

Hollins University

## Hollins Digital Commons

---

Playwriting (MFA) Theses

Master's Theses

---

2022

### The Sun, The Moon, and The Truth

Sarah Cosgrove Gaumond  
cosgrove-gaumond@outlook.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/playwritingtheses>



Part of the [Playwriting Commons](#)

The purpose of the MFA in Playwriting thesis is to provide a definitive record of student progress upon completion of the degree. This text will not reflect any revisions to the play made after degree completion. For the most current version of the play, or for licensing information, please contact the author and/or the Hollins Playwriting Department.

---

#### Recommended Citation

Cosgrove Gaumond, Sarah, "The Sun, The Moon, and The Truth" (2022). *Playwriting (MFA) Theses*, Hollins University. 5.

<https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/playwritingtheses/5>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses at Hollins Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Playwriting (MFA) Theses by an authorized administrator of Hollins Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [lvilelle@hollins.edu](mailto:lvilelle@hollins.edu), [millerjc@hollins.edu](mailto:millerjc@hollins.edu).

*The Sun, The Moon, and The Truth*

by

Sarah Cosgrove

BS in Theatre, Illinois State University  
1997

Presented in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting.

Hollins University  
Roanoke, Virginia  
March, 2022

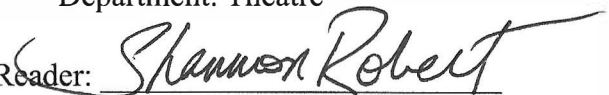
Director of Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_



Todd William Ristau

Department: Theatre

Second Reader: \_\_\_\_\_



Shannon Robert

Department: Theatre

DEDICATION

*For My Family:*  
*Jack, my father*  
*Mary Jane, my mother*  
*Nora and Maria, my sisters*  
*Peter, my husband*  
*And last, but not least,*  
*My son, Christopher*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their guidance, their wisdom, and most of all, for their undying encouragement of the creative process through which I have become a playwright:

Todd William Ristau

Shannon Robert

Dominic Taylor

Bob Moss

Mark Bly

Gary Garrison

Gregg Henry

John Stark

Michelle Lynch

Kimberly Patterson

Richard Cannaday

Walter Dodd

Lauren Brooke Ellis

Shelby Love

## AUTHOR'S BIO

Sarah Cosgrove is an actor, director, and playwright. Her recent playwriting recognitions include: the John Cauble One-Act Play Award for *I Lived to Tell* at KCACTF Region IV Festival in 2022 and the John Cauble One-Act Play Award for *North Wind* at KCACTF Region IV Festival in 2021. Her play *North Wind* was chosen to be included in the Hollins Winter Play Festival in January 2022. Sarah trained as a professional actor with Sanford Meisner at The Neighborhood Playhouse and was awarded a Non-Equity Jeff Nomination for her performance in *Savage in Limbo* by John Patrick Shanley with Inn Town Theater Company in Chicago. As the National Social Media Manager for the Future Is Female Festival, Sarah and her colleagues, created a ten minute female play festival that took place in over fifteen cities in North America. Sarah wrote and performed her play, *It Would Have to be a Girl*, at the Future is Female Festival at Chicago Dramatists. Recent Staged Readings include: *North Wind* at the Hollins New Play Festival in 2019, District Dramatists in 2020, and Rapid Lemon Productions at Motor House, Baltimore in 2020; *Unspoken*: Hollins New Play Festival in 2018; *The Woman Question* and *You'd be So Much Prettier if You* with the Women's Performance Workshop, Strand Theater, Baltimore in 2018. Sarah earned a BS in Theatre from Illinois State University, is currently enrolled as an MFA candidate in Playwriting at Hollins University, and is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild of America.

**North Wind**

*How do you move forward when everything you see reminds you of what you've lost?*

A trio of characters search for freedom from the past in a snow-bound Midwestern bar.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS:**

ROSE CASSIDAY: Female. 40-60's. East Coaster. Ghost.

(HENRY) DOC CASSIDAY: Male. 60's. Midwesterner. Big-hearted. Grumpy.

HANNAH MOORE: Female. 30's. Out-of-towner. Struggling.

RADIO VOICE. Midwesterner.

**SETTING:**

Doc's Bar & Grill, Rural Illinois

**TIME:**

As indicated

**PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES:**

(/): indicates overlapping dialogue.

Playwright encourages open casting.

\*\*Songs are all in the Public Domain.



## SCENE 1

January 25, 1978

A long mahogany bar from the thirties is flanked by a half dozen bar stools. A beer tap is centered on the bar and shelves of liquor line the wall behind the bar. Christmas lights are strung across the back bar. A well-worn stuffed Rudolph the Reindeer leans on one side. Pabst Blue Ribbon and Hamm's Beer signs hang on one wall. Hanging above the bar, a neon sign that once read *Doc's Bar & Grill*, now reads *Doc's Bar & Grll*. There is a front door and a window that lead to the outside world on one side of the bar, and on the other side, another door that leads to a back room. A string of clear lights hang from the ceiling. A television set sits in one corner over the bar. Three tables with two-to three chairs each are staggered in front of the bar. A wood-burning stove struggles to keep the drafty room warm. The sound of a muffled transistor radio can be heard in the background. There's a payphone on the wall and an unlit juke box on another. The window, next to the front door, opens to the black of a moonless night. Two black and white photographs hang on the wall near the front door: one of a young woman and the other, a young man in a military uniform. A POW MIA flag hangs near the photographs.

ROSE sits at the end of the bar near the front door. DOC is sweeping the floor with a push broom.

ROSE

You plan on leavin' the Christmas lights up until the Fourth of July?

DOC

Wasn't the Fourth a' July. Was Memorial Day.

ROSE

Darn close.

DOC

I know 'cuz I took 'em down so I could hang the red, white, 'n' blue ones for Danny.

ROSE

Looks like it's gonna be slow tonight.

DOC

Yeah.

ROSE

Let's tak'em down now while we have the time. Put'em away before next Christmas.

DOC

Next Christmas! Barely made it through this one and you're talkin' about the next.

ROSE

It's been a month already.

DOC

Ease up a little, will ya'?

ROSE

You should try takin' some of your own medicine for a change.

DOC

I don't wanna do this now. It's late and I'm tired!

Beat.

DOC (CONT'D)

Sorry fer snappin' at ya'. Ya' know I don't mean it.

Doc takes something from behind the bar,  
holding it behind his back.

DOC (CONT'D)

Why, hello. Have you been here long?

Rose shakes her head no. She has played this  
game before.

DOC (CONT'D)

I'm sure I woulda noticed someone as pretty as you...seein' as how you're sittin' by yourself and all.

Rose continues to play along with Doc.

DOC (CONT'D)

You like flowers?

Rose nods yes.

DOC (CONT'D)

Well, I just happen ta' have the most beautiful bouquet of roses.

ROSE

My favorite.

Doc takes the floral arrangement from behind his back and sets in front of Rose. This arrangement has seen better days.

DOC

You don't say?

Rose pretends to smell the roses while Doc holds them to her nose.

ROSE

What am I gonna do with you?

Doc puts the roses behind the bar.

DOC

Nothin'. It's as good as can get.

A gust of wind slams the door open. It bangs against the wall. The wind howls and carries snow in with a gush.

DOC (CONT'D)

Goddamn door!

ROSE

How many times/

DOC  
/I know

ROSE  
/have I told you

DOC  
/I know!  
I shoulda had it fixed by now.

ROSE  
That's an understatement.

Doc forcefully closes the door.

DOC  
Always gotta be right, don't ya'?

ROSE  
When you're right, you're right.

DOC  
Some things never change.

ROSE  
Or, some people.

DOC  
If that ain't the pot callin' the kettle black.

Doc gives Rose a dirty look and turns up the volume on the radio.

RADIO VOICE  
...bitter cold and heavy snowfall expected throughout the night. The I-80 corridor may see upwards of thirty inches.

DOC  
Jesus Christ!

RADIO VOICE  
National Weather Bureau says whiteout conditions may cause near zero visibility on the roads. That means you need to stay inside, folks. Keep it tuned to WNPO for the latest weather conditions.

Doc turns off the radio.

DOC

Thirty inches!

ROSE

You get gas for the snow blower?

DOC

Yeah, I got gas for the blower. I can already feel the pain.

ROSE

I don't know why you don't listen to me.

I made you that appointment with the doctor, and then, you went and canceled it.

DOC

I didn't need ta pay alotta money for a doctor ta' tell me my knee's goin' bad. I already know that.

ROSE

That's not the point!

DOC

Yes. It is. I'm gettin' old and I got a bad knee. Don't need no doctor ta' tell me that.

ROSE

Is that right, Dr. Cassiday? Mr. Know-it-all.

DOC

That's me.

ROSE

Can I quote you on that?

DOC

Always gotta have the last word.

ROSE

Yep.

Doc picks up the broom and sweeps again. Rose looks out the window.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
(looking out the window)

Sure is coming down hard.  
'Member how we'd take Danny sleddin' down the big hill by Lincoln School?  
I can see him now runnin' full speed ahead with the red sled behind him.  
He stops and looks back at us. Red cheeks peekin' out from under his hood.  
Huge smile on his face.

Beat.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
What I wouldn't give to take him sleddin' one more time.  
Wouldn't that be somethin'?  
The three of us together again.

DOC  
Yeah.

A car is heard pulling into the lot adjacent to the bar. Headlights briefly flash through the window. A car door slams.

DOC (CONT'D)  
Who the hell is out there tonight?

HANNAH swings open the front door. It bangs against the wall. She is dressed in jeans, boots, a black turtle neck and a denim jacket with a sun flower embroidered on the back, and carrying a leather fringe purse slung over her shoulder, stands shivering in the doorway.

DOC (CONT'D)  
I'm closed!

Hannah doesn't move.

DOC (CONT'D)  
I said, "I'm closed!"

Beat.

DOC (CONT'D)  
Don't just stand there! Close the goddamn door.

ROSE  
Easy does it.

Hannah closes the door.

HANNAH  
It's so...it's so...so...cold out there.

DOC  
Called a blizzard.

Hannah stomps off snow onto Doc's floor. Doc grabs the mop behind the bar and moves to wipe up the snow.

HANNAH  
Sorry.

DOC  
Can't be havin' people slippin' and fallin' in here. They'll sue me.

HANNAH  
Sorry...snow's coming down hard...so glad I saw your sign.

DOC  
Just my luck!

HANNAH  
No. Mine. I sliding all over the place. Thought I was going to hit a tree.

DOC  
Well what kinda car you drivin' out there in this kinda weather?

HANNAH  
Brand new Fiat Spider.

DOC  
No wonder!

Doc sees a bottle sticking out of Hannah's purse.

DOC (CONT'D)  
You always bring your own bottle?

No. HANNAH

She shouldn't be driving. ROSE

I'll take that. DOC

Doc takes the bottle from Hannah.

DOC (CONT'D)  
Boone's Farm Strawberry Hill. See ya' like the good stuff.

He sets the bottle on the bar.

All they had. HANNAH

I was just closin' down for the night. DOC

You...gotta phone I can use? HANNAH

DOC  
(pointing to the payphone)  
Over there. Make it quick. Wanna get outta here before it gets real bad.

Thanks. HANNAH

Hannah goes to the payphone.

You were awful hard on her. ROSE

Not now. DOC

ROSE  
It isn't safe out there. Not on those roads in her condition.

DOC  
Don't go playin' Mother Theresa again.



Hannah struggles to find some change in her purse. She stumbles looking, dumping the contents of her purse on a nearby table. Her car keys fall and land under the table. She finds a five dollar bill and breathes a sigh of relief.

Can I get some change?

HANNAH

Sure.

DOC

Doc takes the five, raises it to the light, and eyes it to make sure it's real.

You're kidding, right?

HANNAH

Never can be too careful.

DOC

He opens the cash register and gives her change.

Thanks.

HANNAH

Welcome.

DOC

Never seen it snow like this before.

HANNAH

Radio man said we could get up ta' thirty inches.

DOC

Thirty?

HANNAH

Yep.

DOC

I could barely see.

HANNAH

DOC

Called a whiteout. Happens 'round here. Nothin' to stop the snow from blowin' across the plain.

HANNAH

Shit.

Hannah returns to the payphone. She attempts to put a coin in the phone, but drops it on the floor. It falls into a heater vent.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Shit!  
Shit!  
Shit!

She gets down on her hands and knees to retrieve the coin, but is unable to. She gets up awkwardly, fishes another coin out of the pile she has, presses it in the payphone, and dials.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Hi. It's Hannah.  
No! I don't need money.  
Jesus Christ, Jack! I just-  
Yeah, that's what I get for trying. Go to hell!

Hannah hangs up the phone.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Asshole!

Hannah gets some more change out and makes another call.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Come on...come on. Just answer the damn phone. Please. Please. Please.

Hannah hangs up the phone.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Now, what?

She gathers herself and her things and walks over to a table. She attempts to sit, misses the chair, and falls on the floor, face up.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch!

ROSE

Go'n'help her.

Doc goes to Hannah and extends his hand to help her up.

DOC

Here. Lemme help ya' up.

HANNAH

No thanks.

DOC

Come on...lemme help.

HANNAH

I said, "No thanks."

DOC

I'm gonna have to insist ya' get up off my floor, Ma'am.

HANNAH

Did you...just...call me, Ma'am?

DOC

I would call ya' by your name, but I don't know it!

HANNAH

Hannah! Name's Hannah!

Hannah moves to all fours and uses a chair to steady herself as she makes her way to a standing position. She brushes herself off.

DOC

Nice ta' meet ya' Hannah. I'm, Doc.

HANNAH

Doc....Ohhhh, you're Doc.

Hannah reads Doc's sign aloud. The "i" is not lit.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

*Doc's Bar & Gr\_ll*. You need to get your sign fixed...unless this is a *gr\_ll*.

DOC

U-huh.

HANNAH  
(looking around)

Where the hell is my purse?

DOC  
(pointing to the purse)

Over there.

Hannah fishes a few more dollars out of her purse.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Hey Doc!

DOC (CONT'D)

Yeah?

Hannah slaps her money on the bar.

HANNAH

Can I get a drink?

DOC

A drink?

HANNAH

Yeah. A vodka n' soda.

Huh?  
DOC

A DRINK!  
HANNAH

Ohhhh a drink...like the one I'm not gonna serve ya'.  
DOC

Anyone ever tell you that you're a real mean bastard? Can't be good for business.  
Pleeeeee, Doc. All I want is one. Lil. Drink.  
HANNAH

Know what I want?  
DOC

No.  
HANNAH

I'll tell ya what I want: I want you ta' sit down before you fall down. Again. Now git yer damn paws off my bar.  
DOC

Hannah grumbles in response, but relents and sits down.

I think you had more'n enough ta' drink already. Besides...I don't think you're gonna find what you're lookin' for in a bottle. The only thing I'm offerin' you is a cupppa coffee. So what'll it be, Hannah: coffee? Or, coffee?  
DOC (CONT'D)

Coffee.  
HANNAH

Doc pours two cups of coffee.

Cream or sugar?  
DOC

No. Thanks.  
HANNAH

Careful now. It's hot.  
DOC

Doc raises his cup.

Cheers. DOC (CONT'D)

Cheers. HANNAH

You hungry? DOC

Kinda. HANNAH

DOC  
(perusing the wares)  
Let's see what we got here: m&m-plain or peanut, cheese popcorn, pork rinds...and, oh yeah, and pickled pig's feet.

Pickled *pig's* feet? HANNAH

Folks lov'em around here. Take yer pick. DOC

M&m's. Please. HANNAH

Beat.

Nice jukebox. HANNAH (CONT'D)

Thanks. Rose loved it. DOC

Rose? HANNAH

My wife. Was my wife. DOC

Doc points to the photograph of Rose.

That's Rose. Taken right after we got married.

She's...beautiful. HANNAH

My Rose a' Sharon.

DOC

Hannah points to a photograph of a young man in uniform.

HANNAH

Who's that?

DOC

Our son. Danny.

HANNAH

He live nearby?

DOC

No.

HANNAH

Aww...that must be hard.

DOC

Yeah. It is.

Beat.

DOC (CONT'D)

Went missin' ...in Korea.

HANNAH

I'm so...sorry.

DOC

Yeah.

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)

Feels like a million years ago. Shot down...so they said. But, I know he's gonna walk through that door again someday.

Doc takes a handkerchief out of his back pocket.

HANNAH

How old is he...in the photograph?

DOC

Seventeen. That was taken the day before he left. He shipped off and never came back.

HANNAH

Musta been real hard.

DOC

Still is.

HANNAH

Yeah. I understand. Looks a lot like you in the picture.

DOC

Ya' think?

HANNAH

I do.

DOC

He was a real good kid. Loved cars and baseball. Notta book person like his Mother. She wanted Danny ta' go to college...or work in the business...anything but the military. It was his idea ta' enlist.

ROSE

He had big dreams...or maybe, I did.

DOC

He used ta' love it when I told him stories about my time in the service...about when I was a pilot and lived overseas. All the different places I got ta' see. He'd look at me with those brown eyes...all lit up.

ROSE

What I wouldn't give to see those eyes again.

DOC

He could be stubborn like me, too...had his mind up before he talked ta' me'n'Rose...said he knew what he wanted ta' do with his life...said he wanted ta' fight for his country. Tried ta' talk him out of it but...he just...wouldn't listen.

ROSE

We should've done more.



DOC

Never forget the day he told us he was goin' to enlist. Hadda get both our signatures-Rose and me- 'cuz he was only seventeen. Rose refused ta talk about it. Wouldn't even look at the damn form...but in the end, she signed it for him. Told'em he was makin' a big mistake.

ROSE

I was wrong. He didn't make a big mistake. I did.

DOC

Felt like I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. I wanted to stand behind Danny's decision...but I thought he was too young. Goin' ta' war's not like the movies. That night Rose had a real bad dream...dreamt...Danny died.

ROSE

Godammit, Doc. For all your stubbornness, you couldn't say no.

DOC

If I could go back...I'd make him wait another year....finish school....but, that ain't how life works.

HANNAH

No.

ROSE

We failed him.

HANNAH

That ain't how life works. If only...if only. I'd never leave her. I'd stay with her every minute. If only, I could hold her...one more time...kiss her cheek again. I miss her so much.

Beat.

ROSE

Say somethin'.

DOC

You lose someone, too.

HANNAH

Yeah.

Beat.

My daughter.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

What was her name?

DOC

Ava.

HANNAH

I'm so sorry...for yer loss.

DOC

Beat

You still hungry?

DOC (CONT'D)

Yes. Can I have the cheese popcorn?

HANNAH

You bet. How 'bout two?

DOC

Thank you.

HANNAH

Hannah devours the cheese popcorn, licking every little bit off her fingers.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

That is a really pretty jukebox.

DOC

It's a Rock-Ola. They call this one "The Capri II." Made in '65. Story has it the guy who started the company, Mr. Rockola, added a dash to his name, so people'd know how to say it. R. O. C. K. dash O. L. A. ROCK-OLA! I been collectin' entertainment machines since before I shipped off. Got a pole barn full of'em.

HANNAH

Pole barn?

DOC

Pole barn's just a fancy word fer a big garage. They made rifles, too.

HANNAH

Who?

DOC

Rock-Ola. Had an army contract. Made a couple hundred thousand carbines for the military.

HANNAH

Carbines?

DOC

It's a rifle with a short barrel. Used ta' use'm all the way back on horseback, if you-kin believe that? Seein' as they were easier to handle than a standard rifle would be, considering...sorry...sometimes I forget who I'm talking to. Danny used to ask me questions like that all the time.

HANNAH

I'm sorry.

DOC

It's ok. As I was sayin' Rock-Ola used their furniture manufacturing equipment to build the rifles. Matter a fact, I got a genuine Rock-Ola manufactured M1 Carbine out back. Taught Danny to shoot with it. Always said he was gonna have one of his own some day.

ROSE

You still have that damn gun?  
You told me you got rid of it!

Hannah walks over to the juke box.

DOC

I did get rid of it. I put it in storage. Haven't taken it out but to clean it.

ROSE

Getting rid of it means it's gone. Outta here. Someplace else!  
It doesn't mean tucked in there with your goddamn penny arcade!

HANNAH

Does this work?

DOC

What?

Jukebox. HANNAH

Nah. Needs service. DOC

Bummer. HANNAH

Hannah flips through the songs.

Got alotta great music here. HANNAH (CONT'D)

Yeah. DOC

Awww. Elvis...I read he died in his bathroom. HANNAH

What? DOC

Elvis. Elvis Presley. Said he died on the toilet. HANNAH

Who said that? DOC

People Magazine. HANNAH

People huh? DOC

People Magazine. It's a magazine about people. Not everyday people like you and me. Famous people. Like Elvis. HANNAH

More'n I need ta' know. Liked the guy's music. That's all. DOC

Ma Rainey's *Booz and Blues*? Sounds like my life. HANNAH

DOC

What a voice!

HANNAH

Awww... *By The Light of the Silvery Moon.* \*\*

DOC

One'a Rose's favorites. Doris Day?

HANNAH

Yeah.

(singing)

*By the light of the silvery moon,  
I want to spoon, to my honey I'll croon love's tune,*

DOC

(singing along with Hannah)

*Honeymoon keep a-shining in June,  
Your silvery beams will bring love dreams, we'll be cuddling soon,  
By the silvery moon.*

HANNAH

*By the silvery moon.* We used to sing that in the car when we'd go on vacation.

DOC

Rose loved that song.

HANNAH

You dance, Doc?

DOC

Nah. Not for me.

HANNAH

Aww, come on. Everybody dances.

A loud crash is heard outside the bar.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Jeezus!

DOC

Tree branch. Snow's gettin' heavy, that's all.

HANNAH

Shit.

DOC

Guess I'm gonna have ta' sweep the roof.

HANNAH

Tonight?

DOC

Nah, it can wait 'til tomorrow. Everything can wait 'til tomorrow.

HANNAH

Okay...

Hannah crosses over to a table and sits down.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I'm just gonna sit here for a minute before...I get back on the road. My eyes are...

Hannah yawns and lays her head on the table.  
She falls asleep.

ROSE

Snow's beautiful.

DOC

Cuz you don't have ta' shovel it.

ROSE

True.

Beat

ROSE (CONT'D)

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, huh?

DOC

You know I was, Rose.

ROSE

Shouldn't a let him go.

DOC

Didn't wanna take away his dreams.

ROSE

You think I did?

DOC

Don't go puttin' words in my mouth.

ROSE

I spent my whole life raisin' our son. Why would I wanna take away his dreams? I just didn't want to lose him!

DOC

Neither did I!

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)

I gotta believe he's still out there. Danny could be...a prisoner of war.

ROSE

They would've found him by now. It's almost thirty years since he was with us.

DOC

Damn it, Rose! You don't know that.

Beat

ROSE

(pointing to Hannah)

What are you gonna do about her?

DOC

I dunno.

ROSE

It's not safe for her out there.

DOC

Not my problem.

ROSE

Yes it is. She was drinkin' before she got here.

DOC

Gotta big day ahead'a me tomorrow. Snow's not gonna plow itself.

ROSE

Let her stay here tonight, Doc.

Ohhhh, no!

DOC

Yes.

ROSE

No.

DOC

Let her stay in the back room.

ROSE

Beat

ROSE (CONT'D)

Okay...she's gonna end up dead in a ditch and it's gonna be all your fault. You know, I'm right.

Hannah wakes up.

HANNAH

Huh? Did you say somethin'?

DOC

You got anybody nearby...you can call?

HANNAH

No.

ROSE

Told ya' so.

DOC

Well...I kinda...got to thinkin' while you were nappin' /

ROSE

/Thank god.

DOC

/that maybe...it isn't such a good idea for ya' ta' get back on the roads. Snowin' pretty hard out there. Ain't gonna get any better tonight...so...I was thinkin'

ROSE

Say it.



DOC  
Maybe you...can stay here tonight.

HANNAH  
Here?

DOC  
Yeah.

HANNAH  
In the bar?

DOC  
No, not in the bar. In the back room.

HANNAH  
Oh...I dunno about that.

DOC  
Where else ya' gonna go?

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)  
Exactly. If ya' go back on the road, you're gonna end up in a ditch and freeze ta' death.

HANNAH  
Wouldn't be so bad.

DOC  
Don't say that.

HANNAH  
Better'n this.

DOC  
I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that...had the back room fixed for Rose after she got sick. There's a bed back there and anything else ya' might need.

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)  
I slept there after Rose died. Couldn't stand to be in the house alone. With no Rose. That was until I got my dog, Sebastian. Ain't so bad with him around.

Are you sure? HANNAH

Yeah, I'm sure. DOC

I'll pay you back as soon as I can. HANNAH

You don't owe me nothin'. Let's see what tomorrow brings. It's gettin' late and I'm gettin' tired. DOC

HANNAH  
*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death.*

You write that? DOC

Nah...Shakespeare. Had to memorize it in high school. HANNAH

Pretty good. That Shakespeare. DOC

Yeah. HANNAH

Come on. I'll show ya' the room. It's right over here. DOC

Hannah picks up her purse and follows Doc to the back room. He turns on the light and steps back into the bar.

Go in and see what ya' think? DOC (CONT'D)

Hannah steps into the back room.

HANNAH

It's nice in here.

DOC

Look in the drawer for extra blankets.

The sound of drawers opening and closing is heard.

HANNAH

Yeah. I got'm.

DOC

(standing in the doorway)

You can put your stuff over there on the chair. Use the phone behind the bar, if ya' need to call me. Phone number is next ta' the phone. Gonna lock the door on my way out. You should be all set then. I'll be back in the bar at sunrise. I live next door. If you gotta problem, call me. Don't matter what time it is.

Doc walks to the bar.

DOC (CONT'D)

I'll leave lights on in here so ya' can see if ya' need to use the bathroom.

HANNAH

(from the back room)

Okay.

Doc approaches Rose.

DOC

You win again.

The sound of a dog barking is heard.

DOC (CONT'D)

Dammit!

ROSE

What?

DOC

Forgot ta' let Sebastian out earlier.

ROSE

Go on. Let him out. And, get some sleep.  
Tomorrow'll be here before you know it.

Doc quickly turns off a few lights off, unplugs  
the coffee maker, puts on his coat, hat and  
gloves.

ROSE (CONT'D)

I'll watch over her.

DOC

'Til tomorrow.

Doc blows a kiss. Rose catches it and touches  
the kiss to her heart.

ROSE

Tomorrow.

Doc opens the door. The wind howls. Doc  
struggles to pull the door closed and locks it.  
Rose stands and moves about the room with a  
lightness in her step. She walks over to the juke  
box and looks at it for a moment. She touches it  
and it lights up. She turns to the door.

ROSE (CONT'D)

We had big dreams, didn't we, Henry?

End of Scene.

## SCENE 2

Middle of the Night.

Dream Sequence.

The sound of a baby wailing is heard. The light comes on in the back room. HANNAH appears as a silhouette in the doorway. Wearing a night gown, Hannah enters holding a baby. As she rocks the baby back and forth, the baby becomes quiet. She kisses the baby.

HANNAH

Shh. Shh. Shh. Shh. It's ok. Don't cry. Once upon a time, the North Wind and the Sun had an argument about who was the stronger. While they were arguing, a Traveler passed along the road, wrapped in a cloak. "Let us agree," said the Sun, "that whoever is stronger can make the Traveler remove the cloak." "Very well," growled the North Wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the Traveler.

The wind howls. Hannah shivers. ROSE gets a blanket from behind the bar, walks over to Hannah, and puts it around her shoulders. Hannah pulls the blanket around herself. Rose walks back to the bar.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

The cloak whipped about the Traveler's body from the wind, but the Traveler held onto it tightly, not letting go. The North Wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain. Then, the Sun began to shine gentle beams. In the pleasant warmth, the Traveler unfastened the cloak and let it hang loosely. The Sun's rays grew warmer and warmer, so much so that the Traveler became uncomfortable. Off came the cap, and eventually, the cloak dropped to the ground. Then, to escape the blazing sun, the Traveler laid in the welcome shade of a tree by the roadside. Don't ever forget, Ava, gentleness and kindness can win when might and force fail. Back to bed, little angel, it will be morning soon.

Hannah exits with the baby.

End of Scene.

## SCENE 3

Next Morning.

Early morning light streams through the window. Dogs bark. The low sound of the wind howling against the building is heard. An occasional car can be heard passing by. DOC unlocks the door and enters. He brushes the snow off his coat. He is carrying a small brown paper bag and a news paper. He sets them on the bar and turns on the lights. He walks back behind the bar, takes off his coat, and hangs it on a hook next to the bar. He makes a pot of coffee, pours himself a cup, and sits at the end of the bar at a stool next to ROSE. He kisses her, opens the brown paper bag, and takes out a donut. Rose bathes in the aroma of the coffee and the smell of fresh donuts.

DOC

Mornin'.

ROSE

Sleep well?

DOC

Real good.

ROSE

What I wouldn't give to have just one bite!

Doc gets up and turns on the radio.

RADIO VOICE

...and light snowfall and low winds expected through the end of the day. We're only looking at up to six more inches today, folks. So, if you want to clear your driveways, now's the time to do it. National Weather Bureau says we're in for another heavy snowfall again the day after next. That means if you have any shopping to do, you better get in done now. Keep it tuned to WNPO for the latest weather conditions.

Doc turns off the radio.

He sits, takes a bite, and sets the donut on top of the paper bag.

He opens the news paper and separates it into two parts, placing one in front of Rose and the other one in front of himself. He takes a sip of coffee, picks up his part of the paper, snaps it open and begins to read.

DOC

Well, I'll be damned! Not Joe, too.

ROSE

No!

DOC

Yup. Time don't stop for nobody.

Doc continues to read the paper.

DOC (CONT'D)

Says here *All in the Family's* on tonight.

Doc imitates Archie Bunker.

DOC (CONT'D)

"Edith, will ya' stifle yourself!"

ROSE

I love Jean Stapleton.

DOC

"The Dingbat!"

ROSE

Whatever you say "Meathead."

HANNAH enters from the back room, barefoot with a blanket around her shoulders. She is hung over.

DOC

Mornin' Hannah. Come on in and sit down.

Hannah doesn't move. Doc walks over to her and guides her to a seat at a table.

DOC (CONT'D)

Right over here.

Hannah sits.

DOC (CONT'D)

Gotta a couple a feet a snow last night. Ran the blower first thing. Parkin' lots all clear. Scraped the ice off yer car windows and knocked the snow off the roof. Got some donuts here. Cinnamon sugar. Want one?

HANNAH

No thanks. I don't feel so good.

DOC

Lemme get ya' some water.

HANNAH

Ok.

Doc pours Hannah a glass of water. She stares at it.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Sorry...about last night.

DOC

Not a problem. Can I get ya' anything else?

HANNAH

No. Thanks.

A gust of wind blows the door open. Hannah pulls the blanket tightly around herself.

DOC

Goddamn door!

Doc closes the door and sits near Rose, continuing to read the newspaper.

DOC (CONT'D)

Says here it's gonna get up ta' twenty-five degrees today. Boy, won't that feel good!



Twenty-five? HANNAH

Yep. DOC

Too bad I didn't bring my bathing suit. HANNAH

Haven't heard that one before. DOC

I don't think I could live here. HANNAH

You'd get used to it. Have ta' get a good winter coat, that's all. DOC

And gloves...and a hat. HANNAH

Don't forget the boots. Now, you're thinkin' like a local. DOC

Right. HANNAH

Hey, I was thinkin' maybe you could help out around here this afternoon? DOC

Doc grabs a broom and leans it on the bar near Hannah.

Okay? HANNAH

We need ta' sweep up before I open up. DOC

Okay. HANNAH

Little hard work never killed anybody. DOC

Beat

HANNAH  
Can I ask you...a personal question?

DOC  
Sure.

HANNAH  
You ever feel...like giving up?

DOC  
Shoot! I'm human, ain't I?

HANNAH  
Yeah.

DOC  
A'course I felt like givin' up. Just gotta put one foot in front the other and keep movin'.

HANNAH  
But...how do you move forward when...everything you see reminds you of what you lost?

DOC  
One minute at a time.

HANNAH  
I don't know how to do that.

DOC  
Sure ya' do. You're doin' it right now.

HANNAH  
No, I'm not...it hurts so much.

DOC  
That pain doesn't ever truly leave ya'. You get used to it, that's all. Then, one day, it's mostly in the rearview mirror.

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)  
Always gonna be there. Somewhere.

HANNAH  
Mine's always here...right in front of me.

DOC

That why you drink so much?

HANNAH

I guess.

DOC

I used ta' drink a lot. Got to the point where I was drinkin' in the mornin' ta' forget the night before. Stopped carin' about anything except my next drink. Got so bad Rose even took away the keys ta' my truck. Ended up sleepin' here at the bar. Couldn't face Rose. Hated myself more than she did.

ROSE

I never hated you. I just couldn't watch the man I love destroy himself.

DOC

Rose called a friend and asked him ta' come talk ta' me. He showed up one mornin' and asked me if I wanted to go to a meetin'. So, I put my tail between my legs and I went. Truth be told: I couldn't bare the thought a losin' Rose. Not after Danny was gone.

HANNAH

How'd you do it?

DOC

One day at a time.

HANNAH

That's it?

DOC

That. And support meetins'.

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)

You sure you don't have any family to call?

HANNAH

I was married. Well, technically, I'm still married, but not for long.

DOC

Ya' know, drinkin' isn't gonna make it better. Makes it worse. Do the next right thing, Hannah.

HANNAH

Next right thing?

DOC

Anything that doesn't include drinkin'.

HANNAH

I need to lie down.

Hannah stands. She runs to the bathroom. The sound of Hannah vomiting is heard.

ROSE

Go'n'check on her.

Doc walks to the bathroom door.

DOC

You ok in there?

The sound of a toilet flushing. Hannah reenters wiping her face with a paper towel. She exits to the back room and closes the door.

DOC (CONT'D)

I don't miss those days.

ROSE

Me, neither.

DOC

I'm blessed ya' stuck with me, Rose. Wouldn't have blamed ya', if ya' hadn't.

ROSE

Goes both ways. You were there for me, too.

DOC

Wouldn't have it any other way.

ROSE

I need to ask you something.

Beat

ROSE (CONT'D)

Will ya help her?

DOC

How?

ROSE

Just help her out is all I'm asking. Don't let her throw her life away.

DOC

I can try.

ROSE

You were there for me when we got the news that Danny was...missing. I didn't want to go on living without...I didn't think I could.

DOC

I still imagine him walkin' through that door.

ROSE

You need to know something.

Beat

ROSE (CONT'D)

Danny.

A blast of wind blows the door open and it slams against the wall. They both look at the door.

DOC

I know. I know.

Doc closes the door.

ROSE

How long you been gonna fix that door?

DOC

Too long.

ROSE

Go! Get what ya need to fix it. I'll watch over her while you're gone.

Doc grabs his coat and keys and moves to the door. He exits. Rose walks to the photograph of Danny. She removes the photograph from the wall and looks at it longingly. She holds the photograph to her heart.

ROSE (CONT'D)

How do I tell him, Danny?

End of Scene.

## SCENE 4

An Hour Later.

ROSE is seated at the end of the bar in her usual spot. HANNAH enters from the back room dressed as she was when she arrived. The door opens and DOC enters, walking backward carrying a box with bar supplies and tools to fix the door. He closes the door behind him.

DOC  
Goin' somewhere?

HANNAH  
I can't do this.

DOC  
Can't do what?

HANNAH  
This. Me. My life. I'm not ready to deal with...what happened. I...can't.

DOC  
I think you can.

HANNAH  
No, I can't.

DOC  
I see you, Hannah.

HANNAH  
And, I see her. Every minute of every day.

DOC  
Doesn't have to be like that, Hannah.

HANNAH  
I can't let go.

DOC  
Yes. You can.

Hannah exits the front door. Doc continues to put things away.

ROSE

I'm gonna miss that broken door.

DOC

I'm not. Neither will the heating bill. I'll get to it after I put this stuff away.

ROSE

Sooner the better.

Hannah throws the door back open.

HANNAH

Did you take my car keys?

DOC

No.

HANNAH

Then where are they?

DOC

I dunno.

Beat

HANNAH

What in the hell did you do with my keys?

DOC

I told ya', I don't have your keys.

HANNAH

Liar!

DOC

Listen kid, I've had it about up to here with you.

HANNAH

I hate you. You're nothin' but a sorry old man in a rundown bar in the middle of fucking nowhere!



DOC

Who do you think you are? Comin' in here blusterin' like the wind. Knockin' things over. Kickin' up all kinda dust. What the hell does it get ya' in the end? A big, fat nothin'! For the last time: I don't have you're goddamn keys!

HANNAH

Then, where are the hell are they?

DOC

I don't know! Probly where you damn well left 'em!

Hannah walks into the back room.

ROSE

They're over there.

DOC

What?

ROSE

The keys. Over there under the table.

DOC

You knew this whole time?

Doc walks to the keys, picks up them up, and sets them on the bar.

DOC (CONT'D)

Hannah! I found your keys!

Hannah reenters.

HANNAH

I knew you had'm.

DOC

No! I didn't. They were under the table.  
Musta fallen outta your purse last night.

Hannah picks the keys up off of the bar. She exits, closing the door behind her.

Goddammit!

DOC (CONT'D)

Beat

Gave it my best, Rose.

DOC (CONT'D)

Rose nods in agreement.

DOC (CONT'D)

Now, it's just you'n'me. We got the place to ourselves again. You remember how it was? Before the war? Before Danny?

I do.

ROSE

Beat

ROSE (CONT'D)

I need to tell you somethin' about Danny?

DOC

Not now.

ROSE

It can't wait much longer.

The front door opens. Doc steps back from Rose. Hannah enters sheepishly and quietly closes the door behind her, standing near the door.

DOC

You again?

HANNAH

Battery's dead.

DOC

Well, ain't that somethin'.

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)

Don't just stand there, have a seat.

Hannah sits.

DOC (CONT'D)

Coffee?

HANNAH

Ok.

Doc hands Hannah the coffee and she holds it to warm her hands.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I thought my luck had changed when I met Jack. And, then we had Ava. But...everything went to shit again.

DOC

No family.

HANNAH

No. My Mom had breast cancer...died when I was fourteen.

DOC

That musta been hard. Losin' your ma so early.

HANNAH

Yeah.

Beat

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Never knew my Dad.

DOC

Who took care of ya'?

HANNAH

Foster care. Eight different homes.

DOC

You're gonna get through this. You gotta have patience, that's all.

HANNAH

I don't do patience.

DOC

You will. We all gotta do patience. Give it time.

End of Scene.

## SCENE 5

Middle of the Night.

Dream Sequence.

HANNAH and ROSE are seated at one of the tables. Hannah comforts an imaginary baby. Rose sits next to her.

What's her name?	ROSE
Ava.	HANNAH
Like Ava Gardner.	ROSE
Who?	HANNAH
Ava Gardner...an actress who died a tragic death.	ROSE
How?	HANNAH
She drank herself to death.	ROSE
Do you know what Ava means?	HANNAH
No.	ROSE
Bird. It means bird.	HANNAH
May I see her?	ROSE
No. She might fly away.	HANNAH (holding the baby tightly)

I'll be careful. I promise.

ROSE

You might wake her.

HANNAH

I won't. Cross my heart.

ROSE

Rose crosses her heart.

And, hope to die?

HANNAH  
(pulling the baby away from Rose)

ROSE

*Truth may seem but cannot be;  
Truth and beauty buried be.  
That are either true or fair;  
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.\**

Rose reaches out to Hannah.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Time to go back to bed.

You can't have her.

HANNAH

ROSE  
(comforting Hannah)

"Very well," growled the North Wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the Traveler.

I won't listen.

HANNAH

ROSE

The cloak whipped about the Traveler's body from the wind, but the Traveler held onto it tightly, not letting go. The North Wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain.

No.

HANNAH

ROSE

Then, the Sun began to shine gentle beams. The Sun's rays grew warmer and warmer. Off came the cap. The cloak dropped to the ground. Then, to escape the blazing sun, the Traveler laid in the welcome shade of a tree by the roadside. Goodnight, little bird. Goodnight. Rest well and fly free.

Rose stands.

ROSE (CONT'D)

It's time now.  
Give her to me.

HANNAH

Please don't take her.

ROSE

Give me your hand.

Hannah stands and takes Rose's hand.

The moon is saying good night.  
The sun will be rising soon.  
To sleep. To sleep.

End of Scene.

\* *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, William Shakespeare

SCENE 6

Next Morning.

Early morning light streams through the window into the bar. A rooster crows. A dog barks. The plaintive moan of the wind howling against the building. An occasional car can be heard passing by. Sound of a truck pulling up outside. Sound of the engine shutting off. Truck door opens and closes. DOC is at the door. He is singing to himself *\*\*Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ral.*

DOC  
(from outside)

*\*\*Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral,  
Too-ra-loo-ra-li,  
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral,  
That's an Irish lullaby.*

Doc unlocks the door and enters. He brushes the snow off of his coat and shakes off the cold. ROSE is seated at the bar.

DOC (CONT'D)

Mornin'!

Doc kisses Rose on the cheek.

ROSE

Morning.

Doc takes off his jacket and hangs it on a hook on the wall. He puts his hand over Rose's back in a loving way. He sets a small brown paper bag, a news paper, and another white bag on the bar and turns on the lights. He starts the coffee maker. While he waits for the coffee to brew, he walks back to Rose and sits next to her.

He opens the bag and takes out a music box.

DOC

Surprise!



ROSE

My Danny Boy!

He winds the music box and lets it play. It plays *\*\*Danny Boy*. They listen to the tune. Doc walks behind the bar, pours himself a cup of coffee, and sits at the end of the bar next to Rose. He opens the paper separating it into two parts. He sets part of the paper in front of Rose.

DOC

My Rose a' Sharon.

HANNAH enters from the back room. She is wearing her coat and has her purse.

HANNAH

Morning.

DOC

You're up bright and early.

HANNAH

Yeah. I've got something I need to do.

DOC

Coffee?

HANNAH

Actually...I was hoping to run to the store, if it's ok with you?

DOC

Ok.

HANNAH

Would it be possible for me to borrow your truck?

DOC

I guess. Still kinda slippery out there.

HANNAH

I promise, I'll be real careful.

Beat

I need to say something.

Ok.

DOC

HANNAH

I owe you an apology. I'm really sorry for what I said yesterday. I didn't mean it.

Doc extends his hand to shake.

DOC

Apology accepted.

Hannah shakes his hand.

HANNAH

Thank you.

Doc retrieves his car keys from his pocket.

DOC

How 'bout we go to a meetin' today?

HANNAH

Today?

DOC

Nothin' to be scared of.

HANNAH

Okay.

Doc gives Hannah the keys.

DOC

Truck's next door. In the driveway.

HANNAH

I won't be gone long.

DOC

No worries.

Hannah exits out the front door.

ROSE

You did a good thing, lettin' her use you're truck.

DOC

Yeah, well...she's startin' to grow on me. Not so bad when she's sober.

Doc sits next to Rose and picks up the newspaper.

DOC (CONT'D)

Says here we're gonna get an early spring.

ROSE

Garden will be full of blooms in no time.

DOC

'Member how small it was when we moved here?

ROSE

And, how you and Danny built the patio around it?

DOC

Glad I had him ta' help me dig it out.

ROSE

He hated that job.

DOC

All that diggin' and rock haulin'.

ROSE

I can see him now. Half-dead. Leaning on the shovel.

DOC

I kept sayin' "Keep diggin', son! Keep diggin'!" You're gonna make your mama so proud.

ROSE

And he did.

Doc takes Rose's hand in his.

DOC

Will ya' marry me, Rose O'Conner?

ROSE

I think I will, Henry Cassiday.

Doc moves closer to Rose. She pulls away.

DOC  
Somethin' wrong?

ROSE  
No. Well...yes.

Rose walks away from Doc.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
I can't do this anymore.

DOC  
What do ya' mean?

ROSE  
I mean: Me. Here with you. I can't do this...anymore.

DOC  
Not now, Rose.

ROSE  
Yes. Now!

DOC  
No.

ROSE  
I miss him too much.  
When you bring a child into the world, you're supposed to care for that child.  
Protect'em from any harm.

DOC  
And, we did.

ROSE  
No! We didn't.  
I didn't.  
We let him go when we agreed to sign the form.  
I shoulda said no!

DOC  
Don't go throwin' salt on old wounds, Rose!

ROSE  
He had his entire future ahead of him!

DOC  
Maybe, he still does.

ROSE  
No! He doesn't!

DOC  
You don't know that.

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)

Don't ya' think it's hard for me, too?  
I think about him every day. I go back ta when he was here and we were still a family. I try ta imagine...what he'd be like today. If he'd have his own family? Ya' think it doesn't kill me every day knowin' I might never see him again?  
I'd give anything to see him walk through that door. One more time.

ROSE  
Danny's not coming back.

DOC  
You don't know that!

ROSE  
Yes. I do.

DOC  
God dammit. Let it go.

ROSE  
I can't.

DOC  
Just because you lost hope. It doesn't mean I have to.

ROSE  
I saw him.

DOC  
What?

ROSE  
I saw Danny. I saw him, Doc.  
He was waiting for me.

You're just sayin' that. DOC

No. I saw him.  
He was there. ROSE

Doc's chest deflates like a balloon losing all it's  
air.

ROSE (CONT'D)

He was there when I died.  
He looks just the same. The eyes. The smile. He was there.  
Our Danny. Our beautiful Danny.  
I need be with him.

No. DOC

Beat

DOC (CONT'D)

I can't...lose you, too.

ROSE

I have to.  
He's waiting for me.

DOC

I'm beggin' ya' Rose. Please, don't go.

ROSE

It's time.

Beat

ROSE (CONT'D)

Hannah will help you.

DOC

Hannah ain't gonna help!

ROSE

She needs help.  
And, so do you.

You said you'd marry me. DOC

Yes. ROSE  
And, I did.

DOC  
Marriage is supposed to be forever.

ROSE  
So is motherhood.

End of Scene.

## SCENE 7

A Few Hours Later.

HANNAH is sweeping the floor. DOC is setting up behind the bar. ROSE is in her usual seat.

HANNAH

That meeting was not what I imagined.

DOC

People are people, Hannah. Just tryin' to get through life.

HANNAH

You're right.

DOC

You can say that again!

HANNAH

I'm SO hungry! Just wanna eat.

DOC

Whatever you're cookin' smells real good.

HANNAH

You like gravy, Doc?

DOC

Who doesn't like gravy?

HANNAH

Let's eat at the bar. Less to clean up before we open.

DOC

Before *we* open?

HANNAH

Oh, I...sorry. I thought...

DOC

Ah, I'm pullin' your leg. You can stay as long as you want, Hannah. Here. Let's make it official. I am officially offering you a job as an employee of Doc's Bar & Grill.

(MORE)



## DOC (CONT'D)

The pay ain't so good; ain't got much money, but you'll get a roof over your head and food to eat. Whaddaya say?

HANNAH

I...accept! Yes!

DOC

Great! You can start today!

The juke box lights up and the song *My Wild Irish Rose*\*\* begins to play.

*\*\*If you'll listen, I'll sing you a sweet little song,  
Of a flower that's now drooped and dead,  
Yet dearer to me, yes, than all of its mates,  
Tho' each holds aloft its proud head. 'Twas  
given to me by a girl that I know,  
Since we've met, faith, I've known no repose,  
She is dearer by far than the world's brightest  
star,  
And I call her my wild Irish Rose  
My wild Irish Rose,  
The sweetest flow'r that grows,  
You may search ev'rywhere,  
But none can compare  
With my wild Irish Rose.*

HANNAH

Holy...shit!

Hannah drops the broom.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Scared the hell out of me.

Hannah picks up the broom and walks over to the juke box. The door blows open, hitting the wall.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Goddamn door!

Rose crosses the room. She turns to look at Doc.

Thank you, Henry.

ROSE

Rose exits through the open door. Doc stands frozen in place, staring at the open doorway.

Time stands still.

Hannah's voice breaks the silence.

Aren't you gonna close the door?

HANNAH

Beat

You ok?

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Huh?

DOC

You ok?

HANNAH

Yeah...I'm fine.

DOC

You sure, boss?

HANNAH

Yeah. I'm sure.

DOC

Doc closes the door with the awareness that he is closing the door on the past.

And, call me, Doc, would ya'?

DOC (CONT'D)

Black Out.

END OF PLAY.

**I Lived To Tell**

CHARACTERS:

ELIZABETH SMITH: middle-aged, any race, any ethnicity.

VOICEOVER: represents the patriarchal structure of institutional systems. It can be played live or taped in advance. It can be one voice or many, male or female.

SETTING:

The play takes place in the imagination. Set design is secondary to the character's journey. Time and place is blurred.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES:

This semi-autobiographical play was born from a time when the world was full of chaos and the earth no longer felt like a safe place.

Or in Haiku form:

*I have had cancer.*

*I overdosed in my room.*

*I lived to tell this.*

-This play unfolds in chronological order.

-**Light Shifts** represent changes in tone.

-**Personal pronouns** (he, she, they, them) and grammatical person (first person, second person) can be changed in accordance with casting.

*We have two lives, and the second begins when we realize we only have one.*

Confucius

*Life and death are one thread, the same line viewed from different sides.*

Lao Tzu

### **SYNOPSIS**

Elizabeth struggles to maintain her identity in the wake of a cancer diagnosis.

Total darkness.

The tick-tock from a clock starts out faint and becomes louder. After about thirty seconds, the tick-tock turns into a loud heartbeat which gradually softens.

ELIZABETH enters.

The heartbeat stops.

ELIZABETH

Gramma--my Dad's Mom--  
 said her wedding was like a funeral.  
 Her sisters-Mary and Margaret-had died right before.  
 One from child birth. The other breast cancer.  
 Broke the mold when they made my Gramma.  
 Grew up poor. No running water and an outhouse.  
 By the time she was fourteen, she was teaching  
 ten children in a one room school house.  
 Said, her Pa would come home drunk every night.  
 Then, like clock work, her Ma would yell:

*"Go sleep in the barn with the other animals!"*

And then, he'd threaten to hang himself.

My Gramma would be on her knees praying  
 all night long that her Pa would be alive  
 in the morning.  
 Which of course, he was.

Never thought much about getting married  
 when I was younger.  
 Too busy doing science experiments.  
 Or playing kickball at the park.

Gramma was diagnosed in her fifties.  
 Had Barium implanted in her uterus.  
 Told my Grandpa she'd give up everything  
 in order to live, except one thing--  
 gin rummy.  
 And, that's exactly what she did.

*Light Shift.*

My Dad had scoliosis as a child.  
 Had to have back surgery at seventeen.  
 Took bone from his leg and fused it to his lower spine.  
 Put him in a huge body cast for a year.  
 Ended up with one long scar on his left leg  
 between his knee and hip and another on his back.  
 Kinda looked like he had a wish bone  
 at the base of his spine.  
 One leg was longer than the other so  
 he walked with a limp.  
 Always reminded me of Laura from the *The Glass Menagerie*.

*Blue roses.*

*Light Shift.*

I couldn't wait to leave home.  
 My Mom and Dad had an awful marriage.  
 Don't ever remember them kissing  
 or showing any affection, for that matter.  
 I'm sure they did at one point,  
 but I never saw it.

My Mom would stand at the kitchen sink  
 with her back to us for hours at a time.  
 I'd watch her gazing out the window  
 and wonder what or who she was thinking about.  
 I can see my Dad walking up behind her,  
 reaching out to touch her arm, and her recoiling  
 from his touch.

This one time, I was helping her pick out a dress  
 to go out to dinner with my uncle  
 when I gathered up the nerve to ask

“Did you ever love Dad?”

*“It's complicated.”*

“It's a yes or no question. Did you?”

After, a long pause, she says,  
*"I don't think so."*

I was twelve at the time.

*Light Shift.*

My Dad did this weird thing  
 over the year before he moved out.  
 He'd call us all into the living room-  
 my Sisters, Mom, and me-and tell us  
 he couldn't take it anymore.  
 My sisters and I would look at each other like  
*What the hell is saying?*  
 He'd go on and on about his life.  
 Eventually, he'd turn to my Mom

*"Don't you have anything to say?"*

Nothing. No response.  
 My Mother looks left.  
 She looks right.  
 Up.  
 Down.  
 Anywhere except my Dad.  
 Which infuriates him even more.

The sound of an explosion can be heard.

ELIZABETH

One day, I decided I'd had enough.  
 As my Dad began his litany of complaints  
 I stood up  
 and at the top of my lungs I screamed.

Elizabeth screams, reliving that moment.

She pulls herself together.

ELIZABETH

I learned how to fight back.

*Light Shift.*



My Dad was diagnosed with breast cancer  
 while I was away at college.  
 By the time I arrived home,  
 he had already been admitted to the hospital.  
 I remember walking into his room and seeing  
 my Mom and Dad.  
 Together.  
 Talking.  
 For the first time in ten years.

His mastectomy left another large scar  
 on the left side of his chest.  
 Seeing it was an unwelcome reminder  
 of what the future might hold for me.

*Light Shift.*

I don't listen to voicemails.  
 Ever.  
 My voicemail has been full of old messages for years.  
 So, when the receptionist behind the desk  
 at the doctor's office asked me  
 if I had received any of her messages,  
 I did what any guilty person would do in my circumstances:  
 I lied!

"Maybe...you were dialing the wrong number?"

VOICEOVER

I've been calling daily for weeks.

ELIZABETH

About what?

VOICEOVER

The radiologist wants to take another x-ray of your breasts.

ELIZABETH

After the second mammogram, while I was changing  
 into my clothes, the nurse tapped on the door.

A tapping sound is heard.

Elizabeth?

VOICEOVER

I'll be right out.

ELIZABETH

The radiologist wants to speak with you.

VOICEOVER

They said it with such authority.

ELIZABETH

I step outside the dressing room.

The radiologist approaches me, X-rays in hand.  
Our eyes never meet.

VOICEOVER

The second mammogram showed the same results as the first.

ELIZABETH

They said it so matter of factly, pointing to tiny dots on the x-ray.

VOICEOVER

See these?

ELIZABETH

Yes.

VOICEOVER

I don't...like these.

ELIZABETH

What do you mean?

VOICEOVER

They could be the first signs of...I'd like you to call your doctor...see a surgeon.

ELIZABETH

For what...specifically?

VOICEOVER

Could be an early sign of breast cancer.

ELIZABETH

Throughout this entire conversation,  
the nurse is standing next to me, patting my hand  
and saying,

Elizabeth pats her own hand.

ELIZABETH

*"It's gonna be ok. It's gonna be ok."*

Boy, were they wrong.

The doctor hands me the x-rays.  
I leave.  
I don't remember walking to my car.

I called my GP who gave me the name of a surgeon.  
I called the surgeon and left a message.  
I called my husband--all three of his phone numbers--  
and every single one went to voicemail.  
I guess you could call it payback.

Elizabeth silently goes through the emotions of  
disbelief, anger, and pain. It is as if the air has  
been sucked out of the room.

ELIZABETH

I have never felt more alone in my life.

A cell phone rings and Elizabeth answers.

ELIZABETH

(speaking into a phone)

Hello.  
Yes, this is she.  
I can talk now.  
Ok...right.  
Could you repeat that?  
Are you sure?  
I mean...how do you know?  
Ok.  
When?  
February 14th. That's Valentine's Day!

I understand.  
 Can't you do it another day?  
 Yes. This is my cell phone number.  
 I'll wait for their call.

*Light Shift.*

My husband had to work  
 on the day of my biopsy  
 so a friend took me.  
 At the hospital, a nurse walks me back  
 to a dressing room.  
 Hands me two gowns and says:  
 "Put on these two hospital gowns.  
 One open to the front. One to the back."

They wait outside for me to change.  
 Then, they lead me down a hall into another room.  
 It's sterile and fucking freezing.  
 Another nurse checks my wrist band.

Name? VOICEOVER

Elizabeth Smith. ELIZABETH

Birth date? VOICEOVER

Seven seveteen fifty-eight. ELIZABETH

What are we doing today? VOICEOVER

Needle biopsy. ELIZABETH

Where? VOICEOVER

ELIZABETH

Right breast.

VOICEOVER

Take off everything except your pants and climb up here.

ELIZABETH

I climb steep steps to an elevated table and lie face-down.  
Arms over my head.

Elizabeth raises her arms.

ELIZABETH

My head turned to one side.

Elizabeth turns her head.

ELIZABETH

The table feels like a slab of ice next to my skin.  
My breasts hang through a rectangular opening.  
A voice that reminds me of the Wizard of Oz  
calls out coordinates for the attack on my breast.

The sound of a needle aspirator, which  
resembles the firing of a nail gun, is heard  
whenever an asterisk\* appears.

VOICEOVER

Ok, here we go.  
Hold still.  
Don't breathe.  
Hold it. Hold it.  
Bam (\*)

Elizabeth reacts as if she's been hit by a bullet.  
The pain resonates through her body.

VOICEOVER

Now, exhale.

Elizabeth exhales.

VOICEOVER

Time to breathe.  
Hang in there, Elizabeth.  
Ok, we're going again.

Hold still.  
 Hold it. Hold it.  
 Bam (\*)

Elizabeth reacts as if she's been hit by a second bullet. She fights the pain.

VOICEOVER

Now breathe.

Elizabeth exhales.

VOICEOVER

Just a few more. You're doing great.  
 Going again.  
 Hold still.  
 Don't breathe.  
 Hold it. Hold it.  
 Bam (\*)

Elizabeth reacts as if she's been hit by a third bullet. The pain is severe.

ELIZABETH

(yelling)

Fuck!  
 Fuck!  
 Fuck!

*Light Shift.*

The sounds of city traffic can be heard in the background.

ELIZABETH

On the drive in to get the results from the genetic test, I tell my husband:

"I need to say this: If the BRCA test comes back positive.

Not negative.

Positive.

Which means I have the cancer gene.

Which makes sense given my family history.

I'm not gonna sit there

and listen to another lecture from the goddamn social worker with the flip chart.

You do what you want.

I'm not staying a minute longer than I have to.  
 Once I know the results, I'm gonna get up and leave.  
 Immediately.  
 Then, I'm gonna take the elevator to the sixth floor  
 and make an appointment to see the plastic surgeon.  
 Do you understand?"

He replies very slowly.

*"Let's just take it one step at a time."*

"I am taking it one step at a time."

*"I know you are. I just mean,  
 let's not jump to any conclusions."*

"I am not jumping to any conclusions!  
 Jesus Christ.  
 For once, can't you just agree with me?  
 Can't you just say: Sure, whatever you need honey. I'm here for you.  
 And then, stop talking."

*"I can't be someone I'm not, Elizabeth."*

"Then... just shut up.  
 Please.  
 Don't talk right now."

The muffled sounds of a hospital can be heard.

#### VOICEOVER

According to the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center: *If a person inherits a mutation in their BRCA2 gene, they have an increased risk for the associated cancers: breast, ovarian, pancreatic, gallbladder, bile duct, and melanoma.*

#### ELIZABETH

I left the genetics counselor immediately  
 and took the elevator to the sixth floor.  
 BRCA 2 positive.

My breasts-  
 once a source of nourishment for my son-  
 can now end my life.  
 From tiny dots on an x-ray to a bilateral mastectomy  
 in the blink of an eye.

VOICEOVER

Have you thought about whether or not you'd like to keep your nipples?

ELIZABETH

What the fuck?

A twenty-something year old resident  
is asking me if I want to keep my nipples.

Is it possible...that the doctor will say...I can't?

VOICEOVER

Yes.

ELIZABETH

Then, I don't have anything else to say until the doctor gets here.

*Light Shift.*

And, so it came to be.  
Bilateral mastectomy with reconstruction.  
Eight-hour surgery.  
First four to remove the breast tissue.  
Next four to create brand new breasts.

In case you're wondering, the doc said the nipples had to go.

Following surgery, the first thing I remember  
is a nurse telling me to get out of bed.  
My husband was sleeping in a chair nearby.

VOICEOVER

You need to walk.

ELIZABETH

I try to pull myself up out of the bed  
and collapse back into it in pain.

VOICEOVER

What's your pain level now?

ELIZABETH

Ten!

The nurse takes a syringe from her pocket.  
Injects it into one of the tubes running into my arm.



The other tube is attached to a machine.  
I can give myself morphine by pushing a button--  
but I digress.

VOICEOVER

Ok. Let's try moving again.

ELIZABETH

I try to obey her command.

VOICEOVER

That's good. One step at a time.

ELIZABETH

After an excruciating trek  
that takes us to the door of the room  
and a few steps into the hallway, they lead  
me back to the chair and help me sit.

VOICEOVER

Great work. Sit here for awhile.

ELIZABETH

They put a blanket over me.  
Then give me wonderful news:  
They'll be back soon to help me take another walk!  
Swell.  
Then they tell my husband to call if I need anything.  
He let's them know he'll soon be going home to clean up

VOICEOVER

We'll take good care of her while you're gone.

ELIZABETH

I have no memory of the following.  
My husband tells it like this:  
I'm in pain.  
I push the button to get another dose  
from the morphine drip.  
My head falls to one side. Drops to my chest.  
I begin making a snoring-like sound as I gasp for breath.  
He jumps from his chair and lifts my head  
with his hands on both sides of my face  
in order for me to breathe.  
He screams my name.

*Elizabeth!*

I've overdosed.

He reaches over.

Pushes the call button.

Yells for help while holding my head.

Ten or more doctors and nurses run into my room.

They scream my name.

*Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth!*

A doctor slaps me--

Nothing.

A nurse arrives with a case of pre-filled syringes,  
neatly arranged, like bullets in a clip.

Naloxone.

They inject one into the tube in my arm.

More slaps and screaming of my name.

Nothing.

A second injection

I begin to wake up.

A doctor is standing directly in front of me yelling:

VOICEOVER  
(echoing)

Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH

Standing behind the doctor.

So many faces.

VOICEOVER

Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH

Yes.

VOICEOVER

Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

I see my husband collapse with relief into a chair.

Elizabeth snaps her fingers.

ELIZABETH

A person's life can change in a heartbeat.  
Here one minute. Gone the next.

*Light Shift.*

Reconstruction is a bitch.  
And, it's not for everyone.  
Breasts...they're kind of like apples and oranges.  
Or fraternal twins.  
They're definitely related,  
but that's as far as it goes.  
Let me just say up front:  
I really like my plastic surgeon.  
They're's great.  
But--They have this weird habit  
of talking directly to my breasts.  
They will look at my reconstructed breasts  
and say things like

VOICEOVER

Are you mad at me?

ELIZABETH

Or?

VOICEOVER

Why do you keep doing that?

ELIZABETH

Like they are impertinent children acting up at any opportunity.  
I finally say:  
You know...it's not my fault. I can't control their behavior.

VOICEOVER

I know.

ELIZABETH

Then why do you keep talking to them like they know any better?

*Light Shift.*

Virginia Woolf said:

“Someone has to die in order that the rest of us should value life more.”

Almost  
dying  
changed me.

In her final years, my Gramma would say:

“I love your Mother like a daughter. “

And, so it was with my mother.

In the end, they got along better than my parents did.

My sister was with my Gramma when she died.

She said Gramma insisted on applying

fresh red lipstick

before getting into the ambulance

that would take her to the hospital for the last time.

Elizabeth takes a compact and red lipstick from her pocket. She carefully applies the lipstick to her bare lips. Closes the lipstick and compact, puts them back in her pocket, and exits.

The sound of a heartbeat starts quietly and becomes louder.

Total darkness.

Silence.

End of Play.

## AFTERWARD

My first memory of creating a world in my imagination was as a young child at bedtime when the lights were turned off and I was tucked tightly under my cover. I would close my eyes and open my mind to another world that included: the hungry crocodile who was ready to chomp at any limb that might come his way; the pink-cheeked, blond-haired doll with the pearl necklace hidden away in a secret pocket inside her dress; and the magical world of Samantha from the television series *Bewitched*. Growing up with a backdrop of the Vietnam war, race riots, and the sexual revolution, I found a kind of peace in the world of the imagination that did not exist in my daily life. As children, my sisters and I would put on shows for the neighborhood parents by constructing a curtain from a sheet and clothes line, drawing programs, creating costumes from our mother's dresses, and lip syncing to the popular musical theatre shows of the time. Like Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in *Babes in Arms*, we put on a show!

Before becoming a playwright, I trained as an actor. While I was in high school, I acted in the musicals *West Side Story*, *Show Boat*, and *George M*. I devised and acted in a play about Isadora Duncan with Stage 212 Community Theater in the Illinois Valley. Following high school, I began college as a premed student, but quickly realized that medicine was not my calling and enrolled at The University of Iowa, where I was introduced to The Writer's Workshop. I took acting classes and was cast in a play called *The Hatfield Connection*, where I met playwright, Charles Smith. I auditioned for The Neighborhood Playhouse, was accepted, and moved to New York to study with Sanford Meisner. It was an intense year filled with ups and downs. I was exposed to Broadway, the life of an actor, and many teachers, both good and bad. At the end of the school year, I moved back to Illinois, enrolled at Illinois State University, and completed my degree in theatre, where I studied with Alvin Goldfarb, Douglass Harris, Calvin Pritner, Jean Scharfenberg. I moved to Chicago and began a life in the theatre. In Chicago, I studied with Kyle Donnelly, Jane Brody, Barbara Gaines, William Norris, Dennis Zacek, and as fate would have it, Charles Smith. I was nominated for a Jeff Award for Outstanding Performance of a Supporting Role in a Play for the role of Linda in *Savage in Limbo* with Inn Town Theater Company. I worked with The Organic Theatre under the artistic directorship of Richard Fire and took part in a reading of a new play, *The Goldfish Bowl*, written by J.J. Johnston and directed by Mike Nussbaum. My life in the theatre was starting to make sense. I loved new plays and wanted to become a part of this world. I continued on this journey by writing poetry, acting in new plays, and studying writing in my spare time. After I moved to the DC area, I began researching graduate theatre programs and saw that John Bergman, someone I had met at University of Iowa, was a faculty member at the Hollins Playwriting Program. I reached out to Todd William Ristau, Hollins Playwriting Program Director, and we began a conversation. I applied, was accepted, entered the Hollins University Playwriting Program in June of 2016. My four-decade journey to find my artistic voice has been long and filled with twists and turns. I write about the human condition, because I believe that as people, we are more alike than not.

In the Hollins Playwriting Program, I was taught to analyze plays through their dramatic structure. In the first year of the Hollins Playwriting Program, we take two classes which provide the foundation upon which all other classes stand: Play Script Analysis and Criticism and Narrative Theory and Structure. Play Script Analysis and Criticism, taught by Megan Gogerty, offered different lenses through which to view dramatic structure. We studied Freytag's Pyramid, Aristotle's *The Poetics*, and Elinor Fuchs's "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," and applied each of these frameworks to the plays we examined. Freytag's breaks down a play into seven parts: exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and denouement. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle describes the six elements of drama: plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song. Elinor Fuchs spoke of her method as "a template for the critical imagination." She believes that by looking at the world of the play from different perspectives and through central images, one can see that, although it "lives within the "rules" of its operation, nothing stays the same." (Fuchs, E., 2004) Narrative Theory and Structure taught us how to build a play from the bottom up utilizing dialogue, character development, stream of consciousness writing, set design, as well as, marketing and poster design. We explored the playwriting process with Todd Ristau's version of Marsha Norman's Five Questions, Aristotle's *Poetics*, and writing exercises to push us further into our creative process. The Five Questions are the cornerstone for the creation of the plays that I created at Hollins University.

They are:

- 1) It's a play about \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) The \_\_\_\_\_ wants \_\_\_\_\_, but in order to get \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ has to \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) Along the way the \_\_\_\_\_ learns that \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4) It takes place \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5) We know the play is over when \_\_\_\_\_.

By answering these five questions before beginning a new play, a playwright is able to create a through-line by which the dramatic question of the play can be answered. This through-line serves as the play's spine. As playwrights and dramaturgs, we adjust a play in the same way that a chiropractor makes an adjustment to a spine, identifying and freeing sticking points and nudging misaligned elements into place, so that the play's dramatic action moves forward in a way that allows the audience to experience the play as a living, breathing thing. The first question tells us who the protagonist is. The second question establishes what the protagonist wants and the main obstacle that's in the character's way. The third question tells us what the protagonist needs in order for them to complete their journey, the fourth question, of course, tells us where the action takes place, and the fifth question tells us what has to happen in order for the play to be over.

(Gregory, D.W., n.d.) After many drafts are written, we add actors, a director, a dramaturg, and an audience, and only then can we come to realize the possibility of what the play may become. This is why Playwright's Lab is invaluable to a new playwright. It is where we come together as actors, playwrights, dramaturgs, directors, and audience members in order to serve the playwright and the play. Without the collaboration of all the other artists, a play is nothing more than words on a page. As Todd Ristau has said many times: "A playwright learns most about his or her play, when he/she sees the audience lean in or fidget in their seats, or when he/she hears them gasp, laugh, or shed tears." Another important aspect to Playwright's Lab is the abattoir, a place where anything and everything can be shared about a student's reaction to a play. At Hollins Playwright's Lab, a playwright learns how to move a play from the paper to the stage, one draft at a time.

As a playwright, my work allows me to tell stories and examine narratives through dramatic writing. Although my plays can be rich in biographical details, they are not autobiographical per se. Rather they draw on my personal experiences and my observations about other's experiences. My process involves calling up these experiences, sifting them through my imagination, and creating anew. Plays are like tapestries: constructed works into which various threads are woven, shimmering brightly from one angle, more darkly from another, and hiding some aspects while revealing others. They contain secrets that come to light in the dramatic action of the characters, as well as lies and truths, both spoken and unspoken. There is no single way to experience or interpret a play. It comes to life in the interplay of the wholeness of a production and the feelings, perceptions, and judgments it evokes in audiences. I believe that a moment of silence in a play can be as powerful as one filled with dialogue. Carl Jung said "the creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable." (Adler, 1976) I identify strongly with the sentiment that a new work is created from inner necessity. I think of the characters who come together onstage in a play as gemstones that can be viewed from many angles. These characters are not representations of me or of my experiences, but rather representations of the human condition and the wants and needs, obstacles, imperfections and handicaps, ambivalence, decisiveness, fear, courage, insight or misguidedness we bring to the choices that determine our paths.

The first play I wrote for Narrative Theory and Structure, taught by Hollins University Playwriting Program Director Todd William Ristau, was called Café Bernard. In preparation, I answered Todd Ristau's version of Marsha Norman's Five questions, created a Freytag pyramid, (Freytag, 1863) and applied Aristotle's Poetics to the work. I was overwhelmed and unsure of myself in this process, but took to heart Todd's words of wisdom; "It doesn't have to be good, it just has to be done. And, submitted by the deadline!" Words I continue to tell myself today. Following the November 2016 election, I became a part of the team that created The Future is Female Festival, which took place in over forty-five locations in Canada and the United States. At the Future is Female Festival at Chicago Dramatists in March 2017, I wrote and performed my ten-minute play It Would Have to be a Girl. I was beginning to combine the crafts of acting and

writing for the first time. Prior to Hollins, one of my dreams had been to create solo works. That dream was beginning to be realized. I acted in two plays in festival that year and researched and wrote about Maria Irene Fornes and her plays in Bob Moss' Off-off Broadway class. I was beginning to find my artistic voice—to understand on a deeper level, what it meant to be a woman in the theatre.

I attended the Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive in May 2018 where I studied with Mark Bly, Gary Garrison, Calleen Jennings, Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Artistic Director Gregg Henry, and dramaturg Heather Helinsky. Mark Bly assigned the “My Character’s Greatest Fear or Greatest Pleasure” exercise to the group. In an interview published in 2020, Bly stated that he “always talked about it [the exercise] in relation to the character’s secrets, actor’s challenges, and the pressures the character is feeling. When that pressure explodes to the surface, it can drive the momentum of the play forward.” (Davies, M., 2020) My “Greatest Fear” exercise involved the characters from my play *Hiding in Plain Sight*, which would be part of the upcoming Hollins Playwrights Festival of New Works. I wrote a scene between Kate and her Uncle Tim where Kate contemplates using a knife to protect herself from him. Through the exercise, I came to understand the power of a character’s secret and how that secret impacted a scene’s writing process. *Hiding in Plain Sight* was chosen as part of the Hollins Playwrights Festival of New Works.

### ***North Wind***

When I imagine a new play, I begin with the characters. I imagine where they live, what they eat for breakfast, and who, if anyone, they say their last words to before their head hits the pillow at night. I create the world within which they exist. I began writing *North Wind*, initially titled *Jack’s Place*, in late 2016, following my first year at Hollins. I knew that I wanted to write a play that would take place in an old bar in the Midwest. Many drafts with various titles would follow. In November 2016, I had a staged reading of *Jack’s Place* at The Tinker at Dwellings Dancetheatre in Roanoke. At the talk back following the reading, the audience was enthusiastic and seemed genuinely interested in these characters and their stories. I left the reading inspired because they wanted to know more.

In March 2019, I wrote a new draft of *Jack’s Place* for CenterPiece’s Reading Series at Mill Mountain Theatre. This draft was fueled with the urgency I felt in relation to an upcoming surgery and by the grief from the recent loss of my father. I channeled my sadness and longing into the wants and desires of the characters, Doc, Hannah, and Rose, utilizing the elements that were inherently theatrical, such as a banging door, a juke box, and a character who was lost, both literally and metaphorically. At this point in the development of the play, Rose was a minor character and I viewed Doc as the protagonist. In May 2019, I attended my second Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive. I planned to use the workshop as an opportunity to further develop *Jack’s Place*, now known as *North Wind*, prior to the 2019 Hollins Playwrights Festival of New Works that would take place in July 2019. At the Kennedy Center, Mark Bly assigned us the “Greatest



Fear or Greatest Pleasure Exercise” and I chose to work on the opening scene between Doc and Hannah. At this point in the development of *North Wind*, Rose was not the protagonist. Seeing the words and characters come to life so beautifully—especially through Rick Foucheux’s portrayal of Doc—was thrilling. It gave me strength to push the play further. I would be some time yet, before I would realize that Rose was, in fact, the protagonist.

Freytag’s pyramid (exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and denouement) and Todd Ristau’s version of Marsha Norman’s Five Questions have been useful tools for me as I developed the play, reminding me to be mindful of structural foundation. With *North Wind*, I applied the pyramid and the five questions in a myriad of ways. I wrote various drafts with all three of the characters as protagonist. I knew the point of no return—the climax—was when Rose leaves the bar. I allowed the play to reveal itself to me, rather than forcing a preconception on it. Elements, like the blizzard and Hannah’s struggle with the loss of her child, came relatively late in the play’s development.

For the 2019 Hollins Playwrights Festival of New Plays, I worked with Dominic Taylor as director, and Kimberly Patterson as dramaturg. My previous experience collaborating with Kimberly gave us trust and an understanding of each other’s processes, allowing us to hit the ground running and to work smoothly together. I had three major rewrites of *North Wind* prior to the actual festival. The first one came after many long discussions with Dominic. His questions grounded me in the reality of the play: Who is the protagonist? Why doesn’t Doc kick Hannah out of the bar? Why does Hannah stay? What does Doc want? What does Hannah want? What does Rose want? Why doesn’t Rose leave? Is Danny dead or alive? Then, there was the casting of the play. The second rewrite came after our first table read with the cast. The actors playing Doc, Rose, and Hannah asked many questions, gave me feedback on their characters, and Dominic, as director, facilitated a further discussion of the play. A second rehearsal followed the rewrite, after which I wrote a final draft which would be used for the festival. Throughout the development process leading to the festival reading, I learned by attending auditions, casting the play, writing, rehearsing, and rewriting. Dominic taught me that the key to rewrites is keeping the “good parts” as you let go of “what isn’t working” in a play. His professionalism, enthusiasm, and respect for the craft of playwriting nurtured and guided me throughout the process. In the end, *North Wind* became a play about a ghost who wants to leave this earthly world in order to join her son in the afterlife. In order to leave this world, she needs to say goodbye to her husband. It all takes place in a bar. We know it’s over when she leaves the bar.

Over the following year, I was able to take the work from where it was in the festival to a fully developed one-act play. *North Wind* had staged readings with District Dramatists at The Reach at The Kennedy Center in 2019 as well as Rapid Lemon Productions at MotorHouse in Baltimore and the Baltimore Dramatist Guild Footlights in 2020. *North Wind* was also a KCACTF Region IV Festival 53 John Cauble One-Act Play Selection in 2021, leading to a reading at the KCACTF. Additionally, *North Wind* was studied in an academic class at Hollins University, used

in a set design class this past semester at Illinois State University, and chosen for the 2022 Hollins Winter Festival.

For the KCACTF Region IV Festival 53, there was a live reading of *North Wind*, directed by Richard Cannaday, with Lauren Brooke Ellis, Rachel Graf Evans, Christopher Gaumont, Shelby Love, Todd William Ristau, Leigh Strimbeck, and Gwyneth Strobe. The talkback immediately following the reading included: Sean Byrd, Hannah Joyce, and Padraic Lillis. The feedback was positive. Among the things I noted were that: 1) more references to the time period would be helpful, 2) the ending was very strong, 3) the use of the jukebox was effective, and 4) the rules governing the ghost needed clarification. This was the first KCACTF I'd ever attended. I found it to be an important part of the process of presenting a new work to the world. It enabled me to experience my play within a larger structure than the academic setting. It was a step closer to an actual production.

My Thesis Director, Todd Ristau, and Second Reader, Shannon Robert, have guided me throughout this process. In the classes Company Creation and Design on a Dime, Shannon has helped me define my artistic vision. This past year, in Design on a Dime, I collaborated with Richard Cannaday as director and Shannon as scenic designer on the Scenic Design for a planned production of *North Wind*, which was to be part of the 2022 Hollins Winter Festival. Throughout fall and winter of 2021, we continued the design discussions with Todd, Richard, and Arne Johnson. In production meetings for Winter Festival, we discussed the expectations of the director and playwright and the limitations confronting the production team. Although, the festival was canceled due to the pandemic, I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to collaborate with this team on the development of *North Wind*. During the KCACTF Region IV Festival 54, I participated in a panel led by Todd Ristau that discussed dealing with "How to handle a covid canceling of your show." It was an inciteful discussion about the process. I was happy to be a part of it. In the future, I plan to create a trilogy of one-act plays with *North Wind* as the first of three one-act plays-and who knows, one day there may be a production!

### ***I Lived to Tell***

I have been working on, *I Lived to Tell*, since my cancer diagnosis in 2012. I started out writing poetry and short stories prior to the Hollins Playwriting Program. I can see the seeds of *I Lived to Tell* in the short play I created for The Future is Female Festival in 2017. *I Lived to Tell*, a generational play about family, life, and ultimately death, is inspired by the ties that bind me to the Midwest, the history of my ancestors, and their struggle to battle their inner demons while remaining hopeful.

*I Lived to Tell* is also influenced by Spalding Gray performances I attended at the Goodman Theatre Studio, an intimate space with approximately one hundred seats in the original Goodman Theatre building. It was my favorite place to see theatre. In a Chicago Tribune article, Richard Christiansen, describes Gray's monologue play, *Swimming to Cambodia*: "His is the ultimate one-

man show. He sits alone, spine erect, in a straight-back chair behind a wooden table. He is casually dressed in a plaid shirt, dungarees and a pair of boots he bought at Screaming Mimi`s, a New York shop he likes. When he is ready to start, he pours himself a glass of water, takes a long, ritualistic sip and puts the glass down. Then he tells his stories.” In the article, Gray is quoted as saying about his process: “By telling the same stories over and over again, by throwing those scenes out, I could handle the experience, deal with the material. Even now, each time I tell them, I still want to shape the stories.” (Christiansen, R., 1985) I was mesmerized by Gray’s ability to weave his tales with such simplicity and in awe of his ability to speak with such candor about his life. It is with great sadness that I think about the way his life ended.

The past two years—where social distancing and isolation have become the norm and when productions, if they take place, must often be virtual—have been particularly challenging for those of us who remain dedicated to a life in the theatre. I think it is because of this difficulty that I kept coming back to the play *I Lived to Tell*, which deals with isolation, life and death, connection and misconnection, identity, love, and the need to be seen and heard. A nonlinear solo one-act play written in Iambic Pentameter, *I Lived to Tell* is the most personal work I have written to date. It is the story of Elizabeth, a middle-aged woman, who fights to stay alive despite seemingly insurmountable odds. It is a multigenerational story about family and the cycles of disease and abuse. But most importantly, it is a story about the human condition: about what touches us most deeply, causes us despair, and gives us great joy.

In October of 2020, I enrolled in my third Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive with the intention of completing a final draft of *I Lived to Tell*. I remained open to its possibilities and gave myself the deadline of the one-act play submissions for the 2022 KCACTF Region IV New Play Program. For me, this playwriting intensive was by far the most challenging to date. Because of the pandemic, it was virtual and spanned two weekends instead of one. Workshops with Gary Garrison, Mark Bly, Heather Helinsky, Caleen Jennings, Amrita Ramanan, and T.J. Young, allowed me to think about this play in new ways. I believe that form follows function, and an exercise T.J. Young gave us—the creation of a haiku describing our play—helped me to begin refining the form *I Lived to Tell* would take. My haiku read:

*I have had cancer.*

*I overdosed in my room.*

*I lived to tell this.*

Because *I Lived to Tell* began as poetry, I found great satisfaction in reversing the development process by lending its structure to a haiku. I am also grateful for the opportunity I had to develop an earlier version of *I Lived to Tell* in Advanced Workshop with Kimberly Patterson. The work I did in in that class and the feedback I received in it directly informs the play that it is today. Advanced Workshop was a four-student class I was fortunate to attend with three students—now good friends—with whom I had entered the program: Walter Dodd, Shelby Love,

and Lauren Brook Ellis. The writing exercises we undertook and the intimate setting the class afforded for sharing our work, allowed me to dive deeply into this most personal play. I found that exploratory writing was just as important to the development of *I Lived to Tell* as were submitted assignments. Both deepened the play in ways I cannot explain. Most recently, *I Lived to Tell* was chosen as a finalist for the John Cauble short play award for KCACTF Region IV. This past week the director, Richard Cannaday and Laurie McCants, the actor, and I recorded a performance of *I Lived to Tell* that will be presented during the KCACTF Region IV Festival 54.

Before my NPP Play Reading of *I Lived to Tell* at the KCACTF Region IV Festival, I had a phone call with Todd Ristau. We reviewed the framework of the upcoming reading and feedback session. I mentioned the reference in my play *I Lived to Tell* to “blue roses” from *The Glass Menagerie* and we discussed a class I had taken with Todd in 2019, Short Forms, and the influence of Tennessee Williams’ work on mine. We spoke about inciting incidents and how they inform the beginning of a play: What occurs that forces the character to take this journey? I believe that a play needs a beginning, middle, and an end in order to have a complete experience for the audience. I knew that *I Lived to Tell* has a strong ending moment, but wasn’t sure about the beginning, so I was looking forward to hearing feedback at the KCACTF Region IV Festival.

Audrey Cefaly, Ben Gonzales, and Aaron Scully provided thoughtful, enlightening, and reassuring feedback. Ben Gonzales asked who Elizabeth was speaking to. Audrey Cefaly spoke of hypnotic storytelling, the hairpin turns in my play, and how much she appreciated the silences. Aaron Scully, whom I had met at the 2018 Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive, talked about the narrative imagery, in which he found compelling. All in all, it was a wonderful experience. I came away believing in my play and excited to write a new draft. *I Lived to Tell* was chosen as a Finalist for The John Cauble One-Act Play Award and will be submitted for possible National Recognition.

In Narrative Theory and Structure, we examined our plays using the dramatic structure theory we learned viewing the plays through the different lenses: Freytag’s Pyramid, The Poetics, and Elinor Fuchs’ “Visit to a Small Planet.” Although each draft of *I Lived to Tell* differed greatly in structure and form, one thing remained constant: the climax—the point at which the protagonist overdoses, the moment where the main character lives or dies. This is the fulcrum, or point of no return in *I Lived to Tell*. The exposition, rising action, resolution, and dénouement all hinge on this moment in the play. In the end, this is a play about a woman who wants to live, but in order to do so, must accept life in all of its complexity. It all takes place in her mind. We know the play is over, when she takes out red lipstick and applies it to her lips.

The past six years in the Hollins Playwriting Program have given me the tools needed for the craft of playwriting, the courage to express my voice in my writing, relationships with dedicated colleagues who share my passion for theatre, and the understanding of the importance of the audience, the knowledge of the painstaking effort that goes into the production of a new play, and the gratitude for the teachers and administrators who make it possible. I leave Hollins

University with the knowledge that my time here has been well-spent. I have become a better student, artist, and most important of all, a better human being. Having come to this program as an actor, a poet, and an artist, I leave it a playwright.

#### References

Adler, G., Hull, R.F.C., ed. *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 6: Psychological Types*. Vol. 6. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976. Print.

Christiansen, R. "Spalding Gray Has Compelling Story to Tell About 'Swimming to Cambodia'." *Chicago Tribune* 1985, sec. Entertainment. Print.

Davies, M. "'New Dramaturgies:’ Insights into Mark Bly’s Playwriting Exercises. Interview with Mark Bly." *The Theater Times* April 4, 2020.

Freytag, Gustav. *Die Technik Des Dramas*. Hirzel, 1863.

Fuchs, Elinor. "Ef's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play." *Theater* 34.2 (2004): 5-9. Print.

Gregory, D.W. "Playwriting: Breaking the Block, Part I." *D.W. Gregory Blog* n.d. Web. January 22, 2022.