Shakespeare Meets Twitter
How Social Media Marketing Can Build Community, Audiences
Tips, Best Practices from Tech-Savvy Theatres

Entitled
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The experience can be yours.
Robert Arbaugh as Orlando in As You Like It tweets his poetry to followers rather than carving poems on trees during a 2009 production at Regent University. The tweets were delivered to the phones of audience members in a “wired” section of the theatre and projected on a screen behind Orlando for the entire audience to see. See story, Page 16. Directed by Scott Hayes. Scenic design, lighting design and projections by Michael Burnett. (Photo by Vincent Schilling; Photoshop work by Garland Gooden; cover design by Deanna Thompson)
The year 1984 seems to have been a rocky and seminal one for playwrights. An all-male production of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was shut down by author Edward Albee. Arthur Miller took legal action to halt the Wooster Group’s production of *L.S.D.*, which contained a large excerpt from Miller’s *The Crucible*. And Samuel Beckett disclaimed a production of *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theatre that did not follow his stage directions for a “room and two small windows.”

Recently, I have seen university productions of plays in which directors have changed dialogue, altered the casting requirements, re-written scenes, eliminated scenes, and created prologue and epilogue scenes for the characters. Defenders of these practices may claim the right to deconstruct original material, and there is plenty of rationale to spread around for such choices.

In this age of digital media – with open access to download and change various forms of music, art, photography and literature – anyone and everyone with computer savvy has the technology to alter original works.

However, there are copyright laws that prohibit the alteration of published dramatic material without permission from the publisher or playwright. Clear restrictions are printed inside the cover of each Samuel French and Dramatists Play Service script. In addition, the standard contract sent by the publisher to the producing entity for signing includes very specific clauses concerning unauthorized changes, deletions or additions. Yet I’ve seen directors continually violate what their organization has pledged to do: honor the contractual rights of the playwright and/or publisher.

Whether these practices are artistically valid or ethically justifiable is a matter for debate in venues other than this column.

What concerns me, at the university level at least, is this question: What kind of behavior model are we presenting to impressionable and unseasoned students? Many enter a college-level theatre program without a high level of respect for the playwright’s text. Shouldn’t we be teaching them to honor the authors’ contributions? Are our institutions encouraging illegal behavior by openly ignoring a contractual agreement?

I had a recent conversation with three professional playwrights, whose reactions to unauthorized alterations of scripts were uniformly negative and passionate. One writer had shut down a New York production of his play at dress rehearsal after learning that the director had moved a major monologue from the end of the play to the beginning.

Edward Albee now requires submission of headshots of actors for all productions of *Virginia Woolf*. Beckett and Miller are gone. All three were some pretty big guns. Who is going to protect, honor and serve playwrights without that kind of clout in the future?

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**Letter to the Editor**

**Dear Editor:**

I haven’t responded to a letter, rant or article in some time. That’s probably because it’s been some time since someone’s passion about a subject moved me to respond. In short, I say “bravo” to David Balthrop’s letter (“400 Words,” Summer 2010 *Southern Theatre*) denouncing artistic communication through texts and e-mails. I cannot recall any significant idea ever being generated through texting, and darned few through e-mail. There’s just something about the group dynamic which fertilizes the germ of an idea into a seed and a full-grown plant. Stream-of-consciousness collaboration is, by definition, impossible in e-mail and text exchanges. The time taken to digest the previous thought, to process and then to respond clogs the stream. How about more e-mails/less meetings for administrative matters, so that production meetings can be dream-and-realize sessions crucial to collaborative artistry? And to those who can’t do without cell phones or texts for an hour, I say, “If you’re that damned important, stay home.”

Murray Chase
Executive/Artistic Director
Venice Theatre, Venice, FL
What’s new in theatre? Well, for starters, technology continues to transform the arts in enormous ways. We strive to update you on cutting-edge developments that artists, educators, technicians and administrators are incorporating into their work.

In this issue, we focus on social media, the online world that is becoming part of both our theatre productions and the marketing of our plays. Richard St. Peter shares information on how theatres are using social media for marketing, discusses the importance of linking online efforts and offers tips for how to gauge success in this area. Accompanying his story are a number of case studies, offering helpful information from theatres and schools that have used social media for marketing, fundraising, student recruitment and building community.

This is the issue of Southern Theatre in which we regularly spotlight the work of the playwright. Beginning on Page 23, you’ll find the play Entitled, published in its entirety. The winner of SETC’s 2010 Charles M. Getchell Award, the play was written by Alice Shen. On Page 21, you can read about Shen, her work and the development of Entitled in an interview conducted by Steve Burch.

Inclined more to the technical side of theatre? You’ll find helpful tips from Brent Menchinger for creating your own fabric for rock construction in our “Outside the Box” column, which focuses on innovative and cost-saving design-tech methods.


Finally, be sure to read Ray Paolino’s “400 Words” column, which casts a critical eye on university theatre departments that change playwrights’ dialogue, scenes, stage directions and more without permission. A violation of copyright that should be stopped? Let us know what you think.

Whatever your passion, we hope you’ll encounter provocative questions, new tools for your toolbox and intriguing ideas as you turn the pages of this issue of Southern Theatre.
For our recent production of *The Jungle Book*, we needed several rock structures. These were too large for us to make from the EPS foam available, but small enough that we were able to experiment with different methods for making them from our own molding cloth material. We discovered a relatively simple process that was far less time-consuming than the traditional method we were using.

**First, the traditional options**

Carving rocks from foam blocks is easier than traditional methods of rock-making, but thick foam is not readily available in our location and the cost of this foam has gone up dramatically in recent years.

So we typically have used the traditional method, calling for a structure of screening material, such as poultry netting (chicken wire), with muslin strips applied onto the netting in papier-mâché fashion. However, this is a very time-consuming and messy process that requires a large amount of material in relation to the surface area to be covered. In addition, as the muslin shrinks, it stretches and you lose a lot of the undulations in the metal screening that you spent time creating in the first place.

In searching for materials that would make this process easier, we found several kinds of prefabricated molding cloth that are made of foil and muslin and have many of the same properties. However, the cost of these was well outside our price range. Materials such as these may make economic sense at theatres where carpenters are paid by the hour. However, in a university or community theatre setting, where labor is cheap, the cost of the materials is the overriding factor.

**Our new process**

Our molding cloth material is a simple sandwich of paper, netting and presized muslin. The process we used is simple:

1. We started with a contractor paper backing to prevent the material from being glued to the floor. This also provided additional surface area for the glue to stick to both the muslin and the wire.
2. We cut the screen material and muslin to the same length. We found that a lightly primed or prepainted muslin scrap worked well because the muslin did not shrink as the glue dried.
3. We rolled undiluted Elmer’s Glue-All (white glue) onto the paper, coating it completely.
4. We laid the screen on the paper and rolled it onto the paper using the glue.
5. We glued the back side of the muslin and laid it over the screen and the paper.
6. Once this was in place, we further pressed it down with rollers dipped in a 50/50 diluted white glue and water mix, which helped press all the layers together.

Not counting drying time, the whole process took one person about 15 minutes for a 3-foot x 10-foot test piece. (Figure 1.)

**Other tests, other materials**

On the first test, we used metal bright aluminum screen wire (mosquito screen), and this worked wonderfully. We also did test pieces using hardware cloth mesh and chicken wire. The process again worked fine with the hardware cloth mesh, but we needed to reverse the process for the chicken wire. The layers did not stick well together as the chicken wire did not lie flat enough. To combat this, we flipped the process by first laying the muslin on the floor,
then the screen and then the paper, gluing each layer as we progressed. (Figure 2.) This was then covered with plastic and weighed down with a flat and some stage weights. (Figure 3.) The end result worked just as well as the other screening materials.

**Applying it to the forms**

We applied the material to 3/4-inch plywood rock contour forms. This was a fairly simple process, with the added benefit that the rock was immediately ready to paint once the material was applied. The material is a bit stiff to work with, so we were careful to form and shape it as we moved across the rock contours, creating the shapes we desired. (Figure 4.)

The muslin, screen and paper sometimes began separating as we worked. However, the components stayed together long enough for us to shape and attach it to the rock forms, thus allowing us to maintain the integrity of the fabric.

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Brent Menchinger, an associate professor of theatre at Murray State University in Kentucky, has designed scenery and/or lighting for over 100 productions. Theatre major Kristina Whitehair works in the university scene shop. For more information on this technique, e-mail brent.menchinger@murraystate.edu.

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**Materials Needed**

(for four 3-ft. x 10-ft. finished pieces of cloth material)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>COST</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 1&quot; x 36&quot; x 25' poultry netting (hex netting/chicken wire)</td>
<td>$14.86</td>
<td>$29.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR 2 1/4&quot; x 36&quot; x 25' hardware cloth mesh</td>
<td>$17.97</td>
<td>$35.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR 2 36&quot; x 25' bright aluminum screen wire &quot;mosquito screen&quot;</td>
<td>$19.24</td>
<td>$38.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 1-gallon containers of Elmer’s Glue-All (white glue)</td>
<td>$9.34</td>
<td>$18.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35&quot; x 150' contractors paper (kraft paper)</td>
<td>$10.97</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>36&quot; wide x 40' prepainted muslin scraps</td>
<td>Stock</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** $59.37-$68.13 (plus muslin if not in stock)

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**Have a design/tech solution that would make a great Outside the Box column?**

Send your idea to Outside the Box Editor Doug Brown at dwbtdmail@gmail.com
Ten years ago, it was still a novelty for a theatre company to have its own website. In 2010, it is almost unheard of for a theatre not to have a website – and many also have a Facebook page, a dedicated blog, a Twitter account, a MySpace page and the ability to shoot and upload their own YouTube videos promoting productions, seasons as a whole, special events or whatever the theatre wants to spotlight. Social media marketing via the Internet not only is a trend, but also is becoming a necessity for theatres striving to have their voices heard in an increasingly crowded entertainment world.

Recently, *Southern Theatre* conducted a survey of member theatres and theatre programs, asking those that use social media for marketing purposes to share information on which forms they use and how they gauge their success. The most popular social media form used by those who responded was Facebook, with 98 percent indicating they had a page on the social networking site. Respondents noted that Facebook provides a variety of flexible ways to reach out to their communities, while also providing a platform where they can link and coordinate the many other social media tools they use for outreach.

The second most popular form of social media among survey respondents was Twitter, the social networking and micro-blogging site where users can send and receive messages of up to 140 characters each, which was used by 46 percent of respondents. YouTube, the online video sharing site, was next at 41 percent, followed by blogs, sites where news and commentary are posted regularly, at 30 percent. The social networking site MySpace was used by 23 percent, and podcasting, or Web transmission of audio or video files, was used by 2 percent.

Theatres use social media for a variety of purposes. In *Southern Theatre*’s survey, 80 percent of respondents said increased ticket sales was one of their main goals with social media. That response was second only to
generating publicity for the shows. Creating a sense of community was third, at 77 percent of respondents. Some respondents also noted they use social media to build community with donors, to reconnect with alumni and to attract students to theatre programs. (See sidebars throughout this article for case studies of social media campaigns in specific areas.)

Many theatres use a spectrum of social media to support their traditional marketing efforts. For example, Actors Theatre of Louisville (ATL) utilizes Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, blogging, YouTube and Flickr (an image and video hosting site), each with its own dedicated purpose but all working together to serve the larger goal of promoting what is happening onstage at ATL.

“We have a social media strategy and plan,” says Kory Kelly, ATL’s director of marketing and communications. “We feel that social media is a way to build stronger relations with patrons, and social media is viewed at ATL as another tool in an ever-growing toolbox.”

The idea of the ever-growing toolbox, and of diversifying ways of communicating with audiences is a trend echoed by a number of companies, ranging in budget size from multi-million dollars to nearly nothing.

Even as social media has permeated theatre marketing, many theatres still struggle to understand how they can use social media most effectively. What works and what doesn’t? How do you judge the success of your efforts?

We asked those and other questions in our survey and in a number of interviews with theatres of various sizes—and found three key recommendations that we share below.

**Link your efforts**

The most successful social media campaigns link platforms, with Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other tools all feeding one another.

“Think of the Web and social media as layers of an onion,” says Rich Benjamin, director of marketing and sales for WonderWorks and the Hoot N’ Holler Dinner Show in Tennessee. “Each depends on the previous to build and form the next level.”

He says his biggest success in social media has come from realizing “the interconnective nature of

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**YouTube Previews: Videos Help ATL Reach Younger Audience**

by Amile Wilson

From babies making cute faces to “Ask a Ninja” segments, YouTube has made nationwide sensations out of everyday people. Now theatres are hoping to harness the power of YouTube to showcase their productions and build audience relationships.

One theatre with particular success is Actors Theatre of Louisville (ATL). With each new mainstage production, the theatre’s resident videographer, Philip Allgeier, films the production and creates a short sizzle reel of exciting clips from the upcoming production. Links to the video are shared on Facebook and Twitter. A video feed of interviews with actors and directors, as well as more in-depth looks at the production, are available for major donors.

The videos are between one and three minutes and feature clips of the play cut together and set to music. “Philip does a great job making them exciting while staying true to the play,” says Whitney Miller-Brengle, public relations fellow at ATL. “In the end, people are going to see a play, not a film.”

Videos on the theatre’s YouTube site typically get 500-1000 hits. “Our trailer for *Dracula* last season got tons of views,” Miller-Brengle says. “We received a lot of feedback on how entertaining it was.”

Although verbal feedback has been great, Brengle says the theatre hasn’t been able to quantify the results of this type of marketing. “I don’t think you can quantify exact ticket sales from the videos, but they are a crucial part of the overall marketing of the entire theatre.”

One of the major benefits? “This has helped us reach a younger audience,” she says. “Sure, we have great stories of people who have been subscribers since the beginning, but the real challenge is always bringing in younger audiences and expanding the subscriber base.”

A key challenge is “to produce these videos on a consistent artistic basis, especially during the Humana Festival, with seven plays running simultaneously!” Miller-Brengle says.

In addition to creating short videos for YouTube, Allgeier also creates full archival videos of everything produced at ATL, creates lobby displays for the shows, and films the many events held at the theatre.

Amile Wilson is creative director of Pippin and Maxx Arts and Entertainment and a member of the *Southern Theatre* Editorial Board.
all social media. ‘Content is King’ in the Web. We are playing an imaginary game of three-dimensional chess. Keep that in mind as you build your social media Web platform. Experiment and evaluate each move.”

Similarly, Amie Conner, a marketing intern at Florida Stage, a LORT theatre located in Manalapan, FL, credits a carefully planned, inter-related mix of social networking programs with her theatre’s success in this realm. “We get a great response from our blog post, which we link to and from Facebook, Twitter and MySpace – also the same for videos we post on YouTube, which we then link to as well. The right combination is key.”

Another theatre that has had good success with linking Facebook and YouTube is Kentucky’s Jenny Wiley Theatre.

“In 2008, we created a film-like teaser trailer to promote Frankenstein,” says director Mickey Fisher. “It was a compelling and more importantly FREE promotional tool that we could send out in one mouse click to the thousands of people on our mailing list. Our hope was that this teaser trailer would go ‘viral’ in some small way, where fans of the theater would think it cool enough to relay to people in their own network. We went further in 2009 with our production of Dracula, creating a set of video production diaries that began with the concept and went all the way through the opening of the show. The diaries caught on, and soon a number of teachers requested the videos be put on TeacherTube, an educational version of YouTube, so that they could share the videos with their students in class. Right now, our Facebook fan page is on its way to 2,000 fans. By combining our YouTube efforts with Facebook and our e-mail list, we’re able to involve fans in a more intimate way and keep a running dialogue with them about our productions.”

In addition to linking your social media efforts across platforms, be sure to connect efforts within your own theatre. Many times, a theatre will not only have a Facebook page, but also will create pages for individual shows, as will cast and crew members working on those shows. Theatres are also shooting YouTube videos of rehearsals, creating online diaries with cast members, designers and directors, and posting rehearsal and “behind-the-scenes footage” on their Facebook pages. As with any marketing effort,
In addition to fundraising opportunities such as Chase Community Giving, banking giant JPMorgan Chase donated a total of $5 million to 100 charities chosen by Facebook users. Rather than tediously processing thousands of grant applications, Chase used “crowdsourcing” to choose which nonprofit organizations should be recognized. “Crowdsourcing” is when companies ask customers to make a decision.

To cast a vote in the Chase Community Giving competition, voters had to be Facebook members and become fans of Chase Community Giving. The top 100 nonprofit organizations in the first round of Facebook voting each won $25,000 and advanced to a second round. The top five vote-getters in the second round each received $100,000 and advanced to the final round. The grand prize winner (Invisible Children, Inc.) received $1 million. Over 500,000 nonprofit organizations competed in this nationwide competition. In the summer of 2010, Chase donated another $5 million in a similar competition.

How does an arts organization rise to the top 100 in an intense competition like this? LCT’s campaign to win the money “truly was a grassroots effort,” LCT Development Director Maggie Morris says. “We encouraged teenagers involved with our programming to participate and ask their friends to vote on Facebook ... because as you know, they are the ‘Facebook generation.’ We had a tremendous effort put forth by our staff and interns, and many of our board members helped with the campaign. A few even joined Facebook in the process! We used LCT’s website, Facebook fan page and e-newsletter to generate interest in the campaign.”

LCT also mounted a major marketing campaign that involved community groups, nonprofit organizations, local leaders and politicians, as well as local, state and regional arts organizations (including LexArts, the Kentucky Arts Council and SETC), in circulating information about the campaign. Morris also sought publicity and endorsements that raised LCT’s profile locally and regionally.

“We secured a billboard in downtown Lexington and arranged to have an advertisement run on the video board at a University of Kentucky women’s basketball game so that patrons could vote from their phones at breaks during the game,” says Morris. “I appeared on the Noon Hour News Show on LEX 18 [television station] to promote the competition and spoke to the Lexington-Urban Fayette County Council about LCT’s campaign. I also gained the endorsement of Governor and First Lady Beshear. Children involved with our programming also ran voting booths at our local bookstore, Joseph-Beth Booksellers, to generate more votes.”

During the campaign, LCT’s Facebook page grew from 700 to 1,700 fans. The theatre was proactive in cultivating support for the cause but kept its focus on involving fans in the theatre rather than “selling” LCT. That’s a critical point to remember in using social media for development, Morris notes.

“Don’t try to ‘sell’ your message too aggressively,” she says. “Instead, try to engage and interact with your ‘fans.’ In development, relationships are the core of what we do, thus by engaging rather than selling, you will definitely gain more ‘friends.’”

Morris believes that social media will be used increasingly in nonprofit fundraising. “It allows your target audience to become more deeply invested in the activities and mission of your organization,” she says.

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Facebook and other forms of social media are increasingly being used for fundraising at theatres and other nonprofit organizations. Earlier this year, the Lexington Children’s Theatre (LCT) in Kentucky and Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York City both used Facebook.com to win $25,000 in the Chase Community Giving Facebook competition.

In a new approach to philanthropic giving, banking giant JPMorgan Chase donated a total of $5 million to 100 charities chosen by Facebook users. Rather than tediously processing thousands of grant applications, Chase used “crowdsourcing” to choose which nonprofit organizations should be recognized. “Crowdsourcing” is when companies ask customers to make a decision.

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Quiana Clark-Roland is the executive assistant in the SETC Central Office.
sold more tickets using discounts via social media than we do when we send out an e-mail.”

Another way of tracking results is by using Google Analytics, a free tool that allows you to gauge your website traffic and your marketing effectiveness based on the flow to your site.

“We use Google Analytics to track when we post something to Facebook, Twitter or YouTube [to analyze] how our web traffic is around the time of the post,” says Nancy Jones, director of development and marketing at Birmingham Children’s Theatre.

In addition to using Google Analytics, Florida Stage goes a step further.

“We use a program (HootSuite) that gives us statistics on our posts on Facebook and Twitter,” says Conner. “This allows us to track how many people click on the links we post on Twitter and Facebook, which is helpful. We have seen great response to numerous postings and have been able to use that information to target our posts better.”

HootSuite (http://hootsuite.com) allows Florida Stage to manage its Twitter and its Facebook accounts on one website, with multi-column views. It tracks the links posted in the tweets, giving Florida Stage daily click totals and clicks broken down by post, so the staff can see which links generate the most interest.

Conner notes several other key advantages to the program. One advantage is that HootSuite allows Conner to schedule tweet posts for later delivery. Another is that it allows URL shortening, important for Twitter posts since Twitter only allows 140 characters per tweet. “If you want to include a link, that takes up A LOT of the space,” says Conner. So how do you shorten a URL? Conner notes that there are several sites on the Web that “allow you to put in the full URL, say http://www.floridastage.org/Florida-Stage-Kravis-Center, and it shortens it to http://ow.ly/1WIUT. This gives you more characters to type your message.” She actually discovered HootSuite through one of the URL shortening programs, ow.ly (http://ow.ly/url/shorten-url), because HootSuite has that shortener built into its homepage.

Conner says her favorite HootSuite feature is the search capability. “It allows me to set up various

Contests: Alliance Theatre Invites Singers to Compete on YouTube

by Amile Wilson

Contests via YouTube and Facebook are proving to be creative ways to grab an audience’s attention, get new people interacting with a theatre and often get some publicity as well.

In 2010, the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta used a “Sing Your Soul a Cappella Competition” to attract attention to its YouTube channel and to spur interest in its upcoming production of Avenue X.

“To our knowledge Avenue X is the only a capella musical, so we wanted to incorporate that,” says Lindsey Hardegree, public relations assistant at the Alliance Theatre.

On its Facebook page, its website and in other communications, the Alliance invited a capella groups to submit videos on YouTube. Then, online viewers voted by rating the videos. Each of three top-rated groups was invited to perform an opening act before a performance of Avenue X, and a winner was chosen. The contest had 14 entries and earned the theatre an article in the Atlanta Journal Constitution. The highest rated video had 800 votes. “It cost us nothing and got us a lot of exposure,” Hardegree says. “We had a lot more participation than expected.”

The primary purpose of the competition, though, was to attract attention to the theatre’s YouTube channel. “The rest of the season we put videos up on YouTube as a preview to let people see what we are doing,” Hardegree explains. “Our production of Looking Glass Alice was very visually appealing so it was a big benefit to attracting people.”

Other online competitions conducted by theatres have included:
• Chicago Opera Theater YouTube contest. Entrants competed to win free tickets to three upcoming operas by submitting videos showing why they should win free tickets.
• Actors Theatre of Phoenix Facebook contest. Entrants were asked to find billboards for a show and post their location on the theatre’s fan page for a chance to win show tickets.
• Next to Normal YouTube competition. People were invited to create their own interpretations of the Broadway show’s songs and submit them online to be included in a fan-generated YouTube musical mashup video.

The rule of thumb with these competitions is to enjoy and engage. Give audiences something to actively do to become a part of the theatre community – and make it fun.

Amile Wilson is creative director of Pippin and Maxx Arts and Entertainment and a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
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searches for keywords on Twitter, so that anytime anyone mentions Florida Stage (or whatever I have the search set-up for, i.e., show titles) in a tweet, I know about it and can respond or retweet.”

**Divide tasks among several people**

“Social media takes a much larger time investment than more traditional media to be effective.” says Andy Orrell, marketing director of Tampa, FL-based American Stage Theatre Company.

So how can smaller companies with small staffs find the people hours they need to do social media effectively? “It is an ongoing dilemma,” says Peggy Taphorn, producing artistic director of the Temple Theatre in Sanford, NC.

By dividing up social media tasks, Taphorn has been able to keep a Facebook page updated while also sending out a series of e-mails on theatre events.

“We have split duties between myself and our marketing/administrative person,” Taphorn says. “I try to do daily Facebook updates, and she sends out the e-mail blasts. I typically spend about 15 minutes daily to enter the Facebook text and daily picture, and she spends several hours on the e-mail blast to make sure the content is appropriate as well as entertaining and informative.”

Companies that have interns typically involve them in handling social media functions – a good strategy considering that younger people are often heavy users of social media. Large companies, with marketing staffs and often interns at their disposal, typically have more resources to devote to updating social media outlets. Hence, they typically have a greater presence on multiple platforms.

(Continued on Page 19)

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**High Schools: Paul Dunbar Involves Students in Facebook Events**

by Alice Allen

High school theatres hoping to use social media to promote productions often face major restrictions due to the age of their cast and crew. At Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Kentucky, drama teacher Alicia Henning used her creativity to overcome the restrictions and reaped significant benefits from a Facebook campaign – a tripling of the audience from one production to the next.

It all started with a dilemma: How could she, as a drama teacher, use Facebook to market a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* when teachers are not allowed to accept Facebook friend requests from students? The solution was as simple as getting her students involved in the marketing process. First, a student was chosen to create an event through Facebook Events, targeting audience members 18 and under. Then a parent was asked to create a separate group to target audience members over 18.

Facebook statistics state that 3.5 million events are created each month with Facebook Events. So how can you spotlight your specific event? With status updates, of course! Henning asked students to update their Facebook status often. She also cautioned them to think before they wrote, suggesting that they not use Facebook as a place to vent but rather as a place to say positive things about the show and rehearsal process.

“That seems obvious,” Henning says, “but teens are prone to complaining when things get stressful during rehearsals. I warned them that Facebook was not the place … because that could have a negative impact on ticket sales.”

The impact of the campaign was seen in higher ticket sales to a variety of age groups. A typical audience for non-musical productions at Paul Dunbar includes students’ immediate families and close friends. “The grown-ups for [*The Taming of the Shrew*] seemed to be a lot more of the parents’ friends and extended family than we had had in previous years,” says Henning. She also noticed a large increase in college-age alumni and their friends, due to the opportunity Facebook provides to market to a larger network.

Though not the first time Paul Laurence Dunbar had utilized Facebook to market a show, it was the first time the school had an organized plan and one that involved students. Henning’s advice for other high school drama groups is to utilize the students to help market on Facebook. “Different age groups use Facebook in different ways, and I think that the kids really work to make coming to see a play sound like a lot of fun, instead of something that boring, old people do.”

In addition to the impact on attendance, the Facebook campaign also had a positive impact on performances by cast and crew, she says. Because of their involvement in marketing the show, students “felt that they had more at stake when their names were out there in the cyber world for all their friends to see. When they knew that so many people were coming to see the shows [through the RSVP confirmation information in Facebook events], it made them up their game.”

Alice Allen is a graduate student in theatre history at Regis University.
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Theatres are incorporating social media onstage as well as using it for publicity, blurring the line between the production of plays and the marketing of them. Two good examples are provided by recent productions at Virginia Stage Company (VSC) in Norfolk and Regent University in nearby Virginia Beach.

Romeo and Juliet at Virginia Stage Company

When VSC presented Romeo and Juliet in late 2009, director Patrick Mullins used insights he had developed in exploring the text with high school students and set the play in modern times.

“Social media is a large part of their world (and mine),” he says. “It only made sense for it to be part of the storytelling device.”

YouTube and blogs were integral parts of the story line and the production, as well as marketing tools for it.

“Within our production, Romeo was a YouTube filmmaker, constantly making videos of himself and his friends goofing around,” says Mullins. “It was only natural that when he met Juliet, he would video his first interaction with her at her balcony (www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdaJuFSbm34). The major fights in the show were also caught on video, allowing them to roll out into the lobby and ultimately the street, still following the ‘live feed’ that we had been watching in the house (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLIW6CRqHHYL&feature=channel). Also, Juliet kept a video blog, allowing her soliloquies to be intimate even in our large performance space.”

Facebook was part of the story as well.

“If Romeo and Juliet and crew were alive today they would have a Facebook page, so of course we set them up,” says Mullins. (Juliet’s page, above right.) “They were used for exposition during the show (and before if you had already friended) as well. Facebook usage, for us, was an extension of the play and an experiment to see what they might have written on their ‘public’ Facebook walls while all of this drama was going on in their lives. They ended up with several hundred Facebook friends each. But the goal wasn’t to get the whole city to follow them on Facebook. It was to explore what kind of depth we could get with the followers we did have. Personal messages were sent to followers, often with long message strings back and forth.”

VSC also used its blog, Facebook page and YouTube channel to promote the show, inviting people to friend Romeo and Juliet on Facebook, watch a show playlist on YouTube and enter trivia contests to win free tickets.

As far as marketing via social media, Mullins cautions theatres that there should be a purpose to what they do. “Don’t use it because you can,” he says. “Use it well. Have a purpose and an audience in mind, that connoted the traditional Elizabethan theatre, with the Twitterers in the balcony receiving additional info bits. In Hayes’ mind, that connoted the traditional Elizabethan theatre, with the ‘educated’ in the balcony and the masses in the galleys. Hayes used an Elizabethan production concept as well, with two-level stage and few scenic elements.

“We didn’t change Shakespeare’s verse, language or structure, but in addition to Twitter, we incorporated contemporary music, live video, Guitar Hero and other 21st century communication tools,” says Hayes.

At one point, Orlando tweeted the audience via Blackberry rather than posting his poetry on a tree. That tweet was displayed behind him for non-wired members of the audience (cover photo).

The biggest problem the Twitter audience experienced? Some users complained that their cell phone carriers delivered the tweets hours later – a variance that the theatre could not control.

And in terms of marketing the “wired” production, Hayes can see in retrospect that a structured social media marketing campaign to attract more “wired” attendees would have made sense. His institution concentrated on traditional marketing methods.

“Audience and company members spread the message of our production using Facebook and Twitter, but this was exclusively an individual, rather than institutional, effort,” he says. “I noticed a larger audience in our ‘wired’ section during the second week of performances, and I attribute that to ‘word-of-mouth’ – spread both by face-to-face communication and social media. I have no doubt that our ‘wired’ audience would have increased with a more deliberate use of social media as a marketing tool.”

Deanna Thompson is editor of Southern Theatre.
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Are social networking sites a good tool for recruiting students? The New York Film Academy (NYFA), which began using social networking sites for recruitment in October 2008, answers with a resounding “Yes.” NYFA, which offers workshops as well as associate and master’s degrees in film-related careers, uses a blog, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to reach thousands of prospective students in this country and abroad.

“Our social network drives over 26,000 website visitors and generates over 50 informational requests per month,” says Kalin Moon, NYFA’s director of marketing.

He notes that in education marketing, “success is measured by enrollment. If enrollment is growing and classes are at capacity, you know your marketing is working.” However, figuring out which of your varied marketing techniques are working best can be challenging, particularly with traditional media, Moon notes. “With social media sites, we can track hits, read blogs, and the statistics are there on the use of the sites,” he says.

NYFA has documented a major increase in fans and followers on its sites, which also has led to more informational requests from students.

“On Facebook, we’ve gone from 1,653 fans in October 2008 to the personal page capacity of 5,000 with an additional fan page of 3,000 and various groups and classes that have over 9,000 fans in total,” Moon says. “Facebook generates 10-15 messages a day from prospective students. Our Twitter account has 4,564 followers and receives two messages a day from prospective students. Our YouTube account currently has over 2,900 subscribers and will soon have a million views posted.”

Perhaps the most successful component in NYFA’s social media campaign is its blog, which was started in 2008. “Out of the 90,000 visitors we have to our website each month, 23 percent of that traffic comes through our blog,” Moon says.

Moon notes that the posts on the blog are “a calculated mix” of inspirational stories, informational updates and influential media. “I call it my ‘inspire, inform and influence’ social media campaign,” Moon says.

Most of the entries are short updates on the success of students and alumni, he says. “Posts that influence are heavy on emotion, usually with video or photos that accompany the blog.”

Blog entries that generate lots of interest and responses are the most likely to produce a paying student. “A good rule of thumb is: The higher the impressions and the greater the number of comments and shares, the more likely that post will produce a paying student,” Moon says.

He notes that it is important to “manage” your sites, rather than just let them grow on their own. But he also notes that the larger your social network, the more work it is to maintain. “We use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on a daily basis,” he says. “Since 40 percent of our students are international, we have accounts with popular sites in Europe and Asia as well.”

Moon says there is no secret formula for creating a successful social media campaign. “If you think of your social media as informational and treat your social network as you would your real-life social network, the same principles apply,” he says. “Funny, entertaining and juicy information travels fastest. And, just like in your real-life social circles, people in your social network want to know you care.”

Bottom-line advice: “Keep good media/information pumping through your network on a regular basis, engage your audience, be involved and watch it grow,” says Moon.

David Balthrop is chair of the Department of Theatre at Murray State University and a member of the SETC Publications Committee.
At ATL, for example, Public Relations Manager Kirsty Gaukel says staff members "spend anything from 5 to 10 hours per week updating our social media tools." She notes that social media updates are "primarily the responsibility of the public relations and marketing team, and everyone in this team touches them to a lesser or greater degree." However, all departments are encouraged to contribute to ATL's social media sites.

"Props or scenic, for instance, utilize Flickr, in partnership with Facebook and our blog, to give viewers sneak peek looks at costumes/design drawings," Gaukel says. "Actors and directors have blogged for us before. Our apprentice company often has creative thoughts and ideas about their projects and/or experiences they can contribute as content."

**Keep a balance in marketing**

Because you can do so much with the click of a mouse or the push of a button, there can be a tendency to bombard your potential audience with information.

"The delicate balance with these new social media tools is between contact and over-saturation," says Jerome Davis, producing artistic director of Burning Coal Theatre Company in Raleigh, NC, which primarily uses Facebook and YouTube. "We are trying to be careful that what we send out will be of use to our audiences – will be fun and playful and on point."

At the same time he cautions against social media overkill, he notes the importance of connecting with people.

"You have to be known in a profound way by your audience in order to cut through the clamor of today’s marketing-obsessed culture in order to get them off the couch and into the theatre," Davis says.

Devon Smith, a consultant who has done extensive research on social media, also says theatres need to realize the role that social media can play in building a long-term, meaningful relationship with the audience – and understand that may be more important than capturing the single-ticket buyer.

"If your goal is to simply sell more tickets, social media may not be giving you the best ‘bang for your buck.’" Smith notes. "If your goal is to develop a deeper relationship with your audience, to serve them better, to engage with them where and how they want to engage with you, social media can be a great tool. But just like we don’t choose plays based purely on how many tickets we’re going to sell, neither should we be thinking of social media as just another way to sell more tickets/raise more money."

Similarly, be sure to keep a balance between social media and traditional marketing. Warner Crocker, artistic director of Wayside Theatre in Virginia, notes that the season-ticket audience at many theatres is in a demographic that doesn’t frequent social media websites. "Part of our problem is that our existing customer base is still on average an older population that doesn’t, at the moment, use social media or websites to get info or help them make decisions."

Still, Crocker notes that his theatre is using Facebook, e-mail and more recently, Twitter, to reach potential new audiences.

Like many, Marsden of Theatre IV and Barksdale is enthusiastic about the future of social media marketing in theatre.

"What we do know at this point, and this is no small thing, is that we have been able to create our own buzz and create excitement about shows in a way that we have never been able to before," she says. "As I think we all know, word-of-mouth is the most powerful generator out there, and for the first time, we have some control over that."

That level of control and that ability to coordinate your message across several media platforms is a profound technological breakthrough for theatre companies. While it is time-consuming and has to be done correctly, social media provides an opportunity to control and target your message that is unprecedented in the history of American theatre. For theatre companies using social media, the future is now.

Richard St. Peter is a doctoral student at Texas Tech University and a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.
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Alice Shen Finds New Inspiration as a Playwright

Alice Shen, a college English instructor by day, may have found her true calling as a playwright when she won SETC’s Charles M. Getchell Award in 2010. Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Shen moved at age 5 with her family to Springfield, VA, where they came in search of better career and educational opportunities. After discovering theatre late in her undergraduate career, she went on to earn an MFA in playwriting from Virginia Tech. Devoted to both her students and her writing, Shen recently moved to Evansville, IN, to teach at the University of Southern Indiana. She also plans to continue writing for both professional theatre and film. Steve Burch, chair of SETC’s Playwriting Committee and an associate professor of theatre history at the University of Alabama, talked with Shen, 25, about her evolution as a playwright after the staged reading of Entitled at SETC’s March 2010 convention in Lexington, KY.

STEVE BURCH: Dylan Thomas opens Under Milkwood with “To begin at the beginning.” So, a little biographical material: Where did you go to school? Any theatre background from your family? How did you get into theatre?

ALICE SHEN: I’m a bit of a Johnny-come-lately actually. As a Chinese-American, I was raised to value math and science, not art and creativity. I didn’t get involved in theatre until my junior year at James Madison University when I was cast as Setsuko Hearn in a student production of Naomi Iizuka’s 36 Views. First acting role, first leading role, first onstage kiss – it was all very nerve-wracking, so I can’t say I was great.

BURCH: That’s a lot of firsts. Clearly that load didn’t scare you away from theatre. How did you begin to write plays?

SHEN: I started with a few playwriting and screenwriting classes. In addition to acting in a couple more plays and short films, I provided publicity, props and very light dramaturgy for other student productions. I also took a directing class for which I helmed The Love Course by A.R. Gurney, a tragicomedy about awkward English professors – slightly prophetic, I suppose. After graduating with my BA in English (and probably enough myriad credits for a theatre minor), I decided to remain in the nurturing womb of academe and get an MFA in playwriting.

BURCH: Do you enjoy writing for other dramatic forms (film, television, radio)? If yes, which do you prefer?

SHEN: I’ve written a few short screenplays and one full-length adaptation of a young adult novel, Time Windows, by Kathryn Reiss, but since I’ve solely been writing stage plays for the past three years, I would say I prefer that form because of the familiarity. I can’t really compare the dramatic forms, but I definitely prefer drama over fiction and poetry. I’m not good at describing stuff or using figurative language. Funny story: When I was workshopping Entitled at Virginia Tech, several of my classmates thought [the lead character] David’s poem effectively establishes him as the one-hit-wonder-has-been-hack because it’s so hilariously bad. They didn’t realize that the badness wasn’t intentional.

BURCH: What was the genesis for Entitled?

SHEN: Jules’ thought of how easy it’d be to drive off the road – similar to David’s inspiration for the bad poem. I like existential philosophy in a college-freshman-taking-Philosophy 101-for-the-first-time kind of way. Most of my plays deal with the tenuous responsibility one has over one’s life. Sometimes it’s as drastic as suicide; sometimes not. People have wondered if I was trying to make an anti-abortion statement with the play as well. I wasn’t; I was more interested in Renee’s existential quandary and David’s capability of dealing with the aftermath.

BURCH: What kind of research did you need to conduct in order to write the play? How many drafts and how long between the initial idea and the reading of the script?

SHEN: Being surrounded by fiction writers in the graduate program, I was able to pick their brains about the publication process

Are You a Future Getchell Award Winner?

SETC’s Charles M. Getchell New Play Award recognizes worthy new scripts written by individuals who live or go to school in the SETC region or by SETC members who live in or outside the region. More information: www.setc.org/scholarship/newplay.php.

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The SETC Playwriting Committee has created a playwriting contest just for high school students. The winner of the High School Play Contest receives a $250 prize and an invitation to attend the SETC Convention. Submissions are accepted from October 1 to December 1. More information: www.setc.org/scholarship/hsnewplay.php.
and what seems realistic for an author/literary manager dynamic. The medical stuff about polycystic kidney disease I researched online. The play went through four drafts in 2007, and it didn’t see the light of day until this past March.

**Burch:** How did you happen to apply for the Getchell Award?

**Shen:** From the listing in the Dramatists Guild Resource Directory.

**Burch:** How does winning the Charles M. Getchell Award feel to you as a writer? Are awards important?

**Shen:** Awards are important when you win them! However, after the whirlwind of accolades and champagne died down, I realized I had to get back to work. What’s great and “un-terminal” about the Getchell experience is that it’s not a full production. It’s a staged reading with critique, the purpose of which is to cultivate further ideas. There’s no illusion that emerging playwrights will become established playwrights instantly. SETC gave me the confidence (and funds) to keep at this daily sending-out-of-scripts grind, in which maybe one out of 100 submissions may score. *Entitled* was the first full-length play I ever wrote, and despite recognizing its problems at the time, I had to step back and say, “It’s finished. I don’t know what else I can do with it.” After the revitalizing experience of your staged reading and [respondent] Gary Garrison’s adjudication, I realized there is a lot of work left to do. I need to keep revising and sending out.

**Burch:** Have you directed your own work?

**Shen:** During grad school at Virginia Tech, I directed a staged reading of another one of my full-lengths, *The Life of Television*, with some of my undergrad playwriting students. That was a fun experience, but it’s difficult for a young playwright such as myself to take an objective, directorial eye to her own work. I can only see it one way, and that would stifle the creativity of the team. I aspire to be a triple threat – writer, actor, director – but I realize my visions for my plays are probably like those of an overbearing mother who wants her kids to take over the family basket-weaving business or something.

**Burch:** Many years ago playwright Robert Anderson (Tea and Sympathy, I Never Sang for My Father) famously proclaimed “You can make a killing in the theatre but you can’t make a living.” Michael Weller, in a talk-back a few years ago, advised that if as a writer you want to do theatre, then you must treat it as a hobby because you’ll not be able to make a living from it. Are you finding this is true? How do you make a living?

**Shen:** It’s somewhat true, but I don’t want to get discouraged by the connotations of “hobby.” I guess that’s how the term “emerging playwright” came about – as a bridge to connect hobby and career. My day job is teaching English composition at the University of Southern Indiana. Higher education is my other calling, you could say. Or perhaps my other hobby. To be honest, I’m not ambitious. I’m not disciplined. I don’t write every day. I do what my friend Jim calls binge writing: I start a play, don’t touch it for six months, then pick it up again and finish it in one night. Grading papers often takes precedence. And as a result of my tardy entrance into theatre – through only academic channels at that – I still second-guess my nerve to chuck a solid day job for the mercurial show business. It’d be hard to give either up.

**Burch:** What’s next? For *Entitled*? For your next project?

**Shen:** I need to finish *Magical Thinking*, the play I’ve been writing for over a year. The first 10-minute play I ever wrote, *Suicide Pact* (not about suicide, oddly enough), was recently a finalist in Albuquerque’s FUSION Theatre Company’s The Seven New Works Festival, so I think I should start revisiting more of my old work. As for *Entitled*, perhaps a theatre producer who’s an avid reader of *Southern Theatre* flips through this copy and hits me up.
CAST OF CHARACTERS:

DAVID WINTER, a man of 33, once-published novelist but has not written a follow-up since.
BRANTFORD MERRICK, David’s literary manager, Jules’ brother-in-law, 40.
RENEE GRACE, David’s estranged half-sister, five-months pregnant, 26.
JULES, David’s girlfriend, Brantford’s sister-in-law, 29.
DR. HOUGH, Renee’s OB/GYN, female, mid-40s.

TIME:

Four months.

PLACE:

Various – some real, some imaginary.

FOR PRODUCTION:

Alice Shen
6901 Brooklyn Ct., Apt. 2B
Evansville, IN 47715
Phone: (571) 345-4135
E-mail: alice_in_punderland@yahoo.com

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NOTE:

/ (slash) in play text indicates overlapping of lines.

SCENE 1

A meeting room in a retirement home. Lights up on a makeshift podium, behind which stands DAVID WINTER. His first and arguably only success occurred when he was 29, and it is becoming steadily more apparent that he can’t get bookings in the classier of venues. He addresses the audience.

DAVID: (feigned enthusiasm) The idea for this next one, the last one I’m reading today came to mind when I was on a cross-country road-trip with my girlfriend – now fiancée – Julia, who couldn’t be here today. In case you wanted to catch a glimpse of her, she’s the breathtakingly beautiful ash blonde not in the last row. (pause for polite laughter, of which there isn’t much) We were driving to Poughkeepsie from Lansing, Michigan, visiting her sister and her sister’s husband, and one of Julia’s favorite songs came on the radio, “Wake in the Lake.” The Wainscots. Old band, never really got into them but she used to play their one album all the time. I hadn’t heard the song in maybe five years. Hadn’t listened to it anyway. The poem is entitled “Song to Drive By.”

“Fifty miles out of Dodge a car goes off the road. Seemingly deliberate on its part – the wheel let go like parents let go on their kids’ first bike rides. Not fallen asleep at the wheel, somnambulant over the yellow line, each gritty bump of tread on raised asphalt ridge a last kiss on the forehead. Other drivers join the crowd of ambulances and feigned concern. Eyewitnesses clamor for that ten percent chance to prove their testimonies true: He fell asleep at the wheel. He swerved to miss a dog. He did it on purpose. Had he planned this, waiting for an overcast day to blame? Or was it spontaneous and halfway through, he wished he could take it back?

The time he was lucky, the time he was worthy, the time he put on his favorite song to feel worse about himself and the time he actually was. Jaws of life pluck his mangled body from the metal frame. The windshield lies in shards from row after row of well-intentioned pines never to see presents beneath themselves. The steering wheel chisels his doughy features. The seatbelt burns into his body, a neat crossing of the heart.”

Thank you. (The audience idly applauds.) Thanks for coming out everyone. I’ll be signing books downstairs next to the TV Lounge and Guest Check-In desk. I’ll have copies for sale too if you don’t have one already. Ten minutes. Eight o’clock. See you then.

(DAVID murmurs cursory salutations to sounds of the crowd exiting. He begins clearing the reading area of programs and water bottles, dissatisfied with his performance. DAVID’s manager, BRANTFORD MER- RICK, enters.)

BRANTFORD: David.

DAVID: Brantford, hi.

BRANTFORD: How are you?

DAVID: Didn’t know you’d be here. (They shake hands perfunctorily.)

BRANTFORD: Thought I should check up.

DAVID: I’ve been meaning to –


DAVID: Wasn’t the liveliest of crowds. People on break from dialysis and terminals biding the inevitable. As good as can be expected.

BRANTFORD: Hell in a dune buggy, David.

DAVID: I aim to please.

BRANTFORD: Need some help?

DAVID: I’ve got it, thanks. (Silence.)

BRANTFORD: The spin was…good.

DAVID: Thanks.

BRANTFORD: Poughkeepsie huh?

DAVID: Never been.

BRANTFORD: “Wake in the Lake.” Good song.

DAVID: Tell me about it.

BRANTFORD: I did see Jules last week though…

DAVID: Yeah?

BRANTFORD: Never mind.

The Play

by Alice Shen

ENTITLED

by Alice Shen

Getchell Award
BRANTFORD: No, what?

DAVID: “Breathtakingly beautiful ash blonde!”

BRANTFORD: What’d you expect me to say?

BRANTFORD: She fancied a change I suppose.

BRANTFORD: She didn’t.

BRANTFORD: She didn’t change her hair?

DAVID: No.

BRANTFORD: Okay.

DAVID: Okay. (pause) Brant, it was just spin. You said –

BRANTFORD: No, I know what I said. And yes, the spin was good.

BRANTFORD: Okay. Great. I mean, I figure if I’m already lying to them –

BRANTFORD: Is that what you’d call it?

BRANTFORD: What would you call it?

BRANTFORD: Not “lying” per se. I didn’t mean to give you the wrong impression. We don’t want you to lie. You’re just, well, your readings up until recently have been very straightforward. Bland. Read, water, read, water, et cetera.

DAVID: I get thirsty.

BRANTFORD: It’s a performance after all. If you don’t have a story, they’re not gonna buy it. They want to hear some comedy. Some perverted anecdote. They wanna know what inspires you. Your process.

BRANTFORD: No one wants to know that.

BRANTFORD: You’d be surprised.

DAVID: Right.

BRANTFORD: I, as your manager, would very much like to know what it takes for you to churn out a novel —

DAVID: Really, Brant? Next time I hear a perverted anecdote, you’ll be the first to know.

BRANTFORD: I’m not kidding, David.

DAVID: I’m not either. I don’t get “inspired” okay? I just sit down and start writing and if nothing comes out or whatever comes out is shit, I get over it. I don’t need to get inspired to make stuff up —

BRANTFORD: It’s what you do best.

DAVID: — and you know what else? I hate the spin. It’s embarrassing and not just to me. Give them a little credit. They’re here, they read. I’m not television.

BRANTFORD: Do you have any fucking clue where you are, man? St. Agatha’s Assisted Living. What do you think they read in here all day? Dickens and Chaucer in between the little green bars on the TV that say Volume Up or Volume Down?

DAVID: You don’t have to tell me it’s fucked up —

BRANTFORD: Well, you can’t afford to be choosy about your venues, your delivery, your fucking morals.

DAVID: I’m here doing the spin aren’t I?

BRANTFORD: This shit — (picks up DAVID’S book) — is not so hot anymore okay? City Once Removed has gone where all good paperbacks go to die and the only places I can get you booked is retirement homes and your great-aunt’s book club which is frankly just a living room filled with chintz and blue-blood octogenarians.

There’s no time for your little poetry masterpieces —

DAVID: You said I could dabble.

BRANTFORD: Your poetry dabblings then. You know I’d never ask you to compromise your goddamn artistic vision and write some marketable… Van…Morse Code, but please, it’s been nearly four years. You need a novel. Get with the program or you’ll go the way of Fahrenheit, my friend.

DAVID: Read you load and clear, Brant —

BRANTFORD: David. — but you know me. It’s not done, not even a little, no title, no anything, and I’m not sending out some half-assed —

BRANTFORD: Just a couple chapters.

DAVID: No.

BRANTFORD: OCD fucker. (During the following, a WOMAN in her mid-twenties enters. She is five-months pregnant and holds City Once Removed in her hands.)

DAVID: Are we finished?

BRANTFORD: Unfortunately no. Vick called. Wants to see us for drinks after. Discuss some options. Cab waiting downstairs.

DAVID: Are you serious?

BRANTFORD: Like a heart attack.

DAVID: Shit.

BRANTFORD: Can’t say I didn’t warn you.

DAVID: Warn me? A heads up would’ve been –

BRANTFORD: I’m not your baby-sitter —

DAVID: No, just my manager. You tell me right now — right now — the woman wants to see me in half an hour —

BRANTFORD: Just found out myself —

DAVID: Oh, that’s real likely —

BRANTFORD: (reaching into his pocket) Check my phone.

DAVID: That won’t be necessary. (addressing the WOMAN) Can we help you?

WOMAN: (slight confusion) We were — I mean, I was — wondering if the signing had been moved or delayed.

DAVID: The signing. Damn it — I’m sorry —

WOMAN: Everyone’s pretty much left. Well, I was kind of the only one there anyway.

BRANTFORD: Perfect.

WOMAN: Sorry.

BRANTFORD: (all charm) It’s all right, miss. (holds his hand out for her book) Mr. Winter here can just sign your book for you and then we can get that cab and get going. Your name?

WOMAN: Actually, I was hoping I could talk to Mr. Winters if that’s — (pauses) —

DAVID: Winter / but call me David.

WOMAN: Renee. (holds out her hand to shake) Grace.

BRANTFORD: (recognizes the name) Perfect.

WOMAN: Renee Grace.

BRANTFORD: (nervously) Renee. (Nene’s hand is still outstretched.)

BRANTFORD: (finally taking RENEE’S hand) Grace.

DAVID: (picks up phone) Sorry to cut and run, but Mr. Winter –

DAVID: — and I are on a tight schedule, Mrs. Grace, so if you –

BRANTFORD: David. (slight pause) Regardless —

BRANTFORD: – and Brantford.

BRANTFORD: What? I meant nothing by that, Miss Grace, Ms. Grace, Your Grace – whatever you prefer to be called — I am very sorry, but we do have some urgent business to attend to. Now as I said before, Mr. Winter — so sorry — please call him David, can sign your book if you wish –

RENEE: Thanks.

BRANTFORD: Sorry to cut and run, but Mr. Winter —

DAVID: David.

BRANTFORD: – and I are on a tight schedule, Mrs. Grace, so if you –

RENEE: Ms. actually.

BRANTFORD: (slight pause) Regardless —

BRANTFORD: – and Brantford.

BRANTFORD: What? I meant nothing by that, Miss Grace, Ms. Grace, Your Grace – whatever you prefer to be called — I am very sorry, but we do have some urgent business to attend to. Now as I said before, Mr. Winter — so sorry — please call him David, can sign your book if you wish –

RENEE: I really just wanna talk –

BRANTFORD: I’m sorry but that’s completely –

RENEE: A minute of his time —

BRANTFORD: Ms. Grace –

BRANTFORD: (pause) I’ll be a minute.

BRANTFORD: Need I remind you your career — what’s left of it —


BRANTFORD: Thirty seconds, no more. (BRANTFORD exits. DAVID continues organizing papers in an effort to look unfazed. After a while, RENEE speaks.)

RENEE: He’s delightful.

DAVID: More than you know. (Silence.)

RENEE: I’ve read everything you’ve written. They’re good.

DAVID: Thanks. I aim to please.

RENEE: You do.

DAVID: I – Sure.

RENEE: You look taller than on your book jacket photo.

DAVID: Well you know the camera adds ten pounds.

RENEE: Tell me about it. My sonogram makes this thing look like a fifteen-pound gerbil.

DAVID: Thanks again.

RENEE: Sorry.

DAVID: So, Renee Grace. What brings you to St. Agatha’s?

RENEE: I wanted to meet you.

DAVID: (gestures as if to say “here I am.”)

RENEE: My father died last spring, liver cancer –

DAVID: Sorry to hear that.

RENEE: It’s all right, we’d known for some time. And I don’t know if you knew or not, but Mom died a while ago. (DAVID doesn’t react.) But before that, she had told me about her other family. You, specifically —

RENEE: Her “other” family.

RENEE: Those weren’t her words. They’re not really mine either. Sorry. I just meant, I knew about you.

DAVID: That makes two of us.

RENEE: She kept in touch?

DAVID: Only for a couple years after.

RENEE: I’m sorry.

DAVID: I preferred it that way.

RENEE: Oh.

DAVID: (DAVID’S cell phone starts ringing during the following. He pulls it out but doesn’t answer.)

RENEE: Should you be drinking? Either of those things?

RENEE: No, I know. Look, I’m sorry for showing up here out of the blue. We don’t know each other very well.

DAVID: Or at all.

RENEE: Yes, at all, but I’m trying. Toss me a bone here. Not over dirty martinis for obvious reasons, but just talk to me for now and maybe…

DAVID: For now?

RENEE: I – yes – I don’t know. (Silence.)

DAVID: How far along are you?

RENEE: Five and a half months.

DAVID: And the father? (RENEE doesn’t answer.) I thought as much.

RENEE: Excuse me?

DAVID: These kinds of stories. They’re a dime a dozen aren’t they?

RENEE: It’s not “that kind” of story.

DAVID: I understand. It’s “complicated.”

RENEE: Who are you to say –

DAVID: I’ve got a tight schedule —

RENEE: I’ll wait.

DAVID: I’d advise against that –

RENEE: Why? What’ve you got to lose?


RENEE: (hard) No, not exactly – (DAVID’S phone starts ringing again.)

DAVID: Look, Renee – Ms. Grace, we’ve been strangers for about twenty years. I’m not too banged up about it. Whatever you’re looking for: time, money, an ear. I don’t have it and don’t care to lend it. I’ve got a deadline and I’ve already wasted more than thirty seconds here just meeting you.

RENEE: And I appreciate it –

DAVID: Then please, just let me go. Here. (takes his
book out of RENEE’S hands and opens it up to the title page to sign, slowly speaks as he writes) To Renee.

RENEE: Mom used to say that.

(Shes leaves without taking her book.)


(END OF SCENE.)

SCENE 2

DAVID’S apartment. DAVID sits on the couch, grading papers. JULES enters from the kitchen with a Ziploc bag full of ketchup packets.

DAVID: You have a surprise for me?

JULES: Ketchup. Tons of it. Stole them from the break room.

(DAVID takes them and laughs.)

DAVID: You are insane...

JULES: Certifiable.

DAVID: And good to me...

JULES: Barf.

DAVID: And into petty thievery, should I be concerned?

(JULES laughs.)

DAVID: Is it helping?

DAVID: Well, you know, as research goes.

JULES: How meeting with Vick?

DAVID: Riveting as usual.

JULES: I’m guessing Brantford wasn’t too happy.

DAVID: Brantford? Brantford. Brantford’s not a happy guy. He’s sulky and self-obsessed and / I embarrass him, Jules. I’m embarrassing. The one-hit wonder / has-been hack he was pretty much coerced into taking on and won’t let me forget.

DAVID: David. / Not one...

(JULES says nothing.)

DAVID: This is the part when you defend my honor.

JULES: Well, I can’t say I totally blame him.

DAVID: And it all comes out.

JULES: You know I hate saying that, but he needs to make bank soon. You’re not helping.

DAVID: It’s not like I’ve ever let him down before. I’ve delivered the occasional short story, that benefit for MS.

JULES: The eulogy for Corinne’s piano teacher –

Who unfortunately didn’t benefit from that MS benefit, but precisely. He can trust me. I’ve just gotta... get back on track.

JULES: Back on track.

DAVID: Back on track.

JULES: Not...

DAVID: Stop. It doesn’t exist.

JULES: What doesn’t? I know.

DAVID: You know. Don’t make me say it. If there was ever a more ridiculous concept in the English language. Do you see a palpable block on my desk that I keep bludgeoning my head against? All that inspiration crap, you know I don’t buy that. (pause) Maybe I’m just preoccupied with other projects.

JULES: What other projects?

DAVID: Maybe I’m bored with this particular storyline.

JULES: Change it.

DAVID: Maybe I’ve gotten lazy.

JULES: You write every day.

DAVID: I eat Doritos in front of my computer every day.

JULES: Ah, the process.

DAVID: And when I’m not doing that, I’m teaching and grading and not getting anywhere with... Lady Piccadilly shacking up with – with Count Bartholomew, which calls into question whether or not their lovechild will inherit the rest of the Frisbie Pies empire.

JULES: (laugh) What? I don’t know. (buries head in hands in comical exasperation) I don’t know I don’t know I don’t know.

JULES: Maybe you need an outside opinion. Like a writing coach.

DAVID: Skin alive.

JULES: Or just a regular somebody who likes to read and give constructive criticism.

DAVID: Not this again.

JULES: Let me read it.

DAVID: This has nothing to do with you.

JULES: Shouldn’t it though?

DAVID: Why? How?

JULES: You don’t trust me with your precious work.

DAVID: I don’t trust anybody with my “precious” work.

JULES: I know I’m not literary but I’m not a snobby critic either. I’d probably think it was great.

DAVID: Exactly. You’d probably think it was great.

JULES: I’m kidding. I would support you and the work like I’ve done in the past, buying the hardback the first day it came out –

DAVID: And I know how you hate buying hardbacks.

JULES: Thank you. But I wouldn’t lie to you if your character development sucked, or if the motivation was unbelievable, or if it’s rife with comma splices and anachronisms, stuff like that. (off DAVID’S look) I know what I’m talking about! (DAVID smiles.) When did Frisbie Pies come out?

DAVID: I don’t think you’re a snob or a pandering yes-man...woman. And I know you’re not incapable of giving constructive criticism...

JULES: But...?

DAVID: (babbling) I can’t. I keep telling you. I don’t want you or anybody else reading it before it’s finished. That’s just how I work. I know, I’m crazy. I’m anal. I’m sorry. I’m not ready for a bigger commitment. It’s not you. It’s me.

JULES: Wow.

DAVID: You know that.

JULES: Can we still be friends?

JULES: What about Renee?

DAVID: What about Renee what?

JULES: Would you let her read it?

DAVID: What? Why would you even ask that?

JULES: She is your sister.

DAVID: Half-sister. And no. I barely know her.

JULES: Thought it might be a family thing...

DAVID: My Dad, yeah maybe, but he’s dead. You don’t have to get all defensive –

JULES: I’m not getting defensive –

DAVID: It’s a pretty big deal.

JULES: Right. Okay. Well, I wish you luck. (They kiss.)

JULES: Good night.

DAVID: (just before JULES exits) I’m sorry about the manuscript. Are you still mad?

JULES: Yes. (She smiles. Then exits.)

(END OF SCENE.)

SCENE 3

A coffee shop. DAVID and RENEE sit, cups in hand.

RENEE: I like this place. The sizes are small, medium, and large. Not venti or grande or...gigundo.

DAVID: Italian’s a beautiful language.

RENEE: Oh it is. I just can’t ever remember which one’s which. You speak it?

DAVID: No. (Silence.)

RENEE: Thanks for meeting me.

DAVID: Yeah well, I realized I was...well, a jackass.

RENEE: I guess that’s something of an apology.

DAVID: Oh yeah, no, I really am sorry. I’m sorry for being a jackass.

RENEE: I know, kidding. I guess I should apologize for walking out. Do you have my book by any chance?

DAVID: Damn, no, left it at home.

RENEE: Now you’ll have to apologize for that.

DAVID: Right, then I don’t know, global warming.

RENEE: This could go on for a while.

DAVID: It could. (They smile.)

RENEE: How are you? More readings?

DAVID: Not so many recently. Brantford’s been kinda pissed at me.

RENEE: Your agent?

DAVID: Manager. Agent’s higher up. Manager schedules my appearances. Talks to agent who talks
RENEE: I see. So what’s going on there? DAVID: It’s bad. RENEE: I enjoy a good cry every now and then. (DAVID laughs.) DAVID: I guess, about four years ago, I wrote a pretty good novel. REINE: Pretty good? DAVID: Pretty good for four years ago. People thought I was the next big thing. Got snatched up by a huge publisher, snazzy agent. REINE: And now? DAVID: You tell me, I’m thirty-three. Haven’t published a real sophomore effort since. That snazzy agent dropped me last year so Jules, my girlfriend, asked her brother-in-law to liaise for me, just until I get my act together and finish the damn thing. Begged is more like it. REINE: And you haven’t. DAVID: Brantford has little faith. He hates me for personal reasons as well. (Silence.) REINE: You teach too, right? DAVID: Community college. REINE: You say that like it’s a bad thing. DAVID: It’s not. Not really. The kids are bright for the most part. Demographic of course is the not-so-well-endowed so in some cases, they work for what they pay for. REINE: And you wish you could do better. DAVID: I don’t know if I’m ready for that kind of honesty yet. (RENEE laughs.) DAVID: So where did you go to school? REINE: You’re talking college I presume. DAVID: Yeah, or… REINE: Smith. Magna cum laude. DAVID: Wow, no kidding – shit, sorry… REINE: That’s okay. I don’t carry my diploma on me. I’d show you if I had. DAVID: No no, I didn’t mean it like that. That was a completely…jacksass thing to say. I’m sorry. REINE: Don’t start apologizing again! DAVID: Sor – crap. What’d you study? REINE: Biochemistry and film. DAVID: Film, like movies or… REINE: Theory and history, not how to make them or anything. DAVID: That’s an interesting combination. Biochemistry and film. Tell me, what does one do with a degree in biochemistry and film? REINE: No idea. I design menus for some really upscale restaurants in Chicago. It’s pretty neat. DAVID: That does sound pretty neat. I love Chicago. And food. REINE: As do I. DAVID: How could you not? REINE: Hey! DAVID: No, not like that. I meant it as a tag question. “I love food. How could one not?” REINE: Not because I’m the size of a whale? DAVID: I’d say you’re more the size of a small walrus. (They laugh. Silence.) DAVID: So how does it feel? Being pregnant? REINE: You’re considering? DAVID: Shopping around. Getting price quotes. REINE: Really? Is there something Aunt Renee should know about? DAVID: (coloring the truth) There might be. I mean, children are definitely not a “staggering improbability,” to quote the words of a great rhetorician… REINE: Huh? DAVID: Nothing. Inside joke. Well, not even. Inside joke with myself. I just… REINE: You’re a wacko. (DAVID is amused, but speechless.) REINE: You can tell Jules it’s not as bad as they make it out to be. DAVID: They? REINE: Yeah, them. DAVID: Really? No raging hormones? REINE: Nope. Like just a second ago, I burned my tongue on this cocoa. Didn’t faze me at all. DAVID: Morning sickness? Tedious Lamaze classes? REINE: Well sure. First trimester was all morning sickness, hot spells, dry spells, inexplicable sudden horniness, but honestly, I haven’t had anyone to take it out on or anyone to witness me in the worst moments, so most of the time, I feel nothing. DAVID: How do you feel nothing? Like if a tree falls down in the forest – REINE: Sound of one hand clapping, exactly. I don’t know really. I don’t know how I feel nothing. (Silence.) DAVID: Do you mind if I ask how it happened? REINE: Well, it’s a beautiful thing really – DAVID: You know what I mean. REINE: I went to a sperm bank. DAVID: Really? REINE: No, I met a man, got him drunk, and had my way with him. (DAVID laughs.) DAVID: Did you plan this. REINE: More or less. Why? Do you think that’s crazy? DAVID: Well, to each her own. I’m personally not wild about the idea of kids and even less the idea of parenting so I might not be the best person to gauge your sanity. Or lack thereof. REINE: It wasn’t always set in stone or anything. I never said to myself, “I want to be a mom somebody.” Be a housewife and raise seven kids and cook something new every night of the week, you know? Generally having the rest of the life planned out like that? It wasn’t the old lady clock ticking or some glorious epiphany moment either. I just want to care for a child. My child. And why not? My eggs are gonna expire anyway. Might as well take advantage. DAVID: Well, that’s nice. I mean, that it wasn’t an accident. I mean, it’s nice that you had things planned. Have them planned. Your job and everything. REINE: I’m on a paid sabbatical of sorts right now actually. I suppose you thought I came here asking for money. DAVID: Well, no, not exactly. REINE: I’m not saying that I won’t ever need help in the monetary sense. After all, no father, no relationship. Right now anyway. But no, I wasn’t going to impose on you, especially with your own wedding coming up and maybe a baby. DAVID: Yeah, well… REINE: I really just wanted to meet you. Even before I decided to have a baby, I wanted to get in touch. Mom talked about you a lot. More than I let on. DAVID: Good things, I hope. REINE: They weren’t really good or bad things. Just stuff. (Silence.) DAVID: So is it a boy or girl? REINE: I don’t want to know. (END OF SCENE.) SCENE 4 Out of time. Spotlight on DR. HOUGH. Most of her face is in shadow. DR. HOUGH: I have some difficult news. We got the results of your blood test back and it seems that you’re in the moderate stages of Polycystic Kidney Disease. It generally shows up in the late 30s, early 40s, but in some cases, it can show up earlier, sometimes even in childhood. I’m sure you already know how it is with your family history and all. I’m sorry. Are you still taking those iron supplements for your anemia? You really should keep up with that. I know they’re difficult to swallow but you can’t afford these blackouts when your iron count gets low, you really can’t. You’re two months along. In my professional opinion, I recommend termination. You’ve a family history of kidney disease, anemia, diabetes that may cause complications in childbirth. You could have an aneurysm, lose too much blood. The physical stress of childbirth could leave you permanently disabled. Your body isn’t able to handle this change and aborting would be the safest solution as soon as possible. (She disappears as DAVID appears.) DAVID: I don’t really know what to say about this one. It’s…I guess inspired by my sister who died in a car accident a couple years ago. We never really knew each other but I like to think we thought of each other. It’s entitled “Song to Drive By.” “Jaws of life pluck her mangled body from the metal frame. The windshield lies in shards from row after row of well-intentioned pines never to see presents beneath themselves. The steering wheel kneads her chiseled features. The seathelt burns into her body, a neat crossing of the heart.” (His voice fades as lights go down.) (END OF SCENE.) SCENE 5 DAVID’S apartment. DAVID, JULIES, BRANTFORD, and RENEE are present, and JULES is showing off the baby clothes she picked out for RENEE earlier that day. None of them are baby blue or pink. JULES: For a boy, blue or green? DAVID: BRANTFORD: Blue. Green is too…vegetables. RENEE: Green is gender-neutral though. BRANTFORD: I personally have a tortuous love affair with pink. Who says a man can’t pull off pink? DAVID: A man could, but you? (Collective “oohs.”) BRANTFORD: At least my boys can swim the length of the pool, if you know what I mean. DAVID: Yeah, I know what you mean. RENEE: You have kids, Brantford? BRANTFORD: Three girls and a boy. Her sister – (indicating JULES) – hell of a woman, could pop out four more if she were so inclined. JULES: Which she is not. RENEE: How old are they? BRANTFORD: Let’s see: Madeleine is seven, Corrine is ten, Terrence is fourteen, and Abby is sixteen. JULES: Going on sixty. DAVID: Sixty? JULES: She’s playing Aunt March in her high school production of Little Women. BRANTFORD: And I cannot wait for it to be over so she’ll stop going around the house speaking in that god-awful New Englandy brogue that sounds more like Katharine Hepburn on helium. JULES: I didn’t know Kate was an inhaler. DAVID: Oh yeah, one of those less than glamorous habits Hollywood likes to keep hushed up. (They laugh.) RENEE: You know, I’ve never actually read Little Women. JULES: Me neither. DAVID: What? RENEE: I’ve seen all three movies, but in grade school when all the other girls were reading classics like Black Beauty and The Chronicles of Narnia, I was reading trash like The Baby-Sitters Club and The Boxcar Children.
JULIES: The boxcar hoboes were awesome.

DAVID: How could you have grown up without reading *Little Women*? That’s so... un-feminist. Brant, you’ve read it.

BRANTFORD: Oh yeah. Bawled my eyes out.

JULIES: Well excuse Renee and me for spurning our inner femininity.

RENEE: I’m having a baby. That should be enough.

BRANTFORD: (to JULES) What’s your excuse?

JULIES: I already know Beth dies. Book’s ruined.

BRANTFORD: Beth dies?

DAVID: You quit after the wedding didn’t you?

BRANTFORD: Had to return the video before six or else they charge the late fee. (Laughs and groans.)

RENEE: (digging through her purse for a pen) Speaking of weddings, when’s you guys’? I should save the reading.

DAVID: Time’s on your side. You’re going somewhere, but you know, keep on dragging it

JULIES: (overlapping) That’s not necessary – JULIES: (simultaneously) Our what?

RENEE: Registry. Your wedding registry?

(Slight pause.)

BRANTFORD: Here we go.

DAVID: God, Brant, shut up –

JULIES: Guys?

RENEE: I thought you and David were...

JULIES: Engaged? No, not really. How’d you get that?

RENEE: He mentioned it... at the reading, a month ago.

DAVID: It was just some spin, Jules –

JULIES: That we were getting engaged? Better yet, already are?

RENEE: I shouldn’t have asked. I didn’t mean to –

JULIES: (slightly sarcastic) David, I didn’t think you were ready for that big a commitment.

DAVID: I’m not not –

JULIES: Even in a lie.

BRANTFORD: Lie? What lie? It was just some spin.

DAVID: Damn it, Brantford, can you please not be an asshole about this?

BRANTFORD: You spun this / yourself, kid –

JULIES: (to DAVID) What are you yelling at him for?

DAVID: Oh yeah, create some intrigue, David. Give them some sick anecdote, David. Don’t they buy your books, they buy your bullshit. Maybe next time, I’ll let ‘em know how I got a high-priced hooker to give me books, they buy your bullshit. Maybe next time, I’ll let ‘em know I’m not the woman you want to marry?

JULIES: Your life’s certainly not that glamorous.

DAVID: I wouldn’t really say that, Jules.

BRANTFORD: Calm down, David, I didn’t tell you to

DAVID: Make up stuff? You didn’t? Cuz I could’ve sworn –

BRANTFORD: I merely asked you to listen up your reading. Make yourself more sympathetic to the audience –

RENEE: He was sympathetic.

JULIES: Or just pathetic.

DAVID: Nice. Thanks.

BRANTFORD: You were the one who got your personal life into the mix.

JULIES: (to RENE) Is that why you asked me when I went brunet? Sorry to disappoint, David. I’m no blond bombshell.

DAVID: (overlapping) Your hair’s fine.

BRANTFORD: (overlapping) Your hair’s lovely.

RENEE: (overlapping) Blondes are so 90s.

DAVID: It’s not that big a deal.

JULIES: It wouldn’t be that big a deal if you were even remotely in the ballpark. Remotely interested in the idea. If you even for a second thought we could be going somewhere, but you know, keep on dragging it out. Time’s on your side.

DAVID: (overlapping) Jules, what are you talking about?

BRANTFORD: (overlapping) Of course you’re going somewhere.

RENEE: (overlapping) You guys are adorable. *(JULES looks at the three of them oddly)*

JULIES: Are you three working in cahoots or something?

RENEE: No... uh, I don’t think so –

DAVID: Jules, maybe we should save this for later.

JULIES: Later like five more years later?

DAVID: No, I’m just saying –

RENEE: You guys’ve been together for five years?

BRANTFORD: Off and on.

DAVID: (exasperated) Of course.

JULIES: Brantford, put it away.

RENEE: Maybe we oughta call it a night.

JULIES: Yeah, that might be a good idea.

*(All of them get up and gather their belongings.)*

RENEE: I had a really great time. Thanks for helping me... with the clothes. He or she’s gonna love ‘em.

JULIES: You’re very welcome.

RENEE: I’m really sorry about –

JULIES: Please, don’t worry about it.

RENEE: Thanks. Well, catch you later, bro.

DAVID: I’ll call you – both of you – soon.

BRANTFORD: Looking forward to it, Jules, always a pleasure.

JULIES: Tell Jill I’ll pick her up Thursday for the flower show.

BRANTFORD: Will do.

DAVID: Good night guys.

(BRANTFORD and RENE EXT. DAVID and JULES face each other. Silence. JULIES then begins cleaning up.)

JULIES: So... *Little Women*. Manly.

DAVID: Fuck.

JULIES: No, I think it’s sweet. I mean, you’re a writer. You should be familiar with the canon.

DAVID: Stop it, Jules.

JULIES: (sincere) No, I get it, David. We don’t need to rehash it. You don’t want to get married –

DAVID: No, stop defecting –

JULIES: I’m not.

DAVID: Yes you are, you always do this. You act / like something doesn’t bother you when it does.

JULIES: I do not. No it doesn’t.

DAVID: What? What doesn’t? You don’t even know.

JULIES: I do too. I want to get married and you don’t. Tear. I’m over it.

DAVID: No – we’re not. You deflect. You defer. It’s like when you want to talk about something, I don’t, and when I want to talk about something, you don’t.

JULIES: Well I’m sorry we’re so Abbott and Costello.

DAVID: It’s not just that. I know you’re mad –

JULIES: Third base.

DAVID: – but you act all ambivalent like you’ve got this guard up or something. You’re usually just cool but when you’ve got something on your mind you check yourself and pretend to be funny and chill because you think I want you to be “low maintenance” or something.

JULIES: So it’s my fault I don’t wrestle for the last word?

DAVID: No – well, kinda –

JULIES: So what if I’m cool? It’s my right. Do you really want me wrestling for that last word? A “high maintenance” woman it’s convenient for you so you can feel less threatened? They fly off into the ether?

JULIES: I’m saying I could go either way. I don’t have to have a husband. I don’t have to have children. I’m only twenty-nine and despite the rest of the world thinking that’s ancient, I’m not too worried about becoming a cat lady. As for us, you’ve got a wife, a lot of time has come and gone. I just want to know where we fall.

DAVID: Where we fall? Gees, Jules, I guess we fell here. In love and all that. I thought we were fine.

JULIES: You don’t just fall in love, David. It’s not a hole you trip and fall into. Sure it’s all rainbows and gumdrops at first but after that, we decide where we go and if you won’t. I will.

DAVID: You make us sound like a car with customiz- able options or something. You don’t choose who you love –

JULIES: Yes you do. Look, kids don’t have to love their parents just because they’re their parents and parents don’t have to love their kids just because they’re their kids.

DAVID: Of course parents should love their kids –

JULIES: Yes, of course they should, but they don’t. You of all people should know that.

(Silence.)

DAVID: Wow. That was really mean.

JULIES: (shrugs) You chose to love me.

DAVID: I did not. It just happened.

JULIES: Just happened? Are you that fatalistic?

DAVID: Yes.

JULIES: So you wanna wait some more? After five years, you still can’t decide? You’ve still got your hopes riding on this fleeting window of possibility?

DAVID: I don’t know. How am I supposed to know? It’s one of those things that when I know, I’ll know.

JULIES: That’s deceptively deep.

DAVID: Well pardon me for fuck’s sake, it’s late. I’m damned if I do / and damned if I don’t.

JULIES: And damned if you don’t.

(DAVID says nothing.)

JULIES: And it seems clear that you don’t.

DAVID: Jules...

JULIES: So...this has been nice. Great even. We had fun.

DAVID: You’re not gonna leave it like this, are you?

JULIES: Like what? I’ve already made my choice. Am I not the woman you want to marry?

DAVID: You’re the woman I love, Jules. I love you. This, and marriage are two completely different things that frankly, I don’t understand why people keep lumping together, the latter of which, is not something I have a definite answer to.

JULIES: Then why do you joke about it or spin it? You tell that to a roomful of strangers so they’ll think some magnificent thing about you, like you’re mature and sensitive and ready for commitment –

DAVID: Since when does not-ready-for-commitment preclude maturity?

JULIES: It doesn’t, but lying about it? Sorry, spinning?

DAVID: Can you stop judging me on that one transgression? I never said never.

JULIES: Fine. So are you merely saying you’re not ready?

DAVID: What do you want from me? You want me to say yes, you’re the one, but unfortunately, I am so deep in my sister having a baby and my editor breathing down my neck and maybe another commitment is not what I need right now?

JULIES: Don’t say what you think I want –

DAVID: I don’t presume to know anything you want –

JULIES: Then get a fucking clue!

DAVID: Fine, damn it! Gone a clue!

JULIES: Just answer the question!

DAVID: I forget what it is.

JULIES: (laughing) Are you merely saying you’re not ready?!

DAVID: (laughing as well) No!

JULIES: (still laughing) No you’re not ready or no that’s not what you’re merely saying?!

DAVID: (still laughing) I don’t know!
SCENE 6
Out of time. Spotlight on DAVID, center stage. He speaks to the audience, but it’s implied that Vick’s asking the questions.
DAVID: It’s about a boy. […] Yes, you’re right, it’s absolutely been done before, but well, he’s not a boy per se. Let’s say he’s, uh, middle-something—um, twenties—twenty-fives—[…] No — no — yes, of course I know—he’s twenty-four and recently divorced. Bad marriage, complete spur-of-the-moment thing. You know those hole-to-Vegas types — […] Oh, that’s right. You’re right, they do get married in her pastor’s church, wow you have a really good memory. Las Vegas was just a figure of speech. I wanted to make clear, crystal clear, how spur-of-the-moment the whole thing was — […] No, no bun in the oven. […] Yes, the high school sweetheart. Well, girl he dated in high school. […] Why’d they get married? Huh, why does anyone get married? I — I — they went to college together and nothing better came along so, seemed like a logical progression. Been together long enough you think, hey why not spend the rest of my life with this person? Time is a — ticking — ticking time bomb. Yeah. […] They got divorced after three years. Nice big fight, punches thrown. The girl. The guy didn’t hit her or anything. […] You think he should? Well, I don’t know if that’s really in his character, but yeah sure, okay, yeah I’ll think about it. I’ll have him think about it. Yes. […] No, no kids. There’s the dog though. And they both love the dog. It’s a great dog. White Scottish Terrier. […] His name? Pickle Relish. […] No, they just happen to like pickle relish. […] Right exactly, the condiments, right. I don’t wanna get too steeped in symbolism though, but yeah, I can see how the reader could misconstrue that. Or plain construe that rather, since they wouldn’t be wrong. It wouldn’t be “mis-”constructed. Just construed. Anyway, here’s his thing: he collects ketchup packets from every fast food restaurant in town cuz you know, Burger King uses Heinz, but Wendy’s uses Hunts, which I prefer actually, do you? Prefer Hunts? […] Excellent, that’s great. And of course, McDonald’s uses Fancy Ketchup or whatever and the smaller franchises have their own affiliations naturally or something. Taco Bell, which doesn’t give out ketchup at all so it’s really any kind of red sauce that he collects. He’s been doing this for about fifteen years so he’s amassed quite an enviable collection obviously. He’s pretty neurotic about it too. Keeps the packets in little crystal sleeves. Likes to catalog the changes in packet design, consistency of the product, how much of the packet is sauce, how much is air, looking for some ketchup conspiracy or something — I’ve actually done some extensive research on this. And Annabelle, the girl, used to think this was cute — the collecting — she thought it was cute, but the depths of his insanity are really starting to — un — bubble to the surface. And one day, he cracks. Annabelle comes home from work to find the place covered, just smothered in ketchup. Ketchup from the packets, torn apart. Loose ketchup everywhere. It’s on the lampshades, the sofas, ketchup. Ketchup from the packets, torn apart. Loose ketchup on top are going to be these really cool elaborately carved king and queen chess pieces, carved out of Bavarian chocolate. We’re having a chess-themed wedding. Ballroom floor’s gonna be all black and white checked too. We were considering red and black but decided against it. It’d be like emo-punk — Alice in Wonderland or something. We’re not dressing the bridal party up like chess pieces or anything, no that would be too little but the guests can if they want. Halloween masquerade ball oh my God that’s a great idea. I’ll have to talk it over with Jules. Might set us back a couple months or so. Yeah, no, we are having a crazy crazy crazy-awesomed time planning this wedding. Your invitation’s in the mail. I am stoked. Unbelievably. Thanks. […] A title? Oh, a title for, yeah, okay, that’s something, um, Devilish Eggs. No I’m sorry that made no sense. My train of thought went: Pickle Relish — condiments — paprika — deviled eggs. I love deviled eggs, even though paprika’s not technically a condiment. It’s a spice, or herb, I can never remember which. I like mine with a little bit of chives sprinkled on top. My deviled eggs, I mean. They’re great. Sure, no, that doesn’t work. The title. The title. You know, a crazy thought just came to me. Having a chess-themed wedding is basically giving in to all the marriage clichés that made no sense. My train of thought went: Pickle Relish. […] No I’m sorry I’ve actually done some extensive research on this. How much of the packet is sauce, how much is air. That was never my plan. I could but I made a promise to Jules. No matter how much I really wish I could, David. I really wish I could but I made a promise to Jules. No matter how shitty the writing gets. DAVID: Fuck off. BRANTFORD: I wish I could, David. I really wish I could but I made a promise to Jules. No matter how shitty you’re going to have a really good time. It’s with the little packet of plant food tucked in there. She was asleep at the time but the second the stench reached her superhuman olfactory senses — the only thing as yet untouched by the cancer — she woke up. Started yelling about how he was an idiot and how he didn’t know her at all, and he yelled right back, saying she could go to hell and get pricked by thorns along the way. What’s funny is that she had always liked the thorns. The only redeeming part of the flower. Prickly. For pricking people. And she did. She grabbed the bouquet — not the vase, that was Grandma’s — and the cellophane and hurls the loose stems at Dad all the way across the room. Incidentally, he hadn’t asked the florist to desert the roses. Got that part right at least. Is that a word? Dethorned? How animals get declawed? (Lights come up slightly to reveal a bouquet of red silk roses on a bedside table. DR. HOUGH stands in the shadows.) DR. HOUGH: Twenty-eight weeks is almost up. You have only a small window of opportunity left if you wish to terminate. RENE: That was never my plan. DR. HOUGH: I understand but — RENE: Then please stop counting down for me. DR. HOUGH: Does he know yet? RENE: No, DR. HOUGH: Are you going to — RENE: Yes, of course I’m going to tell him. Please don’t worry about me. DR. HOUGH: As your doctor, I have to keep you aware of the consequences — RENE: I know — DR. HOUGH: — risks — RENE: I know DR. HOUGH: It doesn’t seem like you do. RENE: It’s not supposed to seem like anything. (END OF SCENE.) SCENE 2 DAVID’S great-aunt’s house. DAVID and BRANTFORD sit in chintz-covered wicker rockers. DAVID is sartorially all over the place. BRANTFORD: Well, this is a nice new development. DAVID: Fuck off. BRANTFORD: I wish I could, David. I really wish I could but I made a promise to Jules. No matter how shitty the writing gets. DAVID: Don’t use that all right? We’re not even together anymore — BRANTFORD: Her deal still stands. DAVID: What? BRANTFORD: Yeah. DAVID: Oh. (pause) It’s not shitty okay? It’s getting good. It’s getting really good. I’ve really hit my stride. BRANTFORD: Yeah you’ve got some grade A material. A nation of fast food. DAVID: It’s not about a nation of fast food. / It’s about a boy.
SCENE 4

Out of time. DAVID and RENEÉ appear in separate spotlights. They seem a little punchy.

RENEÉ: (reading from the frame)

“Fifty miles out of Dodge a car goes off the road. Seemingly deliberate on its part—the wheel let go like parents let go on their kids’ first bike rides. Not fallen asleep at the wheel, somnambulant over the yellow line, each gritty bump of tread on raised asphalt ridge a last kiss on the forehead.”

(Pause.)

DAVID: You know what I remember about Mom?

RENEÉ: What?

DAVID: The ring fingers on both her hands were longer than the middle fingers.

RENEÉ: That’s an odd thing to remember.

DAVID: You never noticed?

RENEÉ: I did. It creeped me out.

DAVID: Did she wear a wedding band on her left ring finger?

RENEÉ: I don’t remember. Probably.

DAVID: What was her favorite color?

RENEÉ: Lavender.

DAVID: I knew you were going to say that.

RENEÉ: Why?

DAVID: It’s a pretty word.

RENEÉ: It was her favorite color.

DAVID: She didn’t like red.

RENEÉ: Hated red.

DAVID: Color of blood.

RENEÉ: Blech.

DAVID: Do you think if blood were lavender, she wouldn’t’ve been scared at the sight of it?

RENEÉ: She wasn’t scared at the sight of blood.

DAVID: Wasn’t she?

RENEÉ: I think that’s you.

DAVID: I am not.

RENEÉ: You are too.

DAVID: Maybe just a little.

(RENEÉ takes the frame)

(RENEÉ puts the frame on the table and looks at it.)

RENEÉ: (to herself) Easy to love but didn’t love me back.

DAVID: (to RENEÉ) RENEÉ...

RENEÉ: (to DAVID) Don’t be sad.

DAVID: I am not.

RENEÉ: (to DAVID) I’m not a sad person.

DAVID: No, you are.

RENEÉ: (to DAVID) I don’t want your sympathy.

DAVID: I know you don’t. I just... just wanted to thank you. Again. Is that all right? Is that all right? I just want it to be all right.

(END OF SCENE.)

DAVID: (to RENEÉ) RENEÉ...

RENEÉ: (to DAVID) Don’t be sad.

DAVID: I am not.

RENEÉ: (to DAVID) I’m not a sad person.

DAVID: No, you are.

RENEÉ: (to DAVID) I don’t want your sympathy.

DAVID: I know you don’t. I just... just wanted to thank you. Again. Is that all right? Is that all right? I just want it to be all right.

(END OF SCENE.)
herself very well. She didn’t believe in blind loyalty. She never trusted anyone from the get-go. They had to earn her trust, like, and on some level, I respect that. No one is entitled. She knew herself so well. She knew herself so very well that she wouldn’t turn off that filter, not even for me. (pause) You know Jules’ parents are divorced?
RENEE: Recently?
DAVID: When she was eleven. And of course, they said to her, “It’s not your fault, sweetie. It’s not your fault,” but really, it might’ve been. She thinks it might’ve been. Her dad was always going to Europe on business and when he was away, she’d sleep in their bed. Nightmares. She’d go back to her room when he came back, but after one particular trip, she didn’t. She stayed in the master bedroom and he took her room. This went on for close to a year. I mean, something must’ve been wrong already for her parents not to object, but that lack of intimacy. Perhaps that was a reason. Perhaps it was her fault. (pause) Her fault. Her fault is something I don’t get. Whose fault. Her fault. My fault. Who can blame her? She didn’t know at the time. Then again no one knows anything “at the time.” Then again, kids can also be so intentionally cruel, you never know. I just – I’d never want to think that. About mine. My child. My hypotheti- cal child. (pause) We were grocery shopping one time and in the bread aisle. We saw a little girl. Alone. She was crying. I figured her mom or dad must’ve stepped away for a second and lost sight of her, but before I could even think to go to Customer Service, Jules went to her, just scooped her up in her arms and held her. She was so beautiful in that moment. She still is, all the time, but in that moment, I think even me, with my hypotheticalness, just – visions – through my mind – and I thought… this is it. This is what I want. (pause) But what if I don’t like her? The hypothetical child? What if she doesn’t like me? It makes me so angry that I can even entertain that notion. It makes me so angry that I – the – he’s been spinning – a television together. Honestly, I don’t know what else to say. I – the – (rips page out and crumples it up)

SCENE 6
A coffee shop. JULES and RENEE sit. RENEE is eight months pregnant now.
JULES: I had a weird time. Not a depression, just a weird existential time. Always thinking of ways to kill myself. Not me specifically, just how one would go about doing it if one was so inclined. That our lives are in our control and that dying by one’s own hand might actually be the only honorable way to go. I’m saying “one” a lot aren’t I? Don’t worry, I’m not suicidal. I just find it fascinating, the whole concept of seppuku, falling on your sword, that type of thing. Creative people or people in show biz offing themselves. It’s not some kind of conspiracy, I think they really knew what they were doing and on some level, I admire that. I hesitate to call it courage around other people because that sounds like I’m condemning suicide or something, which I’m not. Not exactly. Guts. Is that better? It takes guts to pull the trigger on yourself, hang yourself, take pills, drive off a cliff, whatever. So yeah, that’s where I got the idea. Driving off the road. I guess I’m glad he spun it or else I’d seem, I don’t know, weird. I guess it doesn’t matter now. It’s all for the best really.
RENEE: How can you say that?
JULES: Easy. “It’s just stuff.”
RENEE: You’re making a big mistake.
JULES: It’s already done. He made it too.
RENEE: You guys…
JULES: What? Us what?
RENEE: I don’t know. Something. Lots of things.
JULES: Lots of things were said.
RENEE: And you meant them all?
JULES: I always say what I mean.
RENEE: But do you always mean what you say?
JULES: You’re begging the question.
RENEE: I don’t think you do.
JULES: You know me pretty well huh?
RENEE: No. I just don’t think that you do.
(Julie and Renee giggle. Jules looks at her)

SCENE 7
Some kind of limbo. Spotlight on RENEE, writing in a journal.
RENEE: Okay. I need some support, huh?
RENEE: Okay David needs some support. He misses you.
JULES: He does not.
RENEE: He needs you. You keep him sane. He’s gone to pieces.
JULES: What are you talking about? He sounds fine.
RENEE: His novel’s going well. He’s hanging out with you. He sounds great.
RENEE: Well he’s not. Not all the way. He needs to get back on track.
JULES: He doesn’t believe in writer’s block.
RENEE: He means with life.
JULES: Not my job. And not your job to go enlisting help for him either.
RENEE: I know that.
JULES: Then why are you?
RENEE: I just don’t think – I mean, I don’t know for sure whether David can handle things on his own or not.
JULES: He’s thirty-three and not addicted to any illegal substances, I think he’s doing all right.
RENEE: I mean, handle things. Like, you guys were thinking kids, right?
JULES: No Renee, we weren’t even thinking of buying a television together. Honestly, I don’t know what else he’s been spinning –
JULES: He’s changed.
RENEE: He’s changed you’ve changed I’ve changed. Doesn’t change a thing.
RENEE: But kids specifically –
JULES: Why do you keep bringing up –
RENEE: You want kids, right?
JULES: I’m honestly kind of ambivalent right now
RENEE: But you could go for it?
JULES: Sure, but not with David.
RENEE: What if he had a kid?
JULES: How could he “have a kid”?
RENEE: Because I may not be able to keep mine.

JULES: That’s great. I’m very glad.
RENEE: What’s up?
JULES: Nothing, I mean, whatever. He can go on stealing my life –
RENEE: He’s not stealing. It was both your lives. And it’s really not bad at all. There’s still no title and I don’t think it’s up there with City Once Removed, yet, but it’s definitely.
JULES: No it sounds great. I just, and I’m sorry for cutting to the chase here, but was there a reason for…meeting? Not that I mind, I just wonder why, you sounded…
RENEE: I thought you might need some support.
JULES: I need some support, huh?
RENEE: Okay David needs some support. He misses you.
JULES: He does not.
JULES: He needs you. You keep him sane. He’s gone to pieces.
JULES: What are you talking about? He sounds fine.
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RENEE: But you could go for it?
JULES: Sure, but not with David.
RENEE: What if he had a kid?
JULES: How could he “have a kid”?
RENEE: Because I may not be able to keep mine.

JULES: You’re putting it up for adoption?
RENEE: Not exactly.
JULES: Renee, are you okay?
RENEE: No.
JULES: What is it? Should I –
RENEE: Jules, this is important.
JULES: I’m listening.
RENEE: Get David.
JULES: Renee? (BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE.)
He was capable of the impossible. (rips page out and crumples it up) She wanted so much to have a baby. She didn’t want to be married. She just wanted a baby to take care of, to nurse, to bathe, to kiss, to love. She got him drunk one night and had her way with him. She left in the morning, never looking back. Oh well. (rips page out and crumples it up) I wish I could tell you the whole truth, David, just the truth, and nothing but the truth. But you’re right, it is much easier to spin. (END OF SCENE.)

SCENE 8
The waiting room. DAVID and JULES stand with DR. HOUGH.

DAVID: She didn’t know?
DR. HOUGH: No, not at the time.
DAVID: Had she always been sick?
DR. HOUGH: Most likely, but the test results were inconclusive up until a few months ago.
DAVID: And what is this?
DR. HOUGH: PKD. Polycystic Kidney Disease. It’s a genetic disorder characterized by the growth of cysts in the kidneys. Renee happens to have autosomal recessive PKD, a rare form of the disease that reduces kidney function drastically and would make it extremely dangerous for a woman of her health to go through childbirth.
DAVID: And my – our mother had this?
DR. HOUGH: Your family history is not exactly promising.
DAVID: What are the chances of Renee passing it to her child?
DR. HOUGH: It’s hard to say. Your mother had the dominant form, which accounts for 90% of all cases, but she wasn’t diagnosed until her thirties.
DAVID: Well, what can we do? There has to be something we can do.
DR. HOUGH: I suggested early termination to her on several occasions but she declined repeatedly.
DAVID: Why?
DR. HOUGH: I’m sorry, I’m not able to make a judgment call on why I think she did that. You’d have to ask her yourself.
DAVID: Ask her myself? When?? Tell me when? She’s dying! When am I gonna ask her??
DR. HOUGH: It was her choice, sir.
JULES: (moves toward DAVID) David, come on –
DAVID: You’re her doctor. Couldn’t you have talked her into it? Out of it?
DR. HOUGH: It is beyond my jurisdiction to force a patient to have an abortion. It would be completely unethical.
DAVID: Unethical?
JULES: (taking his arm) David –
DAVID: Jules –
DR. HOUGH: Mr. Winters, please remain –
DAVID: So her only options are dying or – or – dying.
DR. HOUGH: We have performed a Caesarian section and will continue to take care of her the best we can but her chances of survival look slim. The infant is in intensive care, being several weeks premature, but otherwise, alive and well.
JULES: How’s Renee?
DR. HOUGH: Weak. It’d be best if somebody were in there with her now. (Silence.) I’m sorry. (DR. HOUGH exits. DAVID sits, distraught. JULES stands, not sure of what to do. After a moment, she moves towards the exit.)
JULES: I’m gonna –
DAVID: Please don’t leave.
JULES: I was just gonna –
DAVID: Jules –
JULES: … get us some coffee…
DAVID: Please. Don’t leave. (JULES looks at DAVID, then sits. They remain there, unmoving.) (END OF SCENE.)

SCENE 9
A hospital room. RENEE lies in bed, drugged and drenched in sweat. DAVID sits beside her.

RENEE: They gave me stuff. I feel nothing.
DAVID: You feel nothing? I feel like shit.
RENEE: Isn’t it divine?
DAVID: Yes, it’s fantastic. (RENEE grins.)
DAVID: Why are you here? I never wanted you.
RENEE: Tough.
DAVID: How can you say that? How can you lie there and say “tough”?
RENEE: How can one not?
DAVID: Do you understand what’s happening?
RENEE: Of course David. I planned it all out. If you’re worried about the money –
DAVID: No Renee, I’m not –
RENEE: Between my job and my inheritance, I have it all planned out.
DAVID: All planned out. And what if I wasn’t here? What if I refuse?
RENEE: Are you? Refusing?
DAVID: I don’t know. I don’t know I don’t know I don’t know. It just… it scares me. Just a bit. Who in their right mind would kill themselves for –
RENEE: Jules said it was courageous.
DAVID: Jules knew?
RENEE: No, of course not. I mean, she meant, the gesture, the car ride to Poughkeepsie, the seatbelt crossing the heart thing was courageous. Or gutsy. Gutsy. That’s what she said.
DAVID: Suicide is gutsy?
RENEE: Jules said that. Didn’t she say that to you?
DAVID: Yes.
RENEE: You don’t agree with her?
DAVID: You’re dying.
(Silence. After a few moments, RENEE starts laughing.)
DAVID: Stop laughing.
RENEE: I just remembered a joke. You wanna hear it? A nurse told it –
DAVID: No.
RENEE: A nurse told it to me –
DAVID: No.
RENEE: You do.
DAVID: I don’t. I really don’t. You didn’t have to do this.
RENEE: We all have our morals.
DAVID: Are you kidding? This is a total moral gray-area. Pro-life, pro-choice. There’s no definitive right or wrong.
RENEE: Not to me. Do you know how many abortions Mom got after me? Five. Five. I always thought she just wanted to keep me an only child, dote on her only girl, doesn’t answer.)
DAVID: I don’t know her. She didn’t love me.
RENEE: You know me. I… like you all right.
DAVID: That’s not funny. That’s why this hurts.
RENEE: I wanted to be a mother. I didn’t know ahead of time that I wouldn’t make it. I thought I would be good at it. But maybe you’re right and I was stupid. These stories are a dime a dozen.
DAVID: You’re not stupid, I’m sorry for saying that.
RENEE: Then when I did find out, I knew I couldn’t get rid of it. I’m not like her. I’m not like her. You believe that, right?
DAVID: Yes.
RENEN: Then let me tell my joke. Please. I promise you’ll laugh. (DAVID nods.) There was this woman who was pregnant with twins. She suddenly went into labor one day and was rushed to the hospital. The nurses weren’t supposed to alert her husband at work, busy signal, so they called her emergency contact: her brother. He was the one to hold her hand, he was the one to tell her she could do it. So after nineteen hours, the twins were born but the woman was really weak and encouraged to rest. Since she was asleep, she didn’t get a chance to name the babies – a boy and a girl – but the hospital needed the names to put on their birth certificates. They really couldn’t wait. So the brother stepped up and named the babies. When the woman woke up and found out, she was a little shocked at first but the brother assured her that she would love the names. The woman asked, “So what did you name them?” The brother said, “Well, I named the girl Denise.” And the woman said, “Oh that’s a pretty name. What did you name the boy?” And the brother replied, “Denehew.” (DAVID laughs, then starts to cry.)
DAVID: What do you want me to do?
RENEE: Name your book.
DAVID: I’ll do that. Name it. Something. RENEE: Many happy returns, David. (END OF SCENE.)

SCENE 10
Outside the baby room. DAVID, JULES, and BRANTFORD look out into the audience.
BRANTFORD: It’s so quiet.
JULES: They’re behind glass.
BRANTFORD: It’s not soundproof. They’re not even crying. None of them.
JULES: Maybe they’re tired.
BRANTFORD: Or hungry.
BRANTFORD: Or zombies.
JULES: Plotting a zombie attack. (They grin. Silence.)
DAVID: I had never even seen a picture of her before. She looked a lot like Mom.
JULES: She looked a little like you too.
DAVID: I don’t know what I look like.
BRANTFORD: Need a mirror?
DAVID: You have one?
BRANTFORD: No. (Silence.)
DAVID: Their heads are so big.
BRANTFORD: Abby weighed nearly ten pounds when she came out.
JULES: I remember. Jill was like, “Get this fucking bowling ball out of me!”
BRANTFORD: Hell of a woman.
JULES: To do it three more times, yeah I’d say so. (Silence.)
JULES: (to DAVID) What are you thinking? (DAVID doesn’t answer.) Sorry. Don’t answer that.
DAVID: No Jules. You’re fine. (pause) I was thinking how… I’d like to keep… (indicating the baby)
BRANTFORD: You will.
DAVID: And I hope that… (indicating the baby) … likes me. (Silence.)
JULES: You think of a name yet?
BRANTFORD: Hey don’t pressure him.
JULES: He doesn’t have to answer. (Silence.)
BRANTFORD: You think of a name yet?
DAVID: It’s coming to me. You’re gonna love it. It’s awesome. (DAVID takes JULES’ hand. They smile at each other.) (LIGHTS FADE.) (END OF PLAY.)
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