

**Living the Craft Plays
and Poems**

Senior Creative Writing Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Creative Writing at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Spring 2007

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Living the Craft

Plays and Poems by

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Living the Craft

Poems and Plays

Dedication

Dedication is a word describing the support and effort it takes to live the craft of a writer. These two plays, *Planchette* and *An American Classroom*, and the sampling of poetry are the culmination of more than my own efforts.

My best friend and writing mentor, Mendy Knott, encouraged me to read the University of Arkansas Press publication: [The Afterlife of Leslie Stringfellow: A Nineteenth-Century Southern Family's Experiences with Spiritualism](#) (2005). This book is the basis for my full-length play *Planchette*. The author, Stephen Chism graciously granted his permission to use quotes and details from his text. Writing the play *Planchette* would not have been possible, without his dedication to bringing Leslie Stringfellow's story back into the public eye.

An American Classroom is the direct result of my wild, wonderful and sometimes absurd experience in Dr. Blake Hobby's Contemporary Literature classroom. The content of this play attempts to grapple with the complex and sometimes disturbing nature of understanding literature written in the last half of the 20th century. Dr. Hobby's dedication to facilitating effective discussions in a safe classroom environment became my inspiration.

Poems are the elucidations of our lives ~ what we experience and what we observe. The poems and plays included here in [Living the Craft](#) are an example of a new creative effort: an effort completely and unconditionally supported by my dedicated partner, Ms. April Joy Dennis. While Mendy Knott, Dr. Blake Hobby, Dr. David Hopes, Dr. Rick Chess, and the author Stephen Chism created impetus for my work, my partner remains my muse.

Thank you to Kim Pounds, and Heather in the UNCA writing center, for excellent advice and assistance with form and format.

Kamala K. Parker

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Planchette

Planchette
A Play by Kamala K. Parker 30
April 2007

The Players:

1848: The Fox Family

Father ~ a distinguished gentlemen, stern but caring
Mother ~ Father's wife, and the mother of Kate and Margaret
Kate ~ Margaret's happy 10 year old sister
Margaret ~ Kate's exuberant 15 year old sister
Margaret (older) ~ 30 years old and a bitter alcoholic
Mr. Hyde ~ a wealthy neighbor of the Fox family
Mrs. Hyde ~ Mr. Hyde's wife
Shoemaker ~ another neighbor of the Fox family
Pastor ~ a concerned friend of Father's

1887: The Stringfellow Family

Leslie ~ The Stringfellow's young son who writes from Summer land
Alice ~ Mrs. Stringfellow, Leslie's dedicated and loving mother
Mr. Stringfellow ~ Leslie's hard-working and loving father

2010: Summer land

Stephen Chism ~ the spirit of an enthusiastic University librarian
Percy ~ a spirit who is a friendly Summerland Police Officer
Eloise Wylie ~ a persistent, but kind spirit of an old woman
Elinor Wylie ~ the spirit of Maggie's Grandmother
Edith Abbot ~ Elinor Wylie's companion

2010: Best Friends

Maggie Wylie ~ A teenager obsessed with talking to the dead
Feron ~ Maggie's patient best friend

ACT I: SCENE ONE.

(1848. A family is sleeping in their home. The main living room has a table with two chairs, and an extra bed off to side. When lights come up, an occasional knock is heard, like a hammer on a nail. Then the knocking persists escalating to the point of annoyance until FATHER rushes out into the living room in his white nightgown and cap, his face pale like a ghost. He shouts with maddening frustration at the pounding noise.)

FATHER

What is the meaning of all this racket?!

*(He grabs his head as if the sound would crack his skull.
Then shouts into the air.)*

I've pleaded with you before. Please stop making so much noise!

(MOTHER comes out into the living room sleepily.)

MOTHER Please

dear, be quiet. You will wake the children.

FATHER Do you honestly think they are sleeping through this infernal rap-tap-tap ping?

(The knocking mimics the rhythm of the words rap-tap-tapping. MOTHER and FATHER look about curiously as the two sisters, MARGARET and KATE enter rubbing their eyes.)

MOTHER

I told you.

FATHER

It isn't me.

KATE

Why are you shouting Daddy?

(MOTHER gives FATHER a scolding look.)

FATHER

Do you expect me to believe that none of you hear the hellish clap of a shoemaker's hammer on a shoe. It makes me wish my soul had already been pounded to death.

(The hammering escalates in an anti-rhythmic crescendo, the sound coming from every direction.)

MOTHER

Such language Dear!

KATE Daddy, isn't
the shoemaker supposed to be in bed?

MOTHER

Yes dear, now go back to sleep.

*(MOTHER goes to guide the children back to bed, but
MARGARET swings beneath her arm excitedly)*

MARGARET

I know what it is Daddy. A spirit!

(KATE puts her hand over her face and giggles.)

MOTHER

Now Margaret. April Fool's Day is tomorrow.

(MARGARET ignores her mother and looks about the room.)

MARGARET

Hear me Spirit! Do as I do!

*(The hammering crescendos up then down, then stops.
MARGARET claps her hands together two times. Silence for
a beat, everyone holds their breath. Just as FATHER is
about to speak, the Spirit hammers twice. MARGARET claps
her hands four times. The hammering answers banging four
times. Then MARGARET slowly and silently claps her hands
twice. Without hesitation the Spirit answers with two
confident raps.)*

Look Mother, it can see as well as hear!

FATHER Now look
here it is late, and they'll be no games tonight.

(MOTHER shushes him.)

MOTHER I'll test you!
If you can, tell me the ages of my children.

(First the Spirit raps 15 distinct taps with MARGARET and KATE counting them all the way. There's a pause)

KATE AND MARGARET
Fifteen!

MARGARET
That's my age!

(The rap begins again rapping eleven times, the girls saying the numbers in excitement.)

KATE AND MARGARET
Eleven!

KATE
That's me mama. It can see me Mama!

FATHER
Unbelievable!

(Then the Spirit raps in a deeper tone: three slow thumps.)

KATE
My dead little brother!

(KATE bursts into tears. And MOTHER moves to comfort her.)

FATHER

Now, now you didn't have to remind us of our lost little one. The grave hasn't even had the chance to grass over yet.

MOTHER Please don't upset my children. Are you a human play ing tricks on us?

(Silence. Each character looks at the other. KATE's tears dry up.)

MARGARET Is this a spirit? If it is, make two raps.

(Two firm raps occur that reverberate in the family's bones.)

FATHER

Well, I'll be damned.

MARGARET

Spirit, will you continue to talk to us if we go get our neighbors? Use one knock for "no," or two knocks for "yes."

(The spirit answers with two knocks)

FATHER I'll go get the Hydes; Margaret wake up the Shoemaker!

MOTHER

Kate you have to go to bed, its late.

KATE But I'm not sleepy Mama. Spirit can I stay awake and visit with you?

(The spirit answers with two raps.)

How do you do Mrs. Fox?

Now be quiet!

MOTHER

Now listen here you. I'm running this house.

MR. HYDE

Now, now Mr. Fox, what is all this commotion? I have a calendar just as well as you. And it is only my fondness of the April Fool's Day tradition that has allowed you to persuade me to join you in your living room at this late hour.

MRS. HYDE

Dear why did I have to come with you?

MR. HYDE Because,
if there is a spirit, you would never believe me.

(The hammering stops abruptly, and everyone looks at the little girl in wonderment.)

Now be polite! These are our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Hyde. Knock three times for hello.

(Three knocks occur.)

MR. HYDE

This is an excellent joke indeed. Where is your fair Margaret? Sitting in a closet with a hammer I suspect.

Parker 6

*(FATHER enters with Mr.
and Mrs. HYDE, a wealthy
couple perplexed by their
late night wake up.)*

*(MR. HYDE greets
MOTHER and his wife
yawns.)*

*(The spirit begins to rap-
tap-tap obnoxiously.
Everyone covers their
ears.)*

KATE

*(MARGARET enters, the old
SHOEMAKER reluctantly
in tow)*

MARGARET Daddy! The shoemaker told me our house was haunted before we moved in.

FATHER
You don't say?

MARGARET
Sir please tell everyone what you told me.

(Stalling, SHOEMAKER greets his neighbors.)

SHOEMAKER
Good evening Mr. Fox... Mrs. Fox, and good evening to you Mr. Hyde, Mrs. Hyde. Girls.

MR. HYDE
Come on man! Explain yourself.

SHOEMAKER The last time this house was occupied, there were reports of mysterious things.

MARGARET
Tell ⁴em! Tell 'em!

SHOEMAKER
Well...supposedly combs were snatched from the hair of the Lady of the house, and small blocks of wood were found in the basement with strange writing on them.... and occasionally... knocking. That's why the house was vacant for so long...

FATHER .and
why I could buy it at such a good price.

(The spirit having grown impatient begins to hammer in its fiendish anti-rhythmic tirade, as if its "life " must depend on being heard. Everyone covers their ears except FATHER. He begins to wave his arms)

We can't understand you if you just bang away like a demon!

Am I right?
(The hammering stops abruptly.)

(Two raps. The neighbors exclaim their amazement at the spirit's apparent understanding.)

KATE
It listens to you Daddy!

MOTHER
Shush everyone. Let's not be rude. There must be a reason the spirit wants to communicate with us.

(Two quick raps shut everyone up.)
Are you a troubled spirit?

(Two raps.)

MRS. HYDE
Did something bad happen to you?

(Two raps.)

MR. HYDE
Did you die in this house?

(Two raps.)

FATHER
Of an illness?

(One rap. MARGARET is beside her self with this unusual game. The adults are all amazed.)

MARGARET
I know. I know.

(MARGARET draws out the question dramatically)

Where you murdered?

(The spirit answers with two raps.)

MARGARET

I knew it! I knew it!

SHOEMAKER

I was afraid of that.

FATHER

Murder? I'll be damned.

KATE Mommy. I want to go to bed now. This game isn't fun anymore.

(Lights fade to dim.)

ACT I: SCENE TWO

(1887. As FATHER, MOTHER and the girls exit in one direction and their neighbors in the opposite, the stage hands, wearing pitch black clothing and darkened face and hands, change the bedding and the room's decor in a dramatic flourish. LESLIE, a young man enters simultaneously getting into the bed to appear asleep just as it is readied. ALICE Stringfellow enters as the stage lights come up.)

ALICE

Leslie. Leslie!

(LESLIE, lit more brightly from above, does not move.)

Leslie. The sun is up. I need your help. Leslie, can't you hear me? Your father will be home this morning.

(She goes to his bedside. LESLIE rolls over and looks at ALICE; she is surprised. LESLIE doesn't look well.)

ALICE

Leslie, are you alright?

LESLIE

Mama, is father going to die?

ALICE

No... but yes, we all die sometime Leslie.

LESLIE I

know this Mama. I'm talking about his fever.

ALICE

No, he's better from that. His sabbatical did him wonders. With rest, the body always heals. Come on now, get up. I need your help.

LESLIE

Mama, *(pause)* Mama, I have a fever.

{ALICE, concerned, feels his forehead. He's burning up.}

ALICE

You are a little warm, but you'll be fine. You'll see.

LESLIE

I haven't felt fine for a few days.

ALICE

Why didn't you tell me?

LESLIE I didn't want to worry you... not with father being gone. And somehow I knew.

ALICE

Knew what?

MR. STRINGFELLOW

(from offstage} Alice? Leslie?

(MR. STRINGFELLOW enters}

There's my lovely family. I missed you both.

(ALICE looks at MR. STRINGFELLOW in a way that let's him know something is wrong.)

Leslie? It's a little late to still be in bed, isn't it?

LESLIE Hello Father.

I'm so glad to see you. I have to leave soon.

MR. STRINGFELLOW

Leave soon?

ALICE

He has a fever.

(ALICE starts to weep quietly.)

LESLIE Yes, a fever
for a few days, and I know... I'm dicing.

MR. STRINGFELLOW Leslie, if you've only been ill
a few days, you're going to be fine. We'll call for the doctor.

LESLIE No, father, I'm
only here, because I waited to talk to you.

*(ALICE lets a little sob escape. MR. STRINGFELLOW sits
on LESLIE'S bed)*

MR. STRINGFELLOW

Son, don't talk like that... please.

LESLIE

Do you remember our discussions about what might be beyond death, the other side? I can
already see the light of heaven people have been talking about. It's so beautiful...

(LESLIE grabs ALICE'S hand and sits up slightly.)

If it's possible, I'll contact you Mama! I promise!

(Leslie looks offstage in awe. He reaches out to someone who no one can see.)

Grandmother!

(LESLIE lies back down and dies. His parents are shocked and both cry. Lights fade to dim.)

ACT I: SCENE THREE

(2010. Stagehands enter. They pull the quilt up and over Leslie 'sface, tuck it around his body and lift him as if in a shroud. As the stagehands carry the body offstage the parents follow as if attending a funeral. Other stagehands reset the bed with beautifully elegant white bedding and stack the table with stacks of multi-colored tomes. STEPHEN, who has written a book about LESLIE Stringfellow and his family, enters LESLIE'S room of the afterworld. This is Summer land, the perpetual bright day in the paradise of Sphere 2, a sacred dimension near Earth's realm.)

STEPHEN

Hello? Mr. Stringfellow? Leslie!

(STEPHEN pauses looking around.)

Where could he be? It's been such a long day. The longest most amazing day of my... that I can remember.

(LESLIE, wearing 19th century clothing, floats down from the rafters on a wire or some other means of appearing or arriving like a spirit might with an overly large stack of books in his arm.) There you are!

LESLIE

Do I know you?

STEPHEN

Probably not. But I've been looking for you all over Summerland. I wrote a book about you!
And I'm so excited to find you..

*(STEPHEN approaches LESLIE with his hand extended, but
LESLIE is preoccupied.)*

LESLIE Newton just gave us another
bundle of homework and my head hurts...

STEPHEN Does

it really? We really don't feel pain do we?

*(LESLIE talks as he sets the stack of book down on the
table.)*

LESLIE

Right, right...but some of us do and we certainly still feel fear, frustration, confusion,
annoyance and all those other emotions that go along with existing and doing math.

STEPHEN

Oh.

LESLIE

The new knowledge is incredible! Newton has moved well beyond his treatise *Philosophiae
Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. He's teaching Quantum reality and the mathematical
juxtaposition of our world and the first sphere.

STEPHEN

You mean Earth, right?

*(LESLIE, preoccupied, starts rearranging his books
removing some stacks onto the floor.)*

LESLIE

Yes Earth.

STEPHEN

The first sphere.

LESLIE

Right!

STEPHEN ...and according to the letters you wrote to your mother Summerland is sphere.

LESLIE

...two.

STEPHEN

Right! This is all very exciting!

(LESLIE has sat down and its thumbing through his books.)

Mr. Stringfellow....

LESLIE

Please call me Leslie.

STEPHEN Leslie... I see you're busy, so I'll call on you another time...

(STEPHEN starts to leave.)

...but I'm not certain of how to do that. I was hoping to further my research concerning my book.

LESLIE Your book? Didn't you say you had recently arrived? How so?

STEPHEN

Car accident.

LESLIE

Drunk driver?

STEPHEN

Yes.

LESLIE

Happens all the time. So sorry. Well...

(LESLIE stands to address STEPHEN properly extending his hand.)

welcome, welcome! Leslie Stringfellow.

(STEPHEN shakes LESLIE'S hand.)

Stephen Chism.

LESLIE

Pardon my manners. I've been here so long now. I'm hoping to graduate to the next sphere, that's why I'm so focused on my studies. I should help you settle in a bit I guess. But where are your relatives?

STEPHEN I asked them to help me find you, and here I am. Where are your mother and father?

LESLIE

Off seeing the world. They love to travel. It's so much easier here. Think of where you want to go and Poof! You're there.

STEPHEN That's amazing! When do you expect them back? I'm anxious to meet them.

(LESLIE is surprised by STEPHEN'S enthusiasm, but nonetheless remains friendly mirroring STEPHEN'S good nature.)

LESLIE

(beat) I don't really know...Could be any moment or at least a day, perhaps two months, or 20 years; time is so different here. Come, sit down. I'll make you tea, you can have any flavor you like.

(As the light fades, LESLIE and Stephen exit stage right talking with each other as the stagehands enter to change the bedding to a pink comforter and lots of girly fuzzy pillows. The table stays just as Leslie had left it: piled with books.)

ACT I: SCENE FOUR

(2010. The lights come up as two teenage girls enter the room [as the stagehands finish with the set.] FERON, a tomboy, sits on the foot of the bed and picks up a wireless video game controller and looks towards the audience at MAGGIE's 'imaginary' TV, and begins "playing. " MAGGIE, wearing a "hippie " dress sits at the head of the bed. She begins to file her nails. They sit a moment lost in what they are doing.}

Are you winning?

MAGGIE

All the time.

FERON

Fun?

MAGGIE

Boring.

FERON

I've got an idea

MAGGIE

What?

FERON

(FERON continues 'playing' the game feigning interest.)

MAGGIE Let's talk to the dead,
and ask about how they spend their days.

It won't matter.

FERON

But it'll be interesting.

MAGGIE

No, just different...may be.

FERON

Curious?

MAGGIE

A little.

FERON

Damn it!

(FERON really concentrates. Then obviously "looses " her game.)

Come on, it'll be fun.

MAGGIE

What?

FERON

Talking to the dead.

MAGGIE

when did talking to the dead become fun?

FERON Since

Have you ever talked to the dead?

MAGGIE

No.

FERON

Then how do you know they 're not fun?

MAGGIE

FERON

Interesting may be, but not fun.

MAGGIE

Come on then. We can do it right now?

FERON

(sarcastic) Right.

(MAGGIE jumps off the bed and pulls an Ouija Board in its game box out from underneath it. FERON notices the game and gets up off the bed a little skittish)

If you think I'm going to play with that, you're crazy.

MAGGIE It's just a Ouija Board. We're not doing anything but making a phone call.

FERON

That's not some fucking cell phone; An operator isn't going to pick up and ask if we need some help.

MAGGIE

How do you know?

FERON

(hesitates) I don't.

(MAGGIE sets the game box on the bed and opens it. She removes a book, "The Afterlife of Leslie Stringfello\ v. " She opens it to one of the many flagged pages.)

MAGGIE

Look, this book says we've got nothing to worry about. It says right here: "Good people attract good things, *(teasing FERON)* Aren't you a good person?"

FERON

Good. Bad. Righteous, Evil. What the fuck! All I know is I'm a physical being in a physical reality, and you want to contact a spiritual being in a spiritual reality and that scares the shit out of me.

MAGGIE

Everyone, our whole lives, has told us what to think about the afterlife. I've never believed in a mean 'ol God sitting on a throne who punishes sinners. This book supports that, and now we're going to prove it.

FERON

By using a Ouija Board?!

MAGGIE

Yes.

FERON

How can you trust what it says?

MAGGIE

Faith.

FERON

Faith is what you're objecting to.

MAGGIE

I'm objecting to hell.

FERON

(whining) Why me?

MAGGIE

Would you stop! You know you're the only one I trust. The instructions say it takes two people. That's me and you. I'll take every precaution I can to protect us.

(MAGGIE pulls a shoebox from beneath the bed. She opens it and removes her magical supplies.)

Salt. Sage. White candles. I even bought a Jesus candle for God's sake!

FERON

Jesus S. Christ! Now look, I was raised a Christian by well-meaning folks. My parents aren't perfect, but they said I should never play with this.

MAGGIE

Yeah, and they told you Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny were real until you figured things out for yourself.

FERON

That's not the same thing. This is serious Maggie. If there is a spirit world, there are forces we can't control.

MAGGIE But we are part

spirit too. Don't you at least believe that?

FERON

I don't know.

MAGGIE You're kidding! You're telling me when we die.

Poof! We're gone — that's it. The End.

FERON

Maybe.

MAGGIE Perfect! I'm the believer, you're

the skeptic. This thing can't fake us out.

FERON

So?

MAGGIE

Come on.

FERON

I give up.

MAGGIE

You'll do it?

FERON

I'll do it.

ACT I: SCENE FIVE

(Unable to be heard by the audience, FERON and MAGGIE continue to "talk " silently near Maggie's bed for a beat, then they sit on the bed as LESLIE and STEPHEN enter talking aloud. They are carrying "imaginary" tea. LESLIE and STEPHEN can not see FERON and MAGGIE and the young women can not see them.)

LESLIE

So you say you discovered the book my mother wrote concerning my letters to her; and you wrote another book about that.

STEPHEN

Yes. You see, your mother's book is., let's say... lost in the bowels of a University library... I found it fascinating that you had written your mother everyday for over 15 years after your death. I have to confess I really didn't believe most of it.

(Leslie and Stephen sit at the table and begin sipping the "imaginary" tea which is quite hot.)

I was a fool.

LESLIE

It's really not your fault. Since the late 1800s, things have changed here in Summerland. It's been a hundred years. We could have helped the Earthlings, but with technology no one seems to have time for the living, let alone the dead.

(FERON drops the video controller on the stage. She picks it up. LESLIE reacts to something in his mind, like a mental knock.)

Did you hear that?

STEPHEN

No.

LESLIE

It was like a knock.

(LESLIE stands abruptly, takes the last sip of his imaginary tea, and then tosses the tea away by throwing it over his shoulder. STEPHEN stands as well and mimics LESLIE'S actions. LESLIE begins to quickly clear the table of his books.)

Help me. Quickly.

(LESLIE and STEPHEN quickly remove all the books from the table setting them towards upstage. LESLIE gazes at the table top as if there is something there. MAGGIE and FERON are heading towards the table continuing a conversation. The lighting shimmers. Now everyone can hear MAGGIE and FERON talking, including LESLIE and STEPHEN who can also see them. MAGGIE and FERON can neither see LESLIE and STEPHEN, nor hear them.)

MAGGIE

Come on.

(FERON hesitates to sit down. MAGGIE excitedly pulls up LESLIE'S chair to the table and begins to set up the Ouija board. FERON reluctantly pulls the chair up to the table and sits.)

LESLIE Oh no.

Not a Ouija Board, *(whining)* Why me?

STEPHEN

What's the problem?

LESLIE They've been outlawed by the Summerland Council of Living Affairs.

FERON

OK. How does it work?

Magnetism.

LESLIE

says we both have to touch the planchette.

MAGGIE Everything I've read

That's right.

STEPHEN

(LESLIE looks at STEPHEN curiously.)

I did some research on the Ouija Board too.

The planchette?

FERON

(MAGGIE picks up the triangular piece, and shows it to FERON)

on it with me, resting your fingertips lightly.

MAGGIE This. You have to put your hands

(MAGGIE places the planchette on the Ouija Board, and touches it as she describes the action. FERON starts to reach her hands toward the planchette, then pulls back.)

Like this.

Are you sure about this?

FERON

Oh please don't do it.

LESLIE

What?

MAGGIE

What's going to happen?

FERON

MAGGIE I'll ask a question and the Board will answer. Well, a spirit will answer.

STEPHEN Right. Right Leslie? We'll just let them know we can communicate with them.

LESLIE We shouldn't really do that, it's against are policy now.

MAGGIE
Come on!

LESLIE Well, there's no harm done, if they only ask us silly questions.

FERON
So we're just going to dial up some miscellaneous spirit and ask what? How ya' doin' over their in dead-land?

(MAGGIE takes her hands offtheplanchette and begins thumbing through STEPHEN'S book, "The Afterlife of Leslie Stringfellow.")

LESLIE
Quite fine really.

STEPHEN
That's Summerland.

LESLIE They can't hear us. They have to use the board.

STEPHEN
Right.

FERON *(sarcastic)*
Why don't we just ask about the weather?

STEPHEN That's an easy one. Sunny all day long every day.

(LESLIE and STEPHEN laugh as MAGGIE laughs at something she's read in STEPHEN'S book.)

FERON

This isn't funny!

MAGGIE I'm not laughing at you. I just read the dead can get science lessons from Newton.

FERON

What if we don't get Newton....

LESLIE

You can't.

FERON What if we get a spirit we don't want like Atilla the Hun?

LESLIE

I sure hope not.

(Leslie looks around a little fearful.)

STEPHEN

He couldn't!

LESLIE

No he's still stuck in a briar patch. I hope.

MAGGIE That's a good point. So, put your hands on here and ask for whoever you want.

FERON

Really?

MAGGIE

Really. Really

(FERON and MAGGIE put their hands on the planchette. They both take a big breath and close their eyes.)

LESLIE

Now we can move it.

MAGGIE

Who do you want to phone?

FERON

Shakespeare.

(STEPHEN looks at LESLIE, who shakes his head No.)

MAGGIE Oh spirits of this board. Can we please speak to Shakespeare?

(LESLIE puts his hand on the planchette and moves it slowly on to the No and then stops. The girls wait a second and then open their eyes and look.)

FERON AND MAGGIE

No?

MAGGIE

Let's think of someone else.

STEPHEN

Why can't they speak to Shakespeare?

LESLIE

"To be or not to be a play wright may be the question, but retirement remains the answer."

FERON

OK let's ask to speak to Newton.

(MAGGIE moves the planchette back to the center of the board.)

MAGGIE Oh spirits of the Ouija Board, can we please speak to Isaac Newton.

(LESLIE speaks as he moves the planchette to NO again.)

LESLIE

Isaac doesn't give interviews.

(FERON and MAGGIE open their eyes, and see the planchette resting on No.)

MAGGIE

Guess not.

(MAGGIE moves the planchette back to the center and closes her eyes. FERON's eyes stay open.)

FERON

You're moving it!

MAGGIE

I am not!

(FERON takes her hands off of the planchette.)

O spirits of the Ouija Board. Can we please speak with Leslie Stringfellow?

(LESLIE is shocked.)

STEPHEN

Well answer them.

LESLIE

I can't!

FERON See it's

not working because my eyes are open.

(MAGGIE opens her eyes and glares at FERON)

MAGGIE (*annoyed*) It's not working because you aren't touching it.

FERON
It's not going to work.

STEPHEN
Tell them yes, you'll speak to them.

LESLIE I told you I can't. It's against our policies.

MAGGIE
Put your hands on the planchette.

FERON
How about I just crush it into the table.

(FERON puts her hands on the planchette and presses harder than needed. STEPHEN reaches down and begins to move it towards YES with difficulty.)

LESLIE
Don't!

(LESLIE puts his hands on the planchette with everyone else and starts pushing it towards "NO" fighting STEPHEN.)

STEPHEN
Come on. They asked for you.

MAGGIE
Stop fooling around FERON!

FERON
You stop fooling around!

MAGGIE
I'm not.

I'm not either.

FERON

Then who's?

MAGGIE

Give me that!

LESLIE

What's the harm!?

STEPHEN

(LESLIE grabs at the planchette, and STEPHEN keeps a grip, it "rises" up off the table leaving MAGGIE and FERON's hands behind.)

I can't talk to them.

LESLIE

Why not!?

STEPHEN

You see that?

FERON

Floating?

MAGGIE

Yea...

FERON

(LESLIE and STEPHEN slam the planchette down on the table. FERON and MAGGIE exclaim at the same time)

Holy shit!

FERON

Holy shit! It says Maybe!

MAGGIE

(LESLIE reaches down, no one is touching the planchette, and he moves it to Goodbye.)

LESLIE

Goodbye!

MAGGIE

Goodbye!?

FERON

Goodbye?! Holy shit! Holy shit! Holy shit!

(FERON, continuing to say "holy shit" repeatedly, falls back out of her chair and scrambles to run out with MAGGIE close behind her. Leslie and Stephen begin Jussing with each other silently.)

MAGGIE

Feron wait!

ACT II: SCENE ONE

(As Stagehands sweep through the set removing the books and the Ouija board, LESLIE and STEPHEN exit. The modern bedding is returned the quilt and small pillow of Act I, Scene One's 1848. MARGARET in night clothes, enters quickly. In a fit she lies on the bed and covers her head with a pillow. MOTHER dragging KATE by the arm enters as if chasing MARGARET. They stop at the bedside. MOTHER and KATE are both dressed in Sunday-go-to-church clothes.)

MOTHER

Margaret! Get dressed this moment!

MARGARET

I won't go I tell you! I won't!

(FATHER enters from stage left attempting to finish putting on his dress shirt.)

FATHER Haven't you been able to get them ready. There are already dozens of people outside.

MOTHER
Margaret won't cooperate.

(KATE runs to FATHER and grabs hold of him.)

KATE
I'm scared Daddy. I'm scared!

FATHER
Now listen here girls, we are taking you to your Aunt's. You'll be safe there. These people will not know where you are.

MARGARET
Yes they will! They won't leave us alone!

(Crowd noises are heard from offstage.)

MOTHER You both did an amazing thing! You knew it was a spirit, and you both spoke with it.

(MARGARET sits up.)

MARGARET
We all talked with it!

FATHER
Right. Rigjit. Well that's not how the papers reported it. You and your sister have become celebrities and we are all going to deal with it as best we can. Now get up and get dressed before I get my belt!

MOTHER
Father!

(KATE runs from FATHER and jumps in bed with MARGARET. Both begin to wail.)

FATHER I'll count to four and you had better both start cooperating with your mother! 1...2.

MOTHER
Is this really necessary?

FATHER

(Both girls get up abruptly. KATE still sniffing, but MARGARET more angry. Mother puts her arms around them.)

FATHER
Yes, these crowds are getting out of hand, and not all of them feel are daughters are heroines.

(A loud knock comes at the "front door, " offstage right. Everyone jumps with fright.)

I'm not letting anyone in that I don't trust. Mother, please get the girls ready!

(FATHER goes just offstage right to "open " the Front door.)

MOTHER Yes dear.
Come along girls. Everything will be alright.

(MOTHER, KATE and MARGARET exit stage left, as FATHER and PASTOR enter from stage right.)

FATHER
Pastor, what brings you so early?

PASTOR

Mr. Fox (*catching his breath*) Mr. Fox, one of my close associates alerted me to a matter I feel compelled to share with you.

(The Crowd noises grow louder, a shout is heard.)

MAN (*from offstage among crowd noises*) Give us the girls!

CROWD

(offstage) Yeah!

PASTOR People from all over are traveling to come to your home.

ANOTHER MAN

(offstage) Give us the little witches!

PASTOR

...most hoping to see spirits.

FATHER There's nothing to see!

And he only communicates with us at night!

PASTOR

You as well?!

FATHER I

mean... the girls. We're trying to leave right now...

PASTOR

Right. Well, it seems some have taken to the notion that your girls may be charlatans, or worse ~ possessed by demons. Either way I have to warn you! Kate and Margaret are both in grave danger!

FATHER We know

this, that's why we're trying to move them.

PASTOR There's

a group coming from Philadelphia. They...

FATHER

Yes?

PASTOR

There's talk of a lynching.

(MOTHER and the girls enter, dressed to go, from stage)

KATE

Mama, what's the preacher talking about?!

MARGARET

Pastor Robbins?

(PASTOR looks at them and goes pale. He knows he's been heard. A loud banging occurs at the door, the crowd is getting out of hand!)

CROWD

We want the girls! Witches! Demons!

(The PASTOR is frightened, MOTHER and the girls are terrified.)

FATHER

Come on we'll escape out through the cellar!

(The crowd is shouting and banging on the door.)

CROWD Come

out! We know you're in there!

PASTOR

(earnest) I'll keep them at bay as long as I can!

(FATHER corrals his family and rushes them offstage left as the lights fade. As PASTOR begins to exit stage right, the stagehands enter and the lights dim.)

ACT II: SCENE TWO

(1886. As PASTOR, FATHER and family exit, stage hands quickly transform the set: the bed is remade with a large black cloth draped over it, and the table is draped with a large table-sized scroll of paper. Alice Stringfellow enters and sits at the table with her hands on a planchette styled for "Automatic Writing:" The planchette has a pencil in it so that it writes as the spirit world moves it. The pencil is placed so the planchette writes on the large sheet of paper below it. Alice is sitting waiting patiently, but nonetheless exhausted from her efforts over the last few weeks in attempting to contact Leslie in Summerland. Mr. Stringfellow enters from stage right.)

MR. STRINGFELLOW

Alice come outside and see the sunset, its beautiful.

ALICE

No dear. I'm going to wait.

MR. STRINGFELLOW

It's been weeks...

ALICE

He promised. I have to give him a chance...

MR. STRINGFELLOW

I think you've done your best.

(ALICE sits back taking her hands off the planchette. She pauses. MR. STRINGFELLOW holds his breath hoping she will let the matter finally go.)

ALICE

Henry, I can't explain why. But I know this is going to work. I can feel Leslie trying to say something to me, to us. I can feel it... I think I'm not doing this right...

*(ALICE places her hands very gently onto the planchette.
MR. STRINGFELLOW's disappointment is evident.)*

MR. STRINGFELLOW

Dear you have to come away from this room. Come be with me

(MR. STRINGFELLOW walks over and places his hand on top of hers, initially attempting to persuade her, but as soon as he touches the planchette it begins to move. MR. STRINGFELLOW jerks his hand away as if he has touched fire.)

ALICE It moved!....

Please Henry, please: I've waited so long.

(Slowly out of love for his wife, and a bit of curiosity, he puts his hand back on hers.)

Touch it lightly just as you did before.

(To the Stringfellow 's astonishment the planchette begins to move in a very large bulbous script where all the words are connected; the T's are not crossed, and the I's are not dotted. ALICE and MR. STRINGFELLOW stay focused until the planchette stops moving)

MR. STRINGFELLOW

Dear God!

(ALICE moves the planchette aside and gazes at the message)

Does it make any sense?

ALICE

Yes, it does! It's just all connected *(reading with some difficulty)* "My darling Mama: You must learn to feel that I am always with you. My... my spirit hovers around you night and day...

(MR. STRINGFELLOW, suddenly overwhelmed with love, takes a seat and watches his wife closely.

ALICE continues reading, but with some difficulty because of the manner of writing.)

ALICE CONT'D

...and I will.... I will., love you and never forsake you. I am so happy ...la...that you and Father realize I am indeed with you and that nothing you... could have done for me ever on earth would have given me... half the happiness I enjoy here.

(ALICE and MR. STRINGFELLOW begin crying.) I

am safe, so don't worry about me ever. Your boy, Leslie.

(ALICE falls INTO her husband's arms, elated.)

ALICE

He's alive Henry! Our boy's spirit is alive!

(As the Lights fade to dim Alice quickly rolls up the scroll. ALICE and MR. STRINGFELLOW exit as the stagehands enter.)

ACT II: SCENE THREE

(2010. The set is transformed to LESLIE'S Summer land room. It is overly bright, and the bed has returned to voluptuous white bedding again. Leslie and Stephen enter. LESLIE begins pacing back and forth attempting to figure something out. STEPHEN takes as seat in a chair near the table. More books are piled behind and beneath the table. STEPHEN is watching LESLIE pace like a ball in a tennis match.)

STEPHEN Why are you so upset about them wanting to speak to you?

LESLIE I've been dead over a hundred years. Why would anyone want to talk to me?

STEPHEN Well, you did talk to your mother and father for over fifteen years.

(LESLIE stops pacing.)

LESLIE
How do you know about that?

(STEPHEN realizes his book has exposed LESLIE and is a bit sheepish about it.)

STEPHEN Remember, I tried to explain when I first arrived. I've written a book about you.

LESLIE
(dumbfounded) About me?

STEPHEN
Yes, "The Afterlife of Leslie Stringfellow." It's about the letters you wrote your parents after you died. Those young women have a copy of my book.

LESLIE
Of your book?

STEPHEN
Yes.

(LESLIE starts pacing again.)

LESLIE
This can't be good.

STEPHEN
I don't understand.

LESLIE
Did you try to contact me.

STEPHEN
No... I wish I had. I didn't really believe.

(LESLIE stops pacing to look at STEPHEN with disbelief) Well, I thought our spirits continued, but not to here, not like this.

(LESLIE resumes pacing.)

LESLIE

No one does at first, there's always a big surprise at the birth into this world. When they wake up just as they would on Earth most cry with happiness. But all this doesn't matter, these young girls are trying to talk to the spirit world and it could be very dangerous.

STEPHEN

Talking to two inquisitive young women?

(LESLIE stops pacing.)

LESLIE

It's not just two young women I'm worried about, though that's enough cause. Your book may reopen a Pandora's box. If people start trying to talk to us like they did in the 19th century, something unimaginable may happen.

STEPHEN

I know about all that. I researched the effects, people have their furnishings move around. There are writers, like Stewart Edward White, Sax Rohmer, Jane Roberts and James Merrill who claim the spirit world gave them their book ideas...

LESLIE *Fu Manchu, The Changing Light of Sandover, Seth Speaks*

STEPHEN

Right. All from using the Ouija Board.

LESLIE Didn't you also read about madness, demon possession... murder?

STEPHEN

Well yes. Supposedly a Ouija board told Sly via Plath: "Fame will come to you. And when it comes, you will pay for it with your happiness, your husband and your life."

LESLIE

And what happened to her?

STEPHEN

You never met her?

LESLIE

Summerland isn't so different then Earth's existence: I can't meet every famous person that dies. Who would have the time? And what would be the purpose?

STEPHEN

Well, she committed suicide.

LESLIE

Did the Ouija board tell her to do that?

STEPHEN No, not that I'm aware of... but I do know of an event like that.

LESLIE

Goon.

STEPHEN

After using a Ouija board, a grandmother in Oklahoma stabbed her son-in-law to death, then she packed her daughter and her two grandchildren into a car and she slammed into a road sign attempting to kill them all. She was found not guilty by reason of insanity.

LESLIE No doubt! Did you believe the Ouija board caused the tragedy?

STEPHEN

Well no. I didn't believe the other stories either. And frankly I had a hard time believing that you were getting science lessons from Isaac Newton.

LESLIE

Well, now you know the truth.

STEPHEN

But what's the harm in talking to two young women? You wouldn't do anything to hurt them?

LESLIE

It's not that simple! A hundred years ago we were holding meetings here to discuss creating a better means of communication between our Sphere and theirs. Many of us feel humanity's fear of death prevents them from reaching their potential. We could eliminate that fear to make their lives better. I'm pretty sure my communication with my parents did just that. I had the opportunity to explain how the physical death is a spiritual birth. You experienced it: the spirit begins to rise from your natural body at your breast...

(STEPHEN stands and joins LESLIE at center stage excited about recalling his death experience}

STEPHEN

Yes, yes. Exactly...

LESLIE Then over your heart like some sort of luminous vapor...

STEPHEN

Until my heart stopped beating. I felt that...

LESLIE

Then you were standing on your body...

STEPHEN

And then I opened my eyes.

LESLIE

And all around you were your relatives....

STEPHEN

Yes! My brother. Two uncles, and my favorite Ant who had just past away. Both sets of my Grandparents and even a cousin I remembered from my childhood who had died young...

LESLIE

And you felt?

STEPHEN Elated!

And then they told me I was in the spirit world.

LESLIE

And you believed them?

STEPHEN

Yes I did! I knew the moment I opened my eyes, that your letters to your Mother were all true, that Summerland really existed just as you had described it!

LESLIE

Really?

STEPHEN

Yes.

LESLIE

Well sadly that's not how it happens for all spirits. There are the "unprogressed." spirits who live most of their time near the earth. They find pleasure in mingling with those still living in their physical bodies. They're mischievous and try to influence humans to do terrible things.

STEPHEN I thought you had to be "bad" yourself to attract "bad" spirits.

LESLIE

Or innocent.

STEPHEN

Oh. (pause) Can't you protect them?

LESLIE

Probably, but it doesn't matter. Communication with Sphere One has been strictly forbidden by the Sphere Two High Council.

(PERCY a Summerland police officer appears suddenly. He greets LESLIE enthusiastically and eyes STEPHEN with a little suspicion.)

PERCY

Leslie Stringfellow.

STEPHEN

Why are you dressed like a police officer?

PERCY

I am a Justice of the Peace.

LESLIE Stephen this is Percy ,
sent from the High Council. No doubt.

(PERCY bows with a flourish.)

PERCY

Good day to you sir. I can tell by your clothing you have only recently arrived.
Congratulations on waking up here in the light instead of the dreadful dark forest where I spent
a few years.

STEPHEN

You're free now.

PERCY

Yes, I saw the light as they say.

(PERCY laughs to himself)

And I am also more happy then I could have imagined possible. Almost as happy as you
young Leslie. But enough of that. I am here because an unofficial communication with
Sphere 1 has occurred here, and I've been sent by the Council to investigate.

STEPHEN

Uhoh.

PERCY No

reason to be alarmed. Just routine I hope?

STEPHEN

Routine?

LESLIE

All spirits are contacted at some point, when an earth-bound soul is thinking of
us...thinking... passionately!

(Because he still needs to do his math homework, LESLIE sits down and starts reorganizing his books.)

PERCY

Unfortunately, it's our policy to acknowledge the person's feelings, but resist making contact.

STEPHEN But people need to know we can hear them! See them! It's remarkable really!

PERCY

How much do you think people would take advantage of information they shouldn't have? Say for instance knowledge of an affair or some other lie?

STEPHEN You mean blackmail. What spirits would do that?

LESLIE

The "unprogressed" I told you about.

STEPHEN But the unprogressed can't be the only ones allowed to communicate with Earth.

PERCY

Leslie, this new resident has a lot to learn, *(with great earnest)* Sir, do you think it would matter if we tell them they need to resolve their unhappiness on earth? To avoid the darkest part of our sphere where the trees are tangled like briars ~ a place that mirrors their internal state of self-condemnation ...do you think people would believe us? Would they change?

(LESLIE starts doing his math homework.)

STEPHEN

(To Leslie) What are you doing?

LESLIE

Math homework.

PERCY Better you than me. Poetry! Drama! Those are my loves.

STEPHEN Don't you think those
who want to know the truth, would listen.

PERCY

It's our belief that those who need to know the truth, will find it on their own. As for the others, many unhappy people are so wedded to their miserable lives that they actually take pleasure in it, and they would resist every effort we would make on their behalf.

(LESLIE doesn 't look up from his work.)

LESLIE

It's one of the only sadness' we experience here in Summerland. People suffer needlessly. Those who seek power, who become intoxicated with greed, their time has passed for us to help them.

PERCY

(Overly dramatic) Eventually their Earth will melt under the eyes of a red sun leaning so close the ocean surfaces will boil with the litter of yachts and aircraft carriers and Oceanside hotels on pylons so deep the echo of time can't reach through their foundations to tell the developers this tragedy has happened before, so stop thinking progress and start thinking in a blink of an eye and enjoy the warm breath of a pleasant afternoon before the ashen front rolls in to punish the sky where the next loitering space of asphalt and concrete is laid under another man, woman, and child looking up to make wishes while their world hurls itself though an incomprehensible path of purpose with so many unaware of their inherent creative potential that they just scratch their noses and sniff at the air wondering...

STEPHEN

Drama, huh?

PERCY

(proudly) Why yes!

LESLIE

Ah ha!

PERCY AND STEPHEN

What?

LESLIE

I just figured out the relationship between Number E and the exponential growth of the set of unharvested salmon in Alaska.

(LESLIE keeps working. PERCY and STEPHEN look at him with bewilderment.)

STEPHEN

(To PERCY) I think people are ready. You must know how crazy the 21st century's been...

(Both LESLIE and PERCY chuckle)

STEPHEN

What?

PERCY Time.

There is no 21st century, the idea is absurd!

LESLIE

It's just a technicality. We know what you mean by the 21st century. The fact is Percy is here to check out if we should be talking to anybody or not. He wants to know our purpose.

STEPHEN

(Frustrated) Our purpose? I don't get it. People need to know we see them. They have to be acknowledged. Do you have any idea how lonely people can feel? Have you forgotten being human?

LESLIE It's not that Stephen. Many people are harmed by the contact... and its unpredictable.

STEPHEN

So, let me get this right! Good spirits, the spirits of our loved ones don't communicate because there afraid of harming someone, while all the "unprogressed" who don't care about the council's rules get to hang out and make mischief?

LESLIE He has a point Percy. Why don't you let the council know we have a purpose.

PERCY

Then what is it?

LESLIE They haven't
told us. They just asked to speak to me.

PERCY

Speak to you?

*(LESLIE gives STEPHEN a stern, but affectionate look.
PERCY looks at him inquisitively)*

STEPHEN

I wrote a book...

*(STEPHEN, LESLIE and PERCY mime their conversation.
As Stephen begins explaining the nature of his publication
the stagehands transform just the bed to MAGGIE'S
bedding.)*

ACT II: SCENE IV

*(As the stage is set, FERON enters from stage left in a Jury
followed by MAGGIE. When FERON and MAGGIE's dialog
begins, the men's mimed conversation concludes with
STEPHEN and LESLIE shaking hands with PERCY who
then exits stage right. Leslie pats Stephen on the back, Leslie
sits down to continue his work and Stephen exits stage left.)*

FERON

There is no way I'm doing that again!

MAGGIE

(pleading) You have too!

FERON

You're crazy!

MAGGIE

(angry) You don't get it!

FERON

No I don't!

(FERON glares at MAGGIE, who suddenly starts crying. FERON softens just as quickly, dumbfounded at MAGGIE's emotional reaction. She goes to comfort MAGGIE hugging her close.)

Why are you so upset? It can't be that important.

(MAGGIE cries harder. FERON gently rocks her.)

It's OK..

(MAGGIE puts away)

MAGGIE

No. It's not.

(MAGGIE turns away. FERON's dumb found-ness returns)

FERON

What is wrong!?

(MAGGIE turns to face FERON. MAGGIE is suddenly distraught)

MAGGIE

I have to talk to my Grandmother!

FERON

But sweetie, your grandmother's dead.

MAGGIE

I know that! I...L. I killed her!

(MAGGIE sobs.)

FERON

(confused) You killed her? She died in the hospital.

MAGGIE

With me in the room, remember!?

FERON

Ohmygod! Did you pull a Kevorkian?

MAGGIE

No. *(beat)* I think.

FERON

Ya' think?

MAGGIE

I came out to her.

FERON

(attempting humor) You're gay?

MAGGIE

(shouting) This isn't funny Feron!

FERON I'm

sorry, but you can't be serious...

MAGGIE

Feron, I told her I loved women and I wanted her to know...and she reached towards me... frowned and died.

(MAGGIE starts crying again.)

FERON There's no way that news killed her. I'm sure it didn't even surprise her.

MAGGIE

What do you mean?

FERON

Well, don't you think she knew? You've never had boyfriends.. You don't like cucumbers...

MAGGIE

You're trying to be funny again...

FERON There's no way
your coming out killed your grandmother.

MAGGIE

You weren't there! At the most vulnerable moment in my life, the person I love and trusted the most died without telling me she loved me anyway..

(MAGGIE speaks through her tears.)

My fundamentalist parents would throw me out of their lives if I ever told them. My grandmother knew all my secrets and always, always, assured me I had the right to be whoever I want to be... She was dicing, and I had to be honest with her... I had to tell her... I have to find out if she's OK.

FERON

She's dead Maggie, it's too late.

MAGGIE What if its not?

What if I can talk to her on the other side/

FERON

(gettingfrustrated) Well why didn't you ask for her?

MAGGIE

(calming down) Like you said the Ouija board isn't a cell phone.. I just thought Leslie since he's experienced in these things...would be easier to reach... where ever they are must be full of spirits ~ maybe he could find her.

FERON

You are crazy.

MAGGIE

Ya' think?

(FERON puts her forehead on hers.)

FERON

I'm glad your gay.

MAGGIE

I know...

(FERON lightly kisses her on the lips, and hugs MAGGIE gently.)

But it's not the same...

(The lights shimmer.)

ACT II: SCENE 5

(STEPHEN enters excited. LESLIE is not too pleased with the interruption. MAGGIE and FERON sit on MAGGIE's bed and embrace again.)

STEPHEN

We've got to contact them first.

LESLIE

No! We can't contact them first.

STEPHEN

Why not knock something over in the room?

LESLIE

And scare the shit out of them?

(MAGGIE suddenly pulls away from FERON; their dialog can be heard. Leslie and Stephen continue to silently talk.)

MAGGIE

So you'll do it!

FERON

Do what?

MAGGIE
Help me contact her.

FERON
Maggie...

MAGGIE
Please!

FERON
Did you not see the same thing I did?

MAGGIE We
didn't get hurt ~ and it said, "Maybe"...

FERON
...after it floated into the air.

MAGGIE
Yeah! It was awesome really!

(MAGGIE gets off her bed to find the Ouija board stored underneath)

STEPHEN How did you know when
your parents were trying to contact you?

LESLIE
I was contacting them remember?

STEPHEN
Right. Maybe we could just think good thoughts about them so they know its OK to try again.

LESLIE
(beat) Could help.

(Excitedly, MAGGIE guides a reluctant FERON towards the table.) I feel something! Here help me. Quick!

(LESLIE and STEPHEN quickly begin clearing the books from the table. As the last stacks are removed, MAGGIE places the Ouija board on the table.)

MAGGIE I

feel like its going to work this time.

FERON

(feigning exuberance) Really?

MAGGIE

Yes.

(MAGGIE pulls the Ouija board out of its box. She quickly goes back to her bed to retrieve a portrait in a special box, a portrait of her grandmother.)

This will help.

STEPHEN

So, what are you going to tell them?

LESLIE

It depends on what they ask.

STEPHEN

Of course.

LESLIE

You're excited.

STEPHEN

Yea.

(MAGGIE returns placing the portrait on the table. Then, she places her hands on the planchette.)

MAGGIE Look my Grandmother's picture. Then keep her in mind the whole time.

(FERON smiles nervously, then puts her hands on the planchette.)

OK.

FERON

You ready?

MAGGIE

Sure.

FERON

Well what about a candle?

(FERON takes her hands off of the planchette.)

that really necessary?

STEPHEN Is

Good idea.

MAGGIE

(MAGGIE goes quickly to the bed again to retrieve a candle from another box stored underneath.)

Can't hurt. Candles are nice, but they don't protect anyone, its the belief in the protection that works.

LESLIE

So they could just think "I am protected."

STEPHEN

(MAGGIE returns -with candle and lights it.)

Or "I'm safe."

LESLIE

Thanks. I feel safer now.

FERON

MAGGIE

Good.

(MAGGIE and FERON rest their fingertips and then look at the portrait, then both let out their breath. They close their eyes.) Spirits of the board. Can we speak with Ms. Elinor Wylie?

LESLIE

Elinor Wylie?

STEPHEN

You know her?

LESLIE

No.

STEPHEN

What are you going to do?

(LESLIE slowly moves the planchette to "Don't know. ")

MAGGIE AND FERON

Don't know?

STEPHEN

Why don't you know?

LESLIE

I don't know if I could find her or not.

FERON

This is so weird.

MAGGIE

Maybe they need more information.

FERON

Maybe you didn't say please.

MAGGIE Ha

Ha, I've got an idea. Let's try again.

STEPHEN

Good.

FERON

You sure.

MAGGIE

Stay calm. I'll protect you.

FERON

Ha! Ha!

(MAGGIE and FERON rest their fingertips gently on the planchette again, and close their eyes.)

MAGGIE

Spirits of the board. My name is Maggie and this is my Best Friend Feron. What's your name?

FERON

You are so goofy!

LESLIE

That's easy.

(LESLIE places his hands on the planchette and slowly moves it to these letters: L, S, L, E, E. Maggie keeps her eyes closed.)

MAGGIE

Call out the letters.

(FERON opens her eyes as the planchette moves.)

FERON

L...S...L...E...E.

STEPHEN

That's cryptic.

FERON

Doesn't make any sense..

LESLIE No, its less

letters ~ maybe they'll get it, maybe they.

MAGGIE

Leslie!

LESLIE

...won't.

MAGGIE

Leslie Stringfellow! Ohmygod! Ohmygod!

STEPHEN

(teasing) She's so excited!

LESLIE

Shut up. Are you sure?

FERON

It's gotta' be! What about

MAGGIE

me? Shut up!

STEPHEN

LESLIE

*(STEPHEN laughs aloud good-natured. The girls hear it.
Feron spooks a little and lifts her hands.)*

MAGGIE

Put your hands back on the planchette...

(FERON complies.)

Spirit of the board, are you Leslie Stringfellow?

(LESLIE gives STEPHEN a look.)

LESLIE

You started this.

STEPHEN

Sorry.

(LESLIE pushes the planchette to Yes.)

FERON

Yes!

(Leslie continues to & CO)

AndC...O...

MAGGIE

Yes! And..c?...o?

FERON

And company?

STEPHEN

Thanks.

MAGGIE

How are you?

FERON

I'm fine.

MAGGIE

Not you. Leslie.

Why are you being so weird?
FERON

She's polite.
LESLIE

I noticed.
STEPHEN

(MAGGIE opens her eyes and stares at FERON.)

MAGGIE I thought we should be respectful. He's been dead over a hundred years.

That's a longtime on Earth.
LESLIE

Not here?
STEPHEN

Nope.
LESLIE

FERON But it'll take forever to get any answers if every thing has to be spelled out.

That's for sure.
STEPHEN

I'm patient.
MAGGIE

(MAGGIE doses her eyes again.)

(sarcastic) Good to know.
FERON

Well how are ya' Leslie?
STEPHEN

{LESLIE pushes the planchette to F... /...}

FERON

F...I... fine?

(LESLIE moves planchette to YES.)

FERON

Yes!

MAGGIE

(excitedly) Yes! He hears me! Ohmygod!

FERON Come on Maggie.

Ask him to help find your grandmother.

LESLIE

Grandmother?

STEPHEN

That must be Ms. Elinor Wylie.

LESLIE

Of course!

(MAGGIE opens her eyes and looks at FERON.)

MAGGIE

OK. OK....I'm nervous.

FERON

Why?

MAGGIE

What if...

FERON

You did kill her?

Yes. MAGGIE

No. FERON

Uhoh! LESLIE

What? STEPHEN

Yes. MAGGIE

I don't like the sound of this! LESLIE

No. FERON

STEPHEN Be patient ~ These days the word "kill" doesn't mean the same thing as it used to.

You didn't kill her! FERON

(relieved) Good. LESLIE

(STEPHEN laughs. MAGGIE and FERON perk up like they just got covered in goose bumps.)

Did you hear that? MAGGIE AND FERON

Would you stop!? LESLIE

STEPHEN

Sorry.

MAGGIE

OK. OK. Come on now. We have to focus.

LESLIE

That would be nice.

FERON

I'm ready.

(The girls put their hands on theplanchette and take a deep breath. MAGGIE closes her eyes.)

MAGGIE Leslie, can you please help find my grandmother Ms. Elinor Wylie, so I can talk to her?

(LESLIE stands therefor a pause.)

STEPHEN

Well?

LESLIE

Well what?

STEPHEN

Can you?

LESLIE *(slowly)* I don't know ~ spirits can be hard to find.

STEPHEN

You could try.

FERON

Nothing's happening.

MAGGIE

Sh!

LESLIE If she's in
the dark woods, it migjit be impossible.

STEPHEN
All you...

LESLIE
We...

STEPHEN
We can do., is try

LESLIE
Yes.

(LESLIE moves theplanchette to T...R...Y)

FERON
T....R.... Y... Try.

MAGGIE
Try?

FERON
That's good!

MAGGIE
That sucks!

LESLIE
So much for manners

STEPHEN
They're kids.

MAGGIE *(pissed)*
God damn it! This fuckin' Ouija board is... so.

LESLIE
Unspecific?

MAGGIE Dumb! "Don't know." " Maybe." It's like a guessing game! Not communication!

(LESLIE and STEPHEN talk at the same time.)

LESLIE

Exactly!

STEPHEN

She's got a point!

FERON Well, how did

Leslie communicate with his parents?

MAGGIE

A planchette.

FERON

Isn't this a planchette?

MAGGIE Yes.. But.. Leslie's mom used something different... it was some sort of... wait...

(MAGGIE turns quickly to one of the flagged pages in STEPHEN'S book.)

LESLIE AND STEPHEN

Automatic writing.

MAGGIE

Automatic writing!

FERON

What?

MAGGIE

The planchette holds a pencil and it would write in big connected letters. Can't we do that?

*(STEPHEN reaches down and quickly moves the
planchette to YES. MAGGIE and FERON look at the board
shocked.)*

MAGGIE AND FERON

Yes.

LESLIE

You're supposed to wait until they touch it!

STEPHEN

Oops.

MAGGIE

Stay calm.

FERON

Stay ing calm.

MAGGIE

Place you hands on the planchette.

*(Slowly with shaky hands the girls put their hands back on
the planchette.)*

LESLIE

Now they 're nervous.

STEPHEN

Sorry.

FERON

Placing hands on p lanchette.

MAGGIE

M oving to neutral.

(STEPHEN starts laughing.)

Ignoring spooky laughter.
MAGGIE

(LESLIE gestures at STEPHEN to shut up. STEPHEN stifles his laughter with a little difficulty.)

Check.
FERON

(The planchette arrives at center of board. FERON and MAGGIE take a deep breath. And Maggie closes her eyes.)

MAGGIE Spirits of this
board. Thank you for letting us talk to Leslie.

STEPHEN
Who's she talking to?

LESLIE
I don't know.

MAGGIE Leslie, we'll make a writing
planchette. Can you find my grandmother?

STEPHEN
What are you going to say?

LESLIE
I'll..

(LESLIE begins to spell B...E....S...T)

FERON
B...

LESLIE
...try

FERON

.to do

LESLIE

FERON

...my

LESLIE

FERON

Best!

LESLIE AND FERON

Best?

MARGARET

I guess he means he'll try his best.

FERON

(The lights dim. LESLIE and STEPHEN watch as MAGGIE and FERON put away the Ouija board. When they head towards the bed Leslie and Stephen start a silent conversation and exit stage right as Maggie and Feron put the Ouija board under the bed and exit stage left. The stage hands appear as the players exit crossing their paths gracefully. One stagehand dramatically blows out the white candle as others change the bedding and clear all the books from the stage.)

ACT III: SCENE I

{The table now cleared is moved forward, then topped with an unlit candle and a bottle of liquor. The bed linens are dingy and unkempt.

The adult MARGARET, who is bitter from her exploitation and abuse as a paranormal median, is sitting in the audience. She is dressed plainly, but still reflecting the late 18th century. There is a pause as the audience anticipates what may happen next on the empty stage.)

MARGARET

This is bullshit! This never happened!

(MARGARET stands abruptly. She is clutching an empty glass in one hand and a fist full of money in the other.)

You! You payed me to say that! "MARGARET tell the truth! MARGARET tell the audience it was all a game. Tell us how your sister and you tricked us all."

(She starts to drink from the empty glass. She turns to the audience.)

Liquor. That's the only thing money is good for anymore, (beat) Who did this to me? You did! All of you! You paid your money to hear my story, then you paid your money to hear it was all a lie! Well you can keep your God Damn money!

(She keeps a little money and throws the remainder into the audience. She shows the remainder.)

Not all of it! I'll need a little...

(MARGARET tucks the money into her pocket, and makes her way onto stage)

I remember when I was young, I wasn't afraid of life or death... it was all a game.

(She goes to the table and begins drinking.)

a game of roulette!

(MARGARET takes a quick bitter swallow)

No. A guessing game... Guess what people think when you tell the truth? You're a liar! Guess what they think when you tell a lie? (beat) You're a liar! (pause) It doesn't matter.... it doesn't matter what really happened ~ not once everyone is dead! Mama's dead. She knows the truth now, doesn't she? My little sister Kate...

(MARGARET is almost overcome with emotion and speaks through its intensity.)

She hates me...thinks I ruined her life... that it was all my idea: talking to the spirits, calling the spirits for audiences...lying about it. Then the electric parks came and no one cared to talk to the dead. None of you cared anymore! That thrill of flashing lights and roller coaster hills became more important than the spirits of your own flesh and blood.

(A long pause and another drink as MARGARET gathers herself.)

You paid for this show.... this curiosity... this shameless exploitation of an innocent girl. Am I a blasphemous sinner? Am I an old witch longing for hell? You! - You devils who don't care for the dead one moment after they 've been put in the ground. Oh yes! You may place your flowers or say your prayers over that grave... but that's not who you loved.. No. No. It's just the body, Sweets...dust to dust...

(Another long pause and the candle lights by itself. MARGARET notices, and slowly runs her free hand back and forth through the flame thoughtfully.)

(to herself) You don't want to talk with the dead....

(MARGARET turns her face towards the audience.)

(wickedly) Well, I've got news for you...

(MARGARET stands and gestures towards everyone.)

the dead want to talk with you!

(Two knocks rap loudly enough to scare the audience.)

(Lights fade to dim.)

ACT III: SCENE II

(MARGARET is led offstage by two stage hands in pitch black, as other stagehands change the bedding to that of the Stringfellow 's home restoring it to happy cleanliness. Alice Stringfellow and her husband Mr. Stringfellow come in excitedly. Both are more gray-haired than the last time they've been on the stage. Alice is carrying the planchette and Mr. Stringfellow is carrying a large scroll of paper. Mr. Stringfellow unrolls the scroll of paper out onto the table. Simultaneously, other stage hands are placing other large scrolls of paper in various groups about the stage. The lights come up to full brightness.)

(Mr. Stringfellow and Alice sit down happily. They both take a deep breath together, and then gently settle their hands onto the planchette. Alice's eyes are closed and Mr. Stringfellow's are open. The two of them move the planchette lightly and rapidly in the form of Automatic Writing ~ large cursive letters whose "i 's " are not dotted, and "t's " are not crossed. The letters would measure about one to two inches tall To write across the paper, the planchette "moves their hands " beginning with an arch towards the top of the paper. Mr. Stringfellow and Alice move gracefully like they 've been doing this almost every night for the last 15 years. Their motion spells these words:

"How you will enjoy this glorious world where "to wish is to be " we often think of a per son or place, and in a moment we are there...The happiest moment of a good man's life is when he reaches this world... we are so happy to be with you and it is such a pleasure to feel that you know we are here.... when you put your mind earnestly on us... we are made aware of it instantly by means of something like a fine electric current. I can't explain it")

MR. STRINGFELLOW

(longpause) Done?

ALICE

I think so.

(Alice opens her eyes and takes the pencil from the planchette quickly crossing all the "T's " and dotting the "i's " She reads it aloud with only a little difficulty.)

How you will enjoy this glorious world where "to wish is to be." We often think of a person or place, and in a moment we are there...The happiest moment of a good man's life is when he reaches this world... we are so happy to be with you and it is such a pleasure to feel that you know we are here.... when you put your mind earnestly on us. we are made aware of it instantly by means of something like a fine electric current. I can't explain it.

MR. STRINGFELLOW

Remarkable!

ALICE

No one will believe this has happened. I think its important to let people know he's in such a beautiful place. How would people change if they knew? If they believed?

(Mr. Stringfellow and Alice hold hands as they gather their thoughts.) 'to wish is to be." Henry, how long do we have to wait to be with him?

MR. STRINGFELLOW

As long as our life will be...

ALICE

There's more...

(Both place their hands on the planchette again, which immediately jumps to life. Alice's eyes are closed and Mr. Stringfellow 's are open. This time these are the words written in the light quick dance of their hands:

"Don't be discouraged Mama or think that time will ever change me.. I do not have one minute of unhappiness except when you are sad. " When the planchette stops, there is just a beat of a pause..)

ALICE

Done.

(Quickly Alice dots "i"s and crosses "t" s again. Then reads aloud excitedly.)

Don't be discouraged Mama or think that time will ever change me.. I do not have one minute of unhappiness except when you are sad...

MR. STRINGFELLOW

You see my love...

ALICE He wants me to be happy!... I am happy Leslie! I am happy!

(MR. STRINGFELLOW hugs ALICE to him! He looks towards the sky and tears well up.)

MR. STRINGFELLOW

I love you son! I love you!

(The lights dim. As ALICE and MR. STRINGFELLOW linger in their embrace stagehands begin removing the scrolls and restore the bedding of Maggie's teenage bedroom. ALICE and Mr. STRINGFELLOW share a kiss, and exit holding hands as they go. Stagehands clear the scrolls from everywhere including the table, as others bring stacks of books to pile on the floor below the table.)

ACT III: SCENE 3

(A beautiful bouquet of roses and wild flowers are set on a pedestal downstage. The flowers are, prominent to the audience, but out of the players way. The lights come up bright and golden. LESLIE and STEPHEN enter crossing the exit of the last stagehand. STEPHEN has a clipboard.

Both sit at the table. Quickly, a very prim and proper Grandmother named MS. WYLIE enters.)

MS. WYLIE

Boys I am so happy to be here! When can I talk to my grandson? I didn't get to say goodbye when I died and he's almost a teenager now. I have to tell him all is well with the world, so he won't grow up to have that dark heavy metal angst so many teenagers get these days...

LESLIE

Mam...

MS. WYLIE Yes, not my boy, he'll know the world is full of light and love and he'll be smart.

LESLIE

Mam.

MS. WYLIE

about treating people good, and himself. His father was always the apple of my eye and I have...

LESLIE Mam. I'm sorry, but its a granddaughter looking for her grandmother...

MS. WYLIE

My granddaughter?

LESLIE

Yes. She's looking for Ms. Elinor Wylie...

MS. ELOISE WYLIE No that must be a mistake, my name is Eloise Wylie, and I.

LESLIE

Mam...

STEPHEN Mam, we'll do our best to contact your grandson. What is his name?

MS.ELOISEWYLIE Fredrick Richardson. I call him Freddy. He's such a kind and loving boy. I have to.

STEPHEN We'll do our best. We can only take one case at a time.

MS. WYLIE
Not to worry young man. I have all the time in the world. I'll visit you tomorrow to see if there's any progress...

(LESLIE and STEPHEN talk at the same time.)

LESLIE
That won't be necessary ..

STEPHEN
We'll contact you...

(Ms. ELOISE WYLIE turns to exit.)

MS.ELOISEWYLIE
Thank you so much...

LESLIE Mam.. Mam.. Can you ask the others to wait for just a few moments.

MS.ELOISEWYLIE
Well of course!

LESLIE
Thank you!

(MS. ELOISE WYLIE exits.)

How are we going to find her?

STEPHEN
Summerland has so many grandmothers!

LESLIE

Duh.

STEPHEN

How are we going to find the right Ms. Wylie?

LESLIE

Well its supposed to work by attraction. There's a magnetic cord between those who love each other deeply. It creates a vibration that tells one being the other wants to communicate.

STEPHEN

So its not up to us..

LESLIE Its

up to Maggie. Unless Ms. Wylie is in...

STEPHEN

Hell?

LESLIE

You know there's no such thing as a literal Hell. Hell happens inside of a person. It's their remorse for living a bad life on earth...

STEPHEN

I have regrets...

LESLIE

Of course you do, we all make mistakes... but mistakes are different from rejecting one's own worth, and the value of others. Remorse for deeds against one's body and against others is a thousand times more searing here... so much that those spirits can't be in the light with us. They live in a dark and tangled wood where they sit in their misery. To change they just have to believe that there is a God that loves them, that doesn't punish -humans punish themselves.

STEPHEN I would hate to think that

Ms. Wylie is lost in the tangled woods....

LESLIE

(pause) It doesn't feel like that... It feels more like... like... spirits don't believe anymore, just like their family of humans. They think when we're dead we're gone forever....that heaven is a far-away place, not the parallel dimension occurring right next to them...

STEPHEN You've been doing your homework... that's the new science isn't it?

LESLIE I

guess, but its only new to those on Earth.

STEPHEN

Yea! Real new. People still operate in a mechanized world-view. They see the body as a machine and are skeptical of the spirit that inhabits it...

LESLIE

I know...After my mother was born here

STEPHEN

born here?

LESLIE

Come on now, you've been here a few days. You do know you're not dead... When the body dies, the spirit is born here. The body is like old clothing. When my mother was born here, I feel like one of the last hopes for communication with those on Earth ended. My mother never wanted to share the information for fear of being ridiculed.

STEPHEN I

know. She made that clear in her book.

LESLIE

Yes... if it wasn't for the ignorance of people, communication would have been more common, and people wouldn't be saying goodbye on their deathbed, they'd be saying..

STEPHEN

See you later!

LESLIE

Exactly. So now we're in search of a spirit who may have never entertained the idea of being able to contact her granddaughter...

STEPHEN

My friends were all freaked out about it!

LESLIE

Freaked out?

STEPHEN

You know ~ "Holy shit Stephen you're writing about talking to ghosts!" " the Ouija board is dangerous, it'll let demons into your house!" ., blah, blah, blah

LESLIE

That's incredible!

STEPHEN

Yea, you can buy haunted Ouija boards online.

LESLIE

Haunted Ouija boards were the council's idea

STEPHEN

No.

LESLIE

Yes. Because so many earth-bound souls "freaked out" they wanted to protect them, so they attempted to scare humans away from talking to us... In a million years they never thought the Ouija board would be considered a game and given to children. They pushed humans out of the pan and into the fire...

STEPHEN Frankly, I'm surprised

Ouija boards still exist. Anybody can get one.

LESLIE

The Ouija board isn't what's important. Its the need for good mediums. Humans with the belief and knowledge that spirits exist and want contact with their loved ones. It causes no end of pain for so many spirits to be forgotten.

STEPHEN So what you're thinking is that Maggie's

grandmother may have forgotten about her?

LESLIE Maybe. That would make the connection between them pretty weak...

STEPHEN

Or gone...

LESLIE No, I don't think it would be gone. Not if they really love each other....

STEPHEN

That's good to know.

(PERCY enters as a spirit might: floating, etc.)

PERCY Hello boys. It seems you've caused quite a ruckus.

LESLIE

How's that?

PERCY There's hundreds of grandmothers outside your home here.

STEPHEN

Hundreds!?

PERCY

Well maybe a thousand, they keep appearing and disappearing. It's hard to count. They're all here because they want to talk to their granddaughters.

LESLIE

And grandsons!

PERCY I

thought you were helping two girls.

LESLIE We are, but it seems we didn't communicate that clearly to our grandmother candidates.

STEPHEN How are we going to find
out if one of them is Maggie's grandmother?

*(MAGGIE and FERON enter from stage left. LESLIE,
STEPHEN and PERCY mime their conversation. MAGGIE
is carrying a drill, a heart-shaped piece of wood, FERON is
carrying a large neon pink poster board, a handful of multi-
colored sharpies and duct tape.)*

MAGGIE I wanted a
large piece of white paper, a big scroll thing!

FERON
But neon pink is so much better. And I think you should use a sharpie in that thing, not a
pencil.

MAGGIE
I can't even figure out how to put the pencil in it and still have it move around on the
paper.

*(All the stuff is dumped onto MAGGIE's bed. MAGGIE and
FERON attempt to make a planchette that holds a sharpie in
such a way that when their hands rest on it, the planchette
will easily slide and the sharpie will write.)*

PERCY
I suggest you create a portrait of Maggie and then hold it up to the crowd, and see who knows
the girl.

LESLIE
Might work...

STEPHEN
Sounds like a plan.

LESLIE
I'll need to go take a good look at her again.

(LESLIE sits back in his chair and closes his eyes. MAGGIE holds up a odd shaped duct tapedplanchette with the sharpie stuck in it.)

MAGGIE I

still think we should drill a hole in the wood.

FERON

The duct tape is holding it just fine.

MAGGIE But I don't

think its going to move around easy enough.

FERON Like Leslie needs help ~ he's

almost thrown it off the board already.

(At the sound of his name LESLIE'S eyes open. He stands and makes his way over near the bed to take a closer look at MAGGIE putting his fingers up in such away to "frame her. " LESLIE moves very closely to the girls, but is careful not to bump into them.)

MAGGIE This is different,

we have to be able to decipher the letters.

FERON

Right!

MAGGIE

Do you feel something weird.

FERON

(pause) uh...no. What is it?

MAGGIE I don't know,

(beat) Let's get every thing together and set up.

FERON

Check.

ACT III: SCENE 4

(LESLIE heads back over to the table. As he does Percy and STEPHEN acknowledge him. He raises his hands towards the ceiling, then touches his hands to the side of his head in a gesture of concentration.)

MAGGIE

Would you stop with the Military stuff.

FERON

Check.... I mean... OK.

(A large canvas painting of Maggie "floats " down from the ceiling)

PERCY

Perfect!

STEPHEN

I dont' get how you can do that!

LESLIE

You will.

(LESLIE, STEPHEN and PERCY exit with the painting.)

MAGGIE

Let's set up on the table.

FERON

OK.

MAGGIE

You're awfully agreeable.

FERON

Yea, so?

MAGGIE

It's weird.

FERON

Give me a break. You're the weirdo.

(FERON kisses MAGGIE playfully and tries to tickle her.) I

think you're taking this too serious.

MAGGIE

Don't start! This is so important to me. I have to know what my grandmother thinks of me.

FERON

Thought of you.

MAGGIE

Thinks of me!

FERON Ok. Ok. I'm not

going to argue. Where is her picture?

MAGGIE

Right...

(MAGGIE takes the portrait out of the Ouija box that has been stored under the bed.)

Here it is.

(MAGGIE kisses the picture tenderly.)

FERON

I'm ready

MAGGIE

Good. Let's take this baby for a test drive.

FERON

Oo....you sound so butch!

MAGGIE

Shut up!

(MAGGIE and FERON laugh as they head over to the table. They put the neon pink poster board down and then set the planchette on it. They light the white candle, and Maggie sets the portrait on the pedestal next to the flowers. They sit down and put their hands on the planchette.)

FERON

Do we have everything?

MAGGIE

Believe so.

(MAGGIE and FERON visibly take a big breath)

Oh spirits of the board we would like to... to ... hear from my Grandmother now.

FERON

(sarcastic) Great job.

MAGGIE

Shut up! You're not helping,

FERON

You're nervous?

MAGGIE

No... well.. A little.

FERON

Try again.

MAGGIE We would like to speak with Leslie Stringfellow please.

(Long pause of nothing happening)

FERON

I..

Sh!
MAGGIE

Nothing's happening...
FERON

It's got to work!
MAGGIE

(Long Pause)

You tried.
FERON

MAGGIE Do
you have any idea how important this is?

I think so...I just think..
FERON

MAGGIE
You just think I'm a fool... that I should just get rid of my internalized homophobia and call it a day.

FERON
Well, that would be a good start.

MAGGIE
Well, fuck you Feron. This is about my Grandmother being so horrified by my coming out that I gave her a fucking brain hemorrhage...

(MAGGIE starts crying. LESLIE, PERCY and STEPHEN enter carrying the portrait.)

Oh shit!
LESLIE

What?
PERCY

They 've already started.

STEPHEN

Who?

PERCY

Maggje and Feron.

STEPHEN

(The large portrait is set down. LESLIE quickly goes to table in a tizz; Stephen steps in close as well.)

They aren't touching the planchette.

LESLIE

And they're up set.

STEPHEN

Ya' think?

LESLIE

Come on. Let's try again. It can't hurt.

FERON

I can't see a thing.

PERCY

Sh!

LESLIE

Leslie, are you there?

MAGGIE

(LESLIE puts his hands on the planchette and attempts to move it, but it won't budge.)

What's wrong?

STEPHEN

LESLIE
It won't move...

PERCY
You need more juice that's all.

LESLIE
Stephen put your hands on it.

(STEPHEN puts his hands on LESLIE'S)
Lightly...

STEPHEN
Ok.

MAGGIE
Feron, do you feel...

FERON
It's moving!

LESLIE
Barely... it's so difficult..

STEPHEN It
might help if you told me what we were writing.

LESLIE Yes....I'm trying to write a "y " in
cursive... I need you to just think the word.

STEPHEN
Ok

*(The planchette moves slowly in big awkward "y"
movement and stops. LESLIE let's out his breath. There is
an awkward pause.)*

FERON I
think that's all we're going to get.

(MAGGIE opens her eyes and looks at the poster board.)

MAGGIE

(agitated) "Y" ! As in why do I want to talk to you? As in why do I need to talk to my grandmother!

FERON

Maybe it... he...means "yes"

MAGGIE

Oh. Yes? Yes Leslie is here with us... Ok. Ok.

STEPHEN

She's going to ask for her grandmother!

LESLIE

I know. I know.

FERON

Let's try again.

PERCY

You can see them?

STEPHEN

And hear them.

PERCY

Remarkable!

LESLIE

Sh!

MAGGIE Leslie,

can I please speak with my grandmother.

STEPHEN

What are you going to say?

I'm thinking.

LESLIE

Not too long I hope.

STEPHEN

Can you just... put your hands on it.

LESLIE

*(STEPHEN quickly but lightly puts his hands on the
planchette.)*

Think of the word "Wait."

PERCY

Me too?

LESLIE

Can't hurt.

*(With great difficult LESLIE writes the "Wait" in large
bulbous letters. Then he and STEPHEN remove their
hands.)*

It stopped.

FERON

I know.

MAGGIE

*(MAGGIE and FERON move the planchette aside and
attempt to read the short message.)*

Wh...a,..il... wail?

FERON

No... I think...

MAGGIE

(Maggie takes a pencil and dots the "i" and crosses the "t")

You have to dot the "i"s and cross the "t"s.

FERON

How'd you know that?

MAGGIE

It's in the book.... It says Wait. Wait?

FERON

For what?

MAGGIE

(upset) I don't know! Maybe they can't find her.

LESLIE

We'll find her.

FERON

It's a big place remember?

MAGGIE

But you're loved ones are supposed to respond to you... you're supposed to be connected. Maybe this proves...

FERON

It doesn't prove...

MAGGIE

..that she doesn't love me anymore...

(MAGGIE bursts into tears. FERON, STEPHEN and LESLIE speak at the same time.)

FERON

...anything... damn!

LESLIE

Damn!

STEPHEN

Damn!

PERCY

What?

(LESLIE and STEPHEN look at PERCY dumbfounded.)

MAGGIE *(wailing)* She doesn't love me! Gram, please tell me you still love me. Please Grandma...

(FERON attempts to comfort MAGGIE with an embrace.)

No!

(MAGGIE pulls away violently!)

This is your fault!

(MAGGIE goes to the portrait, and picks it up!)

Hey Grandma., meet Feron ... the woman who I had to fall in love with...

FERON

Maggie...

MAGGIE Look at her! She's beautiful, and perfect, and kind, and I couldn't help it.

(FERON starts to cry.) I couldn't help it. I didn't choose to be gay... I can't help how this feels.

(MAGGIE shouts at the sky.)

I love her Gram! I love her and I just wanted you to know how happy I am...

(MAGGIE sobs. She let's FERON embrace her and they crumble to the floor.) I'm sorry Gram. I'm so sorry.... I miss you...

STEPHEN

I can't bear this...

Something's happening.

LESLIE

(A lovely grandmother enters just on to the stage. Only the audience is aware of her presence. Smiling, she gestures towards the flowers. FERON is holding MAGGIE lovingly when she notices a rose lifting out of the vase and into the air and moving above them.)

FERON Maggie...what was your grandmother's favorite flower?

MAGGIE

Roses...Red roses just like everyone else...

(MAGGIE wipes her face a bit and then looks up at FERON. FERON can not take her eyes off of the rose. MAGGIE follows FERON's line of sight)

What are you...

(MAGGIE catches her breath.)

Ohmygod!

FERON

I think its your grandmother!

(STEPHEN notices ELINOR WYLIE. The rose continues to the table where it comes gently to a rest.)

STEPHEN

It must be!

(ELINOR walks to the table, and her female companion steps into the room .)

ELINOR

Ms. Elinor Wylie, at your service.

(ELINOR extends her hands towards LESLIE.)

It's a pleasure.

LESLIE

(LESLIE puts his hands in hers.)

Come on Maggie!

FERON

(The girls jump up and go to the table.)

had no idea she needed to talk to me.

ELINOR I

Desperately.

STEPHEN

I see that...

ELINOR

(ELINOR notices the men glancing at her companion.)

That lady there is my somewhat shy companion. Ms. Edith Abbott.

(EDITH curtsies towards the men, and LESLIE, PERCY and STEPHEN return the gesture in their unique gentlemanly ways.)

(MAGGIE and FERON are now seated at the table. They sit up tall and take a deep breath. MAGGIE and FERON close their eyes, then slowly let out their breath together. ELINOR leans in and rests her hands on theirs.)

Ready?

MAGGIE

Ready.

FERON

(ELINOR pauses gathering her thoughts, then the writing begins. ELINOR speaks as she guides the "Automatic Writing.")

ELINOR

Hello Maggie. You didn't kill me. I am alive, living here knowing you have done nothing wrong. Trusting family with knowing who we are is like trusting God. I'm here loving you with the delight of heaven.

(The writing stops. There is a pause.)

MAGGIE

What does it say?

FERON

Read it.

(MAGGIE starts dotting "i"s and crossing "t" 's as she reads the writing. As she reads, her emotions build to the message's content. FERON is reading over her shoulder and feels the message in her heart.)

MAGGIE

Grandma!

(MAGGIE and FERON break down into laughter and tears and hugs and giggles. The spirits watching them also turn and nod at one another pleased at the outcome. Silently, Percy bids his adieu; Stephen gets Percy's attention and joins him as he leaves. Leslie shakes Elinor's hand. She pulls him in to hug him warmly. She turns with a smile, as Edith has approached and presented her arm. ELINOR and EDITH exit briskly. MAGGIE and FERON exit in the opposite direction. Pause. LESLIE retrieves the rose. He walks to the pedestal and replaces it in the vase. As the stage lights dim, a bright golden light shines on the flowers portrait. It slowly darkens to a deeper gold then to deep red and fades to dark.} (End.)

An American Classroom

In One Act

An American Classroom
In One Act
By Kamala K. Parker
30 April 2007

Character List:

The Professor: An exuberate literature instructor in his or her early 40s who remains in an altered state while s/he teaches. S/he loves the classroom and feels his/her life is significant.

Jordan: Fe/male student disturbed by his/her 21st century American existence dressed in jeans, a black t-shirt, and a baggy oversized shirt.

Jessie: Fe/male student, desperate to exemplify the absurdity of existence in 21st century America. Jessie has a backpack and is dressed in apreppie sophisticated manner.

The other students are males or females of average college age, some stereotypical and some are extraordinarily insightful about their anomalous existence in 21st century America. Their attire could possibly reflect a caricature of young-American new millennium fashion.

*Student #1
Student #2
Student #3
Student #4
Student #5
Student #6
Student #7
Student #8
Student #9*

(Throughout this classroom discussion students often interrupt or speak at the same time, then nodding or acknowledging the other to talk. Where there is not an interruption, overlap, pause or beat indicated, the lines of the dialog are intended to be delivered tightly against each other from some sort of literary fever of impetus.

The setting is a 21st Century American Classroom arranged with twelve student desks {chair and desk are one unit} in three rows of four facing a cushioned chair on rollers. A large instructor's desk stacked with paper and books visible, but out of the way is optional.

Students straggle in as they enter, some with books, some with backpacks, and some in groups of two or three talking among their selves as they take their seats. As The Professor enters, Jessie rushes past him and sits in the front row. The Professor stands near his/her rolling chair. He gives Jessie an annoyed look and begins speaking as the last student enters the classroom.)

THE PROFESSOR

Good morning class. Did everyone have a good weekend?

(All of the students, except Jordan, Jessie and Student #6 who remain silent, improvise their answers.)

THE STUDENTS Yes. No. It

sucked. I have a hangover. I had too much homework, *(etc.)*

THE PROFESSOR

All right, let's create the circle of love.

(The students move their desks into a circle if the theater is round, or a semi-circle open towards our audience with The Professor's rolling chair in the middle also facing the audience if on a traditional stage. As the other students drag/carry their desks into position, Jessie ends up with her/his desk next to Student #6 who is to The Professor's immediate right, and Jordan's desk ends up the last desk to The Professor's left or directly opposite if the play is being produced in a theater-in-the-round. Jordan has her/his feet wrapped around the legs of his/her desk. The Professor takes his/her seat.)

THE PROFESSOR

I have to tell you! I'm totally captivated by the novel we've read this week! I'm very anxious to hear how all of you feel about it. Someone begin and we'll use your comments to carry the discussion forward.

(Students are silent for a beat, some squirming, some slouching, one tapping their pencil as if only he/she exists.)

STUDENT #1

I find the lack of emotion in the novel insulting.

THE PROFESSOR

Insulting? Say more about that.

STUDENT #1

The way the author wrote the book...the narrator doesn't seem to care about what's happening. He just goes along with everything.

THE PROFESSOR

... and how is that insulting?

(Most of the students are looking at Student #1. Jessie is writing something. Jordan is gripping his/her desk as if it will fall out from under him/her.)

STUDENT #1

It's as if the author expects us to suspend our own feelings... to accept that the protagonist doesn't have any.

(Student #2 and #3 speak at the same time.)

STUDENT #2

The character is a boy...

STUDENT #3 I

agree, it isn't right...

(Both students stop and look at each other for a beat. Student #3 nods to Student #2.)

STUDENT #2 The narrator is just a boy, barely

15. He hasn't developed his own sense of judgment.

STUDENT #3

Yes, but the narrator is reflecting back as a man. Why would he continue this affect of dispassion or detachment?

STUDENT #4

(To The Professor) Is the narrator the boy or the adult looking back? I couldn't tell really, it's confusing.

(The students, except for Jessie, look towards The Professor. Jessie stops writing.)

THE PROFESSOR

That's an interesting question.

(Jessie raises her hand a bit.)

THE PROFESSOR

Jessie tell us what you think.

JESSIE

I think we can't really appreciate what it would have been like to go through this process; no one anticipated the gas, any more than they predicted Kristallnacht. We are so removed from the hegemonic fascist crimes of the past; our ability to translate it into a context we can understand is idealistic at best.

(Students #1, #2, #3 and #8 start talking at the same time.)

STUDENT #1

What...?

STUDENT #2

Speaking English would be nice...

STUDENT #3

Right on!

STUDENT #8

Of course we can talk about it, that's what we do all the time, discuss things we've never experienced.

JESSIE

There is no way we can have a realistic grasp of this character's circumstance without the experience of something in our own lives that is just as traumatic.

THE PROFESSOR

Perhaps you want me to do something traumatic to you so you can attempt a dissociative narrative about it?

(Jessie stares at The Professor, and all of the other students look at Jessie, except Jordan who hesitates until he notices the silence and looks towards everyone to figure out why no one is saying anything. When Jordan focuses on Jessie, she begins.)

JESSIE

Noooo. *(beat)* I just feel that talking about something the author has experienced that we haven't is... is meaningless. We all talk about the text as if we can understand what this character has gone through: the shock! The insanity! But we haven't experienced anything like it ... and I think I can help us.

(Jessie pulls a large knife out of her backpack and slits her throat. [Make use of a blood bag, or not.] The knife falls to the floor. Student #9 gets nauseous and runs out of the classroom. The Professor's jaw drops in surprise. Jordan becomes more agitated. Students #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #7, #8 all start talking at the same time. Student #6 doesn't say anything and acts unaffected and bored.)

STUDENT #1

Talk about fear of interpretation.

STUDENT #2

She could tell us if the Calvinist tradition of hell is correct.

STUDENT #3

God doesn't exist....*(after Student #4)* Percy Shelley!

STUDENT #4 I

fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

STUDENT #5 I

am so over this trauma-drama bullshit!

(Student #6 remains silent lost in his/her own reverie.)

STUDENT#7

Fuck! There are some crazy bitches in this school.

STUDENT #8

Holy shit! You'd think we'd never seen this on TV before.

JORDAN

(aside) Can you believe this shit?!

(Half-way through the lines above, The Professor attempts to regain control of the discussion and interjects.)

THE PROFESSOR

Settle down. Settle down. Everyone can't be heard if we all talk at once.

STUDENT #4 I

want to know what this has to do with the novel.

THE PROFESSOR That's a

really good question. Perhaps, someone can help us out.

(Student #9 comes back into the classroom sheepishly gaining everyone's attention.)

STUDENT #9

Sorry, I have a stomach thing going on.

STUDENT #1

It makes total sense; most of us haven't witnessed any real gore, or much death. Our culture is basically sterile. Our dead wear make up, our news doesn't really show anything juicy. They don't even want to show U.S. coffins from the war. If you work at a morgue, or you're an adrenaline junkie..you know like an EMT or a.Highway patrol officer... you'll see some blood. Otherwise, we just don't see death.

STUDENT #5 Yea right! Haven't you seen old horror flicks like Texas Chainsaw Massacre or Pulp Fiction?

STUDENT #2 Or the new ones! Saw III, Pan's Labyrinth?

STUDENT #3 Pan's Labyrinth and Pulp Fiction are not horror films.

STUDENT #5 Whatever. Everyone knows what I mean.

(Everyone pauses for a beat waiting for the next student to jump in. Student #6 is observing how weird Jordan is acting.)

STUDENT #8 I think Jessie's whole bit has to do with what was said earlier. We're surprised that the author created a dispassionate narrator, but that's how we live our lives every day... I don't get up thinking about crimes being committed locally or in the world. I don't watch the news or read the papers... I think we have to do that to survive.

STUDENT #3 Frankly, I don't see any need to feel sentimental about human life. There are plenty of us, and we're dicing all the time. We need to just get over it.

(Student #3 looks around expecting agreement from other students. Jordan is disgusted.)

We're not going to go extinct... you know?

(There is a pause, then Student #7 laughs hysterically; he/she realizes something.)

STUDENT #7 I got it! Absurdism presented as the new ideal! The new God!

(Student #7 is pleased with his/her own revelation. Everyone hesitates to make a comment. Jordan is about to do something. Student #6 notices no one else seems to discern how weird Jordan is acting, so he/she loses interest.)

THE PROFESSOR

That's good. But let's remember much of what we're reading doesn't rely on the notion of an ideal, or an overriding form that we have to explain like "goodness" or "God." But in all fairness there does appear to be a trend in every age where a spirit of resisting systems or authority rises

up. Hiegel gave it a beautiful name: "Zeitgeist." He believed "History" has a purpose to which we are progressing...

(Student #4 and #5 start talking at the same time.)

STUDENT #4

But this..

STUDENT #5

There is..

(Student #5 nods to Student #4.)

STUDENT #4 But this isn't reflected in post-modern literature.

JESSIE

(aside) Post-modernism. What the hell is that?

STUDENT #5 There is a level of idealism reflected in Kafka's Penal Colony.

STUDENT #4

But Kafka isn't postmodern.

STUDENT #5 Some

believe Kafka was postmodern well ahead of his time.

THE PROFESSOR

Before we debate Post-modernism, let's hear the point regarding Kafka's idealism.

(Student #5 makes a gang sign-like profane gesture at #4 in success. #4 returns with another profane gesture. Student #5 continues enthusiastically.)

STUDENT #5

To have your crime etched into your skin with needles until you get it. You know "Get it!!!" in your head ~ through your skin. Crimes etched down to their core zygote of thought: Can you imagine a criminal laid out on a table that inscribes "Rapist" with a million needles into his back..

STUDENT #1 Or

what about crimes like "Justice" or "Seeking truth?"

STUDENT

Or "bad student."

STUDENT #2
Or "good citizen."

STUDENT #4
You can't read a message covered in blood.

STUDENT #5
I don't get it.

STUDENT #7
(To student #5) Like a tattoo.

STUDENT #5
Oh yea! That's wicked!

(The Professor and Student #8 and #9 start talking at the same time.)

THE PROFESSOR
It seems..

STUDENT #8
Who gets...

STUDENT #9
Fuck!

(Everyone raises there head for a beat and looks at Student #9 accept Jessie of course who suddenly twitches violently with a foot against his/her desk: the final throw of death.)

STUDENT #9
I get it! Crime is a social construct...

STUDENT #8
(Interrupting) Like gender!

STUDENT #7
Like truth!

STUDENT #1
Truth is relative.

THE PROFESSOR

Truth is representative of reality, is it not? Or is truth a western ideal?

STUDENT #2

Truth is the mimesis of reality. If we mimic something that we understand to be true, like a new reality depicted in literature, like the novel we're reading, it still isn't "the truth" or the actual reality the author experienced. It becomes something else... something...

JORDAN

Something ridiculous.

(Everyone pauses for a long beat, not knowing how to respond)

STUDENT #1

In every literary age - the new poets represent reality. Romanticism is the result of a rejection of the scientific rationalization that reality is empirical. They thought they proved you could prove reality exists.

STUDENT #2 And the Romantics believed it exists in nature with or without human intervention.

STUDENT #7 So if a tree falls in the woods with no one around it *does* make a sound!

STUDENT #4 That was always such a stupid question!

(Student #9 hurries out to the bathroom again.)

THE PROFESSOR Why so? Explain that and how it pertains to the novel we're reading.

(Except for the agitated Jordan, and the bored Student #6, the other students eye student #4 [like ha! The Professor has put you on the spot!] There is a pause while Student #4 gathers her/his wits.)

STUDENT #4

I just think it's a ridiculous question. If a tree falls in the woods without anyone around does it make a sound? Of course it does! Sound is sound waves and they exist in that moment regardless if there is an eardrum to hear them. So... so... the way that pertains to our novel is the way the information is depicted. It doesn't matter if we get it or not, the reality of the narrator's experience, his dispassion, exists... its real now, because he wrote it down. Creative determinism.

(The students, except for Jordan and Student #6, nod in appreciation of Student #4 's answer.)

STUDENT #8:

That means that all writing is creating new realities all the time. Realities that may even conflict like science and romanticism. It's...

STUDENT #3 (*interrupting*) For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

(Student #4, #5, and #7 all talk at the same time as Student #3 's cell phone rings and he/she answers it. Jordan continues to grip his/her desk almost as if he/she is having an anxiety attack or needs to go to the bathroom.)

Walt Whitman! | STUDENT #4

Good! | STUDENT #5

I'm in class.. .no I can't talk.. | STUDENT #3

Walt Whitman was a romantic?! | STUDENT #7

STUDENT #4 I argued it in a paper once. A minus work, so yea...

STUDENT #3 Look under the sink. No.... I can't talk right now. Bye. (*Towards professor*) Sorry.

(The Professor is not offended. He/She is enjoying the students' interaction. As the Professor begins to interject the students stop talking and listen.)

THE PROFESSOR I have to say I think we are getting bogged down in the use of the word reality.

STUDENT #3 We're bogged down in "reality." Period.

THE PROFESSOR Explain. This

STUDENT #3 is it. Life.

But life isn't literature. | STUDENT #4

Isn't realism literature? | STUDENT #2

THE PROFESSOR
But our reality: Life... its little details are boring...

Jordan and Student #7 speak at the same time.

JORDAN
Ya' think.

STUDENT #7
Bullshit. My life is fascinating.

THE PROFESSOR.
But could you create a correct representation?

STUDENT #7
Sure! The best way to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is to use fresh ground peanuts and my grandmother's damsel preserves on toasted cinnamon raisin bread. That way the filling drips into your mouth...

(Student #6 grabs his/her stomach as if suddenly hungry. Student #9 burps with nausea. Student #8 and Student #3 talk at the same time.)

STUDENT #8
God, I'm hungry!

STUDENT #3
(To student #7) You are such a moron.

THE PROFESSOR
Remember no..

STUDENT #3
(interrupting) We're friends.

THE PROFESSOR *(To student #7)* Yes, perhaps you could write a Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich into a novel...

STUDENT #2

(talking over the Professor) Or a poem...

THE PROFESSOR

.. .but you would have to idealize it.

STUDENT #9

This is just so.. .pointless!

(Student #9 starts crying and puts his/her head on the desk inconsolable.)

THE PROFESSOR

Do you mean our discussion lacks a sense of direction or a sense of purpose?

JORDAN

Can't you see (s)he is upset?

THE PROFESSOR

It seems that way, but lack of a direction or a sense of purpose is a valid point.

JORDAN

What's happening in the text or in this classroom doesn't have a point. Surviving is the point...

THE PROFESSOR

Exactly! I want every student to understand how imagination is a viable facility for survival.

JORDAN

Yea! And I'm imagining you just said something....

Ineffable?

THE PROFESSOR

Fuck the ineffable!

JORDAN

(Jordan stands and pulls out a gun and waves it around at his classmates as he takes center stage. Some students are leaning back over their desks, one is chewing a pencil, one is playing with their hair, one is scratching their head, one is checking to make sure their cell phone is off. One is pushing their glasses back up their nose. The professor has his/her hands pressed to his/her knees looking as if she/he might spring on Jordan any moment. Jordan growls with frustration. This gains the students attention. Due to the unfortunate events of the Virginia Tech incident, the playwright requests the use of a vibrantly colored water pistol that the players nevertheless respond to as real.)

THE PROFESSOR

What?

JORDAN

No one is listening to me!

(Student #7 starts rummaging through his/her backpack. Student #4 and #5 talk at the same time)

You weren't talking.

STUDENT #4

Say something! I'm

STUDENT #5

tired... Well sit

JORDAN

down.

THE PROFESSOR

(Jordan handles his/her gun recklessly, sometimes pointing it at someone, sometimes gesturing with it, occasionally laying it against his/her face or scratching his/her temple with it. Student #7 finds what s/he was looking for, and offers a sandwich wrapped in brown bathroom paper towels.)

Here.

STUDENT #1

What is it?

JORDAN

Peanut Butter and Jelly.

STUDENT #7

No thanks.

JORDAN

Well, can I eat it?

STUDENT #7

Do whatever the fuck you want!

JORDAN

(Student #7 offers it around. Students decline. S/he shrugs and starts eating it. Cleaning up with the brown paper towels afterwards. Then

spraying his/her mouth with a breath freshner.))

You know what the real problem is here. You can't make money just sitting there discussing beautiful and disgusting little books... and... and give them a political overcoat!

THE PROFESSOR

(uncharacteristically defensive) I'm not trying to politically deconstruct anything. I'm just trying to show you that academia has a sociological bias that preaches about race, gender and ethnicity. This novel is controversial because it doesn't emote about its consequences.

JORDAN

Life is not just about emoting... it's not just about the body, blood or... or... heat. It's the ability to create care, meaning and joy in our lives!

STUDENT #2 But

you can't discard the past and still create the future.

STUDENT #3

And you have to think about what society needs.

STUDENT #4

Society needs order.

JORDAN Order?! If the system thinks you're an object, order can become the thing that mistreats you!

STUDENT #5

Order. Bad.

(All the other students, even #6, laugh at #5 's humor. Justin points his/her gun at him gaining everyone's attention and silence.)

JORDAN

Do you think we need to see the other as important as the self?

STUDENT #5 *(nervous)* Only if

the person sees you as you are and can accept you...

JORDAN

(devilishly) Seeing the other as important as the self is when something magical happens, isn't it?

(Jordan pulls back on the gun's hammer or in some other -way shows he/she is about to shoot. Student #9 gets up and starts to leave the classroom. Jordan keeps his gun pointed at Student #5.)

Where are you going?

(Student #9 stops and faces Jordan. Student #8 squirms annoyingly in his/her seat making the desk squeak.)

STUDENT #9

(matter-of-factly) To the bathroom

(Jordan gestures to "just go ahead, " and Student #9 exits. All but Student #6 watches him/her leave, then students #4, #5, #3 and #8 get up to leave.)

What are you doing?!

JORDAN

Going to the bathroom.

STUDENT #8

No you're not.

JORDAN

(The students take their seats.)

THE PROFESSOR

The deal is we are all dangerously close to a precipice - we are all close to insanity, because the world is not so sensitive and caring...

Like in this classroom?

STUDENT #3

(Jordan swings around to address student #3 and then the audience. The students and The Professor give Jordan their attention, except Student #6.)

JORDAN

(agitated and sarcastic) No! This classroom is sensitive and caring. Here we can ask ourselves "What is a good life?" "What makes a good person?" "Do the characters have a good heart or just behave with good intentions?" "Are there universal truths or are all truths constructed?" You know what the problem is?! Humans can never ever fully communicate with each other, and realism only exasperates the situation.

(Student #7 suddenly jerks his/her hand in the air. Jordan sees the student but ignores him/her.)

You may ask yourself how you maintain a safe classroom where anything can be said without harming the minds or hearts of another person. And then we realize that we tell stories to save us! Novels, plays, poems... it's all the same fictions to realize the truth... we aren't real, we are just an experience someone else is having.

(Student #7 vocalizes a long sigh of impatience)

JORDAN

What!?

STUDENT #7

Did you know pressing the shift key on your laptop five times in a row turns on the sticky keys option?

(Some of the students start giggling. Student #9 walks back in and hurries to his/her seat. Jordan rushes at Student #7 and puts the gun to his/her head. Student #7 seems unaffected, but does attempt to restrain his/her laughter.)

THE PROFESSOR Finally, you're searching for truth, now you just have to put it in an exact context.

(Jordan withdraws from Student #7 as he swings back towards The Professor pointing the gun at him/her. As Jordan makes his/her reply, The Professor rolls back and forth in his/her wheeled chair attempting to get Jordan not to point the gun directly at him/her, but Jordan just follows his/her movement.)

JORDAN

(angry) Put my actions into context? And what context will it be? My alcoholic father, my recovered alcoholic president, my cousin's death in Iraq, my last fucking suckass grade on my last fucking suckass paper? My great grandmother's status as a full blooded Mohawk? You tell me (Mr./Ms.) Professor, which fucking context explains my fucking behavior?

(The Professor stops rolling side to side and takes a deep breath and corrects his/her perfect posture.)

THE PROFESSOR

This is a very applicable question for our discussion, who wants to start?

(The Professor looks around. Student #2 gestures with his/her hand. The Professor nods. All the students [except #6 who is picking at his/her teeth] anticipate Student #2 's answer.)

STUDENT #2

I think an alcoholic father would be the most intimate and explain the irrationality of this type of behavior.

STUDENT #5

But a cultural context is just as appropriate ~ the Native American grandmother or the impact of losing someone to a war.

(As Student #4 goes into her/his rant, Justin listens intently, as if he/she cares.)

STUDENT #4

But you can't lump it all together. No one cares right now how are political system is affecting us. You can find shelves and shelves of non-fiction explaining what's happening. But it doesn't matter in the present! We as in "We the human race" are not reading it to the point that "the truth" is known. Assuming someone in the future examines the illegitimacy of American elections, the ruse called 9-11, and those making the American Military Complex go ching ching ching like a slot machine, then.... Maybe...years from now that someone might understand what its like to live in America right now. Until then we can't because we're living it!

JORDAN

(almost screaming) And who the fuck cares!?

STUDENT #4 Obviously you do. You're going to an extreme to make a point about context right?

JORDAN

(calms a bit) Yeah.

STUDENT #1

Well which context do you want us to pick?

STUDENT #8 You have your own psychological innards that no one knows - a context of the unknown.

THE PROFESSOR

That is a great observation.

(Jordan swings the gun at the professor and points.)

JORDAN

Shut the fuck up!

(As the next section of dialog precedes Jordan spins in circles to keep his/her weapon aimed at who is speaking. The lines come unhesitant from each student as the discussion becomes more important then Jordan. Nonetheless, the lines are said directly "at" him, because that is how his mind perceives it. As Jordan spins around he/she begins to panic and eventual spins into a state of vertigo.)

STUDENT #7 I get it! Beckett isn't a pessimist; he represents a condition we are experiencing inside ourselves.

THE PROFESSOR

Exactly!

STUDENT #4 But

Auschwitz is an external event.

STUDENT #1 But it isn't described that way.

Auschwitz is "That thing that is taboo unintelligible..."

(This next line is said by Student #1 and Student #5 together as if it is a well known quote. As they speak Jordan points his gun at each moving back and forth, then continues his panicked spin.)

STUDENT #1 AND STUDENT #5 "It exists so far out of our comprehension it is impossible to interpret it."

(Student #3 and Student #8 speak at the same time.)

STUDENT #3

Imre Kertesz.

STUDENT #8 But

interpreting reality isn't what every author is trying to do.

STUDENT #1 An

American reality or the world's?

STUDENT #3 Here's to "indirect free discourse." Jump inside anybody's mind anytime you want to!

STUDENT #2 The objective collective - an object that embodies someone's mental state.

THE PROFESSOR And objective observations create questions that create hypothesis.

(Student #6 silently yawns on occasion.)

STUDENT #7 Yeah, like when you ask yourself, "is the antagonist a bitch or an asshole?"

STUDENT #9

We label people good or evil, but what if someone in the text is being an asshole for what they think is a good reason?

STUDENT #5

Well, a text isn't just a bunch of crazy stuff- a fantasy.

STUDENT #3

Cause and effect turns fantasy into a real world.

STUDENT #7 My

fantasies are real.

STUDENT #2 And of course there's always

something that's happened that we don't know about it.

STUDENT #9

Like what happens in the bathroom...

(Everyone looks at STUDENT #9 like "say what? " or "oo gross!")

THE PROFESSOR

(beat) Novels can assume a sub-conscious narration.

STUDENT #8

What's in our dreams or our sub-conscious comes up....

STUDENT #1

The reader is a voyeur...

STUDENT #2

...attempting to interpret the character's actions

STUDENT #4 ..

.and place them in a moral framework

(Student #6 has fallen asleep propped on his/her arm.)

THE PROFESSOR

But America's finite moral vision of the world isn't easy.

STUDENT #1

Who's to blame?

STUDENT #4

Who's in power?

THE PROFESSOR And how

can we project moral judgment on anyone's behavior?

STUDENT #5

Forget moral judgments! What about happy endings?

STUDENT #3

Idealized promises ~ the result: if you follow the rules...

THE PROFESSOR

The rules established by enlightened humanism ~ the core emanating from mutual compatriots in a world of systematic hope!

STUDENT #7

Systems and rules that don't really exist.

STUDENT #4 Systems

of moral judgments we have to fundamentally resist.

STUDENT #3

(loudly and pointing at Jordan) What about this? You probably think this is a radical form of resistance!

(Jordan swings around to aim at Student #3. Jordan is shaking and sweating.)

JORDAN

What the fuck are you saying?

(Jordan puts his/her gun to Student #3 's head.)

STUDENT #3 What I'm saying Jordan is it

doesn't matter if you shoot me and the rest of us...

STUDENT #7

Speak for yourself...

STUDENT #3

...and then kill yourself. There are plenty of Homo sapiens. We'll make the news, our families will mourn us and then the world will forget us.

(Jordan shoves his/her gun up against Student #3's head as he/she replies.)

JORDAN

Well you know what I have to say about that...

Do tell.

STUDENT #4

Please share.

THE PROFESSOR

JORDAN

...this world has gone fucking nuts, and I think we can't figure out this god damn Holocaust novel because the narrator isn't crazy, he's the only one who gets it.

THE PROFESSOR

Gets what?

JORDAN

I'm trying to say something here.

STUDENT #5 Why don't you put the gun away so we can hear you talking over your teeth chattering.

(Some of the students laugh. Jordan swings his gun towards Student #5.)

JORDAN

(shouting) Shut the fuck up already! *(takes a deep breath)* None of you get it. I was sitting in Philosophy class...

STUDENT #2

(aside) That explains a lot.

(The Professor gestures for Student #2 to be quiet. Jordan continues talking using his hands gesturing carelessly with the gun.)

JORDAN

...I realized we talk and talk and every single mind boggling thing we're talking about is just a theory that doesn't even exist... we're playing some sort of intellectual make-believe to explain an existence that doesn't even matter.

STUDENT #3

So you agree with me!

JORDAN

Would you please let me fucking finish my point!

(Jordan rubs at his temples. Everyone holds their breath. Student #6 is finally awake and alert observing Jordan carefully.)

STUDENT #1

You know Jordan, I can understand Jessie slitting h(is/er) throat, but I really don't get the gun thing.

THE PROFESSOR That's fair.

Jordan, can you explain how your actions relate to the novel.

JORDAN

(incensed) I just told you! .. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator says that who we are isn't important: our labels, our religion, our fate. We don't have a chance, because it's just the luck of the draw to which family or what time in history we are born into. We can't choose *how* to live; we can only choose *to* live...

(Jordan pauses. Students #4 and #5 whisper to each other.)

STUDENT #7

(aside) Whispers don't make friends.

JORDAN

(To Students #4 and #5) What did you say?

(Students #4 and #5 remain silent. Jordan puts the gun to Student #4 's head.)

JORDAN

I said, "What did you say?"

STUDENT#5

The brain shrinks from chronic pain.

(Jordan puts the gun to Student #5 's head.)

JORDAN

What do you mean by that?

STUDENT #5

I think those who resort to weapons have been hurt deeply at some point in their lives. You resort to a gun because you don't feel safe. You're so hurt you're afraid and that makes you need a gun.

JORDAN

(furious) What makes you think you can get inside my head?

You mean your heart?

STUDENT #4

(There's silence. Everyone is staring at Jordan holding the gun against Student #5's head, but 'who is looking at Student #4. Jordan begins to show signs of an emotional melt down. Student #6 is looking at everyone watching Jordan. Jordan begins to not hold the gun so close to Student #5 's head, and student #5 slides their head out of the way as Jordan covers his/her face with his/her free hand. As Jordan turns towards the audience and moves towards center downstage, Student #6 speaks in the silence).

STUDENT #6

(matter-of-fact) It's not loaded.

STUDENT # 8

Goddamnit, I could have dropped this fucking class!

(Student #8 walks out of the class. Everyone remaining, except Jordan who begins to cry, looks at Student #6.)

STUDENT #6

The gun isn't loaded.

(Student #9 gets up and walks towards Jordan)

STUDENT #9 ..like a head in a paper sack telling you how to feel about not being able to see... god damn it!

(Everyone looks at Student #9 like he/she's possessed. She/He hugs Jordan, then Jordan collapses pulling Student #9 with him/her; Jordan is balling like a baby. Student #9 is soothing Jordan rocking him/her back andforth.)

STUDENT #9 It's

OK, it's OK

(Student #7 suddenly brightens.)

STUDENT #7 I

get it! Trust is fine, but control is better.

STUDENT #1

Well that's a strange statement about relationship.

STUDENT #2

You can't build an authentic relationship based on control.

THE PROFESSOR

Is authentic real? Strangely, the truth is our world often has human relationships that are governed by power relationships. This is played out all the time, even in the classroom. It could be happening right now. Ask yourself, "how much of education is a power-play?"

(The Professor stands abruptly)

Do I want control? Hell yea. I do!

(The Professor retrieves Jordan's unloaded gun.)

THE PROFESSOR

I'll take that.

(Jordan doesn't resist and remains cradled in Student #9's arms.)

THE PROFESSOR

Because we are all experiencing life together, there is no capacity for personal interpretation. There is no inner life separate from the outer world.

(The Professor holds the gun into the air. The students realize class time is up and start packing up. Then, they begin moving their desks back into place, some screeching them as they go. The Professor is unaffected by this common response and continues enthusiastically with his/her closing remarks.)

And this is not a form of radical resistance, writing is! The pen is the ultimate weapon! *(She/he looks at her/his watch.)* Well, we're out of time ladies and gentleman. What an excellent discussion. Let's get these desks back in place. Have a great weekend.

(Students begin leaving classroom.)

STUDENT #9 *(To*

Jordan) Would you like to hang out sometime?

JORDAN

Sure.

(Some students chat as they leave. Student #9 gets his/her things. Student #3's cell phone rings again as he/she exits. No one touches Jessie or her desk. The Professor walks over to Jordan who is standing a little dazed at center stage.)

THE PROFESSOR

Are you going to be alright?

JORDAN

Yea... yea.. I think so.

(The Professor gives Jordan his/her gun back.)

THE PROFESSOR

Keep this in a safe place; you never know when you might need it again. Our next novel is much more controversial then this one.

JORDAN

Right. Thanks.... Hey...

(Jordan raises the gun and points it at The Professor's head who gets a little nervous.)

JORDAN

Are you sure it's not loaded?

STUDENT #9

You ready Jordan?

JORDAN

Yes undeniably so... see you next week Professor.

THE PROFESSOR

Yea, next week.

(Jordan and Student #9 exit, both smiling. The Professor looks after them making sure they 're gone. He looks at his watch, then towards offstage again. He glances at Jessie, then turns toward her.)

THE PROFESSOR

Jessie? Jessie?

(The Professor turns away, glances at her/his watch, looks back towards Jessie's body again, then up.)

Jessie... Thank you.

(The Professor glances at his/her watch one more time, then exits. The lights fade to dark leaving a golden conical light over Jessie's body that very slowly changes to red, pauses then abruptly cuts off leaving Jessie's body and the stage in the dark.)

(End.)

Poems

Not One Senator

Sometime after the 2000 election
in an antiquated chamber full of mostly fair
men in dim suits and bright ties
Representatives of the African American
Community formally requested an inquiry
of the legitimacy of a Caucasian man
appointed President by our Highest Court

For these Liberty-Winged Angels
to proceed with the discussion
of the probability
of diabolical deeds done
by this man's brother governor
one Senator's signature
had to be scribbled across the line
that demarcates what's white
and what's wrong.

But these Senators sat broad
backed in broad leather chairs
watching plea after plea laughing
with the V.P. who seemed to
make light of his own election
make light of the possibility of
discrimination

Not one Senator
rose to denounce racism
to allow the question of bigotry
brought into the light of day

On the contrary They clapped, they jeered
thinking it better this way choose now a
President non-elect who didn't get the
popular vote who didn't win the electoral
majority But benefited from his brother's
brouhaha of casting left votes aside

In Florida, the bean counters
didn't get their chance

to complete the Tuesday evening stew
Before we knew
he and his were shaking hands
slick with complicity
And not one sackcloth Senator
rose to defend
the African American
from humiliation

Hidden high in a red sky
like hungry eagles poised to strike
haughty Senators
pretended not to hunt prey
or turned their face the other way

Men, Women and Children
bright, beautiful and black
bore the birth of our nation on their backs
spilled their blood in the Revolution
for our freedom not theirs
died in all our wars
died in the fight for Civil Rights
for their freedom and ours
Dying still

And not one Senator rose to put
their pen to paper to answer Jim
Crow cawing and crying his
alarm. Sharp as eagle's talons
they sat with crossed legs put
chins against closed hands until
the V.P. shooed the brave ones
away with a dusty flag of liberty
stolen from a soldier's memory

A flag flies still above the
Capital Pillars Like prison bars
of impatience We locked Justice
behind the flickering square
screens our TVs tuned to distract
u.s. from the death of a crow's
preemptive truth.

Not one Senator. Not one.

Iraqi Anthem

With the early morning baking in a hot sun,

I step in the street eager for bread. Then, the air explodes.

Fear pricks my skin like a thousand toothpicks.
I know I am not the one bleeding.
The body lies kneaded with concussion.

The sounds I hear every day and every night

echo with the boom of bombs, the crush of bone under tank treads.

Like mortar and pistol, my teeth grind
their accompaniment to the ringing in my ears.
The body screams with stillness from a jawless face.

All around me

brows furrow above peppercorn eyes, over mouths open wide with weeping.

The body and I become blood family
as my pathetic hands proffer
the weight of this weightless one to my brothers.

My stomach cries out with morning's dearth.

Questions devour the stale air. Who are the doer and the undone?

My mind rises with guilt,
I want to shout, "I am hungry!"
The body, shrouded like fresh baked dough, cracks with steam.

The body's blood stains dark as wine.

We, the wailing men, pass this American Eucharist to its father, his face a cavern of grief.

As the crowd disperses along war-washed streets
some with salt on their faces, some with dead-red palms,
I turn east. Soon, it will be time to pray.

I search for a trail of bakery smoke in a resurrected sky.

Beingness

First grade I thought life lived in the long hair of a little girl who thought everything small and book-like magical enough to contain the secrets to a heart which could touch a blue-jay if only the steps towards it were as peaceful as a silent prayer but seasons changed that innate innocence to a bizarre revelation the physical body does have a mind of its own vulnerable to the scents and deception of predators who objectify the virgin folds of "you oughta' know better" but how can you until it happens until I had to choose between fight and flight and experienced both a rounded fist hitting a face so hard small incisors folded down like wounded soldiers resting under my tongue until a soul shattering scream sent those boys running away the Amazon war cry turning to laughter the teeth laid down forgotten during Marine Corps bootcamp when I a young woman saluted my country's flag during our star spangled banner and cried because of what I thought it ought to stand for but gallons of JP- 5 and synthetic hydraulic fluid later a doctor on the phone asks "Are you sitting down?" when it was too late to grab a seat because the melanoma had already made its mark and claimed my whole life but 5 years when my lover who loved me enough to know better cured the moment of fear with laughter assuring me life doesn't stop until it ends so with 5 years left I chose college because I wanted to know more about being American being human being me reconciling tenderness with muscle a scalpel with flesh and blood a rebellion against my body my own little terrorist attack needing to make peace when a piece of my body has rebelled against the system and I'm still learning how disaster makes each one of us choose a different way of being in this world ~ like a plane not intending to land my terror cell plotted against my Self forcing my own patriot to act question my body's loyalty to a grand scheme I failed to complete because I forgot being forced to kneel in the corner of a house I was building with the hands tied behind my back a shotgun to my hooded head held by a masked youth screaming "jCallete! jCallete!" "Shut up! Shut up!" when my mind became as smooth as a lake on a windless day I wasn't afraid to die but to die unhappy scared me to death so when those young men took off running it wasn't long before a plane left an island and I began a new chant be happy or die, die happy or lose, pray my own way, love my own way a new life living every second the second hand swings forward beyond knowing the surgeon's blade cuts, and the molester's hand offends, because the thieves' shotgun blunts against the bulletproof promises made to me about me being a person who refuses to suffer the sins of others or my own I don't have to figure out the meaning of a cup of coffee or my compulsion to do push-ups or why its frightening to read my father's letters I don't have to understand why I'm writing or living just being here is enough. Just being here is enough.

Politicism

Believing that the word fuck has lost all of its panache poses a contextual problem for expressing the present political situation in which the powers who control the world about the billowing crossed clouds of chem-trails because there is not one word that can encompass the feeling of the common man has when he is choosing between peanut butter sandwiches and the next gallon of gasoline needed to get him to his girlfriend's so he won't arrive at the solution of suicide for the problem of survival in a time where absolutely everyone is wondering which book Hugo Chavez was holding while articulating his American concerns to the United Nations of the world on international digital satellites tuned to enough ears and eyes thousands who knew and thousands who asked what book could have been so important besides the Spanish translation of the Bible or English or Hebrew what author succeeded in weighing in on the international chess tournament of nuclear debate and cross-cultural assimilation in the event of AIDS or flood which seems appropriate when considering the two ways in which white Christian supremacy inundates the minds and cultures of other asphalt places and jungle realities like a virus of golden arches and jeans strung between horses or the cascade of manufacturers determined to save on production so the economy will sustain the masses desire to own it cheaper then the word someone tried to buy yesterday on e-bay's wheel of fortune but were told they could only have a vowel or two depending on the way in which their tie had been knotted around their vulnerable juggler where each one can feel a heartbeat caffeinated by *Starbucks* and Noam Chomsky's new found fame on their quotable cups where little bits of wisdom have the potential to change someone's life in the event they savor the lines in between the sips of conscientious coffee growers who languish in the shade without the awareness of a white rabbit clock reminding them of a 100 second nap they should have found yesterday but were tuned to the awareness of a deep belly hunger for something as abstract as something better but also relieved it isn't the voting season because its too stressful to doubt whether one's vote is counted or not in a world where binary rules are the deterministic finality of a human's existence among the culture of access that clings to his workpants like drywall spackling wet then dry and flakey it washes off but leaves a stain just like the heartbreak of asylum and confessional torture that can't be trusted just tolerated in a world that many experience as a daily numbness creeping into their cells like Parkinson's until the writer of a book builds a mental bridge between the working man and the giants who inherited the strings of a Machiavellian present where each turn of a key in its ignition reminds someone it can all be disconnected in the event of a malfunction but this does not address the function of words needed to stimulate the hairs growing in one's cochlea or bronchial tubes after exposure to a capsized tanker on highway 40 at 4 in the morning after an all night fight with *Busch* and *Goldslogger* and a brunette who insisted she was somebody's X who couldn't remember the importance of honoring the request to marry below her station in a bar where no one shares their head more than twice per week unless their helmet is too small and the sweat from the hot summer weather can be soaked into a red paisley handkerchief used to wipe his hands after diving into the sacred pagan sites of the brunette he met last week before getting the news his mother has been over-exposed to truth in advertising and the blue line of continuous sensation traveling across the bottom of Fox news when someone in the English Academy of Official diction determined Fuck had become a cliché.

The American Poet: Walt Whitman!

When Emerson recognized the profundity of America the Republic, and the wild character of its freedom, he knew Time would desire a record of the unique nature of our fledgling nation. Embodied in Walt Whitman, American Poetry became an original art form, new to a literary world where European tradition caged all words.

Ezra Pound called the iambic pentameter the words first in need of a shove long after 19th century America birthed her unique literary and poetic form: the new ideas of poets, like Emily Dickinson, inspired by the freedom of America's epic individualism, and the song of Walt Whitman, whose cadence recalls the ecstatic nature

of the Romantics who glimpsed the unity of nature with the heart of humankind. Among the high-spirited words of Keats, Shelley and Lord Byron ~ the rebels Whitman would have dined, drank and slept with had America not divorced herself from England's conditional freedom ~ were the defiance of the rules of conventional expression. Forms new

were thought to fail; Poetry is tradition, not invention. Despite the new world, many held to the direction of Alexander Pope's poetic nature: to teach and instruct, to adhere to the allusion of freedom a reader might experience despite a poem's imprisoned words lined up side by side by height and weight. The Nature of America demanded the champion of Emersonian ideals: Walt Whitman!

His lifelong work etched in *Leaves of Grass*: the soul of Whitman! A poet for an age of romanticism ignited in America anew, one who understood Emerson's call to the writers of a new America, who walked in morning dew and felt the thorny beauty of Nature, who could guide future generations to carve the new wood with words "brawny enough and limber and full enough" to imbue a nation's freedom

with "the powerful language of resistance¹:" the common sense of freedom! Embraced by the poetic divinity, the sacred "gangs of kosmos" follow Whitman's "speech of the proud and melancholy races and of all who aspire" to use words as a means to express "the exquisite beauty and reality of the soul" born new through a poetry inherently its own, an amplitude of the perfection in human nature. Each time a poet rises within the medium "to express the inexpressible," America

responds to the freedom "grown fresh out of the fields." The new breed of America's Poets begin their elegiac lyrical nature in the gallant church of Walt Whitman's soul. There in his meadow of vibrant green a tender forget-me-not inspires our new words.

Fruit of Our Labor

You
have no right
to pare
me down
I am not
a sectional
fruit
to be torn out
of its skin
I am not
an olive
or cherry
to be pitted
and chewed up
I am not
arose
to be pulled apart
petal by petal
for
potpourri
or hot bath
I am not
a dandelion
gone to seed
to be
blown away
by your
fantastic wishes
I am not
here
to please
perfume
or perform

I only
thought
we could
create
with my pistil
your stamen
waft
pollen
onto the legs
into the open mouths
of bees

Parker 126