I

stopped going anywhere. With anybody.

I met Michael in the sixth grade. I didn't talk to anybody at school, didn't speak on the bus. I also didn't touch anything on the bus, because it was gross. And he didn't have any friends, so I guess he thought I needed a friend and started, like, following me home. I ignored him for days until I got on the bus and he had put his sweater on the seat next to him. And from then on, I had someone who wasn't bothered by me.

When I was 16, I got tapped for this poem I wrote in lit class and passed on to the counselor, who sent me to a therapist, who sent me to a psychiatrist, who told me that I, in fact, was not the freak of nature I felt like—that there was a name for people like me. And there were pills I could take. And it helped to know that I wasn't special. That it wasn't just me, on this plane all by myself.

But therapy, medicine, it doesn't fix it. I just learned how to focus my obsessions on things that were productive; school. Work. Michael.

And then I met you.

GRACE: Do you think I'm a sin?

JESS: *(She shakes her head.)* There's so much God in you. Grace, when I say I see everything, I mean—everything. I grew up being told that God was Love but nobody seemed to believe it. To understand it. But for every tragedy and heartbreak and nightmare I see, I see just as many kindnesses and sacrifices and Love. They don't knock out the bad things, but they give me something to hold on to.

GRACE: Why did you run away?

JESS: Just because I know something is good, doesn't mean I can forget someone taught me it was bad. Where I am, hope and fear don't cancel each other out. Knowing and believing are different things. And, where I am—how I experience—is so far from everyone who's ever tried to find it. I love more than anyone I've ever met, but I can't love someone more than I can drain their love out of them.

GRACE: I don't think Michael is your person, Jess.

JESS: I know.

GRACE: But I don't think anyone has a "person". I think we all get people, to do with whatever helps us best. Michael can't be your therapist and your protector and your pillar but he can be your best friend.

JESS: I know.

GRACE: But that means you have to let other people in. For the other things. You need a real

therapist.

JESS: I know.

GRACE: Do you believe it?

JESS: Yeah. I do.

GRACE: Michael can't be your lover, either. But that doesn't mean you don't get one. It just means you have to start trusting new people.

JESS: I'm trying.

GRACE: And I get obsessing; I mean, a lot of things could go wrong. We could date and I hate you; we could date and you realize you hate me; we could have sex and like most sex, it sucks. So bad. We could get a few years older and decide, nah. *(Beat.)* We could be happy. We could fit. Because when I think about you, I think... how this girl looks at me like she knows every freckle on my face. And she does. And how she's broken down her own boundaries to meet me where I am, and how when I get to hold her, she's so warm my heart beats a little faster. And I'm not sadistic enough to believe absolutely everything happens for a reason but I do think some things do. And I think about how my car could have, should have broken down way further up the coast but it sputtered all the way here. And I don't believe in like, a book, or any singular truth, but—

JESS: You believe in Love.

GRACE: Just like you. And, like you said—love is about trying. *(She holds out her hand.)*

JESS: You can't fix me.

GRACE: I don't want to.

JESS: It's not easy—

GRACE: I like a challenge.

AUTHOR: Finally:

JESS: I don't want to hurt you.

GRACE: I'll brace myself.

JESS: Baby steps.

AUTHOR: Jess takes Grace's hand. Gold all over.

(JESS and GRACE get up and walk through the glimmering light, leaving the dark of the church behind.)

II.4

(The grass in the field has grown even further. MICHAEL sits in the middle of it. JESS enters from one side. She and MICHAEL stay where they are.)

MICHAEL: I do love you.

JESS: I know.

MICHAEL: It's just—

JESS: Hard. I know. Can I sit? *(MICHAEL nods.)* I have this memory of you that I never brought up, because I know you don't really like feelings. But I've been thinking about it the entire drive home and I feel like I need to tell you about it.

MICHAEL: ...You're going to anyway, aren't you?

JESS: When Grace walked into St. Peter's tonight, I didn't see her at first. I saw a horrifyingly-dressed, acne-ridden, seventeen-year-old you. You were wearing this puffy, igloo sweater and bright red Converse and you still had a black eye from the time you tried to jump off the trampoline. And your lip was shaking. It had never done that before. And I realized, when I was little and I thought I was going to hurt somebody, I never thought—I never thought it would be a kind of pain someone could choose. I never thought anyone would choose a more difficult life to care about me. *(MICHAEL's lip trembles. JESS brushes it.)* That one moment made me go back on medication. And I never thought I could do that. You've done so much.

MICHAEL: I wish I could be everything—

JESS: You are. No one's cut out to be sick. And no one's cut out to deal with it, either. But you've always tried your best. I see all the sacrifices you make to comfort me and to hold me up. And I'm sorry that I've cost you that way.

MICHAEL: Loving anybody has a cost, Jess. *(Beat.)* But the rewards are greater.

JESS: Do you think so?

MICHAEL: When you ran off, I went for my jacket pocket, not guessing that you'd already tossed my cigarettes. ...And the ones in the car. And the stash in the booth. When my father died, I couldn't think of how to explain why I couldn't live in that house anymore. It was a great house. But you already understood—you could see it. You just have this way of seeing—I'm not scared to come off as cruel or sad when all I talk about is how shitty everything is because I know you see—.

JESS: Most things are at least a little shitty.

MICHAEL: Yeah. But still worth it.

JESS: You can't be my person anymore.

MICHAEL: I know. *(They sit in this.)* It's not your fault.

JESS: I know.

MICHAEL: What now?

JESS: We keep trying. I have to go back to therapy.

MICHAEL: Thank God.

JESS: Rude.

MICHAEL: True. *(Beat.)* Are we still best friends?

JESS: Always.

MICHAEL: Thank God. I can't cry in front of anyone else. It'll ruin my image. *(Beat.)* I guess since you're doing something constructive, I have to actually quit smoking, right?

JESS: Right.

MICHAEL: Shit.

JESS: Sorry.

MICHAEL: Don't be. You're just doing your job. Thank you.

JESS: Thank you. For seeing me. *(Beat.)* Oh! I need your help with something?

MICHAEL: Needy.

JESS: I need you to come in early tomorrow... *(JESS whispers to MICHAEL, who nods. They exit, plotting all the while.)*

II.5

AUTHOR: The lights in the theatre dim to one single spotlight. Jess leads Grace into the space. Grace's eyes are closed, and she relies on Jess' hands to guide her safely.

GRACE: But you open in two hours!

JESS: We have time. No peeking.

GRACE: Okay. (*JESS stops GRACE center stage.*)

JESS: Open.

GRACE: Okay. (*She does.*) Hi.

JESS: Hi. (*Beat.*) Grace Hanratty. You have single-handedly forced me to do the formerly impossible—to bring someone else into my plane of existence. Or, try to. Michael's helping me—

MICHAEL: (*over the VOG*) You're welcome.

GRACE: Hi, Mike. (*MICHAEL groans.*)

JESS: I might not be able to explain it perfectly. And that's okay.

GRACE: Okay.

JESS: Right. (*She looks to MICHAEL in the booth.*) Um, so normally, there's some kind of noise happening—all the stuff it seems like other people can filter out. Like what I'm doing today or what I should be doing today or what I should be doing five minutes or five years from now. So—

AUTHOR: She gestures. Noise rises.

JESS: Everything's got its own feeling. So, dancing. (*She sways, and gets GRACE to do the same.*)

AUTHOR: The room goes green.

JESS: That's almost always warm. Comforting. But... strangers, bus handrails, doorknobs—

AUTHOR: She reaches to brush GRACE's hand; the world flashes red.

JESS: Panic. It's a lot of um, pressure. And then, usually, when I panic I feel guilty, too, which is... numb, in a cold a way.

AUTHOR: The light dims low.

JESS: When I experience something I love.

AUTHOR: Purples and pinks wash around them.

JESS: Swan Lake. 80s movies. Landing a turn perfectly. All those things are... fizzy. Bright.

GRACE: What about people?

JESS: People are different. Michael—he's blue.

AUTHOR: We see it.

JESS: He takes you completely over, like an ocean.

GRACE: Do you have one?

JESS: I'm just in the center of it all. But my room is kind of teal. Soft.

GRACE: What about me?

JESS: I told you.

AUTHOR: The world glows yellow.

JESS: You're golden.

MICHAEL: *(From the booth:)*-That's your time!

GRACE: Jess. I have an idea. Do you trust me?

JESS: The best I can. *(GRACE grabs JESS' arm and pulls her backstage. The lights go down.)*

"BEST THAT I CAN"

AUTHOR: Michael and Grace enter and hover at the back walls of the stage; They each carry a bucket. Jess walks on, dressed in black. The lights come up, just enough green to catch the shortest blades of grass. Jess moves through the space, often meeting Michael or Grace, narrowly avoiding them.

The grass stretches upwards. Michael and Grace are just that much closer to Jess: she is trapped between them.

(The music swells.) Jess reaches out to Michael, whose touch spreads blue paint across her arm. At first, Jess recoils, but as the grass gets taller, she returns to him, and comes away with more and more paint.

Jess turns to Grace, who lifts a palm covered in gold paint. Their hands clasp, twist, and trace across each other, tracking blue and yellow across skin and clothes.

Michael and Grace tip their buckets onto the floor; paint spills everywhere. Jess steps into the center of the mess, dancing on her own, dragging paint with her as she moves. Michael and Grace go to exit, but Jess catches Grace's arm and spins her in the paint puddle before bringing her close.

Quietly, just to Jess, Grace whispers—

GRACE: You're a mess.

JESS: I know.

AUTHOR: And with that, Jess kisses Grace. It's perfect. Everything is fluid, colorful, in motion. The grass still grows. It reaches up, higher, higher, higher—

LIGHTS OUT.

END OF PLAY.

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Appendix A: Rehearsal Artifacts

Documents

Grass Grows

Rehearsal Schedule: JANUARY



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1	2	3	4	5	6 You receive the script!
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 7-10 p.m. Free-Through Demolishing the script	16	17	18 4-8 p.m. Demolishing the script Character Work	19	20
21 4:30-5:30 p.m. Photo Call— meet on the lawn	22	23 6-10 p.m. Staging	24	25 4-8 p.m. Staging	26	27
28	29	30 6-10 p.m. Plugging in sound	31			

To reach Amanda (the director): 407.470.8806
To reach Jordan (the stage manager): 407.446.4977

January's rehearsal schedule.

NO SORRY

Read Throughs

15 January 2019

- directions
- schedule review
- do it!

NOTES

rehearsal policies

- sitting in
- slumps
- NO SMALL WORK. (Mats quiet)

Run - look for repetition + when you repeat others

- why do you speak or not speak?

- when have you done this before? when haven't you
Jess / when do you open
and when don't you?

Michael / when do you joke
and when don't you

Grace / when are you talking
and when are you
listening?

NO-SMILE RUN

JUST TALKING

SPACE

C - new does die moment // your instinct to comfort

→ S - let states live - keep going // your instinct to crawl

H - the truth usually is // your instinct to out of your skin

meet people where they're at

Do you think so

MY TO-DO'S

Wednesday + Fridays

stage directions

plan next

how many chairs

Swan Lake tape

send to Evelyn

make

Rehearsal notes from the cast's first read-through, where the "No Sorries" rule was established.

Jo Ann + Dancing

✓ CUT MUSIC + E-MAIL

✓ plug her into the schedule

• leaving to read-through

✓ [times w/ Sabrina + Jo Ann]

blocks for Sabrina - Leonard + lights

Take your time

* floor work

* lyrical meets ballet

start on words

both cut out

paint + grass

Monster

* aggression

* exercise "fade out at oh oh oh oh"

15TH MEETING

Evelyn

* most ballet

* ballerina in a music box

stably repeated

The Best Flat I Can

* contact

* when dove switch

* grounded

Choreography notes from the first meeting with Jo Ann.

28 January

HW □ lights

To Do

25 January

ADDRESS

DO

- QLab Sound
- Curtain LX? R(T)
- House Manager + capacity 79
- Recording
- LX cues!

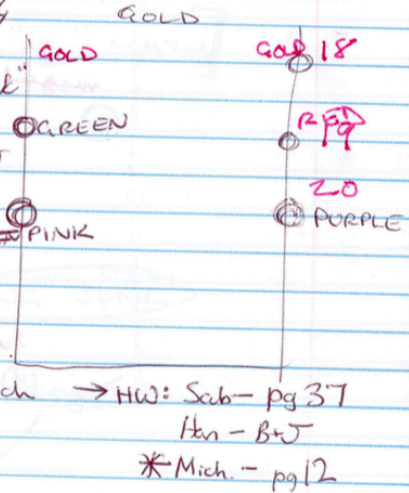
ADDRESS DO

- Reorg chairs? R
- Reservations ↓
- Cross-walls (T)
- Amenda
- Sub 2
- Hannah 2
- Chase 2
- Jo Ann 0
- Jo 0

TOTAL

To day?

- Take pauses that aren't written out
- reaction to phone was perfect
- GRACE-0: "It's just the truth"
- talking about update is AWK, CHASE
- SAB - mikes
- ○ ~~what do you~~ what do you think about things people do/say
- Nice level of attack SAB
- don't breathe in before imp "I am/sick"
- HAN - take your time
- pick up the pace, SAB - the angst DRIVER you. If you don't say it now, you might not say it
- "it was gross" just a fact
- rilly nice receiving H+S
- don't get quiet when you get soft
- find opportunities to look out to the church
- pg 40 line
- "right"

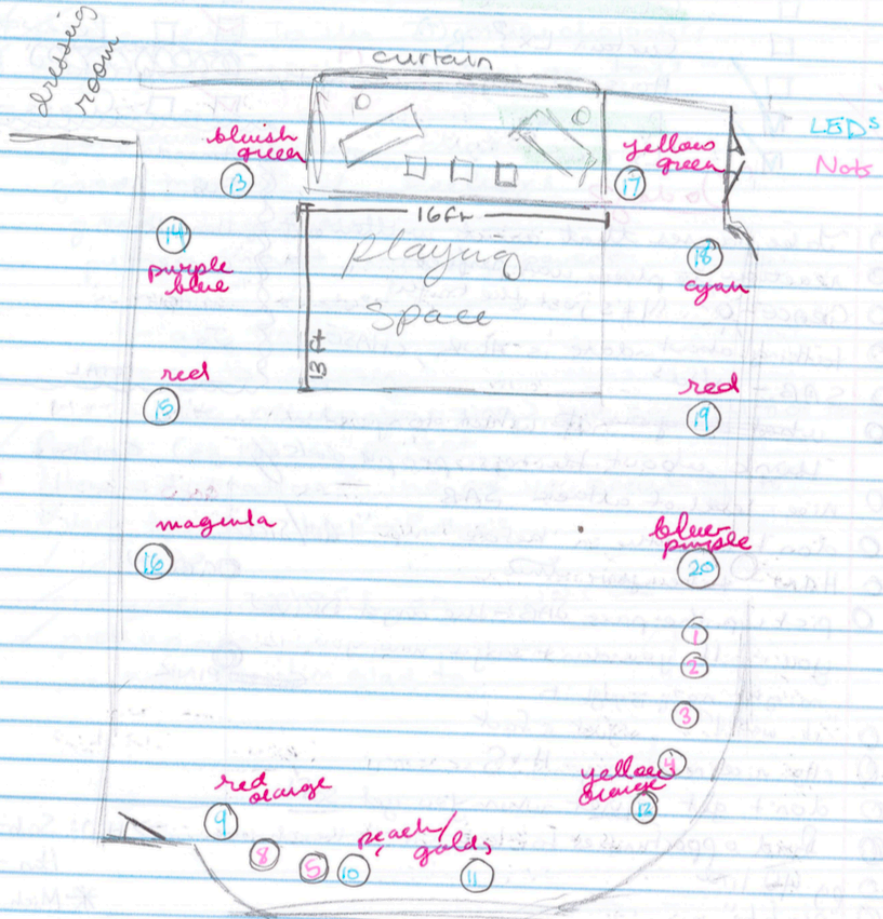


- can we refocus lights ETC
- Color Source manual
- SL lights are 18-20, but what are JR
- Thomas + Missy coming on Friday

Rehearsal notes from January 25th, 2019, including a basic lighting plot.

Lyman Plot

28 January



playback pg. 1, bumper 20
→ channel to central portions of

The plot used to light the Lyman Blackbox.

Rehearsal Photos



The company—stage management included—completing character maps for themselves and their roles, based on an exercise from *Essential Acting* (Panet, 2015).



The company in rehearsal on February 6th, 2019.

Publicity Photos



Grace (Hannah Gonzalez), Jess (Sabrina Bergen), and Michael (Chase Walker).



The company of *Grass Grows*.

Appendix B:
Show Artifacts



rollins players presents
grass grows
a staged reading

written & directed by amanda grace
february 9, 2019
203 e. lyman ave, winter park, fl
rollins.edu/fred

Poster, designed by Carmen Cheng.

a note from the playwright

Mental illness is the lens with which I view the world. It is nothing more insidious, nor anything less influential than my day-to-day life. Through my studies and training, I've seen my world boiled down to a list of symptoms in a diagnostic manual, or else reduced to a prison devoid of love or light. Both of these portrayals are alien to my experience. After pouring through the dramatic canon and a hefty stack of peer-reviewed research, it became clear to me that the only way to make sure people outside the pathology of mental illness could come close to imagining the experiences of the mentally ill was for us to tell our own stories—for me to tell mine.

That said, Jess' story is different from my own. Her life has been informed by the experiences of many open-hearted people who have shared their journeys with me in the name of telling the truth. My highest hope is that *Grass Grows* offers you a new lens with which to view the mentally ill experience: that of the mentally ill themselves.

x

this play is
dedicated to
Jess Corner

deepest gratitude and
special thanks to

Rollins Players
Missy Barnes, Thomas Ouellette, Lisa Cody-Rapport,
and Dr. Andrew Luchner
Carmen Cheng '18
Mike Punter (@punter_michael)
Brigid Panet
Maria Salamanca, Manny Solis, Faith Artis, and Maddie Crump



Outside face of the programme.



Sabrina Bergen (Jess) '22 is a freshman attending Rollins. This will be her first production with this lovely college. She is exploring majoring in Psychology and plans on being involved in theatre throughout her years here. She is so proud to be in the premiere of *Grass Grows*!



Chase Walker (Michael) '20 is ecstatic to be involved in the *Grass Grows* staged reading. He has recently been seen in *Avenue Q* on the Annie Russell stage and will be playing Oscar in the upcoming production of *Sweet Charity*. Thank you for supporting the second stage series. For more: @cwalker248



Hannah Gonzalez (Grace) '20 is a Communications and PR major with a love for all things theatrical. Second Stage patrons may recognize her as Alex from last year's production of *On The Verge*, though she spends all of her free time as a technician for Annie Russell productions, specifically in electric, stage management, and costumes, make-up, and hair. Thanks to Mom, Dad, the lovely Pinehurst Organization (especially her Co-President, neighbor, and fast friend Shelby), and her cats Ashley and Darla for their endless support. For more: @hanngonz



Amanda Grace (Writer & Director) '19 is an international theatre artist and soon-to-be Honors graduate of the Psychology and Theatre departments at Rollins. She prides herself on integrating psychological theory and mental health awareness into her work, beginning with the world premiere of *Improv Therapy* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2017. Amanda trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and made her London debut as Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Recent theatre and film credits include Sarah Elmira (*El Dorado*), Juliet (*Romeo & Juliet*), and Henrietta Leavitt (*Silent Sky*). She has released two original EPs, which you may find for download at amandagrace.bandcamp.com. For more: @astuteandkind



Jordan Lewis (Stage Manager) '22 is a freshman at Rollins studying Theatre and Social Entrepreneurship. She has recently Assistant Stage Managed *Avenue Q* at the Annie Russell Theatre. She is so excited to be a part of the premiere of *Grass Grows*. Thank you for supporting the second Stage!



Jo Ann Wood (Choreography) '21 is a sophomore at Rollins and is studying Anthropology, Dance, and Theatre. She has been dancing for thirteen years and is trained in ballet, pointe, lyrical, modern, tap, and choreographing as well as singing and acting. Jo Ann has performed the lead roles in ballets, including Princess Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* and Isabel Fezziwig in *A Christmas Carol*. At Rollins, she has danced in two Attitudes dance concerts; this semester, she will appear as an ensemble member in *Sweet Charity* and in *The Body Keeps the Score* choreographed by Sarah Carlson.

Donations from tonight's event provide mental health services for our neighbors. For more information on the Mental Health Association of Central Florida, please visit mhacf.org

Inside face of the programme.

graduate's note

I owe so much

to Andy Kleiman—

I carried my dusty 1990 manual to obsessive-compulsive disorders into our first appointment, where I insisted I didn't need a psychiatrist. Thank you for laughing at me. I couldn't have written this if it weren't for your encouragement of my perspective, uniqueness, and humour.

to Missy Barnes, Thomas Ouellette, Lisa Cody-Rapport, and Dr. Andrew Luchner—
my respect for each of your contributions to this world makes me ever more grateful for your support of mine. Thank you for always hearing the best of what I have to say and pushing me to share it well.

to Brigid Panet, Natasha Rickman, and Mel Jessop—
thank you for confirming my suspicion that life is good enough to be art.

to Mike Punter—

thank you for feeding me when I was so poor I ate cucumber slices for lunch and reading the delusional drafts that came from such a diet. You championed every one of my creative endeavors during the writing of this play and I am grateful.

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you allowed me to see myself. Words fail.

to Maria Salamanca, Manny Solis, Faith Artis, Maddie Crump—
thank you for sharing yourselves without reservation, and in so doing, reminding me of my own humanity. Your stories made Jess' stronger.

to Fiona Campbell, Annabelle Cuitino, Carmen Cheng, and Jascinda Farrell—
I am lucky to have risked myself alongside you strong, brilliant women.

to the friends who have supported me through the mental and emotional volatility of creating this thesis, who are far too many to name and far too precious to leave out—
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to Amanda Franklin—

thank you for forcing me to write this when all I wanted to do was watch serial killer documentaries. We did it!

to my mother—

for donating her glowing review, and for everything else, especially the hard things.

to Jess Corner—

may you find the most brilliant train in our bustling station. May I be on it.