

Muddle: The Trouble for Mothers

Four Short Plays

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Department of English, Film, and Theatre

University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB

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Abstract:

The following creative writing thesis is an artistic interrogation of various mediating affects in personal relationships, including: language; illness; cultural constraints; memory; the challenges of love, care, and communication; as well as displacement, loss, racism, and other damages from war. The interrogation is presented as a sequence of four playlets, theoretically framed by an introductory essay. Besides providing personal justification for the creative work, as well as notes on the genre, the introduction functions as a philosophically interpretive guide, offering a loosely psychoanalytic and existentialist investigation of certain problems of potential entrapment, or liberation within connotations of language and disparate meaning systems — especially pertaining to *narrative identity construction*. The thesis should reveal that certain conditions of existence (i.e., the inevitability of suffering, disconnection, sickness, loss, or death) are not so much changed through narrative, as the experience of events of self and other might be potentially altered, within a co-creative and malleable meaning system, in which actualized connection (in part through empathy) can provide a strong antidote to isolation.

Acknowledgements:

This degree has been made possible through the generous financial support from several sources, in the forms of various awards, scholarships, fellowships, and bursaries. I would like to thank: The Brandon University Department of English and Creative Writing, The University of Manitoba Department of English, Film, and Theatre, The University of Manitoba Faculty of Graduate Studies, The University of Manitoba Centre for Creative Writing and Oral Culture, The Canadian SSHRC, The Manitoba Arts Council; and *Prairie Fire* Literary Magazine for support in the form of publishing.

I am grateful to my brilliant teachers for patient, astute, exceptionally kind, and encouraging council, as well as for inspiring me through making and/or exposing me to great art: Dale Lakevold, Di Brandt, Reinhold Kramer, Rosanne Gasse, Laurie Block, Patti Harms, Jim Forsythe, Michelle Faubert, Serenity Joo, Dana Medoro, Diana Brydon, and especially to my advisor, George Toles, for my newly larger, richer world, and for entering into dialogue with me.

Thanks to Anita King, Darlene McWhirter, Vanessa Warne, Glenn Clark, Louise Renée, and Warren Cariou.

Thanks to Al Cameron, John & Nicole Cameron, and Marie, Chris, Caitlin & Amber Drohan.

Also, thank you to my dear family of kindreds for constantly loving and supportive friendship: Robin MacColl; Paul St Pierre; Ryan Hrabliuk; Charlotte Cook-Dowsett; Reta Saborowski & Baby Isabella.; Kaylee Juliak; Jennifer Nicholson, Jeffery, Benjamin & Elanor Scott; Krista Ferguson, Ezra & Adrienne Penn; Candice Arthur, Sean, Sadie & Billie McCormick; Lindsay and Susan Miller; Janet Smith and Scott Stewart; Shanti Subedar & Tanya Shultz; Kim Moffat & Clinic Peeps; Rodney Huculak.

And to my loving and joyful daughter, Aly Cameron, who greatly inspires my perseverance.

Dedication:

For my mother, the talker, who loves learning the names of things. For my grandmothers and their dreams. And especially for my daughter, with Love from your happy, lucky mum.

Chapter I: Introduction

Language as Longing in *Muddle: The Trouble for Mothers*

Four Short Plays

A Theoretical Introduction to Kirsty Cameron's MA Thesis

“Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us.”
-Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

A writer often begins at a loss. The intuitive, pre-verbal intimations or the strong sense impressions that lead one along her own particular turkey trail of obsessions, or into clouds of abstractions wanting form can take a better shape for contemplation once cajoled into language. Language, like love in the Platonic sense, is evidence of a longing — one wants, or writes in an attempt to have what one does not yet possess. Curiosity, not certainty, impels the writer. One writes after questions, to discover what one understands, or to confront what of questions was formerly hidden in the silent gaps. Among a series of dramatic events in my early childhood and development, being separated at two years old from my mother due to her experience with psychiatric illness, then maintaining a lifelong relatively distant relationship with her (largely mediated through letter writing, or telephone conversations) and becoming a mother myself at a young age (without having been consistently mothered) have continually forced my own questions of (maternal) care, which are central to constructions of meaning in my life. Wondering about questions of care and love in families and relationships — some of the primary themes in my creative thesis, *Muddle: The Trouble for Mothers, Four Short Plays* — are my earliest and most persistent questions. My explorations seem also to have always occurred through

storytelling, as curiosities over meaning in and through language have also pestered me since one of my earliest childhood realizations that there was often a difference between what people said and what was meant, along with an awareness that fictive stories could offer me a truer sense of reality than many other ways language was used to explain things. Having a mother with an extremely idiosyncratic personal use of language — a model for the character “Joanie” in the sequence, also influencing the character “Camille” in *Jump* in terms of her relationship to shifting senses of self-definition, whose father was psychologically injured through war like the character “Harry” in *Rain*, and whose voluble words and stories are either not always believable, are not always believed, or are repeated incessantly as momentary frames on truths in a mash of loose associations — compelled me to have to patch together senses of family narrative to either locate, or better name my own place. Words were my earliest map in this quest of questions.

Language has always been necessarily and carefully scrutinized by me as it pertains to shifting senses of identity, or definition, since often words or silences functioned in my young world as codes for alternate and significant meaning systems which were not overtly articulated. This fact has not undermined, but emphasizes the multiple ways meaning is told or experienced, exaggerating either a question of the hiddenness of unclaimed or unconscious meaning, or its affect — which I often view as the search for a good story as the best possible version of truth, or understanding in a moment, which become the various *choices* of meaning. I admire thinkers and writers who refuse to reduce complex phenomenologies, imagining strict categories for identities of being, isolating tenets of affect in terms of the specificities of mental illness, or even the more poetic, or elevated ‘madness,’ but instead present an intelligibility to questions of a troubled semantic that could otherwise be dismissed as nonsense. As intriguing as it is to speculate about

characters in fiction, when the people with whom you share blood become character-like (due to a separation from them or their extreme expressions of apparent great remove from ‘the ordinary’), then the poignancy of the view on and various considerations of the meaning of certain subjective narrative designs are deepened. Within this system of wonder, the values of various personally told stories are weighed especially in terms of not readily accepting any easily labelled types, definitions of being, or moral judgments in relation to difference. A heightened awareness that there is always a little more to learn (about one’s self, or others, or the world) and that meaning is not fixed become the guides for curiosity. At least, this has been my personal experience, and these themes resonate in the art that I appreciate or attempt to make. Forgiveness in the face of the inevitable contradictions of being (or expression) must accompany searches for meaning in any system of necessary flux. Here, the flux can also be celebrated in fluid terms which do not even need to pretend to be definitive. Here also, the poetry of moments can more loudly announce its availability, as when little can be taken for granted, less of what exists might be lost.

According to my mother’s telling of my conception near the time of my great-grandmother’s funeral, this story became poetically woven into my personal mythology and appreciation of the significance of the *character* of the influential woman, whose ending was my beginning. My great-grandmother is the model for the character “Alice” in *Rain*, whom I have come to know largely through the photocopied pages of her typed memoirs. My interest in my great-grandmother’s life is also a deep interest in my grandmother and mother’s lives, inseparable from a deep interest in my own life, connecting me also to a deep interest in my daughter’s life. These personal interests parallel my general interests in other questions of love,

care, and connection (or their lack) — maternal, or otherwise — which are the themes I tend to write most about. Also, my great-grandmother's residence on the recently colonized Salt Spring Island after a difficult period of homesteading on the prairies (the latter place eventually becoming my home after my earliest connections to the coast and mountains) intensifies my attachment to and curiosity about the complicated west coast Gulf Island place, which has itself become a character in my personal imaginarium. What I have lacked in up-close family experience, or knowledge about people, or place, I construct in language, existing as I do in a string of writers from my great-grandmother, who lists the prices of butter and sugar at the Swan River general Store in 1905; through my grandmother's daily journal entries fifty years later on how many loaves of bread she baked, whether the cherry trees were in bloom, or whom she visited in the hospital; as well as my mother's current weekly letters to me describing variously what she ate for breakfast, or the colour and temper of the day's sky and wind; to my regular sweet and funny banter through text messages with my daughter, as a significant aspect of our shared love and humour. I see my writer's place in this line as embellishing what already exists, sewing together the gaps with a narrative thread.

Any vitality in my creative work regarding questions of the damages from war, or curiosities about madness, mental illness, suicide, connection and disconnection in relationships, poverty, class, religion, silence, art, and the phenomenology of self *as story* derive from my closest experiences and reflections. Above all, I perceive narrative as an empathetic bridge between otherwise potentially isolated others. In this opportunity of communication, I perceive the possibility for shared understanding, meaning, healing, and when this communication is at its best, also a place of peace. My central fixations on these concerns are consistent in much of my

life, from my doing counselling work in crisis intervention and suicide prevention, or my intellectual and creative musings as I work out my considerations through study, and my own forms of storytelling. Besides needing or wanting explanation, it seems also that art will simply continually return anyway, as its own justification for what it is, or does, or wants, or hopes for.

A work of art is the record of the progress of both feeling and thought, meaning exactly what only it can mean in the many ways it signals meaning. To speculate about what various impressions might mean prior to writing is a difficulty which many writers will tell you can be fatal to art. Theorizing a piece too thoroughly before writing it can kill the writer's impulse to write. Perhaps it is more apt to address the question of meaning (or, ironically, what one intends) after the fact of writing, when the shifting terrain of signs offers up its various momentary footholds, so an audience can stand to contemplate a view. However, prior to writing, a particular form or genre still might assert itself as the best container for certain explorations. Writing short dramatic scenes, or playlets, occurs to me as an opportunity to set a mood, or create a brief, but impactful sketch, or to offer up an image unfolding in time more slowly than what might occur through the writing, or reading of a poem. Exploring character in this way also provides me with an opportunity to dig a little deeper into character than what I might be able to do in writing prose short-stories, in my attempt to find meaning in the gaps. Intimations of understanding, contradictory moods, or feelings, and various odd situation with language and shifting connotations impacting relationships can, if the writing works well, be further realized (by me as a writer, at least) once characters start talking to one another, and I imagine them as players with full lives of un-confined dimensions. Ideally, a more thorough exploration of tensions, revealed differences, or tender, fleeting moments of connection — connections which happen rarely in

life, but in whose quest becomes the green fuse driving so much of speech and creation — is what can happen through even a few moments of dialogue, which in life are opportunities for all of history to enter a room, however commonly so much of communication is casually dismissed. Also, I write scenes intended to be *played* by people. In this way, I hope to enter into dialogue with others, however mediated the form of discussion. Writing a five minute playlet is like offering up a short sentence in a long and evolving, artful conversation. Writing is also playing with meaning in the consideration of ideas, as the short scenes provide momentary frames for the subtleties of the questions of being. That these frames might shift depending on who later embodies the character is a co-creative delight and relief to me. On another note, while I have admitted that much of my work derives from personal experience, I will still preface it by referencing a quote of Di Brandt's, from the beginning of her *Questions I asked my mother*, when she introduces her work by writing, "Some of this is autobiographical & some of it is not (Brandt iii)." Since surely one's story of self must be as prone to flux as one's stories of others, an artful telling leaves room for change.

A story is a record of conflict in search of a resolution. In the rest of the following introduction to the short dramatic piece *Muddle: The Trouble for Mothers, Four Short Plays*, I will briefly discuss some stories of conflicts as primary themes in *Muddle's* playlets of varying lengths, each offering a glimpse at moments of relationship between characters searching for connection. Of particular interest to me is the question of what mediates connection in relationship, especially within the general broad category of language. Where longing is expressed through language, I hope to show how it is want for connection in relationships. Love, as it pertains to connection in relationships, and the concepts of a narrated self, or of *narrative*

identity construction — which is also the ‘co-creation of identity of self and other’ (in the existentialist sense soon to be elaborated in this introduction) — are in focus in each of the sequence’s playlets. As well, within the scrutiny of uses of language in relationships, plays of and on meaning and the (re)narration of connection and meaning are essentially viewed. The connotations of language pertaining to the poetics of madness, or mental illness and its flight from the world; the symbolism of religion; attempts at relational connection; Twentieth Century cultural conflicts on Salt Spring Island, Canada, especially racism and intergeneration trouble for mothers and others in relation to war; the mediation of memory; and mid-life wrestling with the guises of contemporary pop cultural affect are some of the playlets’ main stories. If there are gaps in what I hoped to convey in the sequence, then a record of an exploration still exists here, with questions of the semiotics of narrative held momentarily in their existentialist containers — expressions of various mythologies and metaphors of being. The rest of this introduction should be an elaboration of some of *Muddle*’s philosophical underpinnings, interspersed with words on specific aspects of narrative structure.

A simple list can address the more obvious questions regarding the structure of the playlets. From Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* comes the minimalistic theatrical affect (evident in each short play). A lack of props and scenery can ideally supply a clearer canvas for the audience to consider a space on which to project personal fantasy and desires. Ironically, mimed action raises pointed questions about the significance of action generally in temporal terms, or in terms of meaning. From John Murrell’s *Waiting for the Parade*, I took a measure of inspiration toward reviewing vernacular around a particular Canadian narrative of war, to recall certain events often lost to conventional, or accepted public remembrance. From Dale Lakevold’s *Aleta Day I*

learned the magical theatrical effect of letter writing and reading as exposition, which doubles as character revelation (evident in *Rain*). From reading Annie Baker's *Circle Mirror Transformation* and *The Flick*, I became emboldened to closely view contemporary cultural moments (especially evident in the playlets *Cradle* and *Jump*). Recently I was inspired after a viewing of Will Eno's *Middletown*, by its sensitive exploration of relationships. My inspiration from Tennessee Williams, besides his brilliant poetic and characterization might be summed up in his 1972 "Too Personal," written as an introduction to his play *Small Craft Warnings*, framing something more of my own creative thrust:

It is the responsibility of the writer to put his experiences as a being into work that refines it and elevates it and makes of it an essence that a wide audience can somehow manage to feel in themselves: "This is true."/In all human experience, there are parallels which permit common understanding in the telling and hearing, and it is the frightening responsibility of an artist to make what is directly or allusively close to his own being communicable and understandable, however disturbingly, to the hearts and minds of all whom he addresses (167).

The unique beauty and terror of the strange act of writing fiction as a record of one's essential life experience is also what makes writing necessary for structuring the writerly imagination, as I have discovered writing to be an integral type of thinking, reducing my senses of more limited access to the world, or even to my own understanding.

Besides those more obvious tenets of structure, there is the question of the structure of *Muddle*, or of *style* as meaning — in the ways that structure and style are synonymous — or of the meaning of and in structure, or style. Here, my definition of style is from Susan Sontag in her 1962 essay "On Style," as the "epistemological decision (35)," or 'distantly objective construction of a work of art, advancing an idea of meaning necessarily, if latently (Sontag

15-36).’ A major structural container consciously constructed in my sequence *Muddle* is the play on, or within the play aspects, apparent in all of the short works. The play on, or within a play theme begins with *Regalia*, where one of the two main characters is called “Actress” and literally narrates the events of the play as they have, or as they are about to occur, raising questions of the subjective interpretation of phenomena and value judgments made within the complex terrain of mental illness (if it is accepted that the character “Joanie” is mentally ill); through to *Jump*, where questions of the roles of the narratives of popular culture and various conventions of manners, as they are linked to the phenomenology of self, become major themes of the play. In *Jump*, the character “Camille” experiences herself as trapped by absurdity and walled in by the words, definitions, and meaning structures of others (such as those of her mother Joanie’s — the character who also appears in *Regalia* and *Rain*), which are staged within the play *as various plays* to heighten the problem of absurdity. Camille’s initial, unclaimed longing is to connect with someone in a less mediated, more authentic way. This opportunity is facilitated when Camille must choose and instinctively, or automatically chooses (i.e., without mediating contemplation, or distancing cynicism) to act to save the life of her friend “Amy.” Camille’s action shatters her cynicism and opens up a possibility for an altered lived experience and phenomenology of self. However, several questions remain: Is the happening of Amy rushing onto the bridge to jump (thereby saving Camille’s life) the act of God Camille was waiting for on Suicide Bridge? Was Camille saved by God, her friend, or by something else?

The question of the play of religious, or spiritual intervention (as a mediator in relationships) is also alluded to crudely at various times in *Rain*, especially through the character “Alice’s” questioning the supposed Christian invocation of God in support of racist rhetoric.

Alice's theatrical staging of the Pauline tract "First Corinthians," which is used as a modern Christian wedding verse, usually intended to celebrate, announce, articulate, or warn against some complications of love, is placed in Act II, Scene III of the short play to emphasize Alice's embodiment of love — an embodiment less dependent on rhetoric than actions, which in Alice's case are fuelled by compassionate understanding. However, the verse is also placed to question the general efficacy of colloquial framing narratives, especially when meaning is either idiosyncratically squeezed, or extremely loosened to express unjust fanaticism (such as racial discrimination). The issue of Alice's drunkenness also emphasizes a question of plays of meaning, as an audience might question whether the invisible audience in the scene would find Alice's plea for compassion compelling, considering Alice's inebriated delivery. As well, Alice's constant lapses into memory, which appear in the playlet *Rain* as flashback episodes woven into the other timeline, hinged by the impact of war on the family, indicate the persistence of Alice's relationship with her dead husband as an occurrence in memory. The question is of the harsh determinism of war inflecting narrative play, especially in relation to the mediating affects of love in relationships, or appeals to framing colloquial cultural idioms (including the religious).

Wondering about appeals to religious, or spiritual invocations (fanatical or otherwise), and memory as mediators in relationships is a theme articulated more succinctly in the five minute short *Cradle*. Here, communication and relative closeness (or distance) between a couple is being negotiated as they attempt to determine (or experience) connection at the event of the impending birth of their child. Although confusion is apparent through "Samantha's" awkward retelling of a religious philosophy she only loosely understands, interrupting "Sean's" first attempt to confess his feelings (potentially thwarting his movement toward connection), what

follows in the scene could be played to illustrate the couple actually connecting through a shared expression of what, on some level, is to them the foreign cultural-religious utterance “Om.” The viewer must decide the value of the symbolism, and also what various symbols could potentially mean for communication and connection in relationships. Sean’s memories in *Cradle* are also displayed as he questions his own nature prior to becoming a father. *Regalia* also invokes religious imagery and problems of memory to question the placement of symbolism as a mediator in relationships. Here, the meaning of Joanie’s expression of her personal relationship to various religious symbols (her singing of the hymn, her participation in the funeral, her thoughts about the Christian God, her understanding of the priest’s connection to marriage, and the idea of immaculate conception, etc.) must be interrogated. Does Joanie’s apparent understanding and invocation of, or her participation in a world of religious symbolism bring her closer to any sense of shared cultural understanding, or does it drive Joanie away from connection? Conversely, does Actress’s religiously devotional appeal to poetry in her invocation of Carl Solomon, the “mad” addressee in Allen Ginsberg’s famous “Howl” poem, bring Actress closer to understanding her mother Joanie’s “madness” (the literary equivalent to mental illness), or not? The discrepancies and agreements apparent in the languages of various shared meaning systems, which become the isolating and disconnecting fissures between separate memory/identity systems, mediate the slippery semantics of relationships in each playlet, for the characters seeking connection.

Playing on various plays of systems of relative connection, or themes questioning structures of meaning, especially toward senses of self identity, and/or influences on relationships, appears in much of my creative thought and work. Much ground for these

theoretical musings is fertilized by Victor Frankl's important existentialist text *Man's Search for Meaning*. Central to tenets of the development and maintenance of identity in relation to meaning structures is Frankl's concept of *logotherapy*. *Logotherapy* is a form of a personal narrative technique toward potential psycho-spiritual health, underpinned by the idea that "striving to find a meaning in one's life," or a "*will to meaning*," rather than the Freudian *will to pleasure*, or the Adlerian/Nietzschean *will to power* is a "primary motivational [human life] force (99 Frankl)." This is to say that personally decided, or expressed 'stories of meaning' about who we are, or about what is important, including choices regarding orientations of and to various identity and meaning structures, such as engagement in community, or relationships, are the necessary potential ground for fuller psychological health. Frankl's basic tenet is that an individual can realize greater existential freedom and psychological strength, or health by determining (or narrating) the meaning of her own experience, even within confinement (Frankl 102-107). This determination of meaning includes senses, or concepts, of self definition, which can be malleable and also become significant toward the health of relationships. Personal participation in the mediating aspects of narrative have potentially deterministic outcomes for relationships, even within some situations of conflict (Frankl 107). At any rate, the question of the variability of meaning acts as a hinge on a door opening to various possibilities of philosophical orientation. *Narrative play* becomes the possible field of self-understanding and renewal, incorporating and allowing for change within individual memory systems, while also potentially increasing meaning in life, and greater understanding of, and connection with others.

While story-telling is probably as ancient as language, since Freud's implementation of the psychotherapeutic *talking cure*, psychoanalysis has become a system of shifting meaning

structures through story-telling, as is indicated by Peter Brooks's in his 1994 *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*, as well as by many others (such as Jungian psychotherapist and folklorist, Clarissa Pinkola Estez, in her *Women Who Run With the Wolves*), who note the expansive implications of narrative. The significance of one's own decisions, or expressions of a *narrative of self* are an integral actant within community, or generally in relationality. Acceptance of the viability of a personally decided meaning structure (or of a self in the world) can lead to an ethic of care, whereby recognition of the possibility for the existence of a uniquely separate individual, who might become revealed (or who is always being uncovered, even unto self) indicates caution around imposing judgments of definition. Here, accepting the inevitability of *playing with*, or of *plays on meaning* become essential to an understanding of the variability and contingency of meaning, according with Frankl's idea that, "...the meaning of life differs from...[person] to... [person], from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment (Frankl 110)."

The semantics of meaning in relation to a person's sense of self depends on relationships with others, who are also largely (potentially, or actually) self-determining personal meaning systems. According to Frankl, 'loving a person provides the greatest insight into another's being' within the variability of meaning systems (113). As Frankl understands loving, love is a "primary phenomenon" and the surest way to "grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality (Frankl 113)." Loving another becomes an act of witnessing that person, which is a key unlocking certain "potentialities" of being within various systems of meaning (Frankl 114).

As I hoped to demonstrate through aspects of my dramatic sequence *Muddle*, in line with some tenets of existentialist theories of self and other, definition (of self and other, as well as the

viability of relationships) does not occur in an existential vacuum, but in relation to others who are also defining, and also in relation to collective meaning systems in their myriad variability. According to R.D. Laing in his foundational psychoanalytic text *Self and Others*, a self in definition becomes further realized through recognition and reflection by others. Toward the psychoanalytic concept of a system of co-creation of identity (or of a potential community-of-care's relative determination toward self definition), Laing states in the "Complementarity" section of *Self and Others*:

All 'identities' require an other: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized. The other by his or her actions may impose on self an unwanted identity...By complementarity I denote that function of personal relations whereby the other fulfils or completes self...(Laing, 82).

This idea of the fulfilment, or the completion of a self requiring an experience with the other, or needing an act of complementary witnessing by another, far from being a worrying concept, provides insight into the phenomenon of mirroring in the regular acts of mimicry of the *playing* human species, as markers of personality development, or in the creation of self-identity.

Experiences of self in relation to others fosters expressions, or realizations of versions of self in a co-creative situation of narrative interplay. Within shared meaning systems, receptivity to the unique separateness of another occurs through various acts of recognition, where the two beings collide in (accidental, or conscious) acts of co-creation, which might be understood within the circle of Frankl's state of love. Shared experience (where experience *can* be shared) and value determinations congeal according to various language/semantic systems. Shared, or contested narratives are the markers of communities, or affinity groups. They also constitute the threads of relationships. Caring for one's vision (or story) of another includes caring for a vision (or story)

of self, as the mutual acts express necessary co-dependence in an inevitable feedback loop, which becomes the phenomena, or experiences of connection.

It occurred to me that if I wanted to illustrate in my dramatic sequence *Muddle* the significance of how care, recognition, or connection in relationships contributes to shifting senses of identity, or the co-creative aspects of identity formation — i.e., the general *narratives* of identity — then I would have to illustrate various difficulties arising from either an individual's inability to adjust well to the conditions of needing to provide care, or from one (or a group) having been oddly cared for by the close environments offered up by the family, a lover, or one's general cultural communities. Issues of care in the series of playlets are strongly connected to the shaping influences of love, or lovelessness. Issues of love (having, getting, needing, wanting, giving, receiving, or experiencing love in all the silent and loud ways which this occurs) are the ultimate correlates in each question of identity challenged in my series *Muddle*. As the whole drama of self plays out crudely on the level of narrative, with senses of self framed by parameters of love, a possible explanation arises for the perennial attraction to stories and storytelling. Perhaps our storytelling supports our attempts to reconcile ourselves with what Ernest Becker in his existentialist text *The Denial of Death* calls... “...*the basic* [human] *animal condition*...[of] the incomprehensible mystery of the body and the world (Becker 35).” Within these mysteries of experience and our attempts to explain them, relations of love and care in the co-creative laboratory of human experience seem to want containment and tend to find it through narrative. Of these questions of self-understanding, definition, or general experience, Becker says there can exist a prior foundational project of consciousness, which is a thrust toward a type of “heroic” experience of being (Becker 1). This ‘heroic phenomenon of

consciousness' is not an exclusive psychic overcoming of the body (which Becker says is impossible), but more the development of a meaning system (the heroic feat) which makes human experience intelligible, or otherwise narrates it (Becker 1-7). The language, or narrative of self in its heroic thrust, works toward degrees of reconciliation with the challenges from existing in a body, to existing within Laing's "...social system or "nexus" of persons," whereby individuals 'influence the other's experiences of self' in ways that, according to Laing, also go so far as to potentially, "contribute...to the other's fulfillment or destruction (Laing 9)." The complex languages of love, of care, and of co-creation in relationships are what love, care, and identity co-creation *mean*. The defining projects with their shifting plays of and on meaning manifest in various states of personal containment, spillage, or outlying influences within community.

The character of Joanie, as she is seen at age sixteen in the longest playlet in the series *Rain*, is a character whose boundaries of self (as I attempt to draw them) are fluid to the extent of her alienation from the regular words and ways of the world. That is, Joanie is not contained by her own internal dimensions of character, as what might compel another character to occasionally speak her own personal feelings, or opinions. Rather, Joanie exists as a *character composite*, much in the way that Echo appears in the Greek myth, *Narcissus*. Just like Echo the nymph in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* version of the myth, as cited by philosopher and psychotherapist Thomas Moore in his *Care of the Soul* — who falls in love with Narcissus, the rigid youth who is unavailable for love with others due to his preoccupations with himself (Moore 55-65) — Joanie cannot speak her own language. Instead, like the mythic Echo, Joanie appears to echo the tail ends, or poignant aspects of others' speech. If Joanie is not echoing the

words of others, then she speaks (through her body, especially with her apparently unintelligible language) aspects of the language of her environment. Besides literally echoing others' speech, Joanie speaks what others think, or feel, but do not always specifically articulate directly in verbal language. Joanie emphasizes meaning by echoing it. Joanie's echoing speech also reflects the moods of her environment. Joanie's expression of meaning is also counter to what generally can be, or is specifically stated outright by other characters, through the usually acceptable colloquial narratives of Joanie's world. Joanie's awkward expressions belie the lingering record of island racism, her mother's ambivalence, or her heightened awareness of her father's tragedy — which becomes a legacy of her father's trauma. Much as other characters in the play carry their deeper stories of self, or experiences of being silently and so appear in dramatically fragmentary ways, as when Harry carries the story of war in his body, but cannot have a conversation with his wife, or when Phyllis, or Alice, or Mrs. Miyazaki contain the multiple stories of their fears and losses, and remain disconnected from potentially helpful relationships, until Joanie connects with "Richie," she appears to only tell the stories of others. This apparent lack of speaking for, or of herself, leaves open a question whether Joanie possesses her own self, or any version of herself which might be separate from others, as what is required for relationship. It is unclear whether Joanie retains the ability to transform her character in relation to others in any positive sense, as her mother appears not to recognize anything of value in Joanie, and Joanie's father remains mostly despondent throughout the course of the playlet. Unless either Joanie can communicate something of her unique identity, or something in her (existing prior to, or outside of certain tenets of expressed language) can be recognized by another, she could remain as an object character, with a frustratingly static reflection. Joanie's

meaning system is poised as a potentially isolated and isolating trap of disconnection, which cannot simply be effaced by telling a more compelling story.

Questions of the placement, or efficacy of one's own voice, or voicelessness (or the various uses of language) in relation to love, or its lack — which hinge partially on recognition and reflection through relationship — are also raised by other characters in the sequence. In reaching out for sympathy in *Cradle*, for instance, the character “Sean” is met by his partner “Samantha” with a reflection of a movie reference. After Sean, in a moment of vulnerability, shares his tender story of killing a frog as a child, Samantha mediates connection by responding that Sean's story reminds her of a scene from a Charlie Kaufman movie. While it is possible that the couple could connect over the shared reference, the reference also becomes an echo of Sean's lived and personally felt experience, disconnected from the experience, or at least from Sean's telling. The ‘echo’ is more of an imposition of Samantha's reflection, potentially obliterating an aspect of Sean by not recognizing it, or through calling it by another name. The character of Samantha here appears as Harry appears in *Rain* — as someone unavailable to a moment of vulnerability in relationship, except through highly mediated expression. The high mediation, lack of mediation, or general difficulty with connection churns meaning (of self, or of selves) into limited echoes of self-reflection, altering relationship.

The character Camille in *Jump* is also a figure who appears trapped in the system of her own echoes, ironically flooded by the words and ways of others while simultaneously unable to realize relationship, or connection, due to the distance between herself and the ‘speaking world’ which has flooded her. This flooding includes reverberations of her mother Joanie's affect, emphasizing a trajectory of the character Joanie's language, or meaning system, which reflects a

limiting tone. Reading Joanie as (merely) a dependent, or ineffectual victim character whose speech is suspect becomes more poignant (and debatable) in relation to her daughter Camille/Actress, who must piece together her mother's affect, along with questions of love, family, and maternity in a questioning of her own separate identity. Both Joanie and Camille appear in the sequence as characters fragmented in ways that cause them to become lost *in* and possibly to others. According to Moore, after Echo is rebuked in her love for Narcissus, "in her grief, feeling rejected and frustrated, Echo then loses her body and becomes a mere voice (Moore 58)." The voice of Echo in relation to Narcissus (or narcissism) is empty of its own personal expression and resounds with fixed meaning. The rigidity is itself of the narcissistic type, which becomes dangerous when the possibilities of transformation through dialogue (or the potentially healing affects of relationship) are shunted into a recursive impasse. The cost of lovelessness can be very high, with a trend toward ossifying repetition, or self replication.

Of course, the loving Alice, the ambling Mamma Bear figure in *Rain* who becomes barren of many cultural, or colloquial conventions and affectations, recognizes various truths of her granddaughter's nature which are not perceived by others. Alice *identifies* Joanie in Joanie's desire for friendship with Richie — an act, or expression signifying personal feeling. That later in Joanie's timeline (in the opening short playlet *Regalia*) Joanie's desire becomes potentially suspect, in that it becomes confusingly distorted in a troubling sexual way (which need not be explained here as anything other than complicated) does not undermine Joanie's ability, or desire to make a connection. While Joanie connects infrequently, when it happens it is with greater lucidity and tenderness than what most of the other characters in the series of playlets can, or do realize. Since the Richie character has experienced his own similar loss and is himself alienated

from much of the common culture of their shared home environment on Salt Spring Island, Richie is undeterred by Joanie's idiosyncratic expression. Richie also recognizes in Joanie what others cannot as immediately perceive, thus Richie's experience with Joanie becomes a place where their shared narrative opens a horizon of possibility. Of course, for the connection to occur, the recognition must be mutual, as it becomes. As Richie sees Joanie, so must Joanie see Richie. Richie and Joanie's private experiences become shared through the loving connection of (the story of) friendship — a connection with the potential to incorporate, or contain pain, without being annihilated by it.

In the Narcissus myth, according to Moore's telling, while Echo 'dies,' or disappears from unrequited love, Narcissus also dies unto his own rigid self obsession — as he must, for growth to occur. The image of the narcissus flower growing up beside the reflecting pool which swallows the figure Narcissus indicates, in Moore's analysis, the "breaking up" of the impenetrable loop of the miserly narcissistic affect; a "transformation" indicating the actual 'fluidity and renewal of identity, which after the dissolution of Narcissus (or of narcissism) is now open to relationship (Moore 59).' As various reflections (of and on self and others) deepen, recognition brings about the changes in character. Alice, Richie, Amy, and Joanie (at least as the latter exists in *Rain*) are the characters in the playlets with outward focus, able to perceive and meet others beyond the looking glass. Through recognition and receptivity, or active engagement in relationship, various echoes of self are transformed. An empathetic bridge becomes relief from isolation, as healing relations of love literally circumscribe, or re-narrate tragedy, or generally provide shelter for those in want of connection.

With Joanie, I hoped to at least hint toward a figure whose acts, set during an adolescent period of her characterization, become a heightened mirror of, or to the world in the sense of embodying a stance within Laing's co-creative 'self-world nexus.' The apparent lack of reflecting the personal contents of self for the sake of reflecting the (under expressed) contents of others occurs in part in strong correlation with the intensely dramatic moment of Joanie's conception and coming into the world during her father's immediate return from war. The attending unspoken traumas of war exist as a living record in Harry's being, manifest in his night terrors, his despondency, and his silences, leaving him rigidly preoccupied (with himself and his own internal states), and therefore unavailable for participation in a fully receptive, reciprocal, loving relationship with his daughter. Harry's rigid unavailability contributes to Joanie's repetition through reflection of the various states of others, in want of a more comprehensive exchange, or the creation of meaning through relationship. While in his *Madness: The Invention of an Idea*, Michel Foucault says that Freud's attempt to 'explain the neurosis of war (Foucault 136)' led to Freud's 'dreaming war,' as a postulation of Thanatos, the inevitable death drive and "counterweight for the life instinct (Foucault 136)," my creative instinct — in a piece considering care in relationships — was to accept a priori that war is (at minimum) a strange alteration in the heroic thrust toward caring for self and others. That is, war is a twisted heroism (in Becker's sense) which tears at relationships, as both the consequence and potential cause of tragedy. The character Percy's desire in *Rain* to care for his reputation through soldiering, as well as for his legacy, his kinship bonds, and to increase his stature (which could ultimately benefit his family) takes him away from immediately caring for his wife and children. Harry's desire to see his distant mother drives him to leave behind his pregnant wife for the war on the other

shore. I meant to spotlight various conditions of war, not to blame any character forged from their consequences, but to demonstrate war's attending situations of grief. The language of war speaks in *Muddle* of psychic injury, racism, as well as family displacement and disconnection.

The symptomatology of grief can manifest in language through the *absence* of expression, or in the silences of the grieved, as Julia Kristeva indicates in her psychoanalytic text *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, when she articulates the aetiology of a sort of “asymbolia (9)” which can occur as a form of deep ‘mourning for the lost object, leading to morbid silence (Kristeva 9-25).’ As Kristeva explains, in the face of an overwhelming loss (of one’s sense of identity, one’s sense of safety, or loss of a beloved, etcetera) certain gravely depressed persons “riveted to their pain...[can] neither act nor speak (Kristeva 34).” Harry in *Rain* is thus grieved. The state of grief so thorough as to lead to the morbid silences of sadness can, Kristeva says, also lead to the final silence of suicide (36). The point regarding grief’s manifestations in language is furthered in Cathy Caruth when in her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* Caruth refers to the apparent untranslatability of certain traumatic experiences, directly on behalf of the injured. Yet, the psychic “wound” of trauma still ‘speaks’ in the “crying voice” of those closest to the injured, as Joanie manifests her father’s pain in the playlet *Rain*, telling of the “violence” of what is otherwise “not fully known (Caruth 7-9).” It is as if the dark secrecies of psychic injury are persistent in their apparent will to be recognized, if only partially glimpsed. Vulnerable and sensitive characters such as Joanie, who exists in *Rain* as if her skin is paper thin — easily written on by others, whose words mix with her own to muddle the questions of her identity — can struggle to declare a self separate to a nexus convoluted by trouble.

An inability to declare an “I” able to perceive a conflict presented by relationship (at least in part) as an object, separate from one’s self — i.e., a thing, or state with which, or a person with whom one enters into dialogue — shifts the possibility of *containing* the conflict, to potentially being *consumed* by it in what Kristeva calls the melancholic “shadow of despair (Kristeva 5).” The situation of not being able to claim a separate “I” outside of conflict can become either the crux of ‘madness’ in extremely alienating environments, or a play within, or on meaning — opening to a sense of possibility through the language-hinge, within the myriad labyrinths of self and other. Like Joanie, who appears *made up* of others, Camille in *Jump* speaks of her own thin skin, which causes the language of others (especially here in terms of of pop culture references and conventions of manners, as annoyingly proffered by the memory of her mother’s invocations) to invade Camille to the extent that she appears also to be *made up* of the stories of others. Camille is obsessed with repeating, arguing with, or decrying various clichés and cultural colloquialisms, as if they have the power to comprise, or challenge the whole of character. Awash in a flood of insensate, or undesirable meaning which Camille cannot satisfyingly contain, or step away from, Camille contemplates suicide as a form of escape from the too noisy, determining world of her imagination — until she experiences a lifesaving connection of friendship, which is hinted at also in *Rain* as a transformative possibility for Joanie.

When, in a state of apparent existential aphasia, or extreme disconnection from her environment, a person retreats into the spiritual wilderness which Tennessee Williams describes as that “...excess of privacy which is imposed upon a person drifting almost willingly out of contact with the world (Williams 165),” then one might ask what alienating cultural situations

forced the movement into the non-consensual, excessively private muddle? In his *Madness the Invention of an Idea*, Michel Foucault admits that while ‘madness’ (known in less literary language as ‘mental illness’) cannot entirely be explained by an appeal to sociological conditions, he still compellingly cites the “psychological dimensions of mental illness” in ‘non autonomous’ terms (Foucault 139). In articulating some conditions of one’s movement away from the world, Foucault states:

...when man remains alienated from what takes place in his language, when he cannot recognize any human, living signification in the production of his activity, when economic and social determinations place constraints upon him and he is unable to feel at home in this world, he lives in a culture that makes...the pathological form[s of various mental illnesses]...possible; a stranger in a real world, he is thrown back upon a “private world”...; subjected, however, to the constraints of this real world, he experiences the world in which he is fleeing as his fate (Foucault 138 - 39).

This sad irony speaks of the dual laceration of abandonment, when one whom is forced from an abandoning world repeats the conditions from which she sought refuge. This conundrum becomes the paradox of escape, when fleeing abandonment becomes a trap of complete (or near complete) abandonment. Abandonment might tend toward repetition, except when something, or someone interrupts its narcissistic echo. Connecting on the bridge in the midst of the muddle is a stutter in the system of hopeless possibility. If the characters Joanie and Actress/Camille (or any other character in the series *Muddle*) are lost, or are considering becoming lost, or are in danger of becoming lost, or of letting go of another character in the wilderness, how far away from the rest of the world do any of these character appear? And, is there evidence in any of the playlets in *Muddle* of any passage back for the ones in drift?

If in *Muddle: The Trouble for Mothers, Four Short Plays* I have sketched images of characters grappling with abandonment, tripped up in conundrums of identity construction, in want of love (or troubled by the limitations of expressing love) in the various challenges of relationships, I hope I have also shown glimpses in the playlets of the idea that *connection* is a possible and strong antidote to much of the alienating difficulties. Recognition of another and receptivity to relationship are possible bridges back to the world. A return to others as reprieve from alienation through the traps of language and the genuine and apparent impasses in discursivity (as reflective echoes of various under expressed depths of being) which they represent, becomes the healing route through various existential troubling muddles. The constancy of the analgesic function of narrative affects the basic transformations of individual consciousness, available to expression and understanding, from making art to conversational play. My work is driven by an assumption that there is more similarity between people than not, as emotional creatures with impulses to love and be loved, and that consensual reality is a fluid narration of meaning, in which caring for self and others can become a shared story.

Chapter II: Plays

Muddle: The Trouble for Mothers

Four Short Plays

Plain set. The stage left tree with a cradle wrapped onto a far branch should only be illuminated during the opening and closing segments. However, the tree can remain onstage for the duration of the four playlets.

Opening segment: Character, dressed in black like a thief with a balaclava (face exposed) tiptoes onto the stage carrying a small gramophone. Character sets the gramophone at the base of the tree, down-stage left, and winds it up. Gramophone starts playing a scratchy, warbling version of the lullaby “Rockabye Baby.” Character runs back across the stage, exits right, and comes back cradling a swaddled baby. Character pauses and with great tenderness, kisses the baby. Character anxiously checks to ensure no one is following. Character climbs the ladder standing beside the tree and carefully places the baby in the cradle, which is perched on the farthest branch. Character rushes down the ladder and looks both ways again before tip-toe/running offstage as the warbling music winds down. Abrupt silence. The sound of a baby’s cry signals an entry into the world of the play(s).

#1

Regalia

Characters:

-Camille Newman, a.k.a Actress: Late twenties. Dressed conservatively. Most of the time the actress will be speaking to the audience, except when she is either calling out to Carl, or speaking with him on the phone, or occasionally when speaking to her mother.

-Actress’s mother, Joanie Newman: Late fifties. Dressed in her “finest regalia,” which should be a melange of costume jewelry: Bright, plastic, bulbous, beaded necklaces from the sixties and seventies, glass brooches from the thirties and forties, and perhaps a hat that would be worn by a contemporary British aristocrat. The hat could have a large, swaying feather, and a mesh veil. Joanie is carrying a plastic bouquet of flowers and wearing a brightly dyed feather boa over her flimsy, pink, cotton nightie. Joanie’s face is coloured by slashes of bright pink lipstick and rouge. Although most of Joanie’s expression is “over the top,” her speech should also contain moments of excruciating lucidity. Also, Joanie is always speaking directly to her daughter, except when addressing the EMTs.

-Two burly EMTs: Any age. Wearing stiff looking uniforms, glossy, black army boots, and police hats.

The set is a barren stage, sometime in the early 2000's.

Actress: [*Hollering into the darkness*] I'm with you in Rockland, Carl Solomon...With you and you and you in Rockland, too...I...am...with you!

[*Lights up on actor, centre-stage, talking into her cell phone*] What? [*Betraying the caller, to the audience*] Carl Solomon's calling to shore from the boat, with suspicions about *The Stage*. [*Back to the person on the phone*]. Suspicions? Oh, you should just come and see for yourself! In a few minutes, my mother is going wander onto the stage in her night-gown, all wild-eyed and breathless. [*Matter of fact and excited, as if giving stage directions for a melodrama, which occur to her as she speaks them*]. She will have forgotten her slippers. Her gown will be a flimsy pink shift of cotton, and the drugs they've pumped her full of will definitely not put her out. [*To the audience*] Even though the doctor said there was enough sedation in her system to drop a full grown horse! [*Back to phone conversation*] No, you just have to imagine it, is all. [*Pause*] There will be a thin covering of snow on the ground and the grass beneath will still be green and iridescent in the moonlight. My mother will have slipped out the front door of the hospital, completely un-noticed. Her great escape. [*Aside, to the audience*] She's really good at it. [*Back to the phone*]...Her hurried footprints will melt a warm line of little impressions across the frozen hospital lawn...

Joanie: [*Walks on stage blunderingly*] Honeeey...

Actress: Oh, that's my mother. Gotta go. [*Hangs up on Carl and tosses the cell phone*]

Joanie: I have been most anointed. I have sung in the church. I am dressed in my finest regalia.

Actress: [*Addressing the audience, in an unemotional reportage*] She was in Victoria last week, at an old friend's funeral.

Joanie: My best friend, Elsie. Sleeping with the Lord.

Actress: [*Informing the audience, flatly re-narrating her mother's expression*] Well, the old woman was more of an acquaintance, really. A good Samaritan of sorts. She suffered my mother sometimes for tea.

Joanie: I walked right up the centre aisle, through all of those pews. Josh, Elsie's nephew, was singing and I took my place right beside him on the stage. Oh, honey, that church was so magnificent...

Actress: And then she started singing, an impromptu vocal performance. My mother, dressed in her finest regalia...Pushing out the words to "The Old Rugged Cross" in her warbling soprano.

Joanie: They were playing my favourite hymn, dear. [*Sings a few notes of The Old Rugged Cross*] “To the old rugged cross I will ever be true; Its shame and reproach gladly bear...” And I just knew that Elsie would want me to join in on a duet. Elsie was a good Christian woman who had been called back home by God. To go to sleep. You know? To get a bit of rest. And then, God called *me* too!

Actress: So, my mother crashed the funeral of her old acquaintance Elsie, upstaged everyone, and made a proper queen of herself while the organist played on.

Joanie: And the pipes on that organ! It was like the pipes in the big churches in Europe, like what we saw when we visited great granny in England. You know, your granny was such a handsome woman. I wonder sometimes if you’re like her...

Actress: Later, at the come and go tea, after sifting through umpteen trays of finger sandwiches...

Joanie: [*Yelling in a sudden burst of anger*] They are NOT ladies fingers!

Actress: [*Bored, or exasperated, perhaps sardonic*] You’re thinking about cookies.

Joanie: Oh, pardon me. [*Pause*] Hon...Gotta kleenex?

Actress: [*Fishes around in her pockets, pulls out a kleenex, hands it to her mother*]

Joanie: Oh, thanks, dear. [*Joanie loudly blows her nose, then hands her daughter back the used kleenex*]

Actress: [*Back to audience, absently taking the kleenex from her mother, and stuffing it back into a pocket*]. Then, after coming on to the minister at the back of the room, during the tea, somebody called the cops on my mother.

Joanie: [*Admonishingly*] He had his hand on my breast, dear.

Actress: She must have...un-buttoned her blouse.

Joanie: I had a feeling he wanted to marry me, dear. I asked him if he was married and he said, no, he wasn’t. [*Laughing*] He had never been married. We could have had a wedding right there! I was certainly dressed for it and he was surely good looking, although a little old. He had wavy white hair, like your grandpa’s was before he died. Wavy and creamy like a great, big bowl full of delectably sculpted mashed potatoes. [*Genuinely puzzled*] Can a minister marry himself?

Actress: So, the question is, was the minister an old, lonely man who sensed his chance to get some action with a very...vulnerable woman? Or...was something else really going on? Poor, old Elsie’s funeral...now a proper mess...and everyone wondering, what to do...What to *do* about Joanie...?

Joanie: [*Loud, agitated, sing-songy voice*] I said, if you want to kiss me you'll have to marry me first!

Actress: [*Turning to her mother, suddenly emotionally engaged*] And then what, Mom? What happened?

Joanie: [*Nervous laughter*] What do you mean, what happened?

Actress: Who called the cops mom? What about the cops?

Joanie: Then he said that he didn't want to marry me at all!

Actress: What did they do to you Mom? Where did they take you?

Joanie: He was shouting at me. He was shouting at me. I told him to stop...He threw me on the ground, dear. Oh, it was awful. Someone was screaming...

Actress: Did he hurt you?

Joanie: They said I cut him...I had painted my nails. They had grown so long. I was screaming, "Help! Help! Somebody help me!" [*Frank and steady*] I think he was trying to rape me, actually.

Actress: [*Back to the audience*] And then the cops came, and took my mother away.

Joanie: I am pregnant, dear.

Actress: She spent four months in the hospital that time. Recovering. Doctor said she was due for a medicine adjustment anyway.

Joanie: God has done this to me! I didn't have sex, honey. I promise.

Actress: Mom?

Joanie: Immaculate conception.

The two EMTs walk on-stage and wrap Joanie up in a fabric which has a straight jacket effect. The EMTs lift Joanie and carry her offstage. Joanie's feet should be dangling and kicking, like a child's.

Joanie: Don't you hurt me! Don't you hurt me! I am carrying a holy child in my body.

Actress: [*Runs a little, trying to catch, or catch up to the EMTs and Joanie, but gives up. Returns very slowly to centre stage. Calls out into the fading light*] Caaaaa-rl? Carl Solomon? Where is Rockland? I repeat: *Where in Hell is Rockland?*

Fade out

End

Characters:

Phyllis Beech/Newman: Invisible Ages 2, 4. Visible ages 30, 35, 49. Adult Phyllis wears fashionably cut, brightly coloured women's print dresses to match the era, except when she is pregnant, and then she wears frocks. Occasionally, Phyllis wears an apron.

Alice Beech: Ages 35, 37, 67, 69, 83. Dressed in plain, or print dresses in neutral colours, usually with an apron, and sometimes in a long woollen coat with a fur collar, and a thick, wooly hat.

Hazel: Same age as Phyllis. Dressed similarly to Phyllis.

Percy Beech: Age 35. Dressed in a 19th century Gulf Islander farm labourer's attire - overalls, gumboots.

Squire Bullocks: Age 45 — a barrel chested, burly, bald headed, bearded man. Dressed in an upper class English gentleman's attire — a white shirt, tie, waistcoat, top hat, and spectacles. He carries a piece of cane.

Invisible Gladys: 4, 6.

Doctor Lionel Beech: Age 85. Dressed like an English middle-class retired doctor, in out-dated British fashion.

Harry Newman: Age 35. Dressed casually in 1950's men's trouser's and a long sleeved cotton shirt.

Mrs. Miyazaki: Ages 40 and 60. Dressed in fashionably cut, darkly coloured house dresses and a long dark blue raincoat, with a cloth belt that she repeatedly tugs on.

Mr. Miyazaki: Slightly older than Harry Newman. Dressed similarly to Harry Newman.

Invisible Miyazaki children: Richie, 4. Baby Mary. Sylvie, 8. Jenny, 6. Reta, 16.

Joanie: Age 16. Dressed in plain denim and a white blouse.

Visible Richie: Age 21. Dressed in denim dungarees and a white top.

The ages of the characters do not need to be precise, as they are intended to serve as a basic a guide to the general trajectory of the narrative, which progresses linearly, except when Alice's

story muddles the timeline through her lapses, or flashbacks into memory, triggering the other timeline. As the timelines blur together in close succession, the challenge for the actress playing Alice is to demonstrate the change in timeline, or her excursions into memory, through changes in characteristics between Alice as a young woman, and Alice as an aging woman. The setting of the play will variously alternate between 1914/16 and other dates in the 1940's, with the whole (short) third act occurring during the summertime of 1963. All of the events occur near Bullocks Lake, close to the village of Ganges, on the largest of the Gulf Islands — Salt Spring Island, Canada. There will be sparse sets and little scenery and props throughout the play, except for the round, wooden dining table with two chairs in the parallel Beach/Newman and Miyazaki homes. As well, the outside down stage left 'lawn chairs' (one round, wicker, and stool like, and one a wooden adirondack) in the Newman family scenes should remain consistent. There should be a tall, oval, stand-up mirror in the back left kitchen of the Beech/Newman homes. An alternative staging would be to place three separate 'circles' of kitchen sets (for younger Alice and Percy Beech, the Newmans, and the Miyazakis), as well as to maintain a separately demarcated circle for Hazel. Alice would travel between two kitchen worlds (with one appearing and functioning as a dream kitchen) while everyone else would remain fixed. Minimalist staging could ideally allow Alice's movement through memory as relatively seamless drifts between her two worlds. The rest of the action (i.e., what occurs outside in the yard, or the park, or the 'bedroom,' or in the Miyazaki garden) could occur downstage. As often as possible, actions such as getting a drink of water, hanging clothing on the line, packing suitcases, or picking berries should be mimed, unless it would be less distracting, or more poignant to work with an actual item. The wicker suitcases should be real, the canes real, Hazel's letter real. Alice's trunk and black coat are also real. However, animals, berries and the berry bucket, the violin, eggs in a bowl and various other referred to items should appear as intimations. Also, the children who significantly populate the play must be given a sense of presence through various gestures and speech directed toward their invisible figures, as if in pantomime. Lighting and scrimms, rather than lush scenery, could emulate the basic moods of scenes, as well as denote changes in era, especially as filters on Alice's recollections. Also, there is a significant difference between the hot, bright, sunny and dry summer Salt Spring days and the wooly, grey days of winter, sopping with low hanging clouds and rain - the world then an iridescent, tangled, un-tamed green wave.

ACT I

Scene I

Lights up on pregnant Phyllis, age 30, during a sunny, summer day on the island in July, 1942. Phyllis mimes hanging clothes on a clothes line, reaching into the pocket of her apron to pull out pins, periodically cradling her very pregnant belly. Alice, age 67, ambles into the scene for the short dialogue. After Alice ambles away, Phyllis perches on a tall, painted wicker chair, to rest and read her letter.

Phyllis:

[*Hanging clothes, offering reportage*] If you think I'm here to offer you up a dire history of war on a silver platter, well...I'm not. I believe it best to remain positive. Besides, that's my mother's story - the dire one. The one about how one day my father went off to war and mother would not see her husband again. [*Pause*] Sixty thousand dead, from Canada, in that war. Many of them fathers. A lot of broken promises. [*Pause*] My father was the only soldier from this place who didn't come back to the island. [*Cradling belly*] But your father will not break *his* promise, little bird. Your father will come home from his war. [*Back to hanging clothes, intermittently pondering*] Mother gets emotional about these things. Still. When Harry and I married last summer, July 1941 - a perfect day for a wedding - mother warned me. But then, she'd gotten angry when Old Man Bullocks showed up, strutting around like a goat in his white beard, attempting to look regal in his ancient top hat.

Alice:

[*Hollering in from offstage*]
Phyllis...

Phyllis:

My mother said...

Alice:

[*Offstage, still hollering*]
You could do better than become a widow.

Phyllis:

I think it was Harry's uniform that set her off. So much like that one picture of my father he sent her before he was killed. But Harry's been gone now six months, after shipping out of Halifax. [*Saluting like a soldier*] *Signalman Harry Newman, Canadian Scottish Regiment, reporting for duty, sir!* And the most he's done is tinker with a few radios. [*Pause*] Father was pushed to the front. He was old, an easy target. I tell mother that Harry won't let that happen to himself.

Alice:

[*Alice ambles into the scene. Admonishingly*] You cannot predict calamity, Phyllis. You must prepare yourself for the worst!

Phyllis:

[*Dismissing her mother*] But how could I not support my own husband? *Phyllis*, he said, *I want to go home to England, to see my mother*. How can a wife argue with that?

Alice:

Has he seen her?

Phyllis:

He's yet to see her.

Alice:

[*Snorts in response. Stands beside Phyllis and begins miming hanging clothing from the same basket*]

Phyllis:

Well, they keep him very busy, but he'll get there. I wrote to her, my mother-in-law, in Dorset.

Alice:

Seems a strange thing for a woman to write to a mother-in-law she's never met.

Phyllis:

[*Orating*] *Your son wishes to inform you that he has enlisted and should be by soon to visit. And she wrote back to say that makes two sons, as Harry's brother Peter, seeing the good sense in things, had also signed up.*

Alice:

In England!

Phyllis:

In England. [*Pause*] But you know, mother, Harry hadn't been back to England since his mother sent him here to his cousin when Harry was a boy. *Salt Spring Island will remind you of home, she said. It will be very wet and very green, in the winter.*

Alice:

All the world thinks they know a thing or two about this place, don't they?

Phyllis:

You will farm sheep like your father, Harry's mother said, and live happily ever after.

Alice:

Name one person you know who's living happily ever after, Miss Phyllis? Seen any queens in castles on the island lately?

Phyllis:

Your heart's a stone, mother. I'm going to make my husband a home, once he returns. You know, he lived his whole youth in a boarding school!

Alice:

She must be a strange one, that mum. Sending her boy away, when she could afford to keep him.

Phyllis:

[*Cradling belly*] None of that will happen to our child! No, little bird...that will not be *your* life...

Alice:

You think you know what fortune has in store for you, do you?

Phyllis:

I'm not inclined to *worry* as you do, mother.

Alice:

You think life's a pretty little package, tied up neatly with a bow!

Phyllis:

You're past help! Maybe you've simply lost too much by now to see anything but holes...in *everything*...

Alice:

How will you continue to make a living, Phyllis, with Harry gone? What if Harry doesn't return? You know what happened to us!

Phyllis:

I will wait for him. I will cook in the new hospital and get paid. I will stay here with you. And when Harry returns, we will start our lives. I have told you this a thousand times!

Alice:

A thousand and one times!

Phyllis:

I will say it again, then. I will say it as many times as I must.

Alice:

[*Alice, preparing to leave the scene*] Again and again and again. You think you can change your life story, daughter, just as easily as you change your woolies. [*Walking off...*] But that's just because it's what you've come to *believe* about the way things *ought* to work...

Phyllis:

[*Dismissing her mother in frustration, plunking herself down on the wicker stool by the clothes line*] She speaks nonsense these days, my mother. Talks to herself, eyes far away. Says she's talking to God, but I hear her say my father's name... But you can't tell her anything, about anything. She's too surly now with her various aches and pains. Besides, you

can't explain a thing to the older generation anyway. All their words of war are death and rot and doomsday! Like they don't have any faith at all in a good outcome.

Scene II

[Phyllis rests on the stool, pulls a letter out of her apron pocket to read aloud. Lights up on a very pregnant Hazel, sitting writing a letter in a lonely, separate circle parallel to Phyllis on the stage. Phyllis waves the letter for the audience]

Phyllis:

A note from my best friend Hazel, writing from Regina.

Hazel:

[Reciting as she writes] My Dearest Bird, August 17, 1942.

Phyllis:

[Looking up] Such a treat to encounter someone who *understands* you...*[Back to reading the letter]*.

Hazel:

How is life for my fellow war wife? Are the kinfolk bothering you as much as mine are bothering me, with the husband away?

Phyllis:

Treacherous!

Hazel:

It's hot in Regina and I miss you terribly. I wish we could rewind ourselves six months, back to Truro, to the moment before our men were pushed out.

Phyllis:

Why didn't you travel back with me...?

Hazel:

Why didn't I travel back with you to your island after the army sent us home, to be where it's cool by the water? Pregnancy on the prairies in the summer is a terror! And since this is my first baby, my feet are swelling like the Dickens. I work the mornings, but I laze afternoons, sipping lemonade, fanning myself like a lady!

Phyllis:

[Looks up] Of course I know she doesn't mean that last part. Hazel hates ladies.

Hazel:

Of course, you know I don't mean that last part. I hate ladies! Have you heard from Harry? Wendell writes to tell me he's bored, which is relief enough to me. Still, I worry about having this baby without him...

[Phyllis pauses and cradles her body/the baby].

Hazel:

Can you send word and tell me how I should survive this? Hire a thousand maids to fan me 'til winter?

Phyllis:

Hazel...I'm so happy we met and had that time together when our men were in training...

Hazel:

I am sure I will be a good mother. Of course, I know you will be, too. I wish we could squish this country together, so our children could live side by side. I'm becoming maudlin. It must be the weather screeching at me, or maybe its my swelling feet. *[Pause]* Kiss, kiss, Bird.

Phyllis:

Kiss, kiss.

Hazel:

Yours, Hazel.

Lights down on Hazel as Phyllis folds up the letter slowly and tucks it back into her pocket.

Phyllis:

My father is buried on another continent in a place my mother will never see. His death was announced by a letter when I was three and my sister five years old. Horrible, really. For mother. But whatever one does, it is best to not bring my father's death up around her! *[Exaggerating, cynical, frustrated]* She's bound to fly into a tizzy, with her habit of exaggerating all pains.

Lights

Scene III

A dreary fall Salt Spring Island day, 1942. In the kitchen of Mr. and Mrs. Miyazaki, the couple are in distressed dialogue about the impending Japanese internment.

Mr. Miyazaki:

They're getting ready to move us off island now...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

It will be alright, Minoru...[*Tentatively*] All the Japanese?

Mr. Miyazaki:

Eventually. For now, it's just the men...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

We're going with you.

Mr. Miyazaki:

No, Sayoko... You have to wait. You can't come with me.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

I want to go with you. The family must remain together.

Mr. Miyazaki:

You need to stay here, to look after the children. You need to stay here to look after the chickens... We need to keep things up now...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

We won't be gone that long! In the market the women are saying the war will be over quickly...

Mr. Miyazaki:

That's not what the men are saying. And the camp where they're sending us will be nothing like home. It's in the mountains. It's going to be cold and there will be a lot of snow. The children won't know how to behave there.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

The children will behave as well there as anywhere.

Mr. Miyazaki:

We do not know how long we'll be forced to stay in the camp, or how they'll make us live. They could put us in shacks! They're housing Japanese in the animal barns in Hastings Park. In the animal barns!

Mrs. Miyazaki:

If we are together, we will be okay...but we are not animals. I am not raising my children in a barn!

Mr. Miyazaki:

What can we do, Sayoko?

Mrs. Miyazaki:

How can I take care of the children in this environment? You know what they're saying about us. Last week Sylvie was chased home from school! A group of kids chased her...almost all the way to the gate. How can we feel safe? I birthed five babies in the Ganges hospital and I've lived half my life on this island!

Mr. Miyazaki:

[*Incredulous*] They think us a threat...in our own home...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

If you leave without us, the children will be frightened.

Mr. Miyazaki:

You might tell them I'm taking a trip.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

They won't believe me.

Mr. Miyazaki:

Make it exciting. Tell them it's an adventure...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

I don't want to lie.

Mr. Miyazaki:

Tell them we'll be together again soon.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

But what if we aren't...?

Lights

Scene IV

1942, in the Newman/Beech kitchen. Alice bends before a trunk in the down-left corner of the kitchen. After peering over her shoulder to ensure she is not being watched, Alice opens the trunk and pulls out a long, black lamb coat with a fur collar. Alice stands to regard the coat, putting it on over her plain house-dress, ambling to the mirror behind (up-stage left) to admire herself. Alice tests her waist size for thickness, turns to ensure she approves of the look of her own behind in the mirror.

Alice:

[*Speaking to her own reflection*] Alice, my mother said, *the babies will come in the heat and the cold. The babies will come, invited, or not. Some of them will grow up. Some of them will not grow up...* But, mother, what about all these others complaints? [*Turning from the mirror; moving back to the trunk with the coat*] Nothing to write home about, Alice... Just a bucket full of regular trouble... [*Incredulous*] But what does any person know about her own trouble, anyhow?

[*Alice begins to tuck her coat into the trunk, appearing perplexed*]

Alice:

And here I am now... wandering through my days like there's something I've forgotten to do... Percy...? [*When Alice lifts up, she is a much a younger woman, entering her memory. The rest of the scene occurs at the Beech residence, during a hot summer day in late August, 1914. The change must be noted by Alice's altered bodily gestures, as well as the semi-lucid lighting*]

Percy:

[*Offstage, clomping and preparing to enter the stage-right kitchen door. Percy enters the kitchen, fussing with his dusty clothing*]

Alice:

Percy! [*Tidying the table, which is stacked with papers*] May as well kick the muck from your boots out of doors, Mr. Beech. I've better things to do than trail behind you all afternoon with a broom.

Percy:

[*Ignores Alice, shuffles toward the table and sits down dejectedly at his spot, on the table's stage-right, nearest the door, splaying his legs out in front*] Is there a cup of something to drink around here? I think I must treat my horses better than you do your husband, Mrs. Beech.

Alice:

If your horses sassed you the way you're sassing me now, you'd change your tune. Besides Mr. Beech, have you forgotten the real owner of those horses? Isn't there a man out here at the great Bullocks Lake who fancies himself Squire, that owns all the life-blood on this property, *by contract*?

Percy:

[*Teasingly*] Where's our marriage document? I'll remind you of *our* contract.

Alice:

[*Teasing also*] Everyone knows you tricked me into that. Now [*Alice moves to the invisible tap at the sink on the wall and fills a glass of water for Percy*]...[*Playfully*] good thing that old Squire fashioned some plumbing for his poor old tenants. [*Sets the water down theatrically in front of Percy*] Tell me, what seems to be the matter, you funny little creature, you? [*Alice stands behind Percy, lovingly placing a hand on Percy's back*] Your mood is clouding my kitchen.

Percy:

It's Island Squire, Old Bullocks.

Alice:

Worse than you?

Percy:

I mean it, Alice.

Alice:

[*Begins to nervously tidy the kitchen, folding and re-folding towels, stacking and re-stacking things as she does when she is upset*] What's Bullocks on about now? I suppose I don't want to know! Don't tell me, Percy...Unless you must....The morning's already worn me out...I've been doing our accounts and...[*Picks up a book from the table and waves it*] the winter forecast is gloomy. [*With some irony*] Something about rain...

Percy:

He says we're not working the dirt well enough. It's our fault the asparagus crop won't produce to snuff...

Alice:

Is it our fault he tricked us into coming all the way to farm this barren rock?

Percy:

That's never been the problem, Alice, and you know it. The rain-coast's as fertile a place as any, if a person could clear the land fast enough to get a crop in to suit Bullocks...

Alice:

As if his royal highness, Mr. Island Squire, could recognize a properly tilled field if he fell into one on his pointy little head!

Percy:

Alice! If he caught you talking like that, we'd be homeless and it wouldn't be a surprise to hear him rapping any moment on the door. He said he was coming to call at noon to discuss... something about our *situation*.

Alice:

Homeless? What, and miss out on all this hospitality? This is our best place yet, Mr. Beech, in ten drab years of farming, but it's starting to make me long for our prairie catastrophes. And, what, he thinks to come at noon, does he? I suppose he expects me to serve him a proper dinner?

Percy:

I heard him hollering at one of the house boys to hold his lunch...

Alice:

[Ironically] One of the little orphans he collects? How undignified! A gentleman should never raise his voice above a whisper!

Percy:

Something has your tongue wound up quite tightly today, Alice. If you don't mind yourself, you will say something foul and anger Mr. Bullocks.

Alice:

[Playfully] He should be so lucky as to have a word from the likes of me!

[Offstage Mr. Bullocks raps on the door before swinging it open and strutting, uninvited, into the dwelling. Bullocks stomps into the kitchen. He is carrying a piece of long, thin cane, which he periodically flicks into the air throughout his stay, alternately slapping it across his empty palm. Percy stands quickly and Alice bends low in a curtsy. Bullocks stands in the centre of the room, sniffing the air, and looking around, before inviting himself into the empty chair across the table from Percy — Alice's regular spot]

Alice:

[Standing at attention behind the centre of the table, with her hands behind her back] How do you do, Sir? What an honour! What a surprise. You must excuse our state. *[Alice reaches to clear up the account books and other sundries from the table]* Had I known you were coming *[clears throat and looks toward Percy]* I would have put on tea.

Bullocks:

Yes, yes, Mrs. Beech. I trust you would have, but do not bother. I am here with some business to discuss with *your husband*. Please excuse my imposition in your lovely...kitchen.

Alice:

[Glares at Percy]

Percy:

[*Dismissing Alice with his eyes*] Of course, Bullocks. Alice was just leaving. The children have been berry picking with Mrs. Stuart and now Alice must see to it that they return with full buckets.

Alice removes her apron, reaches for her hat and pins it to her head while the men each stare gloomily at the floor.

Bullocks:

[*Flicking his piece of cane*] Oh, Mrs. Beech, I see you have not yet taken to the latest in ladies' hat fashion, but you would look delightful if you did! I have ordered new styles from London, did you not hear? I recall you said you once worked as...*help*...to the Liberty Silk people from London, yes? Did you not tell me they gave you a coat as a gift, before you sailed from Liverpool? A black lamb's coat, I believe. I suppose the moths have it now. Of course you are aware that any good Briton, at least, must keep current? The hats when they arrive in Moutat's will be trimmed in real Liberty silk. You must purchase one as soon as they appear! We would not want visitors to our Island believing us a backwater! Salt Spring is at least as civilized as Victoria, and I mean for all of England to know the full measure of her little coastal colony.

Alice:

[*Clearly flustered, on her way out*] Always thinking the best of us! The children will be sorry they missed you, sir...Phyllis has begun to talk, you know, having just turned two...and one of her favourite words is Bullocks!

Bullocks:

[*Coughing in surprise*] Yes, yes, Phyllis, you say? Well...tell her her Uncle Squire says hello.

Alice dismisses herself from the room with a bowed head and the dialogue between Bullocks and Percy begins intensely.

Percy:

I mean to explain sir, about this year's harvest.

Alice is heard offstage, her voice ghosting beneath the conversation: Children...children! Come show mother what you've found...

Bullocks:

It's not the asparagus crop, old boy. Not that. It's not even the orchards, although nothing is faring as it should. The apples look poorly this year, the cherries are not producing. When I hired you, when was that?

Percy:

Four and a half years ago, sir. Winter, 1910.

Bullocks:

When I hired you to farm my land, four and a half years ago, Winter 1910, you promised better. Am I disappointed? Of course I am disappointed! Do I want you to make improvements on this land before the Indians decide to come back and squat again on *my* beaches? Of course, I very much would like to see you improve my property Mr. Beech, as you said you would in exchange for the...extremely low rent of this...home. However, it is not for this lecture that I came.

Percy:

It's not?

Bullocks:

For how, might I ask you, shall you endeavour to improve the place while you are no longer dwelling on this property?

Percy:

[*Stuttering in his speech*] If you are here to evict us...! It's only a year or two more and I should have this crop in hand! It's the start up costs. They were not what we...were promised, you see... We had work to do on many of your...outbuildings, sir... We had to borrow sums... And the orchards! Now we hear the Okanagan farmers sell their fruit cheaper, even to Vancouver. The prairies were unkind and we came here with too little... Maybe if you'll agree to allow us to expand the sheep flock, or perhaps the bee hives...

Bullocks:

Stop it, Mr. Beech! You exhaust me with your prattle. There is another matter, spoken of to me recently by one of my boys. [*Wistful*] You know how they love to gossip? It is our dinner practise to tell tales. [*Gesturing*] They stand beside me and I question them... *Tell me, Henry, what is it you heard while shopping in the Ganges market today? Or, George, what was it you heard as the steamer arrived at harbour today with the mail?* They look upon me as their father, you can imagine. I am teaching them how to live in this world, fashioning them as *observant* gentlemen. And so, naturally, they wish to please me. They tell me all I need to know about the happenings on the Island. And now, one of my boys tells me you have a wish for war?

Percy:

That's not my wish, sir!

Bullocks:

No. Do not suppose I am here to blame you for the Archduke's assassination, or any nasty business with Germany... However, [*Standing, pacing*] that you wish to enlist, as I have been told is, as you can imagine, quite worrying to your landlord.

Percy:

Enlist! Well...I have been considering my duties, sir...

Bullocks:

I see here your duty is to me. You are a farmer, and you need not *volunteer* for war!

Percy:

It's just my father...[*Clearing his throat*] Retired Surgeon, sir? Lieut. Col. , sir? Lionel Beech...Indian Service...

Bullocks:

My friend, the good doctor.

Percy:

And my brother served as an officer under Her Majesty...and perhaps it is my time, as they say. I have friends, good friends, sir. Islanders, farmers, all sorts willing to enlist...It seems we all must decide how much life we want to...trade, for the rest of what life we are afforded.

Bullocks:

And Mrs. Beech?

Percy:

Well, I haven't told Alice yet. I've needed...time...to decide. But I'm not worried about her one bit! [*Jovially, with pride, jumping up*] She shot a cougar last week on the point, did you hear? She was out with the children to visit Mr. Payton for a picnic at the lighthouse. Sometimes she brings him sandwiches since his wife passed, God bless. And when that cougar wandered in onto the beach from the cedars, Alice raised the rifle and shot that cougar dead!

[*Pause*]

Bullocks:

It is not my preference that any lady on this island should shoulder her own rifle.

Percy:

She learned to shoot on the prairies sir and her aim is true, I assure you.

Bullocks:

[*Flustered*] Well, what do you think I should do with my extra income in the case of a long war, Mr. Beech? Use it to subsidize poor tenants who might as soon be widowed as bring in a hearty crop for me and my boys? No, I shall not. I will invest to conclude England's war swiftly. My family knows enough about ammunition...And I will want to do what is right, for my estate, you see. For my...estates.

Percy:

Yes, sir. Well...in truth, I haven't made up my mind. Our little four year old girl Gladys has been unwell...Some matter with her lungs...And my father is getting on and couldn't be much help. Alice so often cooks for him, as well as us, *and* the pastor on Sundays...And it could all prove...too much. But they say the war should only take a few months. If I leave right after harvest, I could be home by Christmas.

Bullocks:

You cannot expect your wife to take this news well, Mr. Beech. Besides, how do you expect me to guarantee your wife's safety in your absence? I cannot foretell what those blacks down island might do when they hear the husband has vacated this property, leaving the wife *alone*. And there are several Jap families who would delight in an opportunity to grab onto a piece of my land. Your father, the good doctor, told me when he wrote you with this business proposition, your word back to him was your plans were to remain with me several years. To make a good go of island farming. You have several obligations Mr. Beech, which I should think will each sufficiently remind you of your reasons against enlistment. [*Abruptly stands up and strikes toward the door*] I will give you a spot of time to consider, but I hope by Friday you will renew your obligation to me and declare your use for war a lapse in judgement. Now good day.

[Before waiting for a response, Bullocks exits the house. Percy hangs his head in his hands. Alice ambles back into the kitchen as an old woman in 1942, glancing at Percy as she moves back toward the trunk to pull out her coat]

Alice:

[Puts on the coat, pulls it in close as the memory of her husband disappears]

Lights

Scene V

December, 1942. This scene occurs at night, in the dimly lit kitchen of the Miyazaki home. There should be a bees wax candle burning on the table. It is loudly and strongly raining outside. There should be a frenetic rush of distraught, but contained activity as Mrs. Miyazaki prepares her family to leave their home, walking back and forth across the kitchen. Mrs. Miyazaki will be offering instructions to her five children, whose presence should be suggested by Mrs. Miyazaki's movements and monologue, as well as by the long pauses in speech, as if the children are seated in a row on the floor on the other side of the table, questioning and complaining to their mother. Mrs. Miyazaki will be packing parts of her kitchen into boxes and packing a wicker suitcase that sits open on the kitchen table, variously reaching onto shelves, into cupboards, etc., to mime gathering items, such as a violin and

sheet music, special pieces of porcelain, an old map of Japan; stacking and sorting. Occasionally, Mrs. Miyazaki might reach out to touch either of the children in comfort, or cajoling preparation. The long pauses in Miyazaki's speech are occasionally placed to indicate her listening to one of the children's questions, or concerns. Richie is four years old.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

Richie, Richie, please...hold your sister a little closer. It would be better if she was sleeping for the boat ride...Rock her a little there...Yes, like that...No, you're not going to drop her. You're a big boy and you know how to rock your sister...No Reta, I don't know exactly where they are taking us. Maybe to father? [*Trying to be cheerful*] That would be good, yes, children?...No, Roseberry is not much like Salt Spring...It's...it's a special place, like a camp. A special camp for Japanese people...Well, because the government said so...[*Pause a moment in speech while a Westminster Chimes Clock begins to sing out the hour of six p.m. Mrs. Miyazaki over the clock sounds, tries to hide her worry*]...I do not know how many men will come to collect us...Yes, I am sure they will treat us kindly...No! We are not spying Japs from Japan! We are the Miyazakis. Farmers, from Salt Spring...Good Christian people who support our country. Remember that, children [*Drilling it in, nodding her head*] We support Canada in the war...Reta, why don't you make yourself useful? Help your mother...I haven't finished packing Jenny's sweaters yet...Yes, everything in the same case...Home? We cannot worry about that now...We will pack up our house and tuck things away, so we'll be surprised when we return to open our boxes...No! Richie, don't think like that! You will scare your sisters...[*Muffled sounds of distant barking*] Of course this will still be our home, Sylvie...Of course we will come back! [*Angry*] Your grandfather built this place, Riche Miyazaki...He laid every tile in the irrigation canal by hand...All of the gardens, this house, the greenhouses, the chicken houses, he built! There was nothing here before we came. Nothing...[*Pause*] Mary, Mary, come back...No, you cannot go to sleep...No, no bombs will fall here...Reta, be careful with your father's violin...Leave it with the map...Japan, from a long time ago...No, we will not travel alone...All the Japanese from the island will go...[*Muffled sounds of people approaching outside, closer barking*] Reta, do you have your registration card? You must remember to carry it at all times...You're too young for a card, Mary...No, Reta, you do not look like a spy in that picture...You look perfectly yourself...No, we did *not* start the war...It does not matter what the kids at school said...Richie! Richie...Come here, son...You mustn't look afraid...

Loud noises offstage: Boots, dogs barking angrily, people shouting instructions, or at the dogs.

It is time now...

Mrs. Miyazaki steadies herself to open the door, raises her head, walks toward the stage-right door.

Lights

Scene VI

Lights up on the Beach/Newman kitchen, initially in a December, 1942 scene which quickly morphs into a 1914 memory of Alice's.

Alice:

[Poking around the kitchen, then sitting agitatedly at the table, picking up a paper to read, then tossing it aside. Suddenly getting up, pacing worriedly] Phyllis says her father's been dead nearly thirty years. Thirty years, Phyllis says! Percy...don't you think that strange...?
[Beginning to rush around the kitchen, passionately upset, huffily "tidying," or moving things around as the era shifts in Alice's mind and Percy enters the kitchen]

Percy:

[Drifting in to sitting in his spot at the table, legs and feet splayed]

Alice:

[Intermittently pacing back and forth across the kitchen floor, then suddenly speaking to Percy, as if in mid conversation] Leaving? Leaving? Ten years, Percy Beech. Ten years on that prairie with no children, wondering if ever....All that trouble...What it took for us to get here...And now here we are...And you...? Our whole life, Percy? Our whole blasted life!

Percy:

This changes none of that. It need hardly change a thing.

Alice:

You would leave us? You're leaving? Can I tell you Percy Beech what I think of this war...?
[Sits down in the empty seat at the table and looks directly at Percy] You do not know what life was like for me before I left England. Life for a doctor's son is not the same as it is for an orphan child.

Percy:

Alice, you needn't...

Alice:

[Alternately reminiscing and lovingly raging] No, you have given me your reasons and now you must listen to me! Twenty-one years old and I decide to take the trip from Liverpool, into the toddling colony. That blasted hot prairie. Not with a *family*, like you had, Percy. No. Not surrounded by a mother and father. Twenty-one years old and alone on that rat infested ship. Those weeks on The Canada! Every night, sick in the berth, wondering if the ocean might take us over. And the worry! About colony life...Every item of clothing I owned I wore on that passage, which was not a lot! Tell that to Squire Bullocks, the rich, blind fool. Three petticoats, my dresses dragging to the ground, my money pinned to my corsets...Those other

YWCA women. Getting lost in Winnipeg? The mud on the streets! How I wrecked the heel on my only good pair of boots. But it was all better than what could have been for me in England and you know it! I was coming to something! Coming to some family...Coming to an opportunity to make my own way, Percy. Without having to bow my head.

And did I complain during those years we lost our investments on the prairie? Did I complain when I discovered your great homesteader's debt?

Percy:

You were a perfect farm wife, Mrs. Beech. Worked as hard as any man and then some!

Alice:

Never farmed a day in my whole English life, after being placed with my aunt by my poor parents! And yet, I supported you...every dusty step, Mr. Beech. I learned how to put up a garden to feed us all winter. How to feed fifty men at harvest. How not to drown in that slough of prairie debt. And now here we are. All of us together. We have our family now, Percy. We have our daughters...and we have an opportunity...

Percy:

After I return we'll make good here, and leave Bullocks. We'll move out on our own...

Alice:

After you return? My mother died before my eyes when I was twelve years old, and my father not long to follow. I know what it is to feel quite alone, Percy Beech. And here you are telling me you want to go to war? Trying to spin that rotten yarn into gold as if I cannot determine the difference. Tell me, what would your daughters do, without their father? And what would I do here, Percy? Fending off Bullocks, who would toss us in a heartbeat without your labour here to fatten him up...Besides, Percy, his eyes are hungry, when you're not around...

Percy:

[*Interrupting, hissing*] Alice! You are being morbid. And, you are getting this wrong.

Alice:

[*Sarcastic*] Do remind me how everything is right?

Percy:

Some things a person barely gets to decide on his own. This decision...My decision was made before it came to me to finalize things.

Alice:

[*Getting up, pacing, worried...*] You're too old!

Percy:

I am, a little.

Alice:

And your back! How will your back tolerate all that walking? And sleeping God knows where? Sleeping in ditches! You know you're already all twisted up since moving those rocks at the wharf.

Percy:

I've survived worse, Alice.

Alice:

Ten years of homesteading on the prairies did nothing but weaken your constitution, Percy Beech. You're not thinking of us! You're not thinking of me and the girls. You are thinking of your reputation. Of your father.

Percy:

How can I continue to live here and not serve, when other men are leaving? How could I look those men in the eyes when they return, without understanding them? How could I work beside them after that? [*Pause*] They will put me on an easy crew, because of my age. They will give me light duty. There's word some of the men land in Scotland, far from any fighting...

[*Long pause*]

Percy:

A soldier has a sort of special status, Alice. He is looked upon as a man of high standing. If he has debts with the bank, his reputation as a debtor is forgiven by the public...He has a thing which is worth more than money. More even than land. He can say that he has made a *contribution*...

Alice:

Percy, that is your father talking. That's India.

Percy:

Alice, I am a farmer...My father, the surgeon, did not think it the wisest profession for me, considering his trade and loose association with dirt. He wondered if I might become more like him, or more like my brother. But I have given my life to this work and this is what I will do until I die, through good fortune, or Godawful fortune.

Alice:

[*Admonishing his 'blasphemy'*] Percy!

Percy:

And here...after all these years, we are still only renting our land! I could have stayed in England for that! To have nothing to leave to my children. I do not want for the only thing known of me to be that I was a farmer beaten by the colony, a man who could not decide how to make this land cooperate...After we leave here, things will be better, Alice. We can buy our own place on the point, maybe get some cows...

Alice:

[Pause. Gets up and tidies, slower this time] Well...I married you knowing you were a farmer. We've already survived half starving together and waiting forever and a day for every good thing to come our way. *[Pause]* I know above all you've rocks for brains, Percy Beech. I will just have to continue to chip away until they possibly give way to some sense. *[Leans to kiss Percy on top of his head]*

Alice sinks down into the chair opposite Percy, who is suddenly frozen in tableau. Alice watches as Percy rises and drifts from the table, out of the kitchen. Alice lowers her head.

Lights

Scene VII

Phyllis, age 30, stands forlornly stage right in a spot of light, holding her little nearly newborn baby son on one side and a letter from Hazel in her free hand. It is a dark, rainy, winter island day in 1942. Phyllis solemnly reads the letter. Hazel, lying in a hospital bed, writes to Phyllis from another lonely spot of light on the other side of the dark stage.

Hazel:

December, 1942. Dear Bird...Things change too quickly and then what can we understand of our world? I write you with terrible news. Close to the worst, although I am trying to remain cheerful. How ever did your mother survive it? And you, when you were young? Presently the doctors tell me that Little Baby Wendell has half a chance of living to see his father. His lungs are not developed properly, they say. He does not even cry when hungry. I am at a loss and pray he soon decides to wake to life.

Please write with good news. Tell me your little baby son is fat and happy!

Phyllis:

[Checks in on her baby bundle]

Hazel:

Tell me you're not missing Harry too much...Give me some good news of your sweet little island life. I should not expect a visit. No one has money to travel these days. Regina is a mausoleum and worry everywhere increases. I think Christmas has forgotten to come this year. *[Pause]* I've yet to notify Wendell of the baby's condition. I fear it will set him back and

he must stay strong for the war. He wrote that his regiment is moving soon. Closer to the front...Does Harry know he's had a son? [*Pause*] What can we expect? Things are not as we dreamed, Phyllis. How ever shall we all survive these dark times? [*Pause*] Yours, Hazel.

Lights

ACT II

Scene I

1947. Blustering activity in the bright, afternoon summer sunshine. The scene occurs in the outdoor garden on Sharp Road, where the Newmans are currently living as chicken and egg farmers on the former Miyazaki property. Harry sits in an adirondack chair, stage left, staring blankly, while Phyllis (who is extremely pregnant with her second child) gathers laundry from the line, occasionally pausing to cradle her very pregnant belly. Chickens strut about. Alice, age 67, appears and disappears from the scene, ambling like a bear. She is wearing a thick, wooly hat and her long woollen coat, with the heavy, fur-lined collar, despite the summer heat.

Alice:

[Sniffing and ambling around the garden. Suddenly alarmed, hollering at her nearly five year old grandson who is offstage] Terry, Terry! You get away from those lambs now! You rascal! *[To Harry]* Your son, Harry. Mind, if he's not becoming a proper menace!

Phyllis continues hanging clothing on the line while Harry continues to sit despondently.

Alice:

[Shooing the chickens] Rush away! Get! Get, you clucky little beasts! *[Ambling awkwardly toward Terry, offstage, calling]* Terry, wait for Granny...

Phyllis:

[To Harry] Mother always thinks she's helping. When you were...away, she thought to influence her grandson...*[Laughing]* And now he's half wild...

Harry:

[Despondent, does not register Phyllis's address]

Phyllis:

Harry, do you think you've been too long in the sun? *[Hollering to Terry]* Terry, take yourself away from those chickens this moment!...That's it. Yes...Let's be a good boy and pick granny some flowers...*[To Harry]* No, you'd like to stay out? It's just, it's been so hot...

[Pause. Harry does not alter his stare]

Phyllis:

[*Overly cheerful, speaking rapidly*] Sometimes a change does a body good...Hazel says that Wendell is getting on just fine. Got himself a job at the hardware store, downtown Regina. Five years is a long time to be away, Wendell says, but he knows he's happy to be home... And their little son is getting on, too. So much recovered. Wendell won't talk about the war, Hazel says, not a word...Only about our happy times all together in the east, before you and Wendell shipped out. But she doesn't bother him about it...Isn't that nice? They just get on, about as happy as they were before...No more babies for them, though. One child is enough! for now, so they say. [*Leaning in*] They're not as lucky as us...

Harry:

[*Looks up blankly, sadly, pathetically at his wife, but does not speak. They hold the gaze a long time...*]

Phyllis:

[*Back to blustering about, hollering at her son*] Terry! That dog's going to nip you on the nose if you don't leave her...[*Uncomfortable, careful approach*] I wonder Harry...if there aren't some things we need to decide...If it seems we can't continue to manage here...I wonder if maybe you'd think about getting a job, down at Mouat's? I think they're always hiring in Hardware, and they'd remember you from before, of course. Remember old Mr. Mouat? You know, father helped build his store, mother told me. They spoke so well of you the whole time you were away, always asking...if I'd heard word. [*Pause*]

I think we should make out fine here...selling the eggs this year, Harry... We have orders from Victoria...and you know I love our new place...The Miyazakis did a fine job with this place before the war...but that Veteran's Loan is tying us up now...The payments are so high...and with the baby coming...I might need to rest more...Mother keeps reminding me how it went with *her* mother. Terrible prophecy...

Alice:

[*Ambling back into the scene carrying a small bouquet, having overheard the conversation. Grumbling...*] You know my mother died after birthing fifteen babies! You know *four* of her children died, two of them while being born!

Phyllis:

Mother, we have a hospital on the island now. Mother, have you heard of twentieth century medicine?

Alice:

These...conveniences, they make you stupid, Phyllis. They dull your wits! If medicine knew enough to care properly for a body we'd all live to be a hundred and twenty-five! Now there

are drugs for this and drugs for that...But what does it help? Mothers still suffer their children, my dear!

Phyllis:

[Imploringly, to Harry, as if he might help her] I'm afraid I've little patience these days, Harry. I think it's the baby, pressing on me. I read an article last week that said new mothers cannot be expected to be themselves, since they're in such a weakened condition...

Alice:

It takes a lot more than weakness to birth a baby, my dear...

Harry:

[Smiling feebly, speaking sardonically] I'm sure nobody knows what they are talking about, Phyllis. Nobody...

Alice:

[Admonishingly, snapping] Well, some people might try, Harry...Some people might try.

Phyllis:

Mother...are you about ready for your nap now?

Alice:

[Growling a little] I haven't had a nap since 1916, which is going on thirty years now, and you know it, Phyllis, since I've complained enough times to you about being tired, so you tell me. Mind, you should put your feet up a while, yourself...Save your blessed strength...*[Alice ambles back toward Terry's offstage direction]* Terry...Wait for Granny...

Phyllis:

[Looking toward Harry, tossing up her arms] Harry, will you not ever say a single helpful word?

Lights

Scene II

This scene occurs in darkness on an empty set which is Phyllis and Harry's midnight bedroom. There should be sounds of scuffling, scrambling, and tripping about on the stage as Harry experiences a wartime flashback episode. Throughout the scene, Phyllis will try to appeal to Harry, to talk him through his difficulty...

Harry:

[Shouting out in his sleep] Stop!

Phyllis:

[*Shushing Harry, as one would a child*] Harry...Shhhhh....Harry...

Harry:

[*Non responsive to Phyllis*] Look out! Look out! Private! Private...!

Phyllis:

[*More alarmed, firmer*] Harry, you're having a bad dream, Harry...

Harry:

[*Distraught, does not recognize Phyllis*] Who are you? What are you doing here? How did you get in here?

Phyllis:

[*Cooing*] Harry, it's me...

Harry:

Don't you touch me! Don't come near me!

Phyllis:

Harry, it's Phyllis...

Harry: Phyllis?...Phyllis?...Phyllis?

Phyllis:

It's your wife...Harry...You're safe...Reach for me....

Harry:

I see nothing. There is nothing...

Phyllis:

Take my hand, Harry...See...See...

Harry becomes finally triggered by Phyllis's touch and recoils in a ball, wrapping himself in a bed sheet. Harry begins breathing intensely, hyper ventilating. This should be a prolonged, intense, frightening moment, during which Phyllis continues trying to soothe Harry.

Phyllis:

[*Eventually shouting*] Mother!

Sounds of ambling, grumbling. Alice flicks on the light and comes into the room. Harry is wrapped in the sheet, with his knees up, rocking back and forth in panic, wide eyed

hyperventilating, not recognizing his surroundings. Phyllis hands a bundle to Alice. The bundle is the baby Joanie...

Phyllis:

Take her, mother! Take Joanie...

Baby begins to cry. Alice takes the baby.

Lights

Scene III

Flashback to the kitchen of Percy and Alice, March, 1916. It should be raining loudly and heavily outside. Doctor Beech will enter and rest on his cane beside the door. Alice will rush around the kitchen, folding up small outfits, packing a suitcase which is open on the table. The invisible children Phyllis and Alice are four and six years old.

Older Alice paces agitatedly before looking up to see Dr. Beech ghosting into life in the room.

Dr Beech:

[*Entering quickly*] Everything is arranged.

Alice:

[*Becoming young. Distraught, but focussed*] I am not interested in what that old fool Bullocks promised, I will not get into his, what is it called?

Dr. Beech:

A Ford Model automobile, Mrs. Beech.

Alice:

Contraption! I will not enter Bullocks's contraption with my sick child!

Dr. Beech:

The danger with the abscess on Gladys's lung, Alice, is that it can burst. There is not much time, may I remind you.

Alice:

So you've repeatedly told me, Doctor Beech. Your granddaughter Gladys is in grave danger. You've examined her yourself to conclude! Yet, no one on this whole island has a blessed thing to do about it. I shall get my Gladys to the hospital in Victoria as safely as possible, if I must carry the child on my back to the steamer, in the... rain. A trip in Bullocks's treacherous road monstrosity is not how we will move across this earth...

Dr. Beech:

When Mrs. Dr. Beech was alive...

Alice:

Yes Dr. Beech, I have heard many stories of your compliant wife, my mother-in-law, dearly departed. If your son were still alive, instead of getting himself blown up in some war, he would sing praises over his mother's obedience. However, I have seen Bullocks jerking about on the road in that Model T, scaring the horses, getting stuck in the muck. The fool drives as well as I can fly. I will not further risk my daughter's life...

Dr. Beech:

Mind your own will if you must, Mrs. Beech. But may I remind you...

Alice:

Lionel...I am afraid for my child...I am afraid for Gladys...How can we afford the hospital costs? The doctor from Victoria has written to say he will treat Gladys's lung condition, but still I must pay something. And we might lose our home here at Bullocks's with me away from the orchards. He's already discontent with the tiny veteran widow's payment I toss at him for rent. And Phyllis? How will I keep that child content? A hospital is no place for a four year old....She could easily turn into a wretch with her sister so sick!

Dr. Beech:

You must assume that all will be well, Alice. You must think of how things will turn out. Of course, children die. We sometimes...lose our children, don't we? But sometimes children live on. And we...*prosper*.

Alice:

I have to leave you, too, Lionel. I will not be able to care for you with Gladys in the hospital...

Dr. Beech:

No, I should expect not.

Alice:

If anything should happen...

Dr. Beech:

Alice...

Alice:

[*Noticing an alarming sound outside*] Dr Beech!

Dr. Beech:

It's Phyllis! I hear her, too.

Alice:

Oh...Lionel...Something has happened to Gladys, I know it...Phyllis is screaming about her big sister...

Alice rushes out the door of the kitchen. Dr. Beech sits down heavily, puts his head down sadly on his cane.

Older Alice wanders back into the scene holding baby Joanie, confused by the collision of time periods. Dr. Beech is frozen in tableau. Alice leaves the scene, singing to baby Joanie...

Lights

Scene IV

1949. A cloudy afternoon. The setting is the central town park, in Ganges. Mr. Anderson stands at a podium, centre-stage, orating loudly and gesticulating as if he is preaching from a pulpit. Mr. Anderson is giving a speech to a large crowd of around eight-five islanders — men, women and a few children. The crowd will be indicated by a handful of empty, wooden chairs, facing the podium, as well as by Mr. Anderson and Alice's words and gestures. Alice, age 69, wearing her wool coat with the fur collar will amble into the scene...

Mr. Anderson:

And now the Japs want to come back! They want to continue with their Jap invasion of our island home! Perhaps a few of you islanders here are the soft hearted sort. Maybe some sitting in the crowd did not want to come to this rally today, but were convinced by someone close to you and arrived here with some reluctance. You have fond memories, you say, of your former Japanese neighbours. Your children went to school with their children. Your wives planned town picnics with their wives. You sat beside one another at church. Do not let those memories cloud your good judgment, neighbours. Do not let that softness enter your thoughts! The people you knew before, those Japanese families, were not who you believed them to be! They disguised themselves well, as fishers and farmers. Those spies and thieves of the Japanese race! But their real story has now been told and were it not for our proper War Measures Act, the Japanese plan to take over this coast may have been complete! It is not enough for them to live and work beside the whites. No, they want to own this island, all of the islands in the Gulf. They pretend themselves to be Christian, like us, to trick us.

Alice:

[Ambles onto the scene and noisily takes a seat before Mr. Anderson]

Mr. Anderson:

Look around you. See those cherry trees, in *our* park? Oh yes, the delight of Salt Spring! Those blossoming trees! But those trees did not come from *our* ancestors! Those trees were not planted by my great grandfather, who built much of this island with his own hands! Those are Jap trees! Jap trees planted by Jap families...And the memories of all those Japanese linger here at the bases of those trees...like snakes in the grass!

[Phyllis rushes into the park, pulling a little on Harry, who shuffles behind her. They slide into the nearest empty seats, eyes on Alice]

Mr Anderson:

See, we've taken back the land they tried to own. *[Nodding toward Phyllis and Harry]*. Some of us are doing a proper job of keeping things up nowadays on the farmsteads started by the Japs, when they were still plotting. But although their property was sold to keep them from coming back, families like the Miyazakis still want to return to Salt Spring! They want to steal that property from its now rightful owners, and resume their island take over!

Alice:

[Stumbling up to usurp Mr. Anderson at the podium] This is ridiculous...S'cuse me, if it's not too late...I might have a word or two to say...

Phyllis:

Mother!

Alice:

Calm down, dear...

Mr. Anderson:

A known Jap lover, Mrs. Beech!

Alice:

I don't discriminate in matters of love, Mr. Anderson, but I do see the sense in some things, which you seem to have missed...*[Pause, as if listening to a jeering crowd]*. Oh, so *you* jeer at me! *[Mockingly]* You professional taunters!

Mr. Anderson:

[Jostling with Alice] I am here today to ask for your help as the War Measures Act draws to a close...Islanders! In a few months, October, 1946, the act expires and the doors will be open...

Alice:

Heaven forbid it!

Mr. Anderson:

There are petitions before the court, we have been warned. Several families of the ones...
[*searching for a term to replace incarceration*] *sent away* want to resume their attempts to
take over our home...Do we want these people here? These pretenders?

Alice:

Mr. Anderson, close your trap!

Mr. Anderson:

Widow Beech, ma'am, you smell quite drunk!

Alice:

What's a little brandy at three in the afternoon? This island's not too dry in the summer
[*tottering a little before regaining composure*] As you see I am [*tapping her jacket pocket*]
quite comfortably arranged as you rattle on and on...and on. If *ye rattle on...and know not
love...* Ah! You do know that passage, aye Mr. Anderson?

Phyllis:

[*Bursting up, but remaining fixed by her chair*] Mother! It really is time to leave now...

Mr. Anderson:

Are you questioning my *biblical* knowledge, Mrs. Beech?

Phyllis:

No, Mr. Anderson. Mother is not...Are you, mother? She really just needs to lie down...

Alice:

[*Ignoring Phyllis*] I am not a napper, Phyllis! [*Orating mockingly*] *If I speak in the tongues of
men, or angels but know not love...*I remember you from my Sunday School class, little man.

Mr. Anderson:

Widow Beech! Mind your tone with me, ma'am!

Alice:

I am but a clanging gong! Yes, you were a lad then, weren't you? Shiny and eager, sitting up
in the front row...Mr. Anderson? [*Looking toward his wife in the audience*] or the Mrs.
Anderson, sitting there with your children...

Phyllis:

Mrs. Anderson, don't mind mother one bit...She's not been feeling well lately...Not herself...

Alice:

Then whose self am I? [*Pointing*] You, Mrs. Anderson, sitting there proud as a peacock! All puffed up with your children...How many is it you have now? Oh...yes, three, is it? All good Christians, no doubt? All good Britons too, yes? Raised up right in the church of England, up island?

Mr. Anderson is flabbergasted beside Alice and concedes to giving her the floor by sinking into a chair slightly off to the side of the podium, stage left.

Phyllis:

This is not why we came!

Alice:

No? Well...maybe I'm a tad sorry to shame your children Mrs. Anderson, as they're not much younger than my own grandchildren...Phyllis, how old is Terry now?

Phyllis:

[*Exasperated*] Your grandson is seven, mother.

Alice:

Yes, with Terry, being seven now...and Phyllis's wee daughter, Joanie...toddling around in the grass, I look at your faces and think you could each just as easily be my own...My own child...My daughter...

Phyllis:

Mother!

Alice:

Ready to start a life, right here, on Salt Spring, the most blessed of all the blessed places in the world! But of course...you have your own...lives to live here, each of you, don't you?

Phyllis:

We're leaving now...We are...Harry!

Phyllis grabs at Harry who gets up and walks offstage, ignoring the squabble.

Alice:

It's not the worst place to live, if you don't mind the rain. But the...rest of this nonsense about spying Jap this and stealing Jap that...The most of you here have never been away from this place, am I right? Or you'd know how others live all stacked up together...

Phyllis:

[*Torn between Harry and her mother, moving offstage*] He only means to say that some of us must be careful we don't lose our homes, or run into...trouble. Right Mr. Anderson?

Alice:

[*Being pulled by Phyllis*] We're past trouble here! The Miyazakis will return...And other Japanese families will, too...And we'll all be stuck together here on this rock in the water. All of us...Islanders. [*Holds up flask*] Who here will welcome them ...?

Lights

Scene V

Sharp Road yard. Phyllis is sitting primly in the wicker chair, writing a letter (on her lap) to Hazel, which she narrates as she writes it. Lights up on Hazel's empty spot. Harry sits in his adirondack chair, turned away to the left, asleep for most of the episode, with a blanket across his knees. Occasionally Harry wakes and listens to Phyllis, without her knowing. However, Harry remains despondent.

Phyllis:

Dearest Hazel. September 21, 1949. How times have changed since before the war...Terry is our busy bee, as I'm sure is your Wendell. He does well in school and talks constantly of becoming a soldier someday, like his father...[*Phyllis looks to Harry*] Is that what young Wendell thinks about, too? We had Terry's seventh birthday recently and he ate half the cake himself, when we weren't looking! Mother says he's wild, but you know what I think of mother's opinions. [*Pause*] Joanie is our shy, wee girl. [*Pause*] She's yet to start talking, which is strange at two. Terry was such a chattering little bird. Unfortunately...[*looking again to Harry*] the job at the Hardware store didn't work out for Harry. I think he'd rather stay home anyway. We bought more chickens, so we can work on selling eggs full time. We heard word that the Miyazaki family wants to return to Salt Spring. I said we bought this house and farmyard fair and square from the province with that Soldier's Settlement Loan, no matter if the land *was* sold without the Miyazaki's permission, and it's ours now, according to all the legal papers! I'm sure Harry is worried there will be problems when the Miyazakis arrive... Although, of course, he doesn't speak of such things.

Harry opens his eyes and listens to Phyllis narrate the end of her letter. He stares despondently, as if registering nothing.

[*Uncertain*] I'm sure we've nothing to worry about with Joanie, although I keep trying to get her to say words. Even just hello.

[*Pause*]

Do you think you'll try for more children, Hazel? I always wanted a girl, after losing Gladys when I was a girl myself. Sisters can be such good friends. But, I don't think we'll have another child after Joanie...It's maybe just not meant to be.

[*Overly cheery*] Well, I should love you and leave you. Mother is with the children inside and who knows what they might be getting up to. One of them is sure to start screeching.

Yours,
Phyllis.

[*To the audience*] Who do you talk to when there's no one to talk to?

Phyllis pauses a moment, before hanging her head to weep. Harry slowly turns to look at Phyllis, before turning back to his despondency...

Lights

ACT III

Scene I

This scene occurs on a hot summer day in 1963, in the Sharp Road house Newman's kitchen. Joanie, age 16, is standing in front of the mirror in the kitchen, solemnly looking at her reflection. Outside of the kitchen on 'the lawn,' down stage left, Harry naps in his adirondack chair. Phyllis, age 51, enters the kitchen in a fluster...

Phyllis:

You might want to do something besides stand there all day, Joanie. Too much vanity is much too much.

Joanie:

[*Remains fixed in front of the mirror*] Much too much.

Phyllis:

Yes, and must you continue to parrot me? You know I'm preparing for that Anglican ladies luncheon this afternoon and you've been no help at all. Standing there, making a spectacle of yourself...More trouble than use!

Joanie:

More trouble than use. [*Joanie moves to the stage left seat at the table*]

Phyllis:

Some trouble is better than others, Joanie. See? [*Picks some paper up from the table*] Soon you'll be grown up and gone away like your brother [*waves a letter*] and then you'll wish you'd paid more attention to your mother. See here, a letter from Terry... [*Begins to read*] *Dear mother...Physical training is going well. My Sergeant won't say, but I'm sure I was made to be a soldier...Tell father, in case this interests him...Maybe soldiering is my blood... How is Joanie? Have you had any luck with the speech doctor? [Trailing off] Well! [Pause] We won't be seeing him for a long while...Not much sense in coming back to the island a trained soldier...Not a blessed thing here to defend...*

Alice:

[*Ambles slowly into the kitchen, roots around for something to eat*]

Phyllis:

Foraging, mother?

Alice:

[*Grumbling*] You people are starving me...

Phyllis:

If you refuse to eat with us at meal times, I can be of no further service.

Alice:

[*Sits hunched at the table and uses her hands to scoop honey out of a jar, slathering it onto some bread to eat*]

Phyllis:

Well, I shall leave you two to your own devices. [*Phyllis rushes from the kitchen*]

Joanie:

Leave you. I shall leave you...

Alice: [*Regards Joanie without speaking, continues eating*] I heard a word in town, my Joanie...

Joanie remains silent while looking at her grandmother across the table.

Alice:

About how you're making out on the Miyazaki farmstead. So of course I went and had a word myself with Mrs. Miyazaki. She seemed most interested in telling me the story of her son, Richie, and of your friendship to him in the garden.

Joanie:

[*Silently watching...*]

Alice:

You know, your grandfather and I were great friends, once...

Alice passes Joanie a piece of bread across the table. Joanie takes the bread and begins to slowly eat it. Lights out on the two women sitting in silence at the table.

Lights

Scene II

1963, outside on the Miyazaki market garden farmstead. Richie Miyazaki as a young man of 21 paces the empty stage. Mrs. Miyazaki, age 60, sits low in a chair, speaking with her son. Richie periodically jumps in various hopscotch formations, counting his steps according to an internal rhythm he does not articulate with words. The mother and son are recounting a story, as if it's a game they have played many times.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

None of the other families stayed...

Richie:

We have no home to go back to, they said.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

Our home on Sharp Road disappeared, too. Sold to a soldier who took over egg farming.

Richie:

Their daughter was said to be a strange one.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

And the grandmother, too.

Richie:

Home is more than buildings, Richie Miyazaki...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

That's what I told my son.

Richie:

And strange is not always *strange*, mother...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

We spent the next decade clearing a whole other parcel of land by hand. Starting again...

Richie:

Without father.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

What else were we to do...?

Richie:

Mother wouldn't let us forget him though... We remembered our father in every shovelful of earth we turned turned by hand...

Mrs. Miyazaki:

[Wistful, sad] It would be better if we could guide our memories... If we had some control...

Richie:

But you do remember him, mother. You say his name at dinner, you speak of him before bed.

Mrs. Miyazaki:

Time is a game, Richie Miyazaki, that grabs ahold of you when you're young... and tricks you into believing it will never let you go...

Lights

Scene III

1963. The scene occurs in the 'yard' outside of the Newman farmhouse kitchen. Invisible chickens mill about the grass. Joanie (still age sixteen) and her father are sitting in silence in their respective lawn chairs for an uncomfortably long time...

Phyllis:

[Offstage] Harry! Will you come in here a moment? I need your help...

Harry:

[Gets up from his chair and walks in front of Joanie, without regarding her, to exit stage right]

Joanie:

[Looking after her father] Need you. Need you. I... need you...

Alice, age 83, ambles onto the stage like a bear and nudges Joanie out of her chair. Alice and Joanie leave the stage together.

Lights

Scene IV

1963. This scene occurs in the Newman kitchen, at the table. Phyllis sits stage right, Alice left. Alice, who is wearing her coat and hat, mimes cleaning and sorting eggs from a bowl in her lap. Downstage left, are the two lawn chairs. Joanie is upright, perched on her seat and listening to the conversation indoors, although her presence is undetected by the women inside. Harry sits beside Joanie, in the turned away adirondack chair. Harry will be variously sleeping, or despondent, his knees covered in a knit blanket.

Alice:

You're too hard on her is what I am telling you. And you do not listen to her at all.

Phyllis:

But, her words...are nonsense, mother.

Joanie:

[Loudly] Nonsense! Mother!

Alice:

No, Phyllis. She just speaks a truth you can't understand.

Joanie:

Truth! Understand!

Phyllis:

I don't want to understand it as she tells it. Nobody does.

Alice:

What if I spoke about *my* daughter that way...In the way you're speaking of Joanie now?

Joanie:

My daughter! That way!

Phyllis:

[Sarcastic] Let me tell you how you speak to me, mother...*[Trails off. Pause]*. The teachers at school say they can't keep her in their classrooms anymore. She causes disruptions. She might not be able to graduate from school and then what? Also, she says the most embarrassing things...The other day we encountered the Miyazakis on the street...

Joanie:

[Shouting] Pearl Harbour! Pearl Harbour!

Phyllis:

And Joanie started shouting: Spy! Spy! Spy!

Alice:

She doesn't mean it, Phyllis...She means...something she can't say...

Joanie becomes absorbed by something - a thread on her skirt, or by the chickens strutting around. Harry becomes visibly aware of the conversation happening inside...

Phyllis:

It's hard enough for Harry, worried about what is thought of him in Ganges. Did you know Mrs. Miyazaki will turn her head in town rather than look at us? They are angry with us, for running this farm.

Alice:

Seems a peace offering, them giving Joanie that job.

Phyllis:

Picking strawberries in their market garden? What sort of a job is that for a sixteen year old girl? Maybe they just want to show our family how they made out good anyway, without getting this farm back....How prosperous they've become...It could be spite!

Joanie:

[*Suddenly*] Spite!

Alice:

It's not spite, Phyllis...

Joanie:

[*Knowingly*] Not spite. It's not spite...

Lights

Scene V

A sunny, summer afternoon, Salt Spring Island, 1963. Joanie, age sixteen, kneels between the rows of strawberry plants in a field of strawberry plants, on the the Miyazaki's new market garden property, up island from Joanie's family home on Sharp Road. Joanie periodically picks berries, dropping them into her pail. At other times, Joanie happily eats the berries, sitting on her haunches. Eventually, Richie Miyazaki enters the scene and begins hopping around, over the rows in an internal game of hopscotch, as if he is following his own internal system of regulation, counting and organizing the surrounding environment. This scene should be played slowly, with long pauses, but not so long that the thread of the conversation (once it begins) devolves. Instead, Joanie's replies should come after a long, contemplative

break, with Richie's responses following more closely. Richie, however, is nonplussed by the long pauses in conversation.

Richie:

[*Entering the field. Pausing and hopping a little before stopping to speak*] My mother says she wants you to stay. After summer, when berry season is over. She said maybe we could find you some other jobs, around the farm...

Pause.

Joanie:

Want me to stay?

Richie:

I also do want you to stay.

Pause.

Joanie:

I want you to stay.

Pause.

Richie:

That's great! We want the same thing!

Pause.

Joanie:

Same! The same!

Pause.

Richie:

My mother's not really mad at your father.

Pause.

Joanie:

Mad at father!

Pause.

Richie:

Are you? Are you mad at your father? I understand...

Pause.

Joanie:

Understand?

Richie:

I do understand...My father...He left me, too...

Joanie:

He left me. He left me!

Pause.

Richie:

But...they didn't mean to, Joanie...

Pause

Joanie:

Mean to Joanie.

Richie:

Yes, Joanie...I agree...It actually was kind of mean...

Pause.

Joanie:

Kind...

Richie:

I think you're very kind, too.

Pause.

Joanie:

Two.

Richie:

Yes...I do.

Joanie:

[Gets up slowly and moves closer to Richie] Two...

Richie:

[Stops hopping around, stands parallel to Joanie, regards her tentative approach]

Joanie:

[Extends her arm and reaches her hand out, gesturing toward Richie] Two...

Richie:

[Extends arm and hand in return, stretching toward Joanie across the invisible row]

Lights

Scene VI

1963. Older Alice sits snoozing by herself in the Newman kitchen, beside the table. Joanie tiptoes into the kitchen, wakes her grandmother, and takes her hand. A ball of red yarn falls from Alice's lap, trailing a string across the stage, as Joanie tenderly walks Alice out of the scene.

Lights

The End.

Characters:

Samantha: 26, in advanced pregnancy, wearing sporty yoga attire which includes at least one garishly coloured item, such as a neon headband.

Sean: 25, dressed casually in jeans and a white t-shirt, with a long sleeved button plaid shirt. A pregnant couple in conversation, sometimes in the early to mid 2000s. Samantha sits on the floor cross legged, down-centre stage, cradling her belly. Sean alternately stands and paces, sitting beside Samantha as they attempt their collective Om.

Samantha:

[*Extending her arms, attempting to demonstrate a 'cradling the baby/bird' posture*] You know, it's like, how you'd hold...a pigeon! A pigeon, that you find on the ground somewhere. Maybe the road, or the sidewalk. Yeah, okay? It's a hurt pigeon. That you find one morning on the sidewalk.

Sean:

A hurt pigeon?

Samantha:

The pigeon is actually dying.

Sean:

He's dying.

Samantha:

Maybe he broke his neck or something. He hit a window. It was an accident.

Sean:

Okay...

Samantha:

And, you want to help him. So, you hold the baby like you'd hold a pigeon you want to help. Very carefully, you know?

Sean:

I don't know.

Samantha:

Just...like this [*demonstrating again*]...like you want to be careful not to drop it. Like you know...you need to watch your step.

Sean:

Did you know that pigeons are the rats of the sky?

Samantha:

What?

Sean:

Yeah, rats. They're really dirty. They live in their own shit.

Samantha:

Who cares? I mean, that's not even the point!

Sean:

I'm just saying, you want me to pretend that I care about a dying pigeon, and I'm telling you they're filthy birds. That's all. They actually are.

Samantha:

Just imagine it, Sean, okay? Imagine a puppy if you have to.

Sean:

No, I'm okay with the pigeon.

Samantha:

Okay, so...you need to hold it like you respect what it is...Or, what it...means. To you.

Sean:

A dying bird?

Samantha:

A creature you want to help. Something that needs your protection.

Sean:

Right. Okay, I think I get it now.

Samantha:

So, when you feel nervous about anything...you just remember that you are dealing with an extremely vulnerable...baby. Person. Who needs your help, and there's no one else who can do it.

Sean:

What do you mean, no one else?

Samantha:

I mean, you're it. When I'm away. You're alone. Imagine your phone died, or something, and you can't text anybody for help... So you just gotta do it... because he needs you. The baby needs you and don't have a choice and so you can't really get out of it. There's actually only one thing to do... pick it up. Pick him up, and... hold him. Cradle. Cradle him... and maybe rock him a little, too.

Sean:

Sam, I'd never rock a dying pigeon.

Samantha:

Okay, I know, bad example. But, you get what I mean, right? I'm just saying, its serious.

Sean:

Samantha, I get it. I'm not a total idiot. I'm just... a little worried... I'm going to drop him. Sometimes... I think that. Don't you...?

Samantha:

Well, you can't. You just actually can't. You can't, so you don't. It's like... getting through your comps, or something. Trial by fire. You can't fail, so you don't. It's like skydiving. Or, remember when we went to Machu Picchu? And you thought there was no way you were getting to the top, because you were cramping, and the guide said you should rest, but you just kept going... and we got there... and you took those awesome pictures?

Sean:

That was a good trip.

Samantha:

That was a great trip. Okay, I think it's like that. You just refuse to let yourself down, and then something... good happens.

Sean:

[*Crouching close by*] Okay. I just wish we'd had some more practise, or something. Me. With prenatal. Or... with some little cousins. Or something. Just one time, holding a baby. Just one time.

Samantha:

It's different, when it's your own kid. Everybody has instincts. You have instincts. They'll kick in.

Sean:

Yeah...I'm taking your word for it...but I think...you know, the whole the mom/dad thing? My father was a soldier. My grandpa, too. Everyone in my family is totally crazy.

Samantha:

C'mon, Sean. Just because you're a guy doesn't mean you can't figure out how to... how to tune in.

Sean:

Tuned in. Tuning in.

Samantha:

Right....Just...tune in... You know...I read that chanting Om is good for the baby...The vibrations, or something...

Sean:

[Long pause, nestles in beside Samantha, tries Om...]

Samantha and Sean:

[Awkwardly and initially out of sync, but eventually synchronizing, both hum Om]

Sean:

[Eyes open, back to thought] I just think there's something strange about not knowing...

Samantha:

[Interrupting Sean] My yoga teacher, Aura, says that the trick is to know you don't know anything and that's, like, the gateway to all knowledge.

Sean:

I think that was Socrates.

Samantha:

No, Aura studied Vedic philosophy. In India. She's for real.

Samantha and Sean:

[Both back to a long, quiet, contemplative pause. Eyes closed]

Sean:

You know? I kind of already feel like I'm there. Like I'm...in it...you know?

Samantha:

Mhmm.

[*Pause*]

Sean:

[*Quiet, with great vulnerability*] Hey, Sam, did I...ever tell you about the frog...from when I was a kid?

Samantha:

I don't remember.

Sean:

[*Exceptionally tender, grappling with the shameful memory*] I, uh...I killed a big frog. When I was eleven. I didn't really want to do it. I mean, I didn't totally mean to. I just kinda went blank. There were these boys, my brother's friends, everybody shouting. I just...felt like I had to. It was kinda weird, like an impulse. Like I had to...know...what would happen. So, I threw it. Really hard against the back wall of Richard Ewen's house after school...And, when it was over, I felt...really bad...like...I felt so terrible, like I'd just done the most horrible thing in the world...and...like maybe I was...Anyway, I've never told anyone this story before...

Samantha:

Weird. That scene you just described? That totally sounds like a scene from a Charlie Kaufman movie.

Blackout

End

#4

*Jump
or*

*You'll Die Laughing: A Tragicomic Short
for the Endlessly Heavy-Hearted*

Characters:

Camille Newman: 45, dressed sloppily in grey sweatpants and a Lou Reid t-shirt, with a big, glossy, black purse, and a pair of shuffling Uggs.

Amy: 35/Camille's mother Joanie, 70/The Tour Guide, middle age, or older, dressed in black pants and a black turtleneck.

The set is very simple. Two thirds is covered by an approximation of a section of The Golden Gate Bridge, on roller-wheels, with three steps leading up. The bridge should be painted gold, with glinting rhinestones, or flickering playbill lights, with many burnt out. There is a ledge in front of the railing on the main section of the bridge, wide enough for Camille to stand on. Down stage right is an aging telephone booth, lit up by a streetlight standing beside the booth. There should be visible graffiti on the phone booth and litter strewn about. In between the booth and the bridge (set slightly back) is a table and two chairs, set with a Soho chic type coffee scene. While the table will only be temporarily occupied, it may remain slightly lit, indicating, perhaps, a ghosted sense of connection...

Camille:

[To the audience] It occurred to me last Wednesday that I could walk out the back door of my life, and not return. Walk out the back door of my life as if merely walking out the front door of my house on my way to De Lucas to buy some basil for dinner. A late-in-the-game discovery, as it were. Pot hot and bubbling on the stove. Turn the tomato sauce off. Not set to simmer, because there will be no grand finish. No need for the fresh herb to add that extra bit of flourish...It occurred to me during a coffee, with my little dear of a friend Amy, who'd asked me to meet her on hump day...

Camille moves to the empty seat across from Amy. Light up on the two of them talking, as if in mid conversation.

Camille:

It was the red dress.

Amy:

What do you mean, it was the red dress?

Camille:

I was walking back from the river that day.

Amy:

The red dress day?

Camille:

I'd gone for a smoke. I look up, and there's this red dress.

Amy:

A red dress?

Camille:

Hanging, from a tree in the front yard of one of the houses on the street...

Amy:

And you thought...?

Camille:

How absurd.

Amy:

Of course.

Camille:

The dress hanging out there in front of some privileged white chick's house, in some... *mockery* of solidarity. And as I walked down the street, I keep seein' 'em. Another one and another one and another one. All of these picture perfect, organic, fair trade, hand dyed in India cotton. Pretty, pretty long red dresses, hanging in the trees. Twirling around in the breeze for all the neighbours to see. And as I walked by, looking at all these dresses, I thought: How many aboriginal women from the other side of the tracks walk down the street in this neighbourhood in a week?

Amy:

How many?

Camille:

Not very many, Amy.

Amy:

Camille, I think you're getting cynical.

Camille:

What, you think the red dress actually has the power to...say...*save some lives*?

Amy:

That's not the point.

Camille gets up and drifts away from Amy at the table, toward the bridge. Amy seems to not notice her friend's disappearance, as if she had been sitting there having a drink by herself all along. Amy fiddles and fidgets, takes a sip of her coffee. Lights out on Amy as Camille begins her monologue by the bridge, occasionally eyeing the structure apprehensively as she prepares to ascend the steps.

Camille:

[*To the audience*] It wasn't just the dress. It was the whole colour campaign *thing*. The plan to turn the whole world Rainbow, as if it'd make a difference. Every terrible incident colour coded to map the wild spectrum of human problems. But then what? This week they wanted me to hang a red dress in the trees, and the week before that it was the pink ribbon campaign. And then there were the yellow ribbons, for something or other. And purple T-shirts and orange T-shirts. And, you see where I'm going with all this peace on a platter business? As if any issue can be fixed *that* easily...

Payphone rings. Camille intends toward the bridge...

Amy:

[*Gets up quickly and rushes to the phone. Answers breathlessly, on the third ring*]. Hello?! Oh... hello. Yes, I know. I know. I know. It's very strange. No, I haven't heard from her either... In, like a week, or more. No. Yes. Yes. No. Well... we have this regular Wednesday thing... And it was after that. Well, she was in a sorta bad mood. No, I mean an *unusually* bad mood.

Camille:

[*Slowly walking up the steps, onto the bridge*] So, it occurred to me... that I could leave my life in the same way as I would take a trip to the grocery store. Not simply being at a loss for sea salt, for isn't there always a little bit of that kicking around the back corner of the cupboard? Or, if we still lived in a time when, lacking an egg, or a bit of heavy cream, or a half cup of brown sugar, one could pop over to the neighbours for some help.

Amy/Mother:

[*Hanging up the phone*] *What goes around comes around, comes around, comes around, dear.*

Camille:

[*Looking over the edge. Gesturing to Amy with her thumb*] My Mother, Joanie, the going concern. Great, gushing, geiser-type font of Wisdom.

Amy/Mother:

Oh, you noticed?

Camille:

[*Back to the audience*] I noticed. I...noticed...

So, anyway, this occurrence, that I could simply walk out the back door of my life was like being at a loss for something more...exotic. And with it, a gift of leaving. A little promise. Not even getting endlessly lost in the isle of dried sausages. No deli meat treats for the weekend. All tripped up, hamming around for the right cut of Prosciutto. Nodding at the single women in the aisle. Nodding at the single men in the aisle. How do you know the men are single?

[*Admonishingly*] You are looking at the ring finger.

Amy/Mother Joanie:

First the shoes, then the left hand, ladies. And, for god's sake, don't look so, so, so...desperate!

Camille:

[*Brushing off her mother*] Making small talk with that day's cashier. How's it going? Good, you? Oh, you know, can't complain. No. [*Pause*]. The trip to De Lucas is a ruse. Something you say when someone asks you, "Where are you going?" And you've really booked a flight to San Francisco, to stand on the edge of that most famous bridge (for the first and last time in your life), but you say: I'm off to De Lucas. This tomato sauce recipe calls for fresh basil, and we are definitely *out*.

Yes.

[*Pacing, slowly back and forth on the bridge*] Yes, but not *fully* yes.

Yes in a series of Nos. [*Pause*] A series of Nos that, sometime in the early two thousands, became your life and now...[*Starts climbing up onto the rail, to stand on the ledge. Pauses, crouched on the top of the railing, looking down into the water*] Now you are aware that you are...there and not there. Your life a series of post-it note reminders. [*Stepping down onto the ledge. Warily holding onto the railing, afraid of the height, and of falling*] You know, those little quotes you copy out and post around the house, for inspiration? [*Pointing*] Insert inspirational quote here. If you love something, set it free...The only thing to fear is fear itself...Strive for the stars! You are your own best mountain! - Much love, signed Plato. Or, that pile of journals you shredded last week at the UPS store, even though it cost you sixty-five dollars (because they charge you by weight, and your load was exceptionally heavy), but oh well, now there will be no record. No more words...to make you up. No more attempts...at self...*definition*.

Amy/Tour Guide:

[*Stepping slightly toward the bridge, and speaking automatically, in a tv, or radio broadcaster 'tour guide voice'*] It has occurred to you that, sometime in the early two thousands, you forfeited something in an accidental signing over of your life rights to Facebook...And now...

Now. Well, now you are standing on the edge of *One of The Most Famous Bridges In The World* for the first and last time in your life.

Camille:

[*Mimes/mocks taking a selfie. Experiences and then recovers from a moment of vertigo*].

Amy/Tour Guide:

[*Continued tour guide voice, Barnum and Bailey's 'circus-esque' ring leader lilt*] The Golden Gate. A Golden Wonder. A Golden Wonder of the Modern World. Designed by a poet, no less, and constructed in back breaking time during the buzzing Bay Area pre-war period, with only eleven unlucky steel workers tumbling [*pointing down*] to Hell. Suspended a bazillion feet over the three mile stretch of shimmering Pacific, which astoundingly still appears blue, despite the irrevocable impact of global warming, which will soon be turing our oceans purple — *on now* for your viewing pleasure! Tune in later, when they re-paint the bridge to match the green sky, as the waters continue to rise, three to thirty-five salty feet, [*Fans herself, swooningly*] also courtesy of the fiery new heat wave.

Camille:

[*Back to audience*] All of these facts are available on the internet. Although, Solnit says that Google's world domination through the dot.com craze has been gobbling up this Bay Area, lickety split, with real estate rocketing sky high, and now The Wayward Bus is a Google tram [*mimes texting rapidly with both thumbs*] that rolls over the homelessness as it drives its loads of Gucci wearing Googling suits to work, I still found my way here. [*Pause. Looking around incredulously*] Actually, I don't even know if this place exists anymore. You'd think this bridge would be a little busier. Still, Google was very helpful when planning this little excursion. An easy trip. Didn't even need to book an overpriced Air B&B room, or bring a single piece of luggage.

Amy:

Besides yourself.

Camille:

Lost my bottle of hand lotion in airport security, though. Having forgotten its propensity for conductivity in bomb construction, and I swear I saw that security guard smirk as I walked through the x-ray machine. He smirked. I swear it.

Amy/Tour Guide:

[*Back to tour guide voice, gesturing*] The most beautiful! The most fantastic! The most represented — *that is, photographed* — bridge in the world! Also occasionally known by insiders as Suicide Bridge, due to its status as a world class suicide destination, second only to some very long, very high bridge in [*whips out a card to read*] China. The Golden Gate! [*Speeds up, like the voice-over at the end of a tv commercial, announcing the long list of possible, unintended pharmaceutical side effects*] Where a jumper, falling at a rate of 75 miles per hour

during the four second, 750 foot plunge, has a 98 percent of dying on impact, or else succumbing to hypothermia, or simply drowning.

Camille:

These last facts are not in the brochure. I had to search a little bit...But then, I like knowing what I'm in for. I'm what they call a *details person*.

Payphone rings.

Amy:

[*Rushing to pick up the phone, and talking into it a little desperately*] Something must have happened to her. Something... *triggering*. I don't know what it was...

Camille:

[*To audience*] What is *was* was that it occurred to me that I was trapped in the banal experience of material existence. Flesh, just flesh, and nothing more. Everything already decided, measured, articulated, gained. About to turn 45...Settled into a snooze-fest of a career...And, well, *nothing new under the sun*, as they say.

Amy:

[*Forlornly, dropping the phone*] Camille?

Camille:

[*To the audience*] I'd gotten this crummy text.

Amy:

She'd been seeing this new guy...

Camille:

I'd been seeing this new guy.

Amy/Mother Joanie:

Are you *still* alone, dear?

Camille:

[*Gesturing*] My mother. Cut from a different cloth...

Amy/Mother Joanie:

Whatever you do, don't save your virginity for marriage. It's the worst mistake a woman can make. I never would have married your father, had I *known*!

Camille:

Basically, anyone born before 1958 doesn't have a hope in hell of *getting it*.

Amy/Mother Joanie:

Well, we just didn't have feminism when we were your age, dear.

Camille:

[*Raising her hand to mock block out, and dismiss her mother*] B.A.F, Mom. Bored as fuck. As in, not two fucks were given. Not even one fuck, actually.

Amy/Mother Joanie:

I didn't raise you to swear like a sailor!

Camille:

Do sailors actually swear like that, Mom? Do they? [*Pause. Back to audience*] Anyway. I sent my new lover a series of sweet little text messages...He did not know how to respond poetically, except to say quite flatly, Oh, you're so poetic...

Amy/Mother Joanie:

Poetic...Which, of course, is another name for crazy.

Camille:

Not even one fuck, mom.

Amy/Mother Joanie:

I'm telling your father. You just wait until your father gets home.

Camille:

[*Shouting*] My father is not coming home! [*Pause. Back to the audience*] Anyway...I started wondering...How is it we 'come by' who it is we 'come to be'? Oh, yeah, I can hear the snickering...See the incredulous rolling of the sweet brown eyes of my lover-dud. Still, do we decide these things? And, once decided, are we fixed? I am. I am here fixed to this edge of the bridge. Fixed. [*Pulls out a little business card from her pocket and begins to read*] How do you do? Camille Newman — an introvert with extroverted tendencies. Likes Bach, but only the cello suites. Eats meat, but only in small doses. Doesn't have a card to hand out at dinner parties. Doesn't get invited to dinner parties. Used to have a serious case of flaming ovaries, but no baby ever came to roost in ye 'ol barren nest. Has a degree in library sciences, which basically means being trapped in the same local library down the street for, like, a million years. Has seen one cultural moment eclipsed by another. After another. After another. Thinks that contemporary life is less than an Atwood nightmare, and more like...WHAT? [*Tosses the card behind her, peers intently into the 'water'*]

Amy:

[*Lies down, exasperated*]

Camille:

There's something nobody wants you to know, but you need to know it. Jumping is contagious. I watched a video on the phenomenon, and got the idea to do it. However, highly under-exaggerated and under-reported reports report that sometimes amazing things happen on Suicide Bridge. One jumper, regretting his choice as soon as he jumped, asked for an intervention from God, who sent it in the form of a slippery black seal, that swam underneath the jumper and broke the jumper's fall. Saved his blessed life. But what are the odds that something like that'll happen twice? God is not going to send a seal to come and save me. I just know it.

Amy/Mother:

[*Croaking*] The wages of sin are death!

Camille:

[*Barking*] Please! Mom, you don't even know what that means...

Amy/Mother:

There's something to be said for etiquette!

Camille:

[*Sitting down, legs dangling over the water*] I'd wanted to go to Vancouver. Initially. But then...

Phone rings. Amy jumps up and rushes to answer it.

Camille:

Vancouver's not what it used to be. Foreign ownership. Absentee landlords. Empty, leaky buildings. Rat infestations. A real mess.

Amy:

[*Frantically, into the phone*] Maybe she went to New York? She's always wanted to go to New York.

Camille:

I also thought about going to New York. But then I wondered, which New York? The one with the 18-story Toys R' Us store on the edge of Times Square, where you can get your picture taken with a famous Toy Story mascot for thirty bucks an image? Shoot first, ask later. It's weird...I wanted The Chelsea Hotel...We are ugly, but we have the music. Not Mickey Mouse on the billboard. Not even Banksy's Mickey mouse on the billboard. What about Beijing, then, you ask? Which Beijing? The one where you can't breathe?

Amy:

[*Into the phone*] I think I need to give up now. I've been searching for weeks. It's taking over my life. Any living relatives I can contact? Her mother is dead. Her father... Well, nobody knows what happened to her father. Just another messy footnote in her mother's empty threat...

Yes, of course. Of course, if you say so...I can keep trying. But, I'm not making any promises. No promises. And, I'm not wagering anything, either. [*Walks off stage*]

Camille:

[*Standing up, orating*] No. It occurred to me on the most otherwise non-descript Wednesday, as I was walking to work and a deep black crevice in the earth that threatened to swallow me whole opened up beneath me, that since I was dying to get a bit of space in this life, I could book a one way ticket to the fading jewel of San Fransisco, and jump into oblivion.

[*Sitting down, defeated*] But...it feels like there's something I've forgotten to do.

Amy:

[*Offstage*] Keep your next week's coffee date with your friend, Amy? The one who is always looking you right in your blind eyes. Unless you want to continue falling forward into Oblivion...

Camille:

[*Oblivious to Amy*] Oblivion?! It keeps nattering at me. The concept. A gob of spit in the face of Time! A tidy little alteration to the problem of hitting forty and ceasing to exist. Wham! Your tits dropping to your knees as you become invisible. Like, you literally don't exist anymore. By the way ladies, no matter where you think you're at in your [*mocking tone, air quotes*] "life journey," try as you might to avoid it, every woman eventually ends up with her mother's thighs...[*Slaps her thighs*]. And the same sad, sleepy sacks...under your tired, old eyes. And, as if the fact of the fading flesh isn't enough to give me...migraines...there is also the problem of my too thin skin.

[*Pacing...*]

The problem, I reasoned, is that my skin is too thin. Have you ever thought about how your thoughts are not even your own independent thoughts, but thoughts made up of the thoughts of others? The radio waves seep in through the paper thin skin. Call it crazy? What's crazy are all the particles of words and letters floating around in cyber space. Like, how many text messages are swimming around now in my DNA? The message of what my neighbour wants to have for dinner now resides in my pinky finger. Or whether Joe-blow across the street should take the dog for a walk? Let me answer that one for you: He's been alone all day. The dog. Whining and barking and pining out the window. Should you take the damned dog for a walk? The answer is definitely yes.

After jumping, there will be no more meandering through the mucky backroads of all this... cultural mess.

No more pretending to eschew poetry, either, because it's become popular in a Hallmark greeting card sort of way. Oh, that Mary Oliver! Full of birds. Romance! Nature! And nothing more! Nothing. More. No mind, whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the geese call to you... Their song harsh and inviting. Announcing your place in the family of things! No more place! No more family of things!

It's all over, all that. I give it up.

Amy:

[*Offstage*] To put your love somewhere! You've forgotten to put your love somewhere...

Camille:

We were told to remember Dean Moriory... But nobody remembers Dean Moriory! Nobody remembers who wrote this rag coz we're all gonna die, either.

Gwendolyn McKewan will not be exhumed, falling up from the grave, reaching a word through the wet, wormy dirt, scented with yesterday, when poetry was sexy, back in *the eighties*.

Nothing left, but this being a member of the halfway-to-hell club, on a toll-bridge in a foreign but ridiculously familiar country, Stranger in a Strange Land, with a posted toll-free crisis-line number that I really don't wanna call. Soon to not exist! *Once upon a time*... The wind is going to blow that fog in, and I won't even see my destination.

Amy:

[*Creeping onstage*] Camille?

Camille: [*Ignoring Amy, standing back up*] It occurs to me that maybe I have just lost my denim mojo. [*Pulls disgustingly on her sloppy sweatpants*] Like an American rose that only bloomed once, and then... Do you ever feel like every other person in the world has figured out how to find the right cut of denim, to fit who they really are? But you? You're trapped in some sort of middle age spread that keeps moving around, so, no matter what, nothing works. Clearly, you need a new wardrobe.

Amy:

Camille? Camille! I don't know if you ever had any *denim mojo*... You know, maybe it would be helpful if you believed in something. Like, maybe the person behind the counter at Subway really means it when she tells you she hopes you have a nice day. Maybe she really means it!

Camille:

Besides... If people were good, don't you think I'd know it by now?

Amy:

[Silently climbs directly onto the ledge of the bridge, initially unseen by Camille, and wordlessly jumps off in front of Camille]

Camille: Noooooo! *[Reaches for Amy. They grab hands. Camille pulls Amy back up. They embrace]*

Come on, you must be freezing...

A bridge crew of two members rushes into the scene, with a blanket.

Crew:
Lady? Lady, are you alright...?

The crew wraps up Amy, and leads her off the bridge, a few steps ahead of Camille. Camille lingers for a moment, looking over the edge. Starts to move across the bridge, following Amy and the crew.

Camille:
[Looks back to the audience] It occurs to me that *I* might be America. You know?

[Beginning to run off stage] Hey you guys, wait up!

Lights Out

End

Closing segment: Tree slightly lit. The balaclava clad thief from the opening segment tiptoes back on stage, cranks up the gramophone again. The lullaby “Rockabye Baby” plays its warbling tremolo. Either the character in black, or perhaps Camille from the cast, climbs the ladder and recovers the baby. The union is, of course, quite joyous.

End Sequence.

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