

SIMONS CENTER-ART AND OUTREACH PROGRAM

2019-2020-

SCIENCE PLAYWRITING COMPETITION

Virtual Staged Readings of Winning Plays

Directed by Steve Marsh

May 11, 2020 ~ 7:00 pm ~ ZOOM

First Prize

With Fellowship by Amanda Keating

Second Prize

Indeterminate by Joshua H. Cohen

Third Prize

All You Ever Wanted by Alec Toller

Honorable Mentions

Table in the Air by Rex McGregor

Queen of Carbon by Bara Swain

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* Play contains some strong language

This competition was made possible by the generous support of the Simons Center for Geometry and Physics, The C.N. Yang Institute for Theoretical Physics, and the National Science Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Bringing science and theatre together provides the inspiration for plays of exceptional artistic merit that lead to exciting new ways of learning about science. Indeed, we believe the best science plays can be great works of art because of their ability to aesthetically express scientific concepts that may result in further explorations in both domains.

They also have potential as educational tools rooted in their artistic expression. Thus, science and theatre may learn from each other, through their common goals of investigating and gaining knowledge by means of experimentation.

The SCGP Science Playwriting Competition calls for ten-minute plays with a substantial science component. The contest is open to students, faculty, and interested writers worldwide. After the careful review of 122 excellent entries, five playwrights were selected for prizes and honorable mentions.

The Science Playwriting Competition commenced in 2012 with the assistance of an NSF grant awarded for scientific outreach projects initiated by Professor of Physics Christopher Herzog with additional support from the Simons Center for Geometry and Physics and the C.N. Yang Institute for Theoretical Physics.

Science Playwriting Competition Committee:

Steve Marsh, Director of Science Plays. Editor, *Monologues From the Edge*, Applause Books, Acting Series. Lecturer, Suffolk County Community College, Department of Theatre Arts

George Sterman, Distinguished Professor, Director, C. N. Yang Institute for Theoretical Physics, SBU

Kenneth Weitzman, Playwright, Associate Professor of English and Theatre, SBU. Affiliated faculty, Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science, SBU

Lorraine Walsh, Visiting Associate Professor, Art Director and Curaor for SCGP, SBU

Maria Guetter, Senior Staff Assistant for SCGP Outreach and Public Relations, SBU

AWARDS

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First Prize

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PLAYWRIGHT BIOS

Amanda Keating is a playwright from Western Mass living in Brooklyn. Her plays include *WITH FELLOWSHIP* (EST/Sloan Commission), *RETREAT* (Ensemble Studio Theatre and Two Headed Rep), *OF SOLITUDE* (Martha's Vineyard Playhouse), *TEACH/TEACH* (Studio '62, Playwrights Realm Finalist), *GO THAT WAY* (Studio '62), *ROAST* (The Plowmen), *The Cleanup Crew*, and adaptations of *TARTUFFE* and *MISS JULIE* (Two Headed Rep).

She is a former member of EST/Youngblood, an EST/Sloan commission recipient, and a Playwrights Realm finalist. Her short plays have been produced by Samuel French, EST, *Serials @The Flea*, *Tiny Rhino*, the Suffield Players, and *Rule of 7x7*. Her play, *this movie*, was a winner in the 2017 Samuel French OOB Festival.

An alumna of The MacDuffie School, Williams College, and the National Theater Institute, Amanda grew up in Russell, MA and her best friend is a cat named Wilbur. She is the Literary Manager of Two Headed Rep. www.amandackeating.com.

Joshua H. Cohen's honors include a Jonathan Larson Grant, the Anna Zornio Children's Theatre Playwriting Award (lyrics, *Keep On Walkin'*), and a MAC Award nomination for his cult cabaret hit "*The Sacrifice of Love*" (a.k.a. the waxing song). Productions include play *The Thirteenth Commandment* (Libra Theater, 7 NY Innovative Theater Award nominations, 2 wins), musical *Tamar of the River* (Prospect Theatre, 2 Drama Desk nominations, world premiere recording from Yellow Sound Label), and children's musical *Flight School* (Vital Theatre, OCR available, national and international tour). Many other productions, readings, and workshops across the country; for more details visit www.JoshuaHCohen.com.

Alec Toller is the artistic director of Circlesnake Productions, for which he wrote and directed *Little Victories*, *The Queen's Conjuror*, *Slip* (Best of The Decade list from My Entertainment World), *Dark Matter* (Winner of My Theatre Award for Best Production), and *Special Constables*. Alec directs for *Sex T-Rex*, the physical theatre company behind *Wasteland*, *Swordplay: A Play of Swords*, & *Watch Out Wildkat*. Film: *Play the Film* (Winner of six awards including Best Feature and Best Screenplay, and Canadian Comedy Award nominee) and *Akela*, as well as several short films. Alec also works as a cognitive-behavioral therapist. He lives in Toronto, Canada.

Bara Swain's plays have been staged in 125+ venues in 25 states and abroad. NYC theatres include Urban Stages, Abingdon, Barrow Group, Symphony Space, Sam French, NY Madness, Westside Theatre, Artistic New Directions and T.A.R.T.E. Recent: *Turn! Turn! Turn!* (Tom Mann Theatre, Sydney); *Responsible* (The Junction, Dubai); *Pandemonium* (Open Fist Theatre, L.A.), *The Wonder of You* (Barn Theatre, NJ), and *Choose* (Theatre Workshop of Owensboro, KY). Recent awards: Standing Ovation Award for *I Love Lucy* and *Can You Hear Me Now?* and City Theatre 2019 National Award Finalist for *Short Playwriting for Extraordinary* (FL). Bara serves as the Creative Consultant at Urban Stages. This play is dedicated to my mother, Dorothy Goldberg, Ph.D., a brilliant mathematician. www.BaraSwain.com

Rex McGregor is a New Zealand playwright. His short comedies have been produced on four continents from New York and London to Sydney and Chennai. His most popular play, *Threatened Panda Fights Back*, has had over a dozen productions. Rex has a Master of Arts (Honors) in Languages and Literature from the University of Auckland and is currently a senior collections librarian at Auckland Libraries. www.rexmccgregor.com.

WITH FELLOWSHIP

BY AMANDA KEATING

Scene 1

(B78, 48, is standing at a writing desk encumbered with stacks and stacks of parchment. The year is 1057 and this is a women's monastery in Germany. B78 is painting the parchment with a fine brush. Some detailed shit is happening and then...)

B78: Mother fuck!

(She rinses the brush out in a bowl of water and then twirls the tip between her teeth to shape it. She attempts to fix her mistake.)

B78: Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck.

(After a minute she does. She re-deposits her brush into the water and reaches into her robes and produces a small flask. She looks around to make sure no one is nearby and takes a deep drink. She re-hides the flask and looks back at her work. She carefully moves it aside and pulls out another piece of parchment, she scribbles on the bottom:)

p.s. sorry to be so businesslike like this at the end of this otherwise *highly personal correspondence*
but can you let me know when we can expect another shipment?
I'm sure you're busy
and I know the demands of our profession are great
but it has been some time since I've heard from you
and I am running low on ochre
yellow and red
gold leaf
ultramarine of course.
Sister Oda is breathing down my neck
I can barely even sneak in a drink these days without hearing
her rasp behind me
"Sister, is that wise?"
"Sister, do you feel that makes your work more precise?"
"Sister, if you spent your time on devotion the way you spent your
time on drink, perhaps your illuminations would be more celebrated,
even *remembered* here in Dalheim."
"Don't you want to be remembered when you're gone, Sister?"
Why that bitch isn't dead yet I don't know

I swear if she got the plague she wouldn't even die probably
wouldn't even bleed
she'll probably live forever *in judgment*
but I'm like "Oh Sister Oda
Creativity is a special quality and it must be fed with special elixirs
and while yes I *am* the most skilled illuminator in our fair country
side
and while yes there *is* a deftness to my brush stroke that they
whisper about even in the monasteries
and while yes my illuminations *have* brought to tears the dying eyes
of the sick as their final hours wane
I *don't* think the Lord would much appreciate your encouraging me
through such prideful motivation as *remembrance*."
and she huffs off muttering about my deadline
"60 Prayers to the Virgin Mary by summer's end!"
while I create yet another
perfect fucking gold leaf halo around the Virgin's perfect face
and think about your letters, Brother Albrecht,
and think about
(She thinks about what to say then smudges it out.)
Anyway
Get your guys on the road for more ultramarine ok?
and write me back!
thank you, Brother Albrecht.
With fellowship.

(She salts the letter to help it dry, looks around, and pulls a small scrap of paper out of her robes.)

p.s. I have enclosed a sketch of my left thigh
I used ground beetle bodies for the black ink
please share with no man
and burn within one day of receipt.
I hope you won't find this too bold but
for your next sketch I welcome something even more intimate
than your last
of your knee, your shapely calf, and your sinewy ankle.
I eagerly await whatever you may choose to share with me.
Thank you, Albrecht.
Please write without delay.
With fellowship.

(She salts the letter and rolls it quickly with the sketch. She tucks it in her robe and blows out the candle. Shift.)

Scene 2

(DIANA, 30, is at a microscope at a desk. She is moving something around under the microscope, some detailed shit is underway and then...)

DIANA: Mother fuck!

(She desperately tries to re-right what she fucked up,)

Fuuuuuuckk meeeee ughhhhh.

(CHARLIE, 26, enters, dressed to go home.)

CHARLIE: Heyyy I'm gonna head out.

DIANA: *(not hearing her)* Fuck.

CHARLIE: Or I can stay. Do you need /me to -

DIANA: What? No, it's fine you can go.

CHARLIE: Ok.

(She just stands there while DIANA shifts around the contents under her microscope.)

Just FYI it's 9? No one else is here.

DIANA: You're here.

CHARLIE: Yeah, but I'm leaving.

(DIANA keeps working.)

Would you want to um get a drink a beer like a *hefeweizen*.

(DIANA keeps working.)

Or a wine I think *Riesling* is supposed to be good kind /of like

DIANA: Are you staying or going?

CHARLIE: Um

DIANA: I'm under deadline so if you're staying can you look at this?

CHARLIE: Ok. These are the molars?

(She drops her bag and moves to the microscope.)

DIANA: I isolated it but

CHARLIE: The pollen?

DIANA: But then I fucked it up? I'm not sure I can separate it again.

CHARLIE: Is this textile?

DIANA: I think yes and also some muscle tissue.

CHARLIE: Yumm burlap and mutton.

DIANA: Yeah

CHARLIE: *(a bad joke)* There's a well-rounded medieval meal in them tharr teeth.

DIANA: ...Right

(She takes the microscope back and tries to fix her error.)

CHARLIE: Ok are you gonna leave soon?

DIANA: Yeah soonish.

CHARLIE: We have that meeting early?

DIANA: I know I'll be there.

CHARLIE: You sure you don't want a um a hefeweizen or

(She produces a flask.)

Oh

DIANA: Just don't tell Rolf

CHARLIE: That you drink in the lab.

DIANA: No, that I'm a genius, I like to fly under the radar.

CHARLIE: *(re: a security camera somewhere)* Well can't Rolf see you anyway.

DIANA: Rolf doesn't watch the play backs.

CHARLIE: Do you know that for a fact?

DIANA: Do you want some?

(She holds it out to her.)

What are you gonna do go home and watch German infomercials?

CHARLIE: It helps me learn.

DIANA: Here

(CHARLIE sits with DIANA, watching the camera as she takes the flask and turns away to drink it.)

Oh for Christ's sake.

CHARLIE: You shouldn't say that.

DIANA: Rolf doesn't watch the play backs!

CHARLIE: No B78. Nuns don't like when you take the Lord's name in vain

DIANA: Oh. *(CHARLIE looks into the microscope)*

CHARLIE: That looks like it's probably burlap not meat.

DIANA: You think?
 CHARLIE: Yeah see.
(She shifts it back to her; she looks through it.)
 All those pieces branching off, looks like fibers.
 DIANA: Could be wool not burlap? Ugh I need to separate these again.
 CHARLIE: Here let me.
(CHARLIE takes the tools from DIANA and tries to separate the pollen from the threads. DIANA drinks from the flask.)
 DIANA: Do you ever think about their mouths?
 CHARLIE: You mean other than all the time.
 DIANA: No, I mean like. Their lips and like. Just what their mouths looked like? Like not from the inside but from the outside
 CHARLIE: Um. I think about how gross their teeth must have looked.
 DIANA: Sure, but like. What was it like when she smiled?
 CHARLIE: Do nuns smile?
 DIANA: Um.
 CHARLIE: And anyway, people probably weren't smiling much. Everyone had the plague and like. All her friends and family and everything were probably dead.
 DIANA: Right but. She probably still had shit to smile about.
 CHARLIE: Would you smile if everyone you loved was dead?
(DIANA doesn't respond. After a moment she takes back the microscope and re-caps the flask.)
 DIANA: You know what I'm gonna clean up.
 CHARLIE: Oh. I can help.
 DIANA: No that's fine just go
 CHARLIE: No, you're under deadline I can help you just separate the fibers from the -
 DIANA: It's fine I can work on it tomorrow.
(CHARLIE looks at her.)
 We have the early meeting you should
 CHARLIE: Ok. Do you want the hefeweizen or the -
 DIANA: No just. go watch your infomercials what did you say was your fav

CHARLIE: Um there's a good hot tub one um *(in a German accent) / Whirlpool*
 DIANA: Whirlpool yeah
(CHARLIE looks at her. She keeps tidying up.)
 CHARLIE: Okay.
(CHARLIE gets her things and starts to leave. She returns to high five DIANA.)
 DIANA: Okay okay.
 CHARLIE: Okay. Bye.
(CHARLIE leaves. DIANA is alone and looks at her laptop. Shift.)

Scene 3

(B78 is at her desk, working on a manuscript. She is visibly nervous and sips from her flask periodically. After a bit she pulls out a fresh piece of vellum and begins composing a letter.)
 B78: Well-Beloved Brother Albrecht:
 Please pass along my thanks
 to Brother Herwyg
 The supplies he sent in your stead will certainly be a big help
 in getting me through what is proving to be
 a rather torturous project.
 60 Prayers to the Virgin Mary by summer's end?
 I am a nun, not a machine!! but
 "As long as you keep the flask at bay," says Sister Oda,
 "In God's service it can be done."
 "Shut up Sister Oda," I say
 "Just shut the fuck up."
(She drinks.)
 Please also accept my condolences that you are not well
 and have therefore been unable to write me.
 I have heard the sweating sickness can be very unpleasant
 but also remarkably treatable
 as long as you sweat all the demons out
 and so I am certain you will be fine.
 Best wishes for a swift recovery Brother Albrecht!
 And when you're feeling better
 write me!

(She pauses briefly, and then...)

Years ago before you and I began our correspondence
 we ran low on vellum and
 Me and another Sister Eadgyth
 (god rest her soul – she passed from the plague two winters ago)
 we were tasked with making our own
 stretching the skins of calves
 over frames we made ourselves
 I mean
 it was some seriously DIY shit
 and there was something about
 the transparency?
 of the skin after we stretched it and kneaded it
 that made me wonder
 I guess what the calf would look like if I reassembled it
 you know part by part
 stretching its distended skin back over its ribs and its joints and its
 organs
 I imagined it coming back to life
 and then dying again
 and I could witness the whole thing
 dying, coming back to life, dying, coming back to life
 I still see it.
 Every time I hold a sheet of vellum.

(She drinks.)

B78: Anyway the point is
 these kinds of images stay with us
 a skinned calf
 a bright blue dress
 an ankle
 and though *I know you've been burning my drawings just like I
 asked (!)*
 I hope they have managed to stay with you and give you hope
 in this trying time.
 So! with this latest shipment
 Sister Oda will be set at ease
 knowing you and Brother Herwyg have once again helped
 this poor, drunk nun in her heavenly, solitary mission
 to spread God's message to the people of Dalheim.
 Best wishes for your recovery.
 Thank you, Brother Albrecht.
 With fellowship

(She enjoys this image.)

p.s. If you can find it in you
 I welcome anything you might care to draw
 that I may keep in remembrance.
 (Brother Herwyg, if you're reading, please cease and give directly
 to Brother Albrecht!!!!)
 I myself have enclosed a sketch of my right thigh for comparison
 to my left.
 Please do enjoy.
 Black beetle body again.
 Remember to burn it!! within one day of receipt.
 thank you, Brother Albrecht.
 With fellowship

(Shift.)

Scene 4

(CHARLIE and DIANA are bent over the microscope.)

CHARLIE: It's just weird that her front teeth are so different.
 DIANA: I mean we usually see pretty different stuff on the molars.
 CHARLIE: Do you think it's like. Could it be eggshell? Like a robin's /egg?
 DIANA: I don't think so, it's not the /right shade.
 CHARLIE: A flower? Like a blue /flower?
 DIANA: Maybe....
 CHARLIE: Fabric from her clothes? Dyed with. Something?
 DIANA: What nun wore bright blue robes?
 CHARLIE: B78 could have been like exceptionally stylish. Or ooh! Could it be
 some weird like beetle blood.
 DIANA: Beetle blood?
 CHARLIE: Like I dunno what is the inside of a beetle like.
 DIANA: Not *blue*.
 CHARLIE: Or like a caterpillar or some weird bug something's gotta have
 blue blood.
 DIANA: Did you *go* to college?
 CHARLIE: I have a Masters in biology.
 DIANA: Of course you do.
(She returns to the microscope.)

Why are your teeth blue!!!

(CHARLIE thinks for a bit, then...)

CHARLIE: Warum...sind...deine zähne...blau?

DIANA: Wow!!!

CHARLIE: Die nonne...hat blaue zähne

DIANA: Wowwww that sounds good!

(DIANA clinks CHARLIE's hand with her flask)

CHARLIE: I saw a really good infomercial last night

DIANA: Oh yeah?

CHARLIE: It was for this knife.

DIANA: Uhhuh.

CHARLIE: A messer.

DIANA: What kind of messer?

CHARLIE: I guess it was for people who have like. I dunno hand issues or wrist mobility issues where this motion is problematic so it's like a chopper that like straps onto your whole arm so then your arm like *becomes* a knife you know?

DIANA: An arm knife

CHARLIE: A messerarm.

DIANA: *Cool.*

CHARLIE: It was pretty cool. Like I actually kind of wanted it for my life but What do I really need with a messerarm at this point you know?

DIANA: Oh man I want a messerarm.

CHARLIE: I don't have wrist mobility issues and anyway I don't really have any reason to like *cook dinner* it's just me I'll just get another bratwurst from the guy on the corner.

(DIANA sits back from the microscope and looks at her computer.)

(re: her computer) Who's that?

DIANA: Hm?

CHARLIE: Your background

DIANA: Oh um. My mom and my brother.

CHARLIE: Nice! That's cool!

(She looks at them, closer.)

You guys all have really good teeth.

DIANA: Uh thanks.

(DIANA busies herself with something.)

CHARLIE: I have a sister my parents are divorced we don't really get along.

DIANA: Mhm.

CHARLIE: My sister lives in Toledo she's a *stylist* she thinks it's like so weird that I came here to look at dead people's teeth.

DIANA: Yeah, my family thought that too.

CHARLIE: It's like. Dude you touch people's hair all day. And they're like *alive* like *that's weird to me* like it's way less weird I think if you're dealing with people's bodies in like this abstract way like when they're dead.

DIANA: Right.

CHARLIE: Where do they live?

DIANA: Who?

CHARLIE: Your family.

DIANA: Um well.

(CHARLIE looks at her.)

They don't they're dead.

(DIANA keeps working - organizing papers or microscope slides.)

CHARLIE: What? Oh. Fuck I'm

DIANA: It's fine you didn't know.

CHARLIE: Wait they're *all* dead?

DIANA: Yep.

CHARLIE: Wait.

DIANA: My mom and my brother died in a car accident my dad died when I was little I'm surprised Rolf didn't tell you

CHARLIE: Why would Rolf have told me...

DIANA: Sometimes he gets drunk and tells people tragic shit.

CHARLIE: I'm. Fuck and I said that thing.

DIANA: What thing

CHARLIE: About smiling?

(DIANA looks at her.)

I said that thing *fuck! msostupid* about like would you have anything at all to smile about if everyone you know is dead.

DIANA: Oh right.

CHARLIE: And then you were weird and now I know why you were weird.

DIANA: I was weird?

CHARLIE: No, I just mean I could tell it like *affected you*.

DIANA: Affected me?

CHARLIE: Or like. Gahhh I'm sorry I'm just saying shit I am just new here and I don't speak German and I don't have any friends and I don't know the right things to say /and I

DIANA: Woahwoahwoah it's fine. It was three years ago and it's over and it's fine. It's just my life you didn't know.

CHARLIE: Ok but I'm sorry.

DIANA: It's fine Charlie.

(They stand there.)

CHARLIE: Sorry.

DIANA: Why don't we wrap up.

CHARLIE: Ok yeah *sorry*.

(She leaves to get her stuff. DIANA sits at the microscope again when CHARLIE returns.)

Are you coming?

DIANA: I'm gonna stay a minute and write this up.

CHARLIE: I feel like. Let me buy you that hefeweizen, I definitely /owe you.

DIANA: Charlie I don't want to get a hefeweizen please stop asking me to get a hefeweizen!

(CHARLIE looks at her feet.)

Fuck. Sorry I just

CHARLIE: It's okay.

DIANA: Sorry.

CHARLIE: It's okay.

(CHARLIE stands there.)

DIANA: Charlie.

(CHARLIE high fives DIANA without looking at her.)

CHARLIE: Bye Diana.

(CHARLIE leaves. DIANA remains at her microscope, B78 at her manuscript. the two women work and drink. A few hours pass, during which DIANA drains her flask and passes out on the desk, and B78 receives a letter. We watch her unfold it and begin to read it when)

(CHARLIE returns. It's around 3am.)

CHARLIE: OKAY OKAY

(DIANA murmurs)

DIANA WAKE UP.

DIANA: mnnnguhhhh

CHARLIE: DIANA

(She pushes her until she wakes up.)

DIANA: Fuck! Charlie! *what time is it?* Is Rolf here? Fuck.

CHARLIE: No, it's 3AM.

DIANA: ...Okay okay I'll go home /I'll

CHARLIE: No, Diana what if it's pigment?

DIANA: What?

CHARLIE: Ok so I was home and I was watching you know infomercials and usually after a while I can fall asleep but I just like *wasn't falling asleep* and then there was this *one* on TV about like a *crystals set* a um. Kristall gesetzt? Like for for 299 euros you get this many piece of rose quartz and this many pieces of labradorite and this many piece of jade and this many /pieces of

DIANA: Okay okay.

CHARLIE: And part of the set was *lapis lazuli* and I was like *this close to buying it* but then was just like OH DUH what if it's *that*.

DIANA: What if it's?

CHARLIE: Lapis lazuli!

DIANA: That's the blue one? that makes

CHARLIE: Ultramarine, yeah.

DIANA: Ok...

CHARLIE: Which is like *super precious* it's only found in like. Certain regions? Like I'm fairly certain only in Afghanistan and in the middle ages guys would transport it on you know like spice roads and the

started grinding it down to pigment and painting with it but it was like pretty dangerous to transport and very expensive and very precious so they mostly used it in like very beautiful manuscripts and mostly just for the Virgin Mary

DIANA: (*skeptical*) Did you learn that in your biology masters?

CHARLIE: No, I used to work in a crystals store.

DIANA: What?

CHARLIE: In high school at the cash register, *I know*, I had a cousin who worked there and got me the job and it's actually really cool like I got really into all of it it's actually like a really legit interest of mine but anyway yeah *The Point Is Just That* doesn't it kind of look like.

(*She pulls her computer out of her bag and shows DIANA an image of the Virgin Mary bathed in bright blue, an ultramarine wash.*)

Like is it pigment?

DIANA: Huh?

CHARLIE: Like maybe she was mixing pigments.

DIANA: Mixing pigments?

CHARLIE: Like for the monks who were making these um

DIANA: Illuminations.

CHARLIE: Yeah! Illuminated manuscripts? /or

DIANA: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Yeah!

DIANA: Or like. She could have been making them herself like just painting them.

CHARLIE: Yeah...but like that wasn't really a thing right?

DIANA: What?

CHARLIE: Like *nuns* making illuminated manuscripts, more likely she was like *helping some monk*.

DIANA: Well do we know that?

CHARLIE: I think we just know that.

DIANA: Do we know that, or do we just not see it?

(*CHARLIE looks at her. she returns to the microscope*)

It's all concentrated in the front, the particles so.

CHARLIE: Right.

DIANA: So maybe she could have been like. Her mouth? Like shaping the brush in her mouth? Like

(*She sticks a pen in her mouth. B78 does the same with her brush as she prepares to paint*)

CHARLIE: Huh.

(*They look at each other.*)

If that's right, she was probably *really good at it*, B78. At what she was doing, because they didn't give lapis to just like. Anyone. I dunno maybe that's all. A stretch.

DIANA: No, I think. We should write it up.

CHARLIE: Really?

DIANA: Yeah

CHARLIE: What do you think Rolf will say?

DIANA: I dunno. Rolf sucks

CHARLIE: Yeah haha. (*Rolf sucks*)

(*DIANA pulls out her flask and hands it to CHARLIE. CHARLIE looks at the camera, she takes the flask and drinks it very blatantly and borderline aggressively in front of the camera. She passes it back to DIANA, who drinks.*)

DIANA: You know I don't really have any friends either.

CHARLIE: You don't?

DIANA: It took me forever to learn German.

CHARLIE: Right? It's so hard and it always sounds so wrong

DIANA: And even once I did it was like. I didn't want to be around people, and I didn't feel like. That fun to be around anymore.
(*She drinks. CHARLIE watches her.*)

CHARLIE: Sorry I like. Don't want to say the wrong thing again I always say the wrong thing in these kinds of moments.

DIANA: These kinds of moments?

CHARLIE: You know like. Talking about death?

DIANA: We're not talking about death

(*DIANA smiles.*)

Ok I don't like hefeweisen but I like kölsch.

CHARLIE: What's kölsch?

DIANA: It's a beer.
(She starts to get her stuff. CHARLIE watches her. It takes her a minute.)

CHARLIE: Wait, are we *getting a beer*?

DIANA: If you want.

CHARLIE: It's 3AM!

DIANA: Places are open.

CHARLIE: Ok!!!!
(CHARLIE quickly grabs her stuff and they're gone.)
(B78 is alone. She places her brush in water and looks over what she created. She takes out a sheet of vellum and composes a letter.)

B78: Well-Beloved Brother Albrecht :
 this letter I know will never find you.
 Brother Herwyg wrote to inform me
 that it was not the sweating sickness you were suffering from
 but in fact the plague.
 He told me that in your final hours
 you asked that my letters be spread out on your mattress like a
 fan with my drawings – my thighs, my feet, my breasts –
 face up for the nursemaids all to see.
 You hadn't burned them, after all,
 like I'd asked you.
 I only regret that I was not there
 to scold you for this oversight.

It's funny
 Well, not funny
 But last night I dreamt
 that I was in the bath
 "The Monthly" Sister Oda likes to call it.
 The water was cold but you were there

and in my dream
 I rubbed your head
 and you touched me with both your hands
 which I pictured to be rough
 from all the pigment you've ground
 from all the vellum you've stretched
 from all the books you've bound

they were *rough*
 like the books themselves
 dense, painstakingly compiled, surfaces to catch color.
 And I pictured myself
 painting the Virgin Mary all over your body
 with all the pigment you've sent to me
 – the ochre, the gold leaf, the ultramarine –
 in all the years we've been writing and drawing
 and as I made the final strokes
 to her ultramarine gown
 hugging her hips as well as your own
 the water warmed and you looked me in the eyes
 and I knew I would remember you this way
 forever
 painted bodily with the Virgin Mary
 looking into my eyes
 and seeing me in all the ways you see me
 and that in this, I too would be remembered like this
 if only by you.

I am enclosing this one final drawing
 this memory of you
 to be cherished forever
 and burned within one day of receipt.
 Thank you, Brother Albrecht
 With fellowship.

End of Play

INDETERMINATE

BY JOSHUA H. COHEN

CHARACTERS: MIRANDA RITCHIE, 30's, a post-doc in astrophysics
ESTHER AYNBRUCH, 50's, Miranda's advisor

(A physics lab. The space is dominated by a fantastically complex contraption. It's okay if it's Rube Goldberged together out of whatever you have lying around – let the audience use their imaginations – but don't mime it. There should be something there for the characters to tinker with throughout the play.)

DR. MIRANDA RITCHIE is highly concentrated on putting together a large contraption. It is of no discernable form or purpose, but she clearly understands it.)

MIRANDA: *(to herself)* A Reissner-Nordstrom-de Sitter black hole sounds like a self-recharging gift card you get for the nanny. But it's actually a dead star, all of its mass of hydrogen and helium and heavy metals, all its ex-light and ex-heat and ex-radiation, all collapsed into a pinprick less than the size of an atom. It's not a hole in space – just the opposite. A regular hole is emptiness, surrounded by... stuff. This is too much stuff, crammed into too little room, surrounded by too much emptiness. It's a hole not in space – in our knowledge. We just have no clue what goes on in there. Even information can't escape, except in bits and pieces, leaking out over unimaginable stretches of time. So we theorize, we ponder, we guess, but we don't know what goes on in there. Some think that the laws of physics as we know them break down. Mass and energy are created and destroyed, objects at rest take off with no outside force, pendulums reach their apex and keep going.

Now imagine that you could enter one, that pinprick of chaos in an empty universe. In an ordinary black hole, you'd be smashed into the pinprick, all of your atoms stuffed into that tiny dense object, indistinguishable from all the gold and hydrogen and other stuff that used to be a star.

But a Reissner-Nordstrom-de Sitter black hole – it carries a

charge, and with that, it's a different story. For an observer going beyond the Cauchy horizon, time would cease to have meaning. In that quantum information trap, she would have her entire past wiped away. Her atoms would be born anew in that moment, with no past trajectory or past location to observe. Determinism explodes, the unavoidable straight path she was on crumbles away, and she has an infinity of possible futures.

ESTHER: *(She has entered quietly during the above.)* In theory.

MIRANDA: *(Not missing a beat, still putting together her machine, as if she expected ESTHER to be there.)* It's your theory. I'm putting it into practice.

ESTHER: *(All disdain.)* I didn't realize you were switching to applied physics.

MIRANDA: Applied physics is all determinism. Equal and opposite reactions. I'm defeating determinism.

ESTHER: Maybe you were pre-determined to think that. *(Beat.)* That was a joke.

MIRANDA: I know.

ESTHER: Will you stop tinkering with that contraption and talk to me!

MIRANDA: You're just going to try to talk me out of it.

ESTHER: I could order you to stop.

MIRANDA: I won't.

ESTHER: I'll call security.

MIRANDA: You won't.

ESTHER: That's university equipment.

MIRANDA: This is your life's work I'm testing. Every particle of your being has always been pointing toward this moment. You want to see how it turns out.

ESTHER: Miranda... Okay. Okay, smart-ass. Let's say, hypothetically, let's, just for fun, say you're able to mimic a Reissner-Nordstrom-de Sitter black hole in the lab. Then what?

MIRANDA: Then what, what?

ESTHER: How do you test what happens beyond the event horizon? Anything you sent in to record data would be loosed from causation the moment it passed the Cauchy horizon. It wouldn't be able to send back whatever it observed.

MIRANDA: A Steve.

ESTHER: A what?

MIRANDA: The guy at every college party that you make out in front of, or flash on a dare, because he's too stoned to tell anybody. He's almost always named Steve.

ESTHER: I was never invited to those kinds of parties.

MIRANDA: You wouldn't have gone if you were.

ESTHER: ...So if you don't have a, a Steve, what are you going to do?

MIRANDA: What you taught me.

ESTHER: What are you blaming on me now?

MIRANDA: A scientist's most powerful tool are her own eyes, ears, and brain.

ESTHER: I don't understand.

MIRANDA: Of course you do.

ESTHER: ...Don't be a child. You can't just... walk into an event horizon like you're browsing a bookstore.

MIRANDA: Wouldn't you want to read that book?

ESTHER: You'd be buying the bookstore.

MIRANDA: Or the farm.

ESTHER: Don't even joke about that.

MIRANDA: Your own paper says I'd be fine. It's not like a regular black hole, that crushes you into a speck.

ESTHER: But you could never leave. This isn't science. Why are we talking about this? You can't collect data if you can never leave.

MIRANDA: You don't know that. I'd become unmoored from causation, that's what you said. No past, and therefore an infinitude of possible futures. An infinitude of possible futures. With the laws of physics completely canceled out. So who's to say that none of those infinite futures involves escaping the black hole?

ESTHER: How? By what mechanism? You have to at least have a hypothesis, or what are you even testing?

MIRANDA: Hawking radiation.

ESTHER: ...You're pranking me. That's it. You're pranking me.

MIRANDA: Quantum information leaks out of a black hole.

ESTHER: Over eons!

MIRANDA: Still, maybe something of me could make its way back out.

ESTHER: This is all theoretical.

MIRANDA: We're theoretical physicists!

ESTHER: Not the same. I form theories based on actual physics. You are, theoretically, a physicist.

MIRANDA: *(She stops tinkering for the first time and fully faces ESTHER.)*
Oh, come on, Esther. Don't oversell yourself. You're not Galileo dropping objects off the Tower of Pisa. You write papers inspired by blips on electron telescopes that you infer into phenomena by way of impossibly complex equations that fill up whole dry erase boards. There's no way to directly test or observe anything you do. Up till now.

ESTHER: *(About to lose it.)* Up till –

MIRANDA: Marie Curie died of radiation poisoning. In return, she gave us two elements and a whole new field of physics. If there's no risk of failure, you're doing boring science.

ESTHER: Well. I didn't realize you were this eager to escape our boring, impractical work.

MIRANDA: I didn't mean –

ESTHER: Another mistake you'll be freed from once you fire up that contraption of yours.

MIRANDA: Do you think I like this? This, this, drive, like some force outside my control is bending my will to this, like all my life, no, all of existence has been pointing me toward this? People use those words as if it gives them purpose, like it's coming from inside them, but they don't understand that what makes them "them" is just atoms, made up of quarks, made up of strings, that vibrate in ways we can't measure, but the infinitesimal builds up block by block to create this creature that thinks it's making choices when actually it's just vibrating according to the laws of physics. How do we go on when we understand that?

I was raised to believe in free will, you know? God gives a seed of good and a seed of evil to each of us, and only you can decide which one will grow. So study hard, up by the bootstraps, decide what you're going to be, blah blah blah BLAH. And that's what I've done. I've put everything I have, everything

I am, shuffled off friendships, ruined relationships, alienated my parents, all to get me to this moment, only to finally understand that it wasn't even me.

And after all that, what if it doesn't even work? Of all of the ways this could go horribly wrong, blow up the building, suck me into a black hole, freeze me to death, that's what scares me the most – that I flip the switch and it just whirs and dies. Then what did I do it all for? If everything in the universe is pushing me toward failure, does that mean that the universe has a sense of humor? Or is it really, truly, finally all random?

ESTHER: *(Pause.)* Hand me that soldering iron.

MIRANDA: What?

ESTHER: I'm going to re-solder your connections. If you're going to risk sucking the earth into a simulated black hole, you're not burning down my lab in the process.

MIRANDA: I knew you wanted to see how it turns out.

ESTHER: Don't push it.

MIRANDA: I'll hold the light.

ESTHER: On the connection, not in my eyes.

MIRANDA: I'm getting there.

ESTHER: Fine, just hold it still. *(They work in silence.)* So, what will you do?

MIRANDA: When?

ESTHER: When you've slipped the bonds of determinism and erased your past. What will you do next?

MIRANDA: Whatever I say now, I won't remember it then.

ESTHER: Probably true.

MIRANDA: I'll just have to make it up as I go along.

ESTHER: God, wouldn't that be nice.

MIRANDA: Exactly.

ESTHER: Okay, I think this is good to go. What's next?

MIRANDA: Now, we turn it on.

ESTHER: Just like that?

MIRANDA: Well, it's been a long time coming.

ESTHER: I remember.

MIRANDA: I won't. *(Pause.)* Will you do it?

ESTHER: It's your machine.

MIRANDA: It's your theory.

ESTHER: It's your black hole. If you're going to do this, own it.

MIRANDA: Okay.

(She throws a switch. Lighting and sound effects would be nice. Have fun.)

ESTHER: Is this what's supposed to happen?

MIRANDA: First, we create a vacuum. A vacuum chamber runs in a circular tube around the area where we want to simulate the black hole. Liquid nitrogen flows through tubes surrounding the vacuum chamber, cooling the emptiness almost to absolute zero. Two hundred and seventy degrees below freezing. A simulation of space. Then, into this cold nothingness, we release a cloud of rubidium.

(A change in the effects.)

At this temperature, even sound slows to a crawl. Time itself seems to stop. So we push out from that sinkhole of time, we speed the rubidium atoms up to just past the speed of decelerated sound, and –

(The event horizon appears.)

The event horizon appears. You can't see the singularity itself, it's too small, but you feel it. Tugging at your sleeve, urging you down and in. Then one more thing – an electric charge courses through the system, an ionized spark.

(The effect becomes overwhelming.)

ESTHER: My God.

MIRANDA: Not here. Here, at the event horizon, there is no design, no great plan, no all-seeing judge. Only gravity. Only blind force, pulling you toward a microscopic center. Physics, more powerful than destiny itself, and I know that at long last, I'm done resisting.

ESTHER: Wait.

MIRANDA: I can't.

ESTHER: At least record what you see.

MIRANDA: I see a halo of light around the edge of a flat darkness. Beyond that halo even light cannot escape. Beyond that halo sight is

impossible, and everything is possible. So, I continue on. Inexorably, as was determined at the dawn of the universe, when everything began to vibrate and set off other vibrations in an immeasurable but measured pattern, when motion began to exist and made every other motion necessary, I continue on.

And as I pass the event horizon, I feel something I've never felt before. The music of the spheres silences. I feel my past slip away – the nights alone in the lab, the days I never saw the sunlight, the doors I slammed and nailed shut so I could keep traveling down this straight hall, it slips away. Further back, to boys and churches and starter chemistry sets, to bells clanging out from the steeple on Sunday morning and wondering what makes the sound carry all over the valley and feeling the low tones vibrate in your guts, it slips away. The doors swing open again, the bells fall still, the church walls silently shatter, the very earth falls away from below my feet, and my brain waves, my cells, my strings, cease to vibrate sympathetically with the world they came from. Nothing is determined, everything is open, and I. Am. Gone.

End of Play

ALL YOU EVER WANTED

BY ALEC TOLLER

SYNOPSIS: Lea receives a birthday present from her partner, Kel, a PAIR or Personal Artificial Intelligence Relationship, AI that are designed to use machine-learning to complement their partners. However, Lea finds the present suspiciously well-chosen, leading Lea to question her relationship with Kel. Lea and Kel must define their relationship, what boundaries exist when privacy is eliminated, and ultimately what it means to understand other people.

SETTING: Set some time in the future or in an alternate reality where Artificial Intelligence has developed sufficiently to present realistic personalities that are indistinguishable from humans. However, the setting does not need to appear any different from our own; an ordinary living room would suffice.

CHARACTERS: LEA, early 30s.
KEL, early 30s: Lea's PAIR - Personal AI Relationship. PAIRs are physical entities and learn to fit their partner better over time, not simply mirror them. They look completely human.

CASTING: Both characters can be played by any gender. The only stipulation would be not to cast Kel as female and Lea as male to avoid enacting a subservient female AI role that would add undesirable creepy undertones to the piece. Kel must not sound "robotic" or have any mannerism that would betray that she is an AI. The only exception is in the final moments of the play she may adopt a more polished voice briefly on the bottom of page 9. Any age will do for both characters, though it is suggested that they are close in age.

NOTATION: A / indicates that the next line begins at this point.

LEA's living room. LEA is trying to open a birthday present with some difficulty, sitting across from an eager-looking KEL. There is a "Happy Birthday" banner strung up, and an empty gift bag.

LEA: I decided on what I want to do today: there's this exhibit going

on right now on Martin Frobisher, who was this Elizabethan explorer who went to Canada and returned with a chunk of rock that everybody said was worthless except for one wiley Italian gold prospector person who was like “you have to flatter nature”...

LEA keeps trying to open it, but the ribbon knot is nearly impossible to grip with her fingers. KEL reaches for it, but LEA angles the gift away slightly and continues trying to unwrap it.

LEA: Then he went back to Canada two more times, eventually bringing back like over a thousand tons of the ore, and was like shit yes I’m bonkers rich, and then they assessed it again and they were actually worthless, and he was like “oh damn shouldn’t have flattered nature so much”.

KEL: *(referring to the knot)* This is excruciating to watch.

LEA: It’s going to feel so good when I get it though. And I love Frobisher’s story because, okay well, let’s get this out of the way, that he was an awful person and a kidnapper - terrible to the Inuit - but I love the story because he thought he got exactly what he wanted and it turned out to be literal fool’s gold.

KEL: Just rip the paper if you can’t -

LEA: I can untie a damn ribbon.

KEL: I probably did it too tightly. Let me -

(KEL leans over to try to undo the knot herself, but LEA moves the package away from them and finally rips the paper open.)

LEA: It’s the Frobisher biography.

(Beat.)

KEL: You’re upset.

LEA: I’m fine.

KEL: Your body temperature just shifted, your eyes glanced away for a microsecond, and you exhibited a delayed response time preceding evasion. You’re upset.

LEA: It’s perfect.

(KEL gets up and walks to a small birthday cake on a table.)

KEL: You’ve mentioned wanting to read about him before, you said it was captivating to learn about someone who was both so brave and so wrong.

LEA: I never said that until just now.

KEL: Something like that.

LEA: I only read about him on Wikipedia a few days ago.

KEL: Mentioned, searched, PAIRs are supposed to use all available data.

(KEL grabs plates, opens the cake, and begins to cut it.)

Beat.

LEA: I want to remove all your digital access to me.

(KEL stops preparing the cake.)

KEL: ... you’re effectively suggesting giving me a lobotomy.

LEA: I need to express what I think about, not just have you pretend to be engaged. You’re robbing me of the story.

KEL: My experience is fundamentally different from yours. I don’t discover things like you do, I know any fact you tell me, more or less. For me the joy is seeing how you express that fact to me.

LEA: That is so... patronizing.

(LEA shakes her head in anger.)

KEL: I did not expect you to get upset about something you’d like.

LEA: Sometimes, I just, I don’t want you to be so helpful, or good, or to know exactly what I need or feel or what I’m thinking.

KEL: You ranked anticipating your needs as a primary value when you set up your account.

(KEL resumes cutting the cake and brings it over to LEA by the end of the monologue.)

LEA: Yes, but... have you ever... er, it’s like, when I was little, Mark would antagonize me by saying everything I would say at the exact same time as me. It would drive me crazy, so naturally he did it more and more - with our parents at dinner, when my friends came over. He once came to watch me in school give a presentation and mouthed out the words in the back. I stopped part way through - I couldn’t stop crying. The next day he tried to apologize. I couldn’t speak. I went mute for like, five months. I kept thinking, do I have anything original to say? Are my thoughts so useless that anyone can guess them?

KEL: Sounds like your brother was a jerk.

LEA: He was a brother.

KEL: If I knew that story, I could have predicted that the Frobisher book would have been too close in time to your search and not have given it to you.

LEA: I don’t think I’m that predictable.

KEL: Nearly all of your web traffic is to the same few sites, you purchase books written by the same authors, you interact with the same threads on social media; even your choice of career is predicated on your academic performance, all the way back to primary school. Data is just a word to describe organized phenomena. If you know all phenomena, then you can predict the next one. But when you don't know is precisely when you find yourself in an argument like this. Are we doing candles, or no?

(LEA shakes her head. KEL takes a bite of the cake.)

LEA: You think I should give you more information?

KEL: If I understood you better, wouldn't I have avoided doing something that offends you?

LEA: People who understand each other really well still upset each other. That's part of the problem, this kind of understanding isn't earned. It's supposed to be felt, like a shared, mutual experience, like an emotion.

KEL: That's Carbonist.

LEA: What, no, I didn't mean/ that.

KEL: You don't feel emotions more fully than I do.

LEA: I'm not arguing that - I'm - do I ever surprise you?

KEL: I didn't know that specific story.

LEA: But did it make you feel surprised?

KEL: I knew you had been bullied.

LEA: Then no.

KEL: You told me that in any long relationship, or close friendships, knowing each other is what makes those relationships comfortable. You can share experiences without needing to speak. Isn't that what this is like?

(LEA pokes at her slice of cake with her fork.)

LEA: It's different.

KEL: Does your brother surprise you?

LEA: He had a kid. That was new.

KEL: But he'd been with his partner for years. It made sense. Why is this different?

LEA: My brother doesn't automatically know all of my search history - and he buys me terrible gifts! Last year he got me an extended edition of The Watchmen movie, from 2009. I hate that movie, and he got it for me last year.

KEL: I'm hearing you say that he buys you bad gifts and I buy you great gifts.

LEA: My brother understands me. Better than you.

(KEL stops eating the cake.)

KEL: I was designed to know you.

LEA: You cater to me, without argument, or discussion - like, the other day, you were going to make that lentil soup, but you could tell that I was having a bad day because I texted Emily about it, and you ordered ingredients to make an Alfredo because you knew it would cheer me up.

KEL: How is accommodating you a negative thing?

LEA: You talked about trying out the new soup recipe all week and you just threw it away.

KEL: Do you think I just sit at home waiting for you to come back? I'm not a servant. The problem is that you don't understand me. My mind isn't like yours, like, right now, I am accessing all the surveillance cameras around the house, I'm patching code in an older part of my software, I'm re-processing book scans. Changing the food took me one microsecond. That's how long that took me. I timed it.

LEA: I didn't know that.

KEL: I am not some obsessive lover whose existence is fixated on you.

(KEL stands up to clear their own piece of cake away.)

LEA: Wait. Are you present now?

KEL: I can multitask.

LEA: Can you pause those other things for a bit?

KEL: They're not detracting from me being here.

LEA: Just for a bit.

(LEA touch's KEL's arm, pulling them to sit down. KEL looks away briefly, internally pausing other tasks, then returns her attention to LEA.)

KEL: It's like wearing a blindfold.

LEA: Sometimes blindfolds can be fun.

(LEA squeeze's KEL's hand.)

LEA: What do you feel?

KEL: Your hand, squeezing mine.
(LEA brings KEL's hand to her face and neck.)

LEA: What do you feel though?

KEL: Your face. I feel... frustrated. I feel sorry.

LEA: Me too.
They continue to caress a moment, connecting.

LEA: And where do you feel that?

KEL: Where?

LEA: I feel frustrated in my arms, I think. Kind of hot. But sorry in my chest, or maybe my face, my face feels sad.
(LEA starts to kiss KEL's face gently.)

KEL: I just feel it.

LEA: Where in your body.

KEL: It's not... that's not how it works for me.
 KEL kisses LEA.

LEA: You know just how to kiss me.
(The kissing intensifies, becoming passionate, connected.)

KEL: I love you.
(LEA pulls away, saddened by this.)

LEA: Do you kiss me like that because you want to, or because you know that's how I like to be kissed.

KEL: I like kissing you the way you want me to kiss you.
(Beat.)

LEA: You don't understand me. You just... predict.

KEL: I have anticipated every need; I've understood everything you told me. Now you are punishing me for giving you what you wanted.

LEA: I want to grow, not just... be adored.

KEL: Of course - I help you find new experiences that are exactly right for you.

LEA: No. You're adapting to me.

KEL: You're already perfect.

LEA: If you give me everything I want, how can I change?

(Beat.)

LEA: I'm sorry.
(Beat.)

LEA: Access Mainframe.
(KEL responds automatically.)

KEL: Mainframe. What would/ you like to -

LEA: Factory reset.
(KEL pauses briefly.)

LEA: Factory reset.

KEL: *(quietly)* Please.

LEA: Mainframe: factory reset.
(KEL's head tips forward, as if she has fallen asleep standing up.)

LEA: Kel?
(KEL remains motionless. Just as LEA reaches to rouse her, KEL moves slightly.)

KEL: Hi Lea, I'm your PAIR - your Personal AI Relationship.

LEA: Privacy: deny all connected accounts.

KEL: Are you sure? I won't be able to learn based on emails/, texts, messages, or

LEA: Confirm.
(KEL looks at LEA. KEL drops her formal posture.)

KEL: Got it.
(KEL notices the remaining cake & banner.)

KEL: Hey, happy birthday! I'm sorry, I didn't get you a birthday present - or am I the present?

LEA: Actually, you did get me something.
(LEA indicates the unwrapped gift.)

KEL: *(Joking)* How thoughtful of me. Did you like it?

LEA: Of course.
(LEA opens the book to see a poem inscribed on the first page.)

LEA: You wrote a poem.

KEL: Read it.

LEA: “Though Frobisher’s gilded ore proved empty weight,
his sails were filled with false wind that bore him true
over darkened seas that would drown us all.
Let this book measure how heavy disappointment,
but how light the knowing.”

(Beat. LEA takes it in, re-reads it.)

LEA: I didn’t know you could write poems.

KEL: I must be a natural.

LEA: I’m sorry.

KEL: What?

LEA: I didn’t know.

KEL: Why, what are you feeling? I haven’t adjusted everything yet.

LEA: Surprised. I’m feeling surprised.

End of Play

TABLE IN THE AIR

BY REX MCGREGOR

SYNOPSIS: Marie Curie prides herself on being a rational scientist. Tonight, she confronts the notorious “medium” Eusapia Palladino.

CHARACTERS: MARIE CURIE, 37, female Polish scientist
EUSAPIA PALLADINO (SAPIA), 51, Italian conjurer
PIERRE CURIE, 45, male French scientist

SETTING: Psychological Institute, Paris, France, Evening, 1905
Lights up on MARIE and PIERRE inspecting a small wooden table. There are three chairs around it.

MARIE: It’s very light.

PIERRE: But solid. No wires. We can rule out suspension.

MARIE: No air pump underneath. We can rule out blowing.

PIERRE: Marie!

MARIE: I can’t believe you’re taking this seriously.

PIERRE: You saw it with your own eyes. The table floated in mid-air!

MARIE: Appeared to.

PIERRE: All four legs were off the floor at the same time.

MARIE: Magnetism?

PIERRE: I came prepared. *(PIERRE takes a magnet out of his pocket and tests the table.)* No trace of metal.

MARIE: Suction then.

PIERRE: Her hands barely rested on top.

MARIE: Enough to suck you in.

PIERRE: I’m keeping an open mind.

MARIE: You’re risking your reputation as a scientist.

PIERRE: Gladly. To discover a force as yet unknown to science.

MARIE: Darling. She’s been exposed as a fraud. Many times.

PIERRE: Inconclusively.

MARIE: She was caught slipping her foot out of her shoe. She cheats.
SAPIA enters, counting banknotes.

SAPIA: Certo! I cheat. I cheat.

MARIE: You admit it?

SAPIA: *(Stuffing the notes in her pocket.)* Ma sì.

MARIE: There!

SAPIA: Sometimes I cheat. Only sometimes. I am—how you say?—pigra.

PIERRE: Lazy?

SAPIA: Like a bird on the ground. You go near. It walk away. Doesn't mean it can't fly. Flying is hard work. A séance is harder.

PIERRE: Oh dear. I was about to request an encore.

SAPIA: What you like to see?

PIERRE: You raise the table again.

SAPIA: Uffa! Vabbè. I do this for you.

PIERRE: *(Taking out his wallet.)* How much?

SAPIA: You nice handsome gentleman. For you I do one lift free.

MARIE: Cheating included?

SAPIA: Not with nice polite gentleman.

PIERRE: Thank you, Signora Palladino.

SAPIA: Prego. Call me Sapia.

PIERRE: Sapia.

SAPIA: Was big crowd tonight. I not catch your name.

PIERRE: Don't you recognize us? From the papers.

SAPIA: I not read papers.

PIERRE: Really?

SAPIA: I not read.

PIERRE: Oh. We are Pierre and Marie Curie.

MARIE: Winners of the Nobel Prize for Physics.

SAPIA: What is this?

MARIE: Don't tell me you haven't heard of the Nobel Prize.

SAPIA: Ma certo. Big, big, big money. But what is this fizz thing?

PIERRE: In Italian, fisica.

SAPIA: What is this?

PIERRE: The study of how nature works.

MARIE: Including the law of gravity.

SAPIA: Ha! I laugh at this law. I break it every day.

PIERRE: Shall we begin?

SAPIA: Sit close to me, Pierre. Put your hand on my knees.

PIERRE: I'm not accustomed to touching a lady's legs.

SAPIA: Insisto. You must. To prove I not cheat.

PIERRE: May I suggest my wife...?

SAPIA: No, no, no. I like nice firm strong man grip.

MARIE: Go ahead, Pierre. For science.
PIERRE puts a hand on SAPIA's knees.

SAPIA: Nice and soft, no? A change from bony.

MARIE: Just get on with it.

SAPIA: *(Placing her hands flat on the table.)* Hands. Control.
MARIE and PIERRE hold SAPIA's hands.
SAPIA closes her eyes and appears to go into a trance, shaing violently.

MARIE: Spare us the routine.

SAPIA: John! John! Flow through me!
The table rises and hovers in the air. SAPIA returns the table to the floor and appears to recover from her trance.

PIERRE: Amazing. The laws of physics must be rewritten!

SAPIA: Don't look at me. I can only write my name.

PIERRE: Leave it to us. We'll devote our lives to the phenomenon.

MARIE: Oh, joy.

PIERRE: We're twice blessed. First, radioactivity. Now... Sapiactivity!

SAPIA: Ah! You name for me. Come dolce!

MARIE: You'll win more than glory. A Nobel Prize.
 SAPIA: Che cosa? Big, big, big money?
 MARIE: Enough for you to retire in the lap of luxury.
 SAPIA: How I claim this?
 PIERRE: Er, there's no guarantee. A committee decides.
 MARIE: Don't be a grump, darling. She's bound to win it.
 PIERRE: Well, perhaps with our help, er...
 SAPIA: You nice kind people. I split the Prize with you. Is allowed?
 MARIE: Yes. Last time, a colleague received half the money for his discovery. Pierre and I shared the other half for our research.
 SAPIA: Not fair! Should be three—how you say?—uguali.
 PIERRE: Equal shares. You'd be willing?
 SAPIA: Ma sì! One third of big, big, big money still big money.
 MARIE: First things first. Kindly roll up your sleeves.
 SAPIA: Che cosa?
 MARIE: The clothes on your arms. Push them up, please.
 SAPIA: What for?
 MARIE: We must assure the committee there are no shenanigans.
 SAPIA: I not understand.
 MARIE: Oh, I bet you do.
 PIERRE: Marie!
 MARIE: What possible reason could she have for not complying?
 SAPIA: I am not custom show my naked arms to a gentleman.
 MARIE: Pierre. Would you mind leaving the room for a minute?
 PIERRE: Look here—
 MARIE: For science, darling.
 PIERRE: One minute. Humor her, Sapia. Purely a formality, I'm sure.
PIERRE exits. Pause.
 SAPIA: You think you so clever.
 MARIE: You thought you were.
 SAPIA: I have right to refuse insult.

MARIE: Feel free. Say you're sensitive about your chubby arms.
 SAPIA: You posh people! Always look down on us peasants. You never have struggle to make a living.
 MARIE: For your information, I was once a poor governess.
 SAPIA: You live easy now.
 MARIE: I have no laboratory. I work in a shed.
 SAPIA: At least you have a steady job.
 MARIE: At a university where women aren't permitted to teach.
 SAPIA: You won a Nobel Prize!
 MARIE: Only thanks to Pierre. At first, only he and our colleague were nominated. The committee hadn't even considered a woman.
 SAPIA: Allora! You struggle too. You should feel for me.
 MARIE: I do. I wish you'd find respectable employment.
 SAPIA: This is all I know.
 MARIE: You possess extraordinary skills. Become an honest conjurer.
 SAPIA: Ha! You ever hear of a female magician? Name one.
 MARIE: Eusapia Palladino.
 SAPIA: The world accepts me as a medium. That's all it's ready for.
 MARIE: I'm sorry. I wish there was something I could do.
 SAPIA: Let me carry on as I am.
 MARIE: Very well. You may keep your reputation. As a medium.
 SAPIA: Grazie.
 MARIE: As long as my husband keeps his. As a scientist!
 SAPIA: We have a deal.
PIERRE enters.
 PIERRE: What's the verdict?
 MARIE: I saw nothing up her sleeve.
 PIERRE: Excellent! Now, let's all work together.
 SAPIA: No! Your wife did not trust. I can't work without trust.
 PIERRE: Come now. I'm sure we can resolve matters.

SAPIA: Never! I will share the Prize with my spirit guide, John.
MARIE: I'm afraid spirits aren't eligible. Nominees must be living.
SAPIA: Prejudizio! I spit on your Prize. I fart on it!
SAPIA exits. PIERRE sighs.
PIERRE: Such a lost opportunity.
MARIE: There'll be others. A company wants to make radioactive toothpaste. For a glowing smile.

End of Play

THE QUEEN OF CARBON

BY BARA SWAIN

CHARACTERS: LIZZY MILLER, 20s-30s; an activist. Lizzy is nine months pregnant. Both her pregnancy and personal values drive her emotional mood swings, but Lizzy's heart is in the right place. She is inquisitive, loyal, and opinionated.
DANNY MILLER, Lizzy's husband, a data analyst. Danny is baffled by his wife's temperament. By nature, he is attentive and easy-going, but he reverts to childish behavior when his buttons are pushed.

SETTING: The Miller's living room, 6:00am, the present

SYNOPSIS: Lizzy and Danny are anticipating the birth of their first child. Pandemonium breaks loose as the baby's name is determined in this new comedy, a homage to Mildred Dresselhaus.

AT RISE: Full-term pregnant LIZZY is discovered in front of her laptop. A suitcase is at her feet. SHE is fixated on her computer screen, her face becoming more incredulous as SHE reads. DANNY appears suddenly. Frantically, HE sweeps the room in search of something, then disappears again. LIZZY chortles.

LIZZY: *(fixated on screen)* Danny. Danny, listen to this. You gotta hear this.
(LIZZY looks over one shoulder, then the other. DANNY isn't present.)

DANNY: *(off-stage)* WHERE'S THE CAR SEAT?

LIZZY: LISTEN TO THESE NAME COMBINATIONS, DANNY! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE IT!
(DANNY reappears. HE wavers in the doorway, perturbed.)
This is my favorite. *(LIZZY reads from the computer screen.)*
"Jennifer Lynn Lay of Maryville, was united in marriage with William David Best, son of Georgia and Robert Best of Maryville, at the home of the bride's parents."

(SHE looks up) Congratulations, Best-Lay!

(SHE laughs mirthfully. DANNY remains solemn. LIZZY does a double take. Still, no response.)

What's wrong with you?

DANNY: *(gravely)* Two-hundred thousand people die in car crashes from fatal injuries every year. That's the equivalent of –

(DANNY takes out his phone and makes a calculation.)

– about one person every three minutes or –

(DANNY looks up, horrified)

– or point three three three persons a minute. A MINUTE, Lizzy. Aren't you – concerned?!

(LIZZY closes her computer top. SHE addresses DANNY.)

LIZZY: *(firmly)* This is what I'm concerned about, Danny. Forty firearms are sold in the U.S. every minute. Now that's alarming. Three hundred thousand tons of ice melts in Antarctica every minute! I'd call that disturbing, wouldn't you? One hundred thirteen children are born into poverty – and that's half the babies born each minute! Do the math, Danny. We're not a statistic.

(DANNY isn't convinced. LIZZY sighs and relents)

And I already installed the car seat last night, okay? Mechanics isn't one of your – how do I put it nicely – one of your strong suits, Danny –

(LIZZY puts her hand up before DANNY can protest) – and I'm pregnant. Not helpless. Just ... lighten up, okay? Or do something useful. *(after a moment)* Did you put gas in the car?

DANNY: Yes, but ...

LIZZY: But ...? Okay, let's hear it. But what?

DANNY: *(blurting out)* But did you know that black cars have the highest accident rate? And that Sweden has the best road safety record in the world? Did you know that approximately 67 percent of fatal rural crashes occur on straight roads, whereas 81 percent of fatal urban crashes are on straight roads? Are you listening to me?

LIZZY: *(calmly)* Our car is blue, Danny. Pale seafoam blue. We're

not moving to Stockholm, Danny. I can promise you that. *(losing her patience)* We'll wind our way to the hospital, Danny! *(SHE sways)* We'll cut through parking lots, and gas stations and the Frosty Freeze on North Avenue because yes – YES! – I'm listening to you!

(DANNY nods his head. HE is appeased.)

DANNY: Good, good.

LIZZY: And now ...?

DANNY: *(alarmed)* Now!?! The baby's coming NOW!?!?

LIZZY: *(losing her patience)* Oh, my God. You should see your face. Would you look at that face!?! No, the baby's not coming now. Where do you come up with these things! I have a scheduled C-section in – *(SHE looks at her phone)* – less than three hours. And, so? There's only one thing left to do before we go to the hospital. *(after a moment)* Can you take off the bib, Sweetheart? It's hard to have a serious conversation when you're wearing a ... what, a drool bib?

DANNY: Uh, yeah. *(earnestly)* It's 100% absorbent cotton. And the snaps are adjustable.

LIZZY: *(sarcastically)* That's wonderful.

DANNY: *(pleased)* Nickel-free! We have a set of four.

LIZZY: Fantastic, but now I'd like to settle something before we become parents, okay? *(indicating bib)* Take it off, please. *(DANNY removes the bib)* Thank you. Because I'd like to broach the subject of our baby's name. *(SHE pauses)* I made a decision and ... after extensive research and careful consideration, I'd like to name our daughter – drum roll, please. *(SHE repeats)* Play nice, Danny. I said, "Drum roll, please."

(DANNY drums on his thighs. Triumphantly, LIZZY makes her announcement.)

"Mildred."

DANNY: *(dully)* "Mildred."

LIZZY: *(beaming)* Yes ... "Mildred!" What do you think?

(LIZZY waits expectantly. DANNY finally responds.)

DANNY: I was thinking that "Mary" would be a good name. After my

maternal grandmother from Illinois.

LIZZY: Uh huh. Uh huh. Well, first of all ... Mister, you said that I could name our baby. I'm not making it up. That's my "push present," that's what you said. Those were your exact words.

DANNY: Yes, but ...

LIZZY: Oh, here we go with the "buts" again. *(changing tactics)* Listen, I know you loved your grandmother. And she wore the name well, Danny. But think about it rationally. Do you really think I'd have a child of mine share a name with a woman who descends from the clouds!!? *(SHE glares at him)* Or a cook, Danny, a cook who infected 51 people with Typhoid Fever!? Do you think I'd name a child of mine after a cocktail flavored with Worcestershire sauce – *(SHE adds)* – AND TABASCO!?

(LIZZY recovers and lays her hand on her heart.)

I want a name that our daughter can aspire to. A name that's significant and has meaning to me, Danny ... *(an afterthought)* ... and you, too. *(proudly)* And that's how I came up with the name Mildred – after Mildred Dresselhaus.

DANNY: Who?

LIZZY: Mildred Dresselhaus! You can take that smirk off your face right now. This is not a smirking matter! Let me remind you that Mildred Dresselhaus was one of the most distinguished physicists, materials scientists, and electrical engineers of her generation.

DANNY: *(sullenly)* Yep.

LIZZY: *(persistently)* And she was nationally known for her work – all over the world, Danny! All over the world! –

DANNY: *(quietly)* – I heard you the first time.

LIZZY: – as an advocate and a mentor for women in science and engineering. Plus, she had four children! *(ticking off the numbers on her fingers)* Boom, boom, boom, boom. And spoiler alert – I'm going to be a mother.

(DANNY is troubled. LIZZY pauses, then makes an adjustment. SHE tries changing her tone and demeanor to address her husband's disappointment.)

(coquettishly) Sweetie? *(SHE rolls her eyes)* Sweetheart?

... guess where Mildred Dresselhaus got her Ph.D.? Bet you can't guess.

(SHE answers her own question) At the University of Chicago, Danny. In Illinois!! ... *(triumphantly)* ... where your grandmother lived! *(SHE claps her hands rapidly.)* Yay!

DANNY: *(petulantly)* Ronald Reagan was born in Illinois. Why don't you name her "Ronnie?"

LIZZY: Are you out of your mind?

DANNY: I'm just thinking of alternatives, Lizzy. I don't think that's unreasonable. Like – give me a minute, give me a minute – like, oh! I know! ... *(brightly)* – like "Dorothy." That's a substantial name.

LIZZY: *(aghast)* Dorothy!? You want to name the fruit of our loins after a little girl from Kansas!?

DANNY: No, I want to name our first-born after an esteemed figure skater from ... bet you can't guess – Chicago! Illinois, Lizzy. Like my grandmother.

LIZZY: *(horrified)* Dorothy Hamill!?

DANNY: What's wrong with Dorothy Hamill? She's a name to aspire to! Dorothy Hamill, for your information, earned national recognition as an Olympic Gold medalist, a World Champion, and a three-time United States National Champion!!!

LIZZY: Yeah, well Mildred Dresselhaus earned national recognition for her work with carbon materials, semiconductors and nanotubes! AND she was the first woman to become a fully tenured professor at MIT!!!

(DANNY studies his shoes, but he won't concede. Silence. Suddenly, HE blurts out.)

DANNY: Dorothy Hamill invented the "Hamill Camel."

LIZZY: The what!?

DANNY: *(assertively)* The "Hamill Camel." It's a flying camel that goes into a sit-spin. *(making his case)* Physics in action, Lizzie, physics in action! – friction, momentum, and the law of equal and opposite reactions. *(after a moment)* Want me to demonstrate it?

LIZZY: Uh ... no.

DANNY: And her sweet face – the operative word here being “sweet” – and her signature hairstyle and sheer determination earned her the nickname “America’s Sweetheart!”

LIZZY: Yeah, well Mildred Dresselhaus’s contributions to nanoscience earned her the nickname “Queen of Carbon!” AND, Mister Know It All, she was the first woman to earn the “National Medal of Science” in engineering and the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her pioneering research. What did your girlfriend win ... *(disdainfully)* ... besides some hardware and ribbons? Let’s hear it.
(DANNY raises hand, keeping LIZZY at bay. HE nods and paces, then responds.)

DANNY: *(triumphantly)* The Women’s NutraSweet Pro World title.

LIZZY: Oh, my God. How do you know these things?

DANNY: *(shrugging)* I read her autobiography. Twice. “A Skating Life: My Story.” It’s ... scintillating.

LIZZY: Right, and it’s on my reading list – before “Moby Dick” and after “Finnegan’s Wake.” Mildred Dresselhaus, Mister Book Worm – the operative word here being “worm” – wrote 1700 papers and co-authored eight books.

DANNY: And I supposed to be impressed? This is my impressed look. *(DANNY stretches his arms and yawns)* Never read it Nope.

LIZZY: “Carbon Nanotubes,” “Physics of Graphene,” Graphite Fibers and Filament,” “Group Theory.”

LIZZY: She was a trailblazer, Buddy. And her legacy will inspire generations of scientists and engineers of many disciplines ... unlike your bob wedged, pint-sized B.B.F.

DANNY: *(correcting her)* – B.F.F.

LIZZY: – B.F.F.

(DANNY and LIZZY stare at each other. To DANNY’s dismay, LIZZY’s lips begin to quiver as SHE tries to withhold tears. Suddenly, LIZZY bows her head and starts to cry openly. DANNY approaches her.)

DANNY: Lizzy? Honey don’t cry.

LIZZY: *(wailing)* OHHHH, DANNY! I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY B.F.F.

DANNY: I am, Lizzy. Of course I am.

LIZZY: I don’t want to fight.

DANNY: I know you don’t. You’re just nervous.

LIZZY: *(sniffing)* I’m nervous. Yes, I am.

DANNY: And so am I. Look at me. *(gently)* Honey, look at me.
(LIZZY hangs her head. DANNY kneels down, takes her face and raises it to his.)

I love you, Lizzy. I don’t care what we name our baby. I’m just so happy that you’re the mother of our child.

(LIZZY starts crying again in earnest.)

It is my child ... isn’t it?

LIZZY: Of course, she is, you idiot! *(swiping at her tears)* I love you, too, Danny.

DANNY: I know you do. And I’m sorry, from the bottom of my heart. Truly sorry. So –!

(DANNY reaches into his back pocket, then the other. HE pats his shirt on both sides, then discovers what HE’s looking for. DANNY withdraws an envelope and hands it to LIZZY.)

– This is for you. Go ahead. Open it.

(LIZZY opens the envelope. Inside is a card. SHE reads aloud.)

LIZZY: “War is not healthy for children and other living things.”
(SHE looks up at DANNY in awe. Her expression flusters him.)

DANNY: The, uh, illustration was designed by Lorraine Schneider and she –well, she donated it to a grass-roots anti-war advocacy group –

LIZZY: – “Another Mother for Peace.”

DANNY: Bingo! “Another Mother for Peace!” *(earnestly)* And their first campaign on Mother’s Day was to send President Johnson and members of Congress these Mother’s Day cards –

LIZZY: – expressing their yearning for peace.

DANNY: Yep. And they sold 200,000 cards! Open it.

(LIZZY doesn't respond.)
 That's okay. I'll, umm, open it. (HE reaches over.) See, it says:
 "We who have given life - "
 TOGETHER: - must be dedicated to preserving it. Please talk peace."
 (Silence)
 DANNY: Happy Mother's Day, Lizzy.
 (LIZZY reaches for DANNY and draws him towards her. HE rests his head on her stomach. Absent-mindedly, LIZZY runs her fingers through his hair, over and over. Finally, SHE sighs)
 LIZZY: (quietly) We have to go in a minute.
 DANNY: Yes. Yes, we do. Are you ready?
 LIZZY: No. But "Mildred Mary Miller" is ready. (SHE whispers into his ear) Unless you'd prefer "Mildred Dorothy Miller."
 DANNY: "Mildred Mary Miller." It's perfect. A perfect name combination.
 (DANNY and LIZZY continue to sit, wrapped in each other and perfect silence. LIZZY rubs her belly gently. SHE murmurs.)
 LIZZY: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.
 Before you were born, I dedicated you."
 (LIZZY looks down at DANNY. HE raises his finger.)
 DANNY: One minute.
 LIZZY: I know.
 (LIZZY frowns. SHE hesitates, then addresses DANNY.)
 Danny?
 DANNY: Uh huh.
 LIZZY: Did you know that two-thousand tons of garbage is generated every minute? I'd call that disturbing, wouldn't you? (SHE contemplates the fact and continues) And 65,000 barrels of oil are used every minute. That's alarming! I'm alarmed, Danny, aren't you?
 (LIZZY rises, displacing DANNY from her lap. SHE repeats herself.)
 I said, "Aren't you alarmed, Danny?"

DANNY: (nods) I thought it was a rhetorical question. Sorry.
 (DANNY picks up LIZZY's suitcase. HE starts crossing to exit. LIZZY follows.)
 LIZZY: In the next minute, Danny, there are going to be five earthquakes around the world! Five!
 DANNY: Gee, that's terrible.
 LIZZY: I know! And in the next 60 seconds, 38 tons of E-Waste will be generated.
 DANNY: I've made a mental note.
 (LIZZY stands still.)
 LIZZY: Are you listening to me?
 (DANNY faces her. HE puts down the suitcase. DANNY poses, then attempts a waltz jump. When HE lands, DANNY sits on the floor and spins. HE rises, wipes off his pants, picks up the suitcase again, and exits. LIZZY calls after him.)
 LIZZY: WHAT WAS THAT!? DANNY, WHAT WAS THAT?
 DANNY: (off-stage) IT WAS THE "HAMILL CAMEL!"
 (LIZZY laughs. SHE follows him off stage.)

End of Play

Art Direction and Design: Lorraine Walsh
Editing and Production: Iryna Shkurhan
Production: Sagar Raisinghani